

## **The role of metropolitan areas in the framework of the European Union cohesion policy 2021-27**

### **Morning Session**

28th April 2021

First of all I thank the European Commission, DG Regio in particular and the ESPON programme for their today presence and for invest in enhancing the territorial dimension in European policies and practices

Thanks also to all stakeholders of ESPON METRO project that shared our vision and research need and have accepted to enter in partnership with us.

Today we are here in order to reflect and share on how to enhance the impact of European cohesion policy at territorial level through the contribution of urban and metropolitan areas.

The common expectation of METRO project's partner is to obtain scientific evidences – in a pan European dimension - to answer to two main policy questions:

1. **What are the most efficient governance models of Cohesion policy funds in metropolitan areas?**
2. **What is the added value of applying Cohesion Policy to metropolitan policies?**

Now more than ever it is evident that the metropolitan areas represent the strategical territorial level for the next future development model: more than 70% of European population currently lives in urban areas and projections reveal that the percentage is likely to reach 80% by 2050. Metropolitan areas represent the main economic engine of the EU and their level of education is higher than in the rest of the countries where they are located, making them the most favourable environment for the development of innovative, creative and high-value activities.

Nevertheless, metropolitan regions face a number of important challenges. As they are composed of urban, sub-urban and sometimes even rural and mountain areas, as it is the case of Metropolitan City of Turin, they have to face different needs and they require a multidimensional policy approach to help them to tackle their complex issues in order to achieve a balanced and cohesive development.

However, many metropolitan areas still lack the policy tools, jurisdiction and funding that would allow them to fully embrace their role. Despite their importance for the development of Europe, they are rarely involved in the design of the agreements and operational programs of the Cohesion Policy, which remain mostly managed at a different level (notably, national or regional one). This situation could jeopardize the policies

effectiveness on the ground, including the impact of structural funds, hampering metropolitan areas and cities to play a primary role in terms of attractiveness and allocation of resources for development towards a sustainable and inclusive smart society.

This is also strictly related to the Coronavirus emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic is giving rise to new challenges and worsening old ones, but also highlighting the essential role of cities, metropolitan authorities and regions, which have been at the forefront of delivering local and public services and taking emergency measures as close as possible to citizens. As President von der Leyen said: “Europeans know what their mayors, governors or councilors have done for them. They continue to be the most trusted institutions in our Union. Your work has made your constituents feel that they were not alone, even when they could not leave their home”.

In this light, the need of a better coordination among levels is more evident now than ever and so is a further and stronger recognition of the specific competencies and role of metropolitan areas and cities in the scope of the EU Cohesion Policy.

That being said, it is to be hoped that the new programming period 2012-2027 and the implementation of the European Green Deal and Recovery Plan take into due consideration the metropolitan dimension, with political objectives directly connected to it.

Finally, I thank you all once again, the European Commission, the ESPON Managing Authority, the group of Metro project urban and metropolitan stakeholders:

- Barcelona Metropolitan Area
- Brno Municipality
- Brussels-Capital Region
- Lisbon Metropolitan Area
- Métropole de Lyon
- Metropolitan Area of Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot
- Municipality of Florence
- Riga City Council

The two European participating networks:

- EUROCITIES
- METROPOLIS

And the group of researchers leadered by Turin's Polytechnic.

Our expectation is that the outcomes of today's debate and the scientific evidences produced by the ESPON METRO project research will represent a real added value for the policy makers at European and Member State level, contributing to a new generation of programs truly capable of intercepting and responding to the specific needs of each local community. The metropolitan and urban authorities are ready to take up the challenge.

I close quoting once again President von der Leyen: "it makes a big difference how politics is implemented on the ground. Local and regional politics is never abstract. It is about families, workers, communities. It not only helps to solve small, everyday problems, but also to master the great challenges of our time".

I wish you a fruitful and inspiring working session. I apologize if I cannot stay with you but it will be my care to take in high consideration the outcomes of today's exchanges.