

“Reinforcing UBC Member Cities’ Role in EU Policymaking and Participation in EU Funded Projects”

Dear Friends, Dear Colleagues from UBC Cities,

It’s really great to see you all here. This gathering feels more like a family meeting than a formal conference - because we all share one thing: a deep belief that Europe happens locally.

It’s in our cities where Europe truly comes to life - when a new tram line opens, when a young person studies abroad, or when we launch a cross-border project that changes everyday life. That’s where EU policies stop being words on paper and start bringing real impact.

But for that to happen, cities must not only implement Europe’s decisions - they must help to shape them.

As Members of the European Parliament, we often discuss big numbers -billions for this, millions for that - but what really matters is what those numbers mean for people.

And that’s where your work, the work of cities, becomes essential.

You are not just project partners. You are the link between Europe and its citizens - the ones who turn Europe into action.

Right now, we are entering a crucial moment: discussions on the EU budget for 2026 and the next long-term financial framework for 2028–2034.

The Parliament has made it clear: Europe cannot do more with less.

We must protect programmes that work - Erasmus, EU4Health, Horizon Europe, cohesion policy - and keep investing in innovation, jobs, and resilience.

Because if we cut the budget, it’s cities and citizens who feel it first.

You may have heard that the European Commission proposed merging cohesion and agricultural policies into one big fund. On paper, it sounds simpler.

But in practice - and you know this better than anyone - it risks centralizing decisions and pushing local voices aside.

The Committee of the Regions and many of us in Parliament are worried about that. We want to make sure that every region, every city - no matter its size or location - keeps a fair say and fair access to EU funds.

The EPP strongly believes that partnership, not centralization, is what keeps Europe democratic and trusted.

And this is where the Union of the Baltic Cities makes such a difference. Your projects prove how powerful cooperation can be - cities learning from each other, tackling shared challenges, working across borders on energy, environment, and innovation. You are showing Europe what *true integration* looks like -practical, human, and full of solidarity.

So, my message today is simple:

Stay engaged. Stay vocal. Keep pushing for your place at the European table. Because when cities speak with one strong, united voice - Europe listens.

Let's make sure that the next EU budget not only funds your projects but also reflects your ideas, your experiences, and your ambitions.

Strong cities mean a strong Europe - and together, we can make that Europe fairer, greener, and closer to its people.

Thank you, my friends -and I wish you inspiring discussions ahead.