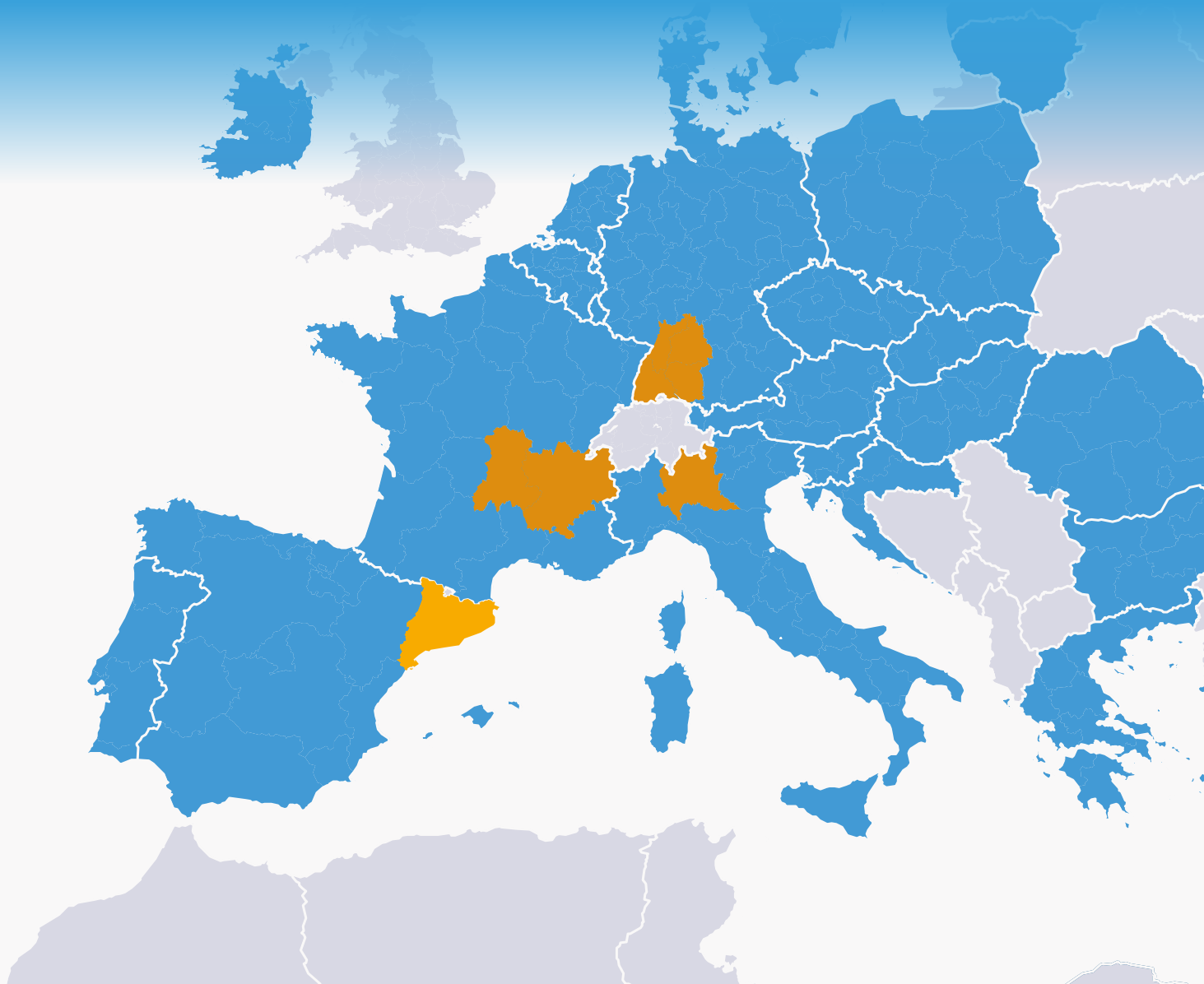


Joint Declaration

THE FOUR MOTORS FOR EUROPE
ON THE MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL
FRAMEWORK 2028–2034:

POWERING EUROPE'S TRANSFORMATION



Acronyms and Abbreviations

Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF)
Best Available Techniques (BAT)
Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV)
Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
European Innovation Council (EIC)
European Research Area (ERA)
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)
European Territorial Cooperation (ETC)
Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10)
Four Motors for Europe (4ME)
Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI)
Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)
Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)
Savings and Investment Union (SIU)

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I. Introduction

As the European Union prepares to chart a new course for its financial architecture beyond 2027, the Four Motors for Europe – Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Baden-Württemberg, Catalonia and Lombardy – reaffirm their commitment to contributing to this debate from the ground up. Since 1988, our alliance has stood for a more competitive, cohesive, sustainable Europe based on democratic values and built in partnership with its regions. Together, we represent nearly 10% of the EU's GDP and bring to the European project a unique combination of industrial leadership, scientific excellence and strong social foundations.

Under the Catalan Presidency of the network, the Four Motors have launched a common work programme whose central theme is “The Compass Motors: the contribution of the regions to the debate on the future economic and social model of Europe.” This agenda aligns closely with the European Commission's Competitiveness Compass, the 2025 Work Programme and the strategic reflections set out in the Draghi, Letta, Niinistö and Heitor reports. All call for renewed investment, greater institutional ambition and shared responsibility across all levels of governance to strengthen Europe's competitiveness, cohesion and capacity to act.

In a context of global transitions and territorial disparities, the Four Motors promote a shared vision of a Union that is innovative, inclusive and resilient, one that proactively anticipates and addresses emerging challenges, and where regional authorities are recognised as strategic partners in delivering Europe's priorities on the ground.

Through this Joint Declaration, the Four Motors for Europe set out concrete proposals for a smarter, fairer and more regionally anchored EU budget. We address key priorities such as the governance and territorial design of EU policies, Cohesion Policy, research and innovation, climate action, strategic autonomy, education, inclusion, external action, and European territorial cooperation.

Thus, the Four Motors for Europe call for the measures set out below.

II. Principles and Governance

Regarding the design and governance of the future EU budget, the Four Motors for Europe call for a Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) that is ambitious, territorially grounded and based on multi-level governance. Our regions are not only engines of innovation and competitiveness, but they are also strategic actors in delivering the Union's priorities on the ground. A specific budget for Cohesion Policy must be maintained and specific regulations for the various instruments related to this Policy must be also confirmed, guaranteeing and respecting the principles of a territorial and place-based approach and multi-level governance.

In this context, the Four Motors for Europe consider that the next MFF must:

01 | Place regions at the centre of EU budget governance and implementation

The next MFF must be grounded in a strong multi-level governance model, ensuring that regional and local authorities actively participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of EU programmes in accordance with their legally recognised competences. Proposals based on national envelopes or centralised plans risk undermining territorial adaptation and reducing the impact of investment. The experience of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) has shown that limited regional involvement in programme design leads to suboptimal results and a lack of cross-border projects. Regions must retain the ability to negotiate and manage their programmes directly with the European Commission, particularly in Cohesion Policy. Regional and local administrations must be equipped and incentivised to act not only as implementers but as strategic partners in innovation governance. This includes fostering a mindset of adaptive administration, openness to experimentation and cross-departmental collaboration. EU funding should support capacity-building for innovation-enabling governance, including digital processes and participatory foresight methods.

02 | Strengthen the strategic ambition and European added value of the EU budget

The EU must be equipped with a budget capable of supporting long-term investment, reindustrialisation and the completion of the Single Market, while ensuring Europe's strategic autonomy, competitiveness and sustainability. A robust Savings and Investment Union (SIU) should be developed to mobilise public and private resources to complement and reinforce the EU budget. In parallel, State aid rules should be revised to enable strategic projects with high transformative potential, especially those that advance the Green Deal, the digital transition and enhance the global competitiveness of European industry.

03 | Implement the new Single Market Strategy (more straightforward, seamless and stronger)

Simplifying legislation, reducing reporting requirements and harmonising rules and procedures at the EU level would significantly facilitate access to the single market – particularly for scale-ups and SMEs –, while also reducing costs. A coordinated effort is needed at multiple levels (strategic, legislative and financial) to establish a truly integrated single market and prevent further loss of competitiveness compared to third countries. Key actions should include harmonizing regulations and certifications for products and services, simplifying procedures for cross-border operations, and developing shared tools, platforms, and databases to provide real-time access to regulatory updates, among others.

04 | Focus resources on strategic and high-impact projects

The future MFF must direct resources towards projects that maximise European added value, help rebalance territorial cohesion and boost territorial development, and strengthen innovation, productivity and social justice.

05 | Simplify and streamline funding architecture and procedures

The current fragmentation of funding instruments generates inefficiencies and administrative burdens. The MFF must be simplified, reducing overlaps and clarifying objectives and access criteria. Harmonised rules across instruments and a more impact-based control model can improve efficiency. It is essential to ensure the practicability of performance-based disbursement of funding and linking funding to reforms, especially in decentralized Member States. Administrative simplification must be applied throughout the entire funding cycle, for the benefit of project developers. It is essential to standardise European sustainability regulations, as the current high degree of fragmentation acts as a non-tariff barrier for companies seeking to offer their products in other European markets. EU innovation policy should move towards more agile, modular and impact-driven funding mechanisms.

06 | Reconcile competitiveness and cohesion as mutually reinforcing objectives

The Four Motors support the creation of a European Competitiveness Fund to promote clean technologies, innovation, and strategic autonomy. However, this must not come at the expense of an independent Research Framework Programme or a strong Cohesion Policy for all regions, also supporting competitiveness as one of the main goals. Competitiveness and inclusion must advance together, ensuring that excellence-based instruments are compatible with and complementary to territorial cohesion and that innovation is accessible to all regions.

07 | Produce a budget that integrates regional conditionality into the new European governance, linked to fiscal reforms and plans

European funds are part of the national medium-term structural fiscal plans, a cornerstone of the new economic governance framework. This context should consider not only funds for investment, but also the necessary reforms and fiscal trajectory. This new governance requires strategic coordination at all levels of government, in line with their spheres of competence.

08 | Ensure a budget for a more equal Europe

The next MFF must provide and allocate the necessary technical, economic and human resources to effectively implement the principles of gender equality, equal opportunities and non-discrimination across all areas. Improving social cohesion must be the guiding principle that shapes public action at all levels of government, adapted to both current and future needs. Ensuring fair access to quality services and opportunities is not only a matter of rights – it is fundamental to strengthening the Union's democratic legitimacy. In particular, it is essential to making progress towards an inclusive Union for people with disabilities.

09 | Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach, enabling place-based and agile governance

Top-down and overly centralised policy designs risk overburdening regional economies with uniform requirements that do not reflect local realities. Future EU programmes should allow for adaptive, place-based implementation with sufficient flexibility to address specific challenges and opportunities at the regional level. Policy design must prioritise enabling conditions over prescriptive procedures.

III. Cohesion Policy

In relation to Cohesion Policy, the Four Motors for Europe reaffirm that it must continue to play a central role in the European Union's socio-economic model and remain a cornerstone of European territorial development. As the Union's main investment policy, it is essential for reducing regional disparities, reinforcing the Single Market and promoting long-term competitiveness. It must support both less developed territories and highly industrialised regions in adapting to current transitions, while ensuring a truly place-based and subsidiarity-driven approach.

In this context, the Four Motors for Europe consider that the next MFF must:

10 | Reinforce a modernised and well-funded Cohesion Policy

Provide a robust, modern and updated Cohesion Policy framework that incorporates lessons learned and addresses the issues identified, particularly the limitations observed in the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility. To this end, the partnership principle must be reinforced in order to promote more participatory and bottom-up strategies. The funding level must be preserved at least at current levels, adjusted for inflation, and the co-financing rate for more developed regions should revert to 50% to ensure adequate incentives and make EU funding attractive and accessible for potential beneficiaries.

11 | Guarantee multilevel governance and subsidiarity

Ensure governance that respects the subsidiarity principle. To ensure that resources meet regional needs, regions must play a decisive role not only in implementing but also in designing and planning policies, in deciding on the allocation of funds to projects, and in their monitoring. Regions and local authorities must be recognised not merely as implementing bodies, but as strategic actors in the design and delivery of Cohesion Policy, alongside the European Commission, the European Parliament and Member States.

12 | Make social cohesion a fundamental pillar of inclusion and democracy

Maintain social cohesion as a fundamental pillar to promote productive inclusion, equitable access to the labour market and the full participation of all groups, especially the most vulnerable, especially people with disabilities. Improving competitiveness is not incompatible with social inclusion; on the contrary, inclusion can help improve it. A Cohesion Policy that addresses the needs of all citizens, contributes to eradicating all forms of discrimination and promotes equality and shared prosperity is a key element in countering disaffection with democratic institutions and the rise of Euroscepticism.

13 | Address demographic and territorial challenges through regional action

Strengthen the role of Cohesion Policy as a driver of regional responses to major demographic and territorial challenges. It must integrate funding mechanisms to address depopulation and population ageing, and recognise the importance of regional agendas. Dedicated support, matching region-specific issues, must be provided to ensure sustainable regional planning and implementation while considering urban and rural areas as part of an integrated regional development, climate adaptation, sustainable mobility, urban regeneration, subregional disparities, mountainous areas, and rural development, digitalisation and equal access to essential services.

14 | Give new impetus to territorial cooperation and macro-regional strategies

Renew and strengthen cross-border and regional cooperation, notably through the Interreg programme. Promoting cooperation, mutual learning and exchange of experiences among territories is essential to spreading innovation and advancing European integration. European Territorial Cooperation must remain a key pillar of the MFF, supporting cross-border, transnational and interregional collaboration. Interreg must retain its current structure (strands A/B/C), with stable funding, simplified access and protection from national conditionalities. Macro-regional strategies – such as the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the initiative for a future EU Strategy for the Mediterranean Region – as well as cooperation with third countries, must be consolidated as effective governance frameworks.

15 | Invest in cross-border and local infrastructure to enhance cohesion

Ensure sufficient EU investment in local and cross-border transport infrastructure. The Connecting Europe Facility must be reinforced, with a focus on closing gaps in the TEN-T network and financing small-scale rail connection “missing links” between border regions. Rail should be prioritised over road wherever appropriate.

16 | Support for Industrial Regions at Risk of Structural Decline

The upcoming MFF must explicitly recognise the situation of industrial regions that are still economically strong but face long-term structural risks, including industrial transformation pressures, demographic change and geopolitical dependencies. These “regions at risk” need tailored support mechanisms to proactively manage transformation, maintain competitiveness and avoid future economic decline. The current Cohesion Policy framework should be expanded to reflect these challenges, including the integration of forward-looking indicators beyond GDP to better allocate resources and ensure that early intervention is possible before decline becomes entrenched.

IV. Thematic Priorities of the Four Motors for Europe

A. Leading research and innovation in advanced and emerging technologies

In relation to innovation and technological leadership, the Four Motors for Europe stress that the future of Europe's competitiveness, prosperity and strategic autonomy hinges on its capacity to lead innovation and the development of critical technologies. We call for an MFF that places research, innovation and technological progress at the heart of the Union's priorities. We advocate for a renewed investment effort in areas that are key to the twin transitions and the Union's global positioning.

From fostering disruptive digital technologies and advanced biotechnologies research and innovation to boosting semiconductor ecosystems, artificial intelligence and quantum technologies, our regions are committed to strengthening Europe's technological leadership. We also stress the importance of knowledge transfer and accelerating research valorisation as a key enabler for turning research and innovation into societal and economic value, ensuring that no territory is left behind.

In this context, the Four Motors for Europe consider that the next MFF must:

17 | Guarantee the independence and ambition of FP10

The future Framework Programme for Research and Innovation must remain a stand-alone and strategic instrument, with its own structure and budget. It should be bold in scope, accessible and capable of addressing Europe's most pressing scientific, social and industrial challenges. We support the recommendations of the Draghi and Heitor reports and call for a significant increase in the FP10 budget, ensuring scientific excellence as the main criterion for evaluation and funding, and aiming for long-term impact. FP10 must preserve its capacity to support fundamental and disruptive research, while fostering stronger links between research outcomes and their uptake in society and the economy – through innovation, technology and knowledge transfer, valorisation and other pathways to impact. A balanced approach between frontier science and applied innovation will be essential to maintain Europe's leadership in knowledge and competitiveness.

18 | Ensure coherent and robust support for innovation and competitiveness

The MFF must promote Europe's innovation capacity through programmes that support industrial alliances, IPCEIs and regional innovation ecosystems. We underline the need to reinforce support for strategic sectors such as health, life sciences, semiconductors, artificial intelligence,

quantum technologies, the space economy and clean and decarbonisation technologies. These technologies are essential to Europe's competitiveness, resilience and strategic autonomy, and require long-term, coordinated investment across all levels of governance. Some of these technologies may also have dual-use potential, underlining the need for coherent European coordination to ensure responsible and values-driven innovation.

19 | Reinforce the European Research Area and the free circulation of knowledge

The MFF must contribute to a strong, interconnected and inclusive European Research Area (ERA). This includes supporting academic and scientific excellence, researcher mobility, open science and cross-border cooperation. It must also safeguard the free circulation of knowledge across borders and disciplines, enabling synergies and shared capacities throughout Europe. A reinforced ERA must go hand in hand with the development of a truly integrated European Innovation Area, where research excellence and innovation ecosystems are interconnected, accelerating the uptake of knowledge and technologies across all regions. Ensuring that all regions – regardless of their development level – can participate meaningfully in EU research and innovation programmes is key to cohesion and competitiveness. To bridge the gap between scientific excellence and social and economic impact, the MFF must promote stronger application-oriented research formats and accelerate technology transfer to SMEs and non-academic institutions. Many innovation results remain unused due to fragmented support structures and capacity limits in smaller firms. Simplified and coordinated transfer of knowledge mechanisms are essential to unlock broader regional innovation potential.

20 | Support Europe's semiconductor ecosystem through dedicated and coordinated investment

The MFF 2028–2034 must earmark dedicated funding for the semiconductor industry as a strategic pillar of Europe's technological sovereignty and industrial resilience. This investment should foster interregional collaboration, strengthen regional and European ecosystems, integrate SMEs and start-ups, address gaps in the value chain and contribute to skills development. A strong semiconductor ecosystem is also key to enhancing Europe's global competitiveness and attracting high impact investment. These recommendations are also shared by the European Semiconductor Regions Alliance (ESRA), of which the Four Motors regions are members.

21 | Facilitate access to research and innovation infrastructure and funding for SMEs

Reducing regulatory barriers and simplifying access to innovation programmes is essential for spin-offs, start-ups, scale-ups and SMEs. The MFF should increase competitive funding instruments – such as the EIC Accelerator and STEP – and ensure that proposals are evaluated by both thematic and financial experts. The use of cascade funding in calls for innovation projects should be extended to facilitate access to European funding for small companies and SMEs that

are not easily equipped to navigate complex and resource-intensive application procedures. The MFF should also foster public-private collaboration and enhance access to state-of-the-art research infrastructures, especially for deep tech start-ups that require efficient access to highly specialised facilities, which are often not financially viable to develop independently. These infrastructures are crucial for experimentation, reducing time-to-market and enabling cross-sector innovation. Additionally, we call for instruments that mobilise private investment – such as business angels, pension funds and alternative finance mechanisms – in high-risk, high-impact sectors.

22 | Promote digital innovation as a catalyst for industrial transformation

In line with the priorities of the Four Motors and under Catalonia's presidency, digital technologies must be a cross-cutting priority in the MFF. Artificial intelligence, high-performance computing, cybersecurity and the space economy are strategic areas that require targeted support. European initiatives must promote ethical, inclusive and sustainable digital innovation, addressing digital divides and safeguarding democratic values and fundamental rights.

23 | Invest in talent, skills and knowledge transfer

Developing and retaining talent is essential for a strong European Research and Innovation Area. The MFF must reinforce programmes that promote training, upskilling and reskilling, as well as the mobility and retention of researchers and innovators across all territories. It should also foster knowledge transfer and cooperation between academia, industry and society, ensuring that education, research and innovation are aligned with long-term societal and economic needs. A coherent and inclusive talent strategy is key to strengthening Europe's competitiveness, resilience and cohesion.

24 | Empower innovation ecosystems through strategic regional investment

The MFF should support the development and strategic integration of regional innovation ecosystems that bring together research, business, civil society and government. These ecosystems must be seen as cross-sectoral structures capable of generating breakthroughs where technology, entrepreneurship and societal relevance intersect.

B. Decarbonisation to compete

In relation to environmental protection, the energy transition and sustainable mobility, the Four Motors for Europe emphasise that decarbonisation is not only a climate imperative but also a strategic lever for competitiveness, industrial transformation and territorial cohesion. In the face of accelerating climate risks, volatile energy markets and increasing pressure on natural resources, the EU must ensure that its financial instruments enable all regions, but especially the most industrialised ones, to lead the transition towards a decarbonised, fairer, more resilient and competitive economy.

Our regions intend to be driving forces for the green transition, with strong industrial bases, research capacities and environmental commitments. Through this joint position, we reaffirm the strategic value of European investment in clean energy, the circular economy, industrial decarbonisation, clean industrial emissions, sustainable transport and climate resilience as a means to strengthen Europe's industrial leadership and autonomy.

We also underline the need to improve the effectiveness, accessibility and territorial equity of EU funding, through clear environmental conditionalities, strong local institutional capacity and balanced territorial allocation mechanisms.

In this context, the Four Motors for Europe consider that the next MFF must:

25 | Link EU investment to climate goals and prioritise high-impact decarbonisation projects and industrial emissions assessment

Funding under the next MFF must be clearly aligned with the EU's climate neutrality objectives. Decarbonisation investments should be assessed not only for their environmental benefits but also for their contribution to productivity, cost-efficiency and global industrial positioning. We call for the creation and reinforcement of specific green finance mechanisms – such as voluntary carbon markets, climate credit systems or robust taxonomies – that can incentivise public and private investment in projects with measurable reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. These measures should not lead to the creation of more administrative burdens for enterprises.

Additionally, due to the recent directives on industrial emissions and air quality, new BAT, their suppliers in the market and new innovative technologies must be analysed to help industry comply with new emission caps, thus also increasing competitiveness. Access to these funds should be conditional on the funded projects being aligned with EU and regional climate and environmental standards.

26 | Support circular economy and resource efficiency initiatives

Dedicated budget lines should be maintained and expanded for circular economy projects that promote material reuse, waste reduction and industrial symbiosis. Circularity must be recognised as an economic opportunity to enhance supply chain resilience and reduce production costs. As regions committed to sustainable industrial practices, we advocate for EU support to local ecosystems advancing bio-circular business models.

27 | Invest in biodiversity, water resilience and climate adaptation

EU funding must consider nature restoration, biodiversity protection and water resilience. The MFF should support nature-based solutions, sustainable irrigation and water reuse systems, while reinforcing territorial capacities to respond to climate risks.

28 | Accelerate the energy transition through renewable hydrogen

The decarbonisation of Europe's energy systems and industrial base is a strategic priority. Renewable and low-carbon hydrogen play a central role in this transition, alongside other clean energy technologies. The next MFF must increase investment in research, production and infrastructure related to hydrogen – including support for regional hydrogen valleys, cross-border cooperation and pilot projects – while ensuring fair access to funding for all regions.

In addition, regions with high industrial demand, strong research ecosystems and critical infrastructure – such as logistics corridors, multimodal hubs and ports – should be recognised as strategic deployment zones. EU funding instruments must reflect this reality by supporting integrated hydrogen projects that align production, end-use and innovation. Dedicated MFF instruments should also support skills development, technology transfer and SME participation to ensure that the benefits of the hydrogen economy are distributed across the entire value chain. Hydrogen investment should contribute not only to climate neutrality, but also to European industrial competitiveness, energy security and regional development.

29 | Foster the decarbonisation of the automotive and mobility sectors

European automotive regions reaffirm their commitment to the EU's climate goals and call for a clear and stable roadmap to ensure a just and competitive transition for the automotive and mobility sectors. Recognising the strategic importance of the industry for cohesion, prosperity and innovation, the EU budget must support tailored, place-based solutions with increased funding for regions undergoing major industrial transformation.

Support should prioritise the transition to clean vehicles – regardless of the technology used – with particular focus on the development of the battery value chain, charging and refuelling infrastructure, and the supply of critical raw materials. Based on current scientific projections, the electrification of the new vehicle fleet (including H₂) is presently the most viable method for significantly reducing CO₂ emissions from private motorised transport. Such investment contributes to both climate objectives and the competitiveness of a strategic European industry. Industrial innovation and worker reskilling must, especially, be supported in regions undergoing structural change.

In addition, the transition must be accompanied by inclusive governance, strengthened stakeholder dialogue, fair access to sustainable mobility and conditions that support the use of sustainable modes of transport, circular economy practices and EU legislation that respects territorial diversity and promotes regional competitiveness.

30 | Promote sustainable rail transport as a key enabler of green and competitive mobility

Sustainable mobility requires substantial investment in interoperable, low-emission and cross-border rail networks. We call for a dedicated funding line to support railway modernisation, night train services and rail freight corridors connecting regional hubs, in full alignment with TEN-T priorities. This should include support through the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), beyond the Competitiveness Fund, to enable transnational projects and improve accessibility to European transport nodes.

31 | Support industrial decarbonisation and clean technology adoption

We call for the launch of an EU facility to accompany energy-intensive industries in their green transition. This includes support for electrification, carbon capture, clean process innovation and the scaling up of strategic clean technologies across sectors such as metallurgy, chemicals and materials. In particular, cooperation between start-ups, scale-ups and established companies can support the transformation process towards climate neutrality. Such transformation must be framed as a competitiveness strategy to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and imported technologies.

32 | Ensure a just and inclusive green transition

Decarbonisation must ensure that no region, worker or citizen is left behind. The next MFF must include mechanisms to support the most affected territories – rural, mountainous and highly industrialised areas – with a strong focus on combatting energy poverty, promoting sustainable housing and fostering resilient local green economies.

This includes dedicated technical assistance and institutional capacity-building programmes, particularly at the local and regional levels, to help design and implement circularity strategies tailored to local realities.

C. Strategic autonomy, safety and resilience

In relation to strategic autonomy, food security and European resilience, the Four Motors for Europe stress the need for a robust and forward-looking EU budget that enhances the Union's ability to respond to geopolitical uncertainty, economic volatility and mounting environmental and technological challenges. Building resilience also requires diversified and sustainable regional economies that promote social cohesion, territorial balance and long-term prosperity. As regions with strong agricultural sectors, dynamic innovation ecosystems and civil protection capacities, we are committed to building a more resilient Europe. This includes strengthening sustainable and competitive agri-food systems, investing in secure and dual-use technologies and enhancing regional preparedness for future crises.

In this context, the Four Motors for Europe consider that the next MFF must:

33 | Ensure a modern, simplified and well-funded Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

The CAP must be adequately funded – adjusted for inflation – and structured to guarantee decent income for farmers, food sovereignty and agroecological transition. It must recognise the diversity of production systems, like small-scale farming, mountain areas and areas with natural values of conservation interest. Regions must retain the authority to shape and implement Rural Development Programmes to ensure effective and place-based support for rural areas.

34 | Support generational renewal in agriculture and rural areas

The MFF must include dedicated mechanisms to facilitate generational change and support young farmers. These would include such measures as tailored financing, comprehensive advisory services and support for rural vitality. Ensuring the economic viability of agriculture is essential to guaranteeing intergenerational continuity and social cohesion between urban and rural areas, enabling young people to build stable livelihoods and remain rooted in rural areas. This is key to maintaining vibrant rural areas and preventing depopulation in affected regions.

35 | Reduce administrative burden and ensure subsidiarity in agricultural funding

CAP implementation should be streamlined and decentralised to empower regions, regardless of the State's organisational model. Income support should focus on small-scale and family-run farms, young people and women, and strengthening resilience to climate and market shocks.

36 | Reinforce strategic food autonomy and competitiveness

The EU must adopt a pragmatic agricultural policy that balances environmental goals with producers' economic viability. The CAP must support a transition towards sustainable farming practices without compromising the productivity and competitiveness of the agricultural sector, ensuring that rural areas receive effective, place-based support that advances both sustainable farming and environmental stewardship. European agriculture must be enabled to meet global challenges, including price pressures and international competition. Funding must recognise and support the central role of agriculture by strengthening the entire agri-food value chain and enhancing risk management. Achieving food security and the relocation of the European production depends on farming systems that are both profitable and resilient, requiring sustained investment in their long-term competitiveness.

37 | Strengthen resilience through public safety and crisis preparedness

The MFF must allocate funding to reinforce crisis prevention and response, including civil protection, public security, natural disaster risk management and cyber incident response – especially when essential or cross-regional services are at risk – as well as to support research and prevention efforts related to forest fires.

It must also bolster agricultural risk management by supporting robust insurance schemes and establishing an EU-level insurance and reinsurance system to address climate-related emergencies, as well as health risks and epidemics affecting both humans and livestock, thereby ensuring rapid compensation and greater financial stability for farmers throughout the Union.

38 | Promote the EU's technological sovereignty through investment in dual-use technologies

The MFF must prioritise ethical, secure and future-oriented infrastructures, including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, space economy, secure communications and smart transport, while supporting a network of regional cybersecurity capabilities that complement national systems. These technologies are critical to ensuring democratic values, fundamental rights, competitiveness, a more effective response in emergency and collective security situations, and European strategic autonomy. Strategic autonomy depends on the ability to shape and govern key technologies based on democratic values and European standards. Investment should focus on areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, semiconductors, data spaces, circular economy technologies and secure digital infrastructures. This reinforces both economic resilience and societal trust.

39 | Foster a sustainable and resilient tourism model for regional prosperity

The MFF must invest in developing a resilient and regenerative visitor economy model that, through new forms of transversal governance, delivers well-being for the entire community. This includes fostering environmentally sustainable, socially fair, territorially balanced and innovation-driven tourism that contributes to the diversification of the economic model, generates tangible benefits for local communities and leaves a lasting legacy. The perspective of upcoming Winter Olympic games in two of the regions will provide an opportunity to test innovative solutions at a large scale.

D. Towards an inclusive economy: talent, decent work and equal opportunities

In relation to social inclusion, education, housing and equal opportunities, the Four Motors for Europe call for an MFF that puts people at the centre. Europe's economic future depends on its capacity to empower individuals, reduce inequalities and invest in human capital across all territories.

We must strengthen Europe's social model, ensure that no one is left behind in the dual green and digital transitions and enable all regions to promote civic participation, youth mobility, social cohesion and territorial vitality.

In this context, the Four Motors for Europe consider that the next MFF must:

40 | Maintain and reinforce the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme

A strong and independent CERV programme is essential to upholding EU values, including equality, participation, non-discrimination and civic engagement. Support must be accessible to local actors, including smaller municipalities and civil society organisations.

41 | Strengthen education, skills and higher education cooperation

The MFF must reinforce investment in education and training as a foundation for Europe's competitiveness, social cohesion and democratic values. This includes strengthening Erasmus+ for schools, as motors for lifelong learning, as well as focusing on the European Universities Alliances as key drivers of a truly integrated European Education Area. It must also support the development of lifelong learning systems and the alignment between the European Higher Education Area, the Pact for Skills and research and innovation policies, fostering excellence, mobility and inclusion across all territories and disciplines.

42 | Prioritise youth: participation, inclusion and mental health

Young people must be at the centre of Europe's future. The MFF should invest in their active engagement, well-being and opportunities through initiatives such as the European Solidarity Corps and other youth-led programmes. Addressing mental health challenges, democracy education and youth participation, combating exclusion, and ensuring support for vulnerable and underrepresented groups must be a priority. Funding must be simplified and better coordinated to ensure a long-term impact and broad participation across regions and social backgrounds.

43 | Boost investment in social and affordable housing

A dedicated European mechanism is needed to increase the supply of affordable and sustainable housing. Independence and access to housing for young people need to be facilitated. Public-private partnerships and third sector actors should also be mobilised to diversify housing solutions. Particular attention must be paid to the renovation and sustainable management of housing stock, including social and cooperative housing. Regions and municipalities must play a central role in delivering these investments, ensuring economic, social and environmental sustainability in housing policies.

44 | Strengthen skills development and the alignment of education and labour market needs

The MFF must support training, vocational education and regional education systems to address evolving labour demands and support the twin transition. It is essential to mobilize European programmes such as Erasmus+ to foster the development of education and training systems that are adaptable to current needs and can guarantee the skills required to decarbonise and reduce dependency in strategic sectors. Collaboration between schools, universities, training centres, industries, regional services responsible for orientation and initial and continuing training and public employment services (PES) must be enhanced to improve employability. Transforming culture and skills must go hand in hand with technological change. The MFF should fund initiatives that promote innovation-oriented mindsets, creative thinking, entrepreneurial learning and digital literacy across all age groups and educational levels. Innovation policy must enable citizens and organisations to co-create change, not just adapt to it.

45 | Protect linguistic and cultural diversity

EU funding should actively support the development, use and promotion of regional, minority and minoritised languages. This includes fostering cultural innovation, digital content and the application of artificial intelligence and language technologies in all EU languages. This is essential to ensuring inclusion, creativity and digital equality in a multilingual Europe. Cultural funding programmes for projects and initiatives such as Creative Europe are essential for protecting cultural diversity and should be maintained as well as strengthened.

46 | Empower vulnerable communities and reduce territorial inequalities

The MFF must support people in vulnerable situations through integrated care models, community-based services and inclusive welfare policies. Support for internal areas, depopulated zones and ageing regions is essential to ensuring equal opportunities and the right to remain in one's place of origin.

V. Reinforce the External Action of the European Union

In relation to international cooperation and multilevel governance, the Four Motors for Europe reaffirm the importance of strong, values-based and territorially grounded EU external action. At a time of growing geopolitical instability and systemic competition, the Union must act with strategic clarity, democratic legitimacy and long-term vision.

We support an EU that promotes peace, sustainable development, multilateralism and human rights and call for an international cooperation policy that reflects the Union's founding values and strategic interests, while empowering all levels of governance.

In this context, the Four Motors for Europe consider that the next MFF must:

47 | Strengthen the EU international cooperation and development agenda

The MFF must provide increased and sustained funding for partnerships aligned with the 2030 Agenda, human rights and the EU's climate objectives. EU external action must move beyond transactional logic and reflect a principled, long-term commitment to sustainable development.

48 | Recognise the strategic role of regional and local governments

Local and regional authorities must be fully integrated into the EU's international cooperation architecture. Their involvement ensures better delivery of the SDGs, supports decentralisation processes and fosters legitimacy. Regional actors must participate in initiatives such as Global Gateway from project identification to implementation.

49 | Reinforce EU multilateralism and global presence

The EU must consolidate its presence in multilateral institutions and dialogue platforms, particularly those advancing democratic governance, peacebuilding, and the provision of global public goods. A strong multilateral voice is crucial to promoting European values and strategic autonomy.

50 | Promote territorial cooperation in key EU external action regions

We call for dedicated support to decentralised and macro-regional cooperation frameworks in priority areas such as the Mediterranean and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the Western Balkans and Sub-Saharan Africa. Strengthening territorial partnerships in these regions – through multi-level governance and Interreg-like tools – is key to delivering stability, regional development and mutual trust.

VI. Conclusion

As the European Union prepares to define the shape and direction of its next MFF, the Four Motors for Europe stand ready to contribute with vision, ambition and a spirit of partnership to help drive Europe's future success.

We represent four of the most competitive, innovative and socially committed regions in the EU. Together, we believe that the challenges ahead demand a smarter, fairer and more regionally anchored EU budget – one that recognises the essential role of regional and local authorities in driving Europe's economic, social and ecological transitions.

This Declaration is both a political signal and a roadmap. The Four Motors for Europe stand ready to play a full and active role in building a stronger Union – one that invests in its people, its regions and its future. We are convinced that Europe's capacity to lead globally will depend on its ability to act locally, with ambition, coherence and proximity.

