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DRAFT REPORT

**Territorial perspectives
for the new Euro-Mediterranean strategic Agenda**

This draft report, drawn up by Ariana CENSI, deputy mayor of the city of Milan (Italy) and Rama EL EZZI, advisor to the mayor the Great Amman Municipality (Jordan), will be presented for adoption at the 16th ARLEM plenary meeting (7 November 2025).

Introduction

At a time of escalating conflicts, climate disruption and democratic backsliding, the European Union must deepen its commitment to a strong, values-based partnership with its Southern neighbours. This partnership must be rooted not only in national diplomacy, but in the power of local and regional authorities (LRAs) to drive inclusive, sustainable, and citizen-led solutions on the three shores of the Mediterranean.

As the only political forum representing subnational governments across the Euro-Mediterranean space, ARLEM has a responsibility to ensure that LRAs are not treated as peripheral implementers, but recognised as co-shapers of the region's strategic future. This report reflects the political conviction that only through solidarity, multilevel governance and territorial cooperation can we tackle the shared challenges of climate crisis, migration, inequality and youth unemployment.

LRAs are on the frontlines of many of the Mediterranean region's most pressing challenges. Through their local knowledge, practical experience, and close proximity to citizens, they play an indispensable role in building a resilient and inclusive future. Yet their role remains under-recognised and under-supported. The objective of this ARLEM report is also to highlight the contribution of LRAs in shaping Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and to make recommendations that will amplify their impact, through better access to funding, improved governance, and by ensuring that their voices are heard in both regional and global policy arenas.

Findings from a study prepared for ARLEM¹ confirm that LRAs identify climate adaptation as their top thematic priority, closely followed by inclusive socio-economic development. LRAs express a strong desire for improved partnership structures and enhanced connectivity, calling for a more ambitious, inclusive, and decentralised Euro-Mediterranean framework. A major barrier remains their limited access to financing for project implementation. LRAs also underscore their pivotal role as cross-border and pan-Mediterranean connectors, translating regional strategies into tangible local action through people-centred, place-based delivery. The current moment demands an ambitious strategic redefinition of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, grounded in peace, local ownership, decentralisation and subsidiarity, as prerequisites for prosperity and shared stability.

¹ Study on *Challenges and opportunities for local authorities in supporting Euro-Mediterranean cooperation* (CASE/IedMed, 2025), commissioned by the European Committee of the Regions.
Link: <https://op.europa.eu/publication-detail/-/publication/5124b41e-4a59-11f0-85ba-01aa75ed71a1>.

Political Recommendations

General Recommendations

The Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM):

- 1) Reaffirms the strategic urgency of revitalising Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in light of growing instability, regional inequalities, climate impacts, and energy and food insecurity. Strongly supports the European Commission's initiative to develop a New Pact for the Mediterranean and calls for the full inclusion of LRAs in its shaping and implementation.
- 2) Calls for LRAs to be recognised as co-leaders, not merely implementers, of the Euro-Mediterranean agenda. From driving the energy transition and climate adaptation to managing migration and promoting inclusive development, LRAs are closest to citizens and best placed to deliver transformative, locally grounded solutions. In this context, the new Pact for the Mediterranean should be co-created with meaningful LRA involvement from both shores, ensuring shared commitments and symmetrical partnerships.
- 3) Reiterates that the benefits of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation must reach beyond capital cities and address territorial disparities between central and peripheral regions. Empowering regional and local authorities to lead in tackling subnational inequalities must become a core objective of the new agenda. Cross-border cooperation across the three Mediterranean shores should be actively promoted, with a focus on underserved and marginalised territories, to ensure balanced socio-economic development in both urban and rural areas
- 4) Stresses the need for a dedicated 'Mediterranean LRA Cooperation Portal' to support matchmaking, capacity-building and visibility of decentralised cooperation across the region. This platform should be hosted by a regional institution such as the UfM or the Secretariat of Interreg NEXT MED and include thematic clusters aligned with ARLEM priorities and flagship initiatives of the New Pact for the Mediterranean. This platform should also foster collaboration with regional and local networks (e.g. CPMR, EPM, MedCities), as well as civil society, academia and the private sector, and include opportunities for municipal twinning, joint project development, and regional cooperation hubs to facilitate peer learning and technical support, especially for small and medium-sized municipalities. It would thus help overcome the current bilateral and project-based approach of the EU towards southern neighbourhood countries which is time and impact limited regarding benefits for the whole region.

- 5) Recognises the structural challenges specific to Mediterranean island territories in terms of accessibility, economy, territorial continuity, energy transition and climate resilience, and calls for the development of a specific section for Mediterranean islands in the future Euro-Mediterranean strategic agenda, accompanied by appropriate financing mechanisms and dedicated representation within territorial cooperation bodies.
- 6) Calls for simplified and fairer access to EU funds for LRAs, including the reduction of co-financing requirements, streamlined administrative procedures, and targeted support to small and medium-sized municipalities. Strengthening the financial and technical capacities of LRAs is essential to ensure their meaningful participation in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. To this end, the restoration of dedicated EU funding lines for local and regional authorities, the creation of dedicated funding windows for multi-stakeholder projects involving LRAs and civil society organisations, and the launch of pre-partnership calls and capacity-building programmes for project development are strongly encouraged. Furthermore, the establishment of LRA focal points in all EU Delegations and the development of digital twinning platforms to facilitate knowledge exchange and joint project design would enhance multilevel coordination and improve access to cooperation instruments.
- 7) Recommends that the Pact embed a strong decentralisation component and strengthen the legislative and financial autonomy of LRAs, especially in domains such as civil protection, migration, renewable energy and climate adaptation. The UfM should explicitly support decentralised cooperation, including through the creation of focal points and a permanent advisory body of LRAs within UfM structures.
- 8) Highlights ARLEM's unique role as the only political forum for regional cooperation at subnational level, and its ability to connect citizens' realities with institutional processes at EU, UfM and international levels.
- 9) Recognises the complementarity between ARLEM and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and calls for enhanced joint action. In particular, ARLEM should contribute to shaping the territorial dimension of the future New Euro-Mediterranean Strategic Agenda and the work of the new Commissioner for the Mediterranean. ARLEM should also deepen its cooperation with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) to better align local and regional priorities with parliamentary dialogue and regional policy-making. Furthermore, ARLEM is encouraged to actively engage with UNEP-MAP to reinforce the role of LRAs in the implementation of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, where their contribution is now formally acknowledged.
- 10) Urges the EU to strengthen ARLEM's role and voice within regional governance structures, including UfM ministerial meetings, civil protection platforms and climate

diplomacy (e.g. COP30). The territorial perspective must be institutionalised across all pillars of EU external action.

- 11) Calls for coordinated, multi-level responses to pressing regional challenges, — including youth unemployment, migration, climate degradation, and energy and food crises — with LRAs acting as strategic partners in designing and delivering solutions that respond to local realities and promote social justice. Euro-Mediterranean cooperation must also prioritise care policies, gender equality, local democracy and human rights protection.
- 12) Urges the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation to pursue peace, safety and stability not only through securitisation, but also through inclusive development, human dignity, and to ending the occupation and all forms of violence, in line with international law and the EU's longstanding commitment towards a just and lasting two-state solution, with a Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

Thematic Recommendations

a) Adaptation to Climate Change

As the Mediterranean faces intensifying climate threats — from rising sea levels to extreme heat and water scarcity — local and regional authorities stand on the frontline of both risk and response. Their proximity to communities and ecosystems makes them essential drivers of climate resilience and innovation. Throughout the ARLEM consultation process, LRAs overwhelmingly identified climate resilience as the top priority, calling for a bold, coordinated response that empowers them to act locally while advancing shared regional and global climate objectives. In light of this, ARLEM calls for:

- 13) **A Euro-Mediterranean Climate Resilience Pact that places LRAs at the centre of climate mitigation and adaptation, through dedicated funding, capacity-building and their formal inclusion in international climate diplomacy (e.g. COP30).**
- 14) Simplified access for LRAs to EU climate funds (e.g. Horizon Europe, NDICI) and tailored support to smaller municipalities. Dedicated funding windows for multi-stakeholder projects involving LRAs and CSOs should be promoted, along with pre-partnership calls and capacity-building programmes for project preparation and implementation.
- 15) **Strengthened territorial governance for climate justice, ensuring social and gender equity in all green transitions.**
- 16) **Enhanced cooperation on shared risks on water stress such as drought, floods and sea level rise. Water resilience must be a cornerstone of this cooperation, with a**

focus on sustainable water governance, transboundary watershed management, and the deployment of innovative technologies for water conservation, reuse and desalination. Ensuring equitable access to clean water is not only a climate imperative but a foundation for long-term regional stability and prosperity.

- 17) **The localisation of climate planning through practical tools such as climate risk mapping, satellite technologies, and early warning systems. The provision of enhanced tools for the restoration and protection of coastal and river ecosystems should be prioritised, alongside the rollout of small-scale renewable energy projects in marginalised rural areas. Urban planning must integrate reforestation, the creation of inclusive green public spaces and measures to reduce urban sprawl. Local and regional authorities (LRAs) must be empowered to design and implement circular economy strategies and sustainable mobility solutions, with a specific focus on youth and vulnerable communities.**

b) **Blue Economy and Coastal Development**

ARLEM proposes:

- 18) **An inclusive and just blue transition that places local and regional authorities (LRAs) at the heart of sustainable coastal development. This means empowering LRAs to lead initiatives in sustainable fishing, ecotourism and marine conservation, ensuring that local communities are actively involved and that marine ecosystems are protected, as well as supporting initiatives such as the *Ocean Rise and Coastal Resilience Coalition of world coastal cities and regions*².**
- 19) **Create quality jobs and training opportunities for coastal youth in emerging maritime sectors, including marine renewable energy and sustainable tourism. A resilient blue economy must be both environmentally sound and socially inclusive.**
- 20) **Calls for targeted actions to support Mediterranean island territories, recognising their unique structural challenges in terms of accessibility, territorial continuity, economic diversification, and climate resilience. To ensure that island populations fully benefit from the inclusive blue transition, dedicated support should be provided for sustainable and locally driven initiatives, including small-scale fishing, ecotourism, marine renewable energy and local value chains in the blue economy. Improving connectivity, digital infrastructure and access to markets must be part of a comprehensive approach to enhance island competitiveness and territorial cohesion.**

² <https://oceanrise-coalition.org/>.

c) Food Security

To counter rising vulnerabilities, ARLEM supports:

- 21) **Stronger territorial food systems to counter rising vulnerabilities and promote local resilience. This includes the development of integrated food strategies that connect urban and rural actors through agroecology, circular practices, and shorter supply chains. ARLEM encourages the replication of successful, innovative, city-led solutions such as urban gardens, community-supported agriculture, and food waste recovery systems. By investing in circular food systems and empowering local actors, Euro-Mediterranean territories can advance food sovereignty and ensure more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient food networks.**

d) Crisis Management and Civil Protection

Recognising the rising vulnerability to climate and geopolitical shocks, ARLEM calls for:

- 22) Decentralised crisis response systems, with local hubs for early warning, rapid logistics and inclusive recovery.
- 23) Investment in local capacity and interoperability, particularly for civil protection in smaller and remote areas.
- 24) Joint protocols and peer-to-peer cooperation, to share tools, training and real-time coordination mechanisms across borders.
- 25) The development of local hubs and decentralised emergency logistics systems as key components of regional resilience. Early warning systems should leverage IoT and sensor technologies to ensure timely alerts reach even the most vulnerable populations.
- 26) The establishment of specialised emergency centres, cross-border coordination structures, and climate-resilient infrastructure. These efforts must be complemented by strengthened local capacities for mediation, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery, particularly in fragile and crisis-affected territories.

e) Human Capital, Skills and Brain Drain

People are the region's greatest resource. ARLEM proposes to:

- 27) Invest in people as the region's greatest asset by strengthening territorial talent through inclusive and place-based approaches. This includes the creation of Euro-Mediterranean talent partnerships that engage the diaspora and reverse brain drain by promoting mobility, youth

entrepreneurship and innovation. Initiatives such as the ARLEM award for Young Local Entrepreneurship should be formally integrated into EU external cooperation instruments and linked to acceleration programmes, mentorship schemes and scholarship opportunities to maximise their impact on youth employment³. **ARLEM also supports the establishment of a Mediterranean Innovation Hub to promote accessible upskilling and reskilling pathways, developed in partnership with LRAs, universities, research centres, civil society and SMEs.**

- 28) **Deepen South–South cooperation and back local innovation hubs, particularly in the green, digital and care economies. Empowering LRAs to lead territorial skills ecosystems is essential to ensure that no community is left behind in the green and digital transitions.**
- 29) **Adapt the EU’s Global Gateway strategy to the Euro-Mediterranean context, ensuring that its implementation reflects territorial realities and fully integrates the role of local and regional authorities. LRAs should be recognised as key partners in capacity-building, project implementation, and addressing local needs, particularly in underserved areas. A territorialised approach would also foster more effective engagement of the private sector, including local micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which are already delivering tangible solutions aligned with the Global Gateway’s priorities. Strengthening coordination among LRAs, SMEs and EU Delegations is essential to ensure inclusive, resilient and sustainable investment across the region.**

f) Migration and Inclusion

Migration is a shared reality requiring shared responsibility. ARLEM recommends:

- 30) A shared and human-rights-based approach to migration, grounded in genuine co-governance with local and regional authorities, in line with the Lampedusa Charter on Human mobility. LRAs must be fully involved in the design and delivery of migration, reception and integration policies, ensuring territorial equity and inclusive service provision. ARLEM advocates for stronger support to community-led initiatives that address the root causes of irregular migration and empower young people with viable alternatives. It further promotes the concept of ‘solidarity cities’ and local integration networks, backed by EU resources to foster intercultural dialogue and inclusive urban service and calls for inclusive urban planning approaches that are co-designed with local communities.

³ [ARLEM Award | European Committee of the Regions](#) . Each year, the ARLEM award rewards a young entrepreneur who has set up a business in one of the ARLEM Mediterranean partner countries. It also rewards the local/regional authorities which supported the business.

g) Territorial and Interregional Cooperation

ARLEM calls for:

- 31) The empowerment of interregional and cross-border cooperation between the European Union and its Mediterranean neighbourhood, as a means to address shared challenges through collective and coordinated action. ARLEM supports the development of a renewed territorial cooperation framework anchored in strong local and regional leadership. In this context, ARLEM reiterates the call—already made by the European Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament⁴—for the urgent establishment of a Mediterranean Macro-Regional Strategy (MRS). Such a strategy, backed by regions and networks including the CPMR-InterMediterranean Commission, the Barcelona Provincial Council and the Government of Catalonia, would provide a formalised EU framework for policy alignment, funding coordination, and joint action across EU and non-EU countries in the Mediterranean. At its core, the MRS must ensure meaningful participation of LRAs, place cohesion objectives at the centre, and guarantee that regional and local authorities play a leading role in its governance and implementation.
- 32) The scaling-up of successful city-to-city partnerships—such as the Milan–Amman cooperation model—through dedicated EU support instruments and decentralised cooperation programmes of the European Commission. To maximise their impact, these partnerships should be supported by collaborative territorial cooperation mechanisms and capacity-building initiatives, with regions playing a key role in overcoming structural obstacles, including restrictive EU funding conditionalities.
- 33) The establishment of a Mediterranean Observatory to collect, manage and translate reliable data into actionable policy, hosted under the auspices of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and in collaboration with ARLEM. The Observatory would serve as a platform to bridge science, policy and practice, fostering evidence-based decision-making, public-private partnerships and multi-level governance. It would also provide space for co-designing a shared Euro-Mediterranean research and innovation agenda, in synergy with successful programmes such as Interreg NEXT MED, Interreg Euro-MED, and PRIMA. Special attention should be given to the inclusion of micro and small enterprises (SMEs), ensuring that innovation ecosystems are accessible, territorially balanced and socially inclusive.

⁴ CoR opinion: Towards a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean, 10 October 2022 (rapporteur: Nikola Dobroslavić (HR/EPP)).

European Parliament's report on the role of cohesion policy in addressing multidimensional environmental challenges in the Mediterranean basin (rapporteur: Francois ALFONSI) 29.3.2023 - (2022/2059(INI)).

34) Improved coordination between Interreg programmes and Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) initiatives, in order to unlock synergies and amplify local impact across the region.

h) Digital and Technological Transition

ARLEM highlights the need for:

35) **Bridging the digital divide through territorial digital inclusion led by local and regional authorities. This requires investment in digital infrastructure, skills training, and governance support to ensure all LRAs can fully participate in the digital transition. ARLEM advocates for smart, green and open innovation partnerships across Mediterranean cities to accelerate progress in sustainable technologies. By enabling inclusive digital public services and fostering cross-border collaboration, LRAs can drive a people-centred digital transformation that leaves no community behind.**

i) Women's Empowerment

For lasting impact, ARLEM envisions:

36) **The full mainstreaming of gender equality across all Euro-Mediterranean cooperation frameworks. This includes dedicated funding for care infrastructure, the implementation of inclusive care policies and targeted support for women-led businesses. ARLEM urges the recognition of the care economy as a pillar of inclusive development, backed by public investment that enables women's full economic and political participation. Ensuring women's leadership at all levels—local, regional, and cross-border—is essential to building a fair, resilient and representative Euro-Mediterranean partnership.**

Conclusion

The Mediterranean needs empowered, well-resourced and politically recognised local and regional authorities. Delivering a resilient, inclusive and sustainable future depends on a truly decentralised Euro-Mediterranean partnership that reflects our shared values and the transformative potential of territorial leadership. By investing in the capacity, autonomy and strategic involvement of LRAs, the EU can unlock new solutions to long-standing regional divides and drive forward a just transition for all Mediterranean peoples.

