



EUROPEAN WEEK of Regions & Cities

*Strong Regions,
Strong Europe*

Making the Freedom to Stay a reality:

The role of Services of General Interest in
strengthening territorial cohesion

14 October 2026
16:00 – 17:30
Square Brussels, studio 214+216



#EURegionsWeek



European Week of Regions and Cities 2026 Policy Debate

Making the Freedom to Stay a reality: the role of services of general interest in strengthening territorial cohesion

14 October 2026

16:00 – 17:30

Square Brussels, Mont des Arts, 1000, studio 214+216

Interpretation available – English, Spanish.

Background and objectives

The concept of the *Freedom to Stay*, introduced by Enrico Letta, has gained increasing political momentum as a key enabler for completing the Single Market. It reflects the need to ensure that people can live, work and thrive in the place they call home, notably by guaranteeing access to quality services of general interest across all territories.

In the context of persistent territorial disparities, demographic change, and labour shortages, ensuring equitable access to essential services remains a central challenge for the EU and its Member States. Cohesion Policy plays a crucial role in addressing these imbalances. Still, its effectiveness depends on strong coordination with local and regional authorities and on sustained investment in key infrastructures and services.

This policy debate aims to:

- Explore how the Freedom to Stay can be operationalised at local and regional level
- Highlight the role of services of general interest as enablers of territorial resilience and attractiveness
- Exchange concrete practices and policy strategies across regions
- Identify how Cohesion Policy can better support these objectives in the future

Draft Agenda

Moderator: Alain Taccoen – Chair of Sustainability Board, SGI Europe

16:00 - 16:05 - Welcome and scene-setting by moderator

16:05 - 16:15 - Keynote address

- **Nicola de Michelis** – Director of Smart and Sustainable Growth and Programme Implementation IV, DG REGIO, European commission

16:15 – 16:45 - Panel discussion: Access to high-quality and affordable SGIs as a strategic investment in Europe's economic and social model

- **MEP María Elena Nevado del Campo** (EPP, ES) - Member of the Intergroup on Social Economy and Services of General Interest
- **Ethem Pekin** - Head of Economic Policy and Sustainability, CER
- **Bouke Arends** - Chair of the Netherlands delegation in the European Committee of the Regions, Mayor of the Municipality of Westland (NL)

16:45 - 17:15 - Interactive discussion with audience

- Open floor interventions from regional representatives and stakeholders.

17:15-17:30 Wrap-up and key takeaways

- Summary of key messages by moderator
- Coalition for the Freedom to Stay