



**PACT OF FREE CITIES
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Since its foundation 30 years ago, the Visegrad Group has been a key actor in European affairs. Founded by the four Visegrad capitals, the Pact of Free Cities has repeatedly argued over the past year that the role of local governments is fundamental not only in the fight against the pandemic, but also in facilitating an economic recovery based on equity and sustainability. As a result of the lobbying efforts of more than 30 European cities, the regulation on the Recovery and Resilience Facility mandates national governments to actively engage and consult with local and regional authorities when designing and implementing their national recovery plans.

We are deeply alarmed by the unwillingness of numerous national governments to engage in a meaningful dialogue with local authorities. Cities and municipal governments in multiple Member States have reported that ongoing consultations with their national governments are merely symbolic, concern only a small fraction of the RRF funds, or are lacking altogether. It is particularly concerning in this context that, as the President of the European Committee of the Regions, Mr. Apostolos Tzitzikostas has indicated, some neglected local authorities turning to the European Commission's dedicated task force have been dismissed and redirected to their national government. This runs counter to the stated objectives of Recovery and Resilience Facility.

We call on Member State governments to comply with the regulation on the Recovery and Resilience Facility, as well as on the European Commission to ensure that the provisions of the regulation are respected by national governments. Cities and municipal governments are offering their steadfast commitment and partnership to all European institutions and national governments in our shared struggle for a fair and sustainable post-pandemic recovery.

Matúš Vallo, Mayor of Bratislava: "The ongoing pandemic and the challenges it creates every day shows how crucial cities and their infrastructure are for combating its effects on health, social relations and the economy. Strong involvement of cities in the design and programmes of Recovery Plans, based on a fair and transparent consultation process, is the best way for national governments to effectively use these funds. The City of Bratislava has proven itself able to manage the pandemic crisis in its many aspects and is ready to contribute to the recovery of our society and its resilience."

Gergely Karácsony, Mayor of Budapest: "Budapest is the EU's ninth largest city, home to 1.8 million European citizens. The city and its metro area produce close to 40% of Hungary's GDP. Excluding Budapest from the recovery plan is in the interest of neither the EU nor Hungary. Let the Hungarian Government be reminded that EU funds flowing into Hungary are not to advance the economic interests of a select few, but to protect jobs and support those most in need."



Zdeněk Hřib, Mayor of Prague: “I am convinced that Prague must be an important partner of the national government in designing the national recovery plan. Our city contributes more than 25% to the national GDP and the city is badly affected by the pandemic as it is depending on the tertiary sector of the economy. Prague has a clear vision for how to design and implement a recovery plan and we have a list of shovel ready projects from the areas which have high priority for the EU - for example those addressing and promoting the green and digital transitions. I hope that national governments will follow the amended guidelines of the RRF and will genuinely cooperate with cities' regional authorities, in the Czech Republic as well as in other member states. Prague is more than ready to take on this pro-active role.”

Rafał Trzaskowski, Mayor of Warsaw: “The Polish capital region accounts for almost one fifth of the entire Polish GDP. It is hard to imagine a green, digital and reform-driven recovery of Poland’s economy without Warsaw’s participation in the NextGeneration fund. Despite the obvious, the government first attempted to exclude Warsaw from ERDF, and now it follows the same logic with the recovery fund. This is a myopic policy that only aggravates existing problems and deepens socio-political rows in Europe. We need a fair and transparent consultation process leading to a just division of the NextGeneration fund that does not discriminate between citizens on the grounds of their place of living.”

Matúš Vallo
Mayor of Bratislava

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