AGORADA 2026: Regional development through structural changes

Thursday 11th June 2026
Location: Permanent Representation of Romania to the European Union
Av. de Cortenbergh 107, 1000 Bruxelles

Background and rationale:

AGORADA is EURADA's flagship annual conference and the association's most important high-level gathering of the year. It brings together representatives of Regional Development Agencies, European institutions, regional and local authorities, innovation actors, business support organisations, academics, and other key stakeholders involved in regional economic development.

The 2026 edition will focus on how regions can respond to the major structural changes currently reshaping Europe's economy and policy landscape. These include the implementation of the Competitiveness Compass, the evolution of industrial policy, the green and digital transitions, growing geopolitical and energy-related disruptions, and the need to strengthen resilience and competitiveness in a rapidly changing global context. As reflected in the agenda, the event is designed around the role of regional ecosystems and development agencies in translating European priorities into concrete territorial action.

In this context, AGORADA 2026 aims to position regions and Regional Development Agencies as essential actors in delivering Europe's economic transformation. The conference will provide a platform for strategic discussion, exchange of practices, and dialogue between European and regional levels on how to ensure that structural change remains place-based, inclusive, and effective.

Objectives

The conference will pursue four main objectives:

- *First, to discuss the implications of the EU's emerging competitiveness and industrial agenda for regional development and cohesion.*

- *Second, to showcase how place-based approaches can support industrial transformation, innovation uptake, sustainability, and resilience across Europe's regions.*

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- *Third, to explore how regional actors can better respond to current disruptions, including energy shocks, geopolitical uncertainty, and global value chain reconfiguration.*

- *Fourth, to foster dialogue and cooperation among Regional Development Agencies, EU institutions, and strategic partners on the future role of regional development in Europe.*

Planned format

*AGORADA 2026 is envisaged as a **full-day in-person conference**, including opening remarks, five thematic sessions, networking breaks, a networking lunch, closing remarks, and a final cocktail reception. The format will combine keynote-style interventions and moderated panel discussions.*

Expected audience

The conference is intended for a specialised audience of approximately senior and mid-level representatives from:

- *Regional Development Agencies and their national associations*
- *European institutions*
- *Regional and local authorities*
- *Innovation and cluster organisations*
- *Academia and policy experts*
- *Business support and industrial ecosystem actors*
- *Partners from relevant European networks*

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AGENDA

09.00 to 09.30 – Welcome coffee and registration

09.30 – 09.45 Welcome Speeches

- **Mrs Iulia Matei** – Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Romania to the EU – TBC
- **Theo Föllings** – EURADA President
- **Francesco Molica** – EURADA Director
- **Victor Negrescu** – Vice President European Parliament – Video testimonial – TBC

9.50 to 11.00 – Session 1: Competitiveness Compass and implications for regional development.

The session focuses on how the **Competitiveness Compass is reshaping the EU policy landscape** and what this means in practice for regional development. The Compass is already influencing legislative initiatives, funding priorities, and discussions around the future Multiannual Financial Framework. It reflects a shift towards a more coordinated European industrial policy, a simpler regulatory framework, and stronger alignment between EU and national actions.

However, while the strategic direction at EU level is becoming clearer, **its territorial implications remain insufficiently defined**. Key questions persist on how the Competitiveness Compass will translate into regional strategies, how it will interact with cohesion policy instruments, and what role regional and local actors will play in implementation.

The session therefore aims to **bridge the gap between the macro-level vision of competitiveness and the realities on the ground**. Regions, cities, and innovation ecosystems are central to Europe's economic transformation, yet their position within the emerging competitiveness framework is still evolving.

Main objectives of the session

- Clarify what the Competitiveness Compass means concretely for EU policies and funding
- Explore how regions, cities, and innovation ecosystems can contribute to delivering this agenda
- Examine the implications for Cohesion Policy and Smart Specialisation (S3), including risks of centralisation versus opportunities for scaling
- Position regional development actors (especially RDAs) as **key implementers**, translating EU priorities into innovation, investment, and economic transformation on the ground

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Speakers:

- **Team Lead**er – TBC
- **Regional leader** – TBC
- **Professor Reinhilde Veugelers** – Bruegel Senior Fellow
- **Giacomo Fersini** – Head of Economic Policy, Eurochambres

Moderator:

Francesco Molica – EURADA Director

11.00 to 11.30 – Coffee break

11.30 to 12.45 – Session 2: A territorial pact for industrial policy and dual-use innovation: place-based approaches in action

This session explores how Europe's industrial and defence priorities can be translated into concrete territorial strategies through place-based approaches. It focuses on **the role of regions in contributing to industrial transformation, dual-use innovation, resilience and competitiveness by mobilising their specific assets, capacities and governance arrangements**. The discussion also addresses how innovation support frameworks and intellectual property rights can enable regional ecosystems and SMEs to grow in strategic sectors, linking European strategic objectives with territorial development outcomes.

Speakers:

- **Guillaume Guezelou** – Project Manager, Bretagne Next
- **Małgorzata Jarosińska-Jedynak** – Board Member, Podkarpackie region
- **Mauro Marini** – Head of Operations, Sviluppumbria
- **Cezara Petruc** – Liaison Officer, EUIPO
- **Lorenzo Mascioli** – Postdoctoral Researcher, Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Evaluation of Public Policies (LIEPP) at Sciences Po Paris

Moderator:

Lucia Huertas Suanzes – INFO Murcia / Region of Murcia

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12.45 to 13.30 – Session 3: Who benefits from industrial policy? A gender perspective on regional development

This session highlights the importance of **gender equality as a driver of more effective, inclusive, and resilient regional economies**. It explores how integrating a gender perspective into regional diagnostics and place-based industrial policy can reveal structural imbalances in areas such as sector participation, access to finance, and decision-making processes.

By incorporating gender analysis into policy design, regional development actors can **improve policy targeting, strengthen innovation systems, and enhance overall competitiveness**. Drawing on experiences from Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and European initiatives, the session demonstrates how **gender mainstreaming can support structural change**, making regional development strategies more inclusive and impactful.

Main objectives of the session

- Demonstrate how gender analysis can enhance the effectiveness and targeting of regional industrial policies.
- Identify key structural barriers affecting women's participation in regional industrial ecosystems.
- Showcase practical experiences from RDAs on integrating gender into policy design and implementation.
- Highlight how gender mainstreaming contributes to inclusive competitiveness and structural transformation.

Speakers:

- **Magdalena Cymerys** – Policy Officer, DG RTD
- **Cristina Oyon** – Deputy Director General, SPRI
- **Inmaculada Rodríguez** – Market Intelligence Manager, ACCIÓ
- **Ingrid Meijer** – Business Developer Tech, Oost NL

Moderator:

Valeria Bandini – Head of Europe and Internationalisation Area, ART-ER

13.30 to 15.00 – Networking Lunch

15.00 to 16.00 – Session 4: Overcoming energy and geopolitical disruptions: building resilient regions for a sustainable future

This session examines how regions can respond to **energy and geopolitical disruptions** while strengthening their resilience and long-term

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competitiveness. Recent crises have exposed Europe's vulnerabilities to external dependencies, particularly in energy and critical resources, reinforcing the need for greater **strategic autonomy** and an accelerated transition towards sustainable and technologically advanced economic models.

In a context of rapidly evolving industrial structures, technologies, and global value chains, regions must enhance their ability to **anticipate and adapt to change**. Ensuring access to critical technologies, resources, and industrial capacities is key to maintaining competitiveness. **Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3)** play a central role in helping regions identify emerging priorities, align innovation investments, and reposition their industrial ecosystems.

The session explores how regional actors can **turn current challenges into opportunities for innovation and growth**, particularly through the **energy transition**. It highlights territorial strategies to strengthen industrial ecosystems, support advanced energy technologies, reduce external dependencies, and build more resilient value chains. Ultimately, the discussion aims to identify practical approaches for aligning regional actions with broader national and European priorities, enhancing resilience, sustainability, and strategic positioning.

Main objectives of the session

- Strengthen regional resilience to energy and geopolitical disruptions
- Reduce dependencies on critical resources, technologies, and energy systems
- Support the adoption and deployment of advanced and sustainable energy solutions
- Anticipate and adapt to industrial, technological, and market transformations
- Leverage Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) to align innovation and investment priorities
- Reinforce regional industrial ecosystems and build resilient value chains
- Align regional actions with national and EU-level strategies for long-term competitiveness

Speakers:

- **Lukas Kleine-Rueschkamp** – Economist at the Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (CFE), OECD
- **Cristóbal García** – Regional Strategy Director, SODENA
- **Giovanni Zazzerini** – Secretary General, INSME
- **Elisabetta Marinelli** – Senior Consultant and Business Lead, SIRIS

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Moderator:

Marija Dušević – Senior Advisor, ZADRA NOVA

16.00 to 17.00 – Session 5: National associations of development agencies: navigating global uncertainty

This session explores how **national associations of development agencies** are **adapting their strategies and tools** to navigate an increasingly volatile global environment marked by geopolitical tensions, trade fragmentation, digital transformation, and shifting global value chains.
Acting as **strategic intermediaries**, national associations connect and represent Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) across countries, facilitating professional exchange, collective learning, and **capacity building**. RDAs, positioned at the **frontline of policy implementation**, translate European and national strategies into concrete regional actions. They face multiple pressures, including maintaining competitiveness, supporting resilience, attracting investment, responding to reshoring trends, helping SMEs navigate trade disruptions, and aligning regional development strategies with evolving EU industrial, trade, and sustainability agendas.
The session highlights how these actors can **turn global challenges into opportunities**, fostering peer learning and sharing best practices to strengthen regional resilience and long-term competitiveness.

Main objectives of the session

- Examine how national associations support member agencies in addressing geopolitical and economic developments
- Share transatlantic perspectives from associations in Canada, the USA, and Europe, including responses to trade adjustments and competitiveness strategies
- Foster exchange of best practices and emerging strategies to translate global trends into actionable responses
- Examine the evolving role of RDAs in the context of global value chain reconfiguration and trade instability
- Identify practical strategies adopted by RDAs to strengthen regional resilience and competitiveness
- Highlight policy gaps and coordination challenges between EU, national, and regional levels

Speakers:

- **John Perrot** – Executive Director, EDAC – video testimonial
- **Mathieu Dejouy** – Délégué Général, CNER
- **Chris Knight** – IEDC Board Member and Ambassador
- **Luminita Mihailov** – Vice President, ROREG

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Moderator:
Malta Enterprise – TBC

17.00 to 17.15 – Next steps and closing remarks

Closing Remarks

- **Cristina Oyon** – EURADA Vice-President
- **Francesco Molica** – EURADA Director

17.15 to 19.00 – Networking cocktail

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