

# **Improve Efficiency of the ESI Funds Absorption Processes in Slovenia**

**(TSI ref. 23SI05 – ESIFunds-SI)**

## **D3.3 - Concept and Roadmap for a possible representation of ZMOS/Slovene Urban municipalities in Brussels**

03.07.2025

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## 2. List of abbreviations

BXL	Brussels
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CoR	Committee of the Regions
COREPER	Committee of Permanent Representatives
EC	European Commission
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
ESI	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
FFG	Austrian Research Promotion Agency
IB	Intermediate Body
IRE	Institute of the Regions of Europe
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MA	Managing Authority
MCRD/MKRR	Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
SBRA	Slovenian Business and Research Association
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
WKÖ	Austrian Chamber of Commerce
ZMOS	Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia

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### 3. Executive summary

The Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS) recognizes the growing importance of having direct representation in Brussels to safeguard and advance municipal interests at the European level. With over 80% of EU legislation impacting local authorities and increasing complexity in accessing and influencing European policy, a structured presence in Brussels is seen as both a strategic necessity and a valuable investment. This document presents a concept and roadmap for establishing such a representation, informed by study visits to Vienna and Brussels, and consultations with key European and municipal stakeholders.

#### Strategic Objectives

The representation aims to:

- Increase the influence of Slovenian urban municipalities on EU decision-making, particularly in cohesion policy and Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI).
- Serve as an information hub for municipalities on EU legislative developments, funding opportunities, and policy trends.
- Strengthen the visibility and credibility of ZMOS at the European level through institutional networking and advocacy.
- Support Slovenian delegations, facilitate study visits, and foster international cooperation between municipalities.

#### Key Findings from Study Visits

The study visits to Vienna (April 2024) and Brussels (February 2025) provided critical insights from successful municipal representations. Key institutions visited included the European Commission, Committee of the Regions (CoR), Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), Eurocities, and national/regional liaison offices.

Successful representations, such as those of Austria, the Netherlands, and Germany, emphasize:

- **Proximity to the EU institutions** and integration within existing diplomatic structures (e.g., Permanent Representations).
- **Strong networks** with organizations like CoR and CEMR.
- Early involvement in the legislative process and ongoing policy monitoring.
- **Staffing of at least 2–3 people** with relevant legal and political expertise.

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- **Independence from project implementation**, focusing instead on strategic representation and information dissemination.

## **Feasibility and Operational Considerations**

### ***Office Options and Location***

Several models were considered, ranging from shared spaces to full-scale independent offices. Integration into Slovenia's Permanent Representation is cost-effective and offers strategic advantages but may lack full autonomy. A joint office with similar institutions (e.g., SBRA or Eurocities) could balance cost and visibility. Visibility in the EU Quarter is deemed essential for credibility and networking.

### ***Staffing and Employment***

Recommended staffing includes a Head of Office, administrative support, and a liaison/communications officer. Employment should follow either Belgian or Slovenian law depending on the legal status of the office, with a preference for secondments to ensure continuity and expertise. Internships and temporary placements can support capacity.

### ***Budget and Financing***

Estimates suggest a yearly budget between €150,000 and €250,000, depending on the model chosen. Funding mechanisms include:

- National and regional<sup>1</sup> government contributions.
- ZMOS membership fees.
- Potential long-term partnerships with academic or research institutions (e.g., University of Ljubljana).
- EU technical assistance funding (though this is unlikely for core office costs).

Long-term funding stability is crucial, ideally guaranteed for at least three years.

## **Institutional Cooperation and Partnerships**

The representation would collaborate with:

- **European Commission (DG Regio)** – especially for cohesion policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Slovenia has only two levels of government – national and local, regions as an administrative unit do not exist.

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- **Committee of the Regions (CoR)**– for legislative influence and visibility.
- **Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)** and **Eurocities** – for networking, knowledge exchange, and coalition-building.
- **Slovenian ministries and national representation bodies** – to ensure alignment of priorities and information flow.

### Implementation Roadmap

Phase	Timeline	Key Tasks	Responsible Actors
<b>Concept Phase</b>	Q1–Q2 2026	Define scope, staffing, location, cost overview	ZMOS, Ministries
<b>Securing Funding</b>	Q3–Q4 2026	Finalize funding model and commitments	ZMOS, National/Local Governments
<b>Legal Framework</b>	Q1–Q3 2027	Clarify regulatory issues in SI and BE	Legal advisors, ZMOS
<b>Property Search</b>	Q3 2027–Q2 2028	Find and lease office in Brussels	ZMOS, Real estate agents
<b>Visibility and Networking</b>	Q4 2027–Q3 2028	Launch communications, build networks	Communications Officer
<b>Implementation</b>	Q3 2027–Q3 2028	Staff recruitment, registration, setup	ZMOS
<b>Opening Ceremony</b>	1 Sept 2028	Formal launch of the Brussels office	ZMOS, EU Partners
<b>Evaluation</b>	Q4 2029	Assess performance and impact	ZMOS, External Evaluators

### Indicators of Success

Key performance indicators (KPIs) will include:

- Number of policy updates and reports provided to municipalities.
- Engagement in EU-level consultations and legislative processes:
  - early legislative influence, providing municipalities with information, early collaboration and strategic networking, influencing and shaping policy in line with the needs of municipalities.
- Number and quality of stakeholder meetings and partnerships established:

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- influencing and supporting CoR members while working with expert groups within CEMR; increased cooperation with institutions important to municipalities, such as Eurocities, but also with the Alps Adriatic Alliance.
- Visibility in Slovenian and European media:
  - structured flow of information through e.g. newsletter and position papers; assessing the releases of the Commission and inform the municipalities; organise expert discussions and support for delegations.
- Level of satisfaction among ZMOS members and municipal stakeholders.

While direct financial gains from project acquisition are not a primary objective, enhancing access to opportunities and partnerships is a critical success factor.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

A Brussels-based ZMOS office offers clear strategic value, especially in amplifying urban municipalities' voice in EU policymaking. Key recommendations include:

- Opt for a model with at least 3 dedicated staff members.
- Prioritize co-location in the EU Quarter for strategic visibility.
- Secure multi-annual national and municipal funding to ensure operational stability.
- Establish strong links with core institutions such as CoR, CEMR, and Eurocities.
- Avoid reliance on project-writing as a core activity; focus instead on strategic representation and coordination.

If implemented as planned, the ZMOS Brussels office could become a critical enabler of Slovenia's urban development ambitions within the EU framework—supporting policy influence, funding access, and enhanced local governance.



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## 4. Aims and implementation steps

### 4.1. Aims

This report aims to demonstrate the feasibility and added value of ZMOS/Slovenian municipalities having a presence in Brussels. It also analyses the advantages and possible structure of such a representation, which would increase the municipalities' influence on European legislation in cases where their interests are affected. At the same time, a presence in Brussels could serve as a source of information and services for Slovenian municipalities.

The study visits to Vienna (23–24 April 2024) and Brussels (11–13 February 2025) provided an opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other, including through practical examples. In Vienna, insights were provided into how processes are organised in Austria as a decentralised federal republic, as well as information on the communication of EU issues and their effects on urban municipalities. Participants included representatives from ZMOS, the Management Authority (MCRD) and the Intermediate Body (IB).

In Brussels, meetings were held at the representative offices of several countries, and visits were made to EU institutions important to ZMOS and Slovenian municipalities. The aim was to gain experience of the procedures involved in establishing a new representation office for Slovenian cities and municipalities in Brussels, and to familiarise with important networks. The target group for participation therefore included political and administrative representatives (mayors and administrative directors) of ZMOS, as well as accompanying Slovenian and Austrian experts.

### 4.2. Implementation steps

Based on the experiences and findings from the two study visits to Vienna (the detailed results of which are described in D2.2 “Findings from the study visit”) and Brussels, as well as further information gathered after the study visit, a concept for a feasibility study was drawn up. In accordance with Slovenian requirements, such as the criteria for site selection, the scope of work, financing and personnel requirements, the following points required further elaboration (see Annex 1):

- Possible options for offices in Brussels
- A comparison of representative offices/locations
- Examples of costs
- Financing options

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- Requirements for a representative office
- Recommendations

The initial findings were presented and discussed three weeks later at a meeting attended by Slovenian experts who had participated in the study trip, as well as 12 municipal representatives and representatives of the three ITI ministries. Their requirements were discussed and subsequently incorporated into the feasibility study's requirements profile.

The structure of this report is largely based on the points agreed with ZMOS. As part of the development of a roadmap for the possible establishment of a ZMOS/Slovenian cities and municipalities office in Brussels, drawing on the experience of regional and municipal representations from Austria and other Member States, a rough plan of milestones for the main actions is also to be drawn up, with the aim of opening the office by 1 September 2028.

During the study trip to Vienna, the representative office of the Association of Towns and Municipalities in Brussels was mentioned. These two offices are therefore naturally included in the programme, as are other comparable offices. To understand the interaction between important institutions, the visit programme has been expanded accordingly. Many years of experience of the Institute of the Regions of Europe (IRE) in Brussels were utilised to select the liaison offices and institutions, in order to identify various possible solutions, as well as on the basis of the requirements and wishes of the Slovenian partners and the current situation (Cohesion Fund)<sup>2</sup>. An initial draft programme prepared by IRE was discussed in depth with ZMOS and representatives of the ITI ministries, after which the final programme was drawn up.

IRE organised and coordinated the meetings, as well as providing advance information on the objectives of the visits in preparation for the meetings. The topics discussed related to ZMOS itself, including its objectives, planned work, resources, costs, pros and cons, and recommendations.

The selection of representative offices that have been active in Brussels for a longer period of time and are comparable includes

- The Austrian Association of Municipalities
- The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns

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<sup>2</sup> No ITI region is known to have an office in Brussels. However, there are certainly around 400 regions and cities organised and present in Brussels. In addition, there are business agencies, NGOs, universities and scientific organisations (see also <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/transparency/lobby-groups>)

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- The Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU
- The European Office of Baden-Württemberg's municipalities
- The House of the Dutch Provinces
- The Regional Office of Carinthia to the EU

In addition, there were other important institutions that were expected to cooperate with ZMOS:

- Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
- Committee of the Regions (CoR)
- European Commission, DG Regio, Unit E3 Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovenia
- Eurocities

The visit programme can be found in the appendix (Annex 2).

The participants of the study trip included:

- - 8 representatives of ZMOS (mayors, administrative directors)
- - 2 local experts (aed)
- - 4 international experts (aed)
- - 2 experts IRE

The list of participants can be found in the appendix (Annex 3).

In the final phase of preparing for the visit, IRE was able to identify the key issues to be discussed with the representatives at the planned meetings.

The key findings and information from the meetings are summarised in three tables in the next chapter:

- Table 1: Brussels office options
- Table 2: Concrete regional examples (offices)
- Table 3: Comparison of the representations

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## 5. Visited representations and institutions

### 5.1. Representations

The following topics are planned for discussion during the representations:

- Organisation: the key cornerstones of the organisation of the office and institutions.
- Tasks: What are the main tasks and how are they distributed?
- Daily work: What does day-to-day work entail, and what constitutes the 'small stuff'?
- Networking: Which networks are particularly important, and how does networking take place?
- Staff and financing: an overview of the staffing situation and how funding is organised.
- Recommendations: What recommendations can be passed on to visitors and ZMOS from many years of experience?

The Austrian Association of Municipalities and the The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns

- Mag. Daniela Fraiss, Austrian Association of Municipalities (Österreichischer Gemeindebund)
- Dr. Simona Woleser, Austrian Association of Cities (Österreichischer Städtebund)

#### **Organisation**

The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns is the first association of local authorities in Europe to have set up an office in Brussels (August 1994), which is connected, physically and organisationally, at the Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU.

The Brussels office of the Austrian Association of Municipalities has been in place since October 1996, it is a one-person operation and is also located in the building of the Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU. The office was set up as a result of a lack of information or incorrect information at the federal level.

It was emphasised that these associations generally hold the same opinion in order to present a stronger position.

The employment of the representative of the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns is funded by the City of Vienna. The Association reimburses the City of Vienna for these costs, utilizing funds from membership fees.

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The representative of the Austrian Association of Municipalities working in the Brussels office is an employee of the Association, funded by membership fees, as the association is responsible for providing municipalities with information, and fulfilling tasks outlined in the constitution.

In terms of disseminating information, the association's committees disseminate information. Not all municipalities are represented on the committees, but colleagues from all regions contribute. Newsletters are produced according to topic and urgency.

### **Tasks**

- Management of the office of the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns in Brussels
- Monitoring, supporting and influencing the legislative processes in EU legislative projects and EU initiatives that are important for municipalities;

Establishing and maintaining formal/informal contacts with colleagues in the EU institutions (in particular the European Parliament, EC, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities), other municipal liaison offices and umbrella organisations (CEMR, United Cities and Local Governments - UCLG).

- Representing the interests of the associations: together with Austrian and European partners, the Association of Municipalities in Brussels lobbies for the interests of local authorities, respect for the principle of subsidiarity and the preservation of local self-government.
- Services: In addition to monitoring the legislative process, the main tasks of the Representation in Brussels include the preparation and dissemination of information, the support of the two associations in international committees and the organisation of visitor groups

### **Networking**

It was stressed out that EU regulations are implemented by cities and municipalities. While they collaborate with the CoR, it is often more effective to work directly with local governments and CEMR. The main priority is influencing and supporting CoR members while working with expert groups within CEMR. She highlighted that having another association within CEMR from a western country with common perceptions would be beneficial. Austria and Slovenia share similarities due to their smaller municipalities, unlike Denmark or Flanders, where municipalities are larger and financial structures differ.

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### **Daily work**

Monitoring: observing, accompanying and influencing legislative processes in EU projects and initiatives that are important for municipalities and cities.

Networking: establishing and maintaining formal and informal contacts with colleagues in EU institutions, especially the European Parliament, the EC and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, as well as with other municipal liaison offices and umbrella organisations such as CEMR and UCLG.

Lobbying: influencing the legislative process and other initiatives.

### **Financing**

Fraiss clarified that they do not engage in lobbying but act as diplomats. Their salaries and taxes are handled in Austria. While regional representation heads are paid in Austria, staff members are registered in Belgium and do not hold diplomatic status. Woleser added that associations receive lump sums from state funding, but cities must reimburse certain costs.

Currently, two people are employed in Brussels for the two associations.

It was explained that rent is paid for their office and when they move next year (along with Permanent Representation) the rental costs will increase but remain comparable to other options.

### **Recommendations**

It was noted that, if it is possible, joining Slovenia's Permanent Representation would be beneficial due to the flow of information. German colleagues envy their access to both formal and informal information-sharing opportunities. Being part of the house and community provides an irreplaceable connection. Recently, Estonia joined the Permanent Representation after first being in CEMR, receiving positive feedback. No disadvantages were seen in this setup.

Regarding funding, it was clarified that they do not engage in EU-funded projects due to the necessity of dedicated personnel and a lack of interest from smaller municipalities

The following qualities were mentioned as necessary to work in this field flexibility, legal knowledge as an advantage but not a necessity, social competence, adaptability and belief in one's work.

The following PROs can be summarised:

- Knowing in advance which legal acts will be applied at a national level.

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- Having a close network at the European level.
- It is useful not only for European affairs, but also for national ones (e.g. legal comparison).

#### 5.1.1. The Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU

- Claus Binder, Coordinator for the Austrian Regions at the Permanent Representation of Austria

#### **Tasks**

A key element are the administrative meetings prior to the plenary sessions, where all the country representatives discuss the opinions to be adopted. The head of the CoR delegation, Mr Wallner (Governor of Vorarlberg), and his team prepare the discussions. The coordinator receives reports, identifies the main issues and drafts annotated agendas with voting recommendations for the regional offices.

#### **Daily work**

The coordinator's role in co-ordinating regional expertise, monitoring Council working groups and tracking legislative changes is described. At the beginning of each Presidency, the coordinator compiles agenda reports and searches for regional information. His reports include updates from the Commission, Parliament and European Council, as well as public consultations to anticipate legislative developments. Among the advantages of being at the EU Representation are the saving of human resources and reducing of report writing. Two persons currently work in the office.

The procedures for formulating regional positions are also described. Discussions take place at several levels, starting with the provincial governors, then the heads of the provincial offices, followed by the provincial councils, the constitutional review and consultations with the competent ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as described in Article 23d of the Austrian Constitution on European Affairs.

#### **Recommendations**

Regarding Slovenia, Mr. Binder stresses the importance of Slovenia's sub-national representation being well-integrated into the diplomatic system. Legal competence and participation in working parties are essential for effective representation.

#### 5.1.2. The Regional Office of Carinthia to the EU

- Walter Singer

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The EU Liaison Office of the Province of Carinthia has been representing Carinthia's interests vis-à-vis the EU since 1995. Within the Carinthian state administration, the Liaison Office is located in the Directorate of the Office of the Carinthian State Government.

### **Tasks**

In order to represent Carinthia's interests in a targeted manner, one of the main tasks of the office is to monitor relevant legislative projects at EU level.

### **Daily work**

The Regional Office of Carinthia focuses on assessing the Commission's publications, organising expert discussions and maintaining contacts with German-speaking colleagues. The office raises awareness of the EU among schools, local stakeholders and communities through discussions and workshops. The Liaison Office team receives numerous groups of visitors every year.

Together with the weekly EU newsletter, this helps to raise awareness of the EU among the people of Carinthia.

### **Networking**

Cooperation is key, and the CoR is their main source of information and contacts. They try to influence the Commission at an early stage, but work mainly with the CoR. Carinthia also participates in projects such as the EGTC "Senza Confini" for cross-border cooperation and management and the Alps Adriatic Alliance, of which Vojvodina (Serbia) is a new member, as well as the European Semi-Conductor Alliance. They are also part of the Regions4Cohesion initiative, together with the Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine and 144 other Regions from 17 EU Member States, to influence the EC on the new Cohesion Policy.

### **Financing**

Carinthia's Brussels office has four permanent staff and interns who monitor news, prepare speeches and organise visits for the Carinthian government. Carinthia's staff are on Belgian contracts, but paid by Carinthia, and are in daily contact with colleagues in the region. They are based in a multi-regional house, but Istria left to focus on funding, which doesn't require a presence in Brussels.

### **Recommendation**



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Carinthia's funding expert remains in the region, as her main role in Brussels is to assess EU issues and provide networks and connections. Preparing project applications is not the responsibility of the liaison offices. These are prepared by experts in Carinthia.

#### 5.1.3. The European Office of Baden-Württemberg's municipalities

- Patrick Wegener, Deputy Head of Office

##### **Organisation**

The Deputy Head of Office provides an overview of the representation in Brussels, focusing on the cooperation between Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. These regions share rent and secretariat services for efficient interest representation. Baden-Württemberg (office established in 1999) has three representatives, Bavaria (office established in 1992) has four, and each office can host up to two interns. Some staff members are seconded while others are hired locally.

##### **Tasks**

Early involvement in the legislative process is crucial as 80% of EU legislation affects local authorities ("If you are not at the table, you are on the menu"). The office acts as an early warning system and assesses relevant policies, with reports sent to regional associations such as Landkreistag, Gemeindetag and Städtetag. Their current tasks include assessing environmental and state aid legislation, identifying funding opportunities and coordinating awareness-raising efforts.

##### **Daily work**

Its main tasks are to provide information, structure EU-related work, support Europeanisation at local level and advise on funding. A fortnightly newsletter keeps the municipalities informed, but they do not usually work directly with the municipalities.

##### **Networking**

The office liaises with the CoR, the European Commission and MEPs from Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. The office works with municipal organisations in Germany and Austria, as well as the Association of Municipal Enterprises, which provides valuable policy expertise (there is a monthly jour-fixe with all German-speaking Municipal and Regional representations). While there are differences between small and large municipalities, common interests lead to joint position papers.

##### **Financing**

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As the representation in Brussels focuses on cooperation between Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, these regions share rent and secretarial services to ensure efficient representation. Baden-Württemberg has three representatives, Bavaria four, and each office can host up to two trainees.

It is funded entirely by membership fees, with no government co-funding. The office is located in the European Quarter for strategic networking benefits, despite high rents, and costs are shared between the associations.

There is space for seven representatives and four trainees, who are generally unpaid but may receive Erasmus funding. The staff is sent directly by the German municipal association (Gemeindetag) and is paid by them.

### **Recommendations**

The importance of early engagement in the legislative process, co-operation and strategic networking should be recognised. The preparation of project applications is not the responsibility of the liaison offices. Preparing project applications is time-consuming and complex, so it is carried out by experts in the home country. Therefore, it is not necessary for them to be present on site or in Brussels.

#### 5.1.4. The House of Dutch Provinces

- Rob Van Eijkeren, Head of Office

### **Organisation**

The Netherlands consists of 12 regions, each with its own parliament and government, all of which are represented in Brussels by the King's Commissioner. The Dutch representation was set up in 2000 and has a staff of 25, including administrative and policy advisers. Most provinces are represented by two people and six people are responsible for administration.

### **Tasks**

Early influence on legislation is a key priority. The Dutch regional governments fully support the Brussels office and rely on it as their main source of European information. Timely updates are crucial - the sooner information reaches experts in the Netherlands, the sooner they can assess its impact and define regional interests. Through cooperative actions in Brussels the provinces strive to achieve synergy in the following areas: interest representation, information management, monitoring and advisement.

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### **Daily work**

The office provides a structured flow of information through a weekly newsletter and position papers, ensuring that the Dutch provinces are well informed about EU developments. There is a jour-fixe every Wednesday with the representatives of the Regions). They invite EU Commissioners to the Netherlands to present regional projects and cooperate with the Permanent Representation and other associations. The head of the office emphasises the importance of cooperation with the Permanent Representation. They are planning to move their office to the Representation in order to be even closer.

### **Networking**

The work focuses on monitoring EU legislation and policy developments, with a current emphasis on economic issues. Cooperation between the provinces is effective, with a common agenda, although each province can pursue specific interests. The provinces are active in the CoR and CEMR and seek partnerships with regions with similar interests, such as Flanders and Austria. They do not collaborate directly with the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) since they are not at state level.

### **Financing**

The office (an association under Belgian law) is fully funded by the Dutch regions, with costs being shared equally. Staff are employed either by individual provinces or through the umbrella organisation.

### **Recommendations**

The Head of the Office emphasises the importance of cooperating with the Permanent Representation. Although the Netherlands is not a federal state and therefore not directly involved in COREPER, the Office is in close contact with the Permanent Representation and thus has access to the agenda documents. Limited staffing makes it difficult to analyse these documents fully, underlining the need for additional resources to maximise influence at the EU level.

## **5.2. Institutions**

The following discussion points have been planned for the important organisations that will be visited:

- The aims of the organisations' activities, particularly in terms of cooperation with ZMOS
- General topics
- Important networks
- Recommendations for representation.

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*European Commission, DG Regio, Unit E3 Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovenia*

- Andreas Von Busch, Head of Unit
- Gašper Kavšek, Programme Manager

The mission of unit REGIO.E3 is to assist Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovenia to programme and manage their allocations under the European Regional Development, Just Transition and Cohesion Funds programmes in the most effective manner,

Andreas von Busch, Head of Unit, says their focus is on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), where the debate is centred on key policies, including a more focused cohesion policy with priorities on industry, geopolitics, defence, border and migration issues, climate and regional policy. However, due to the recovery package and debt, the budget is constrained and finance ministers will now be scrutinising their resources. Access to private funding is therefore crucial. However, the discussion should be concluded by the summer, after the German elections. In addition, the ITI instrument is important, but future funding may become more centralised, although regions need autonomy.

Kavšek's team consists of two members. He argues that absorption rates for the Cohesion Fund for Slovenia for 2021-2027 are not yet high. There are many instruments available to make implementation more intensive. The main differences between the last and the next commission periods include a focus on less developed regions, smarter and greener priorities, shared management and favourable conditions for projects. Slovenia is approaching the EU average and cohesion policy is having a significant impact.

For the future of cohesion policy, the Commission will propose changes in July 2025, focusing on simplification, flexibility, fewer projects and performance-based funding with measurable indicators to achieve set goals.

*Council of European Municipalities and Regions*

- Durmish Guri, Director Projects and Programmes
- Marine Gaudron, Adviser Territorial Cohesion & Local Finances
- Maddalena Fontana, Project Officer

The CEMR has 61 members in 41 countries, covering not only the EU but also broader Europe. The organization is responsible for representing municipalities and regions and their needs. Their work focuses on key impact topics such as climate, cohesion, and society, with activities including position papers, studies, and expert groups addressing various EU legislation topics like the water resilience

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strategy and nature restoration law. The organization also engages in research on topics such as women in politics and the EU elections, while also contributing position papers on the EU budget.

The discussion moved on to the main tasks of the CEMR, which include advocacy by influencing and shaping policy in line with the needs of local and regional authorities, twinning projects, training and capacity building to help local authorities implement regulations and projects, and locally led global cooperation to align with global agendas in local and regional governance. Policies need to be designed together with the local level.

The CEMR hosts at the 4<sup>th</sup> floor member representations from several countries. The advantage is that they share a common space and have opportunities to exchange among them.

Marine, a policy advisor, presents the current focus on the EU budget negotiations, a key political issue for regions and municipalities. She explains that the CEMR works through expert groups that bring together members from all member associations to share the situation in their respective countries and ensure the development of position papers that are validated by members. The CEMR's position on the future of cohesion policy emphasises key principles such as partnership, multi-level governance, place-based development, integrated territorial development and a polycentric vision. It advocates a simplified framework, greater flexibility and a single set of rules for beneficiaries, with a focus on funding for local and regional investment and public services.

Alliances play a crucial role, in particular the Cohesion Alliance, and the CoR is also an important partner.

The CEMR's position on the next MFF stresses the importance of decentralisation. They work with alliances such as the Local Alliance and emphasise the green transition. National associations play a crucial role in decision-making by maintaining links with the EC and certain members of the European Parliament. It is important to participate in national government debates in order to coordinate positions and present a unified message to member state governments.

In Austria, cohesion policy is approached at national level with input from the regions, creating a structure where regional governments, local representatives and ministries work together in a unified committee. While the CEMR sees centralisation as a risk, Austria sees it as an opportunity to provide a harmonised and simplified set of funding rules. The partnership principle is well respected in Austria, but if the EU were to impose it at national level, it could be perceived as a risk rather than a voluntary partnership. The Austrian institutional model operates independently while receiving financial support from both national and EU levels.

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Durmish provides an insight into the twinning process, which includes both long-term cooperation and short-term project cooperation between regions or municipalities. Short-term twinning involves the exchange of experts on specific topics, while long-term partnerships aim to promote ongoing cooperation, including joint funding projects.

Maddalena Fontana presents the Matchmaking platform digital tool, which has been developed since December 2024 and is still being improved. The platform promotes city-to-city cooperation and international partnerships, allowing municipalities, cities, and regions to form partnerships sending a matching request to potential peers across Europe.

The meeting concludes with a summary of key points and an agreement to continue to monitor policy developments and ensure that local and regional needs are represented in EU decision-making processes.

#### 5.2.1. Eurocities

- Andre Sobczak, Secretary General

Eurocities is a network of 210 cities, from both EU and non-EU (this brings together, in total, more than 150 million people from 40 countries). It includes full and associate members (larger cities) and partner cities with at least 50,000 inhabitants. The board consists of 12 cities, and the organization employs around 100 people. They also have an office in Barcelona (Spain).

Eurocities aims to be the leading network of major European cities, working with national stakeholders to ensure that cities are involved in the European decision-making process. Their objectives include creating a climate-resilient and healthy environment, promoting inclusive societies and gender equality, and working on issues such as urban development, economic growth and cultural heritage. They also focus on empowering cities by providing them with useful information on EU legislation. Eurocities also tries to influence EU budgets to ensure that cities are not overlooked.

To date, Eurocities is involved in 40 projects, such as European Mobility Week and cultural heritage initiatives. There are 40 working groups on 10 thematic areas, covering topics such as housing, mobility and the environment, each led by a different city. Ljubljana leads the culture group and holds regular meetings. Eurocities organises several forums and events, including those focusing on mobility, digital issues, social affairs and culture. They also offer training programmes, such as digital twinning and the Women City Leaders' Mentorship Programme. Eurocities maximises EU funding opportunities for cities through training, webinars, funding briefs and partner searches in a dedicated members' area.

TSI ref.23SI05

Its advocacy work includes influencing Commissioners and meeting MEPs with city experience to represent city interests. The organisation also promotes a collaborative platform for networking and cooperation between cities. For the next cohesion policy Eurocity advocates the possibility of deploying more direct funding to cities in comparison to regions and national levels. This is also in line with the orientation for a more place-based approach in EU politics.

#### 5.2.2. Committee of the Regions

- Petr Blizkovsky, Secretary General

The CoR is an advisory body of the EU that represents local and regional authorities across the EU. It was established in 1994 to ensure that the regional and local levels are consulted in the EU legislative process. It currently has 315 members and 315 alternates from 47 countries.

There are seven Slovenian members of the CoR. Their aim is to form opinions, stop legislation and shape regulations. One of the problems for the next period is that member states are unwilling to increase funding or take on more debt. The priority, therefore, is to protect the cohesion policy, which is co-designed between the central and regional levels. Blizkovsky advises that the regions need more influence on ministries, especially the finance ministry. A territorial impact assessment (NUTS II perspective) is recommended.

ZMOS should sign the Cohesion Pact, approach the EC with their concerns and advocate their position. They should strengthen their networks of regional offices to increase their reach and connections. A clear mission and management of expectations in Brussels are essential. Regarding the cohesion policy, CoR advocates that it should be developed from lower to upper government levels.

### 5.3. Important institutions for ZMOS

Based on the findings following the presentations and discussions held at the visited institutions, it is clear that cooperation between ZMOS in Brussels and all institutions is important:

- CEMR
- CoR
- the European Commission, DG Regio, Unit E3 Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovenia
- Eurocities

This also applies to key institutions for cooperation in the field of cohesion policy, which are:

TSI ref.23SI05

1. Slovenian Representation to the EC
2. CEMR
3. Eurocities
4. ITI regions
5. CoR

#### **5.4. Arguments in favour of having a presence in Brussels**

In response to the question, 'Why is a presence in Brussels indispensable? What are the advantages of direct local representation?', asked to the employees of the representative offices and organisations visited, a number of arguments were put forward, as listed below:

##### **Information flow**

- Direct Access to new policy papers
- Active policy observation
- Projects of the European Commission
- Information gathering
- Legislative process

##### **Networking**

- Connection with other players such as Cities, Associations or NGO's in Brussels
- Network of Regions and Cities
- Participation in joint alliances
- Connections to the European Parliament
- Be part of the European Family

##### **Activities**

A clear strategy is needed and clear definition of project goals

- Focus work for my City, my Region, my interest
- Sometimes policy making (in the sense of lobbying)
- Brussels is 24/7 active (the European Year is very intense)
- Being present in Brussels means a lot of activity and manpower
- New projects and new policies need long term preparation
- Reporting for the sending institution back home is state of the art



TSI ref.23SI05

Costs, such as rent and staff costs are generally cited as disadvantages. Nevertheless, having an office in Brussels seems to be of great importance, as demonstrated by the enormous number of organisations represented. A list of these organisations include all EU institutions, NGOs, the EU Parliament, the CoR, diplomats, all permanent representations, think tanks, international offices, companies and more, all of which are accredited in Brussels and work in the 'EU field'.

TSI ref.23SI05

## 6. Scope of work from the perspective of ZMOS

At a ZMOS Mayor's Assembly meeting three weeks after the study visit, a presentation was given on the impressions and initial results of the study trip to Brussels. The idea of the scope of work as per the TSI project was also discussed:

- Representing interests of urban municipalities within cohesion policy with additional focus of the ITI mechanism and urban development (official vs. unofficial lobbying)
- Informing ZMOS and urban municipalities

The committee held a brainstorming session, during which further suggestions were made for topics to be included in the deliberations on the remit.

- Centralised programmes in the interest of urban municipalities
- Applying for project funding, project work
- Supporting CoR delegations
- Supporting urban municipality representatives when they come to Brussels
- Organise trips and visits to institutions for urban municipality representatives
- General legislation

Other important considerations regarding the scope of the work are as follows:

- a. Representation in the areas of group interest (like Austrian regions)
- b. Supporting each of the 12 urban municipalities individually in their interests (finding project partners etc.)

### 6.1. Representation

#### 6.1.1. Location - Brussels office options

The various institutions visited during the study trip demonstrated different approaches to office management.

The types of office most common in Brussels for representations is:

- Single Office Space in Brussels
- Joint Office with other regions or organisations within the same country
- Joint Office with other regions from different countries
- Public Co-Working Space

TSI ref.23SI05

- Satellite person in the Permanent Representation

Various considerations must be taken into account when selecting an office type. The following general indicators are used for comparison:

- *Costs*: Estimation of annual rental costs
- *Visibility to the world*: Visibility in the workplace means that your work is noticed, recognised and valued (visibility for others, visibility for collective impact); also visible for regions/cities
- *Marketing*: marketing the location and office to increase visibility.
- *Place to be*: Location of the office with respect to to the EU institutions
- *NGO Register*: The NGO registration concerns the EU Parliament / the so-called Lobbying Register<sup>3</sup>.
- *Synergies*: Cooperation with permanent representation, regular meetings of all those responsible, passing on information to everyone, coordination with representatives of other areas, exchange of information, teamwork, jour fixe, etc.
- *Marketing*: Concerns public relations, such as cooperation with the Permanent Representation and the joint use of resources.
- *Economy of scale*, in the case of joint offices or sharing working space and common services
- *Activities*: Example: Participation at the annual European Week of Regions and Cities (a must-attend event), always in October <https://regions-and-cities.europa.eu/>
- *Media work*: possibility of active European media work
- *Social media*: All representations in Brussels are more or less on social media, especially Instagram and Facebook; a wonderful medium for inexpensive external advertising (but manpower is required!)
- *EU networking*: Useful for networking at several levels (local, regional, national and EU).
- *Output for home*: a general assessment based on experience.

The following table shows a summary of various office options based on the indicators:

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<sup>3</sup> Appearing as a regional office in a register is simply important and beneficial. It increases your local visibility, provides you with a network and makes it easier to work with the local administration in Brussels (telecommunications, internet, electricity, etc.).

TSI ref.23SI05

## Brussels Office Options

	Single Office Space in Brussels	Joint Office with other regions or organisations within the same country	Joint Office with other regions from different countries	Public Co-Working Space	Satellite Person in the Permanent Representation
<b>Costs</b>	Annual rental costs are high	Rental costs are shared	Rental Cost are shared	Low rental costs	Best case no rental costs at all
<b>Visibility to the world</b>	High visibility - 24/7 all year long	Shared power under one roof	One of so many...		
<b>Marketing</b>	Marketing is clear	Less visibility	Less visibility	Less visibility no unique selling point	No visibility at all
<b>Place to be</b>	Location near EU Quarter, important decision	Location near EU Quarter, important decision	Location near EU Quarter, important decision	all over Brussels (Airport, City Center EU Quarter)	Lowest form of European Presence
<b>NGO Register</b>	Registration in the NGO Platform of the EU Parliament	Registration in the NGO Platform of the EU Parliament	Registration in the NGO Platform of the EU Parliament	Registration in the NGO Platform of the EU Parliament	Registration in the NGO Platform of the EU Parliament
<b>Synergies</b>	Networking with the national Permanent Representation	Networking with the national Permanent Representation	Networking with the national Permanent Representation	Networking with the national Permanent Representation	Networking with the national Permanent Representation
<b>Marketing</b>	Marketing & Public Relation work are important for success in BXL	Marketing & Public Relation work are important for success in BXL	Marketing & Public Relation work are important for success in BXL	Less Marketing & Public Relation possible	Less Marketing & Public Relation possible
<b>Activities</b>	Participation at the annual European Week of Regions and Cities, always in October <a href="https://regions-and-cities.europa.eu/">https://regions-and-cities.europa.eu/</a>	Participation at the annual European Week of Regions and Cities, always in October <a href="https://regions-and-cities.europa.eu/">https://regions-and-cities.europa.eu/</a>	Participation at the annual European Week of Regions and Cities, always in October <a href="https://regions-and-cities.europa.eu/">https://regions-and-cities.europa.eu/</a>	Participation not possible	Participation not possible

TSI ref.23SI05

<b>Media work</b>	Active European media work	Active European media work	Active European media work	Media work is difficult to implement	Media work is less possible
<b>Social Media</b>					
<b>EU Networking</b>	24/7 Networking in Brussels and all other cities with EU Institutions, Connection is all for success	24/7 Networking in Brussels and all other cities with EU Institutions, Connection is all for success	24/7 Networking in Brussels and all other cities with EU Institutions, Connection is all for success	Networking need the right Staff	Networking is difficult with a one man/women Office
<b>Conclusions:</b>	BEST FORM of BXL Presence	BEST FORM of BXL Presence	BEST FORM of BXL Presence	At least a presence in BXL	At least a presence in BXL
<b>Output for home</b>	Very high with the right Staff	Very high with the right Staff	Very high with the right Staff	Less output	Output will be lower

Table 1: Brussels office options

TSI ref.23SI05

### 6.1.2. Costs

The cost estimate is based on approximate information from the visited liaison offices. While rental costs are easy to record (see Table 3), personnel costs are more difficult to estimate due to the different ways in which staff can be involved (see the next chapter for more information).

Below are examples of the representation of two Austrian provinces:

- The Salzburg office has an annual budget of approx. €60,000 for representation costs only, which covers events, visitor groups, activities, the summer reception and CoR Open Days. Fixed costs, such as the salaries of all three employees, are paid by the Province of Salzburg (approx. €180,000). The rent and ancillary costs, such as telephone and electricity, are paid directly by the Province of Salzburg (accounting in Salzburg). (approx. €40,000).
- The Upper Austrian office pays a monthly rent of €2,000 for 100 m<sup>2</sup>. While it is more of a small office without a meeting room, it is perfectly adequate for Brussels and networking.

Table 2 below provides specific examples of the personnel and costs involved, along with the estimated yearly budget:

- Registration: different versions
- Staff with sùr place contracts, but no interns
- Estimated budget: Rent and staff costs included (operating costs?).

TSI ref.23SI05

	<b>Concrete regional examples</b>				
Example:	Regional Office of Land Salzburg, AT	House of Dutch Provinces, NL	Office of Carinthia, AT	free market	Austrian Association of Municipalities, AT
Registration	Registration under Belgium Law	Direct connected to the Dutch Permanent Representation to the EU	Registration under Belgium Law		Diplomatic Status, more visibility and synergies within the permanent Representation of Austria to the EU
Staff	3 Staff, 1 director sent from Austria, 2 sùr place	20 Staff (sent and also with sùr place contracts)	3 Staff, 1 director sent from Austria, 2 sùr place	1 Staff	1 Staff sent from Austria to BXL
Estimated Budget:	200.000 EUR/year	500.000 EUR/year	150.000 EUR/year	100.000 EUR/year	60.000 EUR/year
Weblinks	<a href="https://www.salzburg.gv.at/europa_Seiten/landes-europabuero_verbindungsbuero_team.aspx">https://www.salzburg.gv.at/europa_Seiten/landes-europabuero_verbindungsbuero_team.aspx</a>	<a href="https://www.nl-prov.eu/?lang=en">https://www.nl-prov.eu/?lang=en</a>	<a href="https://vbb.ktn.gv.at/">https://vbb.ktn.gv.at/</a>		<a href="https://gemeindebund.at/services/europa/">https://gemeindebund.at/services/europa/</a>
			<a href="https://www.facebook.com/vbb.kaernten/">https://www.facebook.com/vbb.kaernten/</a>		<a href="https://www.staedtebund.gv.at/organisation/oesterr-staedtebund/buero-bruessel/">https://www.staedtebund.gv.at/organisation/oesterr-staedtebund/buero-bruessel/</a>

Table 2: Concrete regional examples

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When selecting a site, ZMOS considers the following options, prioritising them as follows:

1. Permanent Representation of Slovenia to the European Union
2. CEMR-/Eurocities buildings
3. Slovenian Business and Research Association (SBRA) representation
4. Region/cities representation buildings
5. Other

SBRA is interested in cooperating with ZMOS, given that they have already established contact.

What arguments can be decisive in the choice of location:

- The location must be in the European quarter (Schuman roundabout, EU Parliament, Rue du Trone, Rue du Commerce).
- Ideally, it should be near a metro station or bus stop, as traffic can be congested, but the metro can reach any area where there are EU offices, the Parliament or the Commission.
- An office near Schuman Square is recommended, despite the expense, as it is useful for gathering information.
- Visibility is one of the main priorities for a new office in the first 12 months.
- Availability of staff on site, allowing concentration on the actual representation work
- A location where synergies with the surrounding institutions could be achieved

#### 6.1.3. Financing

The challenge is to secure long-term financing vs. annually confirming the budget. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the possibilities of securing long-term funding for the office, with annual confirmation to be avoided.

Funding must be approved nationally in Slovenia and be on a 'stable footing', ideally from a national or municipal body. Maintaining political independence with a clear commitment to the EU is also important.

The initial aim should be to establish a presence in Brussels for three years, followed by an evaluation.

As can be seen from the examples of representative offices visited in Brussels, the following types of funding are common:

- State funding  
funding is provided entirely within a legal framework at national level



TSI ref.23SI05

Example: All Associations from Austria such as: The permanent representation in Brussels, the Austrian Chamber of Commerce (WKÖ), Advantage Austria, the Austrian Ministries, Österreich Werbung and many other; The bilateral Embassy to the Kingdom of Belgium

- Federal state regional funding  
funding is provided entirely within a legal framework at regional level

Examples: The Regional Office of Carinthia to the EU, The House of Dutch Provinces

- Shared federal state funding

Federal state share the costs

Example: The European Office of Baden-Württemberg's municipalities

- Regional funding  
with reimbursement utilizing funds from membership fees

Example: Austrian Association of Cities and Towns

- Urban municipalities membership funding

Example: the Austrian Association of Municipalities

Funding options via EU programmes

- Technical support for implementation of cohesion policy

In the coming period, it can be assumed that the European Commission will continue to use a flat rate for cost reimbursement for technical assistance in the Structural Funds Programmes, in the sense of 'simplification'. This means that financing within the framework of technical assistance would only be possible if ZMOS, as IB of ITI being a Programme body, would use these funds not only to finance their tasks within ITI but also for the representation – this seems rather unlikely. The other option would be to have the representation defined as a separate 'project' in the Operational Programme or within the ITI mechanism, which would make it dependent on normal implementation procedures.

- Collaboration with research and science institutions

Another consideration could be to collaborate with research and science institutions (e.g. the University of Ljubljana). This could secure long-term funding, similar to that provided by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG).

TSI ref.23SI05

#### 6.1.4. Comparison of the representations

Various indicators compiled from the experience of those familiar with the situation in Brussels are used to compare the different representative offices.

These include:

- Legal Basis for the Office: On what legal basis are personnel managed?
- Organisation represents
- Membership: Membership of an office organisation/office provider (e.g. REGUS)
  
- Represented in BXL since
- Main tasks
- Financial Ressources: Founding organisation
- Ressources Ressources sûr place
- Staff - Number of employees
  
- Office premises
- Cooperation with
- Annual expenses approx.
  
- Impact
- Advantages and disadvantages according to the institutions visited
- Acceptance at home
- Recommendations

The following table compares the 6 visited representations:

TSI ref.23SI05

Comparison of the representations						
<b>Indicators</b>	Brussels Offices					
	Regional Office of Salzburg	Office of Carinthia	Austrian Association of Municipalities	Association of Cities and Towns	House of Dutch Provinces	Baden-Württembergische Kommunen
<b>Legal Basis for the Office</b>	Under Belgium Law	Under Belgium Law	Diplomatic Status	Diplomatic Status	Under Belgium Law	Under Belgium Law
<b>Organsiation represents</b>	Region of Salzburg, AT	Region of Carinthia	Austrian Association of Municipalities	Association of Cities and Towns	all Regions within the NL	all 1.101 municipalities and cities within the 35 regional districts of Baden-Württemberg
<b>Membership</b>	no	no	no	no	no	no
<b>Represented in BXL since:</b>	1995 (1st Austrian Office in BXL)	1995	October 1996	1996	2000	2000
<b>Main tasks</b>	Policy check, reporting, networking, Lobbying, visitor groups	Policy check, reporting, networking, Lobbying, visitor groups	policy process check up	policy process check up	Policy check, reporting, networking, Lobbying	Policy check, reporting, networking, Lobbying
<b>Financial Ressources</b>	Land Salzburg	Land Kärnten	Austrian Association of Municipalities	Association of Cities and Towns	Dutch provinces	Association of Baden-Württemberg Municipalities
<b>Ressourcen sùr place</b>						
<b>Staff</b>	4	5	1 Head of Office	1 Head of Office	approx. 20	6

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<b>Office premises</b>	250m <sup>2</sup>	Shared Office with Friuli-Giulia- Venezia (IT), one house	One office in the Austrian Permanent Representation	One office in the Austrian Permanent Representation	one whole floor for all dutch provinces	one floor for the Brussels Team
<b>Cooperation with</b>	the other 7 regional Austrian Offices	Region of Friuli-Giulia-Venezia	Single player in the process	Single player in the process	national contacts with NL	independent
<b>Annual Expenses approx.</b>	250 000,00	150 000,00	80 000,00	80 000,00	500 000,00	350 000,00
<b>Impact</b>	High	High	Medium	Medium	Very high	Very high
<b>Advantages</b>	information at first sight, Promotion for the Region, Influence on the policy making, Connections to the EU	information at first sight, Promotion for the Region, Influence on the policy making, Connections to the EU	information at first sight, Promotion for the Region, Influence on the policy making, Connections to the EU	information at first sight, Promotion for the Region, Influence on the policy making, Connections to the EU	information at first sight, Promotion for the Region, Influence on the policy making, Connections to the EU	information at first sight, Promotion for the Region, Influence on the policy making, Connections to the EU
<b>Disadvantages</b>	competition with all other 360 European Region is very high	competition with all other 360 European Region is very high	one person is not enough	one person is not enough	competition with all other 360 European Region is very high	competition with all other 360 European Region is very high
<b>Acceptance at home (visibility)</b>	not 100 % visible	high	limited	limited	high	high
<b>Recommendations</b>	more staff for the BXL Office, experts in the field	very active, Governor Peter Kaiser will host an CoR Event in June in Klagenfurt, great promotion for Carinthia	more staff for BXL	more staff for BXL	well organised, best output for the Netherlands	very well organised, long tradition, very active in Europe

Table 3: Comparison of the representations

TSI ref.23SI05

## 6.2. Representative

### 6.2.1. General conditions

#### **Integration under labour law**

As a general rule, employees must be hired in accordance with Belgian law. There is an exception for employees with diplomatic status (see the Austrian Association of Municipalities and Cities for examples of this, and for information on Austrian law).

Freelancers and interns are also subject to Belgian law.

Employment in accordance with Belgian law, which applies everywhere, has several disadvantages:

- no fixed-term employment relationships
- can be terminated at any time;
- taxes of over 40%;
- higher social security contributions.

To avoid these disadvantages and make certain Brussels positions more attractive in terms of income, management functions are seconded from federal states such as Salzburg and Carinthia. This means employees are covered by Austrian social security law, which provides for allowances, extra bonuses, etc.

When determining the length of employment contracts, it should be noted that:

- Interns are usually given contracts lasting 1–3 months
- The duration of contracts for employees can be influenced by the term of office of a member state (4 years); experience shows that 3–4 years are required for familiarisation
- Performance functions are often held for longer periods (>10 or 20 years), so finding a suitable successor can be difficult.

The organisations (ministries, regional administrations, etc.) of the Member States act as employers and their contracts are usually governed by Belgian law.

#### **Remuneration and costs range**

There are data protection concerns regarding the release of more precise salary information for employees in the various offices.

TSI ref.23SI05

For Austrian employees, for example, an estimated value of around EUR 2,500 net for a 40-hour week results in an annual full-time salary for BE of around EUR 50,000. In the case of part-time contracts, these amounts must be reduced accordingly.

The above-mentioned possibility of assigning certain management functions with contracts, e.g. from the federal states, could increase earnings.

#### 6.2.2. Job description for the vacancy of Brussels Office Manager

The specific requirements and prerequisites for the position of Head of the Brussels Office of ZMOS can be derived from the experience and advice of the EU offices visited as well as from the nature of the work and the usual requirements for comparable positions. The following qualifications are typical for positions requiring effective representation of municipal interests at European level:

- Academic background: A university degree (master's degree), preferably in political science, European law, international relations or related disciplines.
- Professional experience: Several years of experience in advocacy, ideally at European level, and knowledge of EU institutions and processes.
- Networking skills: Ability to establish and maintain contacts with decision-makers in EU institutions, other local government representations and relevant networks.
- Communication skills: Excellent oral and written communication skills in Slovene and English; knowledge of other EU languages an advantage.
- Analytical skills: Ability to analyse complex EU legislative processes and assess their impact on cities and municipalities of the country represented.
- Independence and organisational skills: Ability to work independently, coordinate projects and organise events.

When asked what qualities are required for employees to work in this area, the EU offices cited flexibility, legal knowledge as an advantage but not a necessity, social competence, adaptability and belief in their own work.

For example, the head of the Brussels Office of the Austrian Association of Towns and Municipalities is responsible for the following key tasks:

- Observation, monitoring and influencing of EU legislative processes: This concerns in particular EU legislative projects and initiatives that are of importance to Austrian municipalities.

TSI ref.23SI05

- Establishing and maintaining contacts: It is important to establish and maintain both formal and informal relations with colleagues in EU institutions such as the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions.
- Equally important is networking with other municipal liaison offices and umbrella organisations such as the CEMR and the UCLG.

These activities effectively represent the interests of cities and municipalities at the European level, ensuring that local concerns are adequately considered in EU decision-making processes.

### 6.2.3. Key performance indicators

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) help organizations measure progress toward strategic goals and objectives. Here are the main reasons why KPIs matter:

1. **Focus and Alignment:** KPIs ensure that everyone in the organization is aligned with the same priorities and understands what success looks like.
2. **Performance Tracking:** They provide a clear way to track performance over time and identify trends, successes, or areas needing improvement.
3. **Decision-Making:** KPIs support data-driven decision-making by offering concrete evidence about what's working and what's not.
4. **Accountability:** They help assign responsibility and hold teams or individuals accountable for their performance.
5. **Motivation and Engagement:** When used well, KPIs can motivate teams by setting clear targets and enabling them to see their impact.
6. **Resource Optimization:** KPIs help organizations allocate resources more efficiently by highlighting which areas deliver the most value.

Typical KPIs from the experience and information of the liaison offices visited relate to

- Information and reporting requirements (usually included in the service contract)
- Annual progress reports and quarterly reports: accountability to ZMOS, MCRD and the relevant committee in the Ministry
- Written reports to ZMOS, MCRD
- All meetings, including documentation of meetings in Brussels and their accompaniment
- Assistance to official visitors

TSI ref.23SI05

One suggestion from the brainstorming session of the Mayors' Assembly was to measure the success of representation, for example, how much money is gained for the municipalities as a result of having representation.

This suggestion is not approved by the contact persons in the Liaison Offices visited, as the writing of project applications does not fall within the remit of the Liaison Offices. On the other hand, project proposals involve a lot of work and are therefore written by experts in the Member States. According to these liaison offices, it is not necessary to be present in the field or in Brussels.

### 6.3. Feasibility

The following variations need to be addressed:

#### 1. Position of urban municipalities as is vs. with the Brussels representation

According to the application, the broad objectives for representation are:

- To increase influence over European legislation in cases where the interests of municipalities are significantly affected.
- At the same time, representation in Brussels should act as an information and service centre for Slovenian municipalities.

The current position of the urban municipalities can hardly fulfil these requirements at all (due to a lack of resources, insufficient staff, a lack of networking opportunities, and information coming filtered and delayed from the national level). Typical questions in this regard are:

- How does information flow from Brussels to the cities? Is there a flow of information from the Permanent Representation Office to the cities (or, more accurately, to the ministries in Ljubljana)?
- Who prepares relevant information for ZMOS: The Permanent Representation in Brussels or the offices in Ljubljana?
- How is information forwarded to ZMOS in a timely manner and tailored to the needs of urban municipalities?
- What information would be important for ZMOS to receive, according to the findings of the study visits?



TSI ref.23SI05

## **2. Variations in the type and scope of the representation**

### **Type of representation**

Table 1 shows a comparison and assessment of various indicators for the following office options:

- Satellite person in the permanent representation
- Joint office with other regions/institutions within the same country
- Joint office with other regions from different countries
- Single office space in Brussels
- Public co-working space

Not only is the 'Satellite Person in the Permanent Representation' option the most cost-effective, it is also the most efficient in terms of day-to-day work and networking. During discussions at the Slovenian representation, the idea of integrating a ZMOS office into Permanent Representation was not favoured.

A joint office with other Slovenian institutions seems sensible; the possibilities (acceptance, available space, utilisation of synergies, etc.) must be examined in detail.

A joint office with other regions, such as the Regional Office of Carinthia to the EU, is a well-established option that other regions can also participate in.

Not only are the costs of a single office space considerable, but appropriate time must also be given to the necessary networking and 'integration in the community'.

A public co-working space has been ruled out due to several negative factors (see Table 1).

### **Staff**

As with the Association of Towns and Municipalities, the 'one-person variant' only works thanks to many years of intensive cooperation between institutions based at the Permanent Representation of Austria. However, the dialogue at the Slovenian Representation was negative.

The following recommendation can be derived from the experiences of several representations:

An office with three people: a head, one assistant and one person responsible for administration. The requirements are described in the chapter entitled 'A representative'.

In Austria, the current trend is for specialised officers to be seconded to liaison offices for periods ranging from one to several months, in order to gain and exchange experience. This also strengthens the flow of information into the administration, which is beneficial for all involved.

The tasks include:

TSI ref.23SI05

- *Monitoring*: observing, accompanying and influencing legislative processes in EU projects and initiatives that are important for ZMOS and Slovenian municipalities;
- *Networking*: establishing and maintaining formal and informal contacts with colleagues in EU institutions (especially the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities), as well as with other municipal liaison offices and umbrella organisations (such as CEMR).
- *Lobbying*: influencing the legislative process and other initiatives.
- Forwarding information on programmes that are important for urban municipalities.
- Supporting delegations (CoR) with information and on-site assistance.
- Organising and accompanying visitor programmes

The daily workload is determined by the EU institutions' participation in the European calendar (meetings of the EU Commission, plenary sessions of the EU Parliament, committee and political group meeting weeks, conferences, forums, etc.).

As mentioned by several liaison offices, writing project applications is not within their remit, as this is a time-consuming task that is best carried out by experts in the Member States. According to these offices, there is no need for staff to be present on site or in Brussels.

For “beginners”, a familiarisation period of one to two annual cycles is recommended. A long-term approach of three to five years should generally be planned, as this period is required to gain experience, optimise processes and establish an efficient reporting system.

#### **6.4. Broader view**

On the basis of the experience and recommendations of the liaison offices in Brussels, further consideration of emphasising the position of the representation with regard to the establishment of the eastern and western cohesion region within the framework of the new law on regional development will not be pursued. Given that Slovenia is a small country compared to other member states, there should be no separation into two regions with the installation of an office in Brussels. It is very difficult to be 'heard and noticed' in Brussels (see also the register of organisations). Various issues can be regulated through an internal allocation of tasks for office staff.

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## 6.5. Roadmap

### Concept phase

(I/2026 – II/2026)

Definition of subject areas and focal points,

Clarification of personnel (number of people, required qualifications)

Clarification of location

Preparation of cost overview

### Securing funding

(III/2026 - IV/2026)

Clarify type of funding: national funding, ZMOS membership fees, EU programme (Cohesion Fund/Technical Assistance?)

Initially secure funding once for 3 to 5 years

### Legal framework

(I/2027 - III/2027)

Clarification of national legal requirements

Clarification of requirements at ZMOS

Clarification of requirements in Brussels

### Decision by ZMOS

(III/2027)

Search for property in Brussels

(III/2027 - II/2028)

6-8 months, to be carried out without pressure

### Visibility

(IV/2027 - III/2028)

at home in Slovenia, LOGO, design

Online (also via the government website), social media

Communication in the national media

### Preliminary activities

(IV/2027 – III/2028)

Networking with other partners in advance:

Deepening contacts in Brussels to:

- the Slovene desk of the European Commission

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- CEMR
- Eurocities
- ITI regions
- CoR

Participation in the 2025 Open Days at the CoR, held in October

Partnership with the CoR Secretary General, Petr Blizkovsky, in Brussels (access exists and is important)

Preparation of PR and public relations work

### Implementation

III/2027 – III/2028.

Location fixing

Recruitment

Setting up an office

Registering with the official register under Belgian law

Registration with the NGO Transparency Register

The new office in Brussels will open on

1 September 2028

The office will be officially opened with representatives from Slovenia in the EU Commission (DG Regio and others), the EU Parliament, the Council of the EU, the EIB and the ECB, Eurocities and other regional offices from Europe that are already based in Brussels (IT, DE and AT, as well as countries with which there is close cooperation/friendship).

Participation in the EU decision-making process (the working year usually runs from September to mid-July). During the summer, the offices are sometimes unstaffed (company holidays) or have reduced staffing levels.

### Evaluation

(IV/2029).

After one year, the first results and findings of the new ZMOS office in the EU capital, Brussels, will be evaluated.

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## 7. Annexes

### 7.1.1. Annex 1: Topics to address for the Representation of ZMOS

#### **T3.7 - T3.9 for D3.3:**

#### **Topics to address for the Representation of ZMOS/ Slovene Urban Municipalities in Brussels**

Saša Heath-Drugovič, M.Sc. in Management, M.Eng., G. Dip. Bus

11.-13.2.2025

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##### 1. Location

Options to consider:

1. Permanent Representation of Slovenia to the European Union
2. CEMR/Eurocities buildings
3. SBRA representation
4. Region/cities representation buildings
5. Other

Advantages:

- A location where synergies with the surrounding institutions could be achieved.
- It is an important advantage to have support staff at the location to be able to focus on the representation work.

##### 2. Scope of work

The idea of scope of work as per TSI project:

1. Representing interests of urban municipalities within cohesion policy with additional focus of the ITI mechanism and urban development (official vs. unofficial lobbying)
2. Informing ZMOS and urban municipalities

Other suggested topics from the brainstorming session at the Mayor's Committee to be addressed:

1. Centralised programmes in the interest of urban municipalities
2. Applying for project funding, project work
3. Supporting CoR delegations
4. Supporting urban municipality representatives when they come to Brussels
5. Organise trips and visits to institutions for urban municipality representatives
6. General legislation

Important consideration in the scope of work:

- a. Representation in the areas of group interest (like Austrian regions)
- b. Supporting each of the 12 urban municipalities individually in their interests (finding project partners etc.)

##### 3. Key institutions

Cooperation with institutions in the field of cohesion policy:

1. Slovene desk of the European commission

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2. CEMR
3. Eurocities
4. ITI regions
5. CoR

#### 4. The representation

1. Organisational type (under Slovene or Belgium law)
2. Costs of the representation

#### 5. A representative

1. Who is the employer (an urban municipality, ZMOS, MKRR...)
2. Status of the representative
3. Conditions of employment, duration of the term
4. Remuneration and costs range

A suggestion at the brainstorming session at the Mayor's Committee was to measure representative's success, eg. how much money is gained for the municipalities as a result of having the representation.

#### 5. Financing

Possible financing options to be addressed:

- a. Technical support for implementation of cohesion policy
- b. State funding
- c. Urban municipalities membership funding

The challenge is to secure long-term financing vs. annually confirming the budget.

#### 6. Broader view

Highlight the position of the representation in the light of establishing the representation of Eastern and Western Cohesion Region under the new law for regional development.

#### 7. Feasibility

The following variations need to be addressed:

1. Position of urban municipalities as is vs. with the Brussels representation
2. Variations in the type and scope of the representation

#### 3. Roadmap

Define:

1. Tasks
2. Timeliness
3. Actors to implement the tasks
4. Legal framework

Important timeframe milestone: for the representation to be active in the post 2027 talks.

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## 7.1.2. Annex 2: Programm Study Visit Brussels



### FINAL Programme

#### AED-IRE-Study Visit Brussels

**Tuesday, 11. February until Thursday 13. February 2025**

For the AED: **DI Anton Schabl, plus 3 persons**

For the IRE: **MMag. Dr. Joachim Fritz, Stefanie Hauser (sûr place whole February)**

#### **TUESDAY, 11.2.2025:**

Individual Arrival to Brussels

Check In at the Hotel in Brussels

#### **17:00 hrs**

Meeting with Austrian Association of Municipalities (Österreichischer Gemeindebund)

**Mag. Daniela FRAISS**

<https://gemeindebund.at/ueber-uns-ueber-den-gemeindebund/>



Meeting with Austrian Association of Cities

**Dr. Simone WOLESER**

<https://www.staedtebund.gv.at/>



#### **18:00 hrs**

Meeting in the Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU

**Coordinator for the Austrian Regions Mag. Claus BINDER**

Avenue Corthenberg 30, 1030 Brussels, Belgium



#### **20:00 hrs**

Joint Dinner in Brussels near Rond-Point Schuman invitation by AED,

Location: **Restaurant Le 1898**, Avenue d'Auderghem 4, 1040 Brussels, Belgium

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**WEDNESDAY, 12.2.2025:**

10:00 hrs Meeting with CEMR, Durmish GURI, Director Projects and Programmes and Ayben OKKALI AKTAS, Officer Statutory Affairs and Events.



**Location:** Square de Meeûs 1, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

11:30 Uhr

Meeting with **Patrick WEGENER, Head of Office**

Baden-Württembergische Kommunen



**Location:** Europabüro der baden-württembergischen Kommunen

Rue Guimard 1, 1040 Brussels, Belgium

13:00 hrs Lunch break

**Location:** London Brasserie, Place Luxembourg 8, 1050 Ixelles

14:00 hrs **Visit of the House of Dutch Provinces**

**Rob VAN EIJKEREN, Head of Office**



**Location:** Rue de Treves 59-61, 5<sup>th</sup> floor, 1040 Brussels, Belgium

15:30 hrs

Meeting at the Slovenian Permanent Representation to the EU

**Hermine GOLOB & H.E. Ambassador for Slovenia to the EU**



**Location:** Rue Joseph II 14, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium

17:00 hrs until 18:00 hrs

**Visit in the European Committee of the Regions Secretary General Petr BLIZKOVSKY**

**Location:** Rue Belliard 101, 1040 Brussels, Belgium



19:00 hrs

**Joint Dinner at Place Luxembourg, Quartier Leopold** invited by IRE

**Location:** Place Luxembourg 9, 1050 Ixelles, Belgium



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**THURSDAY, 13.2.2025:**

09:00 Uhr

Visit of the Regional Office of Carinthia to the EU

LAND  KÄRNTEN

**Director Mrs. Mag. Martina RATTINGER**

**Location:** Rue du Commerce 49, 1050 Ixelles, Brussels, Belgium

*The EU-Representation Office Carinthia is located close to several transport connection points. The metro station Trône/ Troon (line 2 or 6) is only a few minutes' walk away from the office. The bus lines 34/64/80/95 and 38 will take you to Rue du Luxembourg at the stop Trône/ Troon, which is also only a few minutes' walk from the office.*

Since 2005 the EU-Representation Office of Carinthia has been under one roof with the Representations of Friuli Venezia Giulia (Italy) and Istria (Croatia). The "multi-region house" offers an excellent opportunity to live the added European value day by day. Together, the three regions represent almost 2 million EU citizens.

10:30 hrs

**Meeting with Mr. Gašper KAVŠEK**, Programme Manager

European Commission, DG REGIO, Unit E3 Slovenia

[gasper.kavsek@ec.europa.eu](mailto:gasper.kavsek@ec.europa.eu) +32 2 295 0369

**Location:** CSM1 04/P013A (Cours Saint-Michel 23, 1040 Etterbeek)



13:00 hrs

**Meeting with Secretary General Andre Sobczak**, Eurocities, Brussels, Belgium

**Location:** Square de Meeus 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, 1000 Brussels, Belgium



14:30 hrs

Lunch break

16:00 hrs

Individual Departure from Brussels

**REQUESTS:**

**MMag. Dr. Joachim FRITZ:** [joachim.fritz@institut-ire.eu](mailto:joachim.fritz@institut-ire.eu) Mobile: 0043 664 399 0060

[www.ire-institut.eu](http://www.ire-institut.eu)

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### 7.1.3. Annex 3: List of participants

Name and Surname	Position/Role
<b>Damjan Anželj</b>	Mayor of Urban Municipality Murska Sobota
<b>Timi Gomboc</b>	Deputy Mayor of Urban Municipality Murska Sobota
<b>Iztok Mori</b>	Director of municipal administration of Urban Municipality Velenje
<b>Bojan Veselinovič</b>	Director of municipal administration of Urban Municipality of Kranj
<b>Gregor Deleja</b>	Director of municipal administration of Urban Municipality Celje
<b>Karla Sitar</b>	Head of the Office for Economic Dev. Urban Municipality of Velenje
<b>Jera Grobelnik</b>	Head of the Office for Local Self-Government
<b>Alenka Pograjc</b>	Senior adviser at ZMOS
<b>Anton Schabl</b>	Project Lead, aed
<b>Katharina Nepustil</b>	Project Manager, aed
<b>Matteo Malvani</b>	int. STE, aed
<b>Andrea Rainer Cerovska</b>	int. STE, aed
<b>Ida Bibič</b>	local STE, aed
<b>Saša Heath-Drugovič</b>	local STE, aed
<b>Stefanie Hauser</b>	IRE
<b>Joachim Fritz</b>	IRE Secretary General