

International Cities of Remembrance Network
Under the patronage and with the active support
of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union

“The Dunkirk Appeal”
European cities actively defending the citizens of Europe and its founding values

Committee of the Regions
Rue Belliard, Brussels

7 May 2026

The dangers facing the world are prompting Europe’s cities to mobilise for the civil protection of citizens, based on the strength of European values and the history of cities. Young people will lead this commitment by Europe’s regions.

1. Event title

The Dunkirk Appeal

European cities actively defending the citizens of Europe and its founding values

2. Date

Thursday 7 May 2026
12.30–17.00

3. Venue

Committee of the Regions
Jacques Delors Building
Rue Belliard, 99-101
B-1040 Brussels

Room 52: 180 seats

4. Coordination

- Dunkerque Urban Community, France, on behalf of the International Cities of Remembrance Network
- With the patronage and strong support of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, co-organiser

5. Members of the event's organising committee

- Cities of Remembrance Network
- Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
- Council of European Municipalities and Regions
- Eurocities
- Italian Coordination of Local Authorities for Peace and Human Rights
- AFCCRE
- Cités Unies France
- Cross-Border Operational Mission (MOT)
- Town of Bucha
- City of Krefeld (Germany)
- City of Gdańsk
- City of Bologna
- Town of Marzabotto
- EGTC West Flanders – Dunkirk – Opal Coast
- Regional Committee for the Commemoration of the Victims of Marzabotto

6. General objectives of the event

In the face of the threats currently weighing on European unity and its fundamental values, the International Cities of Remembrance network — guardians of memory and whistleblowers against the dangers of the moment — calls on European cities to rally around the Dunkirk Appeal on 7 May at the Committee of the Regions, at the very heart of the European institutions.

The event aims to demonstrate, in response to the frontal attacks Europe is facing — from both within and outside the Union — the resolute support of the first level of democracy for European unity, the international legal order, and the values of pluralist democracy and human rights upheld by their organisations.

This commitment will take the form of the formal adoption, on 7 May, of the **'Brussels Pledge'**. Through this document, European mayors will commit to systematically combining two approaches. The first will involve setting up local initiatives to raise awareness of the growing challenges of civil protection. The second will aim to launch processes among their young citizens designed to awaken their historical awareness — of the tragedies of the 20th century, but also of the post-war origins of European integration and international law — and to mobilise them to invent, together, a European model of progress for tomorrow, open to the world. This approach will be based on dialogue and exchanges between young Europeans, within the framework of existing twinning schemes, partnerships and cross-border cooperation.

7. Background

The International Cities of Remembrance network was founded ten years ago, in 2016, with a specific aim: to renew, in an innovative and creative way, the transmission of the historical memory of the global conflicts of the 20th century to younger generations. This is a matter of urgency, given the

gradual fading of memories and the rise of worrying phenomena — nationalism, extremism, isolationism and rhetoric of rejection. The Network brings together cities such as Dunkirk, Dresden, Ypres, Coventry, Guernica, Oradour-sur-Glane, Krefeld, Gdańsk, Hiroshima, Hwaseong and Marzabotto, to name but a few. These cities have made exchange and dialogue between young citizens one of their defining features: the aim is to awaken their historical awareness, to help them understand the universal values of progress that emerged from the post-war era, and to encourage them to actively defend these values, as well as the European and international institutions that embody them.

Deeply affected by hostile rhetoric—both internal and external—by the return of war to Europe and by the statements following the Munich Security Conference in February 2025, the mayors of the Cities of Remembrance network solemnly adopted the ‘Dunkirk Appeal’ in May 2025, during their symposium co-organised in Ypres and Dunkirk. This manifesto calls on the cities of Europe — and beyond — to defend the fundamental values of European unity and international law. The text immediately received the support of a large number of European local government organisations.

Among them, the Committee of the Regions — through its President, Kata Tüttö — proposed to the Villes Mémoires that they organise, on 7 May 2026, in its Brussels premises, from the capital of Europe, an event aimed at bringing the Dunkirk Appeal to as many European cities as possible.

8. Objectives of the event – The ‘Brussels Commitment’

The overall objective is to bring together mayors and stakeholders concerned by the frontal attacks being levelled at European and international institutions, and to affirm their stance: on the front line, from the local level, closest to the people, as the first tier of European democracy, in the defence of the values of pluralist democracy, extensive human rights and the European model of progress — in a spirit of dialogue and openness to the world.

The specific objective is to provide the mayors present — and those who will join the movement — with practical tools enabling them to implement initiatives for their young citizens, through exchanges with other young Europeans from their twinning schemes, partnerships, networks and cross-border cooperation initiatives.

These initiatives will draw on one of the primary responsibilities of cities in the face of increasing risks: raising citizens’ awareness of civil protection measures.

Following the Ukrainian or Finnish model, mayors will commit, through the ‘Brussels Pledge’, to pursuing two parallel initiatives aimed at young people: firstly, to provide information on civil protection; and, on the other, to raise their historical awareness — specifically regarding the traumas of the 20th century, which are often directly present in their towns, and the inestimable value of the universal achievements of the post-war era. This work will be complemented by a reflection on the historical role of European integration and international multilateralism. Through dialogue and exchanges with young Europeans from their twin towns, international partnerships and cross-border cooperation schemes, young people will be invited to imagine together the progressive European model of tomorrow — one that is open to the world.

Given the urgency of the situation, the initiative on 7 May therefore pursues a clear ambition. It aims to spark, from the grassroots up, a vast grassroots movement. The aim is to unite young Europeans

by raising their historical awareness and their understanding of the dangers of the moment, through exchange and dialogue. It is also a question of strengthening their identification with European integration, fostering their active European citizenship and fully involving them in shaping the European model of tomorrow, open to the world.

9. Funding for the initiative

- The event is being funded by the Dunkirk Urban Community, on behalf of the International Cities of Remembrance network
- Venue and interpreting services are provided free of charge by the Committee of the Regions
- Free admission