



PROVINCIE  UTRECHT

# Strategy for European collaboration and advocacy 2024 – 2034

Province of Utrecht



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# Executive summary

In 2022, the Dutch cabinet noted that the European Union has essentially become a fourth tier of government<sup>1</sup>. What applies to the central government, equally applies to the provinces: they must comply with what is happening in ‘Europe’. By means of this Strategy for European collaboration and advocacy 2024 – 2034 (hereinafter ‘Europe strategy’), the province of Utrecht addresses this issue.

The Europe strategy emphasises process agreements. This is a deliberate choice. By focusing on the process instead of substantive goals, the strategy does not have to automatically be revised in case of political shifts in Brussels or the province. Naturally, this does not alter the fact that the strategy serves the coalition agreement as well as the substantive policy frameworks of the province of Utrecht.

## **Ambitions and core activities**

The Europe strategy outlines a number of ambitions and core activities. These ambitions include effective advocacy within the European Union (EU), making the most of European funding, international profiling and creating a Europe-conscious organisation. On the one hand, advocacy means lobbying for a favourable policy implementation of regulations drawn up in Brussels, and on the other hand, minimising undesirable regulations or regulations that are too strict for the province of Utrecht. Cluster Europe of the province of Utrecht plays a central role in realising these ambitions.

The core activities of Cluster Europe are Public Affairs and European funding. They form the foundation of the cluster’s efforts. These activities are strongly intertwined and aim to benefit from the opportunities offered by the European Union. This requires a provincial organisation that is not only aware of its tasks’ European dimensions, but also proactively seeks out funding opportunities.

A closer look at the cluster’s core activities reveals a number of underlying tasks and responsibilities. For Public Affairs, this involves monitoring European developments, providing information, advocacy and profiling. When it comes to European funding, Cluster Europe is required to spot opportunities in the complex web of financial flows. The cluster also assists teams throughout application procedures and the justification of implementation.

## **Striving for collaboration**

When it comes to Public Affairs and European funding, effective advocacy requires collaboration, the sharing of knowledge and relationship management. That is why these matters are included in the Europe strategy. Our collaborations are numerous, but the starting point is always for the province to actively seek ways to join forces with like-minded regional, national and European partners.

However, for a successful implementation of the Europe strategy, collaborations within the own organisation are also vital. That is why the Europe strategy outlines how Europe is anchored within the organisation. The starting point is that the substantive policy domains are responsible for the European dimension of their own tasks. This requires the teams within those domains to have a decent level of European awareness. It is the task of Cluster Europe to promote such awareness.

*Like the Dutch central government, provinces must comply with what is happening within the European Union.*

<sup>1</sup> The cabinet’s response to the evaluation report on Dutch coordination of the EU position statement process, which was sent to the House of Representatives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022

### **Cluster Europe as a bridge to European institutions**

When appropriate, Cluster Europe advises and supports substantive teams based on a predetermined assessment framework (see page 18). All direction and coordination of European affairs is organised centrally within the province of Utrecht. Cluster Europe forms a bridge to European institutions and maintains an overview of all ongoing activities within Europe.

Given the nature of its tasks, Cluster Europe works largely on demand. To meet any future demands from both its own organisation and the region, the Europe strategy outlines a phased development trajectory. Within this trajectory,

Cluster Europe will grow from a team that focuses on the core activities mentioned above into a regional EU centre of expertise that supports Utrecht in seizing the (financial) opportunities Europe has to offer.

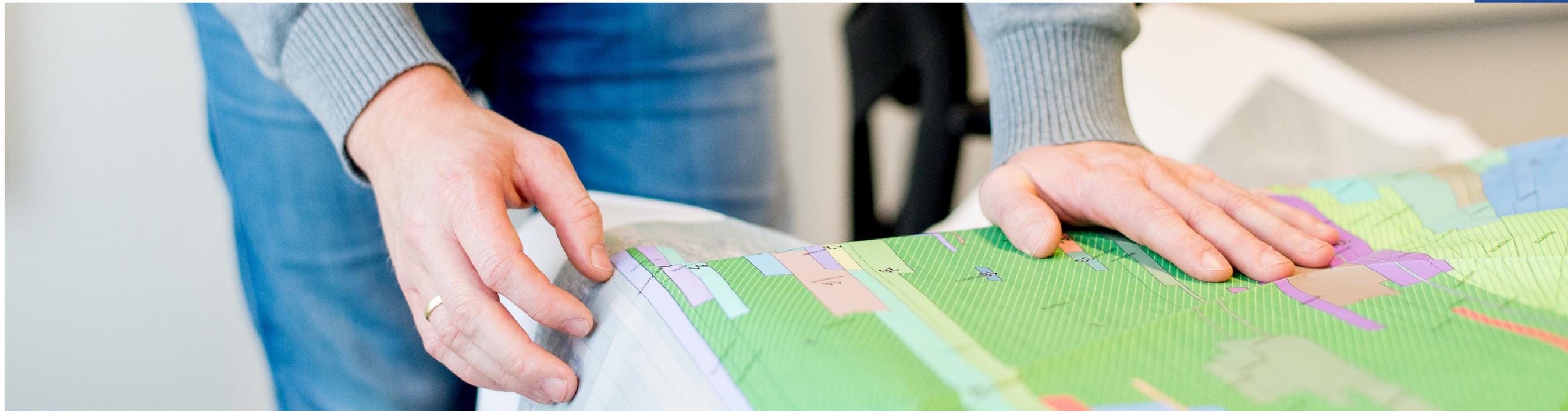
### **Provision of information by Cluster Europe**

Good communication and the provision of information is decisive for both raising awareness in regard to Europe and painting a realistic picture of what is going on in the EU. This is an extensive task in which the flow of information towards the Provincial Council and Provincial Executive must be guaranteed. To serve them as well as other target groups, this Europe strategy outlines the way in which Cluster Europe provides information. For this, an important

starting point is that information is shared by means of a fixed pattern and frequency.

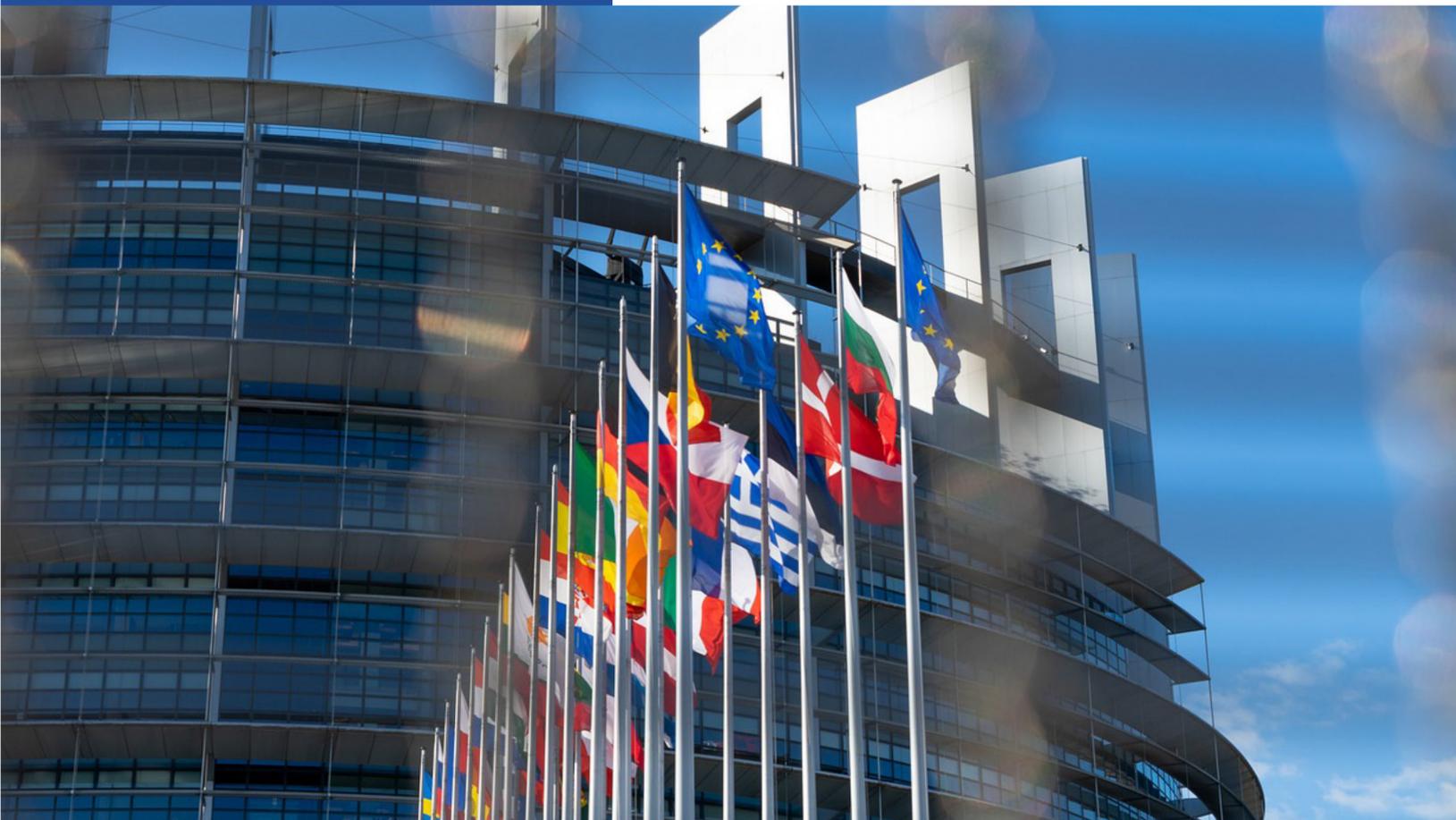
### **Interim review of the Europe strategy**

In short, a Europe strategy that has the ambition to span an entire decade calls for an interim review. The first concise review will take place in 2026 and will highlight the results achieved so far. A more extensive review will take place after the 2029 European elections, but before the start of a new European governance period. Cluster Europe will coordinate these reviews in collaboration with the Provincial Executive. The Provincial Council will be kept informed of the outcomes of both reviews via a council letter.



# 1. Strategy for European collaboration and advocacy 2024 – 2034

The European Union (EU) is of great importance for the work of the province of Utrecht. Approximately seventy per cent of European legislation affects Dutch provinces and European subsidies offer real opportunities for provincial ambitions. If European legislative proposals pose potential risks, the Public Affairs advisers will advocate for the interests of Utrecht. In short, choices made at European level matter. Moreover, these choices do not come about in a vacuum – decentralised governments also have a say. Our organisation is required to focus on having clear goals, clear mutual agreements and a structured way of working.



This long-term strategy for European collaboration and advocacy (hereinafter Europe strategy) is the starting point for this. Within the EU system, regional governments can profile themselves internationally, exchange knowledge and collaborate on ambitious projects. The Europe strategy outlines how the province of Utrecht wishes to anticipate European laws and regulations, how it intends to contribute to decisions that include provincial interests and how it intends to use European funding to achieve its goals.

First and foremost, being active on the European stage is no goal in itself, but rather a way to act more effectively. By giving direction to the province's European engagement, the Provincial Executive wants the EU to fully contribute to Utrecht's tasks. This strategy therefore serves the goals set by the Provincial Council and is strongly anchored in the coalition agreement as well as various substantive policy frameworks.

## **The province of Utrecht underlines the importance of the European Union as a community of values**

The European Union is a community of values, bringing together the principles of democracy, an independent rule of law and justice, solidarity and a social market economy. The objectives of the EU reflect the broad concept of prosperity in which it is not the law of the jungle that applies, but the rule of law. The EU's internal market is committed to a social market economy that includes healthy competitiveness, is focused on good working conditions and values reasonable income ratios<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> [Policy Agenda European Union 2024 – 2029 - Stronger Together in Times of Transition, Social Economic Council, 2023](#)

### Emphasis on the process

This Europe strategy focuses primarily on the process the province uses to shape its relationship with the EU and the framework within which the province operates. By focusing on the process instead of substantive goals, the strategy does not have to automatically be revised in case of unforeseen political shifts in Europe or Utrecht. After all, history has taught us that the future is difficult to predict.

Where the Europe strategy does give substantive direction to the EU's approach, it does so based on frameworks adopted by the Provincial Council. It is up to the Provincial Executive to determine the starting points and ambitions. The method best suited to this is discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 describes collaboration with public and private parties in the European context. Chapter 4 focuses on our own organisation and resources and outlines a vision of the future. Lastly, Chapter 5 provides an explanation of the communication and provision of information involved in the province's European activities.

### About this strategy

This Europe strategy is the result of extensive collaborations within the province of Utrecht. As coordinator, Cluster Europe has collected input from the provincial government and the regional minister for Europe in particular. In addition, during an informative session, ideas have been exchanged with the Provincial Council. Finally, through regular consultations and specific information requests, Cluster Europe was able to gather knowledge and insights from various professional teams within the province of Utrecht and our regional partners.

### Europe and the European Union

This strategy uses the term European Union when referring specifically to European legislative proposals and/or current European policies. However, collaboration within networks and the development and implementation of European subsidy projects often has a wider scope than just the 27 EU member states. Therefore, the term Europe is also used.



## 2. Ambitions and core activities

The Europe strategy gives direction to the deployment of the province of Utrecht in Europe. The Europe strategy determines what the province does and how it is done. After all, it is impossible to establish a joint commitment without the how and what. This chapter describes the ambitions and how these ambitions are implemented.

### Ambitions

#### *Effective advocacy*

During each European governance period (2024 – 2029 and 2030 – 2035), the province of Utrecht will continue to draw the attention of European institutions and relevant stakeholders to its interests. In particular, the focus will be on execution and implementation pressure. In terms of content, the coalition agreement is leading. Collaboration in Brussels (with the Dutch state, provinces and other stakeholders) is necessary to effectively promote the interests of the province of Utrecht. To improve feasibility, it is also vital that decentralised governments are structurally involved in every step of decision-making. That is why the province of Utrecht is actively working on improving intergovernmental and interregional collaborations, in line with the Intergovernmental Relations Code<sup>3</sup>.

### The province of Utrecht wants to make its voice heard in Brussels

The 2016 advice of the Advisory Council on International Affairs reflects a regional component that is also relevant for the province of Utrecht<sup>4</sup>. Even though the indispensable trend of regionalisation is recognised, the question remains to what extent the interests of European regions are heard in Brussels. Legal analysis of the European architecture shows that the extent to which European regions as independent actors can have a say in the European legislative process is limited. Based on European treaties, regions and decentralised governments can voice their opinions through the Committee of the Regions,

but before the European Court of Justice they have the same position as citizens.

As a result, the clout of European regions in Brussels is limited. There have been no significant changes in this since 2016, it is mainly the member states that are the decisive factor. To strengthen the position of European regions in the EU, it is important to better position regions and decentralised governments in Brussels and increase their visibility where decision-making takes place. As a province, we are committed to ensuring regions and decentralised governments are heard throughout the European institutions in Brussels.

*‘Europe’ is not a stand-alone goal or file, but rather an integral part of policy.*

<sup>3</sup> Article 9 of the Intergovernmental Relations Code establishes the extent to which the different tiers of government collaborate on European files.

<sup>4</sup> [Advice 100: Well connected? On the relationship between the region and the EU, Advisory Council on International Affairs, 2016](#)

### *Optimal use of European funding opportunities*

It is the ambition of the province of Utrecht to take full advantage of available funding opportunities. In doing so, the provincial organisation plays a central role. Moreover, the aim is also to help regional partners make more use of these financial resources. Cohesion funds are essential for central governments to achieve their policy goals, which means that their successful implementation is of great value. Maintaining this funding structure or finding an adequate alternative is therefore an important lobbying goal in both Brussels and The Hague, aimed at maximising the financial benefits for our region.

### *International profiling*

The Utrecht Metropolitan Region has a distinctive profile: Heart of Health. English terms are normally used with restraint but 'Utrecht: Heart of Health' increases the region's international visibility and raises the province's profile as well as the Utrecht Metropolitan Region within Europe and its institutions. This will allow for the creation of new opportunities.

### *Europe-conscious organisation*

The goal is to make the most out of the EU as a fourth tier of government, which comes with both opportunities and challenges<sup>5</sup>. A strategic approach to interacting with the EU is being pursued with the aim of maximising the benefits and mitigating any downsides. This involves both proactive and reactive approaches to best represent the interests of the province of Utrecht within the European playing field.

To do so, a Europe-conscious organisation is a prerequisite. EU policy has an impact on almost all provincial policy domains, as the province must comply with European directives and regulations. 'Europe' is not a stand-alone goal or file, but rather an integral part of policy. A Europe-conscious organisation sees 'Europe' as a trans-domain subject that requires optimal sharing of information between Cluster Europe and the substantive domains.

### **Core activities**

The core activities of Cluster Europe can be summarised in two pillars, namely Public Affairs and European funding. In addition, collaboration, the sharing of knowledge and relationship management with a proper provision of communication and information are prerequisite activities for an effective and efficient implementation.



Figure 1: Core activities of Cluster Europe

<sup>5</sup> [The EU has essentially become a fourth tier of government](#) after central government, provinces and municipalities. Civil and lobbying organisations, regional governments and companies recognise the importance of the EU and make their voices heard in Brussels.

## Public Affairs

Public Affairs is a collective term for the strategic process of responding to political decision-making and changes within society. Throughout this process, the province of Utrecht has multiple instruments at its disposal, the most important of which are monitoring, the provision of information, advocacy and profiling.

### Monitoring

Decision-making regarding important files must be closely monitored to prevent the province from unexpectedly being faced with inadequate or otherwise undesirable policy. Proper monitoring is also needed to ensure the quality of information and advocacy. Such monitoring covers both policy-related developments of specific proposals and the European force field in which these developments take place. To monitor as effectively as possible with a limited number of staff, Cluster Europe actively collaborates with partners within the House of the Dutch Provinces (HNP in Dutch), colleagues from other provinces within the Randstad Region and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). Furthermore, Cluster Europe is in contact with the Permanent Representation of the Netherlands in the EU, members of the European Parliament (MEPs), the European Commission and industry and interest groups. Cluster Europe works to obtain as complete an overview as possible of all European decision-making that is relevant to the province of Utrecht.

### The provision of information

Within the European Union, many new legislative and regulatory proposals are being worked on simultaneously and policies are periodically evaluated and revised where necessary. Any changes can directly or indirectly have major consequences for the province of Utrecht, it is therefore vital to be closely involved in European developments and anticipate them in time. However, at the same time, the technical nature of European decision-making makes it complicated for policy advisers to adequately follow all developments. Cluster Europe is therefore tasked with identifying and interpreting policy developments within the EU for the organisation, the Provincial Executive and the Provincial Council.

The method of signalling and interpretation depends on the nature and scope of the legislative proposal or change. The way in which Cluster Europe informs the organisation, the Provincial Executive and the Provincial Council is further discussed in Chapter 5.

### Advocacy

If a proposal or change will affect provincial interests, the province can switch to advocacy to influence decision-making. The decision to switch to advocacy is made by the Provincial Executive who are advised by Cluster Europe and relevant policy advisers. However, it is important that the Provincial Council be informed of these decisions at all times as well. This is done through the annual review of the European Affairs Implementation Agenda. Cluster Europe and the Regional minister of European Affairs weigh up the fields of interest and the chances of success rate for advocacy. The policy advisers

and involved deputies draw up a substantive assessment of the interests involved and determine the best position and need for advocacy.

### What is the European Committee of the Regions?

The European Committee of the Regions is the formal advisory body of local and regional governments within the European Union. It acts as a regional parliament and consists of administrators from local and regional governments who focus on European legislative initiatives. Similar to the European Parliament, the Committee is made up of committees and rapporteurs, and the political groups organise themselves into political families such as the European People's Party and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. Both solicited and unsolicited, the Committee issues opinions for the European Parliament and the European Commission on policies that the Committee considers of interest to decentralised governments. The Regional minister of European Affairs of the province of Utrecht is a permanent or deputy member of the Committee. She is supported by Cluster Europe and policy staff.

A key principle for provincial advocacy is to act within the largest possible partnership whenever possible. This minimises Cluster Europe’s capacity demands and maximises the chances of success. This means that, where possible, the province promotes its interests according to CEMR, HNP or the Randstad. See Chapter 3 for a further explanation of these partnerships.

When it comes to advocacy, the province of Utrecht has several instruments at its disposal, including:

- Participating in public consultative processes of the European Commission;
  - Advising European institutions through the Committee of the Regions;
  - Contributing to central government’s position in negotiations that take place in the Council of the European Union. This can be done by participating in intergovernmental file teams and an Assessment of New Commission Proposals procedures (BNC in Dutch);<sup>6</sup>
  - Highlighting the interests of Utrecht via (joint) position papers;
- Having contact with the European Commission and MEPs;
  - Organising reciprocal working visits to strengthen relations and share knowledge;
  - Establishing or participating in coalitions and lobbying associations;
  - Organising events and meetings.

## EU institutions and the EU body

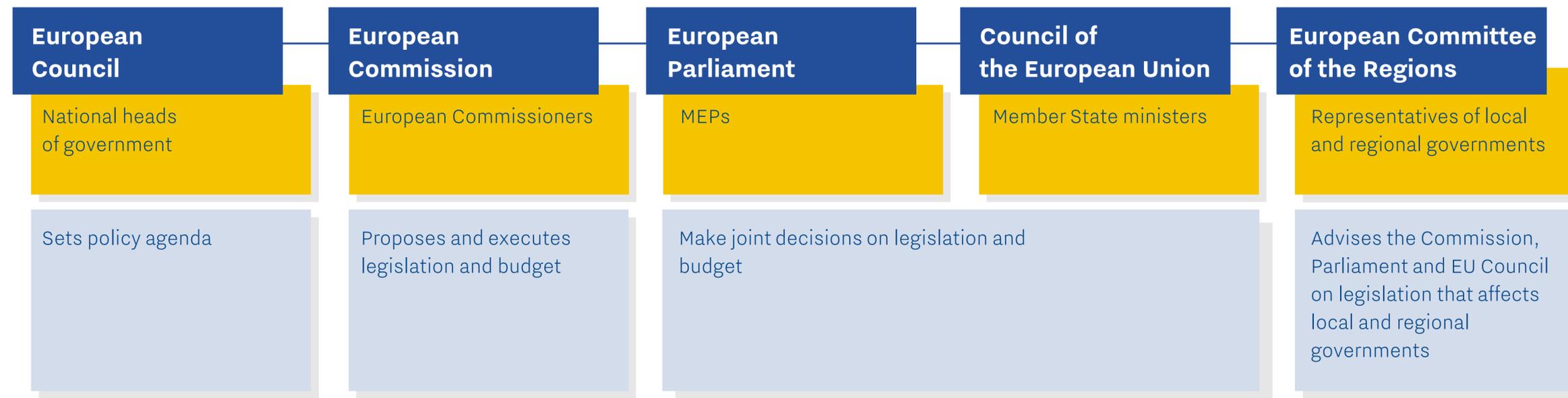


Figure 2: Overview of EU institutions and the EU body relevant to decentralised governments

<sup>6</sup> The European Commission’s legislative proposals are discussed in the interdepartmental Working Group’ [Beoordeling Nieuwe Commissievoorstellen](#)’ (Assessment of New Commission Proposals or BNC in Dutch), but the IPO (Inter-provincial consultation) also receives the BNC assessment and forwards it to the Dutch provinces.

### Profiling

Consistently promoting an appealing regional profile in a European context has several advantages. When it is in line with this profile, provincial advocacy is strengthened and enabled to determine the agenda. Consistent profiling can actively contribute to achieving the objectives set out in the coalition agreement. Potential collaboration partners for European-funded projects are more likely to find our region and our business and investment climate is reinforced. In consultation with regional partners such as municipalities, educational institutions, the Economic Board Utrecht (EBU) and the Regional Development Agency Utrecht (ROM Utrecht Region), the province of Utrecht determines its regional profile<sup>78</sup>. Subsequently, Cluster Europe works with our regional partners and policy advisers to promote our profile within Europe. This is done by, among other things:

- Actively being part of networks and partnerships;
- Organising events and meetings;
- Organising reciprocal working visits for involved policymakers;
- Mobilising fellow governments, private partners and educational institutions.

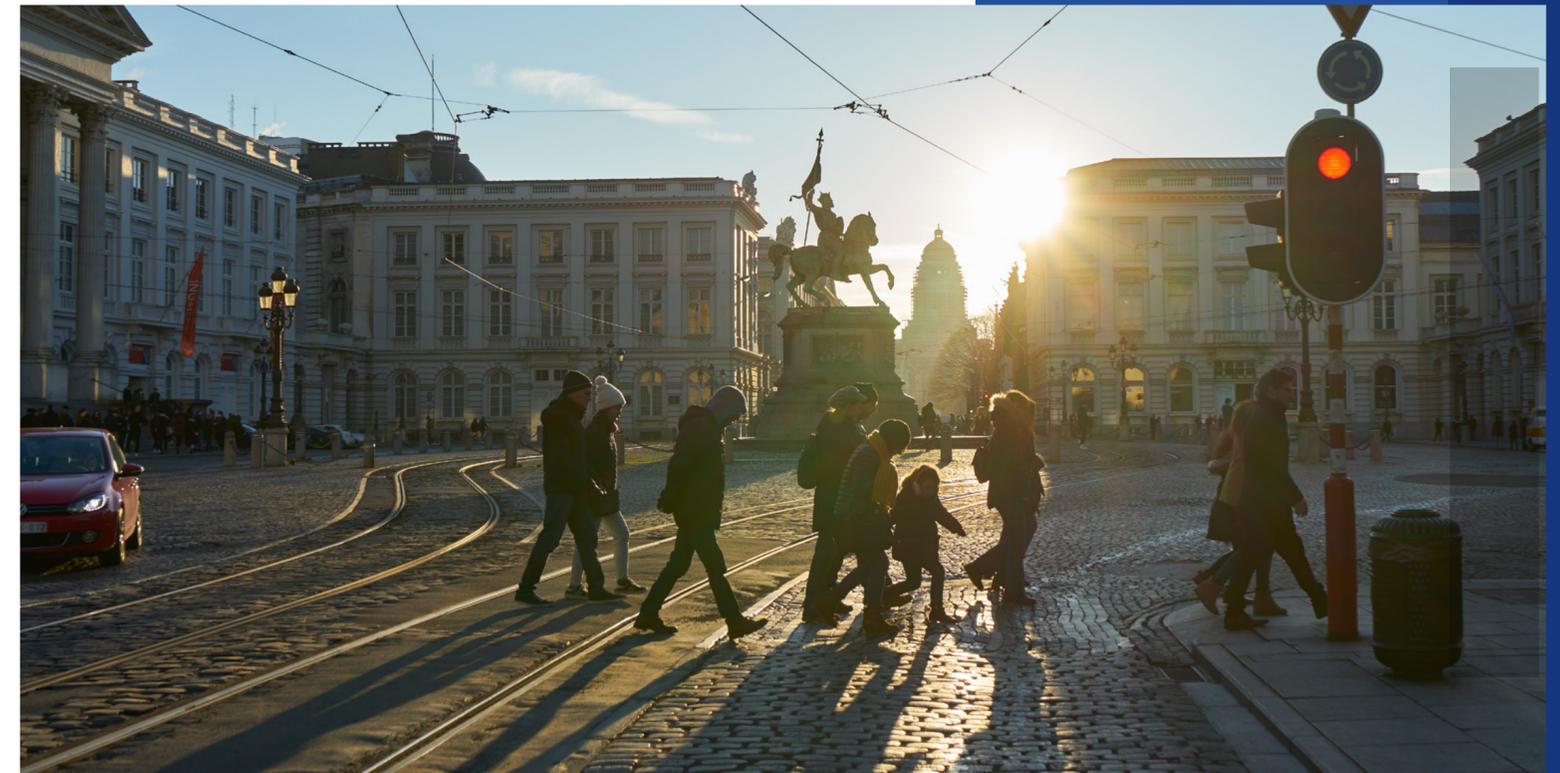
### European funding

Unlike the Dutch central government, the EU as an organisation has very little implementation capacity. Member states determine the policy frameworks within which the EU operates. At the same time, however, the EU increasingly gains power in more and more policy domains as citizens expect the EU to come up with solutions to societal challenges. The EU therefore uses subsidies and other funding opportunities as tools to achieve its policy objectives. As a rule, the EU only funds projects with a demonstrable impact. Thus, over time, an extensive and complex landscape of European subsidies and funding opportunities has emerged.

As the main goal of its Europe strategy, the province of Utrecht has chosen to utilise all the European Union has to offer. Not only to achieve policy objectives through targeted (regional) subsidies, but also through active policy influencing. This approach aims to seize financial opportunities whilst shaping policy in a way that matches the province's interests and vision. European subsidy programmes that are relevant to the province of Utrecht include LIFE, Interreg Europe - North Sea - North West Europe, Horizon Europe, Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), Creative Europe.

### Utrecht, Heart of Health

Metropolitan Utrecht has a distinctive profile: Heart of Health. To make better use of this profile and make the region even stronger, a regional proposition has been developed with the motto: Metropolitan Utrecht: the beating heart of a healthy society. The aim of this proposition is to reinforce the region's profile. A strong profile contributes to increased lobbying, both in The Hague and Brussels. This, in turn, supports our claims to European funding, regional deals and investment agendas.



7 [The Economic Board Utrecht \(EBU\) is Utrecht's network of leading administrators from the business community, educational institutions and governments.](#)

8 [The Regional Development Agency Utrecht \(ROM Utrecht Region in Dutch\) is a major social investor in the region.](#)

### *Managing European subsidy programmes*

An important distinction can be made in European funding between European programmes that are managed by the province and those that are not. In European programmes managed by the province, the economic incentive programme European Regional Development Fund (EFRO in Dutch) Kansen voor West and the National Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy (GLB-NSP in Dutch), the province is given the responsibility to use a certain number of European subsidies on projects within the applicable frameworks<sup>9 10</sup>. The province has a say on the policy choices and management of such programmes.

Currently, these programmes are being implemented by the Urban Living Environment Domain (SLO in Dutch) under the direction of the Regional Minister for economy and by the Rural Living Environment Domain (LLO in Dutch) under the direction of the Regional Minister for the rural domain.

Cluster Europe focuses on European subsidy programmes outside the aforementioned EFRO and GLB-NSP schemes. Each European subsidy programme has its own objectives, conditions, application procedures and implementation requirements. The subsidy advisers of Cluster Europe advise on how best to navigate this complex landscape.



### *Multiannual Financial Framework and European subsidies*

The scope and design of European subsidy programmes are outlined in the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). This MFF covers a seven-year period and is best understood as a long-term, European, national budget. Cluster Europe closely monitors decision-making on the future MFF. Where necessary, the aforementioned Public Affairs instruments will be deployed to optimally align the MFF with provincial objectives.

### *European funding within the organisation*

When attracting European subsidies and implementing projects that contribute to Utrecht's provincial tasks, the subsidy advisers work closely with both the policy domains and the financial and legal staff of the teams involved, advising at every step of the process. This chain approach is outlined step by step in Figure 3.

<sup>9</sup> The EU's [Common Agricultural Policy](#) (CAP) is the common policy for all member states. This policy is financed and managed by the European budget. [The National Strategic Plan](#) (NSP) is the Dutch interpretation of the CAP.

<sup>10</sup> European Regional Development Fund of the European Union. [Kansen voor West](#) implements European programmes for the four Randstad provinces (Noord-Holland, Zuid-Holland, Utrecht and Flevoland). The programmes are financed by the European Structural and Investments Funds (ESIFs).



Figure 3: Step-by-step plan for European subsidies

### *European subsidies in the Utrecht region*

Allowing European subsidies to contribute to the realisation of provincial policy goals also means that the province of Utrecht wants to improve regional partners' access to European funding opportunities. To this end, Cluster Europe plays an informing and stimulating role by organising the European Funding Network Utrecht (EFNU), organising regular training courses 'Werken met Europa' (working with Europe) for (semi) public institutions and providing targeted advice on subsidy opportunities. Cluster Europe also checks in halfway throughout and towards the end of the European programme period to see how many and where European funds have been used in our region and to which policy domains they have contributed. This helps the province monitor trends and identify patterns (also see Chapter 5).

### **Collaboration, sharing of knowledge and relationship management**

Collaboration, sharing of knowledge and relationship management are important means to realise our provincial ambitions and tasks. Many European regions face the same challenges as the province of Utrecht. By joining forces and sharing knowledge and experiences, we can learn a lot from each other.

During the implementation of European projects, the province of Utrecht works on solutions to societal challenges with organisations from various regions in Europe. This happens in multiple policy areas such as mobility, hydrogen, (circular) economy, climate, energy and digitalisation.

Collaboration with other regions also takes place from multilateral (thematic) networks. The province of Utrecht is a member of European networks CEMR, POLIS, ERRIN and RH2INE (see overview of networks in annex 1). These networks join forces to share knowledge, find solutions, influence European policy and find partners for new European-funded projects.

Organising and/or actively participating in international meetings helps put the Utrecht region on the international map, share practical knowledge, draw attention to specific topics and further expand our international network. Cluster Europe organises working visits with like-minded European regions. The aim is to increase collaboration, learn from each other and form coalitions that contribute to effective provincial advocacy within Europe.



# 3. Collaboration in the European context

‘If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together’. With this credo in mind, the province of Utrecht works together with various public and private parties at a regional, national and European level to realise provincial ambitions and tasks. In this chapter, we will elaborate on the collaboration methods used in both Brussels and the Utrecht region.

## Europe

### Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

The CEMR is the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and was founded in 1951. The CEMR consists of two governing bodies, the ‘Policy Committee’ and the ‘Executive Bureau’. A certain number of people are elected from each country to join the Policy Committee. The IPO (Inter-provincial consultation) is a member of the CEMR and delegates two directors to it. The CEMR as an interlocutor of the European institutions enables the province to draw attention to specific issues.

The CEMR focuses on two activities: influencing European policies that impact decentralised governments and creating a platform where regional and local governments can debate with each other. The CEMR focuses on five specific themes that have a substantial impact on European citizens. The CEMR also represents European local and regional governments internationally<sup>11</sup>.

### House of the Dutch Provinces

In 2000, the 12 Dutch provinces and the IPO established the House of Dutch Provinces (HNP in Dutch) in Brussels. For a strong and effective positioning and representation, it is important to collaborate and act proactively. As an advanced post of and for the provinces and the IPO,

the HNP fulfills a signalling role and serves as a platform for the joint advocacy of the provinces in Brussels. The effectiveness of advocacy by the HNP depends on integral coordination in consultation with the IPO and provinces.

*The effectiveness of the HNP’s advocacy depends on integral coordination in consultation with the IPO and provinces.*

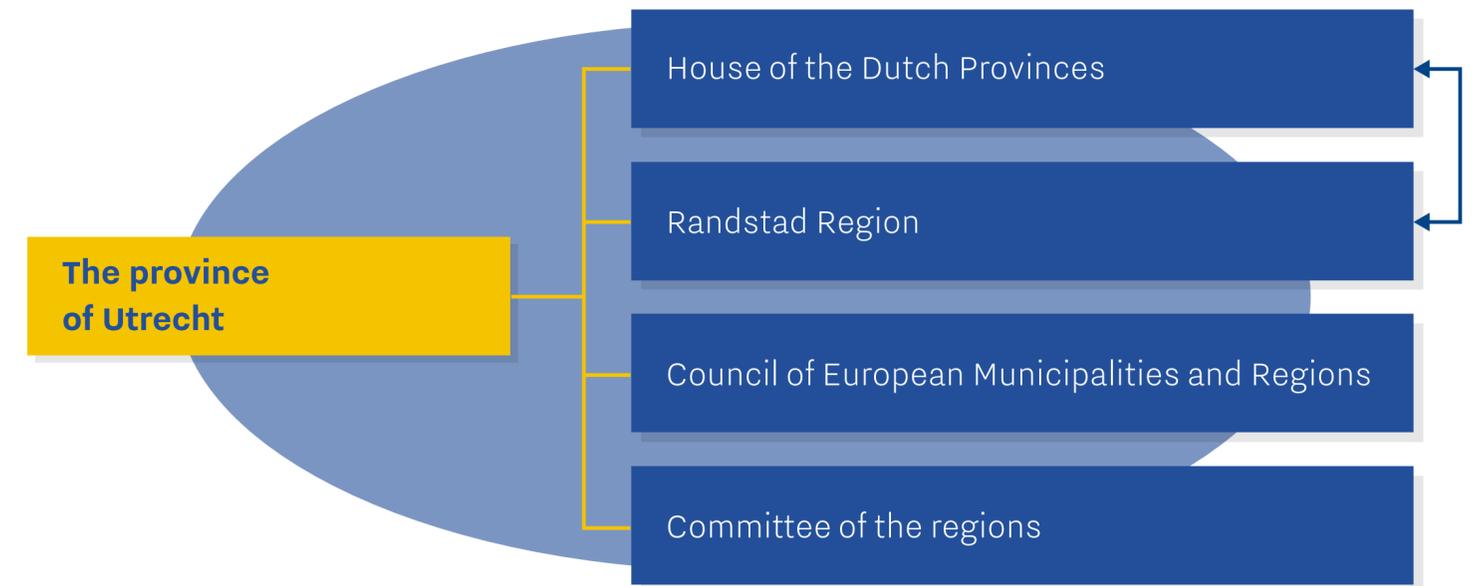


Figure 4: Collaborations in Brussels

<sup>11</sup> The five themes the CEMR focuses on are: governance, democracy and citizenship; environment, climate and energy; international engagement and collaboration; economic, social and territorial cohesion; and local and regional public services.

Every year, province and HNP staff draw up a plan based on the European Commission’s policy proposals and the provincial coalition programmes. This plan outlines the provinces’ joint priorities in Brussels and forms the basis for advocacy at the European institutions. The HNP board adopts the HNP plan, after which it is submitted to the IPO board.

To optimise collaboration within the HNP, the organisation uses an official and administrative division of files. Within this system, each province is responsible for a specific European policy file. The responsible province identifies new initiatives, coordinates advocacy and organises the working group associated with the file.

The HNP’s membership fees pay for the joint accommodation of the Dutch provinces’ representatives in Brussels. There is always an Utrecht Regional Minister member on the HNP board. Since there are usually more administrators than files, an Utrecht administrator is not necessarily an administrative file holder.

**The Randstad region**

When it comes to European affairs, collaboration between the provinces of the Randstad region has a long history. Since 1990, the Randstad region has had a representative in Brussels, and since 2000, the provinces of Flevoland, Noord-Holland, Utrecht and Zuid-Holland have worked closely together in the HNP in Brussels. Thanks to this collaboration, the four provinces can use each other’s knowledge and expertise in European affairs whilst having access to each other’s networks in Brussels.

The collaboration focuses on providing information and sharing knowledge, signalling current developments of European proposals, interpreting their relevance and identifying opportunities or risks.

In addition, the Randstad works together in the HNP and the European Committee of the Regions. This alliance explicitly allows room for provincial considerations within and between files. The Randstad collaboration organises joint events and influences policy developments in Brussels. This collaboration makes monitoring European policy developments more efficient and lobbying more effective. Joining forces also contributes to involvement and decisiveness in the broad field of European affairs.

Moreover, the collaboration promotes policy consistency between the EU and the province and enables the four provinces to respond to new European policy in a timely manner. This way, this collaboration contributes to the effectiveness of the provinces’ EU advocacy.

The membership contribution to the Randstad collaboration is used to pay for extra staff (a Randstad coordinator) and any joint activities. The chairmanship rotates and it is the province of Utrecht’s turn to chair the Randstad collaboration during the period 2024 – 2025.

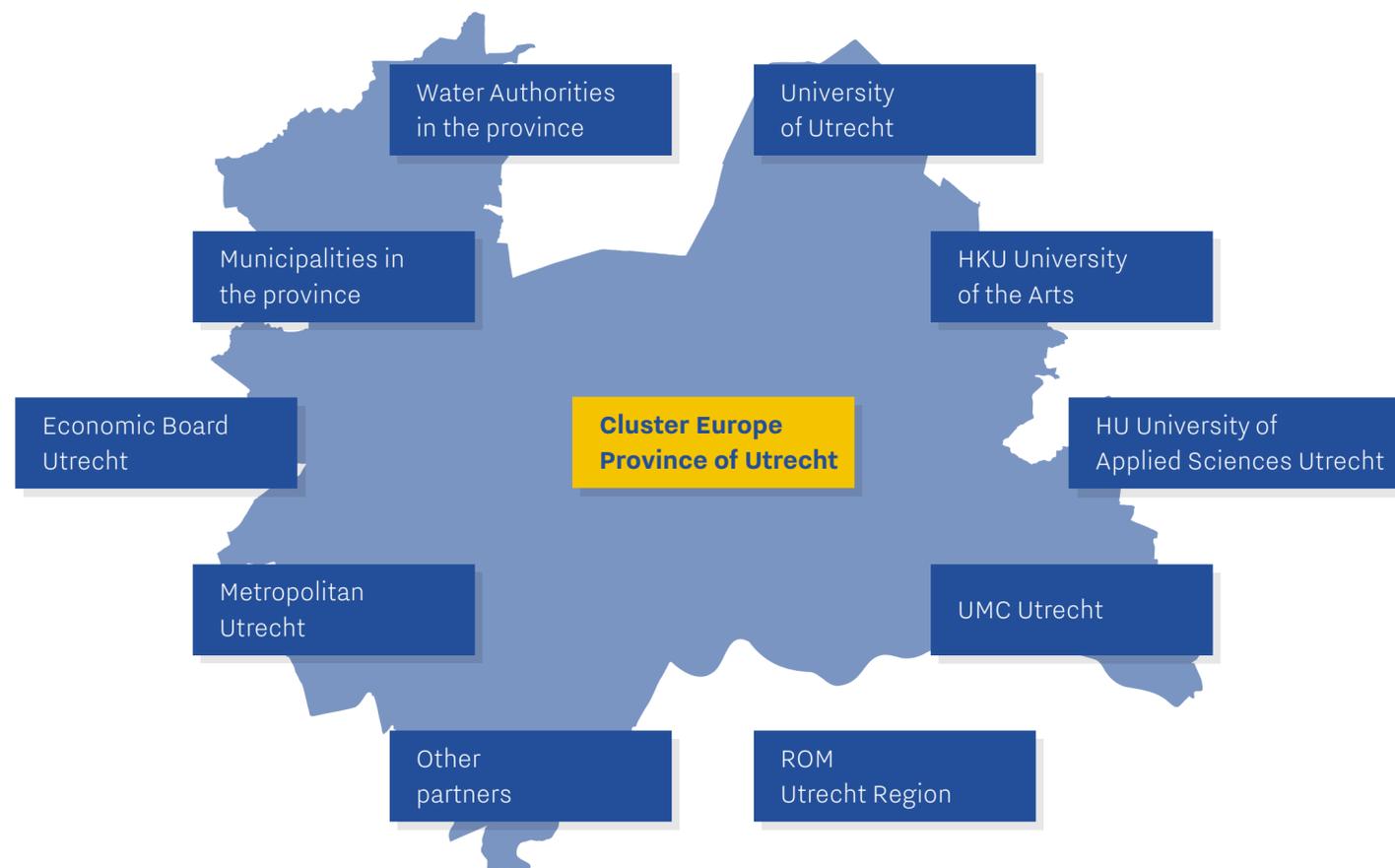


Figure 5 : Regional collaborations

## Region

In 2023, the European Commission designated Utrecht as Europe's most competitive region<sup>12</sup>. This position underlines regional efforts to bring companies, educational institutions and governments together to create a healthy business climate.

At the same time, sustained efforts must be made to secure this high ranking in the future. However, this cannot become a goal in itself. Partners in the region such as the EBU, ROM Utrecht, Utrecht University (UU), the Utrecht University Medical Centre (UMCU), Metropolitan Utrecht (MRU) and the municipality of Utrecht and Amersfoort recognise the importance of the EU as a fourth tier of government and international collaboration and are actively incorporating it in their activities.

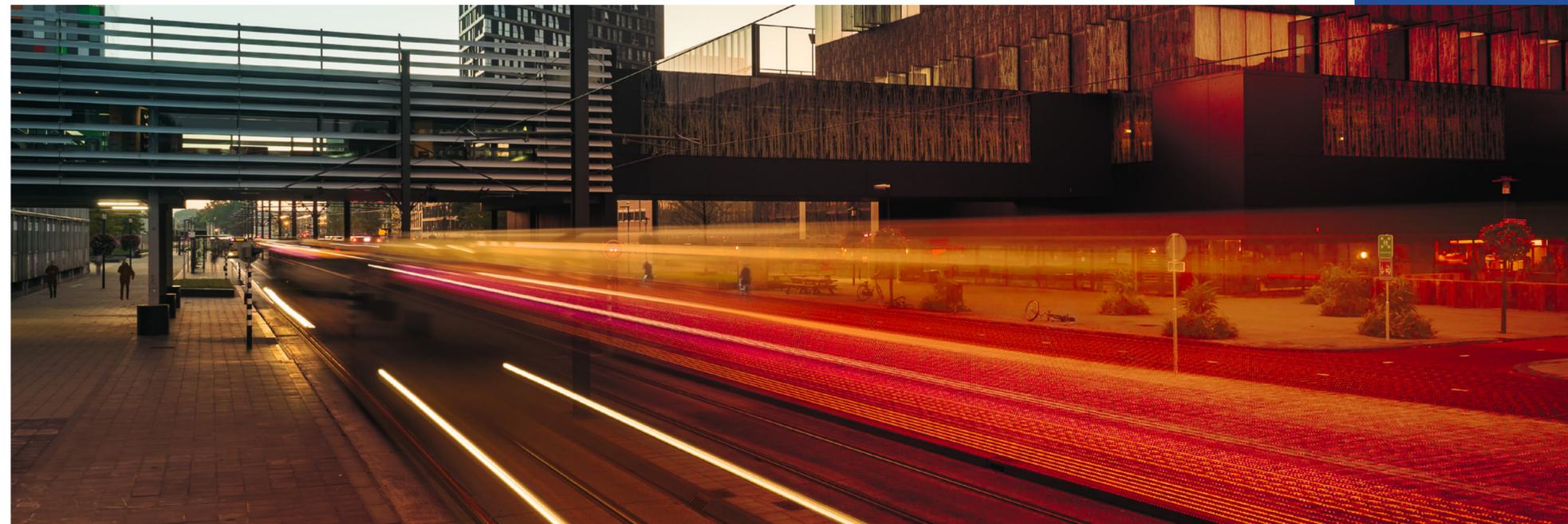
The province values regional collaboration and aspires to a coordinating, guiding and facilitating role with a focus on advocacy, regional profiling and, most importantly, European funding. In 2023, a start was made with the Utrecht community of practice in the field of European affairs.

This community of practice of EU specialists and experts ensures that we work on EU awareness whilst increasing EU knowledge on a regional scale, and that this is applied to real-life situations. This also helps us find each other within the region. Within the community of practice, the development of knowledge plays a vital role. That is why the province organises the EU course 'working with Europe'. This course consists of several modules on European funding (projects and subsidies) and European Public Affairs.

In addition, the European Funding Network Utrecht brings together all subsidy advisers from the region to discuss EU subsidy opportunities and projects. These meetings are also used to keep each other informed about project plans

and to see whether plans can be integrated to increase the chances of subsidies being granted.

Every year, hundreds of European projects are implemented in our region. To inform regional partners about European funding opportunities, the province organises themed information sessions. Cluster Europe will continue to work on regional collaboration to represent Utrecht's interests in Brussels as efficiently as possible. To this end, the periodic regional coordination meeting on European Affairs has been set. During these meetings, regional partners keep each other informed of all EU-related activities so they can collaborate efficiently.



<sup>12</sup> Regional Competitiveness Index; European Commission; DG Region; 2021

# 4. Europe within the organisation: challenges and the future

To successfully implement the Europe strategy, it is important to have clarity on structure, responsibilities, roles and tasks. This chapter describes how ‘Europe’ is organisationally anchored within the province of Utrecht, how provincial commitment is determined and what the role of the Provincial Executive is. In addition, this chapter reflects on the resources available to realise the province’s ambitions and outlines a phased development trajectory.

### Assessment framework

Within the provincial organisation, the individual policy domains themselves are responsible for the European dimension of their tasks. Cluster Europe identifies, advises and supports the implementation of actions to adequately respond to this European dimension. Four factors play an important role in deciding whether Cluster Europe should

get involved. These include whether it affects provincial tasks, whether there is administrative support, whether parties are willing to collaborate internally and externally and, finally, whether sufficient resources are available.

For each task, matters such as the extent to which an activity fits within the provincial ambitions, how concrete it is and whether the province is the appropriate party to take the lead are reflected on. Administrative support and ambition are also essential, as is a willingness to collaborate. After all, the province is stronger when it carries out activities in collaboration with partners in the Netherlands and abroad. Finally, activities can only be performed well if there are sufficient staff, dedication and financial resources (including co-financing) available within the organisation.

### Organisational anchoring

To increase the chances of success, it is important to pay sufficient attention to how Europe is anchored within the organisation. Without a substantive position or definition of commitment, the Public Affairs team cannot operate efficiently and effectively. Without a willingness to participate in European projects or international networks, the province cannot take advantage of European funding opportunities. Therefore, Cluster Europe is constantly working on creating more EU awareness, increasing knowledge and organising inspirational sessions (see Chapter 5, in which we will zoom in on information and communication). This is how Cluster Europe works on developing a Europe-conscious organisation.



Figure 6: Assessment framework for the determination of involvement

*The Europe strategy represents a model based on a future-proof and Europe-conscious organisation and region.*

### *Team Strategie, Europa en Public Affairs*

In recent years, Cluster Europe was part of team Governance, Intergovernmental Supervision and Europe. From 2024 onwards, Cluster Europe will be part of the new Team Strategy, Europe and Public Affairs within the Strategy and Governance domain. This way, the cluster can better fulfil its role and position within the organisation and region. The Director of Strategy and Governance is the responsible board member and will monitor compliance with internal and external agreements.

### *Cluster Europe*

The management and coordination in the field of European affairs are organised centrally within the province of Utrecht. Cluster Europe forms a bridge between European institutions and the province of Utrecht. The cluster identifies and advises the board, management and organisation in the broad field of European affairs. This way, the cluster maintains a central overview of all ongoing activities in Europe and an unambiguous message is guaranteed.

The cluster's core activities are Public Affairs, European funding and collaboration, the sharing of knowledge and relationship management. These activities are described in detail in Chapter 2 and Figure 1. The cluster's activities involve:

- Downloading: gathering information on European current affairs, policy developments, laws and regulations and funding opportunities;
- Crossloading: organising collaborations with stakeholders within Europe to promote provincial interests and exploit funding opportunities;
- Uploading: proactively influencing European policy by drawing attention to specific points. Ownership in the broad field of European affairs lies with the policy domains. The usual procedure is as follows: Cluster

Europe prepares an overview of new European policy proposals, including an initial interpretation. The policy domains, possibly through the IPO, determine the impact, position and whether commitment is desirable.

When applying for EU funding, the substantive domains have an obligation to inform Cluster Europe. The cluster then gives a go/no-go.

The aforementioned implies both the importance of mutual interaction and a mutual obligation to inform. Collaboration with the policy domains takes place in various ways.

Primary contact is through the EU contact persons designated for this purpose. They act as the first point of contact on behalf of the team. This way, everyone is kept informed of relevant European developments. Periodically, all contact persons and Cluster Europe come together during the Platform Europe meeting to identify opportunities and risks (see Chapter 5 for a further description of Platform Europe).

### *Strategic session within the official organisation*

Utrecht's agenda should be sufficiently aligned with that of Europe to anticipate European policy and current affairs in a timely manner. This is essential to avoid any financial and legal risks. The European and Utrecht agendas must therefore continuously be aligned. This is done based on European policy proposals and the European Commission Work Programme (ECWP).

Every autumn, the European Commission publishes its work programme. This indicates when which European policy plans can be expected. In consultation with the HNP and EU contact persons, the ECWP is scanned for opportunities and risks, and translated into points of attention and follow-up actions. The results are included in the annual

European Affairs Implementation Agenda and discussed officially and administratively during a strategic session at the board or MT level (Management Table). Based on this, an overview is drawn up for the Provincial Council.

### **Governance and Europe**

#### *Provincial Council*

The Provincial Council determines the outlines of provincial policy. In doing so, they also determine the frameworks for the Europe strategy.

#### *Provincial Executive*

The Provincial Executive implements decisions and determines policy. Every month, the Provincial Executive is informed and updated on European developments.

### *The King's Commissioner*

The King's Commissioner is the ambassador of the province of Utrecht and the delegation leader during working visits. Through the Circle of Commissioners, the King's Commissioner also joins the annual working visit to Brussels.

### *Regional Minister of European Affairs*

The Regional Minister for Europe plays a coordinating and leading role in the Provincial Executive regarding European affairs. In addition, he or she fulfills administrative roles such as:

- Member of the (daily) board of the House of Dutch Provinces (HNP);
- Administrative file holder on one of the joint files in the HNP;
- Permanent or deputy member of the Committee of the Regions;
- Member of the board of the Randstad collaboration.

### *Regional Ministers for substantive themes*

The other Regional Ministers are responsible for implementing EU-related issues within their domains such as lobbying, subsidies, networking, collaboration and working visits.

### **Vision of the future**

It is difficult to predict how the province and the EU will develop over the next ten years and what this will require from the organisation and Cluster Europe. However, it can be established that European current affairs and geopolitical developments will increasingly influence the provincial agenda. This section identifies key challenges that will have a major impact on the operation of Cluster Europe within the organisation. It then proposes a future-oriented

development trajectory with four phases addressing these challenges. With this development trajectory, the province of Utrecht aims to become a Europe-conscious organisation and region.

### *Challenges*

Cluster Europe plays a connecting role between European institutions and the province of Utrecht. The cluster continuously monitors European policy developments for potential opportunities or risks. The cluster has concluded that both the number of legislative files and their complexity and impact on provincial tasks have increased. There is currently only one Public Affairs advisor in Brussels on behalf of the province of Utrecht. This makes the province very vulnerable, and choices often must be made regarding deployment. As a result, potential opportunities are missed and there is a risk that the organisation will be insufficiently connected to European policy developments.

Administratively, the importance of Europe is also recognised as ambitions regarding European affairs have increased since the installation of the Provincial Executive in 2023. This is reflected, among other things, in the various administrative positions in which the province takes an active role and the desired intensification of work focused on the region. Since 2023, the Provincial Council has also increasingly focused on Europe.

In addition, partners in the region such as the Utrecht municipalities and the EBU, ROM Utrecht Region, HU, UU and UMC Utrecht recognise the importance of the EU as a fourth tier of government and actively incorporate it in their activities. To maintain unity, strengthen advocacy and increase clout, it is important to streamline lobbying efforts. This way, lobbying can be done jointly

for better legislation, regulations and funding of projects in the region. The province is increasingly being chosen to play a directing and connecting role. Moreover, there are many municipalities within the province of Utrecht that lack European expertise and/or capacity in-house. The province would like to take on a coordinating and facilitating role to support those municipalities in seizing European opportunities.

From within the organisation, there is a notion that pressure to solve societal challenges is increasing while available resources are limited. There is also a growing need to use European funding for the realisation of provincial tasks. This further increases the demand for advice and support in applying for and implementing European-funded projects. As a result, the number of explorations, applications and projects in the implementation phase has also increased. Moreover, European projects must be carried out purposefully and lawfully to avoid having to repay the subsidy. However, the maximum number of projects that Cluster Europe can support is limited.

Cluster Europe is also increasingly called upon to advise on European networking or collaboration opportunities and policy leads. Setting up and maintaining adequate information and target group-specific communication is important in this respect.

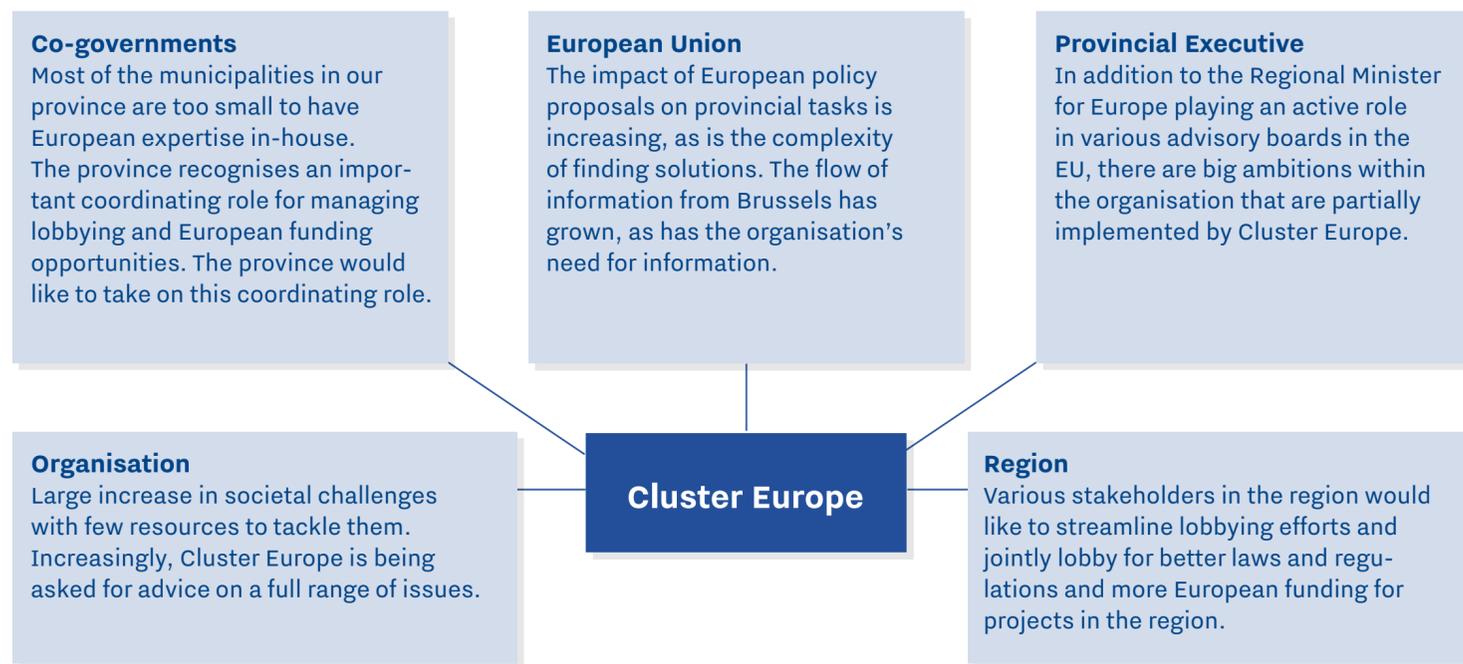


Figure 7: Increased challenges for Cluster Europe

The pressure on Cluster Europe is increasing drastically due to a growth in the number of European files, the impact of European proposals on provincial tasks, administrative ambitions, increased demand from the provincial organisation and the region's desire to manifest itself emphatically in Brussels.

*Phased development trajectory*

To cash in on European opportunities that contribute to policy challenges, a Europe-conscious organisation is a prerequisite. Only when the organisation is aware of the European dimension within the provincial tasks, can opportunities and/or risks be identified and follow-up actions planned. Moreover, it is important to keep tabs on the efforts made. That is why it is necessary to align and

periodically reassess supply (from Cluster Europe) and demand (from the administration, management, organisation and region).

Considering the challenges described earlier, a phased development trajectory that contributes to the realisation of the ambitions (see Chapter 2) is outlined below. In this model, Cluster Europe grows step-by-step towards phase 4 (a regional EU centre of expertise) which will both strengthen the organisational embedding of Europe and at the same time increase regional awareness. This process is divided into four phases which are further explained throughout the following pages (see Figure 8).

**1. Core activities (phase 1)**

During phase 1, only the two core activities of Public Affairs and European funding are carried out (see Chapter 2). By doing so, there is an explicit consideration of what to invest in and what not.

For the realisation of (preconditional) activities such as (inter)regional collaboration, the sharing of knowledge and information supply, the cluster depends on external hiring or other executive parties. At the time of writing, phase 1 is currently being carried out.

**2. Europe-conscious organisation (phase 2)**

During this phase, active efforts will be made to further develop into a Europe-conscious organisation that meets the increased impact of the EU on provincial tasks and the demand from the administration, organisation and region for EU expertise. The aim is to strengthen the province's position in Brussels and increase European subsidy expertise, thus freeing up space for the preconditions described in phase 1.

In addition, this phase will focus on guidance and support for the administration in Brussels. In particular during the plenary meetings of the Committee of the Regions and its committee meetings<sup>13</sup>).

**3. EU expertise centre (phase 3)**

Phase 3 will include a professionalisation of services. This will include an EU expertise centre. The aim is to maximise the organisation's ability to take advantage of EU opportunities. Specifically, this will allow the province to realise more European projects and thus use more EU subsidies. By appointing EU process managers who supervise

13 The Committee of the Regions consists of six committees. In the current administrative period 2023 – 2027, the province of Utrecht is represented by the ENVE (environment) committee.

European projects within the organisation, the dependence on internal project leaders is reduced allowing them to fully focus on substantive work. An additional advantage of this scenario is that Cluster Europe becomes less dependent on external hiring.

During phase 3, the region will also be served more explicitly by Cluster Europe. The province will adopt a facilitating attitude towards the European ambitions of its regional partners and special attention will be paid to how all Utrecht municipalities manage to connect to European subsidy and funding programmes.

#### 4. Regional EU expertise centre (phase 4)

The province of Utrecht aims to further support the region in seizing EU-related opportunities (such as funding, profiling, collaboration, sharing knowledge and networking). During phase 4, a regional EU expertise centre will be built. A precondition for this is the financial and substantive involvement of regional partners such as municipalities and educational institutions. Based on joint ambitions, objectives and shared costs, subsidy expertise and experience will be combined so the region can make better use of European funding opportunities, put the Utrecht region on the map more emphatically and represent regional interests more effectively through regional practical examples.

#### Measuring moments per phase

Per phase, both the organisational embedding of Europe and regional EU awareness are increased. Objectives are therefore formulated for each phase and measuring moments are set to determine to what extent the model is functioning, whether it offers sufficient added value and whether the expected results have been achieved. The final assessment is made by the Regional Minister of European Affairs after the results of the objectives have been discussed in the Provincial Council.

Where further development requires additional resources, the Provincial Council will be involved. The starting point for the entire development trajectory is that investments in additional EU (subsidy) expertise will pay off in the long run. The Europe strategy thus stands for a model that assumes a future-proof and Europe-conscious organisation and region.



Figure 8: Phased development trajectory

# 5. Communication and information

The provision of communication and adequate information are key to the success of this Europe strategy. By communicating and informing properly, Cluster Europe can contribute to greater awareness, knowledge, involvement and support regarding the EU. This ensures a Europe-conscious organisation that is aware of European policy developments and can anticipate them in time. The sharing of information and communication will be handled differently depending on the target group.

Firstly, the Provincial Council and the Provincial Executive need to be informed to fulfil their management and administrative tasks. In addition, it is vital that domains and colleagues receive timely information from Brussels so they can pass on a position, message or mission to the Public Affairs advisers. Besides more internally-oriented communication, external communication is also important to share what the province is doing at the European level.

### Informing the Provincial Council

Members of the Provincial Council benefit from a good overview of the European decision-making process, the role the province of Utrecht plays in this, and the European funding opportunities that exist. The Provincial Council will be informed in the following ways:

Every six months, Cluster Europe publishes a European Affairs newsletter that contains information on policy developments in the European Union and how they relate to the province of Utrecht and the tasks of the Provincial Council in particular. This newsletter also contains developments regarding ongoing European subsidy projects within the province and other relevant news. The newsletter is periodically shared with the Provincial Council via the Statenjournaal, but council members are highly

recommended to subscribe to the newsletter themselves as well. In addition, council members can also subscribe to the Europese Ster (European Star), which is a weekly Dutch newsletter from Kenniscentrum Europa Decentraal and the HNP that contains European news specifically for decentralised governments.

Each year during the first quarter, the province's European Affairs Implementation Agenda is shared in a council letter. This agenda includes joint and Utrecht-specific lobbying sheets, the HNP's work plan and the substantive provincial policy agenda. The HNP's work plan is made on the basis of the European Commission Work Programme (ECWP) and contains the European Commission's policy initiatives for the coming year. These work plans are published in October every year. The Implementation Agenda also contains a review and preview of European affairs. This focuses on European milestones that are relevant to the province such as the implementation and execution of European policy, position papers, working visits, events, European projects in the province and (inter)regional collaborations.

### Kenniscentrum Europa Decentraal

Special attention is paid to Kenniscentrum Europa Decentraal (Knowledge centre Europe Decentral). This is a knowledge centre for European laws and policies of and for (semi-) governmental organisations.

This knowledge centre was founded by provinces, municipalities and the Dutch Water Authority and is supported by the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.

*A Europe-conscious organisation is aware of European developments and can anticipate them in a timely manner.*

Finally, knowledge and inspiration sessions are organised periodically. During such sessions, EU current affairs are discussed and certain themes and topics are further highlighted, for example, during a PUB or information session<sup>14</sup>. The Provincial Council is also invited to various events and working visits, which are periodically included in the Council journal (Statenjournaal).

A working visit to Brussels is organised once per administrative period, possibly in the context of the Randstad region together with the other three provinces. It is also customary to give the Provincial Council the opportunity to participate in the annual European Week of Regions and Cities, which takes place in October each year.



### Informing the Provincial Executive

The Provincial Executive must be aware of what is going on in Europe and how European developments relate to the province of Utrecht. Cluster Europe structurally informs and involves the Regional Minister of European Affairs within the province in a variety of ways. During a fortnightly meeting, Cluster Europe informs the Regional Minister. The EU contact persons and domains inform their own Regional Ministers whilst being supported by Cluster Europe.

The Provincial Executive receives a monthly Public Affairs update. The college is also informed on this basis during the Public Affairs meeting. Naturally, documents for the Provincial Council are always submitted to the Provincial Executive first for decision-making, including the European Affairs Implementation Agenda, annexes such as the HNP work plan, the joint and Utrecht-specific lobbying files and the yearly overview.

Involving and activating the Provincial Executive is also done by organising various events and working visits. A working visit to Brussels is organised at least once per administrative period. In addition, the Provincial Executive visits a European region every other year.

<sup>14</sup> During a Provincial Utrecht Allies (PUB in Dutch) event, the provincial organisation, Provincial Council, Provincial Executive, citizens of Utrecht and partner organisations are informed about current affairs.

### Internal communication and provision of information

Internal communication aims to demonstrate that Europe matters and show where interfaces with internal files can be found. This is done by informing and involving colleagues in European affairs. The intranet page 'Europa in de provincie' (Europe in the province) acts as the first information platform on European affairs within the organisation.

Through this intranet page, colleagues are informed about European current affairs, periodic updates are posted on European projects in the province and a clear mini course is available on the basics of the European Union. In addition, relevant events and in-depth articles are shared. Colleagues are also briefed on European issues during periodic in-house events where a different European topic takes centre stage each time.

During the six-weekly Platform Europe meetings, EU contact persons within the organisation meet. The aim of the platform is to discuss ideas and proposals, share knowledge, experiences and information, increase the internal network and promote mutual collaboration. The EU contact persons with expert knowledge of various policy areas are the first point of contact for Cluster Europe when considering the impact of European legislation or dealing with BNC sheets, European consultations and legislative proposals.

During the Platform Europe meetings, the EU contact persons and Cluster Europe inform each other about substantive developments and bottlenecks within the various policy areas. Cluster Europe discusses European funding opportunities, interprets relevant European legislation and developments and is responsible for carrying out advocacy in Brussels. Within a joint Platform Europe team environment, agendas, reports, consultations and analyses are shared.

An internal annual calendar is published annually for Platform Europe. This lists key European moments, relevant events, Platform Europe meetings and input moments for the European Affairs Implementation Agenda.

The Executive Board and management are also informed annually about the Implementation Agenda, which is then discussed during a strategic session at board or management level (via the MT).

### External communication

The primary source of external communication on European affairs in the province is the website of the province of Utrecht. The website contains concise public information on influencing European policy, European funding opportunities and the administrative functions of the Regional Minister for Europe. Cluster Europe ensures the information on the website regarding the province's European affairs is up-to-date. The province's Europe strategy is publicly available via this site as well.

The province wants to use European funding opportunities to realise Utrecht's goals. Twice per European financial framework, Cluster Europe will publish an online magazine analysing the European investments used in the region. This online magazine will be shared via the website.

Finally, Cluster Europe, in collaboration with the European Funding Network Utrecht, organises several informative events for the region each year and colleagues and municipal employees from the province are offered the EU course Working in Europe. This course aims to increase regional collaboration and EU awareness in the province.

### Evaluation

The strategy for European collaboration and advocacy 2024 – 2034 will be subject to an interim evaluation. The first evaluation will take place in 2026 and will explain the results achieved so far. The full evaluation will take place after the 2029 European elections, before the start of the new European administrative period. Cluster Europe will coordinate these evaluations in collaboration with the Provincial Executive. The Provincial Council will be informed of the outcomes of both evaluations through a council letter.

Annex 1

# Overview of international networks and partnerships





**AIR: Air Quality Initiative of Regions Network**

AIR is a network of European regions that focus on air quality. The province participates in this network on behalf of the Randstad region. AIR's goal is to exchange best practices and to contribute to the revision process of the directive dealing with air quality.

**CEMR: Council of European Municipalities and Regions**

CEMR is an organisation that provides a platform for local and regional governments from 41 countries. CEMR has two aims, to influence EU policy and legislation and to provide a forum for debate.



**ECF: European Cyclist Federation**

This network focuses on promoting cycling as a sustainable and healthy means of transport and recreation. ECF was founded in Europe, but the challenges ECF faces are global. ECF believes that the bicycle offers a solution to many problems. ECF therefore has the ambition to export its expertise globally.



**EGTC: European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Rhine-Alpine**

The EGTC-netwerkorganisatie was set up to represent regional interests in the development of the corridor between Rotterdam and Genoa, develop joint projects, share knowledge and represent the regions throughout the European corridor-building process.



**ERRIN: European Regions Research and Innovation Network**

ERRIN is a European network established in 2001 with the aim of increasing regional research and innovation. To achieve this, ERRIN supports participating regions in exchanging information, sharing experiences, project development support and policy-making. ERRIN also makes the voices of regions heard in Brussels. ERRIN consists of 14 working groups where contacts between regions are established in different policy areas such as the Smart Cities, Blue Economy, Health, and Energy & Climate Change.



### EU-Mission Charter: Adaptation to Climate Change



The [mission](#) aims to guide participating regions and cities towards climate resilience by 2030. In doing so, this mission contributes to the EU's adaptation strategy. The province of Utrecht signed the EU-Mission Charter together with the Utrecht municipality. The climate adaptation mission is one of the five strategic missions of the European Commission. The mission focuses on supporting regions, cities and local governments within the EU in their efforts to build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

The mission contributes to putting the EU's adaptation strategy into practice by assisting regions by making European subsidies available. In addition, the European Union in general and regions and cities in particular will gain a better understanding of climate risks and adaptation strategies.

### POLIS: Cities and regions for Transport Innovation



[POLIS](#) is a network of European cities and regions working together to develop innovative technologies and policies for local transport. POLIS aims to improve local transport through integrated strategies that address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of transport. To this end, POLIS supports the exchange of experiences and knowledge between European local and regional governments. It also facilitates dialogues between local and regional governments and other actors such as industry, research centres and universities and NGOs.

### RH2INE: Rhine Hydrogen Integration Network of Excellence



[RH2INE's](#) goal is to make hydrogen accessible for the international transport of goods along the Rhine-Alpine corridor quickly and safely. To this end, by 2026, about 10 barges should be running on hydrogen with at least 4 hydrogen filling stations between Rotterdam, Duisburg and Cologne. This is a first step towards a zero-emission transport corridor in 2050, which is the ultimate goal. RH2INE is committed to building a network with parties that actively want to use hydrogen along inland waterways. One of the priorities is standardisation.

### Regions for Health Network of the World Health Organization (RHN WHO)



Regions work together to improve the health and well-being of residents by prioritising equity, developing strategic alliances and promoting proper governance. The [Regions for Health Network of the World Health Organization](#) complements the work carried out at the national level by working with subnational actors.

Since 1993, WHO's European Regions for Health Network (RHN) has helped regions accelerate the achievement of better public health. RHN is committed to the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the European Programme of Work (EPW) 2020 – 2025. The network plays an important role in efforts to support local environments that enable health and well-being. The municipality of Utrecht is a member of Cities for Health Network of the World Health Organization.

### Vanguard Initiative



Together with the Randstad region, the province of Utrecht is a member of the [Vanguard Initiative](#). This initiative focuses on deploying smart specialisation strategies to achieve growth, innovation and industrial renewal. They do this by successfully connecting regional, national and European policy levels with European priority regions. Based on these regions, strategic investments are then aligned.

Annex 2

# List of abbreviations



Abbreviation	Meaning
AIR	Air Quality Initiative of Regions Network
BNC	Beoordeling Nieuw Commissievoorstel (Assessment of New Commission Proposal)
CEF	Connecting Europe Facility
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CvdR	European Committee of the Regions
EBU	Economic Board Utrecht
EC	European Commission
ECF	European Cyclist Federation
ECWP	European Commission Work Programme
EFNU	European Funding Netwerk Utrecht
EFRO	Europees Fonds voor Regionale Ontwikkeling (European Fund for Regional Development)
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Rhine-Alpine
EP	European Parliament
ERRIN	European Regions Research and Innovation Network
EU	European Union
GLB	Gemeenschappelijk Landbouwbeleid (Common agricultural policy - CAP)
GS	Gedeputeerde Staten (Provincial Executive)
HNP	Huis van de Nederlandse Provincies (House of the Dutch Provinces)
IPO	Interprovinciaal Overleg (Inter-provincial consultation)
IBDT	Inter-governmental file teams
LLO	Domein Landelijke Leefomgeving (Rural Living Environment Domain)
MEPs	Members of the European Parliament
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework

Abbreviation	Meaning
MRU	Metropolitan Region Utrecht
MT	Management Table
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPLG	National Rural Area Programme
NSP	National Strategic Plan
PA	Public Affairs
POLIS	Cities and regions for Transport Innovation
PS	Provinciale Staten (Provincial Council)
PV	Permanent Representation
RH2INE	Rhine Hydrogen Integration Network of Excellence
RHN WHO	Regions for Health Network of the World Health Organization
ROM	Regionale Ontwikkelingsmaatschappij (Regional development agency)
SLO	Domein Stedelijke Leefomgeving (Urban Living Environment Domain)
UMCU	Utrecht University Medical Centre
UU	University of Utrecht
VNG	Vereniging voor Nederlandse Gemeenten (Association of Dutch Municipalities)

# Colophon

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