Follow-up: 5th European Symposium by NEREUS Regions in Bologna | 22–23 October 2026

Co-organised by NEREUS and the Emilia-Romagna Region, the 5th European Symposium by NEREUS Regions brought together around 200 participants from across Europe for two days of institutional dialogue, technical exchange and interregional cooperation. Held at DAMA Tecnopolo in Bologna, the 2026 edition explored how artificial intelligence (AI), big data and high-performance computing (HPC) can strengthen the use of satellite data and Earth Observation in regional policies, public services and innovation.

Following previous editions in Wallonia, Basilicata, Occitanie and the Azores, the symposium marked a further step in reinforcing NEREUS as a platform for regional cooperation, knowledge exchange and political engagement in Europe's space ecosystem. This year's edition placed particular emphasis on two complementary dimensions: **strengthening the political voice of European regions through the Bologna Declaration and translating regional needs into practical opportunities for cooperation through interactive round tables and Business-to-Government (B2G) meetings.**

Space data, AI and European regional ecosystems

Both days opened with institutional addresses, bringing together regional leaders, NEREUS representatives and European policymakers.

On the first day, Michele de Pascale, President of the Emilia-Romagna Region, highlighted the role of space technologies in public services, emergency management and innovation. Thierry Cotelle, NEREUS President and representative of the Occitanie Region, stressed the network's role in connecting regional ecosystems and strengthening their voice in European space policy. An engaging panel discussion, moderated by Roya Ayazi, NEREUS Secretary General, brought together three distinguished speakers: Tobias Gotthardt, NEREUS Vice-President and Bavarian State Secretary for Economic Affairs, Regional Development and Energy, who underlined the importance of regional involvement in maintaining Europe's competitiveness in the space sector; Anna Huk, Board Member of the Podkarpackie Region, who highlighted the importance of interregional cooperation in addressing shared challenges, including security; and Francesco De Clementi, Head of Division XI for Space and Defence Industry Policies at Italy's Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy, who emphasised the value of space data for informed decision-making and the further development of Italy's space economy. In a video message, Andrius Kubilius, European Commissioner for Defence and Space, highlighted the contribution of Galileo and Copernicus, the opportunities arising from the convergence of space and AI, and the importance of the forthcoming EU budget in supporting Europe's space ambitions.

The morning programme explored how satellite data, artificial intelligence and advanced computing can support regional innovation and public services. The keynote, *"Empowering Earth from Space: The Convergence of Satellite Data, AI, and Big Data,"* featured Jørn Kristiansen, Director of Forecasts and Deputy Director-General of ECMWF, and Luca Girardo, Copernicus and Destination Earth Advanced Infrastructure Manager at ESA-ESRIN. Their contributions addressed the growing role of supercomputing and digital infrastructure in managing and exploiting Copernicus and other satellite data.

The following panel, *"Architects of the Future: How European AI Factories are Revolutionizing Space Data,"* showcased the contribution of five European AI Factory initiatives: IT4LIA, BSC AIF, PIAST AIF, HammerHAI and Gaia AI Factory. Representatives demonstrated how advanced computing capacities and specialised expertise can help public authorities, researchers and

businesses process increasing volumes of space data and develop innovative applications responding to territorial needs. The session highlighted the potential of connecting regional ecosystems with European AI and computing infrastructures to accelerate innovation and the development of space-based services.

The afternoon focused on regional geographic data platforms and collaboration between public administrations and service providers. Under the title *"The 'Typical' Regional Geographic Data Platform: Looking for the Perfect Model,"* representatives from Bavaria, Basilicata, Occitanie and Veneto presented experiences addressing territorial planning, disaster risk management, biodiversity monitoring and the integration of satellite data into regional spatial data infrastructures.

The exchanges illustrated how Earth Observation, AI and digital platforms can help administrations move from data collection to actionable information, supporting evidence-based policymaking and more effective public services. Contributions from Catalonia and Emilia-Romagna on the second day continued this dialogue, showing how regional experiences can inspire transferable approaches to data governance, research and innovation.

Across these sessions, participants explored how regions can connect their territorial needs with research expertise, industrial capabilities and European infrastructures, strengthening cooperation and improving the use of space-based services for citizens and businesses.

From regional challenges to practical solutions: B2G matchmaking

A distinctive feature of the Bologna Symposium was its focus on turning interregional dialogue into practical cooperation. On the afternoon of 22 October, the *"Space Solutions for Local Needs: The B2G Matchmaking Arena"* connected public administrations with potential solution providers through scheduled one-to-one Business-to-Government meetings.

Ahead of the symposium, public administrations from NEREUS partner regions had submitted **17 concrete territorial challenges**, creating a structured basis for dialogue between those seeking solutions and organisations able to provide them.

The challenges covered a wide range of regional needs, including coastal risk and morphology monitoring, water resource management and pollution detection, renewable energy planning, landslide and soil monitoring, agricultural land use, urban climate adaptation and green infrastructure. They offered opportunities to explore how Earth Observation, satellite data and artificial intelligence could support more targeted responses to local and regional priorities.

During the **B2G session**, public administration representatives presented their needs directly to service providers, who could discuss potential applications and solutions tailored to the challenges identified. By creating a focused setting for one-to-one exchanges, the matchmaking format brought the public sector and the space-data community closer together, encouraging dialogue around concrete operational needs rather than technology alone.

This approach reinforced the symposium's practical dimension, helping connect regional challenges with technological expertise and creating opportunities for solutions that can be adapted and shared across territories.

The first day concluded with a social dinner at Palazzo Pepoli. The evening featured the **symbolic handover of the NEREUS trophy from Emilia-Romagna to Podkarpackie/Małopolska**,

honouring the regions that will host the 2027 edition of the symposium and marking the continuation of the network's tradition of interregional cooperation.

Systemic challenges, collective answers: interactive round tables

On the morning of 23 October, the symposium continued with *"Systemic Challenges, Collective Answers: Interactive Round Tables on Space Data Applications."* Five facilitated discussion tables brought together public authorities, businesses, researchers and other stakeholders to examine common priorities and explore cooperative regional approaches to the use of space data.

The discussions covered five interconnected themes: **navigating EU space policy and regional access to innovation opportunities; data integrability and interoperability across administrative boundaries; water resilience and the Blue Economy; extreme-event prevention and digital twins for territorial resilience; and the calibration and validation of satellite data through the integration of in-situ measurements.**

Participants examined how regions can improve access to European programmes, connect fragmented data systems and strengthen cooperation between public administrations and technology providers. Discussions also addressed the use of satellite data to support water and coastal management, anticipate climate-related risks, develop digital twins and ensure the reliability of information derived from Earth Observation.

By combining technical questions with governance and policy considerations, the round tables highlighted the importance of interoperable data, shared expertise and collaboration between regional authorities, research organisations, companies and end users. The sessions aimed to identify approaches that could be adapted and replicated across territories.

Together, the round tables and B2G meetings created a bridge between two complementary levels of cooperation: addressing specific challenges raised by public administrations and discussing the broader regional models, partnerships and governance arrangements needed to expand the use of space data.

Strengthening the political voice of European regions: the Bologna Declaration

Beyond the technical programme, the Bologna Symposium stood out for its strong institutional and political dimension. On 23 October, a dedicated meeting of NEREUS political representatives was hosted under the auspices of Vincenzo Colla, Vice-President of the Emilia-Romagna Region. The meeting brought together Vice-President Colla, NEREUS President Thierry Cotelle and Anna Huk, Member of the Board of the Podkarpackie Region, to discuss regional space ecosystems and recent developments in European space policy.

The discussions reaffirmed the importance of giving regions a structured role in shaping European space policy and its implementation. As actors connecting territorial needs with research, industrial capabilities and public investment, regions can help ensure that European space programmes translate into concrete benefits for citizens, businesses and local communities.

A key outcome was the **Joint Declaration of Political Representatives of European Regions of the NEREUS Network, agreed upon in Bologna on 23 October 2026**. The Bologna Declaration sets out five priorities: strengthening the political role of regions in European space policy; securing a strong regional dimension in the EU budget for 2028–2034; connecting regional space ecosystems; mobilising European AI Factories for space applications; and reinforcing NEREUS as a common political voice in dialogue with European institutions.

The declaration also underlines the importance of regional partnerships between businesses, universities, research centres and public authorities, alongside joint investment and stronger European space value chains. It sends a clear message ahead of the next EU budget cycle: Europe's space ambitions require strong regions, connected ecosystems and concrete opportunities for regional actors to participate in and benefit from the development of the European space economy.

The political meeting also established a basis for more regular exchanges among regional representatives. Participants agreed to organise annual political-level meetings alongside the European Symposium, reinforcing NEREUS's role as a platform for regional political dialogue. The next political meeting is planned around the 2027 symposium in Podkarpackie/Małopolska.

NEREUS President Thierry Cotelle also invited Vice-President Colla to contribute to the network's political dialogue with the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the European Space Agency. The discussions further highlighted the value of involving NEREUS Associate Partners, whose industrial and research perspectives can enrich regional exchanges and help identify emerging technological developments. The participation of Airbus, invited by the Emilia-Romagna Region, provided an additional industry perspective on developments in the European space sector.

Ensuring the continuity and daily impact of Europe's space assets

The second day opened with Vincenzo Colla, Vice-President of the Emilia-Romagna Region, welcoming participants and stressing the importance of data for understanding territories, connecting regional ecosystems and strengthening technological sovereignty.

The keynote, *"Beyond Next-Gen EU: Ensuring Operational Continuity and Daily Impact of Europe's Space Assets,"* addressed the continuity of strategic European space infrastructures and their translation into everyday applications for regional ecosystems. Apostolia Karamali, from European Commissioner Andrius Kubilius's Cabinet, highlighted the need for sustained European investment, stronger security and defence readiness, and better interoperability between European, national and regional services. She also pointed to the growing importance of secure connectivity and the development of downstream services that can generate value from Europe's space capabilities.

Andrea Taramelli, Italian delegate to the EU Copernicus User Forum and representative of IUSS Pavia, emphasised the need to develop both upstream and downstream services, transforming satellite data into actionable information. His contribution also underlined the importance of connecting European space programmes with regional applications and ensuring that regions can make effective use of European instruments and funding.

The morning continued with the second part of *"The 'Typical' Regional Data Platform: Looking for the Perfect Model,"* featuring experiences from Catalonia and Emilia-Romagna. These contributions further explored how Earth Observation tools and regional data platforms can support public policies, foster local collaboration and deliver practical benefits for citizens.

Exploring Emilia-Romagna's space and computing ecosystem

The symposium concluded with technical visits offering participants the opportunity to discover some of Emilia-Romagna's leading technological assets. Delegates visited either the Leonardo High-Performance Computing infrastructure and IT4LIA AI Factory or the ECMWF Data Center at DAMA Tecnopolo. Both groups then joined a visit to the Medicina Radio Astronomical Station.

These visits provided a tangible perspective on the infrastructure, scientific expertise and computing capabilities supporting Europe's data-driven innovation. They also demonstrated how regional ecosystems can connect advanced computing, artificial intelligence, space science and Earth Observation to generate new applications for public administrations, industry and research.

Looking ahead

The 5th European Symposium by NEREUS Regions brought together around 200 participants from across Europe for two days of institutional dialogue, technical exchange and interregional networking. It further strengthened the network's role in connecting regional authorities, European institutions, research organisations and industry around the opportunities offered by space technologies.

The Bologna edition demonstrated that Europe's space ambitions depend on both political commitment and practical cooperation. The Bologna Declaration strengthens the shared political voice of NEREUS regions, while the interactive round tables and B2G meetings provide concrete ways to connect regional needs with technical expertise and innovative solutions. The social dinner and symbolic trophy handover further underlined the continuity and cooperative spirit of the network.

Together, these elements reaffirmed the importance of strong regional ecosystems and effective collaboration in turning space technologies into tangible benefits for citizens and businesses.

The next edition of the NEREUS European Symposium is planned for 2027 in Podkarpackie/Małopolska, continuing the dialogue on the role of regions in European security and resilience and the development of space-based services.

Event materials

Presentations · Photos · Results of the interactive round tables · Full Bologna Declaration