

## I

(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

## RESOLUTIONS

## COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

96TH PLENARY SESSION HELD ON 18 AND 19 JULY 2012

**Resolution on the 'Priorities of the Committee of the Regions for 2013 in view of the Work Programme of the European Commission'**

(2012/C 277/01)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- having regard to the Commission Communication on the Commission Work Programme for 2012 'Delivering European Renewal' <sup>(1)</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 December 2011 on the priorities of the Committee of the Regions for 2012 based on the legislative and work programme of the European Commission <sup>(2)</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 February 2012 to the European Spring Council 2012 on the Draft Treaty on stability, coordination and governance in the economic and monetary union <sup>(3)</sup>,
- having regard to the existing Protocol of cooperation between the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions signed on 16 February 2012,

whereas the Committee of the Regions wishes to outline its key positions regarding the Commission's work programme for 2013,

***The future of the Union***

1. is convinced that, while the European Union is faced with enormous challenges in addressing the ongoing financial, economic, social and political crisis, there is an urgent need for an ambitious European Commission 2013 work programme that would boost sustainable growth, job creation and quality of life in Europe and contribute to restore the citizens' confidence in the European integration process;

2. considers that recovery must rest on two equally important pillars of structural reforms: relaunching growth and ensuring budgetary discipline;

3. supports deeper economic integration and better alignment of policy priorities, revenues and spending between all levels of government, while respecting the autonomy and powers of national, regional and local governments; based on the principles of subsidiarity and multi-level governance, rejects any implicit or explicit renationalisation or centralisation of policies;

<sup>(1)</sup> COM(2011)777 final.

<sup>(2)</sup> CdR 361/2011 fin.

<sup>(3)</sup> CdR 42/2012 fin.

4. requests the European Commission to resist attempts to use inter-governmental agreements to bypass the democratic procedures of the Union, as agreed in the Treaties, without calling into question the enhanced cooperation provided for under the Lisbon Treaty;

5. recalls the CoR position <sup>(4)</sup> that an early adoption of the next multi-annual financial framework (MFF) for the 2014-2020 period at the end of 2012 is an important signal that the EU is able to respond to global challenges with its own strategy for growth, jobs and competitiveness and a prerequisite for guaranteeing that cohesion policy will remain uninterrupted operational;

6. reiterates that the EU budget is an investment budget, that proposals for financial cuts in programmes which are part of the EU growth agenda must be rejected and that the creation of new own resources is needed, in particular with a view of replacing national contributions to the EU budget;

7. reiterates the determination of regional and local authorities to be involved in the simplification of EU funds and the revision of the Financial Regulation, in order to cut red tape, increase the leverage effect of public funds at EU, national and regional levels, as well as ensure transparency and accountability for the EU taxpayers;

8. is of the view that the European Commission should present an analysis of the impact of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union on local and regional authorities and - in particular - on the question how the remit of local and regional fiscal autonomy is preserved;

9. supports efforts to ensure budgetary discipline, in particular with regard to tackling high levels of public debt which are a serious threat to intergenerational solidarity, and notes that adequate capacity among local and regional authorities can at the same time ensure growth through appropriate investment via for example implementation of projects co-funded by European funds and public procurement;

10. reiterates its call on the Commission to mainstream Article 9 TFEU on the promotion of high levels of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection and the fight against social exclusion in all its proposals; therefore urges the Commission to present balanced recommendations related to the European Semester and to bear these treaty obligations in mind in any legislation related to the economic and financial crisis;

11. asks the Commission to cooperate with the Committee of the Regions in elaborating a European Administrative Procedures Act;

### ***Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Semester***

12. emphasises that while the European Semester should contribute to economic growth, fiscal discipline and structural challenges, the European Commission and the Member States must also closely anticipate and monitor the impact of these measures on the autonomy of local and regional authorities;

13. broadly welcomes the new Compact for Growth and Jobs as decided by the European Council of June 2012, and supports its call to 'mobilise at every level of governance in the European Union all levers, instruments and policies', to reach the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy <sup>(5)</sup>;

14. supports the European Commission's efforts to improve the governance arrangements and in particular the partnership principle in the drawing-up, implementation and evaluation of the National Reform Programmes; however, calls on the European Commission to include an assessment of these aspects in each of the Country Specific Recommendations;

15. recalls the need to include delivery-oriented structures such as territorial pacts in the National Reform Programmes <sup>(6)</sup>; moreover, recognition and support should be given to initiatives that foster competitiveness and innovation at the local and regional level, such as the European Entrepreneurial Regions label;

16. is looking forward to reinforcing its co-operation with the European Commission throughout the Europe 2020 policy cycle and requests to be involved in the preparation of the Annual Growth Survey;

17. suggests that the European Commission provide regular updates on the implementation of the Europe 2020 flagship initiatives by particularly reporting on the involvement of local and regional authorities in their implementation;

18. asks the European Commission to outline in 2013 in the context of the mid-term evaluation of the strategy how it wants to ensure a closer involvement of local and regional authorities in that respect;

19. demands that any redirection of unused structural funds into a new growth agenda shall respect the principles of subsidiarity and involve local and regional authorities;

20. encourages the European Commission to further address key challenges such as youth unemployment and employment for workers over the age of 55 years, and socially disadvantaged groups, taking into account the key role of local and regional authorities; invites in particular the European Commission to present a draft Council recommendation for a Youth Guarantee Regulation; calls for the inclusion of a concrete local and regional dimension in the National Job Plans;

<sup>(4)</sup> CdR 318/2010, co-rapporteurs: Ms Mercedes Bresso and Mr Ramon Valcarcel Siso.

<sup>(5)</sup> Conclusions of the European Council of 28/29 June 2012, page 7.

<sup>(6)</sup> CdR 72/2011, rapporteur: Mr. Markku Markkula.

21. invites the Commission to ensure that the forthcoming Recommendation on child poverty and child well-being incorporates the suggestions outlined in the CoR's Opinion on Child Poverty of February 2012 (CdR 333/2011), particularly the adoption of a comprehensive strategy against child poverty and social exclusion that includes national, regional and local levels as well as the setting-up of a monitoring framework based on sound indicators, also linked with the existing reporting mechanism under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The CoR is convinced that in 2013 an evaluation of the impact of the crisis on child poverty based on specific reporting from Member States under the NRPs and the Europe 2020 strategy is needed;

### **EU budget**

22. recalls that in times of crisis and austerity the EU budget should lever as much public and private co-financing as possible at all levels of governance<sup>(7)</sup>; regrets the lack of statistical data that would allow a robust evaluation of such leverage and multiplier effects;

23. supports the European Commission's intention to present a report on the quality of public spending<sup>(8)</sup> recommends a separation of *current spending* and *investment* in the budget deficit calculations so as to avoid investments with long-term net benefits being calculated as a negative;

24. underlines that synergies can in particular be sought between the EU, national and sub-national budgets, provided that proper and effective coordination mechanisms are in place, such as interoperability between public administrations dealing with budgetary matters, harmonised public-finance accountancy rules and budget cycles and comparable budget structures, and invites the European Commission to issue a Green Paper to explore possible concrete measures in this area;

### **Single Market, SME and Industry**

25. calls on the European Commission to include a *Single Market Act III* in its 2013 Work programme, which should include all remaining policy initiatives from the Single Market Act on which action has not yet been taken and keep a balance among the economic, social and governance pillars with respect to the four fundamental freedoms;

26. requests the Commission to give particular attention to further improving cross-border labour mobility safeguarding workers' rights and calls for an improved system of recognition of qualifications in order to support the mobility of professionals;

27. encourages the European Commission to withdraw its Proposal for a Council Regulation on the exercise of the right to take collective action in the context of the freedom of establishment and the freedom to provide services which has triggered the early-warning on subsidiarity by 12 national parliaments;

28. underlines the important role of SMEs in economic regeneration and employment at the local and regional level; this can be further enhanced through the participation of SMEs, universities and local and regional authorities in EU research and innovation funding programmes;

29. calls on the European Commission to enable easier access for SMEs to finance and to public procurement contracts as well as to further reduce administrative burden;

30. expects the European Commission to involve the CoR in the review of the flagship initiative on Industrial Policy;

31. supports the European Parliament request to the Commission to submit, by January 2013, a proposal for a directive, on the basis of Article 114 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to ensure access to basic payment services for all consumers legally residing in the Union;

32. reiterates its call for a European agenda for social housing, which clarifies the competition rules applicable to social housing and empowers local and regional authorities to provide decent and affordable social housing, to promote social mix and to fight discrimination;

33. asks the European Commission, after the withdrawal of a first draft regulation for the statute of European mutual societies, to rapidly present a revised draft proposal;

### **Energy**

34. urges a follow-up in 2013 of the Energy Roadmap 2050 to ensure that the local and regional authorities are enabled to bring their contribution to the promotion of decentralised sustainable energy, and energy infrastructure such as smart intergrids, as a key element of resource efficiency and the green economy; therefore calls on the European Commission to develop a comprehensive investment framework with a time horizon of 2030, so as to provide the required certainty for both market actors and local and regional authorities;

35. calls on the European Commission to assess the options for an additional decentrally-managed financial instrument to stimulate the implementation of the Sustainable Energy Action Plans (SEAPs) by regional and local authorities and, notably by Covenant of Mayors' partners; also supports better bundling of financial support measures for energy efficiency and conservation in future EU funding programmes<sup>(9)</sup>;

36. asks the European Commission to take steps towards resolving connectivity problems between Member States and between regions in Member States; and to promote measures that facilitate the spread of micro-production of energy and its integration into the distribution grids;

<sup>(7)</sup> CdR 318/2010, co-rapporteurs: M Mercedes Bresso and Mr Ramon Valcarcel Siso.

<sup>(8)</sup> See COM (2012)299, point 2.1.

<sup>(9)</sup> CdR 85/2012, rapporteur Brian Meaney.

37. calls for access to loans from the European Investment Bank for investments in the areas of energy efficiency and renewables to be facilitated for small and medium sized businesses and local and regional authorities;

### **Regional Policy**

38. insists on the need to meet the target of early 2013 for the adoption of the legislative package on Cohesion policy 2014-2020 in order to allow local and regional authorities to start Structural Funds programmes on 1 January 2014;

39. calls on EUROSTAT in conjunction with national statistical agencies to address the need for more timely comparable data on regional GDP;

40. recalls the need to take the territorial dimension of EU policies into account in a more coherent and stringent manner; suggests that the European Commission include these elements in its future impact assessment activities and report on them regularly <sup>(10)</sup>;

41. invites the European Commission to extend the scheme of temporary posting of EU civil servants to the sub-national level (instead of focussing on the national level only) in order to improve knowledge within the European institutions of the practice of implementing EU legislation and projects at local and regional level;

### **Transport**

42. looks forward to the forthcoming proposal on the future of EU ports policy; asks that the proposal be subjected to a territorial impact assessment, and is ready to contribute to this exercise;

43. points out the importance of sustainable urban mobility and suggests the promotion of electronic and smart ticketing across all modes of transport, including bus, rail, ferry, car sharing, bike sharing and road tolls, with the aim of encouraging better interoperability between systems and increasing the use of public transport;

### **Environment**

44. observes that the slowdown in improvements to air quality is, to a significant extent, due to a lack of ambition in EU source-based policy and an absence of national measures. Much of the burden and responsibility of solving air-quality problems has been placed on local and regional authorities <sup>(11)</sup>; looks forward to proposals how to address these problems in the forthcoming review of the EU air quality legislation;

45. expects that in this review the levels of ambition and timeframes of EU emissions (source-based) policy and emissions policy are aligned and that in particular the NEC directive

(National Emissions Ceiling) is reinforced in order to reduce background concentrations; that standards for vehicles with regard to NO<sub>2</sub>/NO<sub>x</sub> and particulate matter are tightened and emissions from shipping, air traffic and agriculture are also tackled, while simplifying the indicators and criteria for measurement; it also calls for the integration of EU air quality policy with other policy areas, in particular transport, housing, industry, energy and climate;

46. demands that the EU Adaptation Strategy for climate change include a section on specific adaptation action at regional and municipal level as well as guidelines and support for local and regional decision makers, the setting up of a working group on adaptation strategies in particularly vulnerable European regions, bringing together representatives of the CoR, DG Climate Action, the EEA, the JRC and local and regional networks and associations should also be explored;

### **Agriculture and maritime policy**

47. stresses the need for a targeted Communication on 'A new EU quality scheme for local food products' as local food systems support the local and regional economy by providing employment in agriculture and food production;

48. would advocate greater flexibility on the part of the Commission in helping to overcome the deadlock between the European Parliament and the Council over the legal basis of the multi-annual plans for the fisheries sector, and trusts that the package of proposals on reforming the common fisheries policy will expand initiatives to promote decentralisation of fisheries policy and implementing measures that provide a response geared to the needs of coastal regions and regions bordering inland waterways and the challenges facing them;

49. supports the development of the sea basin strategy approach as a integrated maritime policy tool but considers that these strategies, such as the strategy that will be adopted for the Atlantic Area in 2013, must include a stronger territorial dimension and learn from the lessons of the macro-regional strategy approach;

### **EU Citizenship**

50. calls for the local and regional dimension to be taken into account in initiatives to build upon and strengthen citizens' rights and in efforts to restore citizens' trust in the EU and its institutions, and insists on the need to involve children and young people given their ability to exercise citizenship rights and responsibilities; calls on the Commission to focus on this challenge in the activities planned in the framework of the European Year of Citizens 2013 to which the CoR intends to contribute;

51. is committed to contributing to the follow-up of successful European Citizens' Initiatives in cooperation with the other EU institutions;

<sup>(10)</sup> CdR 273/2011, rapporteur: M Luc Van den Brande.

<sup>(11)</sup> CdR 329/2011, rapporteur Cor Lamers.

***Wider Europe and Europe in the World***

52. requests that the access of local and regional actors in the European neighbourhood Policy (ENP) countries to the specific EU funds for this area be facilitated and supports the opening of existing programmes, including EGTC to partners in neighbourhood countries;

53. reaffirms its intention to continue the positive cooperation with the European Commission in the context of the Local Administration Facility programme in order to improve local capacity building and promote knowledge of

EU and its procedures in candidate and pre-candidate countries; invites the Commission to explore the possibility of expanding it to local governments in the ENP countries;

54. trusts that its recommendations will be duly considered in the process of preparing the Commission work programme for 2013 and instructs the President of the Committee of the Regions to submit the present resolution to the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Council, the President of the European Parliament, the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU and the forthcoming Irish and Lithuanian Presidencies.

Brussels, 19 July 2012.

*The President  
of the Committee of the Regions*  
Mercedes BRESSO

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