I

(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

84th PLENARY SESSION HELD ON 14 AND 15 April 2010

Resolution of the Committee of the Regions on the Priorities of the Committee of the Regions for 2010 based on the Legislative and Work Programme of the European Commission (1)

POLITICAL PRIORITIES

The current EU institutional and political conjuncture

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. notes that 2010 constitutes an important institutional conjuncture with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the beginning of the European Commission’s and the Committee of the Regions’ new term of office. The new Treaty provides the European Union with the appropriate political and institutional framework but current challenges, both at European and global level, have shown that political will, visions and debate must be rapidly translated into tangible results for citizens;

2. considers that the current challenges require a longer-term political vision, enhanced cooperation amongst European institutions, increased ownership of European policies at national, regional and local level and recognition of the principles of multilevel governance;

3. underlines that the consolidation of the Committee’s role in the EU legislative process, not least through the new powers conferred upon it following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, in particular with regard to subsidiarity, aims at contributing to the better governance and efficiency of the EU’s legislative activities;

4. reiterates its commitment to working closely with the European Commission with a view to guaranteeing that the local and regional dimension is taken into account during the elaboration of EU legislation, notably by increasing the local and regional sensitivity of impact assessment;

5. welcomes the multiannual perspective added to the European Commission Work Programme 2010, which enhances predictability, facilitates cooperation and institutional programming and allows for the effective setting of strategic goals;

6. is concerned about the rise of extremist parties and believes that one of the crucial ways to tackle this is to provide resources to local and regional authorities to combat poverty; inequality; discrimination; intercultural conflict; lack of appropriate housing and financial resources to communities, social enterprises and SMEs; in order to create sustainable wealth generation;

7. shares the European Commission’s view on the urgency of addressing the social, economic and environmental challenges facing the EU; reaffirms its intention to contribute to the successful implementation of the Commission’s priority axes for action: the EU’s exit from the current economic, financial and social crisis and the move towards socially and environmentally sustainable recovery that puts citizens first and confirms the EU as a global player; reiterates its willingness to contribute to the optimisation of the use of existing EU policy instruments, inter alia through simplification and reduction of administrative burden, which constitute a key part of the European Commission’s strategic priorities.

(1) This resolution is included among the CoR documents adopted at the 84th plenary session of 14 and 15 April 2010. The opinions from this session have already been published in the Official Journal (OJ) C 232, 27.8.2010.)
Europe 2020 blueprint meets some key requests from EU vision and regulation of the financial markets; broker agreement on strategic initiatives for the effective super cohesion policy; and thus calls for strong measures to reinforce the role of economic and territorial cohesion within the European Union disparities increase. This challenges the very idea of social, regions are affected unevenly, which means that territorial confront with high employment uncertainty. Cities and European economy is still facing weak demand and citizens are without sufficient demand on the EU internal market; Member States, both strong and weak EU economies suffer the strong and growing economic interdependence between EU out of solidarity but is in the interest of all Europeans. Due to the financial, economic and social crisis on regions and cities market players.

of law over the abusive practices of some of the financial a global stable legal framework in order to restore the primacy of economic policies as called for by the Spring 2010 European Council is a vital prerequisite not only to address the crisis, strengthening regulation of financial markets, curbing speculation and keeping public budgets under control – but also to undertake structural reforms needed to embark on a sustainable growth path;

is convinced that enhanced cohesion is needed not only out of solidarity but is in the interest of all Europeans. Due to the strong and growing economic interdependence between EU Member States, both strong and weak EU economies suffer without sufficient demand on the EU internal market;

believes therefore that increased EU-level coordination of economic policies as called for by the Spring 2010 European Council is a vital prerequisite not only to address the crisis, strengthening regulation of financial markets, curbing speculation and keeping public budgets under control – but also to undertake structural reforms needed to embark on a sustainable growth path;

underlines that strategies to fight the crisis should be based on coordinated and integrated policymaking involving all levels of government with due regard to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality;

welcomes the European Commission’s commitment to broker agreement on strategic initiatives for the effective supervision and regulation of the financial markets;

is convinced that the overall issue at stake is to provide a global stable legal framework in order to restore the primacy of law over the abusive practices of some of the financial market players.

The European Commission’s Europe 2020 blueprint from a CoR point of view

Strengths and weaknesses
welcomes the fact that the European Commission’s Europe 2020 blueprint meets some key requests from EU cities, local and regional authorities when it states that (a) cities, local and regional authorities must be permanent partners in the design and implementation of the new strategy, that (b) the Committee of the Regions should be more closely associated, that (c) the economic, social and environmental pillars have to be put at the same level, that (d) the strategy should be flexible enough to adapt to different starting points, and that (e) the benefits of economic growth have to spread to all parts of the Union, thus strengthening territorial cohesion;

regrets, however, that the Commission’s proposal does not address some other key issues raised by the Committee of the Regions, namely (a) how to commit Member States’ governments to deliver on the promises of the new strategy, (b) what role the local and regional authorities should play in the design and implementation of the proposed flagship initiatives, (c) what indicators for assessment of progress should complement GDP and how these should be integrated into the governance of the new strategy;

supports the intention to concentrate the Europe 2020 Strategy on fewer priorities and agrees on the need to link the reporting on the new Strategy with that on the Stability and Growth Pact; the instruments themselves, however, must remain clearly separate, and the independence of the ECB must be safeguarded;

is determined to raise these points in the debate preparing the final decision on the new EU strategy and expects the European Council meeting in June to duly take into account the proposals by the Committee of the Regions on behalf of the EU’s regions and cities.

Taking forward the Europe 2020 flagship initiatives
welcomes the European Commission’s intention to translate the Europe 2020 Strategy into concrete flagship initiatives; stresses that joint efforts are needed from the EU and its Member States as well as local and regional authorities. To this end, local and regional authorities should be further encouraged by the EU to also pursue these objectives by making ambitious long-term investment in education, training, research and innovation; considers that the development of high quality public services based on quality infrastructures, public transport networks and investment in energy-efficient technologies deserves a separate flagship initiative.

Digital agenda
looks forward to the new ‘Digital Agenda for Europe’ and acknowledges its many implications in the fields of low-carbon economy, public services and increased quality of life; underscores the huge potential of the digital agenda for social inclusion and the connectivity of rural and remote areas.
Industrial policy, research and innovation

21. underlines that creativity and innovation are key promoters of growth, investment and new jobs and is therefore convinced that long term investment into education, training as well as retraining and research is the key way to sustain economic development and combat unemployment;

22. supports the development of a strategy to increase the coordination and cooperation between research and innovation on the one hand and information and communication technologies on the other;

23. reaffirms its strong belief in the potential of synergies between the EU’s Research Framework programme, Structural Funds and other public financing schemes to leverage R&D investment and generate knowledge-based employment at the local/regional level; sets as a priority the support for cooperation between different sources of funding (public and private) to promote innovation and technological leadership;

24. underlines the need for coordinated actions among all levels of government to support SMEs to forge stronger links between fundamental research and applied research; welcomes measures aimed at launching and supporting Creativity and Innovation initiatives, especially those targeting university-enterprises cooperation.

Youth on the move

25. firmly believes that investing in youth in particular through educational, training, and voluntary and exchange activities is vital for the achievement of the goals of the European Union in terms of employability, social inclusion and the forging of a European identity and active citizenship;

26. fully supports the headline target indicated in the Europe 2020 blueprint to reduce the share of early school leavers to 10 % from the current 15 %.

New skills and jobs

27. calls for special attention to combating unemployment by helping regional and local authorities to effectively use the means from the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Globalisation Fund (EGF) and all other available sources to stimulate job creation, support SMEs and encourage green innovation;

28. calls for equal opportunities in employment and for special attention to the potential contribution of elder workers who possess valuable knowledge and experience for a balanced working environment, as well as for product and system innovation;

29. welcomes the Commission’s commitment to present a proposal to revise the Working Time Directive.

Social inclusion

30. underlines that the fight for social inclusion must include both measures targeted at particularly vulnerable groups or areas, and support to the economy in general, giving wider attention to employability, flexicurity and a dynamic economy;

31. underscores the importance of stepping up efforts to reduce the number of Europeans living below national poverty thresholds by 25 %, as indicated in the relevant Europe 2020 headline target; emphasises that it is impossible to fight poverty and social exclusion if NGOs social partners, local and regional authorities and those working with people in poverty are not involved. Therefore the CoR warmly welcomes the opportunities for bottom-up cooperation offered by the 2010 European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion aiming at renewing the commitment to solidarity, social justice and greater inclusion.

Resource-efficient Europe

32. will pay particular attention to reinforcing the EU’s Sustainable Development Strategy in the light of the new Europe 2020 Strategy. It will contribute to the debate on improving synergies between both strategies and on how to streamline the implementation and monitoring processes of these two strategies;

33. commits itself to contributing to the future framing of the 7th Environmental Action Programme and to supporting an EU environmental policy which promotes a more efficient use of natural resources, a high quality of life for EU citizens, and takes into account local and regional authorities;

34. looks forward to the presentation of the Energy Efficiency Action Plan by the Commission in early 2011; is committed to EU policies aiming at energy saving and the promotion of new and renewable forms of energy in particular within the context of the new 2010–2014 EU energy technology strategy; believes the security of energy supply in the Union to be crucial and therefore pays particular attention to the interconnection of energy networks;

35. will look closely into the local and regional aspects of existing climate change-related EU legislation, in particular the implementation of the 2008 climate change and energy package along with subsequent accessory legislation. In this context, will also look into the issue of the sustainable use of biomass and the progression towards improved energy efficiency, especially in the housing sector;
36. offers, in close cooperation with the European Commission, to carry forward the Covenant of Mayors initiative for the achievement of the EU’s 2020 targets at local and regional level; and will thus strive to enlarge the Covenant to regional actors;

37. aims at a better recognition by the European and national level actors of the crucial role played by local and regional authorities in delivering climate change mitigation and adaptation and calls for recognition of their role in the ongoing UN climate change negotiations;

38. in light of the need to better target the Structural Funds towards energy investment in the context of regional development, will continue to look into ways to ensure better coordination and coherence of regional programmes with national and European guidelines;

39. will continue to explore further synergies between economic and climate change policies and in this context look into ways to increase the EIB’s role in financing clean technology, infrastructure and energy security at the local and regional level, across the EU;

40. wholeheartedly supports the full exploitation of ICT in the efforts to increase energy efficiency and will continue to work on the drawing up and dissemination of a practical guide, together with the European Commission and other stakeholders, on how local and regional authorities can fully exploit information and communication technologies (ICT) in their climate change plans;

41. reiterates that maritime policy requires an integrated, holistic, cross-sectoral approach, based on maritime spatial planning; highlights furthermore the vital role of local and regional authorities in this policy, as both funding authorities and as the bodies best placed to organise the harmonious coexistence and uses of the sea; recalls therefore the need for a simplified financial system for an Integrated Maritime Policy, uniting all maritime issues within a European Coastal and Islands Fund;

42. acknowledges the need for improved coordination between sectoral policies that are relevant to the usage of marine areas and thus calls for the establishment of a European Maritime Platform, bringing together local and regional authorities and relevant stakeholders to provide an instrument which can help to share responsibilities and disseminate good practice;

43. will accompany the ongoing reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and looks forward to contributing when the Commission makes its reform proposals during the course of 2010 and stresses the importance of ensuring that the future CFP focus on sustainable fish stocks while at the same time taking into account the needs of the EU’s coastal regions and small-scale fisheries;

44. commits itself to actively contribute to the reflections on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) after 2013; will oppose any attempt to dismantle or renationalise the CAP; strongly suggests that synergies be fostered between rural development policy and other EU policies, and in particular cohesion policy since the diversity in the development of rural areas is a cause for concern from the point of view of the cohesion of the EU27;

45. believes that the new CAP after 2013 should therefore enable rural areas to rise to the challenges with which they are currently faced, namely: regional disparities in income and economic and social performance, low rates of employment, problems of accessibility, technological ‘exile’, demographic change and depopulation, the gradual eating away of rural space, etc.;

46. regrets that the Commission does not put enough emphasis on accompanying measures during the crisis in the agricultural sector;

47. believes that climate change needs to be mainstreamed into agriculture with a view to reducing energy consumption and the production of greenhouse gases, inter alia by providing appropriate incentives for farmers. Integrated food strategies should be supported and regions encouraged to develop and promote locally-produced food and food-related products where such schemes contribute to a smaller carbon footprint;

48. believes that an excessive concentration of market power in food retailing or manufacture can be detrimental to both farmers and consumers. The EU needs to address any evidence of abuse of market power in the food chain to ensure all participants obtain a fair deal;

49. believes that the output of quality agricultural produce is particularly important for sustainable development in the rural context and advocates maintaining both instruments (Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)) and urges the European Commission to seek the necessary production management instruments for PGIs and PDOs.

Lc Addressing Europe’s missing policy links

Transport

50. welcomes the European Commission’s initiative to give fresh impetus to the TEN-T network in Europe and looks forward to the Commission proposal for revised TEN-T guidelines following the 2009 Green Paper; insists that local and regional concerns should not only be taken on board, but that local, regional and national planning instruments should be coordinated within the European framework in order to ensure that Trans-European Networks contribute towards improving the accessibility of all European regions while increasing the efficiency and sustainability of the whole European transport system;
51. **reiterates** its support for the Commission’s policy objectives for a more integrated, safe and secure, technologically-led and sustainable European transport system; **awaits** with keen interest the publication of the 2010 White Paper on Transport, which will set the agenda of the European Transport policy in the decade 2010-2020.

52. **requests** appropriate follow-up to be given to the action plan on urban mobility, taking account of the subsidiarity principle.

II. An agenda that puts citizens first

II.a Cohesion Policy

53. **regrets** that the importance of Cohesion Policy is not sufficiently reflected in the priorities of the political guidelines for the next Commission, despite the financial and political weight of this policy area, which makes a fundamental contribution towards developing the economy of the EU as well as reinforcing its social model; **calls for** a strong and ambitious commitment to Cohesion Policy within the EU budget review process, avoiding any kind of renationalisation, in order to consolidate this major policy around its central objective: decreasing the economic and social differences between the least development EU regions and the rest of EU and the harmonious development of all EU territories, allowing all EU citizens – wherever they live – to have equal access to the opportunities offered by European integration;

54. **stresses** the necessity to recognise Cohesion Policy as a development policy in its own right and not an aggregate of sectoral policies. Although there is no doubt that Cohesion Policy should and will contribute to the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, it is a policy aimed at contributing to exploit the very diverse development potentials of all regions, thereby being flexible enough to adapt to many different challenges and circumstances within different territories; **believes** there is a need to carry out an analysis of the earmarking of the Structural Funds during the period 2007-2013 before renewing the earmarking in connection with the new strategy; **considers**, in this context, that as cohesion policy is enshrined in the Treaty it must not be regarded simply as a financial instrument of EU strategies;

55. **stresses** the necessity of implementing the principle of territorial cohesion, which – with the Lisbon Treaty – became one of the political objectives of the European Union and a new dimension of regional policy; **recalls** that all policy areas must promote this objective, and **calls on** the Commission to participate systematically in territorial impact assessments upstream of legislative proposals; in this context **reiterates** its call to the Commission to present a White Paper on territorial cohesion;

56. **underlines** that territorial cooperation is an essential element in achieving the objective of territorial cohesion; therefore recalls that the new legal instrument ‘European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation’ (EGTC) has great potential to improve the quality of life of citizens and the competitiveness of local and regional authorities, and to increase cohesion in border territories. The CoR will elaborate an own-initiative opinion during the course of 2010 to evaluate the EGTC so far and to propose measures to improve it through the forthcoming review of the EGTC regulation;

57. in the framework of territorial cooperation and the implementation of European policy at local and regional level, macroregions are gaining in importance. Against this background the CoR **calls** on the Commission to submit a green paper on the role and function of macroregions.

II.b Public health and Consumer protection

58. **believes** that EU structural funds should be increasingly used to help reduce health inequalities across Europe. In order to ensure that structural funds are more effective in tackling health inequalities, the CoR would support ‘health life indicators’ or approaches which acknowledge the importance of a healthy life;

59. **asks** the European Commission to review the proposal on pharmaceuticals in order to ensure a high level of human health protection. Demonstrating the therapeutic benefits of a new drug in relation to existing ones should be at the heart of this policy. Also recalls the need for a strengthening of cooperation with local and regional pharmacovigilance networks;

60. **asks** the European Commission to contribute to reinforce consumer protection by promoting class action lawsuits and encourages the European Commission initiative to strengthen the effective enforcement of consumer protection rules; class actions on the US model and full harmonisation of consumer protection are, however, opposed as initiatives which go too far.

II.c Services of general interest and competition

61. **reiterates** the key role of local and regional authorities in the provision of services of general interest; **notes**, in this regard, the commitment taken by the Commission President to support a consistent approach to integration measures and the achievement of the common European asylum area; welcomes the Commission’s efforts in addressing illegal immigration and suggests a special attention be paid to border management which is particularly relevant for many local and regional authorities in the European Union;

II.d Freedom, security and justice

62. **reaffirms** its efforts for increased involvement of local and regional authorities in the further development of the area of Freedom, Security and Justice, especially as regards the implementation of the Stockholm Programme where they are responsible for implementing it;

63. **supports** the striving for a consistent approach to integration measures and the achievement of the common European asylum area; welcomes the Commission’s commitment to step up the European Union’s efforts in addressing illegal immigration and suggests a special attention be paid to border management which is particularly relevant for many local and regional authorities in the European Union;
64. **reiterates** the crucial importance of protecting and promoting fundamental rights and freedoms in the efforts to combat terrorism and violent radicalisation and underlines that local and regional government plays a major role in this;

65. **acknowledges** the citizens' initiative based on Article 24 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union as an important new tool of democratic mobilisation in the European process, and commits itself to actively following the implementation of this instrument to ensure that local and regional authorities can play their full part in realising its potential.

**II.e Civil protection**

66. **stresses** that the EU must make it a priority to provide regional and local authorities repeatedly affected by natural disasters with effective assistance in the process of development and implementation of their own prevention measures; furthermore, it notes that often LRAs have the experience-based knowledge needed, but that the funding for prevention measures may not be available; **supports**, in this regard, the European Commission's commitment to give a concrete follow-up to the solidarity clause foreseen in this Lisbon Treaty by setting a new framework for the EU's rapid response capacity but regrets that by presenting a green paper the Commission may unnecessarily delay the adoption of this new framework: in the meantime, **endorses** the call of the European Parliament for a revised EU solidarity fund regulation in order to address the problems caused by natural disasters in a more flexible and effective way.

**II.f Biodiversity**

67. **will give** special **emphasis**, in 2010, to the United Nations International Year of Biodiversity, and the development of both EU and international biodiversity targets for 2020; **calls** in particular for the EU biodiversity policy package for 2020 to include robust new measures to improve the integration of biodiversity protection and restoration objectives into the EU's transport, rural development, energy, agriculture, marine and tourism policies; requests a for more active participation of local and regional authorities in the policy development and implementation; also **advocates** the international strategy to be decided at COP 10 of the Convention on Biological Diversity in October 2010 with a clear reference to the key role played by local and regional authorities in tackling biodiversity loss.

**II.g Culture**

68. **welcomes** the recent proposal of the European Commission to establish a European action for the European Heritage Label and reminds the Commission that the members of the Committee of the Regions are very much engaged in promoting and safeguarding cultural and linguistic heritage of Europe.

**II.h Sport**

69. **welcomes** the inclusion of sports among the areas of EU competence in the Lisbon Treaty; **supports** the development of a sports programme by the European Commission, to be launched in 2012, and underlines the important role of local and regional authorities in exploiting the potential of sports as an element of social integration and healthy living.

**III. The external agenda**

70. **underlines** its continuous commitment to strengthening the role of local and regional authorities in EU enlargement and reiterates the need to fine-tune the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) to the needs of local and regional governments in the beneficiary countries;

71. **continues** successful cooperation with local and regional representatives from the Western Balkans in the framework of the Working Group on the Western Balkans and in the Joint Consultative Committee EU-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; **announces** the creation of a Joint Consultative Committee EU-Croatia in 2010; **will continue** to work towards the set-up of a Joint Consultative Committee EU-Turkey to provide for an appropriate framework for accession negotiations, especially increasing visibility and co-ownership;

72. **draws attention to** the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) in January 2010 which brings together 84 local and regional representatives from the EU and its 16 Mediterranean partners and which aims to provide Euro-Mediterranean cooperation with a territorial dimension, in particular through the exchange of best practice and the launch of new cooperation projects; calls on the Union for the Mediterranean to invite ARLEM to be a permanent observer;

73. **reiterates** its strong support for the development of a territorial and sub-national dimension of the Eastern Partnership; supports the exchange of best practice in the field of public administration reform;

74. **emphasises** its wish to be actively involved in the shaping of the Northern Dimension Policy, furthering relations with local and regional authorities in the partner countries making up the Northern Dimension;

75. **recalls** its objective to increase the participation of local and regional authorities in development cooperation and to promote policy dialogue for greater involvement of the local and regional dimension in the definition, implementation and evaluation of development cooperation strategies; **announces** the organisation in the second half of 2010 of the second ‘Assises of Decentralised Cooperation’ which aim at facilitating exchange and political dialogue among local and regional authorities from the EU, developing countries and EU institutions;
76. **reaffirms** its commitment to implementing, in collaboration with the European Commission, a web portal of decentralised cooperation for development, including the Atlas of Decentralised Cooperation, a stock exchange and an e-library on policies and programmes proposed by all actors;

77. **reaffirms** its support for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the aid effectiveness agenda; while underlining the added value of local and regional initiatives for the achievement of these objectives, calls for increased participation of local and regional authorities in the division of labour and greater coordination of actions among all actors;

78. **reiterates** its commitment to fostering local and regional democracy in Europe and third countries and stresses its ambition to gain international recognition for the CoR’s election observation competence.

IV. Optimising EU instruments

IV.a Governance and better lawmaking

79. **emphasises** the importance of strengthening multilevel governance so that all spheres of government are involved in the formulation and implementation of Community policies; reiterates that the respect of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in the legislative process is at the core of effective and democratic multilevel governance;

80. **believes** that better regulation and the reduction of the administrative burden will boost growth and the creation of jobs; is determined to contribute to the improvement of the regulatory environment and the simplification of the acquis communautaire, as well as to enhanced consultation and strengthened impact evaluation methods; will continue to closely follow the High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders on Administrative Burden, with a special emphasis on the needs of and impact for local and regional authorities.

IV.b Communicating Europe

81. **reiterates** its commitment to promoting and encouraging democratic participation in the European process through its members and their activities in their towns, cities and regions. Local and regional politicians have an essential relay role to play in building this European Union for two reasons: firstly, to ensure that the territorial dimension is taken into account across the board when EU legislation is drafted and, secondly, to engage with their fellow citizens in a dialogue about the added value of European integration; **reaffirms** its key responsibility in effectively communicating this double role;

82. **underlines** in this context the importance of the annual ‘Open Days’ as an ideal framework for regions and cities to showcase good practice in the field of strengthening cohesion, regional competitiveness and territorial cooperation and to impact on the political debates among EU institutions and Member States;

83. **is ready** to join forces with the European Commission, European Parliament and Council in taking forward the three major communication priorities identified in the European Commission’s Work Programme 2010, namely economic recovery and restoring growth, addressing climate change and energy issues, and facilitating the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty; points out the key role of the CoR in the implementation of the three priorities;

84. **instructs** its President to forward this Resolution to the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council, the current Spanish presidency and its Belgian and Hungarian partners of the presidency trio 2010-2011.


The Frst Vice-President
of the Committee of the Regions
Ramón Luis Valcárcel SISO