Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on ‘International climate policy post-Copenhagen’
(2011/C 42/03)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

— points out that European efforts to combat climate change at national, regional and local government levels can serve as an example of a coherent approach and also as a model for countries outside Europe. Transparent structures embracing all sectoral policies and an effective financial infrastructure accessible to local and regional authorities are important prerequisites;

— firmly supports the initiative of the Covenant of Mayors to reduce carbon emissions in over 2 150 European towns and cities by more than 20% by the year 2020, and expects that the necessary resources will be provided to ensure that the objectives announced are actually achieved;

— argues that a constructive way of engaging between local and national levels on climate adaptation measures is via outcome-type agreements whereby each governance level can voluntarily commit to work towards a climate mitigation outcome and jointly take ownership and responsibility for their respective contributions;

— points to the growing importance of sectoral or cross-sectoral energy and climate ‘alliances’ between regions and companies, which were already involved in the Copenhagen negotiating process. These alliances should be explicitly encouraged with a view to further developing and applying low-carbon technologies as soon as possible. The main players here are local- and regional-level decision-makers, and small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs);

— reiterates that more funding is needed, especially at local and regional level, to implement climate protection and adaptation measures.
I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. notes that climate change will have a direct impact on all living organisms on our planet, regardless of geopolitical factors. Containing the climate change threat and addressing the effects of climate change represent one of the major challenges of our time;

2. draws attention to the particular role played here by subnational levels of government, in particular local and regional decision-making bodies in Europe, whose closeness to ordinary people puts them in a key position when it comes to implementing climate protection measures;

3. explicitly supports the Commission in drawing on this potential in relation to climate protection. The ambitious climate goals can only be achieved if there is sustained awareness-raising in society and a switch to a more resource-efficient economic system.

Commission Communication

4. is pleased to note that the Commission has distilled its determination to translate the general consensus on climate change into action in a strategy designed to maintain and further strengthen the momentum of efforts to manage the problem;

5. observes that climate change, whose impact varies between regions, has gained scientific recognition as a global phenomenon and that the international community increasingly accepts that there is an urgent need to take action, as the IPCC recommends. The European Union already set ambitious goals back in 2008: these were to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20%, to increase the share of renewables in energy production to 20% and to reduce energy consumption by 20% by the year 2020. These goals are also referred to in the EU-2020 strategy and are firmly supported by the CoR;

6. emphasises the international dimension of climate change and the need to mount a global response;

7. calls for a strong local chapter within the future international UN climate change agreement;

8. agrees that the UN process of comprehensive, global climate change management should be regarded as indispensable and therefore unreservedly endorses efforts to secure an internationally binding climate protection treaty that should, in particular, incorporate the political guidelines of the Copenhagen accord;

9. reiterates its strong support for the goal of limiting global warming to no more than 2 degrees Celsius;

10. welcomes the substantial progress made by the European Union towards meeting its Kyoto commitments for the period 2008-2012 and appreciates the effort to keep Europe among the most climate-friendly region in the world;

11. notes that while the Copenhagen talks on combating climate change in December 2009 led to a broad exchange of views at international level, as well as a political agreement among a majority of countries which hitherto had made no formal commitment, but that they also failed to produce a legally binding treaty, as opposed to an accord;

12. shares the view that the EU must improve its work of winning people over and should first focus primarily on building support with different partners. The CoR points to the consequent need for the EU to speak with a single voice;

13. believes that an internationally binding agreement must demonstrate environmental integrity if it is to be accepted by the community of states that are party to it;

14. points out that the European Union is one of the few major world blocs to have substantially reduced its CO₂ emissions and that this globally acknowledged leading role gives, and must give, it a particular responsibility to make use of the existing potential for further reductions;
15. notes that the effects of climate change globally and within Europe will vary widely between different regions (e.g. in inland or upland regions or islands, for example in the context of desertification, the melting of glaciers or a rise in the sea level), which means that the potential regional impacts must be evaluated at the level of Member States, regions and local authorities, in consideration of their heterogeneity;

16. calls for a better balance to be struck between the need to exert pressure and maintaining the momentum of the process, so as to avoid deadlocks and/or obstructionism.

Taking stock after Copenhagen

17. regrets the fact that the European Union could not bring to bear its position on combating climate change at the Copenhagen talks;

18. is pleased that the Copenhagen climate conference set a goal of keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius compared with pre-industrial temperature levels, while referring to the work of the IPCC;

19. likewise welcomes the fact that by the cut-off date of 31 January 2010, 55 countries had responded to the invitation to announce binding commitments for their emissions reduction targets. This evidences broad and increasing support for the accord as well as the clear determination of a majority of countries to step up their actions on climate change now, although it is regrettable that these cumulative commitments are insufficient to achieve the objective set by the Copenhagen conference of keeping global warming below 2 °C;

20. welcomes the fact that the Copenhagen accord requires basic standards for regular monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) and measures to be taken by national governments on climate change, also with respect to the necessary financial support for climate action.

Need for action

21. emphasises that with a view to the upcoming negotiations in Mexico and the preparatory conference in particular, a major persuasive effort must be mounted with those countries or country blocs that felt their interests were not taken sufficiently into account in the Copenhagen process;

22. endorses the measures proposed by the Commission to step up awareness-raising in third countries. It is essential in this context to have a prior understanding of the positions, concerns and expectations of negotiating partners on key issues, in particular so as to convince those countries that are not yet willing enough to support a legally binding international climate protection treaty;

23. stresses that the EU must exercise as a bloc its negotiating mandate based on the Lisbon treaty now in force, and urges that these new structures be consistently implemented;

24. thus emphatically calls for the EU to speak with a single voice in Cancun;

25. stresses that it must be possible to measure and monitor the results of various actions and measures taken to mitigate climate change and its inevitable effects. The measures and data to be documented must be compulsory for all states without prejudice to the sovereignty of the countries concerned;

26. draws attention to the need for the Commission to adapt and reinforce its strategy for EU climate policy in case no international treaty is forthcoming;

27. advocates close monitoring of the tension between the comprehensive approach of an integrated energy and climate policy and the subsidiarity principle. The Member States must continue to have room for manoeuvre in the future where structural particularities require specific rules, provided competition is not distorted;

28. perceives a need to make more of progress at home in combating climate change, to continue setting ambitious goals and to underpin and publicise successes in implementing them, especially at regional level, using examples of best practice. The CoR points specifically to the role played by ordinary people here. It will be impossible to realise ambitious climate goals without awareness-raising and cooperation on the ground;

29. welcomes the Commission’s call for issues to be addressed that were not mentioned in the Copenhagen accord, such as the development of an international carbon market and reduction of emissions from international aviation and maritime transport in consultation with the ICAO and IMO;

30. recognises that including air and sea transport in a global emissions trading system, together with a cap and an emissions reduction roadmap, will be an important step towards reducing carbon emissions, while also appreciating that account has to be taken of the particular dependency of individual regions, such as islands, from the point of view of competitiveness;

31. emphasises the important role that agriculture can play in mitigating climate change since the farming sector is unique in its potential to reduce CO₂ equivalent emissions and increase carbon capture more cheaply, while still guaranteeing food production, generating farm income and maintaining the population of rural areas;

32. believes that the EU must launch specific projects to support the switch to a low-carbon economy, based on the EU-2020 strategy for sustainable growth (the ‘Green New Deal’) with a view to becoming the most climate-friendly region in the world;
33. points out that this strategy will succeed only if both the public and private sectors, in accordance with the varying economic and sectoral structures of the Member States, are given sufficient opportunities for structural change and innovation within an appropriate time frame, without, however, thereby losing sight of the EU's reduction targets;

34. emphasises that the huge challenges of global climate protection can better be addressed in a context of consensus with business;

35. points out that appropriate instruments are needed to prevent distortions of competition between countries with and countries without climate protection standards, and warns that 'carbon leakage' could otherwise lead to relocation of jobs, particularly in certain industrial sectors;

36. stresses that an international successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period is needed, also for economic policy reasons, in order to secure the requisite planning and legal certainty for businesses and national governments for at least the next ten years;

37. notes that a follow-up agreement to the first Kyoto Protocol period will only have a chance of success if known weaknesses can be eliminated so as to ensure environmental integrity. Future emissions reductions must be distributed fairly across the whole of the international community, without unreasonable disadvantages arising for individual states. This is particularly relevant for developing and emerging countries, which must be given real support – e.g. technological and financial – by the industrialised countries;

38. believes it would be possible to publicise the expertise gained by regions in EU Member States on measures implemented to combat climate change as examples of best practice (knowledge and technology transfer). This could apply equally to technology application and methods for measuring, reporting and verifying measures;

39. recommends a ‘monitoring platform for climate change’ as a suitable instrument to support the exchange of information on regional and local climate change measures and their further development. This could be used to ensure optimum use and effective application of the knowledge acquired by local and regional authorities and help to inform EU and national responses;

40. believes that coordination between the negotiations on lowering carbon emissions and the ongoing international discussions about loss of biodiversity (CBD), combating climate change (UNFCCC) and desertification (UNCCD) must be improved; therefore calls on the Commission to take the initiative here, e.g. by organising a high-level meeting on the above three ‘Rio conventions’;

41. sees a need for more interregional cooperation the fight against and on adaptation to climate change;

42. argues that a constructive way of engaging between local and national levels on climate adaptation measures is via outcome-type agreements whereby each governance level can voluntarily commit to work towards a climate mitigation outcome and jointly take ownership and responsibility for their respective contributions;

43. is aware that an integrated approach is required for any Kyoto successor agreement in the framework of the Kyoto Protocol, so as to prevent negative interactions between individual instruments.

Commission strategy
EU taking the lead
44. welcomes the Commission’s initiative to actively resume a leading role in international climate protection;

45. notes that the EU-2020 strategy, with the goal of sustainable growth, will produce resource-efficient, environment-friendly and competitive structural changes in the economy, resulting in a resource-efficient Europe;

46. points out that this change requires that all social groups, as well as individuals, be involved and won over at an early stage by means of adequate information and transparency, particularly as, apart from technological change, climate change will lead to adaptations in our current way of life;

47. would mention that the switch to a low-carbon economy necessitated by climate change must take place in a socially responsible way if it is to be accepted. It is important to pay attention to keeping and if necessary adapting existing jobs, alongside the new jobs that are expected;

48. emphatically supports the 20-20-20 climate protection and energy goals referred to in the EU-2020 strategy, which include raising the emissions reduction target to 30 % provided certain conditions are met. Before the EU commits itself unilaterally to a 30 % increase, a detailed analysis should be carried out so as to ensure that European businesses do not suffer any competitive disadvantages. The Committee believes that the shift to 30 % is an issue of the utmost importance that must be decided on the basis of detailed reports validating its environmental and economic viability. The Committee is concerned that the studies carried out, whilst technically correct, are of a macroeconomic nature, and considers it essential that these studies also be presented on a sectoral basis so that the countervailing measures can be defined more clearly. The specific national circumstances of the Member States, particularly at sub-national/regional level, should be borne in mind when drawing up these reports;
welcomes the Commission’s idea of outlining a pathway for the EU’s transition to a low-carbon economy by 2050 and specifically calls for the short- and medium-term stages of that pathway to be defined;

points out that innovative processes and products are one of the keys to meeting the global challenges of climate protection. Only innovation can release the forces necessary for growth over the long term;

agrees with the Commission’s statement that measures must focus on innovation and early deployment of new technologies and appropriate infrastructure in order to further consolidate the leading role of European businesses in key sectors;

notes that sophisticated measures are already being taken in many spheres, thanks to modern climate and environmental protection techniques. This must be recognised and taken into consideration when setting benchmarks. To allow for differences in the progress already made, it is necessary to ensure that each local or regional baseline is taken into account by incorporating a dynamic element into the system;

points out that economic restructuring may have negative effects, especially at local and regional level;

recognises the considerable opportunities that can be created by sustainable growth, in relation for example to job creation and security of energy supply;

urges that building improvements to enhance energy efficiency should be incorporated into the measures planned as a basis for achieving the climate protection goals, and notes that buildings that do not comply with energy-efficiency standards produce a significant share of all CO₂ emissions. Up to three quarters of residential buildings have substantial energy-saving potential;

points out that it will be impossible to achieve the ambitious climate protection targets without taking account of carbon-saving potential in the housing stock;

stresses the importance of cutting greenhouse gas emissions from the passenger and goods road transport sector;

regrets that the Commission communication does not discuss the need for action at regional level to implement the climate protection targets. Promotion of innovation, research and development across Länder and regions through the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and its climate KIC could set an example here;

points in this connection to the growing importance of sectoral or cross-sectoral energy and climate ‘alliances’ between regions and companies, which were already involved in the Copenhagen negotiating process. These alliances should be explicitly encouraged with a view to further developing and applying low-carbon technologies as soon as possible. The main players here are local- and regional-level decision-makers, and small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). Passing on information promptly and efficiently to the relevant stakeholders in comparable situations is a perfect example of the ‘bottom-up’ principle;

draws attention to the existence of numerous initiatives at regional level that are helping to embed the climate change concept firmly in society, such as regional sustainability strategies or alliances between municipal decision-makers, regional governments and business. The CoR would be very happy to share its experience on these projects with interested stakeholders;

therefore welcomes the initiative of the Covenant of Mayors to reduce carbon emissions in over 2 150 European towns and cities by more than 20 % by the year 2020, and thus firmly supports the Covenant as a key player in sustainable energy and climate policy and expects that the necessary resources will be provided to ensure that the objectives announced are actually achieved;

feels that, when regulating, a balance should be struck between the strict respect for safeguarding the environment and the huge cost involved in combating climate change for those regions and islands, which are remote and/or particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon, totally dependent on transport, but nevertheless very committed to reducing carbon emissions, for example by developing renewable energies.

Implementing the Copenhagen Accord

believes that the Copenhagen accord established key pillars for a future binding agreement, especially in the acceptance of the 2 °C target, the voluntary commitment of certain countries to national emissions reduction targets, and binding statements on ‘fast-start’ finance for developing countries and on long-term funding requirements;

agrees that those industrialised and developing countries that together account for 80 % of global greenhouse gas emissions have sent an extremely important signal with their specific emissions reduction targets;

shares the view that the commitments notified by countries will not be sufficient in quantitative terms to ensure that the 2 °C target is achieved;

welcomes the willingness of the developing countries to also assume responsibility and the measures announced by them, although the substance of these has not yet been evaluated;
67. emphasises that it is extremely important during the course of further follow-up UN talks to clarify the details of targets and measures fixed by industrialised, emerging and developing countries, which must ultimately lead to a process that is transparent, comprehensible and measurable in qualitative and quantitative terms;

68. considers that monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV), which is a sensitive issue, can only be carried out effectively and in a way that is acceptable to all parties if the same conditions apply explicitly to everyone. A system based on joint minimum criteria fixed under the UN process, but where the national level is responsible for implementation of measures and access to information, is considered to be the right way of achieving this;

69. welcomes the Commission’s proposal to support cooperation with developing countries that are interested in programmes to expand regional capacity for monitoring, reporting and verification.

**Fast-start finance**

70. welcomes the provision made in the Copenhagen accord for advancing funding which must amount to USD 30 billion during the period 2010-2012 to kick-start climate protection and climate adaptation measures in developing countries;

71. sees an urgent need for action to activate the financial support pledged at Copenhagen for developing countries as soon as possible;

72. notes that the European Council has set the contribution of the European Union and the Member States at EUR 2.4 billion yearly and points to the importance of prompt implementation in the interests of EU credibility;

73. calls for the partnership activities at European regional level with municipalities, provinces, regions and federal states in developing and emerging countries to be promoted and developed and draws attention to the importance of ensuring that fast-start finance also builds on existing measures and initiatives so as to avoid delays.

**Long-term finance**

74. welcomes the forward-looking long-term financing strategy set out in the Copenhagen accord, for which USD 100 billion yearly has been earmarked until 2020;

75. supports the Commission’s suggestion that this finance should come from a range of sources;

76. stresses that transparency for all those involved - providers and beneficiaries - must have first priority in the future international financial architecture, especially where project implementation is concerned.

**Advancing the international carbon market**

77. notes that the long-term development and establishment of an international carbon market based on an emissions trading (cap-and-trade) system is the most effective policy instrument in developing a resource-efficient, low-carbon economy;

78. agrees with the Commission that an international carbon market necessitates a compatible and comparable system, and that this must be taken into account in the continuing international climate talks;

79. points out that setting up the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) market has raised awareness of emissions reductions in the private sector globally, created networks between private stakeholders and encouraged them to innovate;

80. echoes the Commission’s view about the need to evaluate and reform the Clean Development Mechanism should large emerging countries such as China, India, South Africa and Brazil still be unable to accept binding emissions reduction targets;

81. therefore endorses the Commission’s suggestion of moving to sector-wide mechanisms based on prevailing EU emissions trading provisions, in cooperation with interested industrialised and developing countries. This would necessitate improvements in the quality requirements for credits from project-based mechanisms;

82. shares the view that finance from the international carbon market should also be used to support projects in developing countries;

83. also believes that a substantial proportion of the revenues from the European emissions trading system should be made available to local and regional authorities for putting climate protection and adaptation measures into effect at local level.

**Conclusions**

84. agrees with the Commission that the Copenhagen accord produced by the UN climate summit of December 2009 did not meet initial expectations. An awareness of the urgent need for action has nevertheless become evident in the international community;

85. believes it is important that the Commission give due consideration, from the perspective of the regions, to the subsidiarity and proportionality principles in its proposals for steps needed in the short and medium term, especially with respect to consequent measures. The aim must be to secure binding commitments without encroaching on the sovereignty of the parties involved.
The role of local and regional authorities

86. emphasises the role of local and regional authorities in the process of combating climate change and its already inevitable implications for ordinary people. Member States must retain their latitude in this domain, also because of the wide variations in the effects of climate change between different regions;

87. very much regrets that the Commission communication does not discuss the need for action at local and regional level;

88. considers it indispensable for all future agreements on climate protection policy to take into account the key role played by local and regional levels of government;

89. explicitly welcomes the commitment of existing networks at subnational level and calls on the Commission and the European Parliament to take account of those networks’ positions in future international climate talks;

90. commends the existing cooperation on climate policy between different EU regions and developing and emerging countries;

91. points out that European efforts to combat climate change at national, regional and local government levels can serve as an example of a coherent approach and also as a model for countries outside Europe. Transparent structures embracing all sectoral policies and an effective financial infrastructure accessible to local and regional authorities are important prerequisites;

92. urges that the basis for international networking at local and regional level be put in place and that this be deliberately promoted, so as to create an ongoing and open process of dialogue via platforms for exchange that are accessible to all levels involved, with a view to effectively and efficiently combating climate change;

93. urges that subnational organisations in the Member States be given the means to harness opportunities and take on responsibilities as appropriate, taking their specific regional features into account;

94. reiterates that more funding is needed, especially at local and regional level, to implement climate protection and adaptation measures;

95. calls on the Commission to put forward proposals on how to secure adequate funding for bodies dealing with climate protection and suggests that the Member States be consulted on this matter;

96. stresses that a change in values in favour of resource-efficient and climate-friendly practices can only happen from within society, and points specifically to the role of ordinary citizens here. Ambitious climate goals cannot be achieved without their contribution;

97. emphasises that the structural change needed to switch to a low-carbon economy must take place in a socially responsible way;

98. points out that its members are therefore best placed, through being in touch with ordinary people’s concerns, to bring about a change in thinking based on information, interaction and setting an example which will in particular require vocational and further training of employees;

99. offers to stand by the Commission by being a solid partner in the fight against climate change and its effects, and by passing on its experience with regional projects to interested stakeholders.

Brussels, 1 December 2010.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Mercedes BRESSO