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**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Enhancing the European Administrative Space  
(ComPAct)**

**(own-initiative opinion)**

(C/2024/5369)

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<b>Reference document:</b>	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Enhancing the European Administrative Space (ComPAct) COM(2023) 667 final

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR),

1. welcomes the intention of the European Commission Communication on Enhancing the European Administrative Space (ComPAct) to foster cooperation and policy dialogue and to help improve the capacity and the quality of public administrations at central, regional and local levels in Europe;
2. stresses that public administrations play a central role in strengthening the single market, and that the public sector, which employs around 21 % of the EU workforce, manages a market for public works and supply worth about EUR 670 billion;
3. underlines that public administrations directly implement about one third of the EU budget, notably through cohesion policy funds and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), while the local and regional level is responsible for the management of 34 % of total public expenditure and 56 % of total public investment;
4. welcomes the fact that in its communication, the European Commission acknowledges the CoR's past opinion <sup>(1)</sup> in this field, and the fact that certain ideas from its opinion can be found in this communication;
5. calls for the European Commission as well as public authorities to step up efforts to reassess and reduce the administrative burden created, especially for local and regional authorities; underlines that gold-plating should be avoided in this respect as much as possible in line with the principles of better regulation;
6. notes that in order to achieve a real European administrative space, more efforts are needed. Stresses that still after 30 years, barriers to the good functioning of the single market exist, and nationalistic approaches hamper overcoming those;
7. suggests that, while the European Commission presents its communication on a European administrative space, a true European administrative space does not exist yet, and cannot be created (as part of the single market) without a European vision that spans across national interests and coherent and efficient rules and structures based on common consensus with a clear European added value. Acknowledges in this respect the role regions and their public authorities can play, as they often reach beyond national borders;

<sup>(1)</sup> Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Improving administrative capacity of local and regional authorities to strengthen investments and structural reforms in 2021-2027 (OJ C 79, 10.3.2020, p. 25).

8. welcomes the strong support for a strengthened administrative capacity for greater impact in Enrico Letta's report 'Much more than a Market'. Highlights in particular the analysis that budgetary constraints have significantly hindered public administrations' modernisation efforts and their ability to recruit and retain skilled personnel since the financial crisis in 2007-2008, which led to an uneven and in cases incomplete implementation of EU pieces of legislation across the EU. Welcomes in this respect the proposal to establish a new facility for a Pact enhancing European Administrations Cooperation and Expertise (PEACE), which could boost investments and reforms of public administrations and provide support to individuals or to a group of public administrations with similar issues or similar ambitions. Reiterates Enrico Letta's plea that the facility should have a sufficient budget that allows the Commission to provide expertise specifically to improve the functioning of the public administrations;

9. underlines that the European Commission describes its broad ideas for a European administrative space, but its clear vision of what such a cross-border, European administrative space would contain is not delivered in its communication;

10. welcomes the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) as the key EU programme to provide support to public administrations, including at the regional and local levels. Warns, however, that many public administrations, particularly at the regional and local levels, are not aware of all possibilities offered by the TSI. Calls on the European Commission to increase its communication efforts and awareness-raising campaigns;

11. recognises that Member States have different levels of government structures and that legislations need to be adapted to all structures. Supports decentralisation efforts and Member States' efforts in involving lower levels of government in the design and implementation of policy legislation. Underlines, however, that a successful implementation requires not only actions but also funding to be delegated to the respective level;

12. stresses that the ComPAct aims to foster administrative cooperation based on developing the workforce via a skills agenda, strengthening the digital transformation and leading the ecological transition. However, many public administrations face an urgent additional challenge – demographic decline, brain drain, ageing and the ability to attract young people to public administrations as well as a future skills shortage throughout the job market and greater competition for the available workforce;

13. highlights the need for a territorial differentiation in identifying challenges in Member States' and local and regional public administrations, given the diversity of structures, traditions, resources and capacities. Considers, therefore, that the European administrative space offers opportunities, but regional and local differences in the application might remain;

14. underlines that many rural areas, disadvantaged regions and also people (who for diverse reasons do not have access to digital tools) face accessibility problems, due to infrastructure deficits, missing high-speed internet or missing competences. Stresses that even in a 100 % digitalised public service, citizens need to be able to rely on public support in their local authority as a service of public interest;

15. calls for a more ambitious strategy, building on the Strasbourg Declaration on common values and challenges of European public administrations, where Member States clearly declared their willingness to transform their public administrations, promote the exchange of good practices and deepen their cooperation;

16. recommends that the creation of a European administrative space span beyond cooperation between national administrations at national level, and that a renewed Strasbourg Declaration particularly focus on public administrations at subnational level;

17. welcomes the steady engagement of the European Commission with peer administrations through complementary networks, such as the Expert Group on Public Administration and the European Public Administration Network. Calls for a reinforced active involvement of public administration at all levels, based on needs;

18. proposes that civil servants, as part of their training, participate in traineeships or temporary work experiences in a different place of their recruitment, be it in another public body in the same Member State or even in another country. Recognises the linguistic barriers which could hinder this, and recommends making use of artificial intelligence and translation technologies to circumvent those barriers as far as possible. Suggests particularly focusing on those exchanges in a first step towards twin cities and underlines the challenges these would bring in disadvantaged or remote regions;

19. highlights the positive outcome of the new Interoperable Europe Act that will make European public administration more cost-efficient, as it will enable linking different levels even across borders, and will enable developing real learning spaces with digital technologies. Would like clarification of how the ComPAct relates both to the interoperability regulation and to other relevant regulations and data spaces, as certain tools – such as the setting up of Interoperable Europe Support Centres – could also be used for this data space;

20. regrets that local and regional governments and EU social partners were not formally consulted during the drafting of the ComPAct. Underlines the importance, as part of the better regulation agenda, to include feedback from the subnational level by means of the CoR's network of regional hubs, rural proofing tools or the territorial impact assessment;

21. emphasises the importance of achieving the digital decade objective to have 100 % of key public services available online by 2030, leading to efficiency gains and enhanced accessibility to these services and welcomes the European Commission's efforts towards making this a key concern of the European administrative space. Stresses the need to ensure that every citizen has access to up-to-date digital skills and infrastructures, and that targeted training sessions are organised for people with limited digital capacities, but highlights the challenges in implementing the ComPAct, due to the timeline for the decision stages and the adjustments that need to be made to meet future demands at national, regional and local level;

22. stresses that as the Union faces its most significant expansion by having increasing numbers of candidate countries, the CoR welcomes the ComPAct's aim to better and more often involve candidate countries in exchanges of practices with EU Member States. Underlines that this would be in line with fostering a good professional impartial administration, which is part of the EU enlargement criteria;

23. calls on Member States to address administrative capacity challenges at all levels of government in the context of their medium-term fiscal structural plans to be submitted by September 2024 under the reformed economic governance framework.

Brussels, 20 June 2024.

*The President*  
*of the European Committee of the Regions*  
Vasco ALVES CORDEIRO