2.2 **assumes** that economic support for green public procurement is to be given to the municipal and regional level;

2.3 **underlines** the need for information and training initiatives to support and develop public sector procurement of clean vehicles;

2.4 **calls for** a holistic approach to potential measures to promote clean road transport;

2.5 **suggests** that the reporting system used to follow up a possible directive on promoting clean road transport be coordinated with other reporting systems. Coordination should be *inter alia* with the reporting system proposed in the draft directive on air quality and cleaner air in Europe;

2.6 **assumes** that the municipalities and regions are to be involved in further efforts to frame, implement, follow up and evaluate the measures proposed in a possible directive.

Brussels, 15 June 2006.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Michel DELEBARRE

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning

(2006/C 229/03)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council *On key competences for lifelong learning* (COM(2005) 548 final — 2005/0221 (COD));

Having regard to the decision of the European Commission of 28 November 2005 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

Having regard to the decision of its President of 24 January 2006 to instruct its Commission for Culture and Education to draw up an opinion on this subject;

Having regard to its opinion on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing *An integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning* (CdR 258/2004 fin ([1]));

Having regard to its opinion on the Communication from the Commission — *Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality* (CdR 49/2002 fin ([2]));

Having regard to its opinion on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning *The seventh framework programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013)* (CdR 155/2005 fin);

Having regard to its opinion on *the Adoption of a multi-annual programme (2004-2006) for the effective integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe (eLearning Programme)* (CdR 73/2003 fin ([3]));

Having regard to its opinion on the Communication from the Commission on Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006 (CdR 248/2003 fin ([4]));

([1]) OJ C 164, 5.7.2005, p. 59.
([2]) OJ C 278, 14.11.2002, p. 26.
([3]) OJ C 244, 10.10.2003, p. 42.
([4]) OJ C 73, 23.3.2004, p. 33.

Having regard to its opinion on the Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council *establishing the Culture 2007 programme (2007-2013)* (CdR 259/2004 fin (⁵));

Having regard to its opinion on the Communication on the follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth. Proposed common objectives *for voluntary activities among young people* in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding *The framework of European cooperation in the youth field* COM(2004) 337 final;

Having regard to the Communication on the follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth — proposed common objectives for a *greater understanding and knowledge of youth* in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field COM(2004) 336 final (CdR 192/2004 fin (⁶));

Having regard to the draft opinion of the Commission for Culture, Education and Research, adopted on 4 April 2006 (CdR 31/2006 rev. 2) (rapporteur: **Ms Christina Tallberg**, Member of Stockholm County Council (SE–PES));

adopted the following opinion at its 65th plenary session, held on 14/15 June 2006 (meeting of 14 June):

Content of the Commission Communication

The Lisbon European Council in March 2000 recognised that Europe faces challenges in adapting to globalisation and the shift to knowledge-based economies. It stressed that 'Every citizen must be equipped with the skills needed to live and work in this new information society' and that 'a European framework should define the new basic skills (⁷) to be provided through lifelong learning: IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills'.

The Recommendation proposed therefore presents a European reference tool for key competences and suggests how access to these competences can be ensured for all citizens through lifelong learning.

The development of the knowledge society is raising demand for the key competences in the personal, public and professional spheres.

However, the High Level Group on the Lisbon Strategy made it clear in November 2004 that 'far from enough is being done in Europe to equip people with the tools they need to adapt to an evolving labour market, and this applies to high- and low-skilled positions'.

Many countries have begun basic skills programmes, for example on literacy, numeracy and ICT for adults, often through NGOs. However, a number of countries are not yet in a position that would allow all citizens to learn and update their basic skills.

The 'Key Competences for Lifelong Learning — A European Reference Framework' includes knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead people to be more involved in both sustainable development and democratic citizenship. The eight key competences are communication in the mother tongue, ability to communicate in foreign languages, mathematical competence, digital competence, learning to learn, interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, entrepreneurship and cultural expression.

Importance for local and regional authorities

Throughout the European Union the local and regional level has key responsibilities for education, training and developing skills through lifelong learning.

Local and regional authorities are uniquely placed to enter into constructive partnerships with the social partners, institutions and organisations for general and continuing education in order to adapt general education and vocational training courses to specific local needs and requirements.

In addition, various regional and local cooperation projects act as a significant driving force for growth and development.

Education programmes enable the EU to reach out to citizens directly. No other EU endeavour affects so many people each year. The programmes also help to modernise education systems and help individuals update their skills. In view of the local and regional level's responsibilities, regional players should be an important target group for programme activities in the field of education and training (⁸).

(⁵) OJ C 164, 5.7.2005, p. 65.
(⁶) OJ C 43 of 18.2.2005, p. 42.
(⁷) "Basic skills" is generally taken to refer to literacy and numeracy; the Lisbon Council called for adding the new skills needed in a knowledge society such as ICT and entrepreneurship.

(⁸) CdR 258/2004 fin.

The Regional networks for lifelong learning (R3L initiative), set up by the Commission in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions, is an excellent example of dissemination and development of lifelong learning in Europe. This initially involved a pilot initiative with a separate budget from the main programmes. This has now been included in the proposal for the new Integrated Action Programme in the field of lifelong learning 2007-2013.

1. *Committee of the Regions' general views on the communication*

1.1   The Committee of the Regions can endorse much of the European life-long learning strategy, which starts in early childhood and continues all through life, and welcomes the fact that it embraces learning acquired in various ways such as formal, non-formal and informal learning. The Committee of the Regions has on several occasions emphasised that the life-long learning strategy concerns the local and regional level closely, as it often shoulders political and economic responsibility for the education and training sector in the Member States. Frequently local and regional authorities act, alongside the social authorities, as coordinator for development and growth with responsibility for public welfare and infrastructure. They also exercise the role of employer, and are responsible for, as well as having an interest in, upgrading the skills of their workforce [9].

1.2   Education issues are crucial if Europe is to mobilise competitively in conditions that can safeguard welfare. Europe's biggest asset — its people — must be equipped for a working life and type of work that differ significantly from those of previous generations and that will continue to transform rapidly. Businesses and employees alike are facing changes that are hard to assess in advance.

1.3   Naturally, the circumstances and initial situation against which local and regional development takes place will differ, but it can on no account be regarded as happening in isolation from the surrounding environment. As old jobs disappear, regions and communities need jobs in new production sectors or risk facing stagnation, social exclusion in the form of unemployment, etc., high rates of sick leave and an unwelcome trend towards early withdrawal from the labour market.

1.4   People's skills and abilities therefore need to be developed in a way that corresponds to knowledge-based activity. Good language proficiency, communicative skills in general

and the ability to be a team player are increasingly important qualities for the individual. The current trend towards faster trade flows, globalised markets and segmentation makes teamwork all the more necessary. This applies to different businesses/organisations locally and regionally and between regions. The different parts of Europe are increasingly mutually dependent, as are Europe and the rest of the world.

1.5   Interplay between working life, society and higher education is an important prerequisite for innovation and growth at local and regional level. An inclusive, non-discriminatory infrastructure is needed to encourage active citizenship and joint responsibility for social cohesion and sustainable development.

1.6   The Committee of the Regions has on previous occasions argued that it should play an active role in promoting lifelong learning at local and regional level [10]. Logically, this includes issues relating to education objectives and key competences. The Committee of the Regions considers it vitally important that the issues addressed in the communication should penetrate through to the local and regional level.

1.7   The Committee of the Regions wishes to take this work forward in order to follow and support future development and suggests it should work with the Commission on these issues, for example on pilot projects and analyses.

1.8   The Committee of the Regions would stress the benefits of developing regional lifelong learning networks (corresponding to the R3L initiative) in order to strengthen networking amongst institutions and associations for compulsory, higher and vocational education and training and culture, as a key factor in enhancing employability and active citizenship.

2. *The Commission's proposed recommendations to the Member States*

2.1   Seen from the above perspectives, it is extremely important to focus on key competences for lifelong learning in current and future society and working life. This applies to development support at local and regional, national and EU level generally. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the Commission's proposed recommendations to the Member States on key competences for lifelong learning.

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[9] CdR 49/2002 fin.

[10] CdR 49/2004 fin.

2.2   The Committee of the Regions finds it particularly positive that the Commission's proposals highlight the role and importance of the regional and local level. This constitutes significant progress compared to earlier Commission proposals which were almost exclusively limited to the European and national level.

2.3   The Committee of the Regions sees the integrated programme for lifelong learning as an important way to promote the learning sector and to strengthen key competences for lifelong learning. Greater mobility for citizens leads to dissemination of knowledge and skills in the EU regions and municipalities and can help improve competitiveness and boost employment.

2.4   One of the cornerstones of the Commission's recommendations is to ensure that adults can update their key competences throughout their lives and that special focus is given to target groups that have been identified as priority groups in a national, regional or local context. Local and regional initiatives to motivate and inform the less well educated could make an important contribution here. It is a question of building on people's knowledge, experience and interests rather than starting with their shortcomings and failings.

2.5   The impact of the Commission recommendations on the changes in economic, social, cultural and other processes will depend on the concrete and immediate actions taken at national, regional and local level. The Committee of the Regions would therefore stress the need to reform formal and informal education systems. These programmes must cover all levels, with the aim of bringing these systems closer to the needs of the EU labour market and the requirements of the lifelong learning strategy.

2.6   Gender differences in educational participation and achievement are important factors to take on board and address nationally, regionally and locally. This could take the form of encouraging girls and women to study science and technology. In other contexts it is men that need support. In a number of regions and municipalities it is mostly men who abandon their studies and show less motivation and propensity for continuing education.

2.7   The Committee of the Regions considers that the Commission's suggested recommendations to the Member States will provide an important lever to steer educational systems in Europe towards a faster, more focused approach, with a view to achieving agreed objectives on competitiveness, welfare and participation. The Committee of the Regions

endorses these and would make a number of comments as follows:

2.8 Commission recommendation 1:

Ensure that initial education and training offers all young people the means to develop the key competences to a level that equips them for adult life, and which forms a basis for further learning and working life;

Committee of the Regions' comments:

2.8.1   The Committee of the Regions stresses that it is important to provide even young children with effective support for their focused development, whilst ensuring they do not need to feel they have failed along the way. Moreover, compulsory education lays the ground for continuous learning throughout a lifetime through formal, non-formal and informal learning. It is important to take note that children and young people learn in different ways, mature at different rates and often need different timescales to achieve objectives. This is a big challenge in developing education systems and for teacher training.

2.8.2   Children and young people with special needs such as disabilities need particular support so that they can play an active part along with other children.

2.9 Commission recommendation 2:

Ensure that appropriate provision is made for those young people who, due to educational disadvantages caused by personal, social, cultural or economic circumstances, need particular support to fulfil their educational potential;

Committee of the Regions' comments:

2.9.1   The Committee of the Regions welcomes the fact that the Commission document addresses the need for special measures for those with shortcomings in their previous education. The Committee agrees that educational shortcomings are often a result of personal, social, cultural and economic factors, and these should be remedied in cooperation with the various sectors of society. It is essential to remove efficiently any obstacles to employment, education or other opportunities.

2.9.2   The Committee of the Regions stresses that it is essential that all students regardless of background are given the chance to achieve educational objectives and do not leave school early. Specific initiatives and special support that build on the individual student's abilities and needs are required here.

2.9.3   The EU will not be able to achieve the ambitious objectives it has set itself if a number of people are excluded from work and higher performance levels on the basis of gender, disability, cultural or ethnic background, age etc. The local and regional authorities have an important role to play in promoting inclusive, non-discriminatory strategies and in offering all people equal rights and equal opportunities.

2.9.4   The Committee of the Regions considers that cross-border networking between European regions in order to share experience and build knowledge, corresponding to the R3L initiative, would be welcome. This is a question of getting the issue onto the agenda, continuing to develop methodology, skills transfers and garnering support.

2.10 Commission recommendation 3:

Ensure that adults are able to develop and update the key competences throughout their lives, and that there is a particular focus on target groups identified as priorities in the national, regional and/or local contexts;

Committee of the Regions' comments:

2.10.1   The CoR sees this proposal as important and notes that needs often vary considerably between different regions and communities, and that different approaches are needed if all are to be catered for. There is therefore good reason to stress that in many cases it is precisely at local and regional level that prioritised groups must be identified. For example, cooperation could be developed with organisations that have experience of adult education and with the social partners.

2.10.2   The CoR considers that, of the target groups identified as priorities, particular attention should be paid to the category of local and regional government employees, so that they can develop and update key competences throughout their working lives in line with the public duties they perform.

2.11 Commission recommendation 4:

Ensure that appropriate infrastructure for continuing education and training of adults is in place including teachers and trainers, measures to ensure access, and support for learners that recognises the differing needs of adults;

Committee of the Regions' comments:

2.11.1   The CoR has previously ([11]) emphasised that it is essential to mobilise local and regional level resources to support lifelong learning and stressed the need for discussions to be launched at local and regional level. In its opinion, the

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([11])   CdR 19/2001 fin.

CoR stressed that geographical access should also be seen in conjunction with other measures to improve access for the individual, both in terms of structure and organisation. This could be done by, for example, providing daytime/evening and weekend courses; courses during summer and traditional holiday periods; frequent course start dates, distance learning and guided flexible learning. It could also involve providing participants with the economic resources to take up their studies. It is also a question of capitalising on the various forms of learning that have taken place outside the formal school system.

2.11.2   With regard to infrastructure, the CoR sees no need for any standardised local learning centres to be rolled out across the board. As far as possible they should build on existing structures and in accordance with local conditions and requirements.

2.12 Commission recommendation 5:

Ensure the coherence of adult education and training provision for individual citizens via close links to employment and social policies and other policies affecting young people and collaboration with social partners and other stakeholders;

Committee of the Regions' comments:

2.12.1   The Committee of the Regions would stress that this point is extremely important to successful local and regional development. It is particularly important for the local and regional level to be able to bring different policy areas together at local and regional level — economic policy, education policy, labour market policy, integration policy and social policy — in order to avoid any 'tunnel vision'. It is therefore important that responsibilities and powers go hand in hand, as far as possible. Here the Committee of the Regions sees a need for economic resources and more flexible use of resources so that initiatives can be implemented within the framework of the integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning. Cooperation between society, the world of work and higher education is crucial to growth in regions and municipalities.

2.13 Commission recommendation 6:

Use the 'Key Competences for Lifelong Learning — A European Framework' in the Annex as a reference tool in developing the provision of key competences for all as part of their lifelong learning strategies.

Committee of the Regions' comments:

2.13.1   The Committee of the Regions welcomes the proposal for key competences for lifelong learning. This focuses on the basic qualifications an individual needs to be equipped with in a knowledge-intensive society. These key competences can serve as a starting point for future competence requirements in discussions at EU, national, and local and regional level. In Europe this is extremely relevant to efforts to achieve the Lisbon Strategy objectives. It is precisely at local and regional level that these competence issues are put into practice.

2.13.2   The Committee of the Regions takes the view that these competences need to be the subject of lively, continuous discussion and continuous dialogue and development. For example, social and civic competences involve a number of aspects that could eventually need to be developed further or divided up. Furthermore, several of the key competences are closely linked.

2.13.3   The Committee of the Regions accepts that the Commission has worked continuously to develop further the proposal on key competences. The Committee of the Regions endorses the proposal on key competences drafted by the Commission.

2.13.4   The Committee of the Regions makes more detailed comments on each of the proposed key competences in the following section.

3. *Key competences*

The European reference framework for key competences covers eight areas:

— Communication in the mother tongue.

— Communication in foreign languages.

— Mathematical competence and basic competence in science and technology.

— Digital competence.

— Learning to learn.

— Social competence and civic competence.

— Enterprise and entrepreneurship.

— Cultural expression.

3.1 Communication in the mother tongue

3.1.1   The Committee of the Regions agrees that it is necessary to be able to **communicate in the mother tongue**, both orally and in writing.

3.1.2   One's own language is the basis for continued learning, self-expression and identity. A good knowledge of and proficiency in the mother tongue are thus fundamental to the learning process. Language paves the way for accessing information and provides the basis for communication with others, for participation and responsibility.

3.1.3   The Committee would point out that the Commission and national agencies should work closely with local and regional authorities in areas with less widely spoken languages that have a lower profile in current education systems, to encourage more people to learn these languages ([12]).

3.2 Communication in foreign languages

3.2.1   In the Europe of the future it will be increasingly necessary to master several languages. It creates opportunities to establish closer contacts and to acquire a better understanding of other countries' cultures, customs and lifestyles. It is also an important requirement for accessing higher education and provides the basis for greater mobility in the labour market. There is already a mutual dependency between Europe's various language areas. Exchanges between countries will increase, economies are ever more intertwined and goods and services are increasingly being produced across national and language borders. The Committee of the Regions would stress that European language diversity must be seen as an asset.

3.3 Mathematical competence and basic competence in science and technology

3.3.1   The Committee of the Regions sees it as important that mathematical competence and competence in science and technology should be developed in such a way that the student feels it is meaningful and motivating. Mathematics can be a tool for other subjects such as physics, chemistry, biology and social studies. Knowledge in and about the subject can also be a natural part of a modern approach to education. Scientific competence is important *inter alia* to the ability to see and understand the connection between cause and effect, and to test propositions. Active citizenship requires a certain amount of competence in mathematics and science. Competence in technology should be built on the experience of both men and women. It is also important to show how conceptions and traditions shape perceptions of what is masculine and feminine in the field of technology.

3.3.2   In the framework of the European research area, a specific endeavour must be made to increase young people's and women's interest in scientific and technological careers. The confident and critical use of Information Society Technology must be accessible to all. The expansion of Science Parks is an interesting approach to making science and technology studies more attractive.

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([12]) CdR 248/2003 fin.

3.4 Digital competence

3.4.1 An inclusive, non-discriminatory information structure for digital competence must be created for the EU as a whole. The CoR attaches much importance to the promotion of a socially and geographically equitable information society ensuring that all citizens are equipped with the skills they need to live and work in this new digital age. The ability to handle large information flows and complex issues thus becomes an important quality that more and more people will need to possess.

3.5 Learning to learn

3.5.1 '**Learning to learn**' involves an outlook and approach towards one's own education and a technique for acquiring new knowledge. For each individual it involves self-awareness, an awareness of how one reacts in various learning situations, of one's best learning strategies, strong points and areas for improvement. It is also a question of motivation and self-confidence. The 'lifelong learning strategy' largely builds, of course, on a learning perspective and on the fact that this learning takes place in various ways and in different contexts. It involves being able to relearn and being open to learning new things. It also involves being able to build on existing knowledge, skills and earlier experience and acquiring the ability to harness them in a number of different situations.

3.5.2 The Committee of the Regions sets great store by this attribute in the context of the knowledge society. It is particularly important that teacher training courses equip future teachers to work in this way. The nature of this issue is such that it differs from the other key competences and is connected with the ability to develop them all. The Committee of the Regions therefore considers that this key competence should be singled out and placed before the others.

3.6 Social competence and civic competence

3.6.1 The expressions 'social competence' and 'civic competence' cover a spectrum of issues which the Committee of the Regions considers should receive the utmost attention. It is partly to do with developing personal qualities and the ability to establish contacts with other people. A good communicative ability — in the broad sense — is becoming ever more impor-

tant in the working and social life typical of the information society. It also involves inter-cultural understanding.

3.6.2 This field of competence includes *social aspects* in the sense that the individual sees himself as a resource for himself, his family and his environment.

3.6.3 It also includes *medicinal aspects* such as an insight into the importance of a healthy lifestyle, physical and mental health and an active lifestyle. As medicine advances, the health of children and young people is deteriorating in many societies, owing to poor dietary and exercise habits. This will become very serious unless something is done.

3.6.4 Another very important aspect is the *role of civic citizenship*. This involves understanding democracy, individual rights and responsibilities. All of these can be promoted at the local and regional level. The Committee proposes supplementing the definition so as to mention the need for citizens to know the history of the EU, its objectives, the essential facts relating to the Treaty on European Union and to the relations that the Union maintains with its Member States, the problems and progress made concerning the adoption of the European Constitution and the principles underpinning the various policy areas.

3.6.5 The importance of *sustainable development* and an understanding of our responsibility for our common environment is an aspect that the Committee of the Regions considers should be clearly stated in this context.

3.7 Enterprise and entrepreneurship

3.7.1 Enterprise and Entrepreneurship are essentially about being pro-active, turning ideas into action. It is therefore important that from an early age the school system supports and encourages this type of active approach and develops methodologies for this. The Committee of the Regions would highlight the importance of harnessing the potential of women and ethnic groups with good business acumen who wish to start a business. Women could also need active support from various authorities in order to gain access to new technologies. Such initiatives could, together with an active labour market policy, reduce the employment gap between men and women in many parts of Europe. The above is crucial to the future of the EU's economy and wellbeing ([13]).

([13]) CdR 151/2005 fin.

3.8 Cultural expression

3.8.1   The Committee of the Regions agrees that it is very important to understand the cultural and linguistic diversity of Europe and to preserve it ([14]). This involves capitalising on various forms of expression such as music, art, literature and language as part of human learning and development. Generally speaking, it is important to capitalise on people's different perspectives and approaches.

3.8.2   In this context, the Committee of the Regions would stress the historical perspective, i.e. how contacts between different parts of Europe in different periods of time have affected development, and that for at least five decades there has been a well-founded idea of a European Community, which the European Union currently expresses.

3.9 Committee of the Regions' proposals

3.9.1   The Committee of the Regions is keen to follow and support developments ensuing from the Commission's recommendations and proposes it should work with the Commission on these issues in the future.

3.9.2   The Committee of the Regions endorses the Commission's proposals on key competences for lifelong learning and considers that they should be subject to continuous dialogue and development.

3.9.3   The Committee of the Regions suggests that the 'learning to learn' key competence should be placed before the others as it involves an approach to one's own learning and various techniques for acquiring new knowledge. It thus highlights the requirements for all the other proposed key competences.

3.9.4   The 'social competence and civic competence' key competence should also include the importance of sustainable development and an appreciation of responsibility for our common environment.

3.9.5   The Committee of the Regions stresses the importance of becoming culturally aware; this is the very foundation of any receptiveness to the diversity of Europe's languages and cultures, and the key to understanding them and to the enrichment that these may bring to each and every European citizen.

Brussels, 14 June 2006

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Michel DELEBARRE

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([14]) Key competence No 8: Cultural expression.