

## I

(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

## RESOLUTIONS

## COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

137TH CoR PLENARY SESSION, 4.12.2019-5.12.2019

**Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions - The Green Deal in partnership with local and regional authorities**

(2020/C 79/01)

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR),

Having regard to:

- the announcement of the European Commission President-elect, Ursula von der Leyen, of A European Green Deal in *A Union that strives for more - My agenda for Europe*;
- the fact that local and regional authorities implement 70 % of all EU legislation, 70 % of climate mitigation measures, 90 % of climate adaptation policies, and 65 % of the Sustainable Development Goals, represent one third of public spending and two thirds of public investment: they will deliver the European Green Deal on the ground;

**Towards an ambitious Green Deal that delivers at grassroots level, while striving for action at global level**

1. stresses that an ambitious Green Deal is necessary to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050, welcomes that it puts sustainability at the heart of EU policy-making. The Green Deal should be an agenda-setting tool that leads to the integration of sustainability criteria into all EU policies, macroeconomic priorities and financial instruments, the European Semester and the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027;
2. underlines that the Green Deal should be an instrument to achieve the goals of the Biodiversity Strategy and the Paris Agreement, and fully implement the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and make an ambitious EU contribution to the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, which will be decided on by the COP15 to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD);
3. calls on the Commission to review, where necessary, the EU targets included in the Clean Energy Package to ensure a climate neutral Europe that boosts European competitiveness and social justice by 2050 at the latest, and to enshrine them in a European Climate Law. In this regard, calls for raising the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction target to at least 55 %, the energy efficiency target to 40 % and renewable energy to 40 %, by 2030;

**A Green Deal that applies a place-based approach and ensures policy coherence**

4. calls for the Green Deal to adopt a holistic, place-based approach that proposes concrete solutions that take into account the economic, social, geographic and environmental challenges and opportunities of the regions and cities and has the participation and involvement of local population in the design and implementation of future proposals;
5. expects the Green Deal to mainstream sustainability and to make policy integration an approach and not only a priority, and to ensure policy coherence, also in the evaluation or fitness-checks, in order to align the priorities, ambitions and timelines of different EU policies and to avoid duplication or contradictory procedures and outcomes. Calls on the Commission to use the Better Regulation guidelines and toolbox to help design future-proof legislation and warns in this context against a formalistic approach to better regulation such as the 'one-in-one-out' principle for EU legislation, which does not do justice to the complexities of the political and regulatory challenges which have to be met;
6. requests that the Commission propose measures at EU level towards an internalisation of external costs and the coherent implementation of the 'polluter pays' principle;

7. reiterates its call for better reflecting environmental and climate-change considerations in the EU's external relations. Highlights also the importance of sharing peer-to-peer experience within platforms of territorial cooperation such as ARLEM and CORLEAP, as well as through city-to-city partnerships. Climate change should remain a strategic diplomatic priority of the EU in order to ensure that third countries adopt and implement ambitious policies to reach climate neutrality;

8. with regard to these factors, emphasises that an ambitious integrated maritime policy allowing for a comprehensive and consistent approach to the oceans is vital in order to keep up their contribution to the fight against climate change, safeguard their biodiversity on which our food supply also depends, and harness their capacity to contribute to the development of renewable energies;

### **Achieving tangible results on the ground using multi-level governance and active subsidiarity**

9. calls on the Commission to ensure the Green Deal is based on a multi-level governance framework; welcomes the European Parliament's resolutions on the 2019 UN Climate Change Conference in Madrid and on the climate emergency with the call for immediate and ambitious action to limit global warming to 1,5 °C, acknowledging that a lasting transition to a sustainable and low-carbon society cannot be achieved without both bottom-up and top-down involvement; underlines that local and regional authorities stand ready to shape the European Climate Pact together with citizens, businesses, universities, and research centres;

10. calls for support in the form of EU funding to always be subject to a climate impact and sustainability assessment. Subsidies, aid and support programmes that directly or indirectly harm the environment should be reviewed in light of their consistency with the climate and sustainability goals, and should be abolished;

11. calls on the Commission to present Green Deal action agendas with measurable objectives, targeted actions, and appropriate funding, prepared in cooperation with local and regional authorities, in accordance with their legal competences within the Member States. The Green Deal will not be successful unless it is translated into strategies and plans that are developed and implemented at the EU, national, regional and local levels;

12. calls on the Commission to monitor the progress of national governments and local and regional authorities (LRAs) in addressing enabling factors and obstacles through the State of the Energy Union process with the close and direct involvement of local and regional authorities;

13. calls on Member States to put in place Multilevel Climate and Energy Dialogues and actively involve local and regional authorities in drafting and revising the National Energy and Climate Plans, aligning their ambitions to the pathways towards climate neutrality, and in developing Locally and Regionally Determined Contributions to complement the NDCs <sup>(1)</sup>;

14. commits in this regard to setting up a Forum of local and regional authorities, and stakeholders for cooperation with the European Commission and Member States to bring together all relevant actors on a regular basis in order to provide feedback on the implementation of the Green Deal related actions and initiatives as well as suggestions to legislative proposals and an exchange of best practices across all levels of governance;

15. calls on the Commission to include the Green Deal among the topics of the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe, as climate change and sustainable development, within the scope of the UN's SDGs, have a direct impact on the wellbeing of the EU's citizens;

16. expects the Commission to further support and expand initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, both within and beyond the EU;

17. calls on the Commission to take fully into consideration the conclusions included in the implementation reports on the clean air policies and on public procurement made by the CoR regional hubs <sup>(2)</sup> pilot project (RegHubs). The RegHubs project should also be used for the Green Deal initiatives;

<sup>(1)</sup> CoR (2018) 923.

<sup>(2)</sup> <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/Pages/network-of-regional-hubs.aspx>

### **Addressing transitions that make regions and cities more sustainable**

18. calls for the Green Deal to address different transition challenges, including those related to energy, the oceans, the circular economy, food production and consumption, mobility, digitalisation and the environment;
19. calls on the European Parliament to commission an official study on the environmental impact of the European Parliament relocating between Brussels and Strasbourg twelve times a year;
20. calls on the European Commission to ensure that the transitions are just and participatory, engaging all actors in partnership, without leaving anyone behind;
21. calls on the European Commission to ensure the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the transitions, paying a particular attention to least favoured regions, areas affected by industrial transition, sparsely populated areas and environmentally fragile territories, such as islands and mountain regions;
22. stresses that public procurement offers a potentially strong lever for ensuring a more sustainable food supply (local and organic) through public-sector catering contracts in school and hospital canteens, as well as for developing sustainable mobility. These examples can strengthen the rural-urban nexus expressed in the Habitat III New Urban Agenda (NUA); calls once again on the Commission in particular to clarify existing constraints within its public procurement rules in order to apply sustainability criteria, by publishing handbooks, for example;
23. underlines the need for the development of comprehensive education and of skills, which will be much-needed in the green transition; further reiterates its calls for an Observatory of such a transition, which would gather regional-level data supporting policy-making at all levels of governance;

### **Energy and climate transition**

24. calls on the Commission to ensure that European Climate Law is based on a thorough analysis of its impacts and benefits, coupled with concrete financing plans, encompasses both mitigation and adaptation to climate change and forms the basis for a comprehensive and ambitious Climate Neutrality Package;
25. highlights the importance of research and data collection on foreseen climatic variations and the need to boost interregional cooperation to act on the most vulnerable points to climate change;
26. reiterates the call for EU institutions to ensure that climate adaptation and disaster resilience, as key aspects of sustainable development, are taken into account in future EU funds and projects, connecting them with cohesion, rural development, health, research and environmental policies as well <sup>(3)</sup>;
27. calls on the EU to support local and regional authorities in protecting and restoring important natural carbon sinks in order to achieve climate neutrality, in particular by adapting the management of organic soils and restoring peat bogs and marshland;
28. calls on the Commission to propose clear definitions and rules for local energy communities and other kinds of 'prosumers' to provide them with certainty and to ensure access to market, financial instruments and know-how and to foster collective self-consumption in private buildings;
29. as for public buildings, calls for work to be pursued on energy efficiency and to progress towards its self-consumption; calls for fostering data collection on electricity and heat consumption and launching Artificial Intelligence strategies that contribute to saving energy;

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<sup>(3)</sup> CoR (2018) 6135.

30. calls on the European Commission to further support the development and deployment of sustainable renewable energy by providing a clear political and regulatory framework as well as appropriate support for research and development into innovative renewable energy technologies, including a roadmap for clean hydrogen;

31. expects the Green Deal to include an EU Action Plan on Affordable Housing, which should also be consistent with increased efforts to eradicate energy poverty. In order for the transition to be just, measures must be foreseen to ensure that vulnerable people can benefit from warmer, more energy-efficient homes that make use of renewable technologies such as solar energy;

32. highlights that the energy consumption of buildings accounts for more than 40 % of the overall energy consumption in the EU and therefore believes that housing modernisation could significantly contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in Europe and to the eradication of energy poverty. In this respect calls on the Commission to propose an ambitious financing plan for housing renovations as part of the Green Deal package;

### **Circular economy transition**

33. considers that a comprehensive, long-term strategy for Europe's industry is an essential element of achieving the goals of the Green Deal, which will drive innovation, provide competitive advantages and job-creation opportunities, especially for young people; in this context, it is essential to ensure that energy-intensive industries are supported in the transition to low carbon production methods in order to limit distortions to competition and avoid carbon leakage, notably by EU funding for relevant research and development of practical solutions;

34. calls for a new ambitious, time-bound, science-driven post-2020 Circular Economy Action Plan and looks forward to working closely with the European Commission on these proposals;

35. points out that prevention should be the first priority, in line with the EU waste hierarchy, calls for ambitious measures including the eco-design of goods and services, preventing waste, recycling, recovering and reusing materials and components and reducing harmful substances, as well as reprocessing difficult substances in order to promote repairability, recyclability, upgradability and durability. In this context, encourages local and regional authorities to employ multiple instruments, including localising EU binding targets, fiscal measures at all levels, Extended Producer Responsibility and Green Public Procurement with compulsory targets as part of every EU funding opportunity;

36. calls on the European Commission to propose an ambitious target for the reduction of municipal waste by 2030, for the re-use and recycling targets for municipal waste to be 70 % by weight by 2030, for food waste to be reduced by 50 % by 2030 and for a binding target of a maximum of 5 % landfilling of residual waste by 2030;

37. supports also in this context the new efforts in the field of microplastics and those to implement the legislation on plastics<sup>(4)</sup>, underlining that plastics pollution should be addressed at source;

38. asks the Commission to encourage all European regions and cities to adopt bioeconomy action plans or to provide for a chapter dedicated to the bioeconomy in their global development strategy;

### **Food transition**

39. against the background of the fact that the EU has become the world's largest importer and exporter of food, insists that trade agreements are assessed against the objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including in the agro-food sector, and that trade agreements are based on sustainable development;

40. considering that agriculture is responsible for 10 % of GHG emissions and is directly affected by climate change, calls on the Commission to promote sustainable farming through strengthening financial aid for environment- and climate-friendly practices in both pillars of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP);

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<sup>(4)</sup> CoR (2018) 925 and CoR (2018) 3652.

41. suggests a local and regional chapter on the 'Farm to Fork' strategy, particularly important in small economy models, to assess the effects of international and global food production patterns on local and regional production schemes;

42. highlights the crucial role EU forests and peatlands have in achieving climate neutrality. It calls for a solid EU strategy for forests and peatlands and supports ambitious labelling schemes for food being produced without deforestation<sup>(5)</sup>. Recalls, in this respect, Member States' commitments under the LULUCF Regulation and acknowledges the efforts to achieve enhanced CO<sub>2</sub> removals;

43. points out that the oceans make a significant contribution to our food supply; calls for a new strategy supporting marine crops and blue biotechnologies which avoids harming the environment and safeguards natural environments; stresses that sustainable fisheries play a key role in the equilibrium of coastal areas;

44. stresses that LRAs need a standardised methodology for collecting and reporting data on the environmental impact of food products, including food waste, to ensure data comparability across Member States and to encourage environmental and social costs associated with food products or diets to be measured in economic terms;

### **Mobility transition**

45. notes that LRAs are key enablers of clean mobility and for the greening of transport, and therefore calls urgently for measures at EU level for the internalisation of external costs by transport mode to ensure a more level playing field, including the review of tax arrangements for certain transport fuels in particular;

46. points out that power grids, electricity storage, trade, and the management of public infrastructure will all need to be modernised, along with transport rules and taxation, to be properly equipped for new and innovative transportation modes, including battery or hydrogen fuel cell;

47. emphasises that harnessing the potential of digital technologies will make it possible to optimise transportation and set up a multimodal trans-European transport (TEN-T) network. The prerequisites are intelligent transport systems (ITSs) and infrastructure;

### **Environmental transition**

48. reiterates its call for an 8th Environment Action Programme<sup>(6)</sup> and stresses that this programme should be aligned with the objectives of the Green Deal and should contribute decisively to guiding its effective implementation on the ground. Calls for greater participation by subnational authorities in the Environmental Implementation Review Cycle;

49. calls for the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) to be developed by aligning and integrating all relevant environmental UN Agreements with the biodiversity targets for 2030. With a view to COP15 in 2020, the parties to the CBD should formally recognise the indispensable role of LRAs in achieving successful implementation and coherent monitoring, reporting and verification of global and EU policies on biodiversity;

50. reiterates that delivering on the EU zero-pollution ambition requires a wide-ranging approach looking at air and water quality, hazardous chemicals, emissions, pesticides and endocrine disruptors; calls on the Commission not to further delay the development and adoption of the new strategy on endocrine disruptors and stricter rules on hazardous chemicals;

51. asks the Commission to do more to promote the potential of Nature-based Solutions (NBS) and Green and Blue Infrastructures (GI) as useful additions to and not as a replacement for strong biodiversity and ecosystem services actions in peri-urban and rural areas;

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<sup>(5)</sup> CoR (2019) 973.

<sup>(6)</sup> CoR (2019) 1672.

52. stresses the benefits of environmental framework programmes at regional level that are aligned with the different national, European and international strategies; these programmes might help to set objectives and main actions, provide clarity in the regional environmental choices and establish a long-term road map in which the involvement of society is key, as well as facilitating the design of alliances with other European regions;

### **Digital transition**

53. reiterates the important role smart regions, cities and communities play in guaranteeing a just and fair transition towards climate neutrality; calls on the Commission to pursue the concept of digital cohesion to ensure that no person or region is left behind in the digital transition, to promote targeted measures to support LRAs to roll out smart solutions and to increase the leverage of smart specialisation programmes to boost digital skills;

54. calls for comprehensive frameworks to be developed to integrate and use data for the purpose of smart governance and, at the same time, guarantee the required data protection;

55. draws attention to the important carbon footprint of the internet and digital data processing, calls therefore on the EU to do more to address the energy and CO<sub>2</sub> implications of digitalisation and boost its sustainability; believes that the public authorities should raise awareness of the issue;

### **Adequate financial resources at the EU, national, regional, and local level must be provided to meet the needs of the citizens**

56. welcomes the proposal for a Sustainable Europe Investment Plan of EUR 1 trillion in investment between 2021 and 2030, corresponding to the needs identified by European Court of Auditors <sup>(7)</sup>; also supports the decision taken by the European Investment Bank to end financing for most fossil fuel energy projects from the end of 2021 and to gradually increase the share of its financing dedicated to climate action and environmental sustainability; reiterates its call to reduce red tape, simplify the mechanisms related to the preparation of projects, and reinforce tailor-made technical assistance to access the European Investment Bank's JASPERS and ELENA to develop bankable projects, including smaller-scale projects;

57. also insists that additional resources, such as the proposed extension of the Emissions Trading System and introduction of a WTO-compatible Carbon Border Tax are necessary; as well as appropriate taxation on aviation fuel;

58. asks the Commission to establish a new Just Transition Fund targeted at coal and carbon-intensive regions and which consists of additional resources on top of the resources allocated to cohesion policy, but which functions as a complement to the 2021-2027 cohesion policies' operational programmes at NUTS 2 level;

59. calls for at least 30 % of the entire EU budget 2021-2027 to be earmarked for climate and biodiversity action, while phasing out subsidies for fossil fuels;

60. highlights the crucial role of cohesion policy as the main financial instrument in implementing the transitions' objectives; calls for cohesion policy to have adequate funding at its disposal, therefore the share of the budget allocated to cohesion policy in the next MFF should remain the same;

61. is concerned that the Green Deal is unachievable without the right financial framework. Calls for the full implementation of the Commission's Action Plan on Financing Sustainable Growth and the quick adoption of the regulatory framework on taxonomy to facilitate sustainable investment, on disclosures relating to sustainable investments and sustainability risks and on low carbon benchmarks and positive carbon impact benchmarks <sup>(8)</sup>. This framework should also cover investments in the nuclear industry, aviation and the railway sector. The Action Plan should also be rapidly extended to social criteria;

<sup>(7)</sup> European Court of Auditors: Landscape review of EU Action on Energy and Climate Change, 20 September 2017 <https://op.europa.eu/web-public/eca/lr-energy-and-climate/en/>

<sup>(8)</sup> See CoR opinion of 6 December 2018 by Mr Tilo Gundlack (PES/DE).

62. encourages an ambitious approach to EU investments in nature and biodiversity, noting that costs would be exceeded by the benefits derived by ecosystem services, for example, in the form of healthcare services, CO<sub>2</sub> storage, flood retention, purification of water reserves, air purification, or prevention of soil erosion;

63. reiterates its view that no agreement can be reached on the expenditure of the EU Budget unless progress is also made on revenue, because the size of the EU Budget should be commensurate with current and future EU priorities<sup>(9)</sup>; urges the Commission to come forward with contingency measures to support the Green Deal if the next EU Budget cannot be put in place before the end of 2020;

64. stresses the importance of co-funding rates for EU funds to facilitate access for small communities, rural areas and islands; calls to strengthen their capacity to be used as energy transition 'laboratories', by devising innovative solutions and coordinated policy action;

65. in view of the state aid framework post-2020, calls for an increase in the level of permissible state aid, and subsequent adaptation of the Energy Taxation Directive to promote low emission fuels. Sufficient flexibility and a technology neutral approach, with regards to sustainability and reduced emissions, must be applied for regulation and projects related to the energy transition;

#### **Direct communication with the citizens about the benefits of the Green Deal**

66. proposes boosting the information campaigns and direct dialogues with citizens to raise awareness of the importance of a transition to more sustainable societies, healthier local communities and more competitive local economies; invites the Commission to co-organise a series of Citizens Dialogues with the CoR to present the added value of the Green Deal and illustrate concrete results in citizens' daily lives;

67. instructs its president to forward this resolution to the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Finnish, Croatian and German presidencies of the Council and the President of the European Council.

Brussels, 5 December 2019.

*The President*  
*of the European Committee of the Regions*  
Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ

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<sup>(9)</sup> CoR (2019) 3887.