

**Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions — the European Committee of the Regions’ proposals in view of the European Commission Work Programme for 2021**

(2020/C 324/03)

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to:

- the Adjusted European Commission’s Work Programme (CWP) for 2020 <sup>(1)</sup>,
- the Protocol of Cooperation with the European Commission of February 2012,
- the CoR’s priorities for its five-year mandate (2020-2025),

encourages the European Commission to pursue the following actions through its Work Programme for 2021:

1. answer the wake-up call of the COVID-19 crisis by placing greater emphasis on social wellbeing and environmental sustainability within the social market economy model, while at the same time taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals;
2. ensure that the post-pandemic recovery strategy, while fully aligned with the objectives of the Green Deal and with the commitments taken by the EU under the Paris Agreement, focuses on protecting European citizens’ health and restoring economic growth in the EU. The delivery of climate laws must recognise the full geographic, economic and social diversity of Europe’s territories and reinforce the principle of multilevel governance in the transition towards climate neutrality;
3. work with the CoR on increasing the visibility and public support for such actions through its *Green Deal Going Local* framework;
4. include the dimension of health in the Green Deal framework, promoting healthy living for all, further exploring the existing links and synergies between health, environment, energy, economy, jobs, competitiveness and climate protection while proposing a clear strategy to build resilient territories, economies and societies in the post-pandemic period in the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
5. take further steps to reduce the burden on national, regional and local authorities in their efforts to address the COVID-19 crisis, and use all available funds to help meet the needs of European health systems. The rapid spread of the virus has put both health and social care under increased pressure, while at the same time preparations also need to be made for a ‘second wave’. For cross-border pandemic planning, regional crisis teams should be promoted that comprise all tiers of governance, focus on epidemic events and do not stop at national borders;
6. cooperate with the CoR in boosting the awareness and capacities of Managing Authorities to make best use of the opportunities related to the Green Deal and, at the same time, encourage more direct access to the EU funds for local and regional authorities to meet the objectives of the Green Deal, especially supporting border areas by speeding up the introduction of the European Cross-Border Mechanism (ECBM);
7. promote the Climate Pact as a joint undertaking for enhanced cooperation between local and regional authorities, the European institutions and citizens aimed at combating climate change and, simultaneously, tackling the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and as an umbrella that brings all the stakeholders together to draft and implement local climate pacts and exchange best practices;
8. establish a Green Recovery Forum where the CoR, the European Commission, local and regional authorities and other stakeholders can work together on the implementation of the Green Deal within the new framework of the post-pandemic recovery;

---

<sup>(1)</sup> COM(2020) 440 final.

9. ensure that the zero pollution ambition for a toxic free environment, foreseen by the Green Deal, remains an essential part of the Green Recovery. An ambitious zero pollution action plan for water, air and soil is indispensable in particular for contributing to health protection;
10. be more ambitious in view of the future EU biodiversity strategy to halt the ongoing biodiversity loss and allow the EU to lead globally in the protection and restoration of biodiversity, which is essential in preventing or reducing the impact of future pandemics; promote a swift implementation of the European Forest Strategy, ensuring the right mechanisms are put in place to ensure best practices are exchanged and multiplied;
11. promote the sustainable and local production of food in the implementation of the initiatives announced by the Farm to Fork strategy, thereby preserving biodiversity, soil, water and marine environment and ensuring a good level of income for EU farmers; while ensuring fair market prices in a fair market position for agricultural producers through adapting production to market demand in a generally binding manner in particular in the situation of a market crisis; ensure that farmers and rural areas are accompanied in making necessary structural changes for transition towards more sustainable food systems;
12. deliver an action plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, that will help reinforcing the EU's social dimension and mitigating the impact of the ongoing green and digital transitions. The CoR stresses that the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights has a strong territorial component and that the social scoreboard, which currently reflects only national averages, should be reinforced with additional regional data;
13. integrate a European Child Guarantee addressing child poverty and exclusion in the EU into the implementation plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights;
14. explore the potential of the social economy and prepare a 'Social Economy Action Plan' that would incorporate its tenets into different socio-economic policies of the European Union, thus contributing to a green and just transition and to a recovery plan in the post-COVID-19 era in which the gap between education, skills and jobs is closed, in which youth unemployment is prioritised and gender balance promoted;
15. present an ambitious reform of the Stability and Growth Pact integrating the objective of sustainable public finances and the lessons learned from the coronavirus crisis;
16. help trigger public and private investments that can have a concrete impact on the real economy at the local and regional level, with consideration for the specific situation in the outermost regions;
17. propose urgently a deep reform of the European Semester and the EU's economic governance towards a transparent, inclusive and democratic process. The strong link of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) to the European Semester increases the urgency for reform in order to avoid further centralisation and a top-down approach of the recovery plans, instead of prioritising economic, social and territorial cohesion among and within Member States and the quality public investment needed for the EU's sustainable recovery. A reformed European Semester, as the overall European economic strategy implementing the SDGs across the EU, should integrate the principles of partnership, multilevel governance and a territorial dimension, on the basis of the CoR's proposal for a Code of Conduct for the involvement in the Semester of local and regional authorities at national level and of the European Committee of the Regions at European level;
18. address the vulnerability of European value chains revealed during the COVID-19 crisis; identify the weakest links and diversify sources in EU supply chains, reducing their reliance on individual countries, strengthening the European industrial base in a sustainable manner, and securing the EU's strategic industrial autonomy; create a cluster policy as a central part of any EU industrial policy fit for purpose to strengthen the development of European world-class clusters connecting regional clusters, networks and ecosystems;

19. insist on a better implementation of Trade and Sustainable Development chapters (TSDs) in EU trade agreements and focus on improving the socio-economic and territorial impact of trade agreements, including the future agreement with the UK, by providing more detailed sectoral and geographical analyses while strengthening the conditionalities of TSDs in free trade agreements; agrees with the European Commission that free, fair and open trade can only work with a strong and effective World Trade Organization (WTO) and supports its intention to launch a comprehensive WTO reform initiative;
20. ensure that local and regional authorities are fully involved in the preparation and implementation of the Partnership Agreements and programmes for the 2021-2027 period;
21. ensure that greater flexibility granted for the use of cohesion funds and in state aid rules, which is needed to support the recovery of regions and cities and rural areas from the COVID-19 crisis, does not lead to centralisation of powers and deprive local and regional authorities of their prerogatives;
22. capitalise on the experience of the Urban Agenda for the EU and the renewed Leipzig Charter by organising an Urban summit on sustainable urban development;
23. build on the 'Renovation wave' proposal as well the action plan of the Urban Partnership on housing adopted in November 2018 to prepare a European Agenda for Housing mainstreaming housing across the different EU policies impacting it;
24. propose a coherent and ambitious EU Agenda for Rural Areas aimed particularly at remote territories, which have been often neglected, and thus forge a greater connection with citizens who live in rural areas and who by definition are more isolated from centralised systems of governance. Reviving rural towns and communities would help the EU show tangible support and strengthen its legitimacy on the ground;
25. provide a strong response to the challenges faced by European tourism through both short-term financing and a long-term crisis recovery strategy, making it more resilient and sustainable in the future. Thus, cohesion policy in the EU long-term budget 2021-2027 must ensure better exploitation of the potential of culture and tourism. The focus remains economic competitiveness through research and innovation, digital transition, as well as the European agenda on European tourism;
26. implement the updated Digital Education Action Plan to take full account of the impact of COVID-19 and the new conditions for education and training. The Action Plan should also act as a catalyst for the rapid development of distance learning tools in regions, cities and rural areas, in less developed regions particularly in schools, making digital and media skills an integral part of lifelong learning and making the Plan a platform for the sharing of good practice between European cities and regions and across the world;
27. actively involve local and regional authorities in the completion of the Digital Single Market, capitalising on their key role in providing digital services for citizens and creating and managing digital infrastructure; ensure close monitoring and measuring of sustainable digital transformation processes in Europe's regions and cities, with a particular focus on the urban-rural divide;
28. provide increased funding and education surrounding the rapid and comprehensive deployment of digital infrastructure and especially 5G in the EU, including by means of the future EU recovery fund, whilst guaranteeing faster broadband connection and the necessary equipment in rural, mountain and island areas, outermost regions and areas facing demographic challenges;
29. support the rollout of a European Education Area by 2025 in close synergy with the European Research Area, in order to ensure high quality education and training, as well as equality and fairness in education, as a response to demographic change and brain drain; involve the CoR in the design and implementation of future measures on education and training, as well as in the implementation of the Updated Skills Agenda for Europe and the Digital Education Action Plan;

30. present a science-based evaluation of the impact of COVID-19 on demographic change and ensure that future decisions are tailor-made to the local needs and specificities;
31. prioritise support for organisations — including non-profit ones — as well as SMEs, individual artists and employees in the cultural and creative sectors, which have particularly suffered from COVID-19 outbreak. In the process of improving the current EU strategic framework for culture and in the next Creative Europe programme, special focus should be granted to strengthening and safeguarding Europe's rich cultural fabric, as well as regional and local specificities and heritage;
32. ensure that the Union's post-crisis assistance to the candidate countries and potential candidates reaches the local communities, and sufficiently involves and empowers local and regional authorities, which are essential in establishing the democratic legitimacy of EU engagement in those countries, while continuing to highlight and address the dangers of a 'local state capture' threatening the foundations of democracy;
33. increase EU support targeted at the needs of local and regional authorities and their associations in partner countries, in particular in Southern Mediterranean partner countries and in the Eastern Partnership, in order to create new dynamics for decentralisation reforms and improve results in the area of governance, as well as reinforce the visibility of the benefits of EU policies across the territories and levels of governance of the partner countries. This should include the establishment of an Eastern Partnership School of Public Administration, as proposed in the Joint Communication on the EaP Policy beyond 2020;
34. contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, including through the active involvement of local and regional authorities in partner countries and support for peer-to-peer cooperation activities in a spirit of partnership and solidarity, in particular in light of the grave global impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to contain it;
35. involve local and regional governments in the implementation and monitoring of the EU Gender Equality Strategy and incorporate resilience measures and tools against the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis in gender issues into it;
36. use the Conference on the Future of Europe as a timely occasion to reflect with citizens and local and regional authorities on the EU as a project grounded on fundamental values such as democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law, as well as on the necessary changes to its current institutional framework in order to improve its effectiveness and its legitimacy, as well as citizens' sense of 'ownership' of the European project;
37. fully include the CoR and national and regional parliaments with legislative powers in all bodies of the Conference on the Future of Europe, making the process as close to citizens as possible; cooperate with the CoR in developing a pilot model for a permanent and structured dialogue with citizens through local and regional authorities, allowing a two-way process of communication between citizens and EU institutions which could serve later on to improve EU decision-making in the long-run;
38. intensify efforts to combat disinformation, including at local and regional level, through support for independent fact-checkers, media literacy and quality journalism, while emphasising that combating disinformation must not be used as an excuse for censorship or curbing freedom of expression;
39. adopt a comprehensive approach to migration, integration and asylum policies based on the principles of respect for fundamental human rights, subsidiarity, solidarity and the EU's and its Member States' international obligations; ensure better joint efforts for the protection of the EU's external borders and reinforce the fight against irregular migration and human trafficking in cooperation with EU partners and countries of origin and transit; strengthen support for local and regional authorities in the essential role they play in integration policies;
40. pursue the successful cooperation with the CoR on Better Regulation and the promotion of the concept of 'active subsidiarity', notably through the Network of Regional Hubs for EU Policy Implementation Review (RegHub) initiative and its new role in the Fit for Future Platform, and by supporting the CoR in developing RegHub 2.0 to become even

more effective as a provider of timely feedback based upon user experience of EU policy implementation at the local and regional level; confirm and elaborate on these principles in its upcoming Better Regulation Communication;

41. take into consideration the debates on the European Commission's future work programme that took place in regional parliaments, following the conclusions of the European Commission's Task Force on Subsidiarity and Proportionality and the pilot project launched by the European Committee of the Regions and the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE).

The CoR instructs its President to forward this resolution to the EU institutions and the Presidencies of the Council of the EU.

Brussels, 2 July 2020.

*The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions*

Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS

---