

**Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions on the 2020 Work programme of the European Commission**

(2020/C 141/03)

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR)

Having regard to:

- the European Commission's Work Programme (CWP) for 2020 <sup>(1)</sup>;
  - the Protocol of Cooperation with the European Commission of February 2012;
  - the CoR Resolution on the Proposals of the European Committee of the Regions for the new European Union legislative mandate of 27 June 2019;
1. Reiterates the need to involve local and regional representatives and European citizens in framing and implementing EU policies, notably through the proper application of active subsidiarity and multi-level governance;
  2. Calls for an urgent agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to ensure the timely launch of new EU programmes. Urges the Commission, in parallel with its negotiation efforts with the budgetary authority, to put forward a contingency plan to avoid any interruption of programmes in the event of late adoption of the MFF;
  3. Reconfirms its firm call for the future MFF to be set at least at 1,3 % of GNI of the EU-27 in order to secure a budget that is commensurate with the needs, expectations and concerns of EU citizens, including the new priorities set in the European Green Deal;
  4. Calls on the Commission to closely monitor the application of the Code of Conduct on Partnership in the preparation of the Partnership Agreements and programmes for the 2021-2027 period and to ensure that the involvement of local and regional authorities amounts to full partnership. The principles of partnership and multilevel governance should also provide inspiration for the governance of the European Semester, for the sake of effectiveness and legitimacy, even more so since the Semester provides guidelines for the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy programmes;
  5. Welcomes the Commission's commitment to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals through their integration in the European Semester, as recommended by the CoR, and their inclusion in the overall approach of the European Green Deal;

*On the European Green Deal*

6. Calls on the Commission to consistently include local and regional authorities (LRAs) in all European Green Deal legislation and initiatives, starting from the European Climate Pact. In turn, the CoR intends to fully support the implementation of the Green Deal and the development of the Climate Pact through coordinated and cross-cutting measures and initiatives with the aim of ensuring that it builds on multi-level governance and territorial legitimacy and that no person or region is left behind;
7. Reiterates its call for the Commission to ensure that the European climate law is based on a thorough analysis of its impact and benefits, coupled with concrete financing plans, providing a clear indication of the role of LRAs and a clear timeframe for the revision of the targets for reaching climate neutrality;
8. Calls on the Commission to include the necessary support for LRAs in the implementation of adaptation policies in the new EU Adaptation Strategy;
9. Calls on the Commission to ensure that multi-level climate and energy dialogue and public consultation involving LRAs are put in place in the Member States when evaluating the final National Energy and Climate Plans in June 2020. Commits to setting up a forum of local and regional authorities and stakeholders to cooperate with the Commission and Member States to provide feedback on the implementation of Green Deal-related measures and initiatives, as well as making suggestions on legislative proposals;

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<sup>(1)</sup> COM(2020) 37 final.

10. Welcomes the proposal for a 'green oath', which should explicitly involve the CoR. The initiative should allow a) the incorporation of sustainability criteria into all EU policies, macroeconomic priorities and financial instruments, the European Semester and the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, to ensure that all legislation is consistent with the objectives of the Green Deal, and b) the identification and removal of hurdles and inconsistencies in EU legislation. The CoR will contribute to this goal through initiatives such as the Network of Regional Hubs;
11. Calls on the Commission to continue to fully support existing successful initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors, the EU Urban Agenda, Clean Energy for EU Islands and a number of other regional, national and cross-border initiatives;
12. Welcomes the European Commission's efforts to decarbonise the energy sector through its strategy for smart sector integration, a renovation wave and offshore renewable energy. In this context, possible negative repercussions of energy efficiency renovations should be prevented or offset in order to protect tenants, vulnerable consumers and households at risk of energy poverty. The CoR also reiterates its call for a European agenda on housing. Such a proactive agenda, echoing the European Citizens' Initiative 'Housing for all', should, inter alia, cover aspects of state aid reform, the issue of rent regulation mechanisms and the crowding out effects on the housing markets by digital platforms;
13. Welcomes the inclusion of proposals to green European cities and increase biodiversity in urban areas, including the new Green City Accord initiative. Supports the preparation of an ambitious post-2020 EU Biodiversity Strategy and the EU's position in the UN CBD COP15 to ensure LRAs are formally recognised as key partners in the development, implementation and monitoring of measures needed to halt biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystem services;
14. Welcomes the preparation of a new Circular Economy Action Plan, which must be ambitious, time-bound and science-driven, with prevention as its first priority, in line with the EU waste hierarchy. In this context, looks forward to the legislative proposal aimed at empowering consumers for the green transition;
15. Draws attention to the need to address all interlinked challenges when seeking to create a non-toxic environment and looks forward to feeding into the drafting of the 'Zero Pollution Action Plan for air, water and soil', scheduled for adoption in 2021;
16. Welcomes the Commission's commitment to developing a new long-term vision for rural areas and joins forces with the European Parliament <sup>(2)</sup> in calling for an EU Agenda for Rural Areas and for a balanced and comprehensive approach to European territorial development so that the needs of rural areas will be mainstreamed throughout all relevant European policies, as mentioned in the declaration on rural development adopted in Cork;
17. Highlights the fact that LRAs have an important role to play in implementing the future CAP and in the already announced 'Farm to Fork' strategy, including by greening public procurement, promoting healthy diets, raising awareness on food waste and implementing concrete measures on the ground. The CoR considers that the 'Farm to Fork' strategy represents a unique opportunity to increase policy coherence and encourage the transition towards more sustainable food systems and to strengthen the environmental dimension of the CAP. Within this strategy, an action plan should set out quantified targets on reducing chemical pesticides by at least 30 % by 2027 and synthetic nitrogenous fertilisers, as well as on increasing the amount of land farmed organically, stepping up fruit and vegetable consumption and reducing the EU obesity rate;
18. Calls on the European Commission to strengthen consumer information through harmonised European ecolabels and common standards to promote the transition to sustainable consumption by facilitating green purchases and by incentivising companies to develop and improve their sustainability; calls for a European nutritional labelling system to support healthier choices for EU consumers;

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<sup>(2)</sup> EP Resolution on 3 October 2018 addressing the specific needs of rural, mountainous and remote areas.

19. Calls on the Commission for an action plan to promote EU pastoralism;
20. Calls for a comprehensive strategic agenda for all European maritime sectors to support the decarbonisation of marine industries and a sustainable approach to fisheries and food production, as well as to preserve the competitive advantage of European maritime regions;
21. Considers that coastal communities should be included in the design of policies for the sustainable governance of ocean resources in order to address global challenges at local level;
22. Calls for an updated EU Forest Strategy post-2020 to ensure EU-level coordination of policies that have an impact on forestry and to set the scene for an EU Action Plan on deforestation and forest degradation to reduce the environmental impact of the consumption of products and raw materials in the EU;
23. Supports Europe's 'Beating Cancer' Plan and emphasises that prevention, diagnosis and treatment are typically delivered in patients' local communities, making the meaningful involvement of local and regional authorities key to the success of this initiative;
24. Expects that a new Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe will improve the accessibility and affordability of medicines across all EU regions, delivering innovation to patients and strengthening Europe's leading industrial position;
25. Calls on the European Commission to step up cooperation on vaccine-preventable diseases and involve local and regional authorities in the preparatory work leading to a Commission proposal for a common vaccination card/passport for EU citizens;
26. Reiterates its call to apply the principle of 'no safe threshold for exposure' to all endocrine disrupting chemicals across the full spectrum of EU laws, and requests a ban on bisphenols and phthalates in all food contact materials;
27. Calls on the Commission to include disaster resilience as one of the key aspects of sustainable development, and to ensure that it is taken into account in future EU funds and projects and that the capacity of local and regional authorities in disaster risk reduction, disaster preparedness and disaster management is strengthened;
28. Calls on the Commission, along the lines of the European Citizens' Initiative 'Fairosene', to present a proposal for revised energy taxation that removes subsidies for fossil fuels, guarantees a sustainable level playing field between different transport modes and allows lower taxes on renewable energy, making it cheaper than fossil fuel, and urges the Council to quickly adopt the proposed legislation on value added tax (VAT), so that Member States can make more targeted use of VAT rates to reflect increased environmental ambitions;
29. Stresses that it is necessary to avoid unfair competition from non-EU countries with lower levels of climate ambition. Deeply regrets that the Commission's intention to propose a carbon border adjustment mechanism for selected sectors is not mentioned in its work programme;
30. Welcomes the ambition of the Commission's Sustainable Europe Investment Plan to mobilise EUR 1 trillion over the coming decade. Deplores however that the plan itself appears to be less ambitious in practice — consisting largely of a repackaging of pre-existing and previously planned measures — and lacks additional resources;
31. Welcomes the Commission's intention to ensure, as a result of the on-going review of state aid rules and guidelines, more flexibility for just transition regions and more flexibility for sustainability investments;
32. Highlights the crucial role of cohesion policy as the main financial instrument in the EU budget for reaching the objectives of the Green Deal. Particular attention should also be paid to ensuring the complementarity and consistency of the new Just Transition Funds with the other funds. In that respect, confirms that the Cohesion Alliance will continue to accompany the adoption and implementation of the Cohesion Policy initiatives and the programming process;
33. Welcomes the Commission's intention to present a strategy for sustainable and smart mobility to modernise and green the transport sector; underlines that funding for transport infrastructure and research should be linked to sustainability factors. Confirms its willingness to work with the relevant Commission departments to develop practical solutions to incentivise and facilitate the decarbonisation of mobility in the Union's urban and rural areas;

34. Calls on the Commission to simplify the overall management system of Cohesion Policy at all governance levels in order to reduce administrative burdens for managing authorities and beneficiaries with the aim of improving accessibility and effectiveness of funding. Moreover, calls on the Commission to adopt a supplementary set of indicators, such as the Social Progress Index, to complement the GDP indicator to better reflect the real social-economic development of regions and to achieve a fairer distribution of Cohesion Policy Funds. Highlights the importance of increasing the visibility of the results of EU-funded projects in order to better showcase their benefits for the everyday life of Europeans;

#### *Addressing the digital transition*

35. Raises awareness of territorial perspectives for the single market and of the absolute necessity of promoting digital cohesion. Considers therefore that the establishment of a network of Digital Innovation Hubs ensures sufficient coverage for all regions;

36. Considers that the existing EU regulatory framework applying to the collaborative or platform economy requires a thorough update. The CoR in particular expects the 'Digital Services Act' to tackle the crucial issue of platforms' status and access to data and to specify the criteria of general interest;

37. Looks forward to the launch in the third quarter of 2020 of a local/regional Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI);

38. Stresses the need to determine future investment requirements aiming to develop broadband connectivity at the local and regional level, and proposes working with the European Commission and the European Investment Bank to develop new funding and support schemes for ICT infrastructure in disadvantaged areas;

39. Supports the implementation and updating of the European Skills Agenda and an update on the Digital Education Action Plan;

40. Calls on the European Commission to review the European Union's regulatory framework for Artificial Intelligence as an important aspect of research and innovation, as well as for public services. This review should reflect a human-centric approach to technology development and should ensure respect for European values and principles, making sure that Europeans remain fully in control of their personal data;

41. Welcomes the emphasis on 'Increasing cybersecurity' and asks the Commission to include systems run by local and regional authorities in all its thinking;

42. Considers that a comprehensive, long-term strategy for Europe's industry is essential. This strategy must support the digital transition, enable all component parts of industry to contribute fully to the creation of a climate-neutral and circular economy and build on a place-based approach focused on strengthening and connecting regional ecosystems;

43. Looks forward to the Single Market Barriers Report and expects it to provide a clear and comprehensive picture of the most severe obstacles preventing European businesses — in particular SMEs — and the public from benefiting from the full potential of the Single Market. Furthermore, calls on the Commission to propose measures to remove obstacles that have been identified and simplify the overall EU regulatory framework. Underlines the key role of smart specialisation for linking key EU missions such as climate adaptation and industrial transition with local and regional innovation eco-systems and suggests there be close cooperation between the CoR, the Commission and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) to further strengthen this concept;

44. Considers that research and innovation activities, supported by the sizeable Horizon Europe programme and many national funding instruments, should also ensure that no region or city is left behind and that the drain of talent and high-added value investment from European peripheral regions to major cities and established industrial regions does not occur on the scale recently observed;

#### *On social and economic reforms*

45. Supports the overall objective of a Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions and intends to contribute to the full territorial implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, promote decent work for everyone that offers the essential basis for fair and sustainable social and economic development, including on the proposals that have been announced on regulating platform work, establishing a minimum wage, planning an unemployment reinsurance scheme, supporting reskilling, reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and implementing the Child Guarantee;

46. Calls on the Commission to follow up on the Finnish Presidency conclusions on the 'economy of wellbeing', which addresses people's wellbeing both as an intrinsic good and as a factor instrumental in macroeconomic growth and progress;
47. Welcomes the creation of the regional dimension of the European Social Scoreboard by the Commission and asks that these efforts be stepped up in the future through more cooperation with the Member States;
48. Calls for a Social Economy Action Plan, which would, inter alia, propose a cross-cutting legal definition of 'social enterprise' and provide for a European Statute for Social and Solidarity-based Enterprises;
49. Welcomes the Commission's Communication and the opening of a public consultation on the review of the Economic Governance Framework, including the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP). This review of EU economic governance represents a much-needed opportunity to improve the EU's fiscal rules by introducing a Golden Rule for sustainable investments, including the funding earmarked within the Structural and Investment Funds needed to implement the Green Deal;
50. Calls on the Commission to prioritise the capacity building of local and regional authorities under the Structural Reform Support Programme and the forthcoming Reform Support Programme, as requested in its opinion of 4 December 2019 <sup>(3)</sup>;
51. Stresses the need to continue working on deepening EMU, notably by completing the Banking Union and through sufficient budget appropriations for the Budgetary Instrument for Convergence and Competitiveness (BICC), as well as by making progress towards a European Unemployment Benefit Reinsurance Scheme;
52. Reiterates its call for a new communication on sustainable tourism in Europe;

*A stronger Europe in the world*

53. Welcomes the Commission's intention to launch a broad initiative on WTO reform following the next WTO Ministerial Conference in June 2020. Underlines that this is all the more important given international developments towards increased protectionism and international companies supported by state subsidies. Also welcomes, therefore, the proposed White Paper on an Instrument on Foreign Subsidies;
54. Expresses concern that the draft interim report on the sustainability impact assessment for the trade agreement with Mercosur suggests that EU manufacturing and services will benefit most from this agreement, but concedes that agriculture and rural areas in the EU will be hardest hit by the expected negative effects;
55. Emphasises that local and regional authorities contribute to strengthening good governance and local democracy in the EU's neighbourhood and calls on the Commission to increase the financial assistance package for local and regional authorities in partner countries, notably for peer-to-peer capacity-building initiatives, in accordance with the findings of the evaluation of EU support to local and regional authorities in enlargement and neighbourhood regions (2010-2018);
56. Welcomes the action plan that has been announced on gender equality and women's empowerment in external relations and is contributing to its objectives through the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly's (ARLEM's) focus on the empowerment of women;
57. Encourages the Commission and Member States to support cross-border cooperation between regional and local authorities in the European Union and in partner countries, including in the form of European groupings of territorial cooperation (EGTCs) and European macro-regional strategies (MRS);
58. Considers that the enlargement process must continue as an EU priority, and that regional and local authorities in enlargement countries should become even more involved in accession preparations. The review of the accession negotiation methodology should take these concerns into account. Through the activities of its Joint Consultative Committees, the CoR intends to help candidate countries become better integrated in key EU policies prior to accession;

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<sup>(3)</sup> <https://webapi2016.cor.europa.eu/v1/documents/cor-2019-02043-00-01-ac-tra-en.docx/content>

59. Agrees that the Eastern Partnership (EaP) should be strengthened in the light of consultation on its future and will remain committed to advancing its objectives beyond capitals and at the level of governance closest to the public;

60. Underlines the importance of local and regional actors and their decentralised cooperation initiatives in achieving the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Calls on the European Commission to provide continuous support for these initiatives and raise the profile thereof;

61. Regrets that there is no reference to the Southern Neighbourhood in the 2020 Work Programme; emphasises that this year marks the 25th anniversary of the declaration of Barcelona, and asks the European Commission to take into consideration this unique opportunity to propose a renovated EU agenda for the Southern Neighbourhood towards an innovative, intercultural and inclusive Mediterranean community region to face the new challenges on the horizon 2030;

62. Reiterates the need to boost e-learning platforms, increase the availability of open online courses in the field of civil protection and promote knowledge and skills networking. In this context, strongly supports the establishment and deployment of the European Civil Protection Knowledge Network;

#### *On European Values*

63. Calls on the European Commission to strengthen the EU's existing tools to monitor and protect the rule of law and to develop, where possible, a single, horizontal monitoring mechanism for the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights. The mechanism should be based on as many and as diverse sources as possible, including LRAs, organised civil society and individuals;

64. Urges the Commission to continue supporting both the exchange of best practice and experience between different levels of governance in the fight against populism and extremism, and the promotion of a culture of human rights, complemented by funds, expertise and practical guidance for national, regional and local authorities to protect our democratic systems;

65. Looks forward to the initiative for a new Migration and Asylum Pact and points out the urgent need for a comprehensive approach to migration, integration and asylum policies based on the principles of respect for fundamental human rights and solidarity. At the same time, the EU should continue its efforts for the protection of the EU's external borders in order to prevent illegal migration and the fight against human trafficking;

66. Supports the presentation of a new Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion and stresses the fundamental role of local and regional authorities in facilitating integration. Welcomes the recent gradual increase in support from the European Commission accessible directly to local authorities and calls for this support to be stepped up and for there to be more direct, simplified funding for local and regional authorities for receiving and integrating regular migrants and refugees. Commits to even greater cooperation between the CoR, the European Commission and the other partners in the 'Cities and Regions for integration' initiative and network;

67. Welcomes the European Commission's intention to work in close cooperation with regional and national authorities on making the European Education Area a reality by 2025, supports the objective of building up a space for learning, study and research without borders and underlines the need to foster brain circulation and re-migration;

68. Stresses that the new European Agenda for Culture supplements and strengthens European identity, which is complementary to national and regional identities, by acknowledging the cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe, reinforcing the European cultural and creative sectors and their relations with partners beyond Europe. The CoR also encourages the European Commission to support the Unesco initiative on heritage and the EU, aimed at using world heritage as a tool for enhancing the economic and social sustainability of rural areas in Europe;

69. Welcomes the long-anticipated 'New Security Strategy' and the directive on Critical Infrastructure Protection, and calls for all initiatives and strategies undertaken by local and regional authorities in the field of Civil Protection to be included;

#### *Strengthening European democracy*

70. Welcomes the European Commission's recognition of the role played by sub-national levels of government within the Union's democratic system. The CoR reconfirms for its part the strong will of Europe's regions and cities to participate in European democracy and decision-making as fully-fledged partners, and to contribute to the implementation of the principles of multi-level governance, active subsidiarity and proportionality;



71. Welcomes the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe. Points out that the active involvement of the CoR in the governing bodies and in the plenary of the conference will provide added-value to the process, allowing local and regional authorities and the public to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the EU, which should lead to concrete proposals to improve the effectiveness and democratic functioning of the EU;
72. Welcomes the European Commission's commitment to delivering policies in a transparent, efficient way, and to ensuring that they provide tangible benefits while avoiding an excessive administrative burden. Reiterates its general support for the Better Regulation agenda and expects the 'one-in-one-out' principle not to follow a mechanistic approach. The CoR is looking forward to developing cooperation with the European Commission through the CoR's network of regional hubs on reviewing EU policy implementation on the ground;
73. Points out the importance of a strong coordinating role for the European Commission in the implementation of the EU Urban Agenda. The CoR sees a renewed Leipzig Charter as a further step to linking the Urban Agenda for the EU with the 'better regulation agenda' of the European Commission and the Green Deal;
74. Calls for an overarching European strategy on demographic change, to which the CoR intends to contribute by analysing the impact of demographic change on different groups of people and regions;
75. Welcomes the creation of a commissioner portfolio on equality. The CoR recalls that local and regional authorities play a crucial role in dealing with gender equality: equal pay for equal work, equal sharing of caring responsibilities, adequately paid parental and carer leave arrangements, reduction of the pay and pension gap, an end to violence against women and gender budgeting. Calls for concrete measures to this effect in the aforementioned fields as a means of empowering women, starting at local and regional level;
76. Instructs its president to forward this resolution to the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Croatian and German Presidencies of the Council of the EU and the President of the European Council.

Brussels, 12 February 2020.

*The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions*  
Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS

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