

Official Journal of the European Union

C 17



English edition

Information and Notices

Volume 60

18 January 2017

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COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

118th plenary session, 15-16 June 2016

I

(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

118TH PLENARY SESSION, 15-16 JUNE 2016

Resolution on the draft annual EU budget for 2017

(2017/C 017/01)

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

- having regard to its opinions on the draft EU budget for 2014, 2015 and 2016;
 - having regard to its opinion on the Mid-term revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF);
 - whereas the budgetary procedure for the EU budget for 2017 coincides with the mid-term review/revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) foreseen by Article 2 of the Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1311/2013 of 2 December 2013 laying down the MFF 2014-2020;
1. underlines the important role of the EU budget for 2017 in the development and delivery of the Union's objectives and priorities to boost growth, promote employment and create new jobs while enhancing effective EU cohesion and competitiveness to address new challenges;
 2. highlights that the EU's annual budget is faced with several structural misconceptions of the MFF:
 - limited resources in the whole MFF, but in particular in Headings 3 and 4,
 - the system of own resources, which is based mainly on national contributions based on GNI,
 - an increased use of 'satellite' instruments, which increases budget flexibility on the one hand, but also undermine the unity of the EU budget as well as the democratic scrutiny of the European Parliament on the other hand,
 - the de-commitment of unspent appropriations, which are definitely lost, rather than being carried over to the following year as a reserve for unexpected needs;
 3. reiterates on the basis of the Commission's Annual Growth Survey 2016 the need for the EU budget to contribute towards economic recovery and fill the still significant post-crisis investment gap in the EU, which harms competitiveness and threatens economic, social and territorial cohesion;
 4. Highlights the significance of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI), Horizon 2020, Erasmus+, SME funding programmes, and other policies and programmes that stimulate the development of the EU economy; calls on the Commission to further increase investment in research, innovation and infrastructure;
 5. notes that Member States' local and regional authorities are often left alone in dealing with large numbers of displaced people and in managing integration policies, with very limited financing and/or coordination from national/European authorities. Financial resources should be made directly accessible for local and regional authorities in order to allow them to fulfil their obligations where migration and integration are concerned, and to ensure they have rapid access to national and EU funds; suggests that Member States and local and regional authorities also be provided with practical guidelines on potential funding sources;

6. Assistance to local and regional authorities in countries of origin and the surrounding regions, including 'transit' areas, in coping with migration flows should also be provided; as without EU support, LRAs in partner countries will not be able to provide decent living conditions and the basis for economic development in the countries of origin. To this end, a responsible review of the MFF should — in view of agreements with third countries aimed at effective border control, reducing migration flows, cooperation on return, and combating human trafficking — provide for greater financial and operational support, including through new and innovative funding sources;

7. asks the budgetary authority to consider the need for directly accessible financial resources for European farmers affected by various crises (such as price volatility) since the beginning of the current MFF, most notably the dairy, meat fruit and vegetable sectors; highlights the budgetary impact of the emergency measures taken in response to these crises, totalling EUR 500 million in the 2016 budget and EUR 300 million in 2015; underlines the ongoing crisis situation in several Member States' agricultural sectors;

8. recalls that the European Commission shall in 2016 review all Member States' total allocations under the 'Investment for growth and jobs' goal of cohesion policy for years 2017-2020 and shall adjust the total allocations on the basis of the more recent statistics while stressing the need to ensure sufficient budgetary resources in 2017 to finance these adjustments;

9. calls on the European Commission, the Member States and the regions to use these adjustments as a flexible tool to address new challenges in the framework of cohesion policy, in view of the fact that Article 7 of the MFF stipulates that these adjustments must be made taking account of the particularly difficult situation of Member States suffering from the crisis;

10. notes that early analyses show rapid commitments and implementation of projects financed under the Horizon 2020 and Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) programmes and negative effects of the budgetary cuts of both programmes; requests the budgetary authority to compensate the budgetary cuts to Horizon 2020 and CEF related to the creation of the EFSI during the annual budgetary procedure for 2017;

11. recalls that the annual budgetary procedure can only temporarily address the lack of finances as well as the increase of the gap between commitments and payments and that these issues should be addressed within a fully-fledged mid-term revision of the MFF;

12. regrets the reduction of funding available for energy investment under the CEF facility, stresses that this priority heading should not suffer as the result of the transfer of further amounts to other headings. Recommends that better geographical balance be ensured in the implementation of the CEF in the area of energy, so that not only the South Eastern regions of the EU and its neighbours, but also other regions could benefit in a more geographically balanced way from improved interconnections, which are crucial for a well-functioning internal energy market across the EU;

13. considers the youth employment initiative (YEI) to be a key political priority, as it is, with the support of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), one concrete supporting tool for young people to enter the labour market; suggests, therefore, that sufficient commitment and payment appropriations be provided in the 2017 budget for the YEI out of the total budget heading of EUR 3,2 billion adopted for the period 2014 to 2020;

14. highlights the fact that after initial delays, the implementation of ESIF is gaining speed and therefore asks for the payment appropriations to be increased in the EU budget for 2017 to avoid future payments backlogs; calls on the Commission to regularly monitor the evolution of the RAL and to set up an early-warning mechanism;

15. proposes that the European Parliament carry out some pilot projects under the 2017 budget to investigate the needs and growth potential of closing 'missing links' in transport infrastructure in cross-border areas;

16. emphasises that should new unforeseen payment needs occur in the future, these should be financed through new payment appropriations and not by redeploying existing resources;

17. points out that the EU budget should be focussed on results and therefore supports any efforts of the European Commission to simplify the financial regulation, to complement better the different EU funding instruments and to ensure a level playing field for all EU policies and programmes with regard to State aid rules, public procurement and reporting requirements; underlines the need for the EU budget to be guided by a place-based multi-level governance approach;
18. underlines the need for the EU budget to be guided by a place-based multi-level governance approach so that EU Funds and policies deliver better results that capitalise on local and regional specificities;
19. recalls that the COP 21 Agreement of December 2015 commits donor countries to support developing countries with USD 100 billion per annum but that a common methodology to account for climate finance has to be agreed upon before the COP 22 in Marrakesh. Asks that against this background the Commission presents a consolidated EU regulatory framework on climate finance and integrates it in its draft budget for 2017 considering that the EU had also agreed that at least 20 % of the 2014-2020 MFF, i.e. EUR 180 billion, should be spent on climate-related actions;
20. notes, finally, that many local and regional authorities have recently introduced policies of gender-based budgeting, and asks the European Commission to take the gender impact into account in the draft 2017 budget;
21. instructs the President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the European Parliament, the Council and the President of the European Council.

Brussels, 15 June 2016.

*The President
of the European Committee of the Regions*

Markku MARKKULA

Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions — The contribution of the European Committee of the Regions to the European Commission's 2017 work programme

(2017/C 017/02)

Submitted by the PES, EPP, ALDE, EA and ECR political groups

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

- having regard to its resolutions of 4 June 2015 on its priorities for 2015-2020 and of 4 December 2015 on the European Commission 2016 work programme and the Protocol of cooperation with the European Commission of February 2012;
- having regard to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, believes it is important for the Commission to continue to display its commitment to respect for these principles in its work, with a joined-up, multi-level approach, and calls for increasing involvement of local and regional authorities in the European decision-making process;

Jobs, growth, investment and cohesion policy

1. calls on the Commission to promptly put forward, on the basis of the mid-term review of Europe 2020 and the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Developments Goals (SDG), a new long-term strategy for the EU's sustainable development at the horizon 2030 (European sustainability strategy);
2. highlights the role of local and regional authorities in addressing obstacles to investment, as stressed in the 2016 Country Reports and Country-specific Recommendations, and that all levels of government should work in partnership to identify and tackle such obstacles in their respective countries;
3. urges the Commission and the EIB to take further steps on ensuring complementarities and additionality between the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) and the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) as well as other EU-funded programmes; reiterates its call for the involvement of the CoR in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the investment plan in particular with regard to the promotion of investment platforms and the analysis of the EFSI's real impact on tackling the investment gap at regional and local level;
4. stresses that the European Commission — in cooperation with the European Investment Bank — should spell out the role of regional promotional banks and other financial institutions in the system of nascent investment platforms as a tool to accomplish the investment plan for Europe ⁽¹⁾;
5. stresses that simplification is needed to boost the impact and better use of the ESIF programmes and suggests the speedy adoption of a number of simplification measures for the current programming period; suggests at the same time intensifying the work on a fundamental review of the delivery system of cohesion policy for the next programming period by intensifying the work of the High Level Group on Simplification, by starting a comprehensive multi-level dialogue particularly with local and regional authorities;
6. suggests developing broader exemptions of ESIF spending from State aid rules;
7. welcomes the 'Cross-Border Review' to remove legal and administrative obstacles to cross-border cooperation and encourages the Commission to present concrete actions in 2017 to remove these obstacles by also taking into account the proposal of the Luxembourg EU Presidency for a 'European Cross-border Convention on specific provisions in border regions'; calls on the Commission to monitor closely the implementation of the cross-border healthcare Directive 2011/24/EU with a view to addressing its possible shortcomings;

⁽¹⁾ ECON-VI/007

8. regrets that mid-term reviews of several EU programmes and initiatives, due to be finalised in the third quarter of 2017, are not aligned with the mid-term review/revision of the current multiannual financial framework (MFF); therefore urges the Commission to conclude their reviews by 1 July 2017 and proceed to a comprehensive proposal for the next MFF, due to be presented by 1 January 2018; hopes, in this light, that delays in reviews of these programmes will not result in a later adoption of legislative proposals for the next MFF;

9. underlines the importance of implementing the EU urban agenda, agreed by Heads of State and Government, in partnership with local and regional authorities. Highlights the importance of ensuring that the EU urban agenda is consistent with the EU's better regulation agenda, calls for the EU urban agenda to be featured in the Commission's 2017 annual work programme and suggests the preparation of a White Paper on implementing the EU urban agenda to be included in the 2017 annual work programme;

10. requests the Commission to include the elaboration of the 2050 territorial vision in its 2017 annual work programme. Underlines the need for a new territorial vision since the European Spatial Development Perspective Agreement of 1999 needs to be brought up to date, as underlined in the conclusions of the 27 November 2015 ministerial meeting on Territorial Cohesion and Urban Policy;

11. calls on the Commission to focus efforts on removing transport bottlenecks and providing adequate cross-border connections in particular addressing the issue of missing cross-border transport links at local and regional level. Adequate funding is to be provided in particular to small scale infrastructures with cross-border relevance; expects the European Commission to present a concrete proposal and timeline for the introduction of cross-border multi-modal journey planners and interoperable integrated transport ticketing systems;

12. reiterates its call on the European Commission to publish a Green Paper on mobility in geographically and demographically challenged regions;

13. encourages the Commission to re-launch the debate on 'GDP and Beyond' and examine the need for and feasibility of developing complementary indicators for economic performance, well-being and sustainable development;

14. recommends that the European Commission develop a 'minimum qualifications and skills guarantee', recognised and validated in all Member States, without undermining the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems under Article 165 TFEU, and expects that the arrangements for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning will be in place no later than 2018; underlines the need to match labour skills with market needs taking due note of training needs of the unemployed youth in the 2017 annual Commission work programme;

15. invites the Commission to develop an EU strategy on Demographic Change and include a flagship initiative on demographic issues in the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy, and to have an early dialogue with the CoR on the future definition of regions that suffer from severe and permanent demographic handicaps;

16. expects that the Commission will present in early 2017 a legislative proposal for the European Pillar of Social Rights in order to address the asymmetry between economic freedoms and social rights;

17. urges the Commission to present a legal framework which would encompass a body of common definitions applying to the different forms of social economy in Europe, i.e. cooperatives, foundations, mutual societies and associations in order to enable social economy enterprises to operate on a legally certain basis and thus enjoy the advantages of the internal market and free movement;

18. urges the Commission to propose a new strategy for gender equality and women's rights 2016-2020 and to come up with a legislative proposal for the revision of Council Directive 92/85/EEC on maternity leave;

19. calls on the Commission, with the involvement of the CoR and Member States, to submit a second report on the European disability strategy 2010-2020 and to examine the possibility of developing the strategy further;

20. calls on the Commission to address the phenomenon of 'letterbox companies';
21. intends to contribute to the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage by bringing knowledge of cultural heritage to a wider audience at grassroots level;
22. stresses the need for a renewed European tourism strategy and points out that the Committee of the Regions has in this connection begun work on the opinion on 'Tourism as a driving force for regional cooperation across the EU' and will submit proposals on this renewed European strategy to the European Commission;
23. calls on the Commission to take a more systematic account of the rural dimension of all EU policy areas and to come up with a White Paper on rural areas to serve as a starting point for a post-2020 rural development policy;
24. calls on the Commission to promote further blue growth through a new comprehensive plan for the development of the blue economy in Europe based notably on a common European strategy on coastal mapping and marine data in order to help develop the blue economy through better availability of data while avoiding fragmentation and making use of cross-border synergies. Also pleads for the establishment of a Knowledge and Innovation Community for the Blue Economy;
25. calls on the Commission to streamline the principle of disaster resilient investment into its policies and Funds. Calls on the Commission, in consultation and cooperation with local, regional and national governments and with stakeholders, to produce guidance on what the Sendai framework on disaster risk reduction means for Europe and how it can best be implemented;

Sustainable development

26. calls on the Commission to fully implement the circular economy action plan and to evaluate the need to come forward in 2017 with the necessary proposals including an ambitious strategy on plastics in a circular economy, legislation setting minimum quality requirements for reused water, as well as new initiatives on the construction and demolition sector;
27. calls on the Commission to conduct territorial impact assessments on all existing and environmental binding targets;
28. urges the Commission to review the EU climate targets and the necessary means for their implementation in accordance with the global objectives adopted in Paris during the COP21; reminds the Commission about its initial recommendation of a 50 % reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. Believes that any new objectives should undergo a territorial impact assessment and should not restrict the right of the Member States to determine their energy mix;
29. calls on the Commission to put into practice the global climate agreement Preamble 15 recognising the importance of a multi-level governance approach, which not only includes cities, but also regions;
30. asks to be associated with the EU Energy Infrastructure Forum to represent the voice of local and regional authorities in the process of policymaking regarding energy infrastructure investment, in particular in the area of decentralised energy generation, including micro-production and distribution;
31. asks to be involved, from the early stages of the policy planning process, in the review of the EU Directives on energy efficiency, promotion of energy from renewable sources and electricity market design;
32. calls on the Commission to propose more specific initiatives in the area of combined heat and power production and district heating and cooling networks with a view to further reducing CO₂ emissions and to increasing energy security;

33. considers that the Commission should raise its ambitions on renewable energy policy by further supporting, adapting and spreading the Covenant of Mayors' model inside and outside the EU, helping to transform urban governance, climate action and citizen involvement in a more consistent and sustainable manner;

34. calls for the full implementation of the European Union seventh environment action programme 2014-2020 and urges the Commission to present a proposal for an EU directive that would establish compliance assurance provisions across the EU environmental *acquis* ⁽²⁾;

35. calls for the full implementation of EU biodiversity strategy to 2020, and consequently urges the Commission to present in 2017 its long overdue initiative on no net loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services; also reiterates its request to the Commission not to revise the Nature Directives, but to present soon a Communication that includes concrete actions to support their better implementation ⁽³⁾;

36. calls on the Commission to present the Communication on Sustainable Food, setting out a coherent EU-wide policy framework to address the sustainability of farming, food production and supply chain and trade aspects and reminds the European Commission of its past call for more specific objectives to be set for reducing food waste by 30 % by 2025 ⁽⁴⁾. Also reiterates its call for the introduction of a new logo and identification of a common symbol and scheme identity for local products;

37. calls on the Commission to publish a new alcohol strategy 2016-2025, based on the latest evidence and taking societal changes into consideration and supporting programmes already undertaken at national, regional and local level;

Internal market and competition

38. supports the European Parliament's call for the inclusion of the single market pillar in the European semester, with a system for regular monitoring and evaluation;

39. welcomes the upcoming VAT simplification package for SME and the Start-up initiative as concrete steps to reduce the regulatory and administrative burden on them; underlines the need for significant further regulatory simplification in particular with regard to SME access to public procurement and to their participation in ESIF-funded projects;

40. welcomes the Commission's attention to the sharing or collaborative economy, but reiterates that any hard regulatory initiative should keep a sectoral approach and take into account the scale of the initiative as a criterion to draw regulatory lines;

41. believes that the Commission has to be more responsive to the significant financing challenges that Services of General Interest (SGIs) face and, therefore, calls on the Commission to assess the territorial impact of EU legislation on the provision of SGIs, with a special focus on State aid and public procurement rules and use any existing margin for simplification, including the simplification of EU's financial instruments; expects against this background to be properly consulted on the 2017 review of the 'Almunia package' in relation to the financing of Services of General Economic Interest;

42. proposes the Commission's ongoing evaluation of the directive on remedies in the area of public procurement is followed by a review of the Directive to address shortcomings as seen from the perspective of local and regional authorities;

Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the European semester

43. reiterates its call for the Commission and Parliament to adopt a code of conduct to guarantee that local and regional authorities are involved in a structured way in the European semester and undertakes to engage in a dialogue with the Commission on this issue;

44. reiterates its call on the Commission to assess the impact of the new ESA 2010 rules on the ability of local and regional authorities to invest;

⁽²⁾ COR-2015-05660

⁽³⁾ COR-2015-02624

⁽⁴⁾ CoR Resolution on Sustainable Food.

45. urges the Commission to involve the CoR in the preparation of the White Paper on the reform of the EMU, in which the EMU's competitiveness and social dimension ought to be addressed;

Digital single market, research and innovation

46. believes that one of the main challenges for a digital single market lies in the creation of a sustainable data economy, also in an industrial context (Industry 4.0); recommends creating conditions which facilitate the connection of all areas to broadband services and working with the Commission and the European Investment Bank to tap into funding and support schemes for ICT infrastructure and calls on the Commission, as part of the implementation of the digital single market, to report regularly on progress made in overcoming the digital divide, particularly at regional and local level;

47. calls on the Commission to put forward proposals aimed at making better use of the EU-funded research programmes by further developing synergies between Horizon 2020, ESIF and EFSI financing and by strengthening the links to smart specialisation strategies at regional level; suggests putting particular emphasis on the impact of Horizon 2020 funding on growth and addressing the 'innovation divide' when carrying out the interim evaluation;

48. suggests a close CoR involvement in the review of the bio-economy strategy in 2017;

49. stresses that the implementation of new EU tools such as the European Innovation Council as well as initiatives on Open Data and Open Innovation need to take into account the regional dimension, and contribute to narrowing the innovation divide;

EU trade policy

50. asks the Commission that every significant initiative in the field of trade policy should be accompanied with territorial impact assessments and that new trade agreements should not introduce new restrictions on local and regional authorities as regards the provision of services of general interest;

51. requests the Commission to systematically carry out *ex-post* evaluations in order to measure the positive and negative economic, environmental, social and territorial impact of trade agreements;

52. asks the Commission, in order to address problems with transparency on trade policymaking at the EU Member State level, to present guidelines on how trade policy objectives are formulated before negotiations are started, i.e. at the stage when the 28 Member States set a mandate;

Justice, fundamental rights and migration

53. with regard to justice, urges the Commission to encourage forms of incentive that help Member States to improve prison conditions for detainees, promote the establishment of penal mediation processes and focus on restorative justice, deployment of alternatives to imprisonment and training courses which help people to find a way out of a social environment defined by illegality and crime;

54. welcomes the European Commission's willingness to address challenges stemming from the unprecedented influx of asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants to Europe and considers the proposals on the reform of the Dublin system an important step in this direction; expects, however, further concrete proposals to follow in 2017 to build a comprehensive EU migration and asylum policy founded on respect of fundamental rights and international obligations, and on the principle of solidarity;

55. invites the Commission, in cooperation with the Member States to continue building a consensus on a common European list of safe countries of origin, and to work with countries of origin and transit that are deemed to be safe in order to implement effective and swift return policies in full respect of human rights and international obligations;

56. calls on the Commission to propose establishing mechanisms to enable asylum seekers to apply for a humanitarian visa from outside the EU, enabling legal entry into the EU;

57. recognises the important contribution of migration towards the growth of the European economy and calls for the European semester to take this dimension into account notably with regard to the expenditure to ensure the integration of migrants;

58. deems it more important than ever to preserve Schengen and urges the Commission to make all efforts, together with the Member States, to bring back the necessary stability to the system; recalls that suspending the Schengen agreement on border free movement has significant consequences in terms of physical controls and risks creating serious economic effects while failing to solve the problem of migration pressure;

59. urges the Commission to grant more funding to LRAs so they can more effectively fulfil their important role in the support and integration of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants;

60. believes that better regional and local assignment of resources from the European Investment and Structural Funds is a pre-requisite for supporting integration policies. In this connection, calls for more resources to be dedicated as well as a better distribution and greatest efficiency in the use of these resources in addressing the issue of asylum seekers, refugees and migration in the coming years;

61. calls on the Commission to (1) support local and regional authorities in developing local, regional and national prevention strategies to counter radicalisation; (2) continue to collect and publicise best practices of how to prevent radicalisation in a handbook; and (3) support city-to-city cooperation in addressing radicalisation;

62. is concerned by the difficulty of monitoring the presence of unaccompanied minors and the risk of them falling prey to trafficking and exploitation; calls strongly for inclusion and training programmes to be implemented, particularly for minors, and for reception practices to be introduced that involve the communities of origin of the minors themselves which are already well established in the host country, ensuring that minors are able to live in a family or similar environment;

Stability and cooperation outside of the European Union

63. stresses the need, when implementing the reviewed ENP, to give high priority to initiatives supporting decentralisation processes, twinning and capacity-building at the sub-national level; urges the Commission to revive the Local Administration Facility (LAF) and extend it to all neighbouring countries and reiterates its proposal to incorporate the methodologies, concepts and instruments of European cohesion policy in the implementation of the reviewed ENP;

64. urges the Commission to examine in greater detail decentralisation processes, as well as the situation of local self-government in the enlargement countries in the context of its annual enlargement progress reports;

65. insists on the need for EU local and regional authorities to make an appropriate contribution to development cooperation in order to achieve sustainable results, including in the follow-up of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III);

66. invites the Commission to pay particular attention to the protection of refugees in their areas of origin, as an important element in dealing with the growing number of people in need of international protection. Welcomes in this context the European Commission's proposal for a new partnership framework with third countries housing large numbers of refugees; these countries need to develop sustainable reception capacities and provide lasting prospects close to home for millions of individuals fleeing from war and persecution. In this regard, acknowledges the need for an external investment plan by mobilising investments in third countries, and calls for the European regional and local authorities to be fully involved in this process. Local and regional authorities should be encouraged to help their hosting counterparts outside the EU by providing technical assistance and advocating for a more structural approach to the protection of the refugees;

Citizenship, governance and better law-making

67. reiterates its call for simplifying and improving the legal framework of the European Citizens' Initiative as the only direct participation tool at the EU level;

68. draws the attention of the Commission to its successful activities in organising decentralised communication activities on EU matters in close cooperation with local and regional media, civil society and EU institutions and urges the European Commission to intensify its efforts in this domain well ahead of the European elections in 2019;

69. calls on the Commission to draw up an EU-wide standard definition of gold-plating for the purpose of legal certainty in the implementation and application of EU law and for limiting excessive red tape;
70. calls for increased transparency, cooperation and efficiency among the EU institutions following the adoption of the new Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-making, and the inclusion of the CoR in all stages of the legislative process to fully use their potential in the legislative cycle and consultations;
71. underlines the good cooperation with the Commission on the pilot test of Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA) carried out during 2015 and 2016; building on this good cooperation, the CoR calls on the Commission to implement TIA as a standard practice in the impact assessment of legislation that could potentially have asymmetrical territorial effects and in the wider better regulation agenda;
72. expects ever closer cooperation with the European Commission and the European Parliament in monitoring subsidiarity, and around its 2017 Conference devoted to subsidiarity;
73. instructs the President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the European Parliament, the Council and the President of the European Council.

Brussels, 15 June 2016.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Markku MARKKULA

Resolution on the situation of Europe Direct information centres (EDIC)

(2017/C 017/03)

Submitted by the PES, EPP, ALDE, EA and ECR political groups

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

- having regard to its Resolution from 16 February 2012 on the Europe Direct Information Centres (EDIC) (CoR 84/2012);
- having regard to its opinion on 'Reconnecting Europe with its citizens — more and better communication at local level' from 3 December 2014 (COR-2014-04460);
- 1. notes that the EU is facing major political and economic challenges. The fact that a democratic deficit is continuing and citizens are becoming increasingly disenchanted with the EU illustrates the need for joint efforts from all actors in European politics in order to increase engagement with EU citizens in the European project and for European policies to secure their legitimacy;
- 2. underlines that local and regional authorities are well placed to help better connect citizens with the actors of European politics and to inform European leaders about the direct needs of citizens. This is why more importance should be attached to decentralised European communication process;
- 3. commits to step up the cooperation with the EDICs within the framework of its communication strategy 2015-2020;
- 4. recalls that the Europe Direct Network, with its current 518 information centres in the Member States, plays a key role in decentralised European communication strategy. It is one of the most important instruments of the European Commission to inform citizens at local and regional levels about the concrete importance of various European political topics on their daily life;
- 5. welcomes the current evaluation process of the European Commission's framework for the content and technical aspects of the EDIC with view to preparing the 2018-2023 funding period and setting of the EDIC's new framework conditions;
- 6. considers that the EDIC's networking with the European institutions and the European Commission's other information networks, and the link that they provide with the bodies and needs of regions, local institutions and civil society stakeholders are crucial;
- 7. notes that with regard to the current situation of crisis the work of the EDIC has become increasingly important and demanding. Considering the numerous challenges that the EU is facing, the aim should be to use the EDICs' full potential and to further strengthen its role regarding European communication processes. A balanced geographical distribution must be ensured, and there must be no reduction in the current number of bodies providing the service in the individual local and regional authorities;
- 8. considers that the work of the EDIC can be guaranteed in future by developing the already strong collaboration and funding from the EU;
- 9. proposes that financial resources allocated to the EDIC for the next funding period should be substantially increased within the existing multi-annual framework. In particular the lump sum allocated to the basic information offer per EDIC should be doubled and the standard lump sums for funding the different modules should be increased, while ensuring that EDICs strive to improve their efficiency and maximise the good use of their resources. Finally, putting more financial resources at the disposal of pilot modules will enable to react to crisis situations. In this way, an increase in costs like for instance for wages and rents could be absorbed;
- 10. in view of the increased demands on the EDICs, expects financing to be improved. The amount of support should therefore be significantly increased;
- 11. insists on the fact that in view of the public-service nature of the EDICs' activities, they continue to be exempt from VAT;
- 12. underlines that the administrative burden should be drastically lifted;

13. confirms that in principle the European Commission's measures regarding decentralised European communication activity reach their target groups. Nevertheless, the European Commission's priorities only partially match the needs of citizens when it comes to European policies. The more abstract a topic is, the less it will be regarded by citizens as a relevant political matter. For this reason, particular attention should be directed to tackling European political issues that touch the citizen in his daily life;
14. believes that links between the EDIC and local and regional networks of associations should be stepped up by introducing a two-way channel of communication, in order to identify different areas of interest to citizens, so that European information can be better tailored to their questions;
15. notes that the module system is generally considered as positive. However, series of modifications are necessary, like for instance making the different modules more flexible;
16. calls on the European Commission to give the EDIC the possibility to adjust planned measures according to both the Commission's communication preferences and to local needs. If they want to give the European project a future, actors of European politics have to communicate with citizens in such a way that the latter will see Europe again as a common home, as a community of values and peace, as a driving force for social and cultural progress and for justice. Thanks to an information offer close to its citizens, the EDIC can create a link between both parties and promote Europe in a positive way among citizens;
17. suggests that when the new 2018-2023 financing period begins, an information campaign should be launched highlighting the added value of the 'Europe Direct' label and raising awareness of the day-to-day work of the EDIC and their local and regional European actions, to supplement the usual information on high-level meetings that fails to convey an image of the European venture as a whole to citizens;
18. suggests that the module system should be open to regional priorities, formats and groups not so far identified as targets and in particular a flexible use of available modules. The aim is to adapt communication to local needs as much as possible. It should be possible to present regional projects so as to adapt communication to local needs as much as possible. This would serve to enhance the partnership between authorities which together guarantee regional coverage of appropriate public services, more pertinent and up-to-date communication strategies and more structured contacts with stakeholders and the other European networks. Provision should be made to have recourse to forms of partnership allowing for public-private cooperation, as in fact encouraged by the European Commission in the 2014-2020 programme for the European funds. These projects should be guaranteed suitable funding based on population density and public points of contact;
19. calls for the introduction of an option to fund cooperation between different information centres, in order both to facilitate exchange of best practice between centres in different areas, and to harness synergies, especially when they have the same target group with similar characteristics and needs;
20. emphasises in conclusion that the role of the EDIC is crucial to local and regional authorities who know best local and regional stakeholders as well as the topics of interest to citizens. They are particularly qualified to identify which kind of information and which methodology will help to reach the citizens and appeal to them. Their role regarding European communication is therefore vital and should be further strengthened in particular through closer collaboration with the European institutions;
21. supports the European Parliament's call on the Commission to provide appropriate and comprehensive guidance to the organisers of European Citizens' Initiatives ⁽¹⁾;
22. suggests that the European Commission steps up cooperation between different European networks in order to enhance information and communication to citizens, providing them with a wider range of responses to their questions.

Brussels, 16 June 2016.

*The President
of the European Committee of the Regions*
Markku MARKKULA

⁽¹⁾ See European Parliament Resolution of 28 October 2015 on the European Citizens' Initiative (2014/2257(INI)).

OPINIONS

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

118TH PLENARY SESSION, 15-16 JUNE 2016

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — ‘Steel: Preserving sustainable jobs and growth in Europe’

(2017/C 017/04)

Rapporteur:	Isolde RIES (DE/PES), First Vice-President of the Saarland Regional Parliament
Reference document:	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank — Steel: Preserving sustainable jobs and growth in Europe
	COM(2016) 155 final

GENERAL COMMENTS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Importance and situation of the EU steel sector

1. stresses that the EU steel sector has played and continues to play a vital role in the European integration process and is one of the key foundations of prosperity, value creation, investment and employment in Europe. With 330 000 employees and 500 production sites in 23 Member States, it is one of the EU's key strategic sectors. In 2014, the sector produced some 169 million tonnes of steel, representing 10 % of global output, and generated a total turnover of EUR 166 billion, equivalent to 1,3 % of the EU's GDP;
2. highlights that, despite the reduction in production and jobs over recent decades, the steel industry remains a key factor in reindustrialising Europe. The objective set out in the Commission communication of 22 January 2014 ‘For a European Industrial Renaissance’ of increasing industry's contribution to GDP to 20 % by 2020 is achievable only with a competitive steel industry;
3. highlights the close economic ties between the steel industry and upstream and downstream sectors. Together with suppliers such as the mining and energy sectors, transport networks and service providers, and customers such as the metal industry, vehicle manufacturing, the engineering industry and construction, the steel industry forms broad value creation networks and clusters;
4. firmly stresses that the future development of the steel industry has a direct and indirect impact on local and regional development and that a competitive and sustainable steel industry is a prerequisite for economic recovery and growth in numerous regions across Europe; notes that the steel sector is also an important source of indirect employment, since it plays a significant role for many other industrial sectors;
5. draws attention to the fact that the European steel industry forms an integral part of international raw material, procurement and sales markets, and as such relies on fair competition;
6. highlights that firms in the steel industry are energy-intensive per se and that energy costs represent some 40 % of operating costs. The sector therefore depends on an affordable and secure energy supply;

7. highlights the steel industry's contribution to the development of energy transition and climate protection. For example, innovative steel products are essential for constructing wind turbines, highly efficient power plants and electric vehicles. Although steel manufacture is a major source of CO₂, innovative steel products save six times the amount of CO₂ that their manufacture generates;
8. notes that the steel industry is of strategic importance for rail infrastructure across the European continent and also plays a part in the development of local rail transport networks, which offer a valid way to relieve road transport congestion, above all when it comes to improving quality of life and the environment in metropolitan areas;
9. stresses that Europe-based steel producers must make their production as cost-effective and resource-efficient as possible and maintain state-of-the-art technology through continuous investment. The long-term competitiveness depends also on their ability to develop breakthrough technologies in areas such as, for example, energy efficiency. However, it is equally important that the EU and its Member States always consider the impact of their decisions on the national and international competitiveness of the steel sector and the long-term economic impact;
10. notes that in order to secure its survival, the steel industry must continue to demonstrate that it is ready to face the challenges of the future through innovation and good environmental performance. This includes, for example, actively contributing to environmental and climate protection, but also consistently applying technical standards in the field of the environment and climate change policy when reinvesting;
11. draws attention to the high social standards in the European steel industry and its climate and environmental protection efforts;
12. notes that recycling steel saves raw materials, energy and greenhouse gas emissions and strengthens the circular economy. In particular it should be noted that steel is a fully recyclable material. The reuse and recycling of steel should be further developed in view of the objective of creating a competitive and sustainable circular economy and of the fact that the EU has a positive balance of trade in scrap metal. The development of new steel grades, ferro-alloys, and casting and manufacturing techniques also offer huge market potential;
13. points out that the European steel industry, with the latest technology and its highly-skilled workforce, delivers excellence in its field, with the focus on customer-orientated research and product development. The development of innovative and high-quality products helps to safeguard and increase firms' competitiveness;
14. reiterates that modern steel production relies heavily on the continuous development of a highly skilled workforce with the capacity to find pioneering solutions; notes that the New Skills Agenda will make the case for continued investments in people, including reskills and up-skilling policies. It will benefit a broad range of economic sectors, including the steel industry;
15. supports efforts in the European steel industry to ensure greater equality for all staff. For example, the proportion of women employed in the steel sector has increased over the past 10 years and now stands at between 6 % and 25 %, depending on the respective position and EU Member State. In addition, in the past two years steel companies have launched a series of initiatives in various Member States to attract women to the steel sector;
16. notes that the EU steel industry is a leader in health and safety and offers the world's highest standards of industrial hygiene in the workplace. The exchange of best practices for health and safety in the workplace is being discussed in detail at EU level. The EU steel industry is also taking part in an intensive social dialogue at EU level;
17. urges that more emphasis be placed on digital skills and technologies in education and vocational training, in particular apprenticeships, and highlights that the digitalisation of production processes requires employees to have higher skills due to the greater complexity of tasks ⁽¹⁾;

⁽¹⁾ CDR 1319/2014 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — EU Quality Framework for anticipation of change and restructuring.

18. highlights that the digitisation of production processes requires employees to have better abstract thinking and problem-solving skills due to the greater complexity of tasks. Staff must also organise their own work and must have excellent interdisciplinary, self-management and communication skills;

19. points out that global overcapacity, periods of low prices, high energy prices, taxes and charges on energy, the upcoming reform of the EU emissions trading scheme, as well as competition-distorting dumping practices by steel producers outside the EU, place an enormous burden on Europe as a steel-producing region. The production of crude steel and worldwide market shares of the European steel sector are in decline, leading to adjustment processes that impact on businesses and employment;

20. notes with concern the devastating social and economic effects on local and regional communities from closures or reductions in iron and steel manufacturing, and the measures needed to support those communities to regenerate and grow;

21. considers a European strategy for the future of the steel industry to be sensible and constructive. In this regard, it is vital that local and regional authorities are included in voting or decision-making processes and that the respective local circumstances and specialisations of firms are taken into account;

22. supports an EU industrial policy geared to maintaining the competitiveness of the steel industry and a competitive environment, and that will enable existing steel plants and jobs to be safeguarded and further developed;

23. shares the Commission's view, as set out in its 2050 energy roadmap, that lowering the CO₂ emissions of the energy sector and a scenario with a high proportion of energy from renewable sources may be less costly in the long run than pressing ahead with the current policy, and that the costs of nuclear energy and energy from fossil fuels are likely to continue to rise over time, whereas the costs associated with renewable energies may fall; at the same time, acknowledges in this connection Member States' efforts to provide for appropriate compensation for the disproportionate financial costs incurred by the steel industry exposed to international competition, as part of the development of renewable energies; however, urges the European level to ensure that national compensation mechanisms, particularly in the area of aid, do not distort competition in the single market;

24. points out the need to help communities that rely heavily on steel to increase the breadth of their economies before restructuring measures have to be taken; diversification of the local economic fabric should aim in particular to create synergies between sustainable industry and services and could also be promoted through tax breaks;

Reform of the EU emissions trading scheme

25. welcomes the endeavour of the European Council in its conclusions of 23 and 24 October 2014 to strike a balance between the objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and that of ensuring the competitiveness of European industry;

26. points out, however, that the European Council's decision to increase the annual reduction factor for maximum emissions allocated to industry from 1,74 % in the third trading period (2013-2020) to 2,20 % in the fourth trading period (2021-2030) while continuing with free-of-charge allocation of emission allowances based on benchmarks may result in a considerable shortfall in allowances and thus in additional burdens for the steel sector, burdens to which competitors in countries without emissions trading are not subject;

27. considers it essential to establish an emission trading scheme at global level to ensure the competitiveness of European businesses and avoid carbon leakage by preventing further increases of the allowances to be auctioned. Further guarantees could take the form of harmonized compensation mechanisms for indirect costs (such as those of electricity) or of benchmarks based upon accurate and up-to-date data;

28. also notes in this regard that the pig iron benchmark for allocating allowances in the steel industry is already 10 % below the physically and technically feasible level in the third trading period (2013-2020); nor is the sinter benchmark determined properly, as it includes pellet plants. Allocations must be based on actual circumstances, taking full account of electricity production from steel industry blast furnace gas, and be adjusted to keep pace with technical developments. Allowances must also be allocated pro-actively over the production process;

29. is pleased to note that the Commission has presented its *Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2003/87/EC to enhance cost-effective emission reductions and low-carbon investments* well before the start of the fourth EU emissions trading period;

30. therefore hopes that clarity on the future EU emissions trading framework can be achieved for all stakeholders at an early stage;

31. at the same time, sees the need for intensive coordination and discussion between all stakeholders regarding the reform of the EU emissions trading scheme;

32. nonetheless notes with concern that the Commission's proposal for a directive does not fully satisfy the European Council's wish to safeguard the international competitiveness of industry, as the European steel industry in particular currently faces substantial costs that pose a threat to its existence;

33. calls, therefore, for the proposal for a directive to be substantially revised in the subsequent stages of the legislative process and — while ensuring the effectiveness of EU emissions trading and appropriate burden-sharing among all economic sectors — in particular, for the following measures to be included:

- general waiving of charges for the most efficient plants,
- continuation of incentives to pursue technical development and reduce environmental impact through realistic, and technically and economically achievable, benchmarks based on the most efficient 10 % of plants,
- full account to be taken of BFG (blast furnace gas) emissions from power generation when setting benchmarks,
- no across-the-board reduction of benchmarks; waiving of the correction factor,
- no weakening of cost pass-through to electricity prices for energy-intensive industries; option to pass through all indirect costs while at least reference criteria should be considered at European level so as to avoid distortions in competition within the European single market,
- inclusion of precursors of energy-intensive industries to be included in the rules in order to prevent relocation abroad, and
- adjustment of allocation quantities to reflect changing production levels;

34. believes that offsetting of emissions costs passed through to electricity prices is vital in order to counteract potential carbon leakage. As individual Member States have currently been able to choose different ways of doing this, distortions of competition cannot be ruled out. The European Commission should therefore consider whether in future this offsetting process should be harmonised or allowed at EU level;

35. emphatically welcomes the international community's acceptance for the first time, at the global climate conference in Paris, of a binding commitment under international law to the goal of keeping global warming below 2 °C, and its intention of making serious efforts to limit the increase in global temperature to 1,5 °C. The guiding principle of achieving global GHG emissions neutrality in the second half of this century still needs to be fleshed out, in view of its impact on the development of the production sector. The option still open of developing and reaching an agreement on market mechanisms for global, cost-effective emissions trading would be an opportunity to reduce or avoid future distortions of competition due to climate protection measures;

EU external trade

36. recognises the serious threats to the European steel industry posed by lack of a level playing field, unfair foreign trading practices employed by firms and the unequal trade policies of non-EU countries;

37. believes, therefore, that the EU's external trade policy, including its trade defence instruments, is an essential means of safeguarding the global competitiveness of Europe's steel industry and supports the Parliament's call for a general reform of the EU's trade defence instruments in order to remove what are referred to as the 'WTO+ elements' from the EU system and guarantee in particular a level playing field for EU industry with China ⁽²⁾;

38. notes with concern that currently the world steel industry reports 452 m tonnes of excess capacity, and that overcapacity in the Chinese steel industry is repeatedly giving rise to imports at dumping prices in the EU, sometimes via third countries, which without effective EU trade countermeasures pose a direct and indirect threat to the existence of the entire European steel industry, and to many jobs;

39. calls for the establishment of a mechanism to operate in third countries, to monitor the way secondary raw material (scrap) treatment plants are run in the countries of destination, so as to pre-empt exports to third countries whose waste treatment methods are not environmentally sound;

40. calls on the EU Institutions to authorise the Commission to use a non-standard methodology in anti-dumping and anti-subsidy investigations into Chinese imports under Section 15 of the China WTO Accession Protocol until China meets all five EU criteria required to qualify as a market economy. Moreover points out with great concern that the possible granting of market economy status to the People's Republic of China in December 2016 would make effective anti-dumping measures virtually impossible because the method of calculating dumping margins would then change. Highlights at the same time that there is no requirement that WTO members automatically grant China MES in 2016;

41. points out, in this regard, that China currently meets only one of the EU's five criteria for recognition as a market economy. These technical criteria are: business decisions being based on market signals, company accounts kept according to international accounting standards, absence of any appreciable distortion in production costs and in the financial situation of companies stemming from the former non-market economy system, property and insolvency laws that guarantee legal certainty and stability for business operations, and exchange rate conversions at the market rate;

42. therefore urges the Commission, when studying the economic and social impact of market economy status for China, to await the opinions of the economic stakeholders affected and to seek close coordination with other key WTO members such as the United States before making its decision on market economy status;

43. in the event of China being awarded market economy status, calls for the creation of equivalent and effective tools to protect fair trade. In this connection, a solution should also be considered that in future no longer explicitly lists the non-market economy countries in the EU's basic anti-dumping Regulation, but that lays down general rules for non-market economies in the Regulation. The analogue country methodology could be replaced by another methodology, however with the burden of proof regarding the existence of a market economy continuing to fall on the non-market economy countries;

44. in the event of China being awarded market economy status, calls for the creation of equivalent and effective tools to protect fair trade;

45. welcomes the Commission's imposition in February 2016 of provisional anti-dumping duties on imports of cold-rolled flat steel products from Russia and China;

⁽²⁾ See Resolution of the European Parliament of 12 May 2016 on China's market economy status (2016/2667(RSP)).

46. regrets, however, that in doing so the Commission, in the case of Chinese steel products, applied the 'lesser duty rule', with the result that the provisional anti-dumping duties imposed are lower than the calculated dumping margins;
47. considers that applying this rule does not sufficiently protect the competitiveness of the European steel industry;
48. points out that WTO provisions do not provide for such a rule, nor is it used by other regions such as the United States;
49. considers it important, therefore, to abolish the 'lesser duty rule' when reforming the trade defence instruments, particularly in the case of existing excess capacity;
50. welcomes that the European Commission has, as announced in the action plan, decided on 28 April 2016 to (re-) establish a prior surveillance system for the import of steel products into the EU which will require an import licence for the import of steel products into the EU, serve to anticipate short-term market developments and help the Commission to properly address unfair imports, with the possibility of initiating cases when import trends threaten to cause injury to Union producers;
51. welcomes the Commission's efforts, through the trade defence measures for steel products already in force in the EU, to help enforce the rules of fair global competition and thereby to help safeguard the competitiveness of the European steel industry;
52. nevertheless considers that the EU's anti-dumping procedures take too long, particularly when compared with practice in other WTO Member States, so that they are less effective in protecting the competitiveness of the European steel industry;
53. therefore calls for the option also to be considered of speeding up the EU's anti-dumping procedure if and when the EU's trade defence instruments are reformed;
54. encourages the Commission in its efforts to advance the goal of a global level playing-field through dialogue and negotiation at international level;
55. expects the Council to include chapters on energy and raw materials in every new Free Trade Agreement (FTA) mandate;
56. calls on the Commission to include the CoR, as the institutional representative of European local and regional authorities, in the high-level group on energy-intensive industries set up in May 2015, in order to ensure that the stakeholders already represented take note of the interests and possibilities that exist at regional and local level;

Accompanying measures to safeguard the competitiveness of the EU steel sector

57. points out that the relevant EU funding programmes for investment in new equipment, R & D, skills and training can make significant contributions to safeguarding competitiveness, compliance with environmental and climate protection standards, and workers' rights in the steel sector;
58. draws attention to the goals of the Research Fund for Coal and Steel (RFCS), as well as the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs), and the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), which can support research and innovation projects in the steel sector, not least through potential synergy and coordinated action. Points however to the rather limited potential of EFSI for the steel sector as market conditions cannot guarantee an adequate return on investment with the currently low level steel prices. With due consideration for the EU's strict state aid regime for the steel industry, the cooperation of local and regional authorities that have steel-related priorities can also make a valuable contribution;
59. notes how important public investment and the resources of the EU's Horizon 2020 programme are to driving pioneering innovations in the steel industry and to improving the environmental and energy efficiency of the sector;
60. hopes that, given the specific nature of the steel sector, which requires both research and measures of a structural nature, the evaluation of research projects under Horizon 2020 will give more points to those that involve a European Partnership and use Structural Fund resources to secure better integration between the various European programmes;

61. stresses the objective of maintaining the quality and level of employment as part of a more competitive EU steel industry, while acknowledging the importance of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) in providing social support in cases of industrial restructuring involving potential staff cuts, as in situations where more than 500 workers employed by a single company (including suppliers and downstream enterprises) are made redundant, or where many workers from a particular sector lose their jobs in one or more neighbouring regions, this fund could be used to meet up to 60 % of the cost of projects to help workers made redundant find a new job or set up their own business; however, is doubtful whether the maximum annual budget of EUR 150 million for the 2014-2020 period will be enough to meet the challenges involved;

62. points out that the transfer of experience and knowledge to new generations of workers in the EU steel industry already plays a major role and that the skills and industrial know-how of the workforce should be strengthened through targeted education and training;

63. identifies the need to develop and promote resource-efficient circular economy systems at all steel production sites, in order to improve the competitiveness of plants by making more use of by-products and recycled steel; this is also in line with the provision for industrial symbiosis set out in the European Commission's Action Plan for the Circular Economy, increasing the uses for steel processing waste.

Brussels, 15 June 2016.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Markku MARKKULA

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Mid-term revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

(2017/C 017/05)

Rapporteur: Luc VAN DEN BRANDE (BE/EPP)

Chair of the Management Board of the Flanders-Europe Liaison Agency (VLEVA)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

MFF revision: general comments

1. is of the opinion that the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is first and foremost a policy tool for identifying and addressing European strategic targets and that, since the MFF provides funding for the operation of the European Union, its review is pre-eminently a political and not a technical debate;
2. underlines the importance of the MFF in ensuring that EU long-term spending is predictable and carried out in line with mutually agreed common policies. These overarching principles are crucial for regional and local authorities (RLAs) and other beneficiaries of EU funds;
3. notes that the MFF is of particular importance for regional and local authorities (RLAs), since they play a vital role in the implementation of European policy objectives; points out, in the light of this, that regions and local authorities are involved — directly and/or indirectly — in managing or spending 75 % of the EU budget;
4. regrets that the ceilings in the current MFF are for the first time lower than in the previous one, forcing the European Union to assume more responsibilities with fewer financial resources; reiterates its concern about the ceilings of the MFF as expressed in previous opinions ⁽¹⁾;
5. reiterates the fact that the effectiveness of European policy depends on proper application of the principle of multilevel governance, which is considered a general principle governing the structural funds ⁽²⁾ and determines that all levels of government — each according to their competences — work together in an efficient manner to achieve the policy objectives; warns in this respect against a reduction in the shared management of programmes and attempts to centralise the funds at European level; underlines that a place-based approach is also crucial for the effectiveness of EU policies, which entails different levels of government, sectors and stakeholders engaging in a collaborative process to address issues as they are experienced within a geographic space;
6. observes that the EU faces a continuous lowering of investment levels, leading to an investment gap in the EU, which is estimated by the Commission to be of up to EUR 370 billion below the historical norm. Supports the Commission's endeavour to contribute towards tackling this gap through also working more closely with the private sector and aiming to leverage private capital i.e. the Investment Plan for Europe and the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI);
7. welcomes the intention of the Commission to come forward in autumn 2016 with a legislative proposal for a reinforced EFSI beyond 2018, which should in particular elaborate on the synergies between European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI). Calls in this context on the Commission to set clear criteria for identifying the additionality of EFSI projects and to address the geographical imbalances of EFSI projects, the lack of cross-border projects and the deficit in sustainable infrastructure investments in broadband, energy efficiency and transport. Stresses moreover that an MFF revision encompassing an increase of budget lines likely to provide the financial basis for a reinforced EFSI (EFSI 2.0) is an absolute prerequisite;

⁽¹⁾ CDR275-2013_00_00_TRA_AC (23-24).

⁽²⁾ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund covered by the Common Strategic Framework and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 — {SEC(2011) 1141 final} {SEC(2011) 1142 final}.

8. considers it necessary to investigate whether more investment can be obtained by adapting the investment clause, allowing the Member States to deviate under well-defined conditions from their medium-term objective or the agreed fiscal adjustment path under the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP). Investments could include, inter alia, national expenditure on projects co-financed by the EU under the structural and cohesion policy (including the YEI) and the EFSI;

9. welcomes the efforts to encourage greater private investments and couple these with public investments to generate jobs and growth in Europe's regions and local authorities;

10. points out that the current MFF has already reached its limits, exhausting ceilings in some areas and using as many flexibility instruments as currently possible;

11. stresses the need for a full-scale mid-term revision of the MFF. A genuine mid-term revision both of the MFF ceilings and the specific provisions of the MFF Regulation is much needed. It must take the findings of the review into account and provide the EU with a viable budgetary framework to address its political priorities and challenges;

12. points out that, should new priorities be identified, the institutions will have to take on responsibility for ensuring the financing of new tasks, either by clearly identifying policy areas that would no longer be among the Union's priorities or by agreeing to an upward revision of the MFF ceilings;

13. reminds the institutions that scarce resources should not result in a reduction of EU common priorities;

14. invites the institutions to conclude the MFF revision as swiftly as possible, in order to allow a sufficient time for preparation of the Commission proposals for the post-2020 MFF, due to be presented by 1 January 2018;

MFF revision: specific recommendations

15. warns in advance, despite its understanding for urgent needs, that the use of some financing mechanisms and Trust Funds cannot be a pretext for keeping Union initiatives (partially) outside the EU budget — and thus escaping the democratic control of the European Parliament — and for bringing them under the management of the Member States;

Political priorities and challenges for the second half of the MFF

16. emphasises that attention should be paid in the second half of the MFF to the following political priorities and challenges that have a direct or indirect impact on the well-being of European citizens:

— promoting jobs, growth and competitiveness: the EFSI was set up without a revision of the MFF ceilings, but by redeployment of existing programmes (reduction of Horizon 2020 by EUR 2,2 bn and reduction of the Connecting Europe Facility by EUR 2,8 bn); an MFF revision should compensate for these EFSI-related cuts to these programmes;

— achieving greater synergies between EU programmes to promote public and private investment in regions and cities, particularly with regard to the EU's objective of territorial cohesion. It reiterates its call for holistic territorial vision of urban and rural areas as complementary functional spaces;

— tackling unemployment and youth unemployment in particular: the Youth Employment Initiative needs therefore to be continued at least until 2020, with particular emphasis on the integration of young people into the labour market;

— integrating the long-term unemployed into the labour market;

— addressing the causes of destabilisation and external crises;

- addressing the migration and refugee crises: the resources available in the current MFF's heading 3 are insufficient to tackle the problem in the coming years. The relevant MFF ceilings need to be raised to ensure the reception and integration of migrants, for which regional and local authorities are mainly responsible; the new MFF provides an opportunity to step up the resources earmarked for implementing the priorities of the European Agenda on Migration;
- ensuring internal security and the fight against terrorism: an increase of the MFF ceilings of Heading 3 could therefore be envisaged;
- promoting social protection, in conjunction with the objective of implementing the EMU's social dimension. Social protection is a necessary condition for social harmony and for economic growth in the individual countries;
- addressing the demographic challenge, in particular through better tracing of demography-related expenditure notably in ESIF and the EFSI;
- addressing the various crises that European farmers have faced since the beginning of the current MFF;

Compensation of budgetary cuts related to the EFSI

17. notes that the Horizon 2020 and the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) are symptomatic of a budgetary malfunctioning: there is a huge gap between the goals and allocation available for the whole programming period 2014-2020, notwithstanding budgetary cuts in favour of the newly established European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI);
18. notes, on the other hand, that the projects funded by Horizon 2020 and Connecting Europe Facility have a significant European added value;
19. considers that it is too early to assess whether the creation of the EFSI has led to the possible loss of overall funding for European research and infrastructure projects;
20. reiterates the need to reinforce Horizon 2020 and the CEF through the annual budgetary procedure, in order to compensate as much as possible for the cuts agreed during the EFSI negotiations and to enable them to meet their respective objectives, agreed just over two years ago;

Youth Employment Initiative

21. welcomes the steps taken by the European Commission and the budgetary authority in frontloading the whole financial envelope of the Youth Employment Initiative as early as in 2014 and 2015, since this has sent a clear signal about the crucial importance of the whole initiative for young people in the worse affected regions;
22. calls for the continuation of the Youth Employment Initiative, following a fully fledged assessment of its performance and subsequent adjustments to overcome existing implementation impediments, including the provision of new commitment appropriations as of 2017;
23. calls on the institutions to fulfil their commitments made during the negotiations on the EU budget for 2016 and calls on the European Commission to draw lessons from the results of the YEI evaluation and, as appropriate, advance proposals for the continuation of the initiative until 2020;
24. in connection with the YEI, calls on the Commission, in the context of the MFF review, to adopt a special initiative to promote the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market;

Flexibility

25. is in favour of flexibility in the MFF and the annual budgets, in order to provide answers to unexpected events or new challenges, but warns against excessive expectations in this area. More flexibility is not the solution to insufficient financial resources to achieve European objectives;
26. calls on the European Commission to assess all the MFF Regulation's flexibility provisions with a view to removing any constraints that might impede their full use and to improving their performance;

27. again points out to the European Commission and the budgetary authority that several options exist — differing in complexity and feasibility — and that these need to be properly discussed without any bias or suspicion;

28. states that, when the options for greater flexibility and predictability are being assessed, the principle of good faith and stability in the framework conditions for the Member States and economic players must be maintained, while reallocations previously made from individual categories must be taken into account;

29. is of the opinion that the abovementioned options could include:

- a greater flexibility in reallocating resources, initially between instruments and between headings;
- simplifying the use of the Flexibility Instrument within the meaning of paragraph 12 of the Interinstitutional Agreement of 2 December 2013, because its use is hindered by the decision procedures;
- a simplified procedure to adjust and increase the expenditure ceiling to deal with unforeseen circumstances or a change in political priorities;
- revising upward the MFF ceilings in both payment appropriations and commitment appropriations so that they reflect the EU's political and budgetary priorities;
- increasing the Contingency Margin, as the last resort, from current 0,03 % of GNI to a higher rate;

30. points out to the Council that the payment appropriations for the special instruments (the Flexibility Instrument, the EU Solidarity Fund, the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund and the Emergency Aid Reserve) should be calculated over and above the MFF ceilings, as is the case for commitments;

31. notes that Cohesion Policy envelopes are not suitable for substantially tackling current crises with sufficient flexibility, three of the reasons for this being their long-term planning, their focus on structural investment and the thematic concentration; invites the European Commission to come forward with solutions to resolve this problem outside the Cohesion Policy envelopes;

32. although pre-allocated national envelopes — including those under Cohesion Policy — are not to be reduced through the mid-term revision, invites the European Commission to present, within its proposal, an exact algorithm of how the Cohesion Policy envelopes will be adjusted this year in accordance with Article 7 of the MFF Regulation and how this will affect flexibility mechanisms in place ⁽³⁾;

Payments backlog

33. notes that, if its fears come true, the MFF 2014-2020 will lead to a further shortfall in the European budget ⁽⁴⁾; due to the lack of payment appropriations, the Commission will not be able to meet its obligations. This is a particularly worrying trend ⁽⁵⁾;

34. underlines the fact that the payments backlog has negative effects on the regions and various stakeholders as EU budget beneficiaries — such as a risk of losing investments, a reduction in activities, withdrawal from projects, short-term loans, and delays in the implementation of operational programmes. It also limits the interest of potential beneficiaries due to low stability of funding;

35. warns against the current payments backlog and the overly optimistic assumptions of the European Commission about a decrease in the backlog at the end of 2016;

⁽³⁾ According to Art 90(5) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council, the Commission shall review the eligibility of Member States for support from the Cohesion Fund on the basis of Union GNI figures for the period 2012-2014 for the EU-27 and national envelopes shall be subsequently recalculated, with total net effect of these adjustments not exceeding 4 billion EUR (as set in the MFF Regulation).

⁽⁴⁾ The current MFF started with 'a debt' from the previous framework of EUR 23,4 billion and at the end of 2014 this backlog reached an unprecedented level of EUR 24,7 billion for the 2007-2013 Cohesion programmes.

⁽⁵⁾ CDR275-2013_00_00_TRA_AC.

36. points out that one of the elements contributing to its decrease is the absorption rate of Cohesion Policy programmes in the 2007-2013 programming period. The absorption rate as of today is approximately 88,9 % (final payment claims not included) and will certainly not reach 100 % after all the final payment claims are really disbursed. An important part of the Cohesion Policy programmes will therefore be de-committed, which will in turn have negative effects on the EU's economic, territorial and social cohesion;

37. is afraid that some aspects are likely to contribute to a new payment backlog in the second half of the MFF and therefore jeopardise or delay payments to all stakeholders. These include: the current payment ceiling will be further compressed from 2018 due to the offsetting following the mobilisation of the Contingency Margin in 2014; part of the payment appropriations of 2014 and 2015 are being used to pay the payment backlog from the past; the frontloading of EUR 2 billion in payments from the ESIF to Greece in 2015 and 2016 without an increase in payment appropriations and no reinforcement in payments has been foreseen within the framework of the additional commitments for migration;

38. expresses concern at the late adoption of the ESIF operational programmes and at the risk of the build-up of a new backlog of unpaid bills over the second half — and especially the end — of the MFF; therefore calls on the European Commission to present a payment plan for Cohesion Policy up to the end of the 2014-2020 programming period so as to ensure that sufficient funds are available to make payments to the Member States;

39. calls for abolishing the return of the surplus to the Member States' national budgets and the deduction from the following year's Member State contribution to the EU budget;

Budget focused on results and economic governance

40. notes that, when negotiating the present MFF, the institutions failed to properly assess possible consequences of unforeseen crises and that they should have introduced more flexibility into the MFF. One of the answers to this issue, along with greater flexibility, may be an evidence-based performance budgeting;

41. welcomes the European Commission's initiative to present the 'Budget focused on results' (BFOR), aimed at how the budget is spent, in which areas it is spent, how the spending is assessed and how the results are communicated, also in order to establish criteria for rewarding the Member States and regions that manage their resources most effectively;

42. calls for an improved financial reporting by the European Commission. This means in particular up-to-date reporting at regular intervals and in a standardised form on the relevant key figures for all MFF instruments/headings;

43. argues that EU spending should be more closely linked to the economic policy challenges of the Member States and to EU economic policy coordination; asks the European Commission to ensure a more effective link between EU resources and economic policy coordination in the EU in order to align investments more closely with economic, employment and fiscal policy requirements. This approach should be properly analysed in advance and in relation to its achievements in Cohesion Policy, in order to prevent regions and their citizens suffering as a result of the macroeconomic policies of Member States and bearing the consequences of actions at national level;

European added value

44. points out that the concept of European added value still needs to be properly discussed, taking the specific needs and interests of European regions and local authorities into consideration;

45. suggests that common evaluation standards be developed, to be used for measuring the European added value of operations co-financed from the EU budget, based on outputs. Subsidiarity should be a clear assessment criterion to evaluate such added value, as there are EU investments that due to their scale are better done via EU-wide programmes but others would have a better effect if they are managed locally or regionally. These standards, apart from comparing the additionality of different European programmes, could serve as a basis or a justification for future interventions, allocation of financial resources between programmes and better targeted policies; recommends that the European Commission consult the Committee of the Regions on this concept;

46. notes that the negotiations on the next MFF will see the reappearance of the never-ending battle between the Member States and the European Commission on the direct or shared management of programmes. Whilst the Member States mainly advocate national pre-allocations, since these are simpler to manage, local and regional needs and powers will have to be respected in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. On the other hand, only the strict application of the principle of additionality will lead to the achievement of European added value; concludes that the programmes under shared management have proved to be the right approach to combine these forces;

47. suggests that the scale of national co-financing rates be not only based on financing capacities of Member States but also on the level of economic development of the region in question and the contribution that EU expenditure makes to the Union's overarching aims or on its European added value: higher EU co-financing rates for European priorities and lower EU co-financing rates for mainly national priorities;

48. calls for better use to be made of macro-regional strategies and of European territorial cooperation, as a tool that enables functionally operational subnational entities to work together across administrative borders, and to meet the practical needs of European citizens and businesses.

The post-2020 MFF

Duration of the subsequent MFF

49. notes, in line with the CoR opinions on the MFF 2014-2020, adopted in 2011 ⁽⁶⁾ and 2012 ⁽⁷⁾, and on the EU Budget 2014 ⁽⁸⁾, the strong preference for a prolonged ten year budgetary period, with a compulsory substantial mid-term revision after the first five years;

50. is of the opinion that this option would fit the best with multiannual programming, since on the one hand it provides more stability and predictability, notably for programmes under shared management in the field of cohesion policy and rural development, while on the other there would be sufficient flexibility in the case of a mid-term revision;

51. notes that the preferred 5 + 5 years MFF period would fit perfectly into the mandates of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions, leading to an enhanced democratic legitimacy and accountability of the subsequent MFF;

Own resources

52. considers that the reform of own resources is essential for a democratic and accountable management of European funds and regrets that no significant progress has been made in this area;

53. calls for the introduction of new own resources in the next MFF, which would make GNI-based Member States' contributions to the EU budget largely unnecessary. This needs to be thought about as part of the MFF revision, in order to pave the way for the political endorsement of new own resources initiatives, in time for them to be applicable in the next MFF;

54. stresses the key importance of the High Level Group on Own Resources and calls for a proper involvement of national parliaments and local and regional authorities in the forthcoming discussions on new EU own resources;

Unity of the budget

55. calls for the current special instruments — such as the European Development Fund, the Emergency Aid Reserve, the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, European Union Solidarity Fund and the Flexibility instrument — to be incorporated into the MFF in order to guarantee the democratic legitimacy and accountability of the EU budget;

56. notes that the EU should focus on its real needs and not on the 1 % GNI ceiling, which is one of the main reasons why the Member States create satellite instruments outside the EU budget and beyond the democratic control of the European Parliament in order to tackle challenges that are unmanageable with such an under-financed budget;

⁽⁶⁾ CdR 283/2011 fin.

⁽⁷⁾ CDR1777-2012_00_00_TRA_AC.

⁽⁸⁾ See footnote 5.

Financial instruments

57. asks, before the European Commission presents its proposal for the next MFF, for a thorough analysis of the use of financial instruments in the current MFF. Although their unique role in leveraging private investments and creating growth and jobs cannot be denied, there are several areas in which their use is not as efficient because of the sheer lack of market opportunities;

58. underlines the need for striking the right balance between the traditional grants and innovative financial instruments. This means making greater use of financial instruments that prove useful in practice and suggesting alternatives where the opposite is the case. In general, the use of financial instruments should remain optional for the Member States, especially in the case of Cohesion Policy programmes. A suitable combination of grants with lower EU co-financing rates for mainly national priorities and higher EU co-financing rates for European and regional priorities, an enhanced use of efficient financial instruments and a focus on the European added value seem together to be remedies for how to make the EU budget effective, delivering more results with fewer resources;

Simplification of procedures

59. concludes that the crucial challenge for today's EU is not the lack of ideas or solutions, but the slowness and rigidity of decision-making. A simplification of procedures and a greater flexibility must therefore be the first aspect to be decided on when starting negotiations on the forthcoming MFF;

60. welcomes the public consultation on the revision of the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the Union and is willing to cooperate to formulate suggestions for simplification of procedures based on problems identified in the field;

Specific points

61. stresses the need for including GDP-complementing measures in the setting up of the new generation of European Structural and Investment Funds in the next multiannual financial period as pointed out in the recent CoR opinion on 'Indicators for territorial development — GDP and beyond';

62. considers that more attention should go in the next MFF to rural and local development, including the introduction of specific measures for sparsely-populated areas, because investment in local and rural programmes keeps the economic and social fabric alive and creates a proven multiplier effect by giving the regions a fundamental role in the management of investments. While evidence suggests that return on investment may be potentially higher in the periphery than in core regions, recalls that economic efficiency criteria alone are not sufficient to take decisions on the distribution of funding and that political and social criteria are indispensable. EU territorial cooperation programmes should also be put to better use and better integrated into overall cohesion policies because of their recognised added value to the development of a shared European identity;

63. wishes to draw attention to the importance of the LIFE programmes and its adequate funding in the new MFF. The LIFE programme constitutes an important instrument in helping to fund and mobilise local and regional environmental and climate policies and projects with a European added-value. LIFE projects have proven to have an important catalytic value in mobilising other EU funds;

64. considers that more attention needs to be paid to the consequences of demographic change in the European Union. In this regard requests the Commission to take advantage of the post-2020 MFF to tackle demographic challenges, considering the regional and local demographic situation and trends when designing new instruments and making policy decisions;

65. recalls, in that respect that there are no less than 20 separate EU instruments to fund Local Development in the EU Budget. The provisions on integrated Local Development and the Common Strategic Framework of the existing ESIF Regulations are clearly insufficient to avoid overlap and to really ensure integrated funding between the five ESI funds. Therefore we should explore the case for:

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- a simpler and more consolidated EU funding instrument that specifically targets territorial and local development,
 - better empowering local communities to develop their own place-based approaches,
 - reducing both the vertical layers of fund management and the existing horizontal silos at Commission and ministerial levels,
 - moving towards outcome-based performance reporting and lighter audit regime.

Brussels, 15 June 2016.

*The President
of the European Committee of the Regions*

Markku MARKKULA

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Food Waste

(2017/C 017/06)

Rapporteur: Ossi MARTIKAINEN (FI/ALDE)

Local councillor of Lapinlahti

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Introduction: overview of the global situation; terminology

1. regards food waste and waste generated in the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food as a serious global problem which significantly inhibits the achievement of economic, social and environmental development goals. The problem can only be addressed through broad and determined cooperation bringing together different levels of government and areas of policymaking. Civil society and businesses must be fully involved in measures;
2. regards as unsustainable the current situation ⁽¹⁾, in which:
 - fully one third of products intended for human consumption are lost at various stages of the production process (as raw materials, semi-finished products or finished products),
 - 28 % of global arable land (1,4 billion hectares) produces food every year that goes to waste,
 - the climate impact of unutilised products generated at various stages of the process amounts to 3,6 Gt of CO₂ equivalent (without taking into account emissions resulting from changes in land use),
 - wasteful production and consumption patterns entail substantial loss of global water resources, pose a threat to biodiversity in the form of arable land that has been unnecessarily cleared or is unproductive, impoverish the soil, and squander other finite natural resources,
 - the great volume of food lost along the production chain or at the finished product stage devalues agriculture and food production, and skews distribution between every player — also at the level of the consumer — in the food product value chain, with unfair results; the annual financial loss due to food waste is estimated at USD 1 trillion, the environmental cost at USD 700 billion and the social cost at USD 900 billion;
3. has drawn up this own-initiative opinion to support and encourage the entire international community, as well as the UN and its specialised agencies, in their endeavours to improve the current situation, namely, on achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) 2 and 12 (Zero hunger and Responsible consumption and production) which aims at halving food waste by 2030 ⁽²⁾;
4. believes that the initiatives of the European Commission relating to resource efficiency and the circular economy also provide a good opportunity to develop projects and legislation to improve the sustainability of food production and consumption;

⁽¹⁾ Figures used to represent the situation are based on the report of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) entitled *Food waste footprint — Impacts on natural resources* (2013).

⁽²⁾ SDG 12.3 (By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses) and SDG 12.5 (By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse) in particular call for programmes and measures developed jointly by the different levels of government. SDG 2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture) can be addressed by all local and regional authorities locally and internationally.

5. asks the European Commission to take action to develop standard terminology and definitions in this area at European level, and urges it to take part in and shape international dialogue and also to ensure that international observations and recommendations inform EU action. This would make it easier to identify the problems and draw comparisons, and to take the issues into account in the EU's own legislation and cooperation with its trading and development partners⁽³⁾. The EU is among other things an internal market and it has a common agricultural policy, and common concepts, procedures and comparable indicators are therefore needed. This could be the basis for establishing comparable criteria at regional level and interregionally for reducing and preventing the generation of food waste.

European Union policies

The European Committee of the Regions considers that the European Union's own policies and common policies with the Member States offer considerable potential for addressing the food waste problem.

6. The proposal for revision of the *Waste Directive* (Directive 2008/98/EC) signal an attempt to further reduce the generation of waste, including food waste.

7. As far as the *common agricultural policy* is concerned, more effort should be made to ensure that both resource-efficient food production and measures to protect nature and the environment are considered fields of activity in their own right. 'Farming for subsidy' and restricting production effort are practices that lead to low yields and crops remaining unharvested, which entails waste in terms of both the end result and the entire effort of production.

8. Both on the domestic market and in international trade, *trade and consumer policy* should promote contractual practices and processes that reduce waste. For instance, packaging sizes adopted by the retail trade and standards applying to the shape and size of food products result in significant waste of edible food; promoting the sale of bulk products involving the use of recyclable household containers and so reducing the cost for consumers can help to teach people to buy only what they need rather than set portions which are often over-sized or attractive because they are cheaper.

9. The food expiration practices and labelling made to promote *consumer protection and public health* are not fit for purpose in the case of all products, with the result that edible food is unnecessarily thrown away. The Commission has a key role to play in establishing whether it would be possible to draw up guidelines on better resource use, for instance with respect to donating food products to charities and food banks, and employing as fodder food that has passed its use by date, subject to compliance with food safety requirements. It is necessary to educate all stakeholders, producers, retailers and consumers to improve understanding of expiration date labels; for instance, it should be made clear that the 'best before' date does not mean that the food will become toxic after that date.

10. In its *development policy* the European Union must join forces with other major donors to secure regional economic and trade cooperation agreements, and to invest in processes that are better at linking production with consumers, in infrastructure and technology, and above all in sustainable development of the natural resources and agriculture sectors. Fair trade programmes, not least those supported by local and regional authorities, can be an important tool in this respect. It is important to enhance the functioning of local markets and access to them for local products, not least through the internalisation of external costs (e.g. transportation of food).

⁽³⁾ Different definitions and calculation methods can lead to different conclusions. For the FAO, *food loss* is the decrease in quantity or quality of food reflected in nutritional value, economic value or food safety of all food produced for human consumption but not eaten by humans, while *food waste* is part of food loss and refers to discarding or alternative (non-food) use of safe and nutritious food for human consumption all along food supply chains. (FAO, 2014) http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/save-food/PDF/FLW_Definition_and_Scope_2014.pdf. FUSIONS (2014) defines food waste (or 'food spill') as any food, and inedible parts of food, removed from the food supply chain unutilised.

11. Measures to provide *assistance to deprived people* should continue to include a food aid component and should improve the link between relief organisations and local producers, retailers and catering services, as well as providing for the sale of food products approaching their use-by date directly at a token cost and guaranteeing dignity and privacy for people receiving or buying products under these terms. Cooperation with the third sector should be based on proximity, with the focus on local networks and donations or home deliveries to individual towns or networks of towns, as far as possible avoiding storage and distribution of donations via major regional networks. The amount of food that goes to waste will be reduced by diversifying food products and including local and seasonal products in such programmes ⁽⁴⁾.

12. *Public procurement* rules could contain clauses aimed at reducing and preventing food waste.

Proposals for practical measures from the perspective of local and regional authorities

The European Committee of the Regions

13. reminds the European Commission of its past call for more specific objectives to be set for reducing food waste by 30 % by 2025 ⁽⁵⁾ and urges the Commission to develop uniform methodologies for data collection in order to review the food waste reduction targets;

14. welcomes the European Commission's commitment to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals through appropriate steps, the involvement of stakeholders, the sharing of valuable and successful innovation and relevant benchmarking ⁽⁶⁾;

15. urges the Commission to consider the possibility of setting individual reduction targets for every phase of the food production chain: production, processing, selling and distribution, catering services, households and food waste treatment. These targets could form an overarching common EU target, with country-specific programmes and targets being drawn up to achieve it, based on each country's characteristics in each of the phases mentioned, as has been done for example with climate change policy. In order to fully take into account the technical, economic and environmental context, country-specific programmes and plans would be drawn up by all levels of government in cooperation;

16. recommends that the European Commission set up a European platform bringing together different levels of government and relevant stakeholders for the purpose of preventing and reducing food waste and improving the ways in which food waste is managed; expresses its interest in being involved in activities relating to benchmarking of practical measures and promoting best practice;

17. calls on the European Commission to promote and encourage the creation of conventions between the retail food sector and charity associations in EU Member States (i.e. the initiative taken by France who recently passed a law preventing large shops from binning good quality food approaching its best-before date as well as from destroying unsold food fit for consumption). Food donation guides are also needed for industry and charities to clarify liability and encourage businesses to integrate redistribution mechanisms in their supply chain processes. Similar procedures should also be created in other parts of the food sector, such as catering and tourism services. Safety and public health concerns should be assessed in each area of application, using criteria tailored to these areas;

18. invites local and regional authorities, regarding foodstuffs withdrawn or removed from the primary distribution, to establish effective secondary distribution chains (like the model of social grocery stores) and guaranteeing access disadvantaged people to still usable food; recommends that financial support be granted for charities and food banks to increase their operating capacity;

19. draws also the attention to the fish discards which represents one of the important sources of food waste; invites the European Commission to envisage a comprehensive plan (recommendations/guidelines) for the processing and marketing of fish products originating from bycatch. Such a plan could include recommendations on how to use unwanted catch that is suitable for human consumption;

⁽⁴⁾ The CoR reiterates its position on the content of the FEAD Regulation.

⁽⁵⁾ CoR Resolution on Sustainable Food.

⁽⁶⁾ COM(2015) 614 final.

20. urges local and regional authorities that provide catering services to draw up their own programmes to prevent the production of food waste and for efficiently utilising the food waste that is produced. The Committee urges that companies commissioned to provide catering services to authorities be required to introduce the same measures ⁽⁷⁾;

21. stresses the importance of promoting the exchange of good practice on a wide scale. This should primarily involve promoting programmes supporting local consumption of products marketed by local producers through short supply chains and donations. Use of good practice can, through accumulated experience, promote the adoption of appropriate measures by providing local administrations with sufficient information to implement such development programmes, while encouraging administrations which have not yet made any progress in this regard;

22. recommends that as far as possible local and regional products and seasonal products be used as raw materials for catering services (including public catering services, tourist facilities and guest houses, restaurants and other establishments carrying out similar activities) and advocates lobbying on behalf of locally produced food to shorten the production and consumption chain, which reduces the number of processing stages and thus also the waste generated during the various phases;

23. recommends implementing codes of good practice in businesses in the food, catering and hotel sectors to aim to make optimal use of products so that excess food is used for social purposes, through effective distribution networks and with all the guarantees so it can be used by social entities and disadvantaged families;

24. encourages municipalities and local authorities delivering basic school education and other education services to include the issue of food waste and its mitigation as part of the curriculum, for instance through theme days, study visits and students learning how food is managed in their own institution, as well as for instance involving students and other catering service customers in developing catering services. It is important that as many schoolchildren and students as possible get an overall picture during their studies of the way food production and consumption affect the economy, the environment and socially and ethically sustainable consumer behaviour;

it is also important to carry out information and training campaigns on responsible consumption aimed at all consumers, not only schoolchildren, focusing particularly on buying products that meet actual needs and conserving these products;

25. advocates also including the reduction and prevention of food waste in lifelong learning programmes, in which learning methods and approaches geared to different age groups and life stages can be developed;

26. calls on municipalities and local authorities to mount campaigns in cooperation with civil society organisations to raise awareness of the importance of meal planning for households;

27. stresses the key role and commitment of regional civil society organisations and stakeholders which collect and redistribute food derived from food waste; with a view to subsidiarity, thinks there should be closer collaboration between local and regional administrations and welfare organisations responsible for collecting and redistributing food derived from food waste;

28. recommends that local and regional authorities responsible for waste management develop waste sorting and recycling schemes, indicate the proportion of food waste more clearly and make the data collected universally accessible, so as to help increase the level of recycling of food waste, for instance as biogas and compost. This could also have a positive effect on the local economy, employment and local innovation;

⁽⁷⁾ For instance, the EESC and CoR have their own eco-management rules and practical cooperation to recycle surplus food with the help of local organisations.

29. encourages all CoR members in their own local or regional authorities to publicise the objectives of this opinion and to implement their own food waste reduction and prevention programmes. This is one of the most efficient and rapidly effective methods that local and regional authorities can deploy directly to achieve ecologically and economically sustainable development.

Brussels, 15 June 2016.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Markku MARKKULA

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Combatting radicalisation and violent extremism: prevention mechanisms at local and regional level

(2017/C 017/07)

Rapporteur: Bart SOMERS (ALDE/BE) Mayor of Mechelen and Open VLD chairman in the Flemish Parliament

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

INTRODUCTION

1. welcomes the European Parliament's draft resolution on the prevention of violent radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations, and the opinions by the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Culture and Education;
2. stresses that efforts to combat terrorism and prevent the violent radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations remain essentially the responsibility of the Member States, but that local, European and international cooperation is also of crucial importance in addressing the issue effectively; is appalled by the most recent terror attacks carried out by radicalised and ruthless individuals and expresses its deepest sympathies to the victims and their friends and families; underlines that these events once more demonstrate the urgent need for European and international cooperation to fight violent radicalisation and international terrorism; is convinced that much stronger exchange of intelligence and cooperation between all levels of security and law enforcement services, but also between social actors, civil society and different levels of governance are necessary to defend the values of open, respectful, inclusive and diverse societies and to prevent violence;
3. stresses that any kind of parallel society model, in contradiction with these values, cannot be allowed or tolerated;
4. encourages European and national authorities to share intelligence as much as possible with local authorities, without endangering security;
5. considers it necessary to address the phenomenon of violent radicalisation, as it presents a threat to citizens in Europe as well as to Europe's universal values based on its cultural and humanist inheritance;
6. on this regard, underlines that living together requires educational efforts to ensure that democracy, the rule of law and the principle of dignity of the human person are shared by members of communities in the EU;
7. urges the Commission, the Member States, the local and regional authorities, as well as civil society and notably the scientific community to intensify their efforts and in particular their cross-country/cross-sector cooperation in order to investigate the root causes of violent radicalisation, the process and the various influences and factors leading to violent radicalisation, with a view to the development of tools for Member States and the EU to develop evidence-based policies;
8. points out that violent radicalisation is an international phenomenon and that lessons can be drawn from the experiences of many other parts of the world. Welcomes in this regard the creation of multi-disciplinary networks, such as the Strong Cities Network, and the expansion of existing ones, that aim to connect cities and other local authorities even more closely on an international basis to enhance local level approaches to prevent violent extremism. Underlines the need for an EU network to be developed to help achieve stronger EU local and regional collaboration on combatting radicalisation and violent extremism and terrorism; further encourages the Radicalisation Awareness Network and the Strategic Communications Network in continuing the development of effective preventive measures, especially by improving early detection of signs of radicalisation at local level, countering rhetoric through communication strategies and the development of robust rehabilitation programmes;

9. notes that Europe already has a number of tools to address the violent radicalisation of European citizens, and that the EU and its Member States should make full use of these tools and work to improve them in response to the challenges currently facing the EU and its Member States;

10. underlines the importance of action on causes to tackle radicalisation and the recruitment of terrorists, stepping up prevention, mainly by monitoring the internet and holding dialogue with faith-based communities and their leaders, as well as meetings, information days, awareness-raising activities and in general sensitising civil society to these issues;

11. in this connection, highlights the important role of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and the newly established centre of excellence, furthermore welcomes the progress achieved by The Netherlands Presidency of the Council of the European Union;

12. stresses that the RAN should make an extra effort to reach smaller cities and communities, enabling small entities to equally access the RAN;

Definition of the term radicalisation

13. calls on the European Commission to seek swift agreement on a common definition of the phenomenon of violent radicalisation, as a starting point for a more coordinated approach by the various countries and with the contribution of the regional and local authorities, also taking into account that each Member State's experience is deeply shaped by unique political, cultural, and legal elements;

14. In the absence of a commonly accepted definition of 'violent radicalisation', defines 'radicalisation' as a phenomenon of people who regard the use of violence as legitimate and/or use violence themselves in order to achieve their political objectives which undermine the democratic legal order and the fundamental rights on which it is based;

15. sees violent radicalisation as an ideological struggle in which radicalised individuals and groups want to violently overthrow the European model, which is based on human rights, freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief, rule of law, gender equality and non-discrimination, in favour of their own views which are incompatible with these values;

16. stresses that violent radicalisation is a complex and dynamic phenomenon based on a series of global, sociological, political, geopolitical and also personal factors, and cannot be viewed in isolation; also notes that a worrying recent trend seems to be that not only radicals of different persuasions are seeking to turn more individuals towards violence, but also that some groups are purposefully seeking to recruit individuals with a criminal past who have experience in using violence, for radicalism;

17. warns that recruitment to violent radicalism is increasingly taking place behind closed doors, in online communities/forums, where persuasive messages inciting violent ideologies proliferate and where they reach many who are vulnerable to such messages;

18. emphasises that this violent radicalisation does not correspond to one specific profile, but affects men, women, and particularly young European citizens of all social origins, who often share the common trait of feeling at odds with society due to conflicts of identity, alleged or genuine experiences of injustice, discrimination and social exclusion;

19. points out that in many cases they are European citizens who were born and educated in Europe but have still chosen a violent radical ideology;

20. warns that terrorism and violent radicalisation lead to much stereotyping of religions, which in turn is used to justify radicalisation from the other side, including neo-Nazi and neo-fascist movements, with ensuing upsurges in hate speech and hate crimes motivated by racism, xenophobia or other forms of intolerance of opinions, beliefs or religions;

21. notes that despite the fact that the main security concern reported by EU Member States is, quite rightly, the phenomenon of fundamentalists travelling to and from conflict zones, violent radicalisation is not limited to any one ideology or belief, but may occur within various ideologies and in the misapplication of any belief, and that efforts to combat violent radicalisation must therefore not focus solely on Islamic fundamentalist radicalisation;

22. emphasises that political commitment at all levels of governance is a key tool in addressing violent radicalisation; this also implies the need to learn from bad as well as from good experience in the past and to put the openness to cooperation with all the societal forces who can be of assistance, before political point-scoring;

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Human rights and diversity as a starting point

23. takes the view that human rights must be at the core of the Union's policies on counterterrorism and prevention of violent radicalisation;

24. calls for it to be ensured that all measures undertaken by the Member States and the EU to combat violent radicalisation fully respect fundamental rights and civil liberties, namely the right to private life, the right to data protection, the presumption of innocence, the right to a fair trial and due process, freedom of expression, freedom of conscience and freedom of association;

25. stresses that a society in which the human rights of all groups in the population are fully guaranteed and that complies with international and legal standards, including with regard to combatting discrimination and racism and other forms of intolerance, will play a central role in preventing and combatting violent radicalisation;

26. in this context, sees the European Union's democratic values as a way of ensuring the freedom of European citizens;

27. points out that it is important to remove factors that can provide fertile ground for violent radicalisation, starting with racism and discrimination. Although there is no one-to-one link between racism, discrimination and violent radicalisation, and racism and discrimination can be no excuse for violent radicalisation, a society in which everybody can participate actively can only be guaranteed if there is a consistent policy of equal opportunities and non-discrimination;

28. calls on the Commission to encourage the Member States and their local and regional authorities to pursue more active and more interventionist anti-discrimination policies, especially in education and in the labour and housing markets, inter alia, taking their cue from the policies already put in place by regions which have implemented integration measures, such as the distributed reception approach. To tackle the spread of radicalism, the priority objective should be to work for genuine social and cultural integration, based on a constructive dialogue between different groups and on education. To this end, all civil society players whose work is geared to this aim should be given every support and enabled to work in the most effective way;

29. points out that codes, sets of measures or good practice for relations between communities, ethnic groups, religions and politics must be established at the competent level (European, national or regional) and by groups of national and European citizens, allowing for deeper mutual understanding between people who may be involved in conflict or exposed to violent radicalisation. These were initially purely theoretical but can be put into practice with the support of regional, national and European authorities;

30. urges the Commission to support efforts in the Member States and the regional and local authorities to catch up with regard to diversity in the labour market in general;

31. calls on the EU Member States and their regional and local authorities to join forces with the EU institutions in promoting the European model as one in which the diversity of Europe is an essential element of its social structure and a key cultural asset. The European Union's fundamental rights that safeguard this diversity, such as freedom of expression, the rule of law and the separation of religion and state, must not under any circumstances be called into question, either by the totalitarian thinking of radical groups or as part of the steps taken to fight violent radicalisation;

32. calls for EU initiatives, in close cooperation with the Member States and the regional and local authorities, to tackle neighbourhoods and regions where various forms of organised crime are rife. These specific areas should be identified on the basis of consultations, and prioritised and given additional support on the basis of quantitative and qualitative criteria; illegal networks where money can be laundered and where the rule of law is undermined should be tackled effectively by the police and the judicial system. This will prevent the development of neighbourhoods where the rule of law is absent, where lawlessness and a lack of moral standards prevail, and where the foundations of democracy and the rule of law are no longer a visible part of people's social reality and individual lives. This vacuum gives extremist networks every opportunity to obtain financial resources from illegal activities, to recruit, and to undermine the legitimacy of democracy and the rule of law;

33. urges the Member States and the Commission to enforce compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals and their respective targets, in particular Goals 1, 4, 8, 11 and 16. Achievement of these Goals, to which all EU Member States are committed, could eliminate the main causes of radicalisation and extremism in Europe and the world. Bearing in mind that the SDGs also apply to the territory of the Community and that the human development of all the world's citizens is based on dignity, inclusion, resilience and sustainability. This path to sustainable human development is not simply a preventive measure against radicalisation and extremism but the way to ensure the human rights of all inhabitants of this finite planet;

34. highlights the importance of preventing the emergence of deprived non-diverse neighbourhoods dominated by one ethnic-cultural community. The European Commission should assist the Member States and the regional and local authorities in promoting social cohesion and inclusion as a tool in the prevention of violent radicalisation, and encourage Member States to make the necessary means available to take this work forward;

35. calls on the European Commission to provide the financial means enabling local authorities to identify and connect people and networks capable to produce a counter-narrative;

36. believes that it is important to develop a counter-narrative within the Muslim community and to mobilise those Muslims who reject the attempts by extremists to hijack their religion; calls on mayors to work with their local Muslim communities to develop such counter narrative;

37. urges that real opportunities be given to refugees and newly arrived migrants to get started in our society, and that they be advised on tailored naturalisation courses in each Member State, region and local authority, which could focus more actively on issues such as gender equality, the separation of religion and state, the importance of democracy and tolerance, the legal principles binding on every resident, accepted standards of behaviour in public places and their consequences for society, using practical examples, and in which knowledge of the national language is crucially important, not least as vehicle for values, know-how and shared identities;

38. urges the Commission to seriously address unemployment and school drop-out rates among ethnic minorities in cooperation with local and regional authorities, that are particularly affected by these issues, because these problems and the ensuing lack of prospects for young people can act as a major breeding ground for violent radicalisation;

39. encourages Member States and regional and local authorities to develop a policy approach in which the tools of social policy (including employment, education and training, integration and anti-discrimination), humanitarian aid and other policy areas are combined with specific measures in order to prevent and counter violent radicalisation;

The role of local and regional authorities

40. stresses that it is crucial for all stakeholders at European, national, regional and local levels to be aware of their responsibilities in preventing and combatting violent radicalisation;

41. highlights the crucial role played by local and regional authorities in preventing and combatting violent radicalisation, since they are the authorities first and hardest affected by this issue, and have the authority to cooperate with other stakeholders who have an important role in addressing this phenomenon;

42. points out that European funds must be allocated to European towns and regions and local and regional authorities urged to access these funds in order to implement projects and programmes to prevent violent radicalisation, campaigns to identify problems which are at the root of the conflicts, and awareness-raising activities;

43. is aware that the extent to which Member States assume responsibility for counteracting the risk of violent radicalisation and preventing recruitment by terrorist organisations can vary greatly from one Member State to another and that some of them have already taken effective measures, but that others are lagging behind;

44. agrees that there is a need to step up information sharing and operational cooperation and to make progress in curbing illicit firearms trafficking and the financing of terrorism. Also sees a need to introduce effective instruments to monitor the dark web, which is often used as a means of disseminating radical content, as well as to beef up external border controls on the basis of risk indicators;

45. asks the Commission to assist Member States in the coordination of their strategies, by sharing the information and experience gained by local and regional authorities, gathering good practices and skills, evaluating the measures taken, and working together to take new initiatives to combat violent radicalisation;

46. calls on the Commission to highlight the essential role of local authorities in preventing violent radicalisation and violent extremism, and to support this pivotal role by prioritising the establishment of a European framework for action to combat violent radicalisation at local, regional and national levels, which would give the Member States recommendations for (further) developing their own policy;

47. urges the Commission to focus on further collecting and publicising best practices in a workbook of guidelines of the kind already available, for example, from the RAN Centre of Excellence, in order to support local authorities — who often have limited capacities — in developing their own local approach;

48. considers it necessary for the Commission to support local and regional authorities in developing local and national prevention strategies to counter violent radicalisation, for example by providing experts from the RAN Centre of Excellence for the relevant authorities to consult; underlines the importance of exchange of experiences between local and regional authorities such as best-practices and lessons-learned;

49. believes that an integrated policy for tackling violent radicalisation comprises three strands: prevention (preventing violent radicalisation, for example by eliminating its breeding grounds), intervention (specialised mentoring for people who are at risk of violent radicalisation), and punishment (a decisive judicial response to the phenomenon of violent radicalisation);

50. considers it important for national regional and local authorities to invest in specific preventive and intervention measures to counter violent radicalisation, rather than pursuing a solely reactive, punitive policy; it is also important to fund research programmes to enable better understanding of the roots of radicalism and how to combat it;

51. considers civil society organisations and local stakeholders to have a significant role in developing projects to prevent and combat violent radicalisation that are tailored to their community or organisation and stresses the need for a participation and consultation-based approach involving multiple partners and sectors, as violent radicalisation is a multidisciplinary problem that requires multidisciplinary solutions; therefore encourages close cooperation between civil society stakeholders at all policy levels and closer cooperation between the parties working on the ground, such as associations and NGOs;

52. stresses the need for intercultural dialogue with the various communities, leaders and experts in order, in the first place, to gain a better understanding, and thus to improve the prevention of violent radicalisation;

53. considers civil society organisations and local stakeholders to have a significant role in developing projects to prevent and combat violent radicalisation that are tailored to their community or organisation;

54. in this respect, sees a clear need to provide specialised training for front-line and field workers so that they can recognise worrying changes in behaviour and act appropriately in supporting young people who are susceptible to violent radicalisation;

55. also considers it essential to provide specialised training for policymakers and politicians working in the various levels of government, to make them aware of the importance of effective preventive action and the need for collaborative communication on this issue;

56. urges the Commission to support Member States in conducting information campaigns to make young people and young adults more aware of the issue of violent radicalisation and to encourage them to think critically;

57. considers it necessary for each Member State to set up the necessary structures to detect radicalisation, to be responsible for strategic communication and counter-narratives adapted to the reality of each country and its people; to provide guidance and individual mentoring to persons who are at risk of becoming radicalised and to provide a contact point for reporting possible radicalisation and receive guidance on how to react to it, for families, friends, teachers and other contact-persons; such structures should be developed in close coordination between the European, the national, the local and regional levels;

58. considers it necessary for individual mentoring programmes to fit in properly with the life and environment of the individual being mentored, which makes it essential for local and regional authorities to be involved in developing these programmes alongside the social organisations dealing with this problem on the ground; feels, in this connection, that sporting cultural and educational events can provide a framework for breaking down barriers to integration;

59. notes that associations and organisations in this field that are free from government interference can obtain very good results in the social reintegration of citizens who are becoming radicalised;

60. believes that educational programmes should be promoted fostering critical thinking and intellectual openness and promoting the knowledge and principles on which democracy and the rule of law are based;

61. takes the view that supportive measures should also be provided to help returnees reintegrate into society following trial and release from prison; an effective strategy should also be developed for identifying and combatting radicalisation inside prisons;

62. points out that experts in the preventive areas of counter-radicalisation and in the treatment of radicalised inmates in prisons must act in coherence with the national security standards of each country. In this context, stresses the urgency of achieving an integrated and coordinated intervention space where prevention, counter-terrorism policies and staff working in prisons all act coherently in line with principles defined by clear security standards and models;

63. strongly urges the Commission to investigate how these individual mentoring programmes can be validated as a measure in the fight against violent radicalisation, thus ensuring that attention is focused not only on detecting violent radicalisation, but also on reintegrating people into society;

64. stresses the importance of combining individual deradicalisation programmes with measures such as establishing partnerships with community representatives, investing in social and neighbourhood projects to break down economic and geographical marginalisation, and running mentoring schemes for disaffected and excluded young people who are at risk of violent radicalisation;

65. stresses the importance of family support in the fight against violent radicalisation. Some experts suggest that there is often too much focus on working with the individuals instead of working with families. Families could help prevent radicalisation and help to reintegrate people who are becoming radicalised, including those returning from conflict areas, reconnected with society; urges therefore the Member States and their local and regional authorities to recognise the importance of this support and the need to assist families in this situation by developing appropriate programmes;

66. highlights that recent research indicates that more and more women are being radicalised and recruited by terrorist organisations, and believes that the EU and Member States should take at least some account of the gender dimension when developing strategies to prevent violent radicalisation; urges the Commission and the Member States, in cooperation with the regional and local authorities, to develop a more proactive policy of gender equality on the basis that it is a cornerstone of our European social model; calls in this connection for tougher preventive and punitive action against sexual intimidation and violence;

67. urges the Commission to provide support for general programmes to encourage young women in their struggle for greater equality;

68. considers it essential for an alert system to be set up in each Member State, in cooperation with the regional and local authorities, for support and guidance, so that acquaintances or family can quickly and easily make a report or get help if a person suddenly starts acting in a way that could indicate that they are becoming violently radicalised or leaves to join a terrorist organisation;

69. notes in this regard that 'hotlines' have been successful, but that a distinction should be made between lines for reporting violent radicalisation (tip lines) and those for supporting friends and families dealing with these disruptive situations (helplines);

70. calls on the Commission to examine whether it is possible to set up such a system in all European Member States;
71. finally, notes that these measures can only be implemented through long-term social investment programmes, strongly urges both the Commission and the Member States and the regional and local authorities to follow this vision in developing a policy for preventing and combatting violent radicalisation, and calls on the Commission to pay close attention, when developing measures to combat violent radicalisation, to the long-term impact that these measures could have on the future of Europe's inclusive and intercultural society.

Brussels, 16 June 2016.

*The President
of the European Committee of the Regions*
Markku MARKKULA

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — The EU response to the demographic challenge

(2017/C 017/08)

Rapporteur: Juan Vicente HERRERA CAMPO (ES/EPP), President of the Region of Castille and Leon

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

The demographic challenges facing the EU

1. states that demographic change is one of the major challenges facing the European Union. Its factors include an ageing population, a decline in the number of young people, and a lower birth rate. This means that demographic growth largely depends on migration, which varies widely between different regions of the EU. Imbalances are creating various challenges, both in areas suffering from depopulation and in major urban centres that are experiencing a population influx;

2. considers, however, that the contribution made by migration is only a short-term solution and will not be enough to resolve the problem of the falling birth rate. While migration provides more labour in the immediate term, it also increases the adult section of the population present in the EU and does not resolve the problem of the falling birth rate and the general ageing of that population;

3. points out that since 2000, Europe's population growth (around 0,5 % per year) has been very modest in comparison to the preceding 50 years. The population of 12 Member States shrank in 2014, while it grew in 16. There are major differences between eastern and western Europe and, albeit to a lesser extent, between the north and south. Regional disparities are frequently seen even within single Member States. In particular, the overall pattern is that urban areas have more growth than rural areas in most European countries. Remote rural areas right across the continent are facing demographic challenges. The recent economic crisis has aggravated these divergent trends at both European and national level, as well as the challenges of population loss at regional level;

4. stresses the need to take into account the projections to 2060 contained in the 2015 Ageing Report. The interplay of fertility, life expectancy and migration means that major shifts in the age structure of the EU population are to be expected. The ratio of the active to dependent population will move from 4 to 1 to around 2 to 1. Europe will not only be older in 2060; its population will also be very unequally distributed. The projections suggest major disparities between and within the Member States, with population loss in about half of them and population growth in the other half;

5. draws attention to the enormous economic, social, fiscal and environmental impact — at national, regional and local level — of demographic change. It affects the sustainability of pension systems and health systems and dictates the evolution of the welfare state, most powerfully due to the pressure on health care systems and social care services for the elderly and dependent persons. It also affects the development of the various regions of the EU and the maintenance of traditional ecosystems and infrastructure. The Committee points to the risks of depopulation of certain areas of the EU. Remote areas, for example, face specific geographic and demographic challenges due to mobility limitations. And while the characteristics of some areas or regions will mean that these changes will affect them later or to a lesser extent, it is indisputable that the effects will be felt across the entire EU;

6. underlines that these factors should be examined in the context of worldwide demographic change. In this respect, it warmly commends the OECD's efforts to gather comparative population data at local and regional level, enabling the context of demographic challenges to be understood more broadly, beyond their European dimension. Valid tools for understanding demographic challenges and gathering data on demographic changes could be demographic maps at EU level, meaning digital tools used for data mining and for mapping demographic indicators through GIS — geographic information system;

Regions' and cities' responses to demographic challenges

7. notes the various ways in which regions and cities are responding to demographic challenges:
- measures to promote production and employment, essential to tackle both increases and falls in population,
 - policies to support families as well as measures to balance work and family life, which can contribute to achieving higher birth rates,
 - through policies aimed at maintaining educational establishments in rural areas that are isolated,
 - actions to make it easier for young people to become autonomous and remain in their home region, matching qualifications with the needs of the labour market,
 - launching initiatives for the return of emigrants and the recovery of talent,
 - ensuring equal opportunities for women and men, and improving the integration of immigrants,
 - adapting health and social services to an ageing population, with particular focus on supporting independent living, on improving prevention and on coordination between services, in a climate of reduced resources and increasing demand,
 - adapting towns and cities to make them more liveable, particularly for the elderly and dependant people,
 - adapting transport policies and further specific measures to ensure mobility and increase interconnectivity in and among all regions, with innovative approaches such as 'transport on demand';
8. encourages European regions and cities to continue to address these problems, and also to seize the opportunities associated with demographic change, such as those related to the 'silver economy' for businesses and entities that devise and provide innovative products and services for older people, especially as it is precisely this potential that is exploited in the areas most affected by demographic change. Challenges also provide an opportunity to boost investment in human capital, to make better use of local resources, to institute more effective and efficient public services, and to come up with new ways to improve everyone's quality of life. The aim is to improve quality of life but also well-being, intended as the three-dimensional state of physical, mental and social well-being. Opportunities related to demographic change are also employment opportunities connected with services for the elderly (physical, digital, healthy lifestyles, etc.);
9. stresses the importance of the fact that the adjustments to service structures needed in regions with a shrinking population can be carried out in such a way that those who remain in these regions, who are often older people, have access to services in accordance with their basic rights. This will mean developing forms of service provision through vertical cooperation and initiatives between different levels and so ensuring that the local and regional level have the resources they need to adapt to demographic change;
10. is committed to continuing to support the European Covenant for Demographic Change initiative launched by AGE Platform Europe in close cooperation with WHO Europe and built on the AFE-INNOVNET project, a platform for local and regional authorities to promote the creation of environments designed for older people in areas such as health, social services, housing, information and communication technologies, and urban policy and mobility;
11. underlines the importance of European municipalities and regions as key actors in the implementation of European policies tackling the demographic challenge, in particular in setting up initiatives that build on diversity and promote an intercultural society. It is also necessary to work on the design of regional and local strategies to support the establishment of links between R & D centres, businesses and public bodies, promote business incubators, foster rural tourism, etc. in order to generate employment, with a view to making them more attractive to the working age population;

12. highlights the importance of cross-cutting cooperation in relation to demographic change. Territorial cooperation programmes have occasionally been geared towards this objective, particularly in response to ageing, the decline in rural areas, and (to a much lesser extent) aspects related to birth rates in connection with demographic change. The CoR welcomes frameworks for reflection and sharing best practices in this area, such as the Demographic Change Regions Network (DCRN), which has created an environment conducive to formulating joint initiatives and responses;

13. considers that the demographic change that Europe is experiencing is on such a large scale that if it is to be tackled, strong vertical cooperation initiatives are also required, which back up action taken at regional and local level by means of measures designed at national and supra-national level;

The EU's current response to demographic challenges

14. notes that the EU's current response to demographic challenges is limited and is poorly developed. It is limited because it focuses almost exclusively on ageing, while insufficient attention has been paid to other aspects such as low birth rates or population loss due to socioeconomic reasons, and to transport, mobility and emigration issues. It is poorly developed because many policies that could help address demographic challenges are not specifically geared to this end;

15. points out that the majority of initiatives to manage demographic challenges — almost always focused on ageing — have been driven by innovation and research policies. The flagship Innovation Union initiative under the Europe 2020 strategy has given rise to the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing. The third pillar of the Horizon 2020 programme considers demographic change as a societal challenge. The More Years, Better Lives JPI, the KIC on Innovation for Healthy Living and Active Ageing, and the Ambient Assisted Living programme are other examples;

16. emphasises that the 'second pillar' of the common agricultural policy (CAP), which deals with rural development, helps to tackle demographic challenges. During the 2014-2020 programming period, efforts are being focused on encouraging 'the development of services and infrastructure leading to social inclusion and reversing trends of social and economic decline and depopulation of rural areas'. The ageing of the population is a major concern in rural areas, which is why the CAP is promoting generational renewal and women's employment;

17. indicates that cohesion policy should play a more vigorous role in tackling demographic challenges, in accordance with the explicit mandate of Article 174 TFEU. This Article stipulates that 'particular attention shall be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions.' Similarly, Article 175 TFEU stipulates that the objectives set out in the preceding article must be taken into account when formulating and implementing the Union's policies and actions; that their achievement must be supported by the Structural Funds, the EIB and other financial instruments. It adds that other specific actions might prove necessary. To date, however, these provisions have not been sufficiently implemented, while positive action measures corresponding to demographic handicaps have not been adopted;

18. regrets that many European policies that could contribute to tackling demographic challenges do not contain specific measures to assist areas affected by these challenges. This is true of policies relating to transport, the information society, employment and social policy, the environment and climate, business, etc.;

19. regrets that more attention is not paid to demographic problems under the European Semester, as it has hitherto considered only the effects of ageing on the sustainability of Member States' budgets. In particular, more sensitivity is needed to local and regional concerns, both in terms of evaluation and when formulating recommendations for Member States;

A fitting EU response to demographic challenges

20. believes that the EU's response to demographic change should be broad, coordinated and integrated, as this is a cross-cutting issue. A European strategy on demographic change is needed, which will bring all policies — cohesion, innovation, transport, health, society and employment, ITC, rural development, emigration, etc. — more into tune with this issue. This strategy should have a firm basis in common EU values, equal treatment and human rights. A strategic approach should also involve cost-analysis and projections at national, regional and local level;

21. recalls that the European Parliament, in its resolution of 9 September 2015 on the Report on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations ⁽¹⁾, called on the Commission 'to adopt an EU Strategy on Demographic Change to coordinate EU action in various areas in order to ensure synergies and maximise their positive impact on Europe's citizens, economy and job creation, as well as protect the human rights of older persons in all EU policies';

22. considers that such a strategy should prioritise the creation of life sustaining and creating opportunities to help to attract and retain young people in all regions and to foster balanced growth between densely populated areas, areas experiencing population loss and thinly populated areas, focusing on the provision of high quality public services for all citizens. It should also promote family-friendly policies, in particular measures to remove barriers that discourage parenthood; increase the birth rate; incorporate a gender-related perspective; encourage independent living for older people; increase healthy life expectancy and reduce dependency; combat the social exclusion faced by some of the population and promote renewed efforts to support the recognition of unpaid domestic work and the implementation of policies to balance work and family life;

23. indicates that a future European strategy should involve society as a whole and give due consideration to the role of regional and local government in combating demographic change, promote mutual exchange of best practice and encourage approaches based on prevention and early intervention;

24. is committed to highlighting the importance of a response at European level to demographic challenges via the ESPAS system, a platform for political planning involving the various EU institutions and bodies. The platform could exploit the experience of many networks at EU level which deal with healthy ageing issues, such as the WHO Healthy Ageing Task Force, the Age-Friendly Cities Network, European Covenant on Demographic Change, the AFE-INNOVNET, AGE Platform Europe;

25. insists that all EU policies and measures should take demographic challenges into consideration and set out ways to deal with them. The EU should seek to mainstream demographic considerations across all policy areas. The EU should also consider this when drawing up future multi-annual financial frameworks, should include budget headings that aim to enable the further development of these policies and measures, and should set up priority measures for regions that are particularly affected by the consequences of demographic change. Reference should be made here to the NUTS 3 classification system;

26. underlines that demographic change is affecting mobility in demographically challenged regions, particularly rural areas close to major urban areas experiencing a population influx, and reiterates its call for a Green Paper on the issue ⁽²⁾;

27. considers that the EU should support immigration policies in the Member States, mainly based on employment, which can temper the negative demographic trends mentioned above and points to the need for a long-term vision for the integration of migrants, thereby helping to develop an intercultural society that respects fundamental European values. To this effect, the important role of local and regional authorities is highlighted, and they must be fully empowered to successfully implement integration policies on the ground, including in small rural municipalities;

⁽¹⁾ 2014/2255(INI), point 41.

⁽²⁾ CDR 1691/2014: Mobility in geographically and demographically challenged regions.

28. points out that ageing demographics and combined public funding pressures mean that local authorities will have to prepare for an ageing workforce, plan for large numbers of people to retire over the next few years, and ensure that they can attract sufficient young, skilled professionals. The recruitment and retention of younger people and of returning emigrants and older people requires more attention at all levels of government;

29. considers that cohesion policy should have a strong focus on tackling the demographic challenge. This is an issue that should be emphasised in discussions on the future of the 'post-2020 policy' and that should influence its scope, approach and future implementation mechanisms so as to enable the strengths of each region to be harnessed and barriers (including demographic barriers) to their balanced development to be overcome. It regrets that this aspect has not hitherto been sufficiently developed, despite the fact that the Treaty of Lisbon incorporated a territorial dimension into this policy;

30. considers that housing and planning services delivered by regional and local authorities must also take into account the housing needs of elderly people, respecting, as far as possible, their wish to remain in their familiar environment, and having a role in relation to modification or adaptation of existing accommodation, promoting the development of inclusive design in construction practice or carrying out social housing projects when available resources permit;

31. calls on the European institutions to provide a precise definition of the term 'severe and permanent demographic handicaps' in Article 174 TFEU. And also calls on the EU to develop statistical indicators at an appropriate level to back up this definition;

32. recalls that the CoR opinion on 'Indicators for territorial development — GDP and beyond' ⁽³⁾ notes that GDP is not an accurate measure of a society's ability to tackle issues that concern it, such as demographic change, and calls for the establishment of international, national, local and regional indices to measure progress beyond GDP. In view of this, if it is decided to consider other indicators in addition to GDP, it would also be useful to explore introducing indicators which can assess the demographic situation of a country, region or specific area;

33. also calls for cohesion policy to provide specific instruments for areas that are most affected by demographic challenges, such as a higher weighting for demographic criteria in the method used for allocating funding or greater flexibility with regard to co-financing rates or choosing thematic objectives. Reiterates, in this regard, what was stated in its opinion on 'The demographic future of Europe', that is, that support for regions experiencing the most difficulties is 'an appropriate way of tackling demographic change throughout Europe' ⁽⁴⁾;

34. stresses that the European Regional Development Fund can help areas with high levels of ageing, rurality and population outflow to improve their transport, telecommunications and tourism infrastructure, bridge the digital divide, and enjoy better public services and support the adaptation of housing and residential accommodation, among other goals;

35. considers that the European Social Fund can play a very important role in relation to training young people, stopping so many of them leaving, and making it easier for them to return to their place of origin. It can also help to promote women's employability, foster a better balance between work and family life, and combat the social exclusion of the elderly;

36. considers it essential to enhance cooperation between regional and local actors on issues related to demographic change. It therefore suggests that the European territorial cooperation programme should include the option — at cross-border level as well as at transnational and inter-regional level — of forming consortia to work together to solve demographic challenges;

37. underlines, with regard to transport policy, the importance of not isolating demographically less active areas, as well as regions suffering from severe natural or demographic handicaps, so as to stop these areas — which are often rural, peripheral, mountainous and remote — from being further excluded;

⁽³⁾ CDR 4287/2015.

⁽⁴⁾ CDR 341/2006 fin, point 26.

38. notes that the CoR opinion on Mobility in geographically and demographically challenged regions⁽⁵⁾ states that challenged regions fulfil essential tasks for the balanced development of the EU notably through access to raw materials, agriculture, fisheries, environmental protection, tourism, cross-border relations and leisure opportunities. Improved transport links both within these regions and with the rest of the EU should therefore be an essential component of both the EU's Cohesion Policy and the EU's mobility policies, not only for passengers but also for freight. Promoting greater economic growth in challenged regions would contribute to the effective functioning of the internal market and the territorial cohesion of the Union as a whole;
39. stresses the key role that information and communication technologies and intelligent environments can play in improving living conditions in areas most affected by demographic challenges. In this respect, calls on the EU to consider the digital divide affecting many of these areas;
40. urges the European institutions to acknowledge — in policies relating to the environment and the fight against climate change — the key role of many rural and sparsely populated areas, as well as areas with highly dispersed populations, in maintaining the rural environment, biodiversity and landscapes;
41. encourages the CAP to continue to incorporate measures to foster generational renewal in rural areas, promote female employment and enhance economic diversification and insists on the need to improve the methodology of Leader, increasing the participation of stakeholders from rural areas as well as drawing up and implementing integrated development strategies;
42. calls on potential demographic effects to be included in the Better Regulation programme's impact assessments, undertaken prior to any legislative initiative;
43. considers that the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) has the potential to be an important tool for promoting investment in EU priority areas such as energy, transport, intermodal logistics, tourism, culture, information and communication technology, research and innovation, SMEs, education, health, environmental efficiency, social infrastructure and the social and solidarity economy, as stated in article 9 of the Regulation on the EFSI⁽⁶⁾. It would be desirable for the EFSI to also benefit regions with lower demographic trends, thus helping to prevent regional divisions;
44. recommends that the Europe 2020 strategy should be more attentive to local and regional demographic challenges, by means of a flagship initiative on demographic issues. Is committed to including a specific mention of the approach to demographic issues in the Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform;
45. emphasises the link that must exist between demographic change and the European Semester, and stresses the fact that the latter must have a territorial dimension. Local and regional authorities should be active participants in measures taken under the European Semester to tackle demographic challenges, and recommendations made to Member States to address these challenges should take local and regional authorities into account;
46. considers that ageing, while undoubtedly a challenge, is also an achievement in the sense that advances of all kinds by European society are an opportunity for cohesion, employment and progress;
47. concludes that as the EU moves towards a scenario as described above, it is essential to continue to raise awareness at all levels of the significance of demographic challenges and to take steps in the right direction on the basis of existing tools.

Brussels, 16 June 2016.

*The President
of the European Committee of the Regions*
Markku MARKKULA

⁽⁵⁾ See footnote 2.

⁽⁶⁾ Regulation (EU) 2015/1017 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 June 2015 on the European Fund for Strategic Investments, the European Investment Advisory Hub and the European Investment Project Portal and amending Regulations (EU) No 1291/2013 and (EU) No 1316/2013 — the European Fund for Strategic Investments (OJ L 169, 1.7.2015, p. 1).

III

(Preparatory acts)

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

118TH PLENARY SESSION, 15-16 JUNE 2016

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Legislative proposals amending waste directives

(2017/C 017/09)

Rapporteur:	Domenico GAMBACORTA (IT/EPP), President of the Province of Avellino
Reference documents:	Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directives 2000/53/EC on end-of-life vehicles, 2006/66/EC on batteries and accumulators and waste batteries and accumulators, and 2012/19/EU on waste electrical and electronic equipment
	COM(2015) 593 final — 2015/0272 (COD)
	Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 1999/31/EC on the landfill of waste
	COM(2015) 594 final — 2015/0274 (COD)
	Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste
	COM(2015) 595 final — 2015/0275 (COD)
	Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste
	COM(2015) 596 final — 2015/0276 (COD)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMENDMENTS**Amendment 1**

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directives 2000/53/EC on end-of-life vehicles, 2006/66/EC on batteries and accumulators and waste batteries and accumulators, and 2012/19/EU on waste electrical and electronic equipment, COM(2015) 593 final — 2015/0272 (COD).

Article 2

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
Amendment of Directive 2006/66/EC	Amendment of Directive 2006/66/EC
Directive 2006/66/EC is amended as follows:	Directive 2006/66/EC is amended as follows:

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>(1) Article 22 is deleted;</p> <p>(2) Article 23 is amended as follows:</p> <p>(a) paragraph 1 is replaced by the following: ‘The Commission shall draw up a report on the implementation of this Directive and its impact on the environment and the functioning of the internal market by the end of 2016 at the latest.’;</p> <p>(b) in paragraph 2, the introductory phrase is replaced by the following: ‘In its report, the Commission shall include an evaluation on the following aspects of this Directive.’</p>	<p>(1) in Article 2 (Scope), the following paragraph 3 is added: ‘3. This Directive shall not apply to batteries and accumulators whose energy storage contains no metals or their compounds as active materials or as electrode materials and which also do not contain any hazardous substances.’;</p> <p>(2) Article 22 is deleted;</p> <p>(3) Article 23 is amended as follows:</p> <p>(a) paragraph 1 is replaced by the following: ‘The Commission shall draw up a report on the implementation of this Directive and its impact on the environment and the functioning of the internal market by the end of 2016 at the latest.’;</p> <p>(b) in paragraph 2, the introductory phrase is replaced by the following: ‘In its report, the Commission shall include an evaluation on the following aspects of this Directive.’</p>

Reason

The primary objective of this Directive is to minimise the negative impact of batteries on the environment by avoiding hazardous substances (heavy metals) release into the environment. It establishes rules for the market placement of batteries and their special disposal.

Member States promote research into environmentally friendly and cost-effective recycling methods for all types of batteries and accumulators. Organic batteries are a new generation of batteries that do not contain hazardous materials. Research and Innovation activities are carried out all over Europe. In addition to the environmentally safe components, the batteries have an enormous economic potential and a broad range of application.

Without the proposed amendment, organic batteries will be subject to the special disposal requirements for conventional batteries, although they are environmentally friendly. This would be an obstacle to technological innovation supporting the environmental objectives and would also prevent this innovation from contributing to growth and jobs for Europe. Therefore, organic batteries should be excluded from the scope of the Directive.

Amendment 2

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 1999/31/EC on the landfill of waste, COM(2015) 594 final — 2015/0274 (COD)

Article 1 (6)

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>(6) Article 15 is replaced by the following:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">‘Article 15</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Reporting</p>	<p>(6) Article 15 is replaced by the following:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">‘Article 15</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Reporting</p>

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>1. Member States shall report the data concerning the implementation of Article 5(2) and (5) for each calendar year to the Commission. They shall report this data electronically within 18 months of the end of the reporting year for which the data are collected. The data shall be reported in the format established by the Commission in accordance with paragraph 5. The first reporting shall cover the data for the period from 1 January [enter year of transposition of this Directive + 1 year] to 31 December [enter year of transposition of this Directive + 1 year].</p> <p>2. Member States shall report the data concerning the implementation of the targets laid down in Article 5(2) until 1 January 2025.</p> <p>3. The data reported by the Member State in accordance with this Article shall be accompanied by a quality check report.</p> <p>4. The Commission shall review the data reported in accordance with this Article and publish a report on the results of its review. The report shall cover an assessment of the organisation of the data collection, the sources of data and the methodology used in Member States as well as the completeness, reliability, timeliness and consistency of that data. The assessment may include specific recommendations for improvement. The report shall be drawn up every three years.</p> <p>5. The Commission shall adopt implementing acts laying down the format for reporting data in accordance with paragraph 1. Those implementing acts shall be adopted in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 17(2) of this Directive.'</p>	<p>1. Member States shall report the data concerning the implementation of Article 5(2) and (5) for each calendar year to the Commission. They shall report this data electronically within 18 months of the end of the reporting year for which the data are collected. The data shall be reported in the format established by the Commission in accordance with paragraph 5. The first reporting shall cover the data for the period from 1 January [enter year of transposition of this Directive + 1 year] to 31 December [enter year of transposition of this Directive + 1 year].</p> <p>2. Member States shall report the data concerning the implementation of the targets laid down in Article 5(2) until 1 January 2025.</p> <p>3. The data reported by the Member State in accordance with this Article shall be accompanied by a quality check report.</p> <p>4. The Commission shall review the data reported in accordance with this Article and publish a report on the results of its review. The report shall cover an assessment of the organisation of the data collection, the sources of data and the methodology used in Member States as well as the completeness, reliability, timeliness and consistency of that data. The assessment may include specific recommendations for improvement.</p> <p>5. The Commission shall adopt implementing acts laying down the format for reporting data in accordance with paragraph 1. Those implementing acts shall be adopted in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 17(2) of this Directive.</p> <p>6. Wherever feasible, and in line with the principle of Better Regulation, any additional reporting obligation originated from this Directive should be primarily carried out by the use or improvement of existing national reporting obligations, as long as it can be guaranteed that the information provided about waste will be standardised as is required. Creating new reporting lines exclusively to comply with this directive should be the last resort, particularly concerning local and regional authorities. Member States and the Commission shall jointly assess additional reporting needs before Member States introduce implementing rules to comply with this Directive's reporting obligations.'</p>

Reason

This is in line with the EU Better Regulation package and the recent CoR opinion on Implementing EU Environmental obligations. The information should be standardised in order to be able to compare it when adopting measures to improve waste management.

Amendment 3

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste, COM (2015) 595 final — 2015/0275 (COD)

Article 1(8)

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
8) The following Article 8a is inserted:	(8) The following Article 8a is inserted:
<i>Article 8a</i>	<i>Article 8a</i>
General requirements for extended producer responsibility schemes	General requirements for extended producer responsibility schemes
[...]	[...]
<p>2. Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the waste holders targeted by the extended producer responsibility schemes established in accordance with Article 8, paragraph 1, are informed about the available waste collection systems and the prevention of littering. Member States shall also take measures to create incentives for the waste holders to take part in the separate collection systems in place, notably through economic incentives or regulations, when appropriate.</p>	<p>2. Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the waste holders targeted by the extended producer responsibility schemes established in accordance with Article 8, paragraph 1, are informed about the available take back systems, recognised reuse centres, permitted preparation for reuse centres and waste collection systems and about the prevention of waste and littering. Member States shall also take measures to create incentives for the waste holders, producers and retailers to take part in the separate collection systems in place, notably through economic incentives or regulations, when appropriate.</p>
<p>3. Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that any organisation set up to implement extended producer responsibility obligations on behalf of a producer of products:</p>	<p>3. Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that any organisation set up to implement extended producer responsibility obligations on behalf of a producer of products:</p>
(a) has a clearly defined geographical, product and material coverage;	(a) has a clearly defined geographical, product and material coverage;
(b) has the necessary operational and financial means to meet its extended producer responsibility obligations;	(b) has the necessary operational and financial means to meet its extended producer responsibility obligations;
(c) puts in place an adequate self-control mechanism, supported by regular independent audits to appraise:	(c) puts in place an adequate self-control mechanism and a definition of the minimum requirements for assessing extended producer responsibility , supported by regular independent audits to appraise:
<p>— the organisation's financial management, including the compliance with the requirements laid down in paragraph 4(a) and (b);</p>	<p>— the organisation's financial management, including the compliance with the requirements laid down in paragraph 4(a) and (b);</p>
<p>— the quality of data collected and reported in accordance with paragraph 1, third indent, and the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 1013/2006.</p>	<p>— the quality of data collected and reported in accordance with paragraph 1, third indent, and the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 1013/2006.</p>

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>(d) makes publicly available the information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — its ownership and membership; — the financial contributions paid by the producers; — the selection procedure for waste management operators. <p>4. Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the financial contributions paid by the producer to comply with its extended producer responsibility obligations:</p> <p>(a) cover the entire cost of waste management for the products it puts on the Union market, including all the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — costs of separate collection, sorting and treatment operations required to meet the waste management targets referred to in paragraph 1, second indent, taking into account the revenues from re-use or sales of secondary raw material from their products; — costs of providing adequate information to waste holders in accordance with paragraph 2 — costs of data gathering and reporting in accordance with paragraph 1, third indent. 	<p>(d) makes publicly available the information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — its ownership and membership; — the financial contributions paid by the producers; — the selection procedure for waste management operators. <p>4. Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the financial contributions paid by the producer to comply with its extended producer responsibility obligations:</p> <p>(a) cover the entire cost of <i>end-of-life and</i> waste management for the products it puts on the Union market, including all the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — <i>cost of take-back systems for used products</i> — <i>cost of reuse systems</i> — costs of separate collection <i>and transport to sorting and treatment plants including transport from islands or isolated areas whenever feasible</i>, sorting and treatment operations required to meet the waste management targets referred to in paragraph 1, second indent, taking into account the revenues from re-use or sales of secondary raw material from their products; — costs of providing adequate information to waste holders in accordance with paragraph 2; — <i>cost of collection and treatment of non-separately collected waste from the products it puts on the Union market which are collected and treated as a part of the residual waste stream or which end up as litter and are collected and treated by the competent authorities;</i> — <i>any ancillary costs that need to be met by municipal or other public authorities having the ultimate responsibility for waste collection, particularly in the event that extended producer responsibility schemes are not fulfilling their tasks;</i> — costs of data gathering and reporting in accordance with paragraph 1, third indent.

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>b) are modulated on the basis of the real end-of-life cost of individual products or groups of similar products, notably by taking into account their re-usability and recyclability;</p> <p>(c) are based on the optimised cost of the services provided in cases where public waste management operators are responsible for implementing operational tasks on behalf of the extended producer responsibility scheme.</p> <p>5. Member States shall establish an adequate monitoring and enforcement framework with the view to ensure that the producers of products are implementing their extended producer responsibility obligations, the financial means are properly used, and all actors involved in the implementation of the scheme report reliable data.</p> <p>Where, in the territory of a Member State, multiple organisations implement extended producer responsibility obligations on behalf of the producers, Member State shall establish an independent authority to oversee the implementation of extended producer responsibility obligations.</p> <p>6. Member States shall establish a platform to ensure a regular dialogue between the stakeholders involved in the implementation of extended producer responsibility, including private or public waste operators, local authorities and, where applicable, recognised preparation for re-use operators.'</p> <p>[...]</p>	<p>(b) are modulated on the basis of the real end-of-life cost of individual products or groups of similar products, notably by taking into account their re-usability and recyclability;</p> <p>(c) are based on the optimised cost of the services provided in cases where public waste management operators are responsible for implementing operational tasks on behalf of the extended producer responsibility scheme.</p> <p>5. Member States shall establish an adequate monitoring and enforcement framework with the view to ensure that the producers of products are implementing their extended producer responsibility obligations, the financial means are properly used, and all actors involved in the implementation of the scheme report reliable data.</p> <p>Where, in the territory of a Member State, multiple organisations implement extended producer responsibility obligations on behalf of producers of the same product type, the Member State, or competent subnational authorities, shall establish an independent authority (a clearing house) to oversee the implementation of extended producer responsibility obligations.</p> <p>6. Member States shall ensure that extended producer responsibility schemes contribute to litter prevention and collection, and support clean-up initiatives.</p> <p>7. Member States shall establish a platform to ensure a regular dialogue between the stakeholders involved in the implementation of extended producer responsibility, including private or public waste operators, local authorities and, where applicable, permitted re-use and preparation for re-use operators.'</p> <p>[...]</p>

Reason

EU rules should enable full producer responsibility for waste generated. Given the EU-wide scale of the market this must be ensured by common minimum criteria. In keeping with subsidiarity EPR should be defined nationally/locally.

Amendment 4

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste, COM (2015) 595 final — 2015/0275 (COD)

Article 1(9)

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>(9) Article 9 is replaced by the following:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>'Article 9</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Prevention of waste</p> <p>1. [...]</p> <p>2. Member States shall monitor and assess the implementation of the waste prevention measures. For that purpose, they shall use appropriate qualitative or quantitative indicators and targets, notably on the per capita quantity of municipal waste that is disposed of or subject to energy recovery.</p> <p>[...]</p>	<p>(9) Article 9 is replaced by the following:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>'Article 9</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Prevention of waste</p> <p>1. [...]</p> <p>2. Member States shall monitor and assess the implementation of the waste prevention measures. For that purpose, they shall use appropriate qualitative or quantitative indicators and absolute targets notably on the per capita quantity of municipal waste that is disposed of or subject to energy recovery.</p> <p>[...]</p>

Reason

The indicators should be based on the quantity of waste generated, like 100 kg residual waste per capita, to create a representative and effective target, also for countries with small economies and/or that are producing less waste already.

Amendment 5

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste, COM (2015) 595 final — 2015/0275 (COD)

Article 1(10)(a)

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>(10) Article 11 is amended as follows:</p> <p>(a) in paragraph 1, the first and second subparagraphs are replaced by the following:</p> <p>'1. Member States shall take measures, as appropriate, to promote preparing for re-use activities, notably by encouraging the establishment of and support for re-use and repair networks and by facilitating the access of such networks to waste collection points, and by promoting the use of economic instruments, procurement criteria, quantitative objectives or other measures.</p>	<p>(10) Article 11 is amended as follows:</p> <p>(a) in paragraph 1, the first and second subparagraphs are replaced by the following:</p> <p>'1. Member States shall take measures, as appropriate, to promote preparing for re-use activities, notably by encouraging the establishment of and support for re-use and repair networks, and by facilitating the access of such networks to waste collection points, or by creating pre-determined waste for re-use collection points, and by promoting the use of economic instruments, procurement criteria, quantitative objectives or other measures.</p>

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>Member States shall take measures to promote high quality recycling and, to this end, shall set up separate collection of waste where technically, environmentally and economically practicable and appropriate to meet the necessary quality standards for the relevant recycling sectors and to attain the targets set out in paragraph 2.'</p>	<p>Member States shall take measures to promote high quality recycling and, to this end, shall set up separate collection of waste where technically, environmentally and economically practicable and appropriate to meet the necessary quality standards for the relevant recycling sectors and to attain the targets set out in paragraph 2.</p> <p><i>In line with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality and the EU Better Regulation principles Member States shall carry out an assessment, building on the Impact Assessment that accompanies this Directive, of the impact of the targets proposed by this Directive at local and regional level, particularly when these tiers of government are the ones responsible for waste management. The Commission will use the findings as evidence to apply early warning and flexibility in the implementation of this Directive, as stipulated in articles 15 and 16 and Chapter V.'</i></p>

Reason

The new Directive foresees a range of mechanisms to address the issue of under and non-compliance, but also to encourage progress. However in most cases insufficient understanding at EU level of the regional and local responsibilities of waste result in underachievement EU targets.

Amendment 6

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste, COM (2015) 595 final — 2015/0275 (COD)

Article 1(10)(c)

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>(c) in paragraph 2, point (b) is replaced by the following:</p> <p>'(b) by 2020, the preparing for re-use, recycling and backfilling of non-hazardous construction and demolition waste excluding naturally occurring material defined in category 17 05 04 in the list of waste shall be increased to a minimum of 70 % by weight;'</p>	<p>(c) in paragraph 2, point (b) is replaced by the following:</p> <p>'(b) by 2020, the preparing for re-use, recycling and backfilling of non-hazardous construction and demolition waste excluding naturally occurring material defined in category 17 05 04 in the list of waste shall be increased to a minimum of 70 % by weight.</p> <p><i>The Commission shall assess the management of this waste stream and consider whether recycling targets for specific construction materials to be met by 2025 and 2030 should be set by 2020;'</i></p>

Reason

The measures proposed for non-hazardous construction and demolition waste, which make up a significant proportion of all waste, are insufficiently ambitious in this respect. Rather than the present combined target for preparing for reuse, recycling and backfilling, we would propose that — at least as a general approach — specific targets be set for recycling of specific construction materials, in order to work towards a circular economy.

Amendment 7

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste, COM (2015) 595 final — 2015/0275 (COD)

Article 1(10)(d)

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
(d) in paragraph 2, the following points (c) and (d) are added: '(c) by 2025, the preparing for re-use and the recycling of municipal waste shall be increased to a minimum of 60 % by weight; (d) by 2030, the preparing for re-use and the recycling of municipal waste shall be increased to a minimum of 65 % by weight.'	(d) in paragraph 2, the following points (c) and (d) are added: '(c) by 2025, the preparing for re-use and the recycling of municipal waste shall be increased to a minimum of 60 % by weight; (d) by 2030, the preparing for re-use and the recycling of municipal waste shall be increased to a minimum of 70 % by weight.'

Reason

Keeping to the 70 % target, as proposed last year by the European Commission, is a missed opportunity as recycling creates local jobs and produces fewer emissions than does landfilling or incineration. The CoR has already pointed out that the good results achieved in some Member States and some regions demonstrate that it is possible to reach or come close to ambitious targets, when the overall conditions are right and the necessary administrative capacity has been put in place ⁽¹⁾.

Amendment 8

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste, COM (2015) 595 final — 2015/0275 (COD)

Article 1(13)

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
Article 1(13) (13) Article 22 is replaced by the following: 'Member States shall ensure the separate collection of bio-waste where technically, environmentally and economically practicable and appropriate to ensure the relevant quality standards for compost and to attain the targets set out in Article 11(2)(a), (c) and (d) and 11(3).	Article 1(13) (13) Article 22 is replaced by the following: 'Member States shall ensure the separate collection of bio-waste unless it is shown to be technically, environmentally and economically impracticable to ensure the relevant quality standards for compost and to attain the targets set out in Article 11(2)(a), (c) and (d) and 11(3).

⁽¹⁾ COM(2014) 397 final.

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>They shall take measures, as appropriate, and in accordance with Articles 4 and 13, to encourage the following:</p> <p>a) the recycling, including composting, and digestion of bio-waste;</p> <p>b) the treatment of bio-waste in a way that fulfils a high level of environmental protection;</p> <p>c) the use of environmentally safe materials produced from bio-waste.'</p>	<p>They shall take measures, as appropriate, and in accordance with Articles 4 and 13, to encourage the following:</p> <p>a) the recycling, including composting, and digestion of bio-waste;</p> <p>b) the treatment of bio-waste in a way that fulfils a high level of environmental protection;</p> <p>c) the use of environmentally safe materials produced from bio-waste.</p> <p><i>The Commission together with the Member States shall assess, no later than 2018, whether minimum quality criteria should be set for compost and digestate produced from bio-waste, in order to guarantee a high level of protection for human health and the environment.'</i></p>

Reason

The proposed amendment seeks to make the collection of bio-waste mandatory. Subpoint (a) should be fine-tuned by linking the recycling of bio-waste to the production of high-quality compost and digestate, otherwise it ends up in landfills rather than being recycled.

Amendment 9

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste, COM (2015) 595 final — 2015/0275 (COD)

Article 1(17)

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>(17) Article 29 is amended as follows:</p> <p>(a) in paragraph 1, the first sentence is replaced by the following:</p> <p>'1. Member States shall establish waste prevention programmes setting out waste prevention measures in accordance with Articles 1, 4 and 9.;</p> <p>(b) paragraphs 3 and 4 are deleted.</p>	<p>(17) Article 29 is amended as follows:</p> <p>(a) in paragraph 1, the first sentence is replaced by the following:</p> <p>'1. Member States shall establish waste prevention programmes setting out waste prevention measures in accordance with Articles 1, 4 and 9 aiming at the 10 % reduction of municipal waste generated in 2025 compared to 2015 levels and to reduce food waste by at least 30 % by 2025 and 50 % by 2030.;</p> <p>(b) paragraphs 3 and 4 are deleted.</p>

Reason

Municipal waste prevention is in line with the targets set by the 7th environment action programme and the Commission's mandate, in accordance with Article 9(c) of the framework directive. Various national waste prevention programmes already have quantitative targets.

Amendment 10

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste, COM(2015) 596 final — 2015/0276 (COD)

Article 1(3)(b)

<i>Text proposed by the Commission</i>	<i>CoR amendment</i>
<p>(b) in paragraph 1, the following points (f) to (i) are added:</p> <p>‘(f) no later than 31 December 2025 a minimum of 65 % by weight of all packaging waste will be prepared for reuse and recycled;</p> <p>(g) no later than 31 December 2025 the following minimum targets by weight for preparing for reuse and recycling will be met regarding the following specific materials contained in packaging waste:</p> <p>55 % of plastic;</p> <p>60 % of wood;</p> <p>75 % of ferrous metal;</p> <p>75 % of aluminium;</p> <p>75 % of glass;</p> <p>75 % of paper and cardboard;</p> <p>(h) no later than 31 December 2030 a minimum of 75 % by weight of all packaging waste will be prepared for reuse and recycled;</p> <p>(i) no later than 31 December 2030 the following minimum targets by weight for preparing for reuse and recycling will be met regarding the following specific materials contained in packaging waste:</p> <p>75 % of wood;</p> <p>85 % of ferrous metal;</p> <p>85 % of aluminium;</p> <p>85 % of glass;</p> <p>85 % of paper and cardboard.’</p>	<p>(b) in paragraph 1, the following points (f) to (i) are added:</p> <p>‘(f) no later than 31 December 2025 a minimum of 65 % by weight of all packaging waste will be prepared for reuse and recycled;</p> <p>(g) no later than 31 December 2025 the following minimum targets by weight for preparing for reuse and recycling will be met regarding the following specific materials contained in packaging waste:</p> <p>55 % of plastic;</p> <p>60 % of wood;</p> <p>75 % of ferrous metal;</p> <p>75 % of aluminium;</p> <p>75 % of glass;</p> <p>75 % of paper and cardboard;</p> <p>(h) no later than 31 December 2030 a minimum of 75 % by weight of all packaging waste will be prepared for reuse and recycled;</p> <p>(i) no later than 31 December 2030 the following minimum targets by weight for preparing for reuse and recycling will be met regarding the following specific materials contained in packaging waste:</p> <p>75 % of wood;</p> <p>85 % of ferrous metal;</p> <p>85 % of aluminium;</p> <p>85 % of glass;</p> <p>85 % of paper and cardboard.</p> <p><i>The Commission will present a new target for plastic packaging waste within the next few years based on data derived from research in the context of the strategy on the circular economy.</i></p>

Reason

There is no target set for 2030 for the preparing for reuse and recycling of plastic packaging. As a minimum the European Commission should be required to present such a target within a few years.

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

General remarks

1. welcomes the legislative proposals amending waste directives of the new Circular Economy Package and points to their benefits for consumers, businesses, the environment and the EU economy;
2. in that context underlines that the transition to a circular economy will create new jobs, increase the competitiveness of the EU small, medium and big enterprises, boost the development of clean technologies, and reduce Europe's dependency on imported raw materials and energy;

Aligning of definitions

3. welcomes the clear set of harmonised definitions in the waste directives and calls on the European Commission to ensure that all the definitions are in line with the European Waste Catalogue, to avoid ambiguity and to ensure that comparable data are available on the progress made by the Member States and local and regional authorities;
4. recommends that the co-legislators nonetheless provide a definition of 'littering';

Controls

5. recommends tighter controls on illegal shipments of waste, which, inter alia, significantly reduce the availability in the EU of enough waste to feed the circular economy, which is based on recycling and reuse;

Labelling

6. calls for compulsory labelling for consumer products marketed in the EU that clearly defines how to sort waste according to waste collection macro-categories for categories covered by established separate collection. When a product generates waste that falls into different categories, the label should specify how to disassemble the various components into different categories of sorted material, provided the consumer can do this with ease;

Extended producer responsibility

7. points out that the proposal to harmonise minimum requirements is crucial for boosting the performance of extended producer responsibility schemes across the Member States;
8. urges the co-legislators not to water down these requirements and to maintain key provisions such as those guaranteeing transparency, full coverage of costs by producers for local and regional authorities with regard to the collection, management and processing of waste streams, and public information. Buyback of reusable packaging (glass containers and plastic bottles (PET)) by large retail chains may be one of the most significant factors in preventing waste production;

Waste prevention

9. highlights the need for more detail regarding 'minimum quality requirements' for foodstuffs and proposes that a minimum standard procedure be laid down for food recovery which guarantees food safety and which can be rolled out uniformly across the Member States;
10. calls on local, regional and national authorities to launch communication and education campaigns to raise awareness on waste prevention;

Clean-up initiatives: 'Let's Do It!' and 'Clean-Up Day'

11. urges the Commission, Member States and local and regional authorities to give their full support to the various civil society initiatives leading to local and national clean-up activities (e.g. the local 'Let's Do It' campaign or the international day of action dubbed 'Let's clean up the world in just one day!');

Reuse and recycling

12. calls once again for further targets to be set for reuse. The targets should be binding, independent and geared to specific waste streams, particularly furniture, fabrics and waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE). Preparing for reuse is important for waste prevention: like recycling it is at the top of the waste hierarchy and it offers reliable potential for developing the circular economy ⁽²⁾;

13. in that context, calls on the Commission to set a minimum target of 70 % by weight for preparing for reuse and recycling for plastic to be met by 2030 in packaging waste;

14. points out that prevention and reuse are connected to activities that occur with substances and objects that are currently not related to the status of waste, in contrast with the processes of recycling and preparation for reuse, involving materials that do have the status of waste. Because of the legal consequences of the status of waste for companies and institutions, further clarification regarding the distinction between waste and non-waste, is recommended;

15. proposes defining, for example in the European Waste Catalogue, the concepts of recycling and reuse, as these currently comprise two different types of facility tailored to different streams and specific needs. a) Waste products intended for recycling arrive on the sorting belt of the selective sorting system facility, where they will be grouped together according to industry needs. b) In the case of waste intended for reuse, it is possible to avoid the waste management system cycle altogether. Large retail chains could be encouraged to buy back packaging, although the purchaser ultimately decides what to do with this waste;

16. urges the co-legislators to recommend that Member States introduce financial incentives for processes which produce less waste in their waste prevention programmes. Similarly, it calls on local and regional authorities to put in place incentives for reducing waste not sent for recycling;

17. recommends that the European Commission assess whether the framework directive should require Member States to report (non-hazardous) industrial waste and the European Environment Agency to monitor and collect these data. The Commission should review the situation by 2020, evaluating targets on preparing for reuse and recycling for this waste stream ⁽³⁾;

18. points out that moving from targets for recycling to combined targets for preparing for reuse and recycling: i) creates difficulties with regard to the separate measuring of recycling and of preparing packaging and waste packaging for reuse; and ii) needs to be clarified;

19. considers it necessary to define harmonised methods for calculating recycling rates across the EU and, with regard to food waste and inert construction and demolition waste, to adopt a provision which defines instruments and bodies designated to monitor data on reducing waste generation along the entire production, processing and consumption chain;

20. proposes that the European Commission develops indicators for the environmental value of different sorts of waste. The current legislation and the European Commission's proposal do not take into account the differences in environmental value of different sorts of waste. In this way, it will be made clear on which materials there must be special focus on to improve the waste management and make it more environmentally friendly;

Energy recovery and landfilling

21. in line with the waste hierarchy, calls on the Member States to promote the development of high efficiency energy from waste, in the context of the European Commission Waste to Energy Initiative; notes that such waste-to-energy plants can help the Union move towards becoming less dependent on import of energy in line with the Energy Union;

⁽²⁾ CDR-1617-2013.

⁽³⁾ CDR-1617-2013.

22. acknowledges the importance of gradually introducing restrictions on landfilling and supports the Commission's shift towards banning landfilling of waste subject to separate collection (including bio-waste), taking into account communication COM(2015) 614 on the circular economy which promotes the cascading use of biological resources which can create competitiveness through reuse⁽⁴⁾;

23. recommends continuing to give priority to a qualitative, more ambitious approach eliminating landfilling of recyclable, biodegradable waste;

24. calls on the European Commission to examine the possibility of extending the maximum 10 % landfilling target by 2030 beyond the municipal waste and applying it to all types of waste⁽⁵⁾;

Derogations for certain Member States with regard to targets for municipal waste and landfilling

25. upholds the exemptions granted to the seven Member States with the lowest levels of waste management, but stresses the need to maintain the proposed provisions whereby exempted Member States must submit implementation plans with detailed timetables of the measures needed to meet their targets;

Data registration and communication requirements

26. flags up the absence of a provision, proposed by the European Commission in 2014 in the framework directive, requiring industrial and commercial businesses to keep a register of non-hazardous waste processed by them and, upon request, to make these data available to the relevant authorities;

Delegated acts

27. is concerned about the considerable power that the proposed directives confer on the European Commission to adopt delegated acts, and calls on the co-legislators to restrict the use of them as they weaken their own supervisory powers and do not comply with the democratic and legislative process⁽⁶⁾;

Covenant of Mayors on waste management

28. given the notable success of the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, proposes that a similar structure on waste management be set up; in this context highlights the role of the Committee of the Regions as the European Union's assembly of regional and local representatives in mobilising local and regional authorities and stepping up their efforts to boost resource efficiency, reduce waste and increase recycling, reuse and recovery of waste in cities;

Subsidiarity and proportionality

29. points out while there is no cause for concern as regards compliance with subsidiarity, the European Commission's proposals do give rise to concerns as regards compliance with proportionality⁽⁷⁾.

Brussels, 15 June 2016.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Markku MARKKULA

⁽⁴⁾ COR-2014-04083, CdR 3751/2013, CdR 1617/2013.

⁽⁵⁾ CdR 1617/2013.

⁽⁶⁾ COR-2014-04083; Consultation of the subsidiarity expert group and relevant decisions of national and regional parliaments on subsidiarity and proportionality related aspects of the circular economy package — synthesis and analysis, COR-2016-1521.

⁽⁷⁾ See also the Consultation of the subsidiarity expert group and relevant decisions of national and regional parliaments on subsidiarity and proportionality related aspects of the circular economy package — synthesis and analysis, COR-2016-1521.

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — EU Enlargement Strategy 2015-2016

(2017/C 017/10)

Rapporteur: Anna MAGYAR (HU/EPP), Vice-President of the County Council of Csongrád**Reference document:** Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — EU Enlargement Strategy COM(2015) 611 final**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Horizontal remarks

1. reaffirms its commitment to the enlargement process, which is an investment in stability and prosperity; notes that past enlargements helped to overcome historical divisions in Europe, increased prosperity and demonstrated that enlargement is the EU's most powerful foreign policy tool;
2. notes that the European Commission expects no further enlargement during its present mandate, however this must not result in a standstill; acknowledges that time is needed for preparations, but points out that it is essential to use this time well in order to advance the enlargement process through rigorous and fair conditionality and steady progress in the related tasks ahead, and by a credible, realistic European perspective in order to avoid losing the engagement and motivation of candidates and potential candidates for enlargement as reforms and progress in the enlargement countries are in the interest of every EU Member State and each candidate and potential candidate for enlargement;
3. stresses the imperative need to keep the EU in its current form through transparent, appropriate policies which will guarantee and maintain strong political, economic and territorial cohesion. Guaranteeing wellbeing and development for the Member States and European security from various threats is the first step towards a quantifiably enriched European Union;
4. believes that the enlargement package, presented by the Commission in its communication and 2015 country reports, generally presents an accurate and overall positive assessment, considering that there is visible progress in every candidate and potential candidate for enlargement regarding some issues, even when significant shortcomings (or, in some cases, backsliding) persist, and further efforts are needed to achieve sustainable results;
5. urges Member States, candidates and potential candidates for enlargement and EU institutions to ensure the success of the enlargement process; reminds candidate and potential candidate for enlargement of the ownership and commitment required in this regard;
6. stresses that the enlargement process should be an inclusive exercise involving all of society; underlines that the role of the local and regional level is essential, as it is closest to the citizens in terms of subsidiarity, communication, participatory democracy, diversity and identity; it is also key for economic development, cross-border cooperation, absorption of EU funds and implementation of EU legislation;
7. welcomes the reference by the Commission to the key role of local and regional authorities (LRAs); stresses, however, as it has done on numerous previous occasions, that better and more detailed focus is needed in future communications and reports on local and regional governance, even when there is no separate *acquis* chapter or established EU model on the issue of decentralisation and multi-level governance; but considers that ensuring strong, democratic and effective local and regional governance is an essential element of pre-accession preparation as implementation of reforms and a consistent, credible track record of them is often achieved at local level, and points to the importance of subsidiarity as a key EU principle enshrined in the treaties;

8. points out that local authorities have a role to play in illustrating the benefits of EU membership and encouraging people to make use of the instruments offered by the EU to EU citizens. The right to European citizenship offers individuals many new opportunities, and so the EU must be promoted in terms of its advantages for individuals as well as for society;

9. stresses that the involvement of LRAs is also key in communication regarding enlargement in order to ensure public support for the process by demonstrating its benefits for the general public; points to the importance of cooperation with civil society in this regard;

10. considers that the new approach involving a four-year enlargement strategy offers a more reliable perspective with consistent conditionality; welcomes the clearer methodology, the harmonised terms and better identification of tasks as an opportunity for comparability, and supports the strengthened focus on state of play and on the progress in the different fields and measures identified to be necessary for further progress;

11. believes that the fundamentals and priority areas in the Commission communication and reports are generally properly identified; invites the Commission to consider also focusing on other relevant, horizontal issues which are important in every candidate and potential candidate for enlargement among its priority areas (e.g. social policy, focus on vulnerable/disadvantaged groups and minorities);

12. underlines that efforts are necessary to match LRA responsibilities with proper resources and capacities in every enlargement country and calls for LRAs to be involved in policy making in order to ensure effective implementation;

Rule of law and fundamental rights

13. agrees that further progress regarding the rule of law and fundamental rights including the protection of minorities, is indeed of paramount importance, and presents a challenge for every candidate and potential candidate for enlargement; this assessment also confirms the validity of the 'new approach' to the enlargement, which is based on an increased focus on the judiciary and fundamental rights and on justice, freedom and security; flags up the importance of cooperation in and with the Council of Europe (CoE), and its Congress of local and regional authorities regarding fundamental rights, the rule of law and local democracy;

14. welcomes the focus on freedom of expression, but stresses that an equally strong focus is needed on the issue of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and minorities, which is also relevant in every candidate and potential candidate for enlargement (including national, ethnic and religious minorities and the Roma as an often multiply disadvantaged group, and preventing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender, and against people with disabilities, minors and the elderly, and internally displaced persons and refugees), pointing out that awareness raising, ownership and especially proper, credible implementation and results are also needed at local and regional level; in this sense the situation in these countries, in particular with regard to vulnerable groups, needs to be carefully monitored;

15. calls for further efforts to depoliticise public administration and increase transparency in every candidate and potential candidate for enlargement, as high political interference remains a challenge and hinders cooperation between government levels;

16. stresses the importance of the fight against public and private corruption at all levels of government and society, underlining that credible results in this field usually require progress at local level as well;

17. stresses the need to counter radicalisation, extremism, terrorism and the issue of foreign fighters, in particular the prevention of radicalisation of young people, so that their potential is not lost, but rather they are presented with a credible perspective in terms of employment, education, the strengthening of diverse local communities, including the protection and respect of their identity, of cultural and religious heritage, and thereby also fostering core European values rooted in its Christian culture; therefore calls on local communities to support education on tolerance and reconciliation, and on governments to facilitate this;

18. condemns terrorist attacks and all forms of the use of violence, including threats of using violence; points out that the use of violence is unacceptable in any political debate;

Economic development and connectivity

19. stresses that economic development is a key factor in ensuring stability (e.g. through job opportunities and social inclusion); welcomes the economic reform programmes and the strengthening of cooperation and coordination in the form of the Economic and Financial Dialogue Meeting between the EU and the Western Balkans and Turkey;

20. calls for more effective and transparent management and allocation of EU pre-accession funds in candidates and potential candidates for enlargement, including at local level, to avoid losing funding due to lack of policy planning, training, coordination and efficient absorption capacities at local level; also stresses the importance of involving both cities and smaller towns in training and support programmes;

21. welcomes the focus on the connectivity agenda adopted by the EU, and regional initiatives which should be more inclusive (Berlin Process etc.), stressing the need to involve more local, regional and national authorities in candidates and potential candidates for enlargement and also in Member States; and encourages further investments (transport, energy, digital telecommunications, education, youth, etc.);

22. stresses the need to bring waste disposal processes up to EU level and to limit surface waste disposal;

23. encourages and welcomes the work of the National Investment Committees in Western Balkans beneficiaries to create a single project pipeline and calls for the coordination of structural instruments;

24. emphasises the fundamental role played by regional and local democracy in strengthening democratic institutions and their administrative capacity; highlights the role of elected local and regional assemblies as spaces for civil society dialogue and growth and for discussion between decision-makers and stakeholders; points out that local and regional authorities play an important part in engaging with public opinion on European policies and integration; also emphasises that strengthening local and regional governance bolsters administrative reform and improves the delivery of public services;

Regional cooperation among enlargement countries

25. reiterates that good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation are essential elements of the Enlargement Process, as well as the Stabilisation and Association Process; welcomes and encourages the overall positive developments across candidates and potential candidates for enlargement and commends the efforts made, but calls for tangible progress on issues as yet unresolved and for sustainable results; calls on local and regional communities to contribute to this process;

26. calls on every actor involved to take this positive momentum forward, including fostering reconciliation at community and local level and support for inter-ethnic, inter-religious and intercultural dialogue;

27. encourages candidates and potential candidates for enlargement to use existing Twinning or TAIEX programmes;

28. points out that the Committee of the Regions and its working groups and joint consultative committees provide a good forum for contacts and for the exchange of best practices between LRAs, and welcomes the positive outcome of recent JCC and WG meetings, including the inaugural meeting of the JCC with Serbia; furthermore, looks forward to the results of the Enlargement Day which will bring together all these bodies in order to examine issues of a horizontal and thematic nature relevant to all of them;

Migration

29. is pleased that the Commission highlights the issue of migration, as the unprecedented current situation concerning refugees and economic migrants affects the entire region (in particular Turkey and also the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia) and Member States along the migratory route, and no solution can be found without joint efforts, solidarity and mutual delivery on commitments; calls for the implementation of the recommendations of the conference on the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans route as well as the EU-Turkey Statements of 29 November 2015 and 18 March 2016 and the Joint Action Plan;

30. welcomes both the efforts made by the Member States and in particular the candidates to handle the crisis, and the resources provided by them, including the challenges along the migratory route in Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the largest number of migrants and refugee populations in the world currently hosted by Turkey; stresses the need for continued assistance from the EU that should benefit the local and regional authorities; and the need to boost investment in the region to create job opportunities so that the social and economic potential of migrants and refugees is not lost;

31. underlines the key role of local communities, especially those along the migratory route, that are the first to be affected by the influx of migrants and refugees; stresses, however, that local capacities are limited and uneven, which means that there is a need for further assistance for the local level and engagement with LRAs, and points out that special attention must be paid to the needs, concerns and security of and challenges for local communities affected by the mixed migratory flow. Encourages partnerships between local communities along the migratory route in order to exchange information and best practice and expertise, including on integration, training, education, employment, return and asylum and the fight against smuggling and trafficking;

32. with reference to the priorities and measures set out in recent European Council conclusions stresses the need for prevention regarding the situation in crisis regions, including an effective development policy, and to focus efforts on refugees in legitimate need of international protection; therefore flags up the need to ensure both thorough and speedy processing of asylum applications and facilitate effective return according to the common EU standards for those whose applications are rejected, and supports the proposal for an EU list of safe countries of origin;

33. emphasises the need to review and, if necessary, reform traditional approaches to aid in order to help eradicate the causes of economic migration; and also the need to involve the local and regional level from both Member States and candidate countries in the strategic decisions concerning development policy, also aimed to eradicate hunger, poverty and the causes of economic migration;

34. also stresses the need for greater EU involvement in initiatives and policies focusing on migrants' countries and regions of origin, with a view to radically reducing the influx of refugees forced to abandon their country and economic migrants taking the perilous journey to Europe; and to step up diplomatic intervention to promote peace in conflict-affected countries;

Turkey

35. underlines the key partnership and interdependence between the EU and Turkey, and supports strengthened cooperation on shared interests; welcomes Turkey's commitment to reforms and EU accession and calls for this renewed dynamic to be maintained within the framework of relevant European Council and Council conclusions as well as EU-Turkey joint statements; calls for the full implementation of the Visa Liberalisation Roadmap towards all Member States;

36. recognises that the accession negotiations have been given fresh momentum in line with recent conclusions by the Council, the European Council and EU-Turkey summits and encourages further progress in accordance with the negotiation framework and relevant Council conclusions; notes that the good level of preparation in some areas needs to be supported by overcoming shortcomings or, in some cases, serious problems in others;

37. considers that progress on issues related to the rule of law and fundamental rights is a key step forward, and calls on Turkey to cooperate with the Commission on preparatory work for Chapters 23 and 24 without prejudice to the position of Member States; stresses that more needed to be done in this fields especially regarding freedom of expression and thought, freedom of the media, freedom of conscience and religion and freedom of assembly and association, in conjunction with respect for human rights, including minority rights, gender equality and fight against corruption; it is essential to achieve substantial results and a credible track record in this regard, and calls for strengthened efforts, commitment and ownership in alignment with the EU *acquis* in these issues, including at local level; in this light, stresses the great importance of interreligious and intercultural dialogue at all levels, in strengthening civil society and international partnerships;

38. welcomes the adoption of the National Strategy for Regional Development, involving regional development agencies, a coordination mechanism and action plans; calls for it to be implemented and encourages improvement regarding regional disparities; in addition, calls for all parties concerned to make an effort to facilitate the peace and reconciliation process regarding the Kurdish issue;

39. stresses the need to combat terrorism, condemns recent terrorist attacks and expresses solidarity with the victims; furthermore, calls for action to tackle radicalisation, including fostering integration at local level;

40. notes that fiscal decentralisation and resources at local and regional level are still limited, and stresses the need to go beyond the amendments of the 2012 law on municipalities;

41. encourages, supports and calls for a fair, comprehensive and viable settlement of the Cyprus issue, based on relevant UNSC Resolutions, international law and the values upon which the EU is founded; welcomes the positive momentum and engagement towards a mutually acceptable solution and calls on Turkey to actively support efforts to this effect;

42. calls for the full and non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the EU-Turkey association agreement towards all EU Member States, including the Republic of Cyprus; calls on Turkey to maintain good neighbourly relations with all its neighbours, a key element of the accession process; flags up the need to respect the sovereignty and sovereign rights of all Member States in accordance with EU principles, UN resolutions and international law; calls on Turkey to begin withdrawing its forces from Cyprus and to transfer the sealed-off area of Famagusta to the UN in accordance with UNSC Resolution 550 (1984); stresses that such confidence-building measures would constitute a chance for economic, social and regional growth for both communities; notes that inter-communal talks, and dialogue between civil society in local communities can foster the agreement;

43. calls for further efforts to upgrade the CoR-Turkey Working Group to a joint consultative committee;

44. considers it essential that the civil society of Member States should participate more fully throughout the entire process;

Montenegro

45. welcomes the commitment of and progress made by Montenegro on its path to EU accession, and also the opportunity to strengthen stability inherent in the invitation to join NATO;

46. calls for all parties to strengthen cross-party political dialogue; and for all levels of government to ensure that the next elections are held according to the highest democratic standards based on the new electoral legislation;

47. stresses the need to ensure a credible track record with regard to the rule of law and fundamental rights, including at local level; in this regard, welcomes local action plans for the prevention of corruption prepared by a vast majority of municipalities, along with local social inclusion plans, and calls for them to be implemented properly and monitored appropriately;

48. welcomes the efforts made with regard to the professional development of local civil servants, yet stresses the need for further progress (e.g. training and more transparent recruitment procedures based on the merit principle); welcomes the amendments adopted to the law on the financing of local self-government, and encourages further efforts to make local self-government financially self-sufficient;

49. welcomes programmes by the Ministry of the Economy to support less developed municipalities and promote exports by local and regional companies;

Serbia

50. welcomes Serbia's commitment to EU accession which has already delivered results regarding the timely completion of the screening procedure and the opening of the first negotiation chapters, and encourages Serbia to continue these positive steps (e.g. the completion of various strategic documents) by delivering on its commitments; in particular calls on authorities to put anti-corruption actions onto a durable and sustainable track;

51. welcomes the presentation of the action plans for Chapters 23 and 24 and is pleased that the legislative environment in guaranteeing fundamental rights is in place, but stresses the need to ensure effective, consistent implementation across the country;

52. welcomes the adoption by the government of the dedicated action plan on national minorities and calls for it to be implemented properly, and points to the opinions of the CoE advisory committee in this regard; commends the high degree of protection of national and ethnic minorities in Vojvodina, and calls for these rights to be ensured at local level as well (concerning education, access to media and religious services, use of minority languages including for public administration procedures and civil register, and proportional representation in the public sector); welcomes the generally good inter-ethnic relations, and encourages further progress; welcomes the ethnic- and other minority-friendly rhetoric that dominates the discourse of the highest representatives of the government;

53. considers the National Minority Councils to be a good example, and stresses the need to ensure compatibility between the law on National Minority Councils and sectoral legislation, while preserving the level of already acquired rights and competences;

54. points out that local capacity is often weak and uneven, and calls for proper resources at decentralised level that are appropriate for the tasks assigned and with linkages between efficiency of public spending and subsequent income; points out that the law on Vojvodina's financing has yet to be adopted;

55. welcomes the public administration reform strategy and the training strategy on local self-government, and calls for its proper implementation and for the adoption of a civil service law for local government employees; considers the work of the National Convent on European Integration and local consultations to be positive examples;

56. calls for the implementation of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations on municipal elections;

57. welcomes and supports positive developments in the normalisation process and the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, delivering results to the people, and encourages further progress by delivering on commitments and implementing agreements, thus strengthening cooperation and trust; calls upon authorities to actively promote normalisation;

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

58. underlines that this country was the first to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), and in light of this, expresses its concern about the stalemate in the integration process, and in promoting commitments and reforms. Calls both for renewed political will by the country, and for the EU to confirm the country's credible European perspective to encourage delivery on the commitments of the country;

59. calls for all parties to live up to their responsibilities in implementing the June/July 2015 political agreement fully and constructively, and for the implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities; stresses the need to tackle backsliding in the area of freedom of expression, especially in rule of law including the judiciary and trust in the political system; encourages further progress (built on previously achieved results regarding a relatively good level of alignment with the *acquis*) founded on a credible track record, including at local level;

60. expects, based on the above, that the Commission will be able to extend its recommendation to open accession negotiations in line with the Council Conclusions and established conditionality;

61. stresses that further implementation of the decentralisation agenda is essential; in this regard, welcomes the strategic programme for 2015-2020 and calls for the implementation of the second phase of fiscal decentralisation;

62. underlines that good neighbourly relations, including finding a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution to the name issue under the auspices of the UN, remain essential and also that LRAs play a constructive role in this respect in line with the relevant commitment by the main political party leaders under the 2015 June-July political agreement; in this spirit actions and statements that undermine good neighbourly relations should be avoided;

Albania

63. welcomes the proper focus and steady progress made by Albania on key reform priorities, especially regarding the judiciary; and encourages Albania to step up the pace of reforms, notably in the areas under the key priorities, with particular attention to the rule of law, the de-politicisation of public administration, the effective protection of human rights including the rights of persons belonging to minorities throughout Albania and to implement property rights and also to further improve the business and investment environment and address the high level of shadow economy in order to start accession negotiations; recalls that a sustained, comprehensive and inclusive implementation of the key priorities has to be ensured; in particular welcomes the new legislation regarding the exclusion of convicted persons from Parliament while stressing the need for a proper results record; it also welcomes the anti-corruption strategy and action plan; urges further progress in policy and legislative measures and proper implementation;

64. is pleased that the 2015 local elections were held without major incidents, but calls for greater impartiality and professionalism; furthermore, welcomes the ad hoc committee set up by Parliament concerning electoral reform and points to the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations in this regard as well as the ones made by the CoE Congress/CoR Electoral Observation Mission calling for a de-politicisation of the public administration and ensuring impartiality;

65. calls for the reforms process to be broadly inclusive involving all political and civil actors concerned, including the opposition and relevant stakeholders, and commends the work of the National Council on European Integration in this regard, as a positive example;

66. welcomes the national decentralisation strategy with its properly defined priorities, and the allocation of a transitory fund; calls for further progress in the implementation of the reform of territorial administration in an inclusive way through continuous and close dialogue with all stakeholders, including minorities; welcomes the new organic law on local self-government clarifying responsibilities and improving inter-institutional cooperation among different levels of government while underlining the importance of its effective implementation;

Bosnia and Herzegovina

67. is pleased that the country is back on track in the integration process considering that a European perspective is a key incentive for the country, and encourages further delivery on the Reform Agenda, as the entry into force of the SAA shows that commitments can deliver results;

68. accordingly, is pleased that Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted an application for EU membership on 15 February 2016 that provides encouragement for both the country and the enlargement process; therefore stresses the need to keep up this momentum in order to be able to deliver the meaningful progress in the implementation of the Reform Agenda necessary to advance along this path;

69. calls for the SAA to be adapted fully following Croatia's accession and for steps to ensure that the Constitution complies with ECHR rulings;

70. calls for better coordination between government levels in order to eliminate obstacles to the functionality of the country, to effective implementation of the Reform Agenda, to mobility, investment and connections in various policy areas and to the creation of a single economic area. Points out that decentralisation does not mean fragmentation, and that there is also a need for coordinated framework strategies, as reforms need to advance at all levels; encourages the development of common goals that are compatible but move beyond individual interests;

71. in this regard the smooth operation of an effective coordination mechanism on EU matters will be necessary for the country to be able to face the challenges ahead on the EU path; progress will also open the way for Bosnia and Herzegovina to fully benefit from the EU funding available;

72. considers that entity level legislation is largely in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government but calls for more effective distribution of responsibilities among entities, cantons and municipalities;

Kosovo ⁽¹⁾

73. welcomes the signing and ratification of the SAA and its entry into force on 1 April 2016, which could signal a new chapter in Kosovo's relations with the EU; encourages Kosovo to continue the implementation of EU-related reforms (e.g. adoption of the human rights law package) and other positive steps (e.g. establishment of the Specialist Chambers, normalisation process);

74. emphasises that obstructing political debate through violent means is not acceptable, and calls for all parties to return to dialogue and normal procedures;

75. welcomes the results achieved in visa liberalisation, stresses the importance of the fulfilment of all relevant conditions set and encourages further progress;

76. stresses the need to continue efforts regarding the protection of cultural and religious heritage, especially at local level;

77. welcomes and supports positive developments in the normalisation process and the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, delivering results to the people, and encourages further progress by delivering on commitments and implementing agreements, thus strengthening cooperation and trust; calls upon authorities to actively promote normalisation.

Brussels, 16 June 2016.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Markku MARKKULA

⁽¹⁾ This designation is without prejudice to position on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

ISSN 1977-091X (electronic edition)
ISSN 1725-2423 (paper edition)



Publications Office of the European Union
2985 Luxembourg
LUXEMBOURG

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