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**RENEWING EUROPE WITH ITS REGIONS AND CITIES**

**Communication Plan**

**of the European Committee of the Regions**

**for the year 2019**

*"Cities and regions need the European Union.*

*The European Union needs its cities and regions"*

*CoR President, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, 9 October 2018*

# **Political context**

"*We do not see Europe as two-dimensional, with only the Institutions and the Member States. We see Europe in three dimensions, with its 100 000 or so local authorities and 300 regions. This third dimension is the democratic foundation on which we must rebuild Europe, with and for our citizens*."[[1]](#footnote-1)

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) pursues a communication approach based on the principle of "reconnecting Europe with its citizens through a focused, two-way communication centred on its members". In so doing, the CoR builds its communication activities in partnership and cooperation with a "network-of-networks" approach involving its members, associations and local and regional governments and their networks on the one hand and the EU Institutions, in particular the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council and their networks on the other. Within the context of the CoR's 2015-2020 Communication Strategy, this Communication Plan outlines the priorities and objectives as well the tools, channels and resources to implement them in 2019.

The CoR's communication presents the body's political work and messages to the EU Institutions and gives voice and visibility to regionally and locally elected representatives and citizens. Moreover, the EU agenda and recent political challenges provide the context for targeted communication actions. 2019 will be the last full year of the current term of office of the CoR and will include major political milestones such as the European elections, the new European Parliament, followed by the new presidents of the European Council and the new European Commission taking up office.

2019 will also be a crucial year for the future of Europe and as the CoR, through its members, has an active role to play in the European elections. Over the course of the whole year, the overall goal of *Renewing Europe with its Regions and Cities* is to demonstrate that the views of regions, cities and local authorities are taken into account to a much more significant degree in shaping the European Union. This applies to new initiatives, drafting and communicating the EU to its citizens, not only to the formal legislative process.

The 2019 Communication Plan will take forward the president's ambition to improve the role and impact of the CoR by increasing its visibility and enhancing cooperation and communication, in particular with all EU regional and local authorities and their associations. With the political calendar in mind, the annual impact report of the CoR needs to be fully included at a sufficiently stage into our communication activities.

In what is going to be a crucial year for the future of the CoR and of the EU, the over-riding challenge will be that of demonstrating the added value of involving regions and cities in EU decision-making. The CoR must build on the success stories of the 25 years of its existence and show concrete achievements. By taking an evidence-based approach, the overarching focus of all the CoR's communication activities in 2019 will be to demonstrate that regions and cities are instrumental in building a cohesive, inclusive and sustainable Europe and that, consequently, the CoR must be given a stronger role in EU decision-making.

Action to achieve our overall goal can be split into two distinct phases:

A) Before the European elections 2019

* building the case for strengthening the role of regions and cities in the EU, taking forward the 2018 *State of the European Union: the View of Regions and Cities* speech held on 9 October by adopting a Declaration of local and regional authorities to be drafted at the Bucharest Summit in March;
* ensuring the voice of regional and local politicians is heard by EU leaders ahead of the informal European Council in Sibiu on 9 May;
* contributing to the mobilisation of voters for the European elections and raising awareness of the fact that EU policies have an impact on people's lives.

B) After the European elections – reaching out to the new EU leaders

* strengthening relations with the new European Parliament, in particular key MEPs and the new European Commission;
* preparing for the future of the CoR in the next decade and in its next term of office.

# **The 2019 communication campaigns**

The CoR's Communication Strategy 2015-20 set the objective of *Reconnecting Europe with its citizens* by establishing a dialogue between the local, regional and EU levels. In the final full year of implementation, the focus is on interaction with local and regional politicians. The key to connecting the EU with citizens is having the full support of local and regional authorities as the most trusted level of government. The communication work targeted towards politicians needs to go hand in hand with the political work of the CoR as the voice of regions and cities in the EU decision-making process.

The CoR implements its communication activities through up to three campaigns, which present an integrated set of tools and channels to enhance the visibility and impact of the assembly's political work. For this purpose, members who have been or are rapporteurs on the key opinions related to these campaigns will lead the work and will be supported by the administration. Campaign managers will develop detailed Operational Roadmaps and lead inter-service teams, which will carry them out and monitor their results. The criteria for selecting the topics of the campaigns and their roll-out, developed in the 2018 plan, remain as follows:

* they should have the potential to actively involve and engage CoR members;
* they should highlight the CoR's impact and the added value of EU policies;
* they should link the CoR's political work to the priority areas of the commissions;
* they should bring a wide range of EU Institutions and regional/local stakeholders together.

The set of communication tools and main activities for each campaign during the year will be set out in a detailed Operational Roadmap drawn up with the campaign manager and shared through the Group of Communicators by the end of January 2019. After outlining the key messages and specific audiences, the Operational Roadmaps and the related tools will be developed and updated in view of the rolling political agenda and the thematic priorities of the CoR and its commissions. This will include information packs for CoR members, based on a "storytelling" approach highlighting best local practices. These packs will comprise the narratives and lines to take, project descriptions, briefings/factsheets, presentations, infographics and video clips.

These are working documents that can be updated where necessary.

**Campaign 1: Engaging regional and local politicians for the future of Europe**

***"****We need to get real feedback on the EU's policies. Listening is not enough. Citizens' dialogues must be organised and there must be follow-up to improve Union action in specific areas. Local and regional elected representatives must play a key role in organising and following up on these dialogues on the ground, and within the European Institutions." [[2]](#footnote-2)*

**Context and rationale**

On 9 October 2018, the *Reflecting on Europe* Opinion was adopted by the CoR's plenary, the culmination of two years' work based on the referral from the President of the European Council. Moreover, in the light of the results of the Task Force on Subsidiarity and Proportionality and the related European Commission Communication of 23 October 2018,[[3]](#footnote-3) the CoR is invited to raise awareness amongst local and regional authorities to contribute more effectively to EU policy-making throughout the whole legislative procedure. Our ongoing cooperation with the European Parliament envisages active partnership in the run-up to the European elections.

In the *New way of working* put forward by the Task Force, the CoR has the unique opportunity and responsibility to serve as a two-way link between local and regional politicians and the EU. With a wide set of information exchange tools already in place, such as the Subsidiarity Monitoring Network[[4]](#footnote-4) and REGPEX[[5]](#footnote-5) platform, the CoR can use the *Active Subsidiarity* approach and the *New way of working* as ways to strengthen the understanding and ownership of what the Union does. In doing so, the CoR would not only facilitate communication, it would enforce its role as a bastion of the values and principles of partnership and multi-level governance in the future of Europe.

The 8th Summit of Regions and Cities in Bucharest on 14-15 March 2019 is the next major milestone in this respect. The aim will be to involve local and regional heavyweight politicians, including those who are not members of the CoR, in debates with EU leaders, panel discussions on key policies and the adoption of an "appeal" (Declaration) ahead of the Sibiu Informal European Council. Building on the President's *State of the European Union: the View of Regions and Cities* (#SOTREG) speech on 9 October, the appeal should set out a vision of a three-dimensional EU, including how local and regional authorities should be involved in the EU legislative and political process after the 2019 European elections once the new European Parliament and the new European Commission have taken up office.

In relation to the future of Europe, the CoR has committed to propose a methodology for a permanent structured dialogue mechanism designed to involve regional and local authorities, and through them also citizens, even more fully in the development of EU initiatives and policy implementation on the ground (including communication), not just in the formal EU legislative process. The aim will be to involve CoR members and alternates and the assemblies or institutions to which they belong as fully as possible in this process, with a focus on feedback, coordination and linking with the political work of the CoR whilst maintaining low costs to the taxpayers.

Finally, developing the political impact of the CoR on the new Members of the European Parliament and EU Commissioners will be an important component of the events and outreach activities in the second half of 2019.

**Objectives**

* work with other European Institutions, particularly the European Parliament, to mobilise voters and raise awareness of the upcoming European elections;
* ensure the presence of up to 1 000 participants at the 8th European Summit of Regions and Cities in Bucharest; ensure effective dissemination of the output of the event (appeal/Declaration) as input to the Sibiu summit;
* continuous outreach to all regions and to associations representing the 92 900 local authorities and municipalities in the EU;
* engage in active cooperation with the EU Institutions on a permanent structured dialogue mechanism including first tests; continue to collect replies to the online survey from all of the 27 Member States concerned using this at key moments such as the #SOTREG in October 2019;
* begin harvesting the first results of the permanent structured dialogue mechanism as part of the handover for the next CoR term of office, to be finalised at the December 2019 plenary.

**Milestones**

* 14-15 March 2019: 8th European Summit of Regions and Cities in Bucharest;
* 9 May 2019: Sibiu Informal European Council (Leaders' Agenda);
* 23-26 May 2019: European Elections;
* 1-4 July 2019: constitutive session of the new European Parliament;
* 7-10 October 2019: 17th European Week of Regions and Cities
* 8/9 October 2019: State of the European Union: the View of Regions and Cities address;
* 1 November 2019: next College of European Commissioners due to take office;
* 7-8 November 2019: 10th European Conference on Public Communication (EuroPCom)
* 26 January 2020: beginning of the CoR’s 2020-2024 term of office

**Campaign 2: Investing in regions and cities**

***"****We have to show how and why the Union must mobilise local public investment, which alone accounts for half of all public investment. Europeans need this investment, which also creates wealth." [[6]](#footnote-6)*

**Context and rationale**

The objective of this campaign is to ensure the active involvement of regional and local authorities in the negotiations on the EU's future finances and their legal bases. The timely adoption of these instruments in early 2019 is vital if regions, cities and local authorities are to avoid a funding gap. This campaign should build on the success of the #CohesionAlliance in 2018 and be expanded to cover the regional and local angle in the major EU funding programmes.

In this respect, the communication work will be directed at supporting the CoR's rapporteurs on the proposals for the EU 2021-2027 budget as well as the top-level #CohesionAlliance work of the President. In addition to explaining regional and local authorities' responses to the legislative proposals for reducing disparities between regions, we also aim to respond to the question *Cohesion for what?* in key policy areas such as climate change, migration/integration, innovation, the social pillar and bridging the rural-urban divide. This campaign interacts with the next one in that each opinion should be complemented with at least one story from the CoR rapporteur from the regions and cities 'delivering' the relevant EU policy at local level.

**Objectives**

* Further develop narratives on how cohesion policy reduces disparities between regions and how effective blending with notably private instruments can solve this problem;
* develop *Cohesion for what?* narratives in key policy areas such as climate change, disaster resilience, integration, innovation, bridging the rural-urban divide and the social pillar;
* influence current European Parliament positions on the future MFF and cohesion policy;
* influence the EU Council position on the future MFF and cohesion policy;
* connect cohesion issues to the growing debate regarding the 2019 European elections;
* focus the 17th European Week of Regions and Cities 2019 on attracting designate Commissioners and/or relevant Members of the European Parliament to engage in political debate on the *Cohesion for what?* issues with regional and local politicians.

**Milestones**

* 5-6 December 2018: adoption of the second batch of MFF opinions, so the CoR has a full spectrum of opinions including the ones on the overall MFF and the Common Provisions Regulation;
* 14-15 March 2019: 8th European Summit of Regions and Cities in Bucharest;
* 15-18 April 2019: last session of the current European Parliament;
* 4-5 December 2019: last opportunity in the current CoR term of office to update opinions.

**Campaign 3: Regions and cities delivering a sustainable Europe**

***"****Our municipalities, cities and regions, and their elected representatives are a factor for trust and stability for the Union at a time when divergences and antagonisms are growing at national and European level. This stability is vital if we are to continue building a shared future. Local and regional elected representatives very often display pragmatism, not to say courage. Every day, they are in the front line, facing up to practical realities. They have to act. Sometimes, it is possible for a local representative to do what a head of state or government claims is impossible or even intolerable."[[7]](#footnote-7)*

**Context and rationale**

This campaign will showcase regions, cities and local authorities taking action to provide practical solutions and tackle EU-level problems in areas identified by the CoR in its political priorities for 2015-2020: climate action and disaster resilience, migration/integration and broader sustainable development. In so doing, the wealth of know-how as collected by CoR members and European associations and networks of local and regional authorities will be harvested through relevant communication activities.

This is the chance to deliver on the 5-year strategy's commitment to evidence-based storytelling. The subjects need to be those where local and regional authorities deliver on priority EU policies which are in the news, for example sustainable development, climate change (after the Katowice COP) and disaster resilience, international partnerships (given the *Regions for development*/*assises de la cooperation décentralisée* event in February), integration and the alliance for education and skills.

This campaign interacts with the second campaign by demonstrating that the CoR's calls for extra commitment and spending in these areas are justifiable based on the record of achievement by cities and regions. The focuses of this campaign – on the climate, integration and sustainable development – would also offer an opportunity to engage more closely with other EU Institutions and bodies, the EU's Urban Agenda, regions, cities and territorial associations.

**Objectives**

* to showcase the practical contributions of regions, cities and local authorities to a stable and robust EU in areas such as climate change and sustainable development and also to deliver quantitative and qualitative elements from the contribution of the local and regional level to this problem (follow-up of the San Francisco Summit);
* to showcase delivery of CoR commitments to highlight local integration projects and the Alliance for Education and Skills;
* through the above, to help enshrine recent gains for regional and local authorities in the EU policy-making process.

**Milestones**

* 26-27 January: ARLEM 10th anniversary plenary session in Seville (including the young local entrepreneurs in the Mediterranean awards)
* 4-5 February 2019: Cities and Regions for development/assises de la cooperation décentralisée;
* 13 February: Local and Regional Best Practices on SDGs
* 10-11 April: Possible "Mayors for Integration" event back-to-back with the plenary;
* May: 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership
* 18-19 June: Enlargement day
* July: UN High Level Political Forum on Agenda 2030
* November: OECD conference on localisation of the SDGs
* December 2019: United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25);
* (dates tbc) Conferences and communication tools on policy development best local practices, developed together with regions, cities and their associations and with neighbouring countries and international organisations.

#  **Other institutional communication**

Beyond the three campaigns, adequate coverage of the legislative work and other institutional activities should be generated from issues which promise to have the greatest impact. This work includes contributing to the President's priorities ("*four chantiers*") for the term of office:

* energising the functioning of the CoR statutory bodies;
* fostering our cooperation with the EU Institutions and our impact;
* strengthening our bonds with cities, regions and their associations;
* leveraging communication, dialogue with citizens and standing in public opinion.

Moreover, the 25th anniversary of the CoR will feature in an appropriate way across the communication work.

Other institutional communication includes, for example, the CoR's involvement in the follow-up to the Task Force on subsidiarity, proportionality and doing less more efficiently. This is likely to include in early 2019 the launch of a pilot network of regional hubs – one of the first concrete manifestations of *A new way of working*.

It may be useful to recall the "standard package" of communication products and services for legislative work, which is the core business of the CoR. For a normal commission meeting, this could include a highlight or press release, a web entry and, for each individual opinion, the standard format leaflet with the option for the rapporteur to invite the media. For a study or hosted event, this would include a web entry. For examples and success stories, "Europe in my region" is the web repository for all.

**Innovations:** building on successes such as the "no-all-male panel" policy for events, which was adopted in 2018, and always working through the informal group of members who give advice on an ad-hoc basis (to ensure communication remains member-centric), we should:

* consider a more effective and more visible approach to offsetting the carbon emissions of hosted and co-organised events in the refurbished JDE building;
* consider a charging scheme for hosted events (Article 3.2 of Decision 028/2016)
* consider further innovations in graphic design and expand to additional social media channels (e.g. Instagram) as the social media landscape evolves;
* further strengthen engagement on social media, supporting and encouraging members to play an active role in their respective digital communities;
* further invest in a storytelling approach in our communications efforts across the different channels;
* further improve the e-shop system of the CoR in order better to reach out to key audiences;
* member-centric invitations of key political guests to CoR events, based on an appropriate political balance and an agreed profile/background;
* consider a focus group of members to take stock regularly of the impact of our communication (for example on the basis of the 2018 Communication Report which will be prepared in Spring next year).

#  **Monitoring and evaluation**

Outreach and outcomes of CoR communication is monitored by a system of monthly and annual reports on the Communication Plans, and the baseline, mid-term and final evaluation of the 2015-2020 Communication Strategy, which focus on impact and cost-efficiency of the communication tools and channels. The monitoring system looks into the following aspects:

* Press and media relations: Media reports are drawn up on a monthly basis and following plenary sessions and key events, presenting achievements in terms of media mentions and outreach, including through audio-visual media. These reports will also include qualitative analyses by theme and country.
* Events:Results and impact of key CoR events are documented through evaluations and proceedings. Beyond participants' satisfaction surveys, the former will include information about the impact of CoR events, e.g. with regard to follow-up activities conducted by local administrations.
* Publications, online and social media:Reports are up on a monthly basis or following plenary sessions and key events, which present achievements in terms of web and social media outreach. In addition, tools are employed to better track the use of CoR publications and online sources. On given occasions, dedicated evaluations will be carried out to enhance the usefulness of the CoR's paper and web publications.

The following output and outreach indicators will be applied:

* number of media mentions;
* number of social media interactions and engagement.
* number of website visits/users;
* number of CoR members participating/speaking in events
* event reports which feed into the political work of the CoR (qualitative harvesting of content rather than just quantitative targets)
* publications outreach.

For each indicator, the level of outreach to MEPs, other elected politicians and representatives of local and regional authorities should be specified.

The evidence base for the presentation of the 2019 Communication Plan is the report comparing overall communication performance in the first six months of 2018 with the corresponding period in 2017. This report shows clear examples of efficiency gains, cost-sharing with other EU Institutions and setting aside margins in each budget line for innovative communication actions. These examples are useful for the CoR as a whole.

Later in 2019, the final evaluation of the 2015-20 Communication Strategy will be conducted by an external contractor. This would in particular involve a third survey on the reputation of the CoR as a fully-fledged institution. This survey would be conducted among regional and local politicians, with the Institutions in Brussels giving a further snapshot in addition to the baseline survey and the mid-term evaluation conducted in 2017. The results could be used to develop the Communication Strategy for the next term of office in early 2020.

#  **Resources and budget**

The Communications Directorate manages the CoR's various communication tools such as media relations, conferences and events, digital communication including web-based communication and social media, and publications. It employs a total staff of 51 (22 AD, 22 AST, 1 END, 7 CA). The management level of the Directorate (2 AD, 4 AST) also includes a team overseeing the budget for communication. The three units of the Directorate carry out the following tasks with the indicated staff:

* Unit D 1 – Press officers and relations with media: The unit (10 AD, 3 AST, 2 CA) supports CoR members and services through press and media relations and audiovisual services. It comprises a team of press officers and an audiovisual team for video and photo production and distribution.
* Unit D 2 – Events: The unit (5 AD, 8 AST, 1 CA, 1 END) supports CoR members and services through the organisation of events and comprises a team organising the annual European Week of Regions and Cities, a conference team and a visitors' service team.
* Unit D 3 – Social and digital media, publications: The unit (5 AD, 7 AST, 4 CA) supports CoR members and services through the social and digital media communications, publications and graphic design, and is composed of **three** teams dealing with social and digital media and with publications.

Our aim is to focus 60% of the human resources on the three communication campaigns, while 40% will be available for covering general and standard activities.

With regards to the operational budget, the 2019 Communication Plan will be delivered with resources similar to those available in previous years in the order of EUR 2 234 461, increased in view of the 8th European Summit of Regions and Cities to be held in Bucharest. Provided the 2019 budget is adopted by the budget authority, this total will be spread over three budget lines as follows:

* EUR 538 647 for the organisation of events (in Brussels or in decentralised locations) in partnership with local and regional authorities, with their associations and with the EU Institutions (budget line 2542);
* EUR 794 854 for media relations with European, national, regional, local or specialised media and partnerships with audio-visual, written or radio media (budget line 2600);
* EUR 900 960 for digital content production and distribution of audio-visual, electronic or web-based information supports (budget line 2602).

Our aim remains for 80% of the operational budget to be concentrated on the three communication priorities and 20% on other issues. A 10% budget reserve per budget line will be maintained as in previous years to test innovative approaches in communication.

1. Address by Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the European Committee of the Regions, on the *State of the European Union: the View of Regions and Cities*, 9 October 2018; online: <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/Pages/SOTREG-2018.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Cities and regions need the European Union. The European Union needs its cities and regions*, address by Karl-Heinz Lambertz on 9 October 2018 op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. European Commission: The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality: Strengthening their role in the EU's policymaking, Communication COM (2018)490 of 23 October 2018; online: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-principles-subsidiarity-proportionality-strengthening-role-policymaking\_en.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The SMN is the CoR network set up to facilitate the exchange of information between local and regional authorities in the European Union and the Union level regarding documents and legislative and political proposals from the European Commission; <http://portal.cor.europa.eu/subsidiarity/thesmn/Pages/default.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. REGPEX is designed to support the participation of regions with legislative powers in the early phase of the EU legislative procedure, the Early Warning System. Furthermore, it is meant as a source of information and exchange between regional parliaments and governments in the preparation of their subsidiarity analyses; http://portal.cor.europa.eu/subsidiarity/regpex/Pages/default.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Cities and regions need the European Union. The European Union needs its cities and regions*, address by Karl-Heinz Lambertz on 9 October 2018 op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Cities and regions need the European Union. The European Union needs its cities and regions*, address by Karl-Heinz Lambertz on 9 October 2018 op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)