



**European Committee
of the Regions**

RESOL-VII/022

150th plenary session, 29-30 June 2022

RESOLUTION

**on the European Committee of the Regions' proposals in view of the
European Commission Work Programme for 2023**

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THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR),

having regard to:

- the Protocol of Cooperation with the European Commission of February 2012;
- the CoR Resolution on the European Committee of the Regions' priorities for 2020-2025¹;
- the final report of the Conference on the Future of Europe;
- the contributions of regional parliaments with legislative powers received in the framework of the CoR-CALRE cooperation agreement;
- its Resolution on the final outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe;

encourages the European Commission to pursue the following actions through its 2023 work programme:

Future of Europe

1. Welcomes the recommendations adopted by the Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe (COFE) for a more democratic, sustainable and fairer European Union. The CoR is committed to contributing to the implementation of the final report, including to the institutional reforms needed to ensure a strong link between citizens and their elected representatives at all levels. The CoR has outlined its proposals for possible treaty changes and updates of interinstitutional agreements in a separate resolution;
2. Calls for the EC work programme to include concrete initiatives implementing these proposals, in particular in view of developing place-based participatory methods and making them a permanent feature of EU decision-making, while respecting the legislative competences of regional administrations;
3. Welcomes, therefore, the COFE proposal aimed at creating a system of EU Councillors, a proposal initiated by the CoR, as a way to further reduce the distance between EU institutions and citizens. The CoR is committed to implementing this proposal in cooperation with the Commission through its European Network of Regional and Local Councillors, and the project 'Building Europe with Local Councillors'. The CoR also recommends the broadest involvement of young local politicians and administrators in EU law-making processes, also by promoting its Young Elected Politicians (YEP) programme;
4. Calls for a better involvement of young people in democratic processes and for structured ways of engaging with youth (e.g. youth councils), and considers civic education an essential prerequisite for empowering citizens, allowing them to participate in democratic life in an informed and active way. Calls for the EC work programme to propose initiatives to develop a

¹ COR-2020-01392-00-00-RES-TRA.

Europe-wide curriculum for civic education, the promotion of European democratic values, critical thinking, digital skills and media literacy, in partnership with local and regional authorities;

5. Urges the European Commission to lead a fast procedure aimed at reaching a satisfactory and permanent solution to the problem of the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean, firstly focused on protecting migrants' lives, but also on ensuring the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The CoR and the LRAs offer their deepest cooperation;
6. calls on the Commission to systematically use the subsidiarity assessment grid when presenting legislative proposals in policy areas of shared or coordinating competences;

Ukraine

7. Reiterates its request to the European Commission to set up an EU Ukrainian Refugees Local Facility, not as a new fund, but as an operational and complementary tool to cut red tape and fast-track local leaders' access to current funds;
8. Stresses that Member States may use the funding of the Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE) to develop tailor-made solutions for the **long-term integration** of people with a migrant background, through investments in housing, education, employment, health, social inclusion and care, or other social services. Emergency support to refugees should be provided independently of their country of origin;
9. Asks the Commission to put forward a proposal for a revision of Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE), to consider short- and medium-term solutions for local and regional authorities in order to meet ongoing financial needs related to the Ukraine crisis, and calls for strong measures to prevent and tackle human trafficking, and for safeguards to ensure refugees have access to medical and psychological care and to sexual and reproductive health rights; supports a Child Protection Package for Ukrainian refugee children and calls for special measures to protect vulnerable refugees;
10. reiterates with regard to the implementation of the one-in, one-out principle, whereby new legislative "burdens" are only allowed to be introduced to the extent to which previous "burdens" are removed, that the fundamental justification for all legislation in democratic communities is to maximise the net benefit for society as a whole and that the EU's legislative objectives and high economic, social and environmental standards have to be preserved;
11. Welcomes the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive, and underscores that recognising free movement rights and the autonomy of refugees has the positive result of alleviating pressure on national asylum systems and on the reception capacities in border regions. However, the CoR calls on the Commission to reconsider the pertinence of its Proposal for a Regulation on instrumentalisation in the field of migration and asylum and the definition of instrumentalisation in the draft revised Schengen Borders Code, as they would also apply to Ukrainian refugees weaponised by the Russian regime and thereby risk entering in direct conflict with the Temporary Protection Directive;

12. Strongly supports the creation of an EU recovery plan for Ukraine to revive Ukraine's economy, the reconstruction of its destroyed infrastructure, and to support its path of democratic reforms of its institutions and public services. In this context, the CoR will establish an Alliance of Cities and Regions for the reconstruction of Ukraine bringing together local and regional authorities in Europe and in Ukraine, with a view of giving self-government a pivotal role in the reconstruction strategic planning, further implementing the devolution process and multilevel governance in Ukraine and improving good local/regional governance. The CoR also echoes the call of Ukrainian and EU local and regional authorities to revitalise or establish partnerships, and city and region twinning as integral parts of the rebuilding process. The CoR is in favour of measures mitigating the long-term social and economic consequences of the Russian war in Ukraine for the EU's regions and cities;
13. Points out that the corrective measures taken as part of the Member States' macroeconomic imbalance procedures have a more strongly effects in some regions, as those identified in Article 349 of the TFEU, that have an economic and social highly sensitive to exogenous shocks and contractionary economic policies;

Recovery and Cohesion

14. Believes that if the escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) were to be deactivated against the current backdrop of an energy crisis, geopolitical instability, and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, it could have a significant economic, social and environmental impact. Therefore, calls for the general escape clause to remain active until a revised economic governance framework is put in place. The CoR also endorses the COFE's call for a reform of the European Semester with view of increasing its democratic legitimacy and the involvement of local and regional authorities through a "Code of Conduct" modelled on the Code of Conduct for Partnership in the structural funds;
15. With the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) now underway, calls on the Commission to ensure that local and regional authorities are fully involved in their decision-making, programming and implementation in order to mitigate risks stemming from lack of coordination with other sources of funding, including cohesion, and to strengthen coherence and synergies with local development strategies, both of which are key to reaching the objectives of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF);
16. Underlines that the potential of a European cohesion policy plays a decisive role in minimising the territorial imbalances of the economic activities – especially those with higher added value – as well as in a more equitable regional distribution of European income, which the internal market and globalisation alone do not guarantee. So, it must stay among the core ideas for the reflection;
17. Strongly supports the 'do no harm to cohesion' principle put forward in the 8th Cohesion Report underlining that **cohesion is an overall value of the EU**, and suggests an early start for a thorough reflection process about the long-term challenges for cohesion, and how cohesion policy and other EU policies can address them; in this regard, supports the Commission in

establishing rural proofing as part of a better contribution of all policies to cohesion in rural areas, both at EU, Member State and sub-national level;

18. Asks for the 2023 evaluation of the long-term vision for EU's rural areas 2040 to set up concrete proposals accompanied by resources, financial instruments and quantitative targets, and to take into account the impact of the Ukraine war on rural areas; calls for the adoption of a forward-looking European rural agenda that supports agricultures and local production, improves urban-rural integration, takes into account the situation of regions suffering from serious and permanent natural or demographic disadvantages, strengthens food resilience and leads to a sustainable revitalisation of rural communities and peripheral areas;
19. Calls on the European Commission to step up communication efforts on European policies in rural areas, which feel alienated from the debate processes and are often unaware of the channels of participation that the institutions make available to them;
20. Calls on the European Commission to put into practice the new strategy for the Outermost Regions of the Union, in all its scope and depth, which have been and still are particularly affected by the pandemic and are also mostly vulnerable to the international crisis resulting from the war in Ukraine;
21. Agrees with the Conference of Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE) and the European Parliament that the specific demographic characteristics, needs and challenges faced by peripheral and insular regions, including archipelagos and outermost regions require dedicated and targeted support from the EU, for example in the green and digital transitions, including research and investment programmes focussing on the potential of these regions in the areas of renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and fisheries, marine and biodiversity protection, and reducing the multiple structural and permanent handicaps suffered by these European Union territories, as for example the difficulties of these regions in decreasing the CO₂ footprint;
22. Agrees with the European Parliament to move forward an Islands Pact and a European Union Agenda for Islands, with the participation of the principal stakeholders, namely national, regional and local authorities, economic and social operators, civil society, academia and non-governmental organisations, along the lines of the Urban Pact and the future Rural Pact; and calls on the Commission to carry out a study on the diverse situation of island territories of the European Union;
23. Calls on the European Commission to initiate the legislative acts needed to implement the new strategy for the outermost regions "putting people first, securing sustainable and inclusive growth, unlocking the potential of the EU's outermost regions", which reflects the Commission's unwavering commitment to these regions through place-based approaches and tailored support in accordance with the Treaty;
24. Underlines that small towns and villages can play a vital role in designing and implementing integrated territorial development processes, and asks the European Commission to promote their role in ITI and CLLD and other territorial tools supporting initiatives established by the Member States by creating an advisory support network within cohesion policy in order to

foster their use, particularly among the small urban areas which play the role of regional centres, and to guarantee that National Governments will support all initiatives of ITI and CLLD, especially those regions that need it the most, such as less developed regions and those that fell behind in the local development;

25. Considers that the multiple crises the European Union is currently facing reinforce the need to keep the pace of implementing the European Green Deal and giving it a new legislative impetus in 2023 and welcomes therefore that according to the First Annual Report on the implementation of the RRF, the minimum 37% of the Recovery and Resilience Facility funds allocated to the green transition has been exceeded;

Green transition and Sustainability

26. Calls on the European Commission to engage with local and regional governments on the implementation of initiatives stemming from the Glasgow Climate Pact and future COP27 conclusions, and support multilevel collaboration and locally-determined contributions; calls on the European Commission to recognise the role of local and regional governments in achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement and in subnational climate diplomacy; calls to join efforts in an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework with the aim of ensuring that the shared vision of "living in harmony with nature" is fulfilled by 2050;
27. Is concerned that the progress made to promote adaptation to climate change has slowed down compared to the high ambitions announced in the new EU strategy on adaptation to climate change, and also the heightened global ambitions, as underlined by the UNFCCC's call for a global target on adaptation to climate change;
28. Calls on the Commission to systematically integrate the principle of energy sufficiency in the EU legislative framework, promoting systematic action to save energy, to accompany and speed up the transition towards clean, renewable, affordable and secure energy, and asks that the Commission and the co-legislators work towards a sound legislative framework to assess and fight energy and mobility poverty; asks to be included in the Energy Poverty and Vulnerable Consumers Coordination Group; stresses that renewable energy communities are a key tool for promoting the widespread use of renewable energy sources and achieving a decentralised and secure energy system; calls on the Commission and Member States to work with regional authorities to tackle the barriers to their development and devise further incentives, as well as to support necessary investments in such process. In this regard, points out that regions where the energy transition will be more costly because of their energy isolation, such as islands and the outermost regions, should not be forgotten;
29. Calls on the Commission to work on a permanent Green Deal legislative framework that better embeds the SDGs and includes local and regional authorities structurally in a thorough revision of the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action;
30. Calls on the Commission to continue supporting the work of the European Covenant of Mayors, as well initiatives such as the EU mission for climate-neutral and smart cities as a key

instrument for implementing the European Green Deal in cities and regions across the EU, and for helping local and regional authorities meet the adaptation targets;

31. Calls on the Commission to work in cooperation with Member States on a financing and support framework to boost the implementation of the renovation targets for subnational public buildings with a view to ensuring the feasibility of these standards as proposed in the Energy Efficiency Directive; in this sense, recalls the importance of providing direct funding for local and regional authorities for energy efficiency measures, as well as additional guidance and support, especially for the renovation of historic buildings;
32. Commits to continuing to cooperate on the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform, promoting a multi-level governance approach for the zero pollution action plan, including monitoring and, at a later stage, setting up a scoreboard of EU regions' green performance;
33. Supports the designation of a European Year of Greener Cities and expresses its readiness to become actively involved in this initiative;
34. supports a holistic place-based and area-oriented approach on environmental policies and reiterates its call for an Ocean Law, in the same spirit as the climate law;
35. Calls for greater emphasis to be placed on short agri-food value chains and for the recognition of the diversity of production systems across Europe, including alternative production systems, aimed at promoting local and regional forms of production, processing and marketing to build up local and regional food autonomy; calls for greater support for collective local projects that involve processors, local authorities, farms, forest holdings, traders, cooperatives, local products associations and local consumers to develop a local food offer;
36. Highlights the need to develop measures through short- and medium-term economic support and structural social policies aimed at facilitating access to a more sustainable and healthy food system for the most vulnerable groups, thus helping to combat obesity and malnutrition, including a post-2020 EU action plan on childhood obesity to be drawn up;
37. Calls for an effective multilevel governance system combining European Missions with local and regional development strategies, COVID-19 recovery measures, and innovation funding through the Structural Funds to achieve a greener, healthier, inclusive and resilient EU;
38. Strongly supports the recent Partnerships for Regional Innovation pilot action for combining the concept of smart specialisation with the mission approach of the green and digital transitions; suggests that the EU provide additional support for promoting territorial missions as well as local innovation ecosystems via ERA hubs, so that they may play an active role in the European Research Area and in closing the innovation divide in the EU;
39. Underlines that the New European Bauhaus can only be implemented through a multilevel governance and place-based approach, conceived as an interconnected network of regional or local hubs rather than just a single geographical outpost; reiterates its proposal for an easy-to-

use voucher scheme to provide practical support to cities and regions for engaging in the New European Bauhaus community;

40. Expects the Commission to further mainstream the gender dimension into its policy processes, notably by putting forward a methodology assessing the gender impact of EU programmes;
41. Fully acknowledges the need for decisive action to reach the EU's climate goals in the transport sector. Considers that all modes of transport must become more sustainable, and road transport must lower emissions through a combination of long-term sustainable alternative fuels and zero-emission vehicles. It is also important to take account of the whole lifecycle so as to minimise greenhouse gas emissions all the way from well to wheel, not just at the exhaust pipe. In view of the needed substantial transformation of the automotive sector in all regions in order to guarantee that no region is left behind, urges the Commission to address the impact of stricter CO₂ emission standards for cars and vans through a European mechanism to support a just and socially fair transition for the European automotive and supply industry regions;

Digital transition and industry

42. Strongly encourages the dissemination of research results and best practices to local innovation actors – namely via initiatives such as the Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP) and Science Meets Regions, as well as the ongoing activities of the European Institute of Technology and the European Innovation Council, primarily targeting start-ups and high-growth-potential companies within Europe's regions;
43. Welcomes the work undertaken by the Commission under the 'Join, Boost, Sustain' movement, and expresses its readiness to continue its expert activities on local and regional digital indicators, and support the European Commission in providing cities and municipalities with suitable tools to measure the digital transformation;
44. Against the background of the CoR opinion on *Digital Cohesion*, invites the Commission to engage with the CoR and territorial associations on 1) how to identify and monitor growing digital divides, 2) how to make the Union more digitally cohesive and 3) how to implement recommendations on the digital transformation put forward by the CoR and by the Conference on the Future of Europe;
45. Welcomes the Commission's proposal on the Data Act and looks forward to receiving a draft regulation on the Interoperability Strategy Act, which should facilitate fair and equitable data sharing, in particular between public authorities at different levels and between private entities, and which builds trust between private companies and public authorities;
46. Looks forward to the publication of a new legislative initiative to create a single market emergency instrument, and welcomes the Commission's announcement that the instrument will aim to reinforce European governance of the single market in times of crisis in order to anticipate and prevent disruptions, and calls for all relevant actors, including local and regional authorities, to be involved in crisis preparedness and response mechanisms;

47. Stresses the importance of a more politically coordinated and wide industrial strategy, in order to not exclude the more remote regions, with lacking in industrial location factors and low diversification of their economic structures, but with the potential to establish services companies complementary to industrial companies that the European strategy seeks to relocate in the EU territory;
48. Reiterates its recommendation that the Commission link its future industrial policy more closely to future-proofing, and take on board lessons from competitive regional ecosystems, the importance of key enabling technologies, and the need to strike a balance between competitiveness and open strategic autonomy;
49. Suggests the European Commission to improve and strengthen the relationship between the Cohesion Policy and State Aid window of the Competition Policy, by allowing the REACT-EU cofinancing use of actions implemented under the Temporary Crisis Framework for State Aid measures to support the economy following the aggression against Ukraine by Russia;

Cross-border cooperation and mobility

50. Notes that legal and administrative obstacles continue to hinder the development of the European border regions, and calls on the Commission to propose an instrument for coordination between Member States during the transposition of EU directives to prevent the creation of new legal obstacles at borders; also calls on the Commission to reopen the dialogue with the Council on the proposed ECBM Regulation, or to propose an alternative instrument that would allow European border regions to efficiently find solutions to the obstacles they are facing;
51. Calls on the European Commission to present a proposal to ensure the maintenance of land and maritime cross-border cooperation in the event of an EU-wide or regional crisis, and to give adequate funding to projects developing cross-border connectivity and intermodality. The Connecting Europe Facility should always include specific calls to remedy cross-border missing links, and INTERREG should increase its participation in financing these transport bottlenecks. Long-term and sustainable investments through the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the national promotional banks and institutions (NPBIs) should also provide funding for cross-border projects;
52. Welcomes the public consultation initiated by the European Commission on *Brain drain – mitigating challenges associated with population decline*, and reiterates its call for different types of responses to be identified and implemented for each subcomponent of the brain drain phenomenon – brain gain, brain waste, brain circulation and re-migration - as well as of the migration of the skilled workforce;
53. Welcomes the ambitious revision of the guidelines for the development of the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T), in particular the better integration of urban nodes into the long-distance network, and the improved governance of the European corridors. However, implementation of the infrastructure in line with the deadlines for each layer of the network will require a substantial financial effort at European, national and regional level. In order to

guarantee continuity and availability of financing, the CoR encourages starting discussions on the next Connecting Europe Facility (CEF 3);

54. Welcomes the Commission proposal for the new urban mobility framework, while calling for greater emphasis on the promotion of active mobility and public transport. It is necessary to address the significant funding gaps facing LRAs in urban and peri-urban areas, as well as to ensure transport inclusivity for rural regions, in order to achieve the EU's decarbonisation objectives;

Social protection, education and youth

55. Reaffirms the need to further involve young people in democratic processes and decisions at all levels of governance, and stresses that by mainstreaming youth across all relevant policy areas, the EU would ensure a strong legacy for the 2022 European Year of Youth;
56. Stresses the need to facilitate access to social protection, affordable and sustainable housing for all – and not least for young people – including through EU funding, and to combat precarious youth employment, as a response to the aggravated situation faced by Europe's youth in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic;
57. Urges the European Commission to propose an EU regulatory framework to end unpaid traineeships;
58. Asks the European Commission to establish a European housing agenda, which would effectively address the challenges and opportunities facing the housing sector by truly implementing the renovation wave strategy; requests therefore an exemption for long-term housing investment from being considered national or equivalent structural expenditure as defined within the SGP;
59. Calls on the Commission to update its 2011 Council recommendation on preventative policies to reduce early school leaving against a backdrop of major societal challenges that have occurred in recent years;
60. highlights the urgent need to improve digital education, as a key strategic objective for high-quality teaching and learning in the digital age. Mastering digital skills empowers our current and future citizens, enabling them to deal more successfully with the current fourth industrial revolution (digital revolution) and the upcoming fifth revolution with industry 5.0.;
61. Reiterates the need to ensure the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its relevant headline targets for 2030; in this regard, urges the Commission to provide a comprehensive European anti-poverty strategy, also providing for effective monitoring and data collection mechanisms, including at subnational level;
62. Asks that local and regional authorities be involved in the design and implementation of the proposals for inclusive labour markets and stronger social policies;

Health, civil protection and tourism

63. Wholeheartedly supports the recommendation of the COFE to reinforce the resilience of health systems in Europe, and recalls that their management is decentralised in two-thirds of the Member States, making regions a key partner in discussing and implementing any new policies aimed at decreasing the EU's dependence on foreign medicine suppliers, coordinating research and funding, accelerating strategic stockpiling, strengthening manufacturing and reviewing the vulnerability of health systems; in this regard, invites the Commission to reflect on new legislation, similar to the European Chips Act, to increase the EU's independence in the field of active ingredients, ready-made medicines, and all types of medical countermeasures;
64. Expects the Commission to come forward with concrete proposals to implement the CoR recommendations on making the Directive on the Rights of Patients in Cross-Border Healthcare easier to use for patients, health professionals, health insurers and public authorities; calls specifically for more guidance and active support (logistic, legal and financial) to border regions involved (or planning to engage) in cross-border healthcare cooperation;
65. Expects the Commission to propose measures in the upcoming revision of pharmaceutical legislation to ensure that all patients have timely access to affordable, essential and innovative medicines, regardless of where they live, and to address the root causes of shortages of pharmaceuticals;
66. Reiterates the need for a clear plan for a long-term commitment to, and financial reinforcement of, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and its instruments, both in terms of both disaster prevention and preparedness as well as collective emergency response capacity, especially in view of more complex and more frequent disasters; stands ready to contribute to the work of the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network with regional and local disaster management expertise;
67. Continues to request a new strategy for European tourism, and asks the Commission to finally present a European Tourism Agenda 2030/2050 in order to support the dual transition (green and digital) of European tourism destinations, in particular of the outermost regions, boosting their competitiveness and facilitating both the recovery of the economy and tourism employment and the resilient relaunch of activities and the exercise of the right to safe and full tourism by the citizens of the European Union;

External cooperation

68. Expects the Commission to follow up on the CoR's request to give more territorial depth to the relationship between the United Kingdom (UK) and the EU, and to consider ways and means to structurally associate, through the CoR, local and regional authorities to the partnership with the UK, and the institutional framework of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). Beyond the TCA, the CoR stresses that the relationship between the EU and the UK should also benefit from the still untapped prospects for cooperation between EU and UK local and regional authorities in jointly engaging on common challenges, such as the sustainable management of

the North Sea, the Channel and the Irish Sea, or the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at local and regional level;

69. Calls on the Commission, when formulating tourism legislation, to take into account the additional constraints of the outermost regions, which are heavily dependent on tourism for their economic, social and cultural development, and warns, in this context, of the need to ensure proper funding to safeguard accessibility and the climate and digital transition in these regions;
70. Proposes a framework for subnational action to be formally taken into account in the UNFCCC process and the ensuing EU climate;
71. Calls on the Commission to recognise the role that local and regional authorities and peer-to-peer cooperation can play in contributing to peace and prosperity in third countries, such as the Nicosia initiative;
72. Welcomes the European Commission's opinions on Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova's applications to EU membership and subsequently greets the European Council's decision on granting the candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova and recognising the European perspective for Georgia; in this context, invites the Commission to undertake a revision of the Eastern Partnership initiative and an in-depth analyses of the relations with the EU's Eastern Partnership countries, with a stronger focus on their European integration efforts;
73. expresses its support for the accession of all Western Balkan countries to the EU, provided that they meet all the membership criteria; stresses the importance of sending positive signals to the Western Balkan countries in order to foster their commitment to the – unfortunately protracted – EU accession process;
74. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the EU institutions and the Presidencies of the Council of the EU.

Brussels, 29 June 2022

The president
of the European Committee of the Regions

Vasco Alves Cordeiro
