Dear ENVE members, dear colleagues,

The past summer has been a challenging and busy time for all of us. As local authorities, we have been resolving many urgent issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, trying to provide efficient health, hygiene, waste and other services to our citizens, to stimulate and facilitate local economies and to keep workplaces going. At the same time, we also aimed to make this vacation period as green and relaxing as possible for our citizens and for tourists in our cities and regions, many of them severely impacted by the virus and frequently locked down again.

That is why we welcomed the outcome of the July European Summit. We strongly believe that solidarity, sustainable investment and the Green Deal must be at the heart of our green recovery. We need to make sure that 30% of Europe’s future long-term EU budget will be devoted to green investments, to phasing out coal, to the energy transition, adaptation to climate change and new green technologies. As members of the ENVE commission, we will continue to work closely with the German Presidency, the European Parliament, the European Commission and all the other institutions, bringing local expertise to Brussels and making our needs heard. Our Green Deal Going Local Working Group, which has already been brought to the attention of the EU institutions and media, will be a platform for cooperation and exchange among all partners working to achieve a green recovery and the European climate objectives.

I am pleased to invite you to our first ENVE meeting after the summer break with the EU Commissioner for Energy, Kadri Simson, to discuss the Green Deal and the role of the energy transition in the post-pandemic recovery. To support the work of the German Presidency, we are preparing two new opinions, one assessing the Green Deal from regional and local perspectives and the other examining the great potential of regional adaptation to climate change. The Renovation Wave as a part of a green recovery will be a key focus of interest for us, as we perceive this initiative not only as a way of achieving energy efficiency, but also of providing work for people in this time of unprecedented threat.

I look forward to our next ENVE meeting on 9 September and invite you all, dear colleagues, to work together and more closely than ever, with the aim of achieving a green recovery in our cities and regions and looking boldly to the future.

Enjoy reading the ENVOY Bulletin!

Juan Espadas Cejas
Mayor of Seville
Chair of the ENVE commission
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The CoR continues to bring the voice of cities, regions and all other forms of subnational government to the debate on the global biodiversity agenda in the run-up to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP15 in 2021.

According to last year’s Eurobarometer 481/2019, EU citizens are increasingly concerned about the state of the natural world. Almost unanimously (96% of the more than 27 000 people interviewed), EU citizens said that we have a responsibility to protect nature and that this is essential for tackling climate change, too. The 2020 pandemic has lent added weight to this point of view.

The transmission of pathogens, such as the COVID-19 and SARS viruses, from wildlife to humans has been caused by the progressive destruction and alteration of ecosystems, the result of human activity increasingly penetrating pristine areas in order to build settlements and carry out – often illegally – hunting, fishing and agriculture/livestock production. To preserve our health and our wellbeing it is necessary to guarantee the conservation and preservation of nature and biodiversity, as well as to repair the damage caused to habitats and ecosystems.

Figure 2 shows the potential territorial impact of the post-2020 biodiversity framework based on the share of protected areas. It combines the expert judgement of a strong positive effect with the sensitivity of specific regions. A very high impact is seen in 61% of regions. This strong positive effect is evenly distributed across all European regions. A high impact is seen in 25% of regions and moderate impact in 14%.

Local and regional authorities (LRAs) can and must, therefore, contribute to conservation and preservation of nature and biodiversity as a preventive measure to avoid future outbreaks of epidemics and pandemics. The CoR works in partnership with the Advisory Committee on Subnational Governments and Biodiversity (AC SNG) to the UN CBD, and other key organisations and stakeholders such as the ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability network and Regions4.

1. Source: 481/2019

CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

The COVID-19 crisis has had a major impact on our economies. It has shown that drastic and unforeseen changes come with a high economic and social price. Transitioning to a circular economy is a way to reduce the vulnerability of economic and social systems on top of aiming at keeping resource consumption within planetary boundaries and contributing to achieving climate neutrality.

The implementation of the New Circular Economy Action Plan (NCEAP) that was presented by the European Commission on 11 March 2020 will be key to building more resilient societies.

Many regions and cities are pioneers in the field of circularity and they represent a reservoir of best practices. On the other hand, others still face barriers they find difficult to overcome. It will require multi-level governance and active involvement from local and regional authorities (LRAs).

These elements will be at the core of the 16th meeting of the DG ENV-CoR Technical Platform for cooperation on the environment, on 8 September 2020, which will discuss "How can LRAs use the circular economy as an enabler of sustainable recovery?"

The meeting will both highlight existing practices implemented at LRA level and tools at their disposal as well as discuss the remaining gaps and LRAs' needs. It will benefit from the participation of the coordinator of the Partnership on Circular Economy, who will share the results of the Partnership's work as part as the Urban Agenda for the EU in terms of identified barriers and recommendations made to the EU, Member States and cities.
We stand ready to switch to a circular economy

TJISSE STELPSTRA (NL/ECR)
Regional minister of the Province of Drenthe, The Netherlands

Rapporteur on the New Circular Economy Action Plan

What are your views on the NCEAP? Is it ambitious enough to ensure a swift transition to the circular economy?
The NCEAP is ambitious, but could be more concrete in terms of actions and timeframes. On several key matters, we need more commitment and specific targets to drive change. Setting realistic but challenging targets, if necessary with regional differentiation, will stimulate innovation technologies and their market uptake.

How can local and regional authorities (LRAs) better contribute and have a greater impact in transitioning to a circular economy?
LRAs have many opportunities to empower the shift to a circular economy. LRAs can set standards and drive the market towards more sustainable products and services via public procurement. Regional collaboration is also essential to public-private partnerships, which we need if we are to scale up sustainable patterns of production and consumption. Another key area in which LRAs can greatly contribute is water. Water is our most important resource, but is also the biggest waste stream from households and industry. It contains many nutrients that can be recovered and should be reused as much as possible.

Could you share with us a best practice from your region?
I would like to mention the Circular Friesland Association, a network bringing together companies, governments, knowledge institutions and NGOs on a regional scale. Their motto is to think less but do more. The fields of activity vary from agriculture to mobility and from biomass to education. By sharing knowledge and inspiring and motivating each other, developments have the potential to accelerate.

Read the whole interview on the CoR website

Protecting biodiversity must be a key principle of the EU's Recovery Plan

ROBY BIWER (LU/PES)
Member of Bettembourg Municipal Council

Rapporteur on Bio-diverse cities and regions beyond 2020 at the UN CBD COP15 and in the next EU strategy

Is there any role for biodiversity in the post COVID-19 crisis and the EU’s Recovery Plan?
Biodiversity plays a crucial role in human well-being and in so many other areas. We cannot go back to tolerating or even subsidising activities that undermine our health, our food supply and our livelihoods by degrading or destroying our precious ecosystems and their functions. Awareness of preservation and restoration of ecosystems has risen considerably and investments in biodiversity are increasingly expected by our citizens.

How would you summarise the key elements of your opinion on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030?
Biodiversity must in no way be a victim of “old-school” economic considerations and it should be the driver of the EU’s Recovery Plan. The Commission should use the full potential and unique position of local and regional authorities to help implement the new Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.
On 30 September the UN Summit on Biodiversity will take place in New York. What are the key messages that you would like the UN Parties to bring home?

Despite the increasing acknowledgement of the key role of subnational governments in bending the biodiversity loss curve, formal recognition and vertical collaboration is still lacking within global governance frameworks. Local and subnational governments need to be involved in each step and at every level of the biodiversity governance process, both on a global and national scale.

Read the whole interview on the CoR website

HOW CAN THE RENOVATION WAVE HELP THE EU TO RECOVER AND ACHIEVE CLIMATE GOALS?

"We need a real revolution in urbanism and architecture: towns must become greener and more resilient to climate change and natural disasters."

Enrico Rossi (IT/PES), President of the Tuscany Region and the CoR rapporteur on the Renovation Wave, spoke at the Energy Week on 23 June on how the Renovation Wave can help in the recovery process and play a key role for the EU in achieving climate neutrality. He reminded those present that buildings consume around 40% of the EU’s energy, emitting 36% of CO₂. New buildings must respect the most modern energy efficiency criteria, while existing ones must be adapted to similar standards, whilst respecting their historical style.

On the COVID-19 crisis, Enrico Rossi believes that the recovery must be supported by extraordinary and coordinated public investment plans at EU level; failing this, the consequences will be severe given the degree of economic interconnection and the lack of private investment.

Mr Rossi welcomed the recovery support measures presented by the Commission, particularly the resources dedicated to cohesion policy, but underlined the role that regions and cities should play in the Next Generation EU programme. In Europe the construction industry provides 18 million jobs and accounts for about 9% of European GDP. At local level, this “wave” of funding from the Next Generation EU and the European structural and investment funds can be translated into boosting SMEs and creating new jobs. Indeed, the Commission has estimated that this sector could generate 4 million jobs and EUR 300 billion of investment.

He said we must also ensure social cohesion. In Tuscany, dependent on exports and tourism, GDP is set to fall by over 10%, with 160 000 full-time jobs lost. COVID-19 has shown that public authorities must dramatically increase social expenditure: the reconstruction of buildings cannot be left to the private sector which simply reacts to the logic of the market. The Renovation Wave is therefore an opportunity not only to boost our economies and fight climate change, but also to increase solidarity, fight energy poverty and assist people in vulnerable situations, such as those exposed to the rental market, elderly people and those in need of assistance.
The next ENVE meeting will be held both on-site at the CoR and remotely and will take place on 9 September between 11.30 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. The voting on the amendments and opinions will take place online within two consecutive days between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. Members will focus on several topics and opinions ranging from biodiversity and circular economy, through the Renovation Wave in the buildings, adaptation to climate change and the assessment of the European Green Deal. The representatives of German Presidency to the EU Council will join the meeting to present the political priorities related to climate and recovery objectives and to reflect on the above-mentioned topics. More information is available on the Members portal and the ENVE website.

The special guest for the meeting will be:

Kadri Simson, Commissioner for Energy

During the ENVE meeting, members will hold a debate with Kadri Simson, EU Commissioner for Energy on the European Green Deal and the role of the energy transition towards climate neutrality in the post-pandemic recovery.

On 8 July, announcing together with Vice-President Timmermans the energy system integration strategy, Commissioner Simson said: "With 75% of the EU’s greenhouse gas emissions coming from energy, we need a paradigm shift to reach our 2030 and 2050 targets. The EU’s energy system has to become better integrated, more flexible and able to accommodate the cleanest and most cost-effective solutions. Hydrogen will play a key role in this, as falling renewable energy prices and continuous innovation make it a viable solution for a climate-neutral economy".

Photo: European Commission
MEMBERS IN ACTION – OTHER EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

JULY past activities
✓ 2/07: Edinburgh Process results session. The CoR, as a partner of the Edinburgh Process, took part in the session announcing the main results of the consultation organised by the Scottish government under the UN CBD framework. More information here.

SEPTEMBER
✓ 8/09: DG ENV-CoR Platform for Cooperation on the Environment meeting on "How can LRAs use the circular economy as an enabler of sustainable recovery?"
✓ 22-23/09: UN Biodiversity Summit 2020 in New York
✓ 30/09 – 2/10: 9th European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns in Mannheim. The CoR, through its longstanding cooperation with ICLEI, is an official partner of this event.

OCTOBER
✓ 5-22/10: 18th European Week of Regions and Cities. ENVE is organising three sessions on the topic of Green Europe on 22 October including:
  - DG ENV-CoR Platform for Cooperation on the Environment Launch event for the Green City Accord
  - Biodiversity cities and regions post Covid-19
  - Governance models for climate neutrality. The Covenant of Mayors and the Climate Pact
✓ 19-22/10: EU Green Week 2020 "A new beginning for people and nature"
✓ 20-22/10: Green Deal Working Group Meeting

NOVEMBER
✓ 10/11: ENVE Commission meeting at CoR Members portal

DECEMBER
✓ DG ENV-CoR Platform for Cooperation on the Environment meeting on the forthcoming zero-pollution action plan (tbc)

NEXT YEAR
✓ 7-15 January 2021: IUCN World Congress in Marseille, France.
✓ 17-30 May 2021: UN CBD COP15 in Kunming, China.
✓ 1-12 November 2021: UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow.

FORTHCOMING ENVE OPINIONS

ENVE MEETING ON 9 SEPTEMBER
  Rapporteur: Tjisse STELPSTRA (NL/ECR)
  Discussion planned on 9 September, with vote on 10 September (AMs) and 11 September (opinion). Adoption at plenary session: 12-14 October 2020.

✓ Bio-diverse cities and regions beyond 2020 at the UN CBD COP15 and in the next EU strategy. Factsheet
  Rapporteur: Roby BIWER (LU/PES)
  Discussion planned on 9 September, with vote on 10 September (AMs) and 11 September (opinion). Adoption at plenary session: 12-14 October 2020.
The EU environment ministers addressed the green recovery at their first conference under the German Presidency on 13 July, led by Federal Environment Minister Svenja Schulze. Ahead of the European summit, they urged that the future EU budget should substantially contribute to the environment and climate goals of the EU. More here

On 8 July the Commission adopted two strategies for the energy system of the future and clean hydrogen. They will pave the way towards a more efficient and interconnected energy sector and provide the framework for the green energy transition in Europe.

On 17 July the European Council held a summit on the next MFF and the COVID-19 recovery package Next Generation EU (NGEU). EU leaders reaffirmed the importance of “tackling climate change in line with the Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, stating that programmes and instruments should contribute to mainstream climate actions and to achievement of an overall target of at least 30% of the total amount of Union budget and NGEU expenditures supporting climate objectives”. More here

Checking environmental performance of products and businesses is the new Commission’s initiative aiming at reducing “greenwashing” (companies giving a false impression of the environmental footprint of their services and products). Consultation was open until 3 December.

On 4 August the Commission launched the revision of the renewable energy and energy efficiency directives. Consultation is open until 21 September.
#EuropeansAgainstCovid19 Share your experience with us!

We invite CoR members, presidents of regions, mayors and other local or regional partners to kickstart our exchange platform by contacting covid19@cor.europa.eu.

Contact us: enve@cor.europa.eu