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Brussels, 6 June 2016

**168th MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS BUREAU**

**– 14 JUNE 2016 –**

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| **ITEM 6 A)**  **REPORT ON THE IMPACT OF COR OPINIONS**  **– EXCUTIVE SUMMARY –**  *Submitted by the secretary-general* |

**FOR INFORMATION**

**MEMO FOR CoR BUREAU MEMBERS**

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| **ITEM 6 A)**  **REPORT ON THE IMPACT OF COR OPINIONS**  *The 2015 Impact Report provides a thematic overview of the Committee of Regions' work and achievements within the European decision-making process. Following the renewal of its mandate in February 2015, the CoR has made considerable efforts to adapt to the changing interinstitutional reality resulting from a radical shift in the European Commission's approach to policy-making. The CoR has adopted a new, integrated approach to its work based on more strategic thematic planning, strengthening of its commissions and better alignment of the work of its various bodies.*  *As regards interinstitutional relations, cooperation between the CoR, the European Parliament and the European Commission has been further stepped up. Implementation of the Cooperation Agreement with the EP has been systematically assessed at political level and discussed by the executive organs of both institutions. The CoR and the EP agreed to enhance their cooperation in several thematic areas defined by the CoR Bureau, focusing on effective bilateral cooperation between the chairs of the respective CoR commissions and EP committees, and between their rapporteurs. Following publication of the Commission's 2016 Annual Work Programme, the existing priority dossiers for enhanced cooperation with the EP were confirmed. Measures to further increase coordination between the CoR and the EP will continue throughout the mandate.*  *Last year the European Commission maintained its focus on implementation of the ten Juncker policy priorities, delivering the first legislative proposals announced in its Annual Work Programme, and continued its work on the assessment and review of existing EU legislation by setting up the new REFIT platform. In view of the observed drop in the number of incoming referrals, the CoR has taken proactive measures to address the Commission at an early stage of the legislative process through own-initiative opinions, outlook opinions and joint political activities with selected Directorate-General.*    *The need for better regulation is a good reason for developing and strengthening ties with the Council and the presidencies and provides more transparency in the course of the EU decision-making process. In 2016, the CoR's strategy will be geared to identifying more opportunities for effective active involvement in the EU presidency trio activities and the design of future presidency programmes, as well as the opportunity to present CoR requests in Council Working Parties.*  *The drawing up of opinions remains the main task conferred on the CoR under the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU). To increase its impact, the CoR is committed to continuously improving the quality of its opinions using all available instruments, such as political forums like ARLEM, CORLEAP or the Joint Consultative Committees with the enlargement countries, stakeholder consultations, hearings, surveys, studies, the output of its networks and platforms, and closer work with other EU institutions. In this sense the opinions are an integral part of more comprehensive thematic strategies and their aim is to convey the local and regional point of view early on in the EU interinstitutional decision-making processes.* |

1. **METHODOLOGY**

Under Article 60 of the Rules of Procedure, the Secretariat-General has to submit a report on the impact of Committee opinions at least once a year to the plenary assembly.

A total of 44 opinions adopted in previous years, and which had a significant impact on the EU's legislative activity in 2015, are included in this report. The following criteria were used to define the "impact" of the opinion:

* CoR specific proposals adopted in final legislation;
* CoR policy recommendations considered in proposed legislation or in legislative procedures;
* CoR positions that have made a major contribution to ongoing political debates and references made to CoR positions in other EU documents, e.g. resolutions of the European Parliament.

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The CoR performed well in achieving political impact in 2015, resulting from targeted strategic political planning, strong engagement of members and their political groups, and better follow-up on CoR opinions. A more strategic approach helped to increase the CoR's influence along the whole legislative cycle including the agenda setting in the pre-legislative phase, the influence of the co-legislators in different stages of the legislative phase (including the trilogues) and the implementation and evaluation phase of EU law. This executive summary highlights a sample of the CoR's successes in 2015 in some key policy areas. The complete 2015 Impact Report can be found in the attached document.

**Economic policies**

Through its own-initiative **Opinion on the Green Action Plan for SMEs and the Green Employment Initiative** the CoR had an impact on EU-level policy developments in the field, in particular with regard to the European Parliament (EP). Several key points of the CoR opinion were reflected in the draft report and remained in the final text adopted by Parliament on 19 May 2015.

The CoR's own-initiative opinion on the **Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)** contained key recommendations. The CoR was given access to the room containing the negotiation documents at the European Commission (EC) and the Commissioner agreed to regularly inform the CoR on negotiation developments. There has also been a general increase in transparency in the negotiations, and the Commission, together with the US trade authority, have stated that TTIP will in no way affect the way Member States choose to provide social services for their citizens.

With its own-initiative **Opinion on the local and regional dimension of the sharing economy**, the CoR produced the first important document by an EU body focusing solely on the sharing/collaborative economy, and placed itself in a key position with regard to influencing the emerging European-level debate on this topic. Early policy developments in the field are very much in line with the CoR opinion's key recommendations. These developments include the Commission's intention to develop a European agenda for the collaborative economy. An outstanding example of impact at local level is, for example, that Italy drafted legislation[[1]](#footnote-1) on the sharing economy referring to points outlined in the CoR opinion.

**European Semester, Europe 2020 strategy**

**Bureau Declaration on the implementation of the 2015 European Semester and in view of the 2016 Annual Growth Survey**. The CoR and EP (ECON and EMPL Committees) helped to step up inter-institutional cooperation on the *territorial dimension of the European Semester*. This relates in particular to the CoR's focus on regional disparities and to its calls that the European Semester should be given a territorial dimension by developing regional performance indicators for the implementation of the national reform programmes. In the same vein and in the spirit of multilevel governance a code of conduct on LRA involvement in the Europe 2020 strategy should be envisaged.

Structured cooperation with the EP was well received by the ECON Committee, which considers that with CoR participation it could become a forum for debate about the involvement of local and regional authorities in the European Semester and the related CoR proposal for a code of conduct.

The impact of the CoR contribution to the streamlined European Semester is also confirmed in the growing importance of the territorial approach and relevant recommendations in the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs).

**ESIF, Investment Plan and financial instruments**

The CoR's political commitment to addressing the investment gap was echoed in the European Commission's stated intention to engage in dialogue with the Member States with a view to identifying obstacles to investment and analysing these at all government levels, and also to involve the CoR in that process.

Regulation No 2015/1017 on the European Fund for Strategic Investments took on board several recommendations from the CoR opinion on the **Investment Plan and European Fund for Strategic Investments**: complementarity with economic, social and territorial cohesion; consistency with Union policies; complementarity and additionality with respect to ongoing regional, national and Union programmes; and reducing initial cuts to the envelopes of Horizon 2020 and the Connecting Europe Facility.

The Council conclusions on the implementation challenges of 2014-2020 cohesion policy, which include a chapter on the use of financial instruments, took the CoR position into account, and all points in the Council's conclusions were consistent with the CoR opinion on **Financial instruments in support of territorial development**. This was particularly the case with respect to the need for legal certainty when implementing financial instruments, while simplifying implementation, and the continued important role of grants.

The **CoR and EIB** introduced a more structured form of cooperation in 2015 with the presentation of an **Action Plan** for cooperation between the two institutions. That **Action Plan** led to enhanced cooperation, with several EIB representatives taking part throughout the year in CoR activities relating to matters such as investment, infrastructure and urban and territorial development.

The CoR own-initiative opinion on the **Outcome of the negotiations on the partnership agreements and operational programmes** received substantial attention from the Council and the EP. On 12 July 2015 the Council adopted conclusions on the implementation challenges of cohesion policy 2014-2020, conclusions which took the CoR position into account, notably on the importance of using integrated territorial investments and community-led local development and the need for further simplification. During the joint REGI-COTER meeting, participants confirmed the common approach on key messages of the above mentioned CoR opinion.

**Cross-border cooperation and macro-regional strategies**

The CoR opinion on **Strengthening cross-border cooperation** was officially circulated by the Council to all Member State delegations with a view to the informal ministerial meetings on Territorial Cohesion and Urban Policy in Luxembourg, which were also attended by the CoR president. The Council presidency conclusions[[2]](#footnote-2) acknowledged the support given by the CoR and took account of several CoR recommendations from the opinion.

The European Commission published a Communication and an Action Plan for the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) which reflected the CoR's suggestions on the themes and actions of EUSALP, as set out in its opinion on **An Alpine macro-regional strategy for the European Union**. The European Commission also took note of the CoR proposal that a rotating presidency be set up for EUSALP.

In November 2015, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted its conclusions on the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region. The Council called on Member States to introduce an effective multilevel governance system for implementing the strategy and to ensure that the partnership principle was complied with and made fully operational. At the Launch Conference for the implementation phase of EUSALP in Brdo, Slovenia, the partners of EUSALP recognised in their joint statement the validity of the principle of multilevel governance in the macro-regional strategy.

**Urban policy**

The Declaration of Ministers towards the EU Urban Agenda[[3]](#footnote-3) highlighted a number of key concerns that the CoR had raised in its opinion on **Towards an integrated urban agenda for the EU**: in particular the need for an integrated and place-based approach, the need for effective coordination of EU polices with an urban dimension, recognition of the partnership principle as well as the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, and the view that the EU Urban Agenda should apply to towns and cities of all sizes. The EP resolution on *The Urban dimension of EU policies* that followed also took up the CoR's calls for territorial impact assessments to be introduced on the urban dimension of EU policies, the need to base the EU Urban agenda on a new multilevel governance method, involving the local level more closely at all stages of the policy cycle, and the recommendation that the European Commission appoint a special EU urban coordinator.

At European Council level, the Dutch Government involved the CoR at a very early stage on one of the key priorities of the Dutch presidency, and submitted a referral for an own-initiative opinion on **Concrete steps for implementing the EU Urban Agenda**. Both CoR opinions served as a basis for shaping the content of the draft Pact of Amsterdam, which is due to be adopted on 30 May 2016 in Amsterdam at the informal meeting of ministers responsible for urban policy.

**EU territorial vision**

The CoR opinion on **Territorial Vision 2050: What future?** followed a request by the Luxembourg presidency of the Council, and the draft text was presented to the informal meeting of ministers responsible for territorial cohesion policy. The Presidency conclusions explicitly mentioned the CoR opinion as a supporting document, and the messages of the conclusions are in line with the CoR's opinion, notably on the importance of the place-based approach and the need to improve the implementation of the European territorial agenda. With regard to Territorial Impact Assessments (TIAs), the wording of the Presidency conclusions and of the CoR opinion is similar. As a result of its efforts, the CoR notes that TIAs have been included as one of the tools in the **European Commission's 2015 Impact Assessment Guidelines** and the **Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Lawmaking**.

**Transport and mobility**

In 2013 the CoR adopted an opinion on **The fourth railway package**. A number of policy recommendations put forward in that opinion were taken on board by the EP and, to a lesser extent, by the Council. A trilogue agreement on the technical part of the 4th Railway Package reflected the following CoR recommendations: the option of appeal against a failure of the Agency to act within the applicable time limits and specification of the procedures and deadlines applied by the Board of Appeal.

The EP resolution on **Delivering multimodal integrated ticketing in Europe** took on board a number of policy recommendations made in the CoR opinion on **Multimodal travel information, planning and ticketing services** in particular, which recommended the introduction of updated national timetable and fare information systems based on open interfaces linking the travel data for regional and local urban public transport by 2020.

In line with the CoR opinion on the **Urban Mobility Package**, the EP in its resolution on sustainable urban mobility stressed the key role that European cities and regions have to play in boosting and promoting sustainable urban mobility.

**Social and inclusive growth**

On **labour mobility and strengthening EURES,** the relevant European Parliament report included a number of legislative amendments suggested in the CoR opinion: the importance of cooperation and support on a cross-border basis for the categories of organisations in the EURES network, as well as the inclusion of local and regional needs in the supporting role of the Member States.

On the **European Platform Against Undeclared Work**, CoR amendments are evident in different parts of the EP report and in the Council's general approach, with CoR members taking part in the platform on 30 May 2016 meetings as observers, as well as the section regarding tasks assigned to the platform.

The European Parliament resolution on the **EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020** echoes concerns raised by the relevant CoR opinion such as: the lowering of health and safety standards in light of the crisis, the role of the social partners, the role of labour inspectors, the increased risks of discrimination against women, the need to support micro and small enterprises, the need for better and more reliable data about new risks, and the need to pay special attention to older workers.

The final Council text of the **Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States for 2015** took account of the CoR opinion by adding integrated multilateral surveillance of not only economic and budgetary policies, but also employment and social policies, within the framework of the European Semester, and specifically mentioned active inclusion measures, accessible quality services and adequate income support in order to prevent social exclusion.

Responding to a request from the European Commission, the outlook opinion on **Child poverty** emphasised that LRAs need to be fully involved, particularly in terms of providing services relating to health, education and housing. The European Parliament resolution on reducing inequalities, with a special focus on child poverty, takes on board several suggestions contained in in the CoR opinion.

The outlook opinion on **Active ageing: Innovation, smart health, better lives** called on the European Commission "to launch a European Covenant of Mayors on Demographic Change as a legacy to the European Year 2012 to gather LRAs interested to promote innovation, smart health and better lives solutions in support of active and healthy ageing and to provide administrative and financial support to the Covenant". The European Parliament resolution welcomed the EU Covenant on Demographic Change. It also called on the Commission, in conjunction with Member States, LRAs and social partners, to develop effective tools for keeping older workers in the labour market. The resolution was also in line with the CoR opinion in stressing that adult education should be supported to help extend working lives.

## **Education and culture**

The European Parliament resolution of 8 September 2015 **Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe** refers in its preamble to the CoR opinion with the same title and contains elements that are in line with the opinion.

The EP resolution on **European cinema in the digital era** draws on the CoR opinion on **European film in the digital era**, for instance in asking those who benefit economically from European cinematographic works to contribute financially to the making of European films, in calling for more flexible release strategies and earlier availability in video on demand services, and in recommending that Member States promote incentives to facilitate the production, distribution, availability and appeal of European films.

**Energy and climate change**

The key recommendations of the CoR opinion on the **Energy Union package** were reflected in the relevant resolution of the European Parliament, which acknowledged the essential role of local and regional authorities in securing energy independence by increasing energy efficiency and stressed the need for better involvement of LRAs in the preparation of decisions concerning sustainable and renewable energy projects. The EP called on the Commission to facilitate further development and expansion of local and regional renewable energy sources, and of local and regional distribution networks and district heating networks.

The CoR made a substantial contribution, with its political message, to the **global climate agreement achieved at the COP 21 in Paris**, which finally recognised the crucial role of cities and regions in fighting climate change. From the CoR's point of view, the Paris agreement is a first step towards framing a decisive action plan for cities and regions so as to fully integrate them in global climate governance.

The **new Integrated Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy** launched by the European Commission in October 2015 took on board the CoR's main recommendations, such as opening of the Covenant to local authorities across the globe, merging the Covenant and the Mayors Adapt initiatives, and extending the duration of the Covenant until 2030.

**Environment**

The CoR opinion on **The clean air policy package for Europe** influenced the ongoing ordinary legislative procedure of the proposal for a directive on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants (new NEC directive). The European Parliament endorsed the CoR position on introducing binding interim emission reduction targets for 2025 and reinforcing the provisions for better aligning the National Air Pollution Control programmes with the air quality standards to be met by local and regional authorities.

In relation to the **circular economy**, in the run-up to publication of the European Commission's amended legislative proposal, the CoR managed to build a closer alliance with the European Parliament on the key aspects of the revised legislation. The EP explicitly stated in its resolution that the Commission should involve local and regional authorities throughout the development of the circular economy package, and it shared the CoR's view on a number of issues.

The CoR has made a vital contribution to the **fitness check of the Nature Directives** launched by the European Commission and was able at an early stage to influence the positions of both the European Parliament and Council on not opening the Nature Directives for review.

**Agriculture and maritime affairs**

In line with the CoR opinion on **The future of the dairy sector**, the relevant EP resolution called on the European Commission to take structural measures to safeguard the income of all dairy producers, strengthen the role of producers' organisations, improve the operation of the European Milk Market Observatory and develop support for milk production in disadvantaged regions.

Following the call in the CoR's opinion on the **Future of European aquaculture** to introduce a labelling system for aquaculture products, in October 2015 the European Commission announced a new initiative to promote European wild and farmed fish with the label *Enjoy, it’s from Europe!*, earmarking EUR 110 million for the measure.

**Migration and citizenship**

On **EU migration policy**, the CoR has become a regular partner in the new European Migration Forum set up by the EESC and the European Commission. The EP own-initiative report on migration referred to the relevant CoR opinion and shared the CoR's view that the principles of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility should be at the heart of EU policies on asylum, migration and border control. The report also highlighted the key role played by local and regional authorities in the integration of migrants.

**Europe as a global actor**

The European Commission's **Annual Enlargement Strategy** makes direct reference to the key role of regional and local authorities in the EU alignment process and the need for enlargement countries to find an appropriate balance between central, regional and local government so as to support implementation of reforms and the delivery of services to citizens.

In relation to EU neighbourhood policy, the political **CoR-Ukraine Task Force** was launched in 2015. The Task Force was a joint initiative aimed at supporting the reform process in Ukraine by providing expertise and exchange of best practices, notably on political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation. The first meeting of the Task Force took place in September 2015 in Brussels.

In response to the CoR's opinion on **Fair Trade,** the European Commission proposed in its **communication on the EU's trade and investment strategy** to address the issue of fair and ethical trade more systematically and to develop awareness-raising activities in the EU, in particular working with local authorities. This might include launching an *EU City for Fair and Ethical Trade* award, an initiative which was strongly promoted in the relevant CoR opinion.

**PROPOSAL**

**Members of the Bureau are invited to take note of the present document.**

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1. Bill No 3564 of 27 January 2016 on the *Regulation of digital platforms for the sharing of goods and services and provisions for the promotion of the sharing economy.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Luxembourg Presidency Conclusions, 27 November 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Adopted on 10 June 2015 following the informal meeting in Riga of ministers responsible for territorial cohesion and urban matters. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)