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**EN**

Brussels, 29 June 2018

**184th MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS BUREAU**

**- 3 JULY 2018 -**

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| **ITEM 9A)**  **COR ACTIVITIES IN 2017**  **REPORT ON THE IMPACT OF COR OPINIONS**  **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  *Submitted by the Secretary General* |

**FOR DEBATE**

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| **SUMMARY** | | | | |
| **Bureau meeting:** | **184** | | **Date:** | **3/07/2018** |
| **Item 9a)**  **CoR Activities in 2017**  **Report on the impact of CoR opinions: executive summary**  **Executive Summary** | | | | |
| **Type:** | | | | |
|  | | **Document for information / debate** | | |
|  | | **Document for decision** | | |
|  | | **Recommendation to the Assembly** | | |
| **Short description:**  According to Rule 60 of the Rules of Procedure, the Secretariat General is required to submit once a year to the Plenary Assembly a report on the impact of European Committee of the Regions (CoR) opinions. The document contains a compilation of the six commissions' contributions and an analysis of the follow-up of the Committee's opinions based on the following criteria :  (i) Specific CoR proposals adopted in final legislation;  (ii) CoR policy recommendations considered in proposed legislation or in legislative procedures;  (iii) CoR positions that have made a major contribution to ongoing political debates and  (iv) References made to CoR positions in other EU documents, e.g. resolutions of the EP.  The document also reports on the impact achieved through alliance building, communication activities and outreach of CoR opinions as well as the Committee's contribution to the European political debate.  More information about the outcome of the work of the CoR and its impact can be found in the **Annual Impact Report 2017** that is attached to this document. | | | | |
| **The Bureau is invited to take stock of the Executive Summary of the report on the impact of CoR opinions** | | | | |

1. **INTRODUCTION**

In order to respond to European citizens' expectations and to make a difference in addressing global economic, environmental and societal challenges, the European Union has set a number of priorities.

The European Committee of the Region (CoR), as the institutional voice of European local and regional authorities within the EU legislative process, contributed, within its field of competence, to the priorities set out in the Joint Declaration on the EU's legislative priorities for 2017[[1]](#footnote-2).

In that respect, the CoR actively participated in giving a new boost to jobs, growth and investment, through (1) its contribution to legislative programming with a view to the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) post-2020, (2) its efforts in connection with strengthening and simplifying the European Fund for Strategic Investments and, above all, (3) its overall involvement in the shaping and design of the future cohesion policy.

The CoR has remained committed to addressing the social dimension of the EU through its work on the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Solidarity Corps, and to perfecting the Digital Single Market by preventing new disparities between regions. In parallel, local and regional authorities have made their voices heard in contributing to the further strengthening of the EU's research, innovation and industrial policy, as these have become indispensable for the global competitiveness and sustainable development of our territories.

While Europeans consistently point to security and safety as a top priority for the European Union, as well as fighting climate change and ensuring a smooth transition to a clean and circular economy, the CoR has achieved undeniable results in these areas. The CoR has also obtained results in other topical areas of EU priority such as migration and integration.

The overview of the CoR's main achievements showcases some of its successes regarding key Treaty objectives such as economic, social and territorial cohesion and European values, as well as local solutions for facing global challenges. This document shows that the work of the CoR has a much broader reach than its contribution to EU legislation. In addition to its formal role in adopting opinions and resolutions, the Committee showcases what regions and cities are capable of achieving together.

1. **OVERVIEW OF MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS**

As a consultative body to the European Institutions, the impact of the European Committee of the Regions largely depends on its ability to provide input to the legislative process at the right time and in the right place. To achieve this, the CoR combines its long-term political priorities – defined at the beginning of each term of office – with day-to-day dialogue and cooperation with the other EU Institutions, by:

* setting its agenda at an early stage on topics where EU action will be needed;
* providing feedback based on direct experience of how EU regulations and policies work at local and regional level; and
* encouraging dialogue and exchange of experience with and between local and regional authorities in Europe.

This impact report must therefore be considered as the CoR's contribution to addressing the territorial dimension in the delivery of the EU's legislative priorities and political initiatives for 2017.

Four trends emerge from its contribution:

* a pioneering commitment to reconnecting the European Union's decision-making process with its citizens, through citizens' dialogues organised by CoR members at local and regional level;
* an unprecedented dynamic towards building strategic alliances to promote local and regional influence in the European debate;
* a strategic approach to the adoption and implementation of European legislation based on the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and multilevel governance;
* an increasing involvement in inter-institutional and multi-stakeholder platforms.

These positive achievements in 2017 paved the way for its contribution to the 2018-2019 European agenda, which will be dominated by the negotiations on the MFF post-2020 and will be decisive for the future of the EU's existing and new priorities.

A total of 71 opinions adopted in previous years, which had a significant impact on the EU's legislative activity in 2017, are included in this report.

**Making a difference with EU policy- and law-makers - Impact criteria (i) and (ii)**

The most important policy impact of the Committee during 2017 relates to building and effectively deploying a political coalition among European-level associations of regions and cities in favour of a strong, more effective and more visible cohesion policy[[2]](#footnote-3). Facing the possibility of cuts to the cohesion policy budget in the MFF post-2020, the idea of a **#Cohesion Alliance** was launched in May 2017, built around the Committee's opinion on "**The Future of Cohesion Policy beyond 2020"**. The campaign engaged more than 5 000 signatories from private persons to cultural associations, universities and the regions and cities themselves. It is widely acknowledged that the alliance was a major factor in drawing the attention of politicians across Europe to the importance of cohesion as one of the fundamental values of the EU. This level of impact could not have been achieved by the Committee acting alone.

The positive results of this work can be seen in the legislative proposals for the new cohesion policy post-2020, which were presented by the European Commission in May 2018:

* cohesion policy will be available for all regions in Europe;
* the three categories of regions (less developed regions, transition regions, developed regions) will be maintained;
* there are credible steps for simplification, more differentiation and more flexibility;
* the idea of a people-to-people fund for cross-border cooperation has been taken up;
* the principle of multilevel governance has been maintained in the Common Provisions Regulation.

In an effort to strengthen solidarity, cohesion and democracy in Europe, with a particular focus on promoting social inclusion, the European Solidarity Corps will have its legal framework consolidated in the MFF post-2020. Supported by the CoR, it will provide a single entry point for young people to contribute to solidarity activities through volunteering, traineeships and jobs to address concrete societal challenges, both cross-border and locally, and help strengthen communities. The learning outcomes from such activites will be properly validated.

Another essential legislative impact of the Committee during 2017 concerned the fair and equal treatment of employees in Europe and resulted from the opinion on the **"Revision of the Posting of Workers Directive"** adopted at the last plenary session of 2016. The existing regulation had been extensively abused in the past to enable access to a cheap workforce, and the Committee was the first EU institution to publish a new proposal on the topic (in March 2016). After approval in the Parliament and the Council, the latter finally agreed to shorten the existing rule on the long-term status of posted workers from 24 months to 12 months.

In line with the CoR's call to involve all levels of government, the legislative proposal for a Reform Support Programme (RSP) published in May 2018 states that it would be up to the Member States themselves to decide whether to apply for RSP intervention "in light of the possibilities available at national, regional and local level". In its proposal to double the financial endowment of the Structural Reform Support Programme 2018-2020, the European Commission accepted the CoR point that the **capacity-building programme should be open to all levels of government**.

The proposal for the establishment of the InvestEU Programme, presented in June 2018, appears to answer some of the CoR's key concerns. **Simplification of the use of financial instruments** in particular is a long-standing demand of the Committee, which the centralisation and streamlining of different programmes within InvestEU is expected to bring. The CoR has also highlighted that strengthening administrative capacity and institutional expertise of public authorities is a crucial factor in fostering a broader and more effective use of financial instruments. The proposed InvestEU Advisory Hub could play a significant role in this regard.

As a result of the CoR's efforts to promote a **place-based approach**, the new Single Market Programme delivers on some key CoR recommendations. In particular, the COSME successor programme will be strengthened and transparency and synergies between various tools and financial instruments available to small and medium-sized enterprises will be improved.

During 2017, the Committee influenced a variety of new laws and policies, one key example being our contribution to the "**Bonn-Fiji Commitment of Local and Regional Leaders** to Deliver the Paris Agreement at All Levels". This input was based on the opinion on **"Climate finance: an essential tool for the implementation of the Paris Agreement"**, adopted at the October plenary session. Taking part in the 23rd Conference of the Parties (COP 23) in November, the President was particularly pleased that the importance of regions and cities in the fight to cut emissions was being recognised and that there should be an end to subsidies for fossil-fuel industries. On 13 November, the Committee organised a transatlantic dialogue on Climate Change **-** the "**Global Covenant of Mayors Day**" **-** actively exploring ways to work with the US Conference of Mayors and the Federation of Canadian municipalities to make a difference for the generations to come.[[3]](#footnote-4) This represents a key transatlantic alliance in fighting climate change at regional and local level.

With regard to the CoR's commitment to a more sustainable Europe and the reinforcement of the role of local and regional authorities in the development and implementation of the EU Circular Economy policy, it should be mentioned that the Committee's **opinion on the Circular Economy Action Plan** included proposals that are now being developed in the **new** **initiative for Delivering on the Circular Economy Action Plan.** For example this initiative included the new Plastics Strategy, a Communication published in January. The Committee opinion welcomed the Commission’s focus on plastics. In particular the opinion criticised the fact that littering and plastics leaching had not been addressed in more detail in the Action Plan.

The Committee's opinion on the **Fitness Check on the Nature Directives** ensured that the Committee was fully involved in the preparation and implementation of the **Action Plan for nature, people and the economy** aimed at improving the implementation of the directives, and which was launched at an event held in its premises. Furthermore, the CoR President participated in the project team of Commissioners on the follow-up to the fitness check.

With major reforms underway in the Economic and Monetary Union and in relation to harnessing globalisation, the CoR has achieved substantial results. Regarding the establishment of a European Investment Stabilisation Function, the European Commission proposal reflects the requests from the CoR to make **sure that investments are not further reduced**, even in times of severe crisis, which would even further exacerbate the crisis. Furthermore, in the proposal for a European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, the European Commission addresses a number of issues raised by the CoR in its opinion on the reflection paper on harnessing globalisation. These issues include, in addition to a clear reference on the concept of territorial resilience, a simplified approval procedure, lowering the thresholds for triggering the Fund and an increase of funds available, as well as an increase of the co-financing rate by aligning it with that of the ESF+.

**Making a difference in the EU political debate – impact criterion (iii)**

In 2017, the CoR President, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, gave his first**-**ever **speech on the "State of the European Union: the View of Regions and Cities"**. In launching this new annual exercise, he sought to convey the views of local and regional leaders more effectively to the public and to provide a valuable contribution to the Union's political debate in times of rising Euro-scepticism. After Mr Lambertz's speech, the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, confirmed his continuing support for the "Reflecting on Europe" initiative, stating that Europe’s self-confidence depends on the well-being of the Union's cities, regions and municipalities.

During the past year the Committee has been an increasingly **relevant platform** in the European political dialogue. In March 2017, the EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier gave his **first speech on the Brexit consultations** at the plenary session of the Committee, just one week before the official start of the process. Reacting to his speech, the CoR adopted a Resolution together with several research projects to provide valuable input to the negotiations, advocating, and highlighting the need for, territorial cooperation programmes and macro-regional strategies.

To ensure that the **MFF post-2020** is adopted quickly and provides adequate EU resources for regions, cities and local authorities, the Committee held many conferences and events as well as debates in plenary sessions with Günther Oettinger, Commissioner for the EU Budget & Human Resources,. This shows the impact of opinions such as the one on the **"Reflection paper on the Future of EU Finances"** and on the **"Reform of EU own resources within the next MFF post-2020"**. In line with the European Parliament, the Committee's opinions call for the EU budget ceiling to be set at a maximum of 1.3% of the Gross National Income of each Member State.

The Committee intervened in January 2018 in a Resolution **giving a political 'red card'** to the European Commission's proposal for the **Common Provisions Regulation**, as concern grew that establishing the proposed "cash for reforms" system would be contrary to the principles of partnership and multi-level governance. For the first time in five years, the Committee considered bringing a case before the EU Court of Justice should the European Commission not amend the proposal. It was therefore recommended that the European Parliament and the Council reject the plan. In the light of this, a thorough review of the proposal took place.

Cooperation with the European Commission has brought about the CoR's involvement in the **Green Week 2018, with the theme "Green Cities for a Greener Future"**. Furthermore, the **Technical Platform for Cooperation on the Environment** has been proving to be a valid tool for structured cooperation with DG Environment in order to strengthen the role of local and regional authorities in environmental policies.

As the voice of the EU’s regions and cities, the Committee was invited to join the **Task Force on Subsidiarity**, chaired by the European Commission's First Vice-President Frans Timmermans. It aims to look at how to better involve local and regional authorities in EU decision-making and to better apply the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. It will also investigate the possible re-delegation of competences in certain policy areas back to the Member States. The CoR is represented by three of its members in the Task Force: the Committee President, the President of the Subsidiarity Steering Group and the First Vice-Chair of the CIVEX commission. The task force will deliver a report in July 2018.

**Making a difference for regions, cities and local authorities across the EU (impact criterion iv)**

Always aiming to improve the citizen's quality of life at the local and regional levels, the Committee and its thematic commissions focused on cross-border regions in 2017. Looking more closely at living conditions, the opinion on **"Missing transport links in border regions"** was adopted in February 2017, highlighting the issue of the lack of a sufficiently interconnected transport network, which impacts heavily on the well-being of local residents. The opinion resulted in the European Commission proposing an amendment that added an impressive EUR 150 million to the "Connecting Europe Facility" budget for small cross border projects for rail infrastructure, leading to a dedicated call for cross-border and missing links projects, with 332 eligible proposals submitted as a result.

The added value of the **Knowledge Exchange Platform** continued in 2017 in cooperation with the European Commission's DG for Research and Innovation. The platform presents new research and innovation solutions, and the latest products and best practices implemented at local and regional level. Building on the platform's successes in the fields of the bio-economy and Key Enabling Technologies, the theme launched last March was **"innovative energy solutions"**, showcasing how Europe's **regions** and **cities** are leading the way to a successful transition to clean energy. Overall, in the field of research, innovation and development policy, the MFF-related opinion on the **"Local and Regional Dimension of Horizon 2020 and the New Framework Programme for Research and Innovation"** had a considerable impact both at the level of the other European institutions (Commission, EP, Council and rotating Presidencies), acknowledged by the presence of the respective Commissioners and EP rapporteurs, and through national ministerial representatives at key CoR events.

In July 2017, to discuss ways in which local and regional authorities can set about achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, the European Commission and the Committee hosted the **5th "Assises of Decentralised Cooperation/Regions and Cities for development"**. More than 600 participants, local and regional authorities from the EU, Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific and Latin America used the opportunity to forge future cooperation. In order to help municipalities to find partners, the Committee created the **"European Portal of Decentralised Cooperation"**, an online map showing existing projects worldwide, enabling needs to be matched with offers of assistance and expertise from EU regions and cities. These may be seen as a practical impact of the opinion on the **"New European Consensus on Development"**, adopted in the February plenary.

The direct impact of the CoR's commitment to broadband connectivity in Europe is undeniably the launch of a **Broadband Platform** with the Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Mariya Gabriel, during the European Week of Regions and Cities in 2017. The aim of this joint initiative is to help high-speed broadband to reach all European regions in order to tackle new sources of inequalities between regions in Europe.

With the expansion of world trade over recent decades, concern is growing about the uneven impact of globalisation on local and regional authorities. To enhance transparency and the democratic legitimacy of the Union's Trade agreements, the European Commission initiated the "**Advisory Group on EU trade agreements**". As a result of the CoR's strong commitment to increasing transparency of trade negotiations and the impact of its opinion on the **"Trade package",** the Commissioner for Trade, Cecilia Malmström, invited the Committee to become an observer in the Group, thereby taking the first step towards the stronger involvement of regional stakeholders in international negotiations.

**Making a difference on the Future of Europe**

At a time of increasing populism, Euroscepticism and Brexit, the CoR launched the initiative "**Reflections on the EU – Present and Future**" based on a debate held at the October 2016 plenary. This was given a strong political impetus by the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, who formally invited the Committee to prepare an opinion with recommendations on how to reinforce citizens' trust in the EU from the point of view of local and regional authorities. This trust will be crucial looking towards the European Parliament elections in May 2019 - the opportunity for all Europeans to choose the pathway of a joint future. As part of this process, more than 160 **"Citizens' dialogues"** have been held throughout Europe, with the involvement of more than 170 members and the participation of around 17,000 citizens in 2017.

The CoR was the first mover and catalyst on the way to European-wide dialogues[[4]](#footnote-5) with citizens that are now also conducted by almost all Member States.

Other than in person, citizens are also able to give their feedback using the online survey and the mobile application **"Have your say on Europe"**. This has so far received around 20 000 replies. The final results will be delivered on October 2018 in the opinion **"Reflecting on Europe: the voice of regional and local authorities to rebuild trust in the European Union"** by the President, Mr Lambertz, and the First Vice-President, Mr Markkula. The preliminary Report[[5]](#footnote-6) on the Reflecting on Europe initiative has been shared EU-wide.

By May 2019 it is expected that 250 local events will have been held with 260 CoR members and that around 45 000 citizens will have participated in the online survey/ mobile application **"Have your say on Europe"**.

All these contributions to the debate on the future of Europe can also be seen as the impact of the opinion [**"Reconnecting Europe to its citizens - the need for more and better communication"**](http://webapi.cor.europa.eu/documentsanonymous/cor-2014-04460-00-00-ac-tra-en.doc),adopted at the end of 2014.

Finally, the **"Nicosia initiative of support for Libyan municipalities"** of 2017 had a major, forward-looking impact**.** The Committee supported a workshop on "Positive Peace for Youth", which resulted in the re-establishment of the only radio station in the town of Sirte in Libya. Together with UNICEF and the "European Endowment for Democracy", the event empowered Ali, a young Sirte resident, to gather the knowledge and funding necessary to restore the radio station after the Islamic State left the city at the end of 2016. Starting in 2017 with 17 young people, in 2018 the workshop encouraged 180 participants, aged 18-25 years, to think and develop ideas that could be applied in their communities. Both events are the result of a two-year effort by the CoR to establish cooperation between Libyan cities and European cities and regions, and to pool international expertise. Based on this capacity-building experience, the European Committee of the Regions – at the request of the Ukrainian government, succeeded in securing funding and **peer-to-peer cooperation of CoR members with Ukrainian partners** under the "U-LEAD with Europe" programme and in cooperation with GIZ.

3. **PROPOSAL**

**Members of the Bureau are invited to take stock of this Executive Summary and overview of the main achievements as part of the 2017 report on the impact of the Committee's opinions.**

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1. <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/joint-declaration-legislative-priorities-2017-jan2017_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Infographic No. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Infographic No. 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Infographic No. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. https://cor.europa.eu/Documents/Migrated/news/COR-17-070\_report\_EN-web.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-6)