

**FOLLOW-UP PROVIDED BY THE COMMISSION TO THE  
OPINIONS OF THE**

**EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**PLENARY SESSIONS OF MAY 2018<sup>1</sup>**

**81<sup>st</sup> REPORT**

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<sup>1</sup> Including the follow-up to one opinion adopted during the January 2018 plenary session and the follow-up to two opinions adopted during the March 2018 plenary session.

N°	TITLE	REFERENCES
<b>DG AGRI</b>		
1.	<b>Mid-term review of the EU Forest Strategy</b>  Rapporteur: Ossi MARTIKAINEN (FI/ALDE)	COR-2017-05782-00-01-PAC-TRA  NAT-VI/027  Own-initiative opinion
<b>DG MARE</b>		
2.	<b>The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) beyond 2020 – An investment in European coastal communities</b>  Rapporteur: Alberto NUÑEZ FEIJOO (ES/EPP)	COR-2017-05781-00-01-PAC-TRA  NAT-VI/028  Own-initiative opinion
<b>DG ECHO</b>		
3.	<b>Review of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism</b>  Rapporteur: Adam BANASZAK (PL/ECR)	COM(2017) 773 final – 2017/0309 (COD)  COM(2017) 772 final  COR-2018-00617-00-00-PAC-TRA  NAT-VI/029
<b>DG REGIO</b>		
4.	<b>Strengthening Innovation in Europe's Regions: Strategies for resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth</b>  Rapporteur: Mikel IRUJO AMEZAGA (ES/EA)	COM(2017) 376 final  SWD(2017) 264 final  COR-2017-04757-00-00-PAC-TRA  SEDEC-VI/032  Own-initiative opinion

<b>DG ENV</b>		
<b>5.</b>	<p><b>Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the quality of water intended for human consumption (recast)</b></p> <p>Rapporteur: Mark WEINMEISTER (DE/EPP)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 753 final – 2017/0332 (COD)</p> <p>SWD(2017) 448 final</p> <p>SWD(2017) 449 final</p> <p>SWD(2017) 451 final</p> <p>COR-2018-00924-00-01-PAC-TRA</p> <p>ENVE-VI/028</p>
<b>DG ENER</b>		
<b>6.</b>	<p><b>Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and the Council amending Directive 2009/73/EC concerning common rules for the internal market in natural gas</b></p> <p>Rapporteur: Mauro D'ATTIS (IT/EPP)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 660 final – 2017/0294 (COD)</p> <p>SWD(2017) 368 final</p> <p>COR-2017-05833-00-02-PAC-TRA</p> <p>ENVE-VI/026</p>
<b>DG EAC</b>		
<b>7.</b>	<p><b>Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture</b></p> <p>Rapporteur: Tanya HRISTOVA (BG/EPP)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 673 final</p> <p>COM(2018) 23 final</p> <p>COR-2017-06048-00-00-PAC-TRA</p> <p>SEDEC-VI/033</p> <p>Own-initiative opinion</p>
<b>8.</b>	<p><b>Cultural Heritage as a strategic resource for more cohesive and sustainable regions in the EU</b></p> <p>Rapporteur-General: Babette WINTER (DE/PES)</p>	<p>COR-2018-00185-00-01-PAC-TRA</p> <p>SEDEC-VI/035</p> <p>Referral from the Bulgarian Presidency</p>

<b>DG GROW</b>		
<b>9.</b>	<p><b>The Future of the COSME programme beyond 2020: regional and local perspective</b></p> <p>Rapporteur: Robert Sorin NEGOIȚĂ (RO/PES)</p>	<p>COR-2017-03215-00-00-PAC-TRA</p> <p>ECON-VI/027</p> <p>Own-initiative opinion</p> <p><b>Opinion adopted during the January/February 2018 plenary session</b></p>
<b>DG HOME</b>		
<b>10.</b>	<p><b>Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration</b></p> <p>Rapporteur: Dimitrios KALOGEROPOULOS (EL/EPP)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 558 final</p> <p>COR-2017-05048-00-00-PAC-TRA</p> <p>CIVEX-VI/029</p> <p>Own-initiative opinion</p> <p><b>Opinion adopted during the March 2018 plenary session</b></p>
<b>DG EMPL</b>		
<b>11.</b>	<p><b>Mid-term revision of the ESF preparing the post-2020 proposal</b></p> <p>Rapporteur: Catuscia MARINI (IT/PES)</p>	<p>COR-2017-06121-00-01-PAC-TRA</p> <p>COTER-VI/038</p> <p>Own-initiative opinion</p> <p><b>Opinion adopted during the March 2018 plenary session</b></p>

<p><b>N°1 Mid-term review of the European Union Forest Strategy (own-initiative opinion)</b>  <b>CoR 2017/5782 – NAT-VI/027</b>  <b>129<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – May 2018</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Mr Ossi MARTIKAINEN (FI/ALDE)</b>  <b>DG AGRI –Commissioner HOGAN</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>The follow-up given by the Commission to this opinion will be included in a subsequent report.</p>	

**N°2 The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) beyond 2020 – An investment in European coastal communities**  
**CoR 2017/05781 – NAT-VI/028**  
**129<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – May 2018**  
**Rapporteur – Mr Alberto NUÑEZ FELJOO (ES/EPP)**  
**DG MARE – Commissioner VELLA**

<p align="center"><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>10. The European Committee of the Regions asks that the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund objectives focus on the importance of maritime and fisheries activities and of sustainable aquaculture in sea and fresh water, and not, as has been mentioned on several occasions, on giving priority to substituting them with other activities, since all marine activities are compatible. The Committee takes the view that that fishing can retain its traditional character and relaunch it for the future. For this reason, it is important to increase the attractiveness of the fishing profession. Specifically, the Committee calls for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to be devoted to the fisheries sector and to sustainable aquaculture in sea and fresh water and to aim at achieving the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy, in particular supporting small-scale coastal fisheries, providing incentives to young generations, making the fishing profession more attractive and boosting the Union's coastal communities. The European Committee of the Regions would therefore like the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to be designed in such a way as to support new types of activity and develop the industry,</p>	<p>Like the Union's maritime fund, the proposal for a new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund is focused on delivering sustainable and profitable maritime activities, including fisheries and aquaculture. In relation to fisheries, the objective is to help deliver on the environmental, economic and social objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy and on food security.</p> <p>In this regard, preferential support is being proposed for small-scale coastal fisheries, given their key role in coastal areas.</p> <p>Funding will also be available for the development of new maritime activities contributing to a sustainable blue economy.</p>

<p>and would like state aid rules to support such efforts;</p>	
<p>11. The European Committee of the Regions reiterates stakeholder support for the call for a European environmental and maritime financial instrument that would provide support for new and existing businesses in the form of bank loans and guarantees; it is pleased that the fisheries sector is included among the priorities of the Juncker plan 2.0 and calls for this approach to be kept up beyond 2020;</p>	<p>Financial instruments will be available in the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, in particular under the framework of the Common Provisions Regulation.</p> <p>Moreover, it will be possible for Member States to transfer part of their European Maritime and Fisheries Fund envelope to the centrally-managed InvestEU fund for the purpose of delivering loans and guarantees.</p>
<p>12. The European Committee of the Regions calls for the post-2020 European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to include and strengthen the territorial dimension of policies and support provided to European coastal communities to help them in their possible move to diversify traditional maritime industries by supporting investments in complementary activities such as fish restaurants serving local produce, and environmental, cultural and educational services in the fisheries sector;</p>	<p>The Commission wants fisheries communities to become drivers of coastal development, local economic diversification and job creation, by tapping into the unexploited potential of the local blue economy and teaming up with innovators and investors, not least to add local value to seafood products and value chains. To this end, the proposal for the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund extends the scope of community-led local development (CLLD) to allow the development of local strategies in the sustainable blue economy. Community-led local development is a bottom-up approach: it fully relies on the initiatives from local stakeholders.</p>
<p>13. The European Committee of the Regions stresses the need to maintain and increase the resources available for local development, as community-led local development (CLLD) strategies have proved to be a success for small communities by providing financial support for community empowerment and economic diversification beyond the</p>	<p>The new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will strengthen support to community-led local development and open its scope to the broader blue economy.</p>

fishing sector;	
<p>14. The European Committee of the Regions recognises the importance of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and praises the structure of the current fund, which is subdivided into two key areas, relating to the Common Fisheries Policy and the Integrated Maritime Policy, that do not interfere with each other.</p>	<p>The proposal for the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund supports four key objectives, which are closely interlinked given that maritime challenges are cross-sectoral:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the achievement of the environmental, socio-economic and employment objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy,</li> <li>- food security through the supply of fishery and aquaculture products,</li> <li>- the development of a sustainable blue economy that benefits coastal communities,</li> <li>- the achievement of healthy, safe, secure, clean and sustainably managed seas and oceans at the global level.</li> </ul>
<p>15. The European Committee of the Regions calls for specific measures and management arrangements for the outermost regions to be adopted under new European Union programmes to support the sustainable development of fisheries and other sectors of the blue economy in these regions, pursuant to Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Such measures should be part of a specific instrument that includes a compensation regime for the additional costs of fishery and aquaculture products in the outermost regions, something which is currently governed by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.</p>	<p>The outermost regions face specific challenges linked to their remoteness, topography and climate as referred to in Article 349 of the Treaty. They also have specific assets on which to develop a sustainable blue economy.</p> <p>Therefore, the Commission has proposed a new strategic and integrated approach for the outermost regions in order to enhance the development of blue economy sectors, including fisheries and aquaculture. This will be based, in each outermost region, on an action plan for the development of the sustainable blue economy. A financial allocation will be reserved to support the implementation of those action plans.</p> <p>The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will also support a compensation of the additional costs the outermost</p>



	<p>regions face due to their location and insularity. That support will be capped as a percentage of the overall financial allocation.</p> <p>In addition, a higher aid intensity rate than the one that applies to other operations (85%) will be applied in the outermost regions.</p>
<p>21. The European Committee of the Regions lends its support to the widespread demand for the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to reach a minimum threshold of 1% of the multiannual financial framework post-2020, by adding an increase of 0.47% for the integrated maritime policy (IMP) to the current allocation to fisheries and aquaculture of 0.53%. It firmly believes that the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union should not be used as a pretext to cut future funding to the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, given the important challenges for environmental protection, production and trade created by this process.</p>	<p>The proposal for the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) provides that the Union budget must continue to support fisheries and maritime policies. The Commission has proposed a budget of EUR 6.140 billion (in current prices) for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund 2021-2027. This is a 5% decrease compared to the current period (in current prices), which corresponds to a large extent to the budgetary consequences of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.</p> <p>In addition to the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, EUR 990 million have been earmarked for the European Union's international commitments within the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, as well as EUR 128 million for the European Fisheries Control Agency, an important partner of the European Coast Guard Cooperation.</p>
<p>22. and 38. The European Committee of the Regions calls for increased training, particularly in relation to the generational renewal. And also the importance of promoting and achieving a successful handover to the next generation must be stressed, and to ensure this, budgetary support for training and access to the</p>	<p>Trainings and skills development for fishers are eligible under the proposal for the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund since they contribute to the achievement of the social objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy. Support for the first acquisition of a second-hand vessel by a young</p>

<p>sector via the purchase or replacement of vessels must be prioritised, as this does not generate an increase in fishing effort.</p>	<p>fisher in a balanced fleet segment is also eligible as a form of start-up support. However, support for the construction of new vessels is not eligible since it would inevitably increase fishing capacity.</p>
<p>23. The European Committee of the Regions calls for improved safety and living conditions for seafarers to be a definite priority for the future European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, in connection with its contribution to the delivery of the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights.</p>	<p>Investments for health and safety on board of fishing vessels will continue to be eligible under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund since they contribute to the achievement of the social objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy. Such support will be strengthened through a higher aid intensity rate (75%) than during the current period.</p>
<p>24. The European Committee of the Regions reiterates the general call to support and encourage the renewal of the fishing fleet in order to avoid losses caused by ageing, as the average age of a fishing vessel in the European Union is 22.6 years. This renewal must be promoted without increasing the fishing effort and focus on improving safety (for example, fire safety) and working and living conditions on board vessels.</p>	<p>The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund as proposed will allow support investments on board that aim to modernise the fishing fleet, e.g. investments related to health and safety, gear selectivity and energy efficiency. However, such support shall not increase the fishing capacity or the ability to catch fish.</p> <p>Support for the construction of new fishing vessels is not eligible as it would inevitably increase fishing capacity and hence not be in line with the European Union international commitments.</p>
<p>25. The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund must assist the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in contributing to European climate objectives by rolling out innovative investments across the board (mechanisation, aerodynamics, etc.). The Committee points to the restrictive conditions established by the current European Maritime and Fisheries Fund regulation, which drastically limit</p>	<p>Reflecting the importance of tackling climate change in line with the Union's commitments to implement the Paris Agreement and the commitment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will mainstream climate actions and help the Union achieve its target of spending 25% of its budget on</p>

<p>its impact on mitigating the effects of climate change. The post-2020 European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will need to play a pivotal role in reducing the sector's carbon footprint.</p>	<p>contributing to climate objectives.</p> <p>To this end, 30% of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund overall financial envelope is expected to contribute to climate objectives. The contribution to these objectives will be tracked through the application of Union climate markers. They will apply to the areas of support that have an impact on climate change mitigation and adaptation and energy efficiency.</p> <p>This methodology will help the Commission and Member States to track expenditure contributing to climate objectives. However, it will be up to Member States to decide how they use European Maritime and Fisheries Fund support in their programmes for meeting the expected 30% contribution.</p>
<p>26. The European Committee of the Regions highlights the need to maintain and increase, by at least 10%, financial support allocated to data collection and systematisation, as well as to applied research and involving the sector itself in this process by promoting contact between fishermen and scientists.</p>	<p>The success of the Common Fisheries Policy is dependent on the availability of scientific advice for the management of fisheries, and hence on the availability of data on fisheries. In the light of the challenges and costs to obtain reliable and complete data, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will continue supporting Member States' actions to collect and process data in line with the Data Collection Framework Regulation and to contribute to the best available scientific advice. That support will allow synergies with the collection and processing of other types of marine data and include cooperation between fishers and scientists.</p> <p>It is proposed that amounts are ring-fenced for data collection and fisheries control: minimum 15% of the financial</p>

	<p>support allocated per Member State should be allocated to those areas of support. Moreover, the Commission proposes 100% aid intensity and 85% co-financing rate.</p>
<p>27. The European Committee of the Regions links this effort to the adoption of more suitable measures to conserve marine resources and to adapt the fishing effort. It stresses, in any case, the need to continue support for measures to compensate the fleet for socio-economic damage caused by environmental measures such as area closures, temporary stops and other measures limiting fishing activities.</p>	<p>As the Impact Assessment accompanying the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund proposal<sup>2</sup> shows, fleet adaptation remains necessary with regard to certain fleet segments and sea basins. Therefore, the Commission's proposal reintroduces support for permanent cessation under a series of strict conditions including linking the scrapping of fishing vessels with clear conservation objectives and the sustainable exploitation of marine biological resources. In order to ensure the consistency of fleet structural adaptation with the conservation objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy, support for the permanent cessation of fishing activities will be conditional upon the achievement of results by Member States. The Commission proposal thereby provides for support for permanent cessation only on the basis of 'financing not linked to costs'. In practice this means that European Maritime and Fisheries Fund support would only be granted for the permanent cessation of fishing activities on the basis of the fulfilment of conditions and of the achievement of results. This will ensure that support is targeted on those fleet segments most affected by the transition to sustainable fishing.</p> <p>Given the high level of unpredictability of fishing activities, extraordinary circumstances may cause significant</p>

<sup>2</sup> SWD(2018) 295 final.

	<p>economic losses to fishers. In order to mitigate those consequences, the Commission has proposed that the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund may support a compensation for the extraordinary cessation of fishing activities caused by the implementation of certain conservation measures (e.g. multiannual plans), by emergency measures (e.g. the closure of a fishery), by the interruption, due to reasons of force majeure, of the application of a sustainable fisheries partnership agreement, by a natural disaster or by an environmental incident. The difference with the temporary cessation under the 2014-2020 European Maritime and Fisheries Fund is that support will be granted only if the impact on fishers is significant, i.e. if the commercial activities of the vessel concerned are stopped during at least 90 consecutive days and if the economic losses resulting from the cessation amount to more than 30% of the average annual turnover of the business concerned during a specified period of time. It is a compensation scheme for exceptional and significant events. The conditions proposed will thus avoid support for recurrent and predictable closures, for which public compensation is not justified.</p>
<p>30. The European Committee of the Regions calls for continued support to the processing and marketing industry in order to boost its competitiveness and to create a level playing field. The EU should avoid inconsistencies with other policies, such as market or customs taxation policies.</p>	<p>Fisheries and aquaculture contribute to food security and nutrition. However, the Union currently imports more than 60% of its supply of fishery products and is therefore highly dependent on third countries. An important challenge is to encourage the consumption of fish protein produced in the Union with high quality standards and available for consumers at affordable prices. In this</p>

	<p>context the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will support the marketing and processing of fishery and aquaculture products, in line with the objectives of the Common Market Organisation. Such support should aim to improve the quality and diversity of the supply chain and to develop new market outlets.</p>
<p>31. The European Committee of the Regions advocates the diversification and complementarity of coastal economic activities, by making the most of community-led local development strategies, particularly in non-urban coastal areas where they have contributed to a strong ability to retain the local population, and for this reason the multi-fund nature of community-led local development should be strengthened.</p>	<p>The development of a sustainable blue economy strongly relies on partnerships between local stakeholders that contribute to the vitality of coastal and inland communities and economies. The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will provide tools to foster such partnerships. For that purpose, it will support community-led local development under shared management. Community-led local development has been a very successful instrument during the 2014-2020 period. Such strategies boost economic diversification in a local context through the development of coastal and inland fisheries, aquaculture and a sustainable blue economy. They will ensure that local communities better exploit and benefit from the opportunities offered by the sustainable blue economy, capitalising on and strengthening environmental, cultural, social and human resources. Compared to the 2014-2020 period, the scope of community-led local development strategies supported by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will be extended: every local partnership should reflect the main focus of its strategy by ensuring a balanced involvement and representation of all relevant stakeholders from the local sustainable</p>

	blue economy.
32. The European Committee of the Regions suggests that the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund support initiatives and activities linked to maritime and fisheries sector and those activities that it directly influences. To this end, it recommends creating a European financial instrument <sup>3</sup> that would provide venture capital and bank guarantees for loans, on the condition that investments contribute to improving the environmental sustainability of maritime and fishing activities, shellfishing, sea and fresh water aquaculture and the sea-to-industry chain.	The Commission proposal gives the possibility to Member States to deliver – on a voluntary basis – up to 5% of their European Maritime and Fisheries Fund envelope through budgetary guarantees under InvestEU.
33. The European Committee of the Regions calls for a white paper on "The sea at the heart of Europe", to include a maritime roadmap for each European Union policy.	The Commission takes good note of this proposal.  The proposal for the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund includes some strategic elements for the preparation of national programmes: it is foreseen that the Commission develops an analysis for each sea basin indicating the common strengths and weaknesses with regard to the achievement of the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy. That analysis will guide both the Member States and the Commission in negotiating each programme taking into account regional challenges and needs.
36. The European Committee of the Regions believes that these synergies should focus on the implementation of European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) projects in non-urban coastal areas, through community-	The Commission proposal on the Common Provisions Regulation allows multi-fund support for community-led local development under a 'lead fund'. Even if the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development is not part of

<sup>3</sup> A fund called for by the majority of SMEs, associations and new businesses within the blue economy.

<p>led local development (CLLD) strategies and by examining the possibilities for joining up these funds for aquaculture of all types, with particular reference to freshwater aquaculture practised in landlocked Member States, as these Member States and regions have expressly pointed out on various occasions.</p>	<p>the Common Provisions Regulation, it is covered by the rules on the lead fund.</p>
<p>40. The European Committee of the Regions considers that this simplification should include providing fewer and simple requirements and forms to apply for funding and stresses that the application process should be suitable for management by a single body, without resorting to specialist help and third-party advice.</p>	<p>The Commission's proposal<sup>4</sup> aims to simplify the delivery of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund by doing away with the precise and rigid description of financing possibilities and eligibility rules ('measures'). It is proposed that the new Fund moves towards a simplified architecture without prescriptive measures. Instead, the Regulation would describe broad areas of support, providing a flexible framework for implementation.</p> <p>Therefore, it would be up to Member States to draw up their programme indicating the most appropriate means for achieving the priorities of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund adapted to their needs. A variety of measures identified by the Member States in the programmes may be supported under the rules set out in the Fund and in the Common Provisions Regulation, provided they are covered by the areas of support.</p> <p>This performance-based architecture will steer programme implementation towards the achievement of policy objectives in the context of a continuous dialogue between the Commission and Member States on the achievement of results. Flexibility,</p>

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<sup>4</sup> COM(2018) 390 final.



	<p>result orientation and mutual trust between the Commission and Member States are thus the three drivers of an effective simplification.</p>
<p>42. The European Committee of the Regions highlights the need to clearly define the parties eligible for support to ensure the swift and correct implementation of the fund. Generic eligibility guidelines should be set out and the details of parties to be supported should then be fine-tuned in the basins and regions; in particular, we ask the European Commission to define/elaborate a definition of small-scale coastal fisheries, taking into account new criteria and giving response to the reality and diversity of the European Union fleet.</p>	<p>The Commission considers that there should be stability in the definition of small-scale coastal fishing in the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund since there is no consensus on common new criteria.</p> <p>Therefore, as under the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods, it is proposed that small-scale coastal fishing concerns fishing vessels below 12 metres and not using towed fishing gears. That sector represents nearly 75% of all fishing vessels registered in the Union and nearly half of all employment in the fishery sector.</p>
<p>43. The European Committee of the Regions considers, in view of the small average size of fishing businesses, direct public support in the form of a grant to be the best option and stresses that this model guarantees control over the destination and use of funds.</p>	<p>The part of the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) under shared management will be implemented under the rules laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation<sup>5</sup>. Those rules make both grants and financial instruments available. It will be up to the managing authority to decide the form of support to be granted, with the exception of support for productive investments in aquaculture and in processing to be provided through financial instruments.</p>
<p>47. The European Committee of the Regions supports strengthening the territorial focus of the fund, through sea basin strategies, thereby offering solutions tailored to different circumstances and challenges in the European regions and avoiding a "one size fits all" proposal.</p>	<p>It is proposed that the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund supports the development and implementation of sea basin strategies, which provide an integrated framework for the development of a sustainable blue economy.</p>

<sup>5</sup> COM(2018) 375 final.

	<p>Moreover, in the context of regionalisation, the Commission will develop an analysis for each sea basin indicating the common strengths and weaknesses with regard to the achievement of the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). That analysis will guide Member States in the preparation of their European Maritime and Fisheries Fund programme, taking into account regional challenges and needs.</p>
<p>48. The European Committee of the Regions calls for a greater role and more autonomy for the regions in defining the objectives and spending areas. Although the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund is currently managed at Member State level, there are successful examples where it has been sub-delegated to the competent regional authorities in some Member States. The new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Regulation should explicitly encourage this. The Committee emphasises the unanimous nature of this call and the positive experience gained in relation to management of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund in many regions. It considers that the demand for adaptation is particularly relevant to the outermost regions, for whom European Maritime and Fisheries Fund application conditions in terms of eligibility, co-financing rates and aid levels should also be revised and improved. Moreover, support under compensation plans for covering the additional costs for fisheries and aquaculture products in outermost regions should, in view of its objectives and specific features, be stepped up and the associated implementing rules should be made similar to those applying to similar</p>	<p>The part of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund implemented under shared management will give Member States the responsibility to manage their programme according to their own national arrangements (see above reply to point 43).</p> <p>As regards the outermost regions, a specific strategic approach has been proposed (see above reply to point 15).</p>

<p>support granted in the agricultural sector.</p>	
<p>50. The European Committee of the Regions stresses the importance of the integrated maritime policy and the need to increase funds allocated to it as a way of supporting the expansion of job and wealth creation relating to the sea. It stresses the need to provide specific funds and to consider cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation as an essential factor in this field, particularly in areas such as maritime spatial planning, data collection, and ensuring security and surveillance and the creation of areas for the replenishment of fish stocks.</p>	<p>The European maritime policy aims to enable the development of a sustainable blue economy that generates jobs and growth.</p> <p>13.5% of the budget of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will be allocated to direct management. Under this envelope, it is proposed that the Fund addresses the enabling conditions for a sustainable blue economy by promoting an integrated governance and management of the maritime policy, enhancing the transfer and uptake of research, innovation and technology improving maritime skills, ocean literacy and sharing of socio-economic data, promoting a low-carbon and climate resilient sustainable blue economy and developing project pipelines and innovative financing instruments.</p> <p>Moreover, support for the blue economy will also be mainstreamed across other Union Funds through Policy Objectives covering blue investments and the development of coastal areas.</p>
<p>51. The European Committee of the Regions stresses the need to establish a European blue economy investment fund/mechanism, a maritime Juncker plan 2.0, which could have two complementary intervention methods: direct financing at European level of structural and high-risk projects, and the establishment of regional investment platforms.</p>	<p>In addition to the Commission position outlined under point 32, under direct management it is proposed that the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund supports project pipelines and innovative financing instruments to support investment in the blue economy.</p>
<p>52. The European Committee of the Regions emphasises the external</p>	<p>Strengthening international ocean governance is one of the four priorities</p>

dimension of the Common Fisheries Policy and the Integrated Maritime Policy, making explicit the importance of supporting the European Union's contribution to better governance of the oceans. The Committee supports these efforts as a means of boosting the sustainability and competitiveness of our maritime-fisheries sector through the creation of a level playing field for competition and more sustainable oceans.

of the Commission proposal. It aims to support the Union commitments for healthy, safe, secure and sustainably managed oceans at the global level, in the context of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goal 14 and other international commitments.

It is also proposed that the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund continue supporting the Union voluntary contributions to Regional Fisheries Management Organisations.

In addition to the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, EUR 990 million have been earmarked for international commitments within the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, as well as EUR 128 million for the European Fisheries Control Agency, an important partner of the European Coast Guard Cooperation.

<p><b>N°3 Review of the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism</b>  <b>COM(2017) 772 final</b>  <b>CoR 2018/0617 – NAT-VI/029</b>  <b>129<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – May 2018</b>  <b>Rapporteur – Mr Adam BANASZAK (PL/ECR)</b>  <b>DG ECHO – Commissioner STYLIANIDES</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1. At the level of the European Union, the principle of disaster resilience and "building back better" must be streamlined into all European Union policies and Funds. The European Committee of the Regions reiterates that the principle of disaster resilience must also be a cornerstone of the European Union's investment policies, so that public money helps communities become more resilient to the negative effects of disasters and does not put the lives of citizens at risk.</p>	<p>In the Commission proposal for a Common Provisions Regulation<sup>6</sup>, the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund shall support, among others, the following policy objective: “a greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management”, with an enabling condition that would require Member States to develop disaster risk management plans.</p>
<p>6. The European Committee of the Regions underlines the importance of aligning the Commission's proposals with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction to ensure joint efforts, enhance capacity support and avoid duplication, especially in connection with developing national and local strategies on disaster risk reduction.</p>	<p>The legislative proposal<sup>7</sup>, as well as the accompanying Communication<sup>8</sup>, supports the implementation of the Sendai Framework by putting strengthened disaster prevention and reduction of risks at the core of planning. The proposals contribute directly to meeting Target E to “Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020”.</p>

<sup>6</sup> COM(2018) 375 final.

<sup>7</sup> COM(2017) 772 final.

<sup>8</sup> COM(2017) 773 final.

<p>7. The European Committee of the Regions underlines the need for greater synergies between the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction's "Making Cities Resilient Campaign".</p>	<p>The Covenant of Mayors promotes a multi-level governance, cross-sector and holistic territorial approach, as well as the engagement of all relevant stakeholders. Cities signed up to the Covenant of Mayors initiative commit to increasing their resilience. Moreover, the Covenant of Mayors seeks synergies with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction's "Making Cities Resilient" campaign.</p> <p>As signatories to the Covenant of Mayors, cities have access to an extensive city network, both in Europe and globally, informational and awareness raising events, workshops and bilateral exchange between practitioners, as well as information sharing through an extensive framework for monitoring and reporting.</p> <p>The Commission is currently working on assessing its work on adaptation in the European Union in view of its objectives and actions, and new international developments, in particular the Paris Agreement. The process and its outcome will also provide information on the possible scope and options for revising the 2013 Adaptation Strategy. Such a revised strategy could for instance bring more focus and add value to Union action on adaptation within and outside Union borders.</p>
<p>9. The European Committee of the Regions calls on the Commission and the Member States to also involve local and regional authorities in the screening of</p>	<p>As stated in the Communication accompanying the legislative proposal<sup>9</sup>, the Commission sets out a series of activities going beyond the</p>

<sup>9</sup> COM(2017) 773 final.

<p>planned investments in all relevant programmes and in discussing possible changes;</p>	<p>current Multi-Annual Financial Framework, including the screening of planned investments of all relevant programmes under different Union funds.</p> <p>The Commission would have a supporting role in this exercise. Managing authorities would be responsible for the modification of such programmes taking into account their national division of competences, since it is only at the request of the Managing authority that such programmes are modified.</p>
<p>11. The European Committee of the Regions reiterates<sup>10</sup> the need for a framework for risk management plans that can then be used by Member States as a guideline. This would also facilitate comparability of their content; the Committee notes that an European Union framework would be in line with the principle of subsidiarity; it underlines that local and regional authorities should be in a position to devise their own risk management plans but that an Union framework to help provide guidance would be helpful;</p>	<p>The Commission takes good note of the proposal to create a guiding framework to develop risk management plans.</p> <p>Fully aware of the supporting role in this area, the Commission would be ready to create a general framework for the development of disaster risk management plans, in cooperation with Member States, which would allow for a common approach.</p> <p>National and sub-national authorities would have the responsibility for preparing their risk management plans in line with their national and sub-national particularities.</p>
<p>12. The European Committee of the Regions recommends that the management of the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) by the European Commission be conducted in cooperation with the national and regional authorities of the countries participating in the Union Mechanism;</p>	<p>According to Article 8 of Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism, the Commission manages the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC).</p> <p>As stipulated in Article 9 of the said Decision, Member States designate a</p>

<sup>10</sup> CDR 740/2012.

	<p>national contact point that should liaise with the Commission (through the ERCC) and exchange information through the "Common Emergency Communication and Information System" (CECIS) in accordance with Article 8(b).</p> <p>Member States, through their national contact point, are responsible for involving regional and local authorities in the exchange of information with the Commission as necessary.</p>
<p>14. The European Committee of the Regions calls on the Commission, in partnership with national, regional and local authorities, to develop a disaster preparedness strategy, which would cover training and exercise programme, and other elements such as the Union Mechanism's call for proposals, the exchange of experts programme and risk scenarios development;</p>	<p>The Commission has started reinforcing key elements of its disaster preparedness strategy. This includes reviewing its policies in the areas of exercises, training, exchange of experts and the prevention and preparedness projects programme. New exercise types have been developed to fill gaps identified in the current system (e.g. host nation support exercises). Profiles and training paths for Union Civil Protection Mechanism experts have been developed and a study has been launched to identify the changes required in the current Union Civil Protection Mechanism training system. The exchange of experts system now allows for longer-term exchanges. The priorities for the prevention and preparedness projects have been streamlined and its administrative management simplified.</p>
<p>17. The European Committee of the Regions supports the call to create a new Erasmus civil protection programme in line with the rules and principles of Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 establishing "Erasmus +<sup>11</sup>". A new such</p>	<p>The Commission takes good note of the proposal to create a new Erasmus civil protection programme in line with Regulation No 1288/2013.</p> <p>The Commission would like to draw</p>

<sup>11</sup> 2017/0309(COD).



<p>programme should include an international dimension and be open not only to national, but also regional and local representatives;</p>	<p>the attention of the European Committee of the Regions to the fact that the proposed creation of the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network has similar objectives and will facilitate training exercises and knowledge dissemination.</p>
<p>18. The European Committee of the Regions calls on the Commission, Council and Parliament to step up their efforts to strengthen coherence with other Union instruments on disaster risk prevention and management. This should be done by not only creating a link between the Union Mechanism and cohesion, rural development, and health and research policies, and encouraging the integration of these activities into environmental policies, but also by looking into how these linkages can be reinforced in the new Multiannual Financial Framework and the rules governing the use of funds;</p>	<p>See point 1.</p>
<p>19. The European Committee of the Regions underlines that ex-ante conditionalities based on risk assessment and risk management planning alone will not help achieve disaster resilience. Disaster resilience must be set as a criteria in the rules governing the use of Funds as something that has to be met by each project funded by the European Union;</p>	<p>In the Commission proposal for a Common Provisions Regulation, Article 67 stipulates that “In selecting operations the managing authority shall: [...] ensure the climate proofing of investments in infrastructure with an expected lifespan of at least five years.”</p>
<p>25. The European Committee of the Regions notes that the proposed configuration of the rescEU reserve includes resources that have already been committed to the voluntary pool in sufficient numbers; therefore it supports maintaining possibility for the Commission to recompose the rescEU pool in agreement with the Member</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee's support for the flexible configuration of rescEU that should be defined on the basis of current risks, but also in the future should be able to respond to new risks emerging from the new risk landscape.</p>

<p>States, in order to fully adapt it to the identified capacity gaps;</p>	
<p>26. The European Committee of the Regions proposes that the participation of public institutions from the Member States and of the private sector entities in the rescEU should be based on a voluntary principle.</p>	<p>The Commission is fully aware of the supporting role it has in this area, therefore all participation from public institutions in the development of rescEU capacities will be on a voluntary basis.</p> <p>When the services of private entities are to be requested to develop rescEU capacities, this would be the result of a competitive open tender in an open and fair process. The participation of such entities would therefore be on a voluntary basis.</p>
<p>27. The European Committee of the Regions stresses that civil protection is an area where the European Union acts to support, coordinate or supplement the action of its Member States. In turn, it stresses that the Commission must ensure that the new reserve being created is aimed at coordinating, supporting and supplementing the action of Member States rather than giving the European Union its own resources or new competences. The European Committee of the Regions underlines that a focus on supporting and helping to enhance local community response capacities can be a way of ensuring a more effective disaster response in a manner that would comply with the principle of subsidiarity.</p>	<p>As stated in the proposal<sup>12</sup>, the Commission recognises that the primary responsibility to prevent, prepare and respond to natural and man-made disasters lies with Member States.</p> <p>The creation of rescEU, as a dedicated reserve of civil protection capacities, would by no means replace national capacities but complement them.</p> <p>RescEU capacities must be seen as an additional layer of protection for extreme circumstances in which national capacities are overwhelmed and mutual assistance through the European Civil Protection Pool is not sufficient. rescEU should only intervene as a last resort.</p> <p>RescEU capacities, while being available for deployment in need, will be hosted and owned by Member States.</p> <p>Member States continue to be</p>

<sup>12</sup> COM(2017) 772 final.

	responsible for developing and maintaining a sufficient level of protection against the recurrent risks they face.
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<p><b>N°4 Strengthening Innovation in Europe's Regions: Strategies for resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth</b>  <b>COM(2017) 376 final, SWD(2017) 264 final</b>  <b>COR 2017/04757 – SEDEC-VI/032</b>  <b>129<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – May 2018</b>  <b>Rapporteur – Mr Mikel IRUJO AMEZAGA (ES/EA)</b>  <b>DG REGIO – Commissioner CREȚU</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1. The European Union remains the world's largest single market; nevertheless, new realities are emerging on other continents, which mean that we need to refocus our innovation and growth policy. Industrial modernisation is essential for improving Europe's competitiveness;</p> <p>2. The European Committee of the Regions points out that it is important for all levels of governance (European Union, national, regional and local levels) to work together, and for the subnational levels to be given sufficient opportunities and funds to take responsibility for their own development potential;</p> <p>3. The European Committee of the Regions stresses that Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) are catalysts for innovation policy and growth and are an important factor in the success of cohesion policy;</p> <p>4. The European Committee of the Regions points to the need for strong, efficient, targeted efforts at regional level for the development of the S3, for which the European Union can promote good conditions alongside action at national level;</p> <p>5. The European Committee of the</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions and agrees with the view on the important role of smart specialisation as a catalyst for innovation policy and growth. In the current programming period, when cohesion policy supports investments in research and innovation, these investments have to be in line with the national or regional smart specialisation strategies.</p> <p>The Commission draws attention to the fact that many of the recommendations raised in the opinion have been taken into account in the Commission proposals for the post-2020 Regulations adopted in May 2018, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- smart specialisation strategies would continue to be the key strategic basis for interventions promoting a 'Smarter Europe' (PO1). They would be reflected in an enabling condition. These strategies would continue to be the backbone of regional innovation strategies – this approach of regions building on their relative strengths has been key to the success of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in building the potential of</li> </ul>

Regions also stresses that the S3 have created a new "culture of cooperation" within regions, as they are based on a collaborative and participatory process between research and innovation actors and industry that facilitates demand-led innovation and collective solutions;

6. The European Committee of the Regions points out that the S3 have catalysed the development of genuine regional innovation ecosystems. Regional innovation ecosystems generate significant impacts for the economy and regional competitiveness as well as excellent innovation that is close to ordinary people and their local needs;

regional economies;

- thematic concentration would continue to ensure that cohesion policy is focused on what is crucial for competitiveness and structural adjustments to globalisation and technological change. The majority of resources (min 35% in countries with Gross National Income below 75%; min 45% for countries with Gross National Income between 75-100% and min 60% for countries with Gross National Income above 100%) would be concentrated on contributing to the policy objective 1: "a smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation";

- more attention would be paid, through enabling conditions, to the effectiveness of governance mechanisms ruling the design and implementation of Research and Innovation strategy for Smart Specialisation (RIS3). This should guarantee that the objectives are being met and the content updated as far as needed;

- Article 11 and Annex IV of the proposed Common Provisions Regulation<sup>13</sup> lays down thematic enabling conditions for the European Regional Development Fund and each Member State would have to assess if they are fulfilled when preparing a programme. One of the enabling conditions applicable for the PO1 is the "effective functioning of entrepreneurial discovery process" in order to guarantee collaborative and participatory process which is built and

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<sup>13</sup> COM(2018) 375 final.

	lasts through the entire financial period embedding the partnership culture in the innovation ecosystems.
<p>7. The European Committee of the Regions stresses that the S3 go further than the individual strategies of the regions, and should be used to promote more effective innovation policy and interregional cooperation;</p> <p>8. The European Committee of the Regions is convinced that interregional cooperation based on the S3 will help build value and reshape the European Union's value chains by promoting investment synergies between the private and public sectors, thus contributing to the development of the European Union economy as a whole;</p>	<p>Member States and regions of different countries are partnering up in order to identify and exploit the synergies of their respective smart specialisations. Such initiatives have an important European Union added value, and therefore in the next programming period the Commission would like to promote them and provide support to interregional investments in innovation.</p> <p>The Commission has been working with regions for a number of years to facilitate interregional investments in innovation. More recently, it has launched a pilot project to scale-up and commercialise good ideas developed by interregional partnerships. It has become clear that to address the combined financial, technological and collaboration risks associated with this type of investment, the Commission needs a dedicated instrument that can provide support in a simple and flexible manner to the regions, research bodies and companies involved. This would be done through the new component 5 of European Territorial Cooperation.</p>
<p>9. The European Committee of the Regions considers that the future S3 2.0 should be based on interregional strategic cooperation and sustainable links between regional ecosystems in the priority areas of smart specialisation, as a key to increasing the competitiveness and resilience of the regions. For this purpose,</p>	<p>The Commission draws attention to its proposal for the Regulation on specific provisions for European Territorial Cooperation (ETC)<sup>14</sup>, Article 3(5), to support interregional innovation investments through the commercialisation and scaling up of interregional innovation projects</p>

<sup>14</sup> COM(2018) 374 final.

Interreg should be able to finance activities such as shared projects, demonstration activities, new value chains... linked to smart specialisation areas: this would help Regions bringing innovation ecosystems in a European dimension, supporting the competitiveness of the single market;

[points 10-17]

18. The European Committee of the Regions considers it essential to provide sufficient resources to the S3 platform to develop support tools for the implementation of Smart Specialisation policies, such as EYE@RIS3, ICT Monitoring Tool, R&I Regional Viewer and the Digital Innovation Hubs. It points to the need for an expanded and more efficient collection system for data and statistics at regional level;

22. The European Committee of the Regions notes that there are substantial barriers that hinder the use of European structural and investment funds for interregional and transnational cooperation, such as lack of resources or administrative capacity, absence of examples of best practice, uncertainty about how to go about it, lack of a reference or methodological framework, vagueness about objectives, asymmetric levels of political competence, regulatory barriers and the absence of a financial framework to facilitate such work;

[Points 26- 28]

having the potential to encourage the development of European value chains ("component 5"). It is proposed that these investments are supported with EUR 970 million from the European Regional Development Fund, (ERDF) as stipulated in Article 9.2 of the proposed Regulation: "resources referred to in paragraph 1 shall be allocated as follows: [...] (e) 11.5 % for interregional innovation investments (component 5)".

In addition, Article 57.4 of the proposal for a Common Provisions Regulation<sup>15</sup> provides that "All or part of an operation may be implemented outside of a Member State, including outside the Union, provided that the operation contributes to the objectives of the programme."

The Commission established S3Platform in 2011. Since then several tools have been created, contributing to the development of regional innovation ecosystems through providing information, methodologies, expertise and advice to national and regional policy makers, as well as promoting mutual learning, trans-national co-operation and contributing to academic debates around the concept of smart specialisation. This work will continue.

Moreover, data and statistics at regional level are available, being updated and further developed in regional and urban statistics in Eurostat, Cohesion Open Portal<sup>16</sup> and Regional Innovation Scoreboard<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> COM(2018) 375 final.

<sup>16</sup> <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/>

<sup>17</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/innovation/facts-figures/regional\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/innovation/facts-figures/regional_en)

	<p>The Interreg IVC and Interreg Europe programmes, in the previous and current programming periods, have proved very fruitful in structuring the exchange of good practices, transfers of experience and developing policy learning platforms for the benefit of public and private operators.</p>
<p>20. The European Committee of the Regions considers that the S3 should include the double objective of generating synergies between regional innovation and development policies, and financial instruments, and, secondly, of avoiding duplication. Therefore, the objective should be to promote synergies between the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and other funds, such as the future 9th Framework Programme, and with national and regional funds;</p> <p>21. The European Committee of the Regions considers that the 9th Framework Programme should include the regional discovery process and support the creation, strengthening and internationalisation of regional innovation ecosystems. Support for collaborative research, innovation and internationalisation offers genuine European Union added value and should be improved in the next programming period. Moreover, in future European Union Research &amp; Development funding greater attention should be paid to the impact of research and innovation measures at regional level;</p>	<p>Complementarity and synergy between the objectives and scope of the different programmes supporting research and innovation will continue to be strengthened.</p> <p>The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) will remain a key instrument to support research and innovation, as well as innovation ecosystems. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) will support human resource development. Together they will support the take-up and diffusion of advanced technologies, for example through digitising industry, moving towards a circular economy or the deployment of eHealth.</p> <p>At practical implementation level, the proposed regulations would facilitate alternative funding modes: European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund Plus would be able to directly fund operations awarded a Seal of Excellence certification. In addition, Managing Authorities would be allowed to voluntarily request the transfer of up to 5% of programme financial allocations from the funds under shared management to Horizon Europe for the benefit of the Member State concerned.</p> <p>A key element for achieving synergies and for strategic use of cohesion policy</p>



	<p>funds will be the research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3), including the entrepreneurial discovery process. The research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation would continue to concentrate investments on promising fields based on the comparative strengths of the regions. The creation, strengthening and internationalisation of regional innovation ecosystems can also be addressed in this process.</p> <p>Finally, the phrase "the 9<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme" should be replaced with "Horizon Europe", the official name of the programme.</p>
<p>24. The European Committee of the Regions believes that a review should be carried out of the European Innovation Partnerships (ERA-NET, JPI, ETP etc.). The Partnerships can be an effective way of addressing fragmentation, preventing duplication of effort, improving innovation and addressing societal challenges, but studies should be published demonstrating their impact;</p>	<p>The Commission draws attention to the fact that a comprehensive review of the impact of European Partnerships was carried out during the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020. The related studies have been published on the internet<sup>18</sup>.</p> <p>In addition, the Commission requests the use of the expression 'European Partnerships' when referring to these instruments. Furthermore, the example list of these initiatives should include ERA-NET Cofund, Article 185, European Joint Programme, Joint Programming Initiatives, Joint Technology Initiative and contractual public-private partnerships.</p>

<sup>18</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/index.cfm?pg=input\\_studies](https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/index.cfm?pg=input_studies)

<p><b>N°5 Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the quality of water intended for human consumption (recast)</b>  <b>COM(2017) 753 final – 2017/0332 (COD), SWD(2017) 448 final, SWD(2017) 449 final, SWD(2017) 451 final</b>  <b>COR 2018/0924 – ENVE-VI/028</b>  <b>129<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – May 2018</b>  <b>Rapporteur – Mr Mark WEINMEISTER (DE/EPP)</b>  <b>DG ENV – Commissioner VELLA</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>3. The European Committee of the Regions welcomes the Commission's proposals in response to the European Citizens' Initiative 'Right to Water' which aim at ensuring universal access to clean and healthy drinking water as an essential public service, with specific measures to improve such access for vulnerable and marginalised groups;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the European Committee of the Regions' opinion. The Commission recalls that the European Citizens' Initiative 'Right2Water' has called on the Commission to propose action at Union level. The Commission included in its proposal a new article on access to water. This article is two-fold and requires Member States first to ensure access to water for vulnerable and marginalised groups and second, more generally, to improve access to water by a number of measures (promotion campaigns, availability of water fountains, etc.).</p>
<p>5. The European Committee of the Regions advocates a close link between the quality of drinking water resources and the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, in particular its Article 7, and that the cooperation between local and regional authorities in the Member States and water supply companies should be supported. The European Committee of the Regions suggest that the division of</p>	<p>The proposal is consistent with the European Union's established legislation in the field of water, especially the Water Framework Directive<sup>19</sup>. The proposal in particular complements Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Water Framework Directive that concern the requirements to identify and monitor the water bodies used for abstraction of drinking water and to designate protected areas covering</p>

<sup>19</sup> Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, OJ L 327, 22.12.2000.

<p>responsibilities needs to be clarified, particularly when it comes to the role of drinking water companies. This preferably takes place at Member State level, so that proper account can be taken of national legal frameworks and the subsidiarity principle. Furthermore, an intermediate category of large suppliers needs to be introduced.</p>	<p>those water bodies. Furthermore, it complements Article 11 of that Directive, requiring Member States to establish programmes of measures, including measures aimed at protecting the abstraction areas for drinking water. As regards responsibilities, the Commission proposal clarifies the responsibilities of the different actors along the water supply chain, but it leaves wide margin of discretion to Member States to define these in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. The proposal includes a new definition of 'water supplier' that is proportionate and requires fewer obligations for smaller suppliers.</p>
<p>19. The European Committee of the Regions criticises the proposal for a directive for setting lower parametric values than those recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).</p>	<p>The proposal closely follows the recommendations for parameters and parametric values by the World Health Organization (WHO). Only in a few cases the Commission proposed stricter (i.e. lower) parametric values than recommended by the WHO based on the precautionary principle and duly justified for reasons of protection of human health. This is also consistent with the approach in existing Directive 98/83/EC. There were already some differences between the World Health Organization Guidelines and Directive 98/83/EC: for example, for pesticides or for carcinogenic substances, stricter levels are set in the existing Directive than those recommended in the World Health Organization Guidelines.</p>

<p><b>Amendment 4, Recital 9</b></p> <p>The European Committee of the Regions supports the monitoring of microplastics and proposes adding a definition (particles between 1 nm and 5 mm in size with high polymer content).</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the need for developing a methodology to measure microplastics and will consider the proposal for a definition during the negotiations between the co-legislators.</p>
<p>23. The European Committee of the Regions does not support the European Commission's proposal to delete the indicator parameters in Annex I, and asks for the indicator parameters in Annex I Part C of Directive 98/83/EC to be restored and included with the parametric values in Annex I of the proposal.</p>	<p>Indicator parameters have been deleted from Annex I and moved to Annex IV, to be provided as information to consumers. This is because indicator parameters do not provide health-related information but rather information of interest to consumers (such as taste, colour, anions, cations, etc.).</p>
<p><b>Amendment 16 Article 12(3)</b></p> <p><b>Reason</b></p> <p>It is over-regulation to automatically qualify any case of non-compliance with the minimum requirement of a parametric value as a potential danger per se.</p>	<p>The Commission proposed this modification as this follows from the objective of protection of human health of the Directive, and the fact that Member States have to meet the minimum requirements for parameters in the Annex to the Directive. This means that if there is an exceedance of a parametric value, this should be understood as potential danger to human health, in line with the objectives of the Directive. The Commission is however open to clarify in the co-decision process that Member States do not need to take extensive remedial actions if the exceedance of the parametric value is trivial.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 17</b></p> <p>New article headed "Derogations" after Article 12</p> <p>The Committee proposes the former Article 9 on derogations to be retained.</p>	<p>The Commission proposed the former Article 9 to be deleted. The complex process to grant three derogations of three years is no longer justified. It was originally introduced in the Directive to allow Member States to comply with parametric values newly set in 1998. However, both co-legislators have put</p>

	<p>forward opinions similar to the European Committee of the Regions. If the co-legislators decide to reintroduce the possibility to grant derogations, this should only be in duly justified exceptional circumstances, and strictly time limited.</p>
<p>24. The European Committee of the Regions does not agree with the European Commission's proposal to regulate requirements for materials in contact with drinking water through the Construction Products Regulation.</p>	<p>The proposal covers the vast majority of relevant products under the Construction Products Regulation<sup>20</sup> and can adequately ensure the highest level of protection of human health and at the same time remove unnecessary testing and approval costs and obstacles. Discussions have shown that both co-legislators want to strengthen the importance of hygienically safe products, therefore the Commission will endeavour to clarify how to best achieve that in the co-decision process.</p>
<p>10. The Committee finds that the Commission proposal to extend the provision of information to consumers with subjects that are separate from drinking water quality, such as tariffs, leakage losses and organisation does not belong in the Drinking Water Directive.</p> <p><b>Amendment 21 Article 14</b></p> <p>The Committee finds the requirements in Article 14 too far-reaching and suggest deleting some elements of Article 14 and of Annex IV that are not related to drinking water quality.</p>	<p>The proposal includes provisions to ensure that up-to-date information is easily accessible, for instance on a website. According to the impact assessment carried out by the Commission, increased transparency will bring important benefits to consumers. The up-to-date information should not only include results from the monitoring, but also additional information that the public may find useful, and which often influence consumers' perception of tap water. For the same reasons, and in order to make consumers more aware of the implications of water consumption, they should also receive detailed information for instance on their invoice or by smart applications. With</p>

<sup>20</sup> Regulation (EU) No 305/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2011 laying down harmonised conditions for the marketing of construction products and repealing Council Directive 89/106/EEC, OJ L 88, 4.4.2011.

	<p>the improvement of monitoring techniques, water and energy losses have become increasingly apparent and reduction of water losses should be encouraged at Union level to improve the efficiency of water infrastructure. In line with the principle of subsidiarity, that issue should be addressed by increasing transparency and consumer information on leakage rates and energy efficiency.</p>
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<p><b>N°6 Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2009/73/EC concerning common rules for the internal market in natural gas</b>  <b>COM(2017) 660 final, SWD(2017) 368 final</b>  <b>COR 2017/5833 – ENVE-VI/026</b>  <b>129<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – May 2018</b>  <b>Rapporteur – Mr Mauro D'ATTIS (IT/EPP)</b>  <b>DG ENER – Commissioner ARIAS CAÑETE</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p><b>Amendments 1</b>, Recital (3) - This Directive seeks to address the remaining <i>possible</i> obstacles to the completion of the internal market in natural gas resulting from the non-application of Union market rules to gas pipelines to and from third countries. The amendments introduced by this Directive will ensure that the rules applicable to gas transmission pipelines connecting two or more Member States, are also applicable to pipelines to and from third countries within the Union, <i>including territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones of the Member States</i>.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the proposed amendments, but notes that even though these amendments could be taken into account for the purpose of clarity, Recital 5 of the Commission proposal already contains a reference to "territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone of the Member States".</p>
<p><b>Amendment 2</b>, Recital (4) - To take account of the previous lack of specific Union rules applicable to gas pipelines to and from third countries, Member States should be able to grant derogations from certain provisions of Directive 2009/73/EC to such pipelines which are completed at the date of entry into force of this Directive. <u><i>Any such derogation shall be approved by the Commission.</i></u>  <i>The relevant date for the application of</i></p>	<p>The Commission would like to note that the proposal<sup>21</sup> provides for the possibility for Member States to derogate, for a limited period and where appropriate subject to conditions, existing pipelines to and from third countries from the application of the main provisions of the Gas Directive<sup>22</sup>. The possibility for such derogations should mitigate adverse effects of the proposed amendments on the operation of existing gas transmission</p>

<sup>21</sup> COM(2017) 660 final.

<sup>22</sup> Directive 2009/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 concerning common rules for the internal market in natural gas and repealing Directive 2003/55/EC, OJ L 211 of 14 August 2009, p.94.

<p><i>unbundling models other than ownership unbundling should be adapted for gas pipelines to and from third countries.</i></p>	<p>infrastructure connecting Member States with third countries and follow existing practice for granting exemptions as outlined in Article 36 of the Gas Directive. While the legal possibility for such derogations to be approved by the Commission exists, it is considered that such an oversight would not be necessary. The impacts on the internal market of existing infrastructures and their regulatory regime are known to the Member States and they are therefore in the best position to evaluate specific requirements of existing pipelines in their jurisdiction.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 3</b>, Article 1 Point (1) - in Article 2, point (17) is replaced by the following: "(17) 'interconnector' means a transmission line which crosses or spans a border between Member States or – <i>exclusively where the technical firm daily capacity of the overall set of existing infrastructures connecting the European Union to the third country from which the relevant infrastructure (completed subsequently to the date of adoption of this Directive) originates, as certified by the Agency, already (or jointly with that of the relevant new infrastructure) exceeds 40% of the total technical firm daily capacity of infrastructures (including LNG terminals in the European Union) connecting the European Union, or relevant risk group as defined in Annex I to Regulation 2017/1938, with third countries, as certified by the Agency –</i> between Member States and <i>a third country</i>"</p>	<p>The present proposal specifies the exact scope of the Gas Directive. It sets out that within the borders of Union jurisdiction, pipelines to and from third countries are to be regarded as "interconnectors" and thus fall within the scope of the Gas Directive and establishing that such pipelines are subject to the rules set out therein. The aim of the amendment is to establish a common regulatory framework for all interconnectors with third countries. The amendment to the definition proposed in the Committee's opinion would significantly reduce the scope of the Gas Directive by excluding the vast majority of existing interconnectors with third countries. Pipelines excluded from the scope of applicability would continue to be surrounded by the current legal uncertainty to the detriment of all stakeholders. Introducing a threshold would not be in line with the objective of establishing a common regulatory framework for gas transmission within the Union, irrespective of origin.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 4</b>, Article 1 Point (4) - (4)</p>	<p>The aim of Article 36 of the Gas</p>



<p>Article 36 is amended as follows: (a) <i>in paragraph 1, letter (a) is replaced as follows: "(a) the investment must enhance competition in gas supply and enhance security of supply, taking into account in the case of infrastructures to and from third countries also the structure of the relevant offer and the access to export/import pipelines in such third countries;"</i>;</p>	<p>Directive is to provide an instrument for facilitating investment in new infrastructure projects provided that certain criteria are fulfilled. While the proposed additional criteria for assessing exemption applications could be considered, the current Article 36 already permits taking into account all relevant issues, including the supply structure and conditions for access.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 5</b>, Article 1 Point (7) - ... The derogation shall be limited in time, <i>shall cease to apply by ... [3 years after the date of entry into force of this amending Directive] at the latest</i>] and shall be subject to conditions which contribute to the achievement of the above conditions. Where the gas pipeline in question is located in the jurisdiction of more than one Member State, the Member State in the jurisdiction of which the first interconnection point is located shall decide on a derogation for the pipeline. <i>The decision shall be notified, without delay, by the competent authority to the Commission, together with all the relevant information with respect to the decision. Within a period of 2 months from notification, the Commission may take a decision requiring the Member State to amend or withdraw the decision to grant a derogation.</i></p>	<p>The new Article 49 (9) envisages that a Member State may grant a derogation for existing gas pipelines to and from third countries from the provisions of Articles 9, 10, 11 and 32 and Article 41(6), (8) and (10) of the Gas Directive. This possibility should ensure that there is sufficient flexibility to avoid any adverse effects of the proposed application of Union market rules to such infrastructure. The Commission proposal does not envisage the possibility of setting a fixed time limit for derogations to be granted for existing gas interconnectors with third countries due to the fact that the respective interconnectors and their impact on the internal market differ to a great extent. Consequently, the duration of each derogation should be determined on a case-by-case basis further to a detailed assessment of the specific circumstances. Introducing a fixed date for derogations to cease to apply has the potential to distort the application of the proposed amendments in different Member States. While the proposed amendment for giving the Commission oversight on derogation decisions is legally possible, it is considered that such an oversight is not necessary. The impacts on the internal market of existing infrastructures and their regulatory regime are known and therefore it is</p>

	<p>sufficient that Member States evaluate the specific requirements of existing pipelines in their jurisdiction and decide over such derogations. They are also well-placed to take into account the specific situations and requirements of existing pipelines and related contractual arrangements.</p>
<p>13. The European Committee of the Regions welcomes this legislative initiative from the Commission, while pointing out the importance of the necessary impact assessment in accordance with the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-making.</p>	<p>The Commission has come to the conclusion that the present initiative does not require a detailed impact assessment, as the proposal builds on the established practice of applying the principles of Union energy law to several infrastructure projects for the import of natural gas. This is the case for all onshore connections with third countries, as well as for offshore pipelines, such as the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline. In this context, the proposal provides additional transparency and legal certainty while resulting in limited changes to the applicable legal standard. Therefore, the proposal is not expected to engender significant economic, environmental or social impacts which would require an impact assessment under the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making of 13 April 2016.</p>
<p>14. The European Committee of the Regions specifies that responses to this issue should, however, always take into account the overall European Union interest and the establishment of the Energy Union, which continues to take precedence over that of each individual Member State, as well as the need to uphold not only the principle of solidarity, but also the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity, the latter of which the Senate of one Member State</p>	<p>The proposal constitutes an important step towards the completion of the Energy Union and strengthens the Solidarity aspect by creating a single regulatory framework for gas transmission in the Union, irrespective of origin. The Commission would like to acknowledge that it has taken note of the reasoned opinion of the French Senate and nevertheless considers the proposed changes to the Gas Directive necessary to achieve the purpose of an integrated gas market in the European Union. It has</p>

<p>deems to be under threat in this case;</p>	<p>been submitted that achieving that goal cannot be done at national level in an equally efficient manner since pipelines to and from third countries are in most cases of a capacity which is capable of impacting the internal gas market and security of supply in several Member States.</p>
<p>15. The European Committee of the Regions notes that, with this in mind and taking into account the above-mentioned link between the capacity (import infrastructure) and the commodity (natural gas), priority should be given to solutions that avoid discouraging investment in new import structures (e.g. the offshore infrastructure from the Middle East to Greece, which could help diversify the supply sources for the Member States in south-east Europe) and that avoid complicating the management of existing ones, since this could have the paradoxical effect – by decreasing import opportunities – of making the EU more dependent on current suppliers;</p>	<p>The current legal framework does not expressly regulate the operation of gas pipelines connecting Member States with third countries. The absence of common rules on the operation of such infrastructure could result in regulatory conflicts, legal uncertainty and distortion of competition within the Union internal energy market. A transparent and effective legal framework for gas infrastructure to and from third countries is of high importance for the well-functioning of the internal energy market and security of supply. By adopting common rules for all gas interconnectors the amendments will enhance legal certainty to the benefit of all stakeholders. This could improve the investment climate in the Union, enhance effective competition, ensure security of supply as well as avoid inefficient investments to the best possible extent.</p>
<p>17. The European Committee of the Regions points out, in particular, the fact that a stakeholder organisation like the association Eurogas has complained about: (i) the impact of the retroactive effects of the proposal on the security of investments already made (given the legal framework and time frame that would be amended ex post) in existing infrastructure and on investors' legitimate expectations; (ii) the political and legal difficulty (under international law) of</p>	<p>The amendments to the Gas Directive proposed by the Commission, by expressly establishing the application of the Gas Directive and Gas Regulation to pipelines to and from third countries, would ensure that such infrastructure projects could be realised and operated applying the relevant provisions of the Gas Directive and Gas Regulation. Many pipeline projects inside the Union, and several pipeline projects connected to third countries, were realised in full</p>

<p>renegotiating the relevant existing intergovernmental agreements with third countries without their consent; and (iii) the dangers that the above issues and the difficulties also arising for new gas pipelines could pose to the future security of supply in the EU;</p>	<p>respect of those requirements. Where the application of these rules to existing pipelines to and from third countries would prove unsuitable or impossible in practice, Member States could decide to grant a derogation from the application of key requirements set out in Articles 9, 10, 11 and 32 and Article 41(6), (8) and (10) of the Gas Directive. The possibility ensures that there is sufficient flexibility to avoid any adverse effects of the present extension of the applicability of Union market rules to such infrastructure and ensure its continued operation. The rules on gas transmission as set out in the Gas Directive do not prohibit the construction of new gas interconnectors. Therefore, the rights of Member States to conclude or renew bilateral agreements with third countries on the construction of gas interconnectors or on the supply of gas through such interconnectors are not affected by the present proposal. It should be noted that, further to the proposal, future pipeline projects to and from third countries will be able to apply for an exemption for new infrastructure in accordance with the current Article 36 of the Gas Directive.</p>
<p>18. The European Committee of the Regions, in the light of the above, and in accordance with the inextricably linked principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and solidarity, would suggest amendments that: (i) enable the EU institutions to avoid or resolve problems that certain Member States might face as a result of infrastructural initiatives by other Member States that may have the effect of strengthening dominant positions or reducing the diversification of the European Union's third-country energy sources as mentioned in point 10</p>	<p>By establishing a common regulatory framework, the Commission's proposal would contribute towards reducing the likelihood of any detrimental impact of existing or future gas interconnectors on the functioning of the internal energy market. Furthermore, the proposal will contribute to security of gas supply in the Union by ensuring third-party access to supply infrastructure. In addition, Regulation (EU) 2017/1938 concerning measures to safeguard the security of gas supply already sets out measures at Union level in order to safeguard security</p>

<p>above; (ii) protect the European Union as a whole against risks to the European Union's security of supply; and (iii) ensure compliance with the EU's existing legal framework and international obligations;</p>	<p>of gas supply for all Member States, including by requiring Member States to support one another in an emergency situation.</p>
<p>19. The European Committee of the Regions calls on the Commission here, in relation to the proposed Directive's extended scope into the territorial waters, to ensure the necessary conformity with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea concluded in Montego Bay, and thus adjust this extended scope accordingly;</p>	<p>According to the Commission's analysis the proposal is compatible with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, as the convention specifically envisages the right of a coastal State to establish conditions for pipelines entering its territorial sea pursuant to Article 79 paragraph 4.</p>

<p><b>N°7 Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture</b>  <b>COM(2017) 673 final, COM(2018) 23 final</b>  <b>COR 2017/06048 – SEDEC VI/033</b>  <b>129<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – May 2018</b>  <b>Rapporteur – Ms Tanya HRISTOVA (BG/EPP)</b>  <b>DG EAC – Commissioner NAVRACSICS</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>Amendments 2, 3, 5, 7 – references to <i>local and regional authorities</i>.</p>	<p>The Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching has meanwhile been adopted by the Council on 22 May 2018.<sup>23</sup> Without prejudice to the principle of subsidiarity, the Commission recognises the pivotal role of the local and regional level in the field of education and culture.</p>
<p>Amendment 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- suggestion to enable school exchanges within Member States</li> <li>- reference to new and existing opportunities for cultural mobility.</li> </ul>	<p>School exchanges within Member States fall out of the scope of the current Erasmus+ programme whose main feature and European Union added value lie in its transnational dimension. Similarly, the proposal for the future Erasmus programme for 2021-2027<sup>24</sup> generally foresees transnational activities only; national activities could only be funded if they have a strong European dimension.</p> <p>Cultural mobility of artists is notably addressed through Creative Europe and the New European Agenda for Culture: a new scheme for the mobility of artists and/or culture professionals is being set up<sup>25</sup> and the Commission proposal for</p>

<sup>23</sup> 2018/C 195/01

<sup>24</sup> COM(2018)367 final.

<sup>25</sup> Experimentation under call EAC-18-2018, <https://etendering.ted.europa.eu/cft/cft-display.html?cftId=3633>

	the new Creative Europe programme (2021 to 2027) <sup>26</sup> contains a new activity which specifically targets mobility of artists.
12. The European Committee of the Regions restates the importance of focusing attention and resources on awareness and dissemination of European culture, history and identity. To this end, it is proposed that the "Europe for citizens" programme be extended so that a larger number of relevant initiatives can be supported;	Under the new Multi-Annual Financial Framework the Commission is proposing to extend the new Europe for Citizens programme and to combine it with the Rights, Equalities and Citizenship programme into a new Rights and Values programme worth EUR 642 million for the 2021-27 period. The new programme aims at protecting and promoting rights and values as enshrined in the Treaties, in order to sustain open, democratic and inclusive societies. Specific objectives proposed include increasing citizens' understanding of the Union, its history, heritage and diversity.
14.-21. Proposals on cultural heritage; the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage; the European Heritage Label; stronger engagement with Member States, regions and cities; cultural mobility; culture for social inclusion, intercultural dialogue; and passing European culture to Europeans.	The European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, the European Heritage Label, the Commission's New European Agenda for Culture and the new Creative Europe programme (2021-2027) all aim at tackling the promotion of cultural awareness and cultural mobility, the strengthening of a European and shared identity, the support of inclusion and intercultural dialogue, higher visibility of the European Union, cooperation at regional and local levels in the field of culture, the training of specialists, the development of traditional arts and crafts, sustainable cultural tourism as well as cultural and creative industries.
40. The European Committee of the Regions strongly supports boosting the	The Commission proposal for the Erasmus programme 2021-2027

<sup>26</sup> COM(2018) 366 final.

<p>Erasmus + programme with the aim of doubling the number of participants, reaching out to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds by 2025 and expanding towards lifelong learning and educator mobility in order to guarantee mobility for all students under equal conditions, regardless of where they live, including those from remote, insular and outermost regions;</p>	<p>proposes to double the budget to EUR 30 billion, which would allow tripling the number of participants as compared to the current programme. The proposed new programme is more inclusive and accessible, notably to people with fewer opportunities. It is strongly anchored in a lifelong learning approach.</p> <p>The needs of the outermost regions are already taken into account in the current Erasmus+ programme, as it provides the maximum financial allowance to participants going to or coming from those regions. The successor programme will continue taking into account the specific situation of those regions.</p>
<p>46. The European Committee of the Regions is aware that boosting Erasmus+ will require ambitious financing and simpler procedures in order to achieve the programme's objectives; in that respect recognises that the UK is currently a major participant in the programme and hence calls for the ongoing negotiations to enable UK regions and local authorities to continue to participate in European cooperation programmes post 2020 in the same vein as other non-EU Member States already do.</p>	<p>Efforts for simplification will continue during the Erasmus+ programme and will be stepped up for Erasmus programme (2020-2027), with lighter/fast-track procedures for smaller organisations which receive smaller grants (e.g. schools) and less administrative burden (simpler application forms and reports, improved on-line tools, etc.).</p> <p>Whether and how the United Kingdom will participate in the Erasmus programme (2021-2027) will be a subject for negotiations between the United Kingdom government and the European Union following the United Kingdom's decision to withdraw from the Union.</p>



<p><b>N°8 Cultural Heritage as a strategic resource for more cohesive and sustainable regions in the European Union</b>  <b>COR 2018/00185 – SEDEC-VI/035</b>  <b>129<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – May 2018</b>  <b>Rapporteur – Ms Babette WINTER (DE/PES)</b>  <b>DG EAC – Commissioner NAVRACSICS</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>16. The European Committee of the Regions highlights the importance of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 as a significant initiative, and welcomes the fact that the European Commission has already announced an evaluation; it stresses in this connection that the positive effects of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 must be further amplified by follow-up measures in the coming years. This must also be reflected in the various support programmes in the next Multiannual Financial Framework to aid in disseminating European cultural heritage beyond 2018;</p>	<p>The Commission shares the Committee’s view that the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 is a significant initiative. The overarching goal of this thematic year is to raise awareness of the social and economic importance of cultural heritage and to celebrate Europe's cultural richness and diversity. It reaches out to the widest possible audience in regions and cities across Europe to promote a common sense of belonging.</p> <p>The Commission agrees that it is important to build up a long-lasting political legacy after 2018. As specified in the proposal for a New European Agenda for Culture adopted by the Commission on 22 May 2018<sup>27</sup>, at the conclusion of the Year the Commission will present an Action Plan for Cultural Heritage. It will ask Member States to draft similar Plans at national level and provide the Year’s follow up through the future Council Work Plan for Culture. The Commission has also included references to cultural heritage in its proposals for the future Union programmes, including in Cohesion Policy programmes.</p>

<sup>27</sup> COM(2018) 267 final.

<p>17. The European Committee of the Regions points out that the mobility of artists – facilitated inter alia by Creative Europe – contributes to the success story of European integration, and therefore considers it necessary to continue and expand the Creative Europe programme;</p>	<p>Transnational mobility is one of the objectives and priorities of Creative Europe. More than one third of cultural cooperation projects selected for funding support the mobility of artists and culture professionals.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Commission has recently published a call for tenders<sup>28</sup> to test a cross-border individual mobility scheme tailored to the needs of artists and culture professionals. That scheme would be scaled up during 2019 and 2020, and implemented on a regular basis from 2021 onwards via the next Creative Europe programme 2021-2027<sup>29</sup>, in which the Commission has proposed the mobility of artists and cultural and creative operators as one of the horizontal actions under the Culture Strand.</p>
<p>20. The European Committee of the Regions encourages local and regional authorities to evaluate their experiences with this kind of participatory approach and to share them with one another;</p>	<p>The existing cultural networks set up under the macro-regional strategies and INTERREG could facilitate such participatory approaches and the sharing of best practice with other countries.</p>
<p>35. The European Committee of the Regions welcomes, in this connection, the introduction of the European Heritage Label and calls on the Commission to take measures to raise its profile;</p>	<p>To raise the profile of the European Heritage Label, the Commission is reinforcing networking and visibility actions, e.g. the yearly European Heritage Label Ceremony and the yearly gathering of the European Heritage Label network. The 2018 European Heritage Label Ceremony, which took place in Plovdiv (Bulgaria), gathered 200 participants from all over Europe. The yearly gathering of the European Heritage Label network took place as part of a two-day event co-</p>

<sup>28</sup> EAC-18-2018

<sup>29</sup> COM(2018) 366 final.

	<p>organised with the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the active participation of other European Union institutions, including the European Committee of the Regions. New audio-visual materials have been produced for this occasion and are being disseminated via the Commission’s social media outlets.</p> <p>Furthermore, the next Creative Europe programme proposed for the 2021-2027 period<sup>30</sup> foresees specific support to architecture and cultural heritage, including targeted actions for the mobility of operators, capacity building, audience development and internationalisation of the cultural heritage and architecture sectors. The future projects should help to further raise the profile of European cultural heritage through awareness-raising, networking and peer-to-peer learning activities.</p>
<p>42. The European Committee of the Regions stresses that cultural partnerships are being built across all Member States and, with this in mind, urges more vigorous promotion of themed cultural routes that transcend Member State borders, including under the INTERREG programme;</p>	<p>Under the current European Regional Development Fund, more than 8.6% of the overall INTERREG budget is financing “cultural heritage and arts”. This way it has become the second most popular topic, making an important contribution to interregional cultural routes, such as the “Danube Cultural Promenade”, the “Via Savaria” itinerary between Hungary and Slovenia and the hiking route along the Baltic sea coastline in Latvia and Estonia. Moreover, the macro-regional strategies mobilise existing structures to create solid platforms for tourism and culture.</p>

<sup>30</sup> COM(2018) 366 final.

<p>45. The European Committee of the Regions is concerned to note that the European Commission's capping of the European Regional Development Fund investment budget for cultural infrastructure at EUR 5 million in the current programming period of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund is an obstacle to the development of larger cultural infrastructure projects;</p> <p>46. The European Committee of the Regions therefore calls on the European Commission to rescind this arbitrary ceiling and to base the programmes on substantive criteria and the goals to be achieved, especially European added value;</p>	<p>The notion of "small-scale" in Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 is currently being replaced with newly introduced ceilings. Small-scale cultural and sustainable tourism infrastructure is thus eligible for support if the European Regional Development Fund contribution to the operation does not exceed EUR 10 million, or EUR 20 million in the case of infrastructure considered to be cultural heritage within the meaning of Article 1 of the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.</p>
<p>50. The European Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission and the Council to involve regional representatives – with their direct experience – appropriately and far more closely in the conferences and peer-learning initiatives established in the Council Conclusions on a Work Plan for Culture;</p>	<p>In the proposal for a New European Agenda for Culture<sup>31</sup>, the Commission explicitly recognises that regions and cities are at the forefront of culture-led development and are natural partners for experimentation, anticipating trends and exploring models of social and economic innovation.</p> <p>The New Agenda will be implemented through Work Plans and working methods such as the Open Method of Coordination endorsed by the Member States. At the same time, to increase its impact, the Commission also proposes concrete implementation at national, regional or local levels, through joint projects partly financed by Union instruments, offering peer-learning and technical assistance to Member States, or to regional and local authorities designated by Member States.</p> <p>The existing cultural networks set up</p>

<sup>31</sup> COM(2018)267 final.

	<p>under the macro-regional strategies and INTERREG are facilitating peer-learning among different countries and regions.</p>
<p>65. The European Committee of the Regions reiterates its strong support to the European Capitals of Culture (2020-2033) and calls for the continuation of the initiative beyond 2033, which should reflect even more the full diversity of Europe's cultural richness and promote the long-term development of a common European cultural area based on public participation. The Committee regrets against this background that the European Commission has decided to exclude the United Kingdom from the 2023 edition. Indeed, the common European cultural area goes beyond the borders of the European Union;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that the European Capitals of Culture action<sup>32</sup> is an excellent means to showcase the richness of European cultural diversity as well as to promote participation in cultural events.</p> <p>The rules governing the European Capitals of Culture action say that it is open to Member States of the European Union as well as, under strictly defined conditions, to candidate countries, potential candidates and European Free Trade Agreement/ European Economic Area countries.</p> <p>The invitation to the United Kingdom authorities to discontinue the competition is a consequence of the United Kingdom's unilateral decision to leave the European Union as of March 2019.</p>

<sup>32</sup> Decision No 445/2014/EU as amended by Decision (EU) 2017/1545.

<p><b>N°9 The Future of the COSME programme beyond 2020: regional and local perspective (own-initiative opinion)</b>  <b>COR 2017/03215 – ECON-VI/027</b>  <b>127<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – January-February 2018</b>  <b>Rapporteur – Mr Robert Sorin NEGOIȚĂ (RO/PES)</b>  <b>DG GROW – Commissioner BIENKOWSKA</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1. The European Committee of the Regions calls upon the European Commission to ensure a predictable and stable small and medium-sized enterprises support framework beyond 2020 by creating a renewed and strengthened successor programme to COSME, Europe’s programme for small and medium-sized enterprises, taking the needs of diverse types of small and medium-sized enterprises in different European Union territories into account.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions asking for a renewed and strengthened support framework for small and medium-sized enterprises following up to COSME<sup>33</sup> beyond 2020.</p> <p>The interim evaluation of the COSME programme reveals that action undertaken under COSME has served a substantial number of small and medium-sized enterprises in different sectors.</p> <p>The evaluation also suggested that there is still scope for improving the geographical coverage and the synergies with other Union programmes, and with local and regional actions.</p> <p>On this basis, several actions to support the different types of small and medium-sized enterprises have been included in the Commission proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework<sup>34</sup>.</p>
<p>2. The European Committee of the Regions points out that there is a lack of awareness, both among businesses and</p>	<p>Prior to the launch of COSME financial instruments, a pan-European road-show in all 28 Member States</p>

<sup>33</sup> COSME = Europe’s Programme for small and medium-sized enterprise.

<sup>34</sup> COM(2018) 321 final.

<p>among financial intermediaries in many European Union territories, about financial instruments available under the COSME programme: therefore suggests strengthening information and dissemination targeting all European Union territories.</p>	<p>took place (the European Union Finance Days) to present the instruments to local financial intermediaries and other stakeholders. Afterwards, several awareness-raising initiatives have taken place, such as various television and web-based campaigns, dedicated brochures, success stories, infographics and information through the Enterprise Europe Network. Visibility clauses are also enshrined in contracts between the European Investment Fund and financial intermediaries to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises are properly informed about COSME financing. The Commission continues to increase visibility of support instruments through centralised websites and management.</p>
<p>3. The European Committee of the Regions points out the need to devote sufficient resources to easing access to finance for the broadest possible range of small and medium-sized enterprises and promoting public-private partnerships between financial intermediaries and regional and local actors in implementing targeted financial instruments.</p>	<p>Within the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, a number of programmes, such as COSME and Horizon 2020, included financial instruments aimed at easing access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises, research and innovation, etc. Building on the experience of the current Multiannual Financial Framework, the Commission has tabled its proposals for the future framework.</p> <p>The Commission encourages public-private cooperation in the implementation of financial instruments. Bringing together public resources (including Union resources) and private resources, whenever relevant, ensures not only bigger impact but also a more efficient way of spending limited resources.</p>
<p>5. The European Committee of the</p>	<p>The Commission agrees to the</p>

<p>Regions suggests that objectives such as promoting entrepreneurship across sectors and in different types of territories, including less developed and peripheral regions and suburban areas, as well as strengthening regional entrepreneurial ecosystems by supporting the mapping of ecosystems and linking more advanced regions with those that are still catching up, should be prioritised under a COSME successor programme.</p>	<p>importance of support for entrepreneurship at local and regional level. The new European Observatory for Clusters and Industrial Change and the European Cluster Collaboration Platform are already important tools to achieve those objectives.</p>
<p>6. The European Committee of the Regions considers that transparency and synergies between different European Union instruments supporting small and medium-sized enterprises need to be improved in the next programming period and calls upon the Commission to clearly delimit the scope of each instrument supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurs, to avoid creating parallel structures, and to ensure that beneficiaries and financial intermediaries can easily access information about the entire range of available instruments.</p>	<p>The programmes under the current Multiannual Financial Framework have been designed to ensure complementarity and synergies between different financial instruments, in line with a revised financial regulation. Building on this experience, the Commission has tabled its proposals for the future Multiannual Financial Framework and counts on support from the European Committee of the Regions to facilitate upholding these elements throughout the legislative process.</p> <p>The interim evaluation of the COSME programme revealed that action under the programme showed good levels of coherence with other European Union, national or regional support programmes for small and medium-sized enterprises. However, it also showed that there is scope for improving synergies.</p> <p>Complementarities between the support services provided under COSME and European Structural and Investment Funds, but also other European Union instruments providing support to small and medium-sized enterprises are important.</p>



<p>18. The European Committee of the Regions reiterates its call to formally and systematically include regional and local small and medium-sized enterprise envoys in the SME (“small and medium-sized enterprise”) Envoys network.</p>	<p>The network of SME (“small and medium-sized enterprise”) Envoys was established to monitor the implementation of the Small Business Act and currently also of the Start-up and Scale-up initiative in the Member States. The Commission is, therefore, open to exploring suggestions as to how the work of regional and local SME (“small and medium-sized enterprise”) Envoys could be linked with that of their national-level counterparts while preserving the effectiveness of the current set-up.</p>
<p>30. The European Committee of the Regions is of the opinion that Union-level actions in support of internationalisation of European small and medium-sized enterprise can and must provide a real added value to European small and medium-sized enterprises who desire to expand across borders; it points out that these actions should be complementary to the initiatives existing at local, regional and national level in order to avoid overlaps and create a comprehensive and consistent set of measures;</p>	<p>Services for internationalisation of small and medium-sized enterprises at Union level shall be complementary to those available at national or regional level. Any future support at Union level would as usual follow the principles of subsidiarity and additionality.</p>
<p>31. The European Committee of the Regions commends the Enterprise Europe Network initiative and strongly supports its continuation, extension and upgrading under a COSME successor.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes this support and works to address the future needs of small and medium-sized enterprises through the network, integrating the findings and recommendations of the COSME evaluation and in close cooperation with the current Enterprise Europe Network host organisations and stakeholders.</p>
<p>35. The European Committee of the Regions the conception and results of the <i>Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs</i> programme financed under the current</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes this support and aims to continue assistance to entrepreneur mentoring, also considering possible synergies with the</p>

<p>COSME programme and recommends its continuation under the successor programme.</p>	<p>Enterprise Europe Network.</p>
<p>41. The European Committee of the Regions suggests introducing single contact points providing information and access to all relevant instruments that are available under different European Union funds and programmes to small and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurs; considers that an extended and upgraded Enterprise Europe Network could fulfil this function on the ground.</p>	<p>Enterprise Europe Network organisations provide information to small and medium-sized enterprises in the various regions on Union legislation, funding opportunities, Union financing and participation for small and medium-sized enterprises in European Union programmes. In particular, they can make use, and direct small and medium-sized enterprises, to the online information provided by the envisaged Single Digital Gateway.</p>

<p><b>N°10 Implementation of the European Agenda on migration (own-initiative opinion)</b>  <b>COM(2017) 558 final</b>  <b>CoR 2017/05048 – CIVEX-VI/029</b>  <b>128<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – March 2018</b>  <b>Rapporteur – Mr Dimitrios KALOGEROPOULOS (EL/EPP)</b>  <b>DG HOME – Commissioner AVRAMOPOULOS</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>23. The European Committee of the Regions calls for more initiatives from the European Commission to establish a coherent action plan, involving all Member States, the relevant European Union bodies, as well as other bodies concerned by the issue, so as to provide a more effective response to smuggling networks;</p>	<p>In 2015, the Commission set up the first ever European Union Action Plan against migrant smuggling<sup>35</sup>, which set out a number of key actions under four priorities: enhanced information gathering and sharing, enhanced investigation and prosecution, better prevention of migrant smuggling and stronger cooperation with third countries.</p> <p>The Plan spans over the period 2015-2020. The Commission does not intend to put forward a new Plan at this stage but rather to continue pursuing the implementation of the current one. In this sense, it is worth noting that most actions foreseen in the Plan are being implemented or have been completed, and new ones have also been developed, as detailed in the Progress Reports on the Agenda on Migration.</p>
<p>27. The European Committee of the Regions urges the European Commission to develop a set of guidelines for setting up and running reception and identification centres ("hotspots") at the external borders of all Member States, guidelines that among other things would</p>	<p>In the framework of the mid-term review of the European Agenda on Migration<sup>36</sup>, the Commission's services carried out a broad consultation of relevant stakeholders, including the agencies on how the roles and responsibilities in the hotspots</p>

<sup>35</sup> COM(2015) 285 final.

<sup>36</sup> COM(2017) 558 final.

<p>ensure the full respect of European Union and international fundamental rights and establish a specific administrative framework for these facilities. This will mean drawing on the experience acquired (including that of the relevant Local and Regional Authorities) from setting up and running reception and identification centres in Greece and Italy, which among other things highlights the need to create separate structures for refugees and for irregular migrants.</p>	<p>approach could be further clarified. This process led to the publication of the Staff Working Document on Best Practices on the Implementation of the Hotspot Approach published on 15 November 2017<sup>37</sup>. Furthermore, terms of cooperation for the European Union Regional Task Forces in Pireaus (Greece) and Catania (Italy) have been drafted in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders (Commission, national authorities and European Union Agencies) and adopted in March 2018.</p> <p>As for accommodation, including detention, in closed reception and identification centres, such action can only be done by the relevant authorities of the Member States based on individual evaluation, in particular the risk of absconding.</p>
<p>33. Setting up hotspots on the territory of third countries is an important step towards this end, and therefore all the necessary measures should be taken by the European Union to reach relevant agreements with such countries, ensuring full respect of Union law and international human rights standards. At the same time it will be necessary to develop a coherent framework of guidelines and rules to ensure all the essential elements are in place for the smooth operation of hotspots;</p>	<p>The ‘hotspot approach’ on the Union territory aims to assist frontline Member States facing disproportionate migratory pressures at the Union’s external borders. In this context, European Union Agencies provide operational assistance to Member States in accordance with their respective mandate to ensure that migrants are identified, screened, fingerprinted, registered and informed about their rights.</p> <p>As regards interventions in third countries, following the European Council of 28 June 2018, the Commission and the Council are exploring the concept of regional disembarkation platforms, in close cooperation with relevant third countries as well as the United Nations</p>

<sup>37</sup> COM(2017) 669 final.

	<p>High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration. Such platforms should operate distinguishing individual situations, in full respect of international law and without creating a pull factor.</p>
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**N°11 Mid-term review of the European Social Fund preparing the post-2020 proposal (own-initiative opinion)**  
**CoR 2017/6121 – COTER-VI/038**  
**128<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – March 2018**  
**Rapporteur – Ms Catuscia MARINI (IT/PES)**  
**DG EMPL – Commissioner THYSSEN**

<b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b>	<b>European Commission position</b>
<p>4. The European Committee of the Regions considers a new legally binding Common Strategic Framework covering all European Union policies, maintaining the existing multifund territorial delivery tools (Community-led Local Development and Integrated Territorial Investments), to be important; it considers a robust Common Provisions Regulation covering all European Structural and Investment Funds to be equally important, being essential to ensure the necessary synergies between policies that pursue complementary objectives;</p>	<p>The Commission is conscious of the need to enhance synergies across the funds with a view to increasing their European added value. The future Common Provisions Regulation<sup>38</sup> includes common rules for shared management funds and there are Fund-specific regulations, including a Regulation for the future European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). By further harmonising rules, it will be simpler for authorities and beneficiaries to combine support from Funds into one operation.</p>
<p>12. European Committee of the Regions calls for a closer relation between the proportion of socially excluded people and the allocation of resources; it underlines that a more territorially targeted and a stronger place-based approach to the use of Funds would increase the efficiency and effectiveness of support.</p>	<p>The European Social Fund Plus is a people-oriented funding instrument. Therefore, with new demographic and labour market challenges arising, Member States will increasingly need a certain degree of flexibility in directing their European Social Fund Plus resources to better meet social needs, including for socially-excluded people. A balanced approach for the future is to design programming according to the policy competencies of the territory concerned. The Commission took due note of the opinions of stakeholders in</p>

<sup>38</sup> COM(2018) 375 final.

	the process of preparing its proposals published on 30 May 2018 <sup>39</sup> .
26. The European Committee of the Regions calls for the process of defining the proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework to be launched in due time to allow citizens and key stakeholders to be sufficiently involved, thus avoiding the delays in the adoption of the regulations and guidelines which have delayed the start of the current programming period.	The Commission carried out an extensive open public consultation at the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018. The Multiannual Financial Framework proposal and sector specific regulations published in May 2018 provide ample opportunity for political discussion within the current mandate of the Institutions of the European Union.
28. The European Committee of the Regions insists on the complementarity between the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund and the European Social Fund as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds, since the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund is a mechanism that delivers short-term assistance while long-term measures are supported by the European Structural and Investment Funds which can act as follow-up measures in the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund areas.	The Commission expects to achieve greater integration and complementarity of the support provided under the future European Globalisation Adjustment Fund and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) while respecting the different missions and objectives of each of these funds. As regards its mission, the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (a special instrument outside the multiannual financial framework ceilings) will remain in the future a more emergency and ad hoc oriented instrument. For its part, the European Social Fund Plus will intervene with a more forward outlook in order to sustain human capital and enhance employability through improving skills and jobs and social integration prospects.
30. The European Committee of the Regions proposes that, in future, a set of core measures be identified as part of the European Social Fund, in order to ensure that disadvantaged young people have access to a minimum level of education and are provided with the means necessary to acquire an adequate level of	The Commission aims to ensure in the future European Social Fund Plus Regulation that Member States facing high levels of youth unemployment and NEET (young person who is "Not in Education, Employment or Training") rates will allocate sufficient resources to youth employment from the European

<sup>39</sup> COM(2018) 380 final; COM(2018) 382 final.

skills.	Social Fund Plus allocations. Such visibility is expected from stakeholders and the European Parliament.
31. The European Committee of the Regions considers it extremely important to ensure the necessary flexibility to be able to adapt European Social Fund programming to any new challenges that might arise.	The proposals for the future European Social Fund Plus will aim to respond to the expectation of flexibility and responsiveness to national contexts, including through a closer link to the European Semester, and consequently reflecting the European Pillar of Social Rights' and Employment Guidelines' priorities to the relevant programming level.
34. The European Committee of the Regions firmly believes that in order to tackle these challenges, the European Social Fund should remain an integral part of the European Structural and Investment Funds and a key element of regional cohesion policy, to harness every possible synergy in terms of integration with measures financed by the other Structural Funds and the rural development funds; the European Social Fund (ESF) must effectively interact with other Structural Funds, particularly the European Regional Development Fund, in order to achieve regional policy which is integrated through joint Structural Funds measures.	The European Social Fund Plus will continue to contribute to cohesion, in particular social cohesion. As regards implementing rules, it will follow common implementation rules with the European Regional Development Fund and other shared management funds covered by the Common Provisions regulation <sup>40</sup>
35. The European Committee of the Regions also firmly believes that the possibility of the European Social Fund to be a shared managed fund must be preserved and therefore strongly rejects any proposal by the Commission to link the European Social Fund to a model of direct management, and also rejects any possibility of centralisation under the sole	The shared management strand of the European Social Fund Plus will be subject to the rules applicable to European Union funds under shared management, as in the current programming period.

<sup>40</sup> COM(2018)375 final.



<p>responsibility of Member States, unless this is stipulated by the institutional arrangements of the Member State.</p>	
<p>45. The European Committee of the Regions calls, therefore, for further harmonisation – as well as streamlining – of the Common Provisions Regulation<sup>41</sup>, so that the disparities, gaps and duplications between the funds' operating rules are minimised and so that rules are defined in a simple, transparent way, leaving sufficient flexibility for tailored solutions to be developed at national, regional and local level, including an extension of "payment by result" tools as well as Joint Action Plans and Simplified Costs Options; the European Committee of the Regions calls, in this regard, for further guidance from the Commission on the use of Simplified Costs Options at all levels, without any restrictions or requirements on their minimum thresholds.</p>	<p>For the European Social Fund Plus, the Commission's ambition is to significantly increase the share of operations implemented on the basis of Simplified Costs Options. The Commission will also further enhance the provisions already included in the Omnibus proposal<sup>42</sup> in relation to payments based on the fulfilment of conditions with a view to further simplifying implementation and increasing the result orientation of the European funds implemented under shared management (as covered by the Common Provisions Regulation<sup>43</sup>).</p>
<p>46. The European Committee of the Regions stresses the key role played by the European Social Fund in responding to the employment, education and social inclusion guidance set out in the Country Specific Recommendations, calling for better alignment of a reformed European Semester and Cohesion Policy.[...]</p>	<p>The European Social Fund Plus will support labour markets to adjust to challenges of societal, technological or demographical nature. By doing so it will also contribute to upward convergence and reduce social and economic disparities. The European Social Fund Plus will contribute to the implementation of the three chapters of the European Pillar of Social Rights: equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions,</p>

<sup>41</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013.

<sup>42</sup> COM(2016) 605 final.

<sup>43</sup> COM(2018)375 final.

	<p>and social protection and inclusion. This will be translated through a closer link of European Social Fund Plus funding to the European Semester and Country Specific Recommendations.</p>
<p>47. The European Committee of the Regions is therefore opposed to merely making Cohesion Policy subordinate to the European Semester, which would undermine its status enshrined in the Treaties [...]</p>	<p>Already in the 2014-2020 period, Operational Programmes are supporting close to 65% of the Country Specific Recommendations, including structural challenges relevant to European Structural and Investment Funds, as shown in different studies. The aim of the future Country Specific Recommendations and European Social Fund Plus regulations would be to ensure concentration of this Fund to commonly agreed European Union and country challenges and priorities, with a view to contributing to greater European Union added value of investments.</p>
<p>48. The European Committee of the Regions proposes that, in keeping with the opinions adopted by the European Committee of the Regions on Indicators for Territorial Development – Gross Domestic Product and beyond and on The Future of Cohesion Policy beyond 2020, the use of indicators other than Gross Domestic Product which take account of demographic, social and environmental data, such as the European Social Progress Index, also be considered.</p>	<p>The allocation method for cohesion policy funding has Gross Domestic Product at its core while taking into account a number of relevant social and employment indicators. The method aims to be fair and reflect the overall objectives of European Union social and territorial cohesion.</p>