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TO THE OPINIONS OF THE**

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

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90th REPORT

DISCLAIMER:

**Due to current circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, announcements made in
this report may be subject to revision in coming weeks or months.**

N°	TITLE / LEAD DG	REFERENCES
DG JUST		
1.	<u>Strengthening the rule of law within the Union. A blueprint for action</u> Rapporteur: Franco IACOP (IT/PES)	COM(2019) 343 final COR-2019-03730-00-01-AC CIVEX-VI/044
DG NEAR		
2.	<u>Enlargement package 2019</u> Rapporteur: Jaroslav HLINKA (SK/PES)	COM(2019) 260 final COR-2019-02727-00-01-AC CIVEX-VI/042
DG DEVCO		
3.	<u>Regions' and Cities' contribution to the development of Africa</u> Rapporteur: Robert ZEMAN (CZ/EPP)	Own-initiative opinion COR-2019-03729-00-01-AC CIVEX-VI/043
DG EMPL		
4.	<u>Brain Drain in the EU: addressing the challenge at all levels</u> Rapporteur: Emil BOC (RO/EPP)	Own-initiative opinion COR-2019-04645-00-02-AC SEDEC-VI/052
DG ENV		
5.	<u>Towards sustainable neighbourhoods and small communities – Environment policy below municipal level</u> Rapporteur: Gaetano ARMAO (IT/EPP)	Own-initiative opinion COR-2019-03195-00-01-AC ENVE-VI/043
DG EAC		
6.	<u>Culture in a Union that strives for more: the role of regions and cities</u> Rapporteur: Vincenzo BIANCO (IT/PES)	Own-initiative opinion COR-2019-04646-00-01-AC SEDEC-VI/054

<p>N°1 Strengthening the rule of law within the Union – A blueprint for action COM(2019) 343 final COR-2019-03730 – CIVEX-VI/044 138th plenary session – February 2020 Rapporteur: Franco IACOP (IT/PES) DG JUST – Commissioner REYNDEERS</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>The Committee ‘welcomes the Commission's proposal, which recognises and attaches great importance to the rule of law as a precondition for the European integration process and as a fundamental value of the EU, enshrined in the Treaties and common to the constitutional traditions of the Member States’. <i>(p1, first indent)</i></p>	<p>The Commission is grateful for the support of the Committee. With its Communication on ‘Strengthening the rule of law within the Union – A blueprint for action’ of 17 July 2019¹, the Commission has set out concrete actions to strengthen the rule of law in the EU.</p> <p>The Communication of 17 July 2019 identifies avenues to reinforce the existing toolbox to encourage and enforce the rule of law in the EU, resting on three pillars: promoting a rule of law culture, preventing rule of law problems from emerging or deepening, and how best to mount an effective common response when a significant problem has been identified.</p> <p>As a follow-up to the mentioned Communication, and as announced in Commission President von der Leyen’s political guidelines, the establishment of the new European Rule of Law Mechanism is a key priority of the Commission.</p> <p>The new European Rule of Law Mechanism will cover all Member States, with objective annual reporting by the Commission. The objective of the Mechanism is to develop a stronger awareness of developments in all Member States and to work together to prevent problems from emerging.</p>
<p>The Committee ‘supports the European Commission's proposal to create an annual monitoring system covering all Member States,</p>	<p>The monitoring approach will be the same for all Member States, it will rely on comparable information and all relevant sources and it will be</p>

¹ COM(2019) 343 final (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/7_en_act_part1.pdf)

highlighting the importance of objective and transparent parameters for proper monitoring. The CoR considers that these parameters should be based on the case law of the Court of Justice, the EU Justice Scoreboard models, the Venice Commission's Rule of Law Checklist and, more generally, on the experience gained by the bodies of the Council of Europe'. (p1, second indent)

based on an open dialogue with the Member States.

The standards used for the assessment will be those stemming from EU law, the case law of the Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights, as well as from the Council of Europe. The Commission will rely on a diversity of relevant sources.

As announced in the Communication, the EU Justice Scoreboard, which provides comparative data on independence, quality and efficiency of national justice systems, could be further developed and improved, including to better cover relevant rule of law related areas, such as criminal and administrative justice.

The Committee 'urges the Commission to step up the involvement of the CoR, LRAs and civil society in promoting a culture of respect for the rule of law. LRAs can contribute to the annual event for promoting the rule of law, proposed by the Commission, by hosting a series of meetings on the rule of law, at regional and national level, in advance of and in preparation for the annual event; suggests that the Commission could nominate a "rule of law city" every year, and that the annual event would be held there'. (p1, third indent)

Promoting a culture of respect for the rule of law is a shared responsibility of all Member States and of all the EU institutions, including of the Committee. Respect for the rule of law is vital at all levels of government, including at regional and local level.

The Committee has an important role to play to promote the rule of law in the Union, especially at the local and regional level. Local and regional authorities are an essential component of our democracies and could play an important role in promoting respect for the rule of law. The Commission remains open to reflect on possible initiatives, suggestions and projects in this regard.

Civil society also plays a key role in promoting the rule of law, in particular as regards promoting rule of law standards and monitoring the rule of law situation in Member States. This is why the role of civil society is one of the central points in the mentioned Communication.

Under the European Rule of Law Mechanism, civil society organisations and other stakeholders will have the possibility to contribute to the preparation of the first Rule of Law Report

	<p>through a targeted consultation.</p> <p>The Commission will follow-up on its project of an annual event for promoting the rule of law. The precise format of the annual rule of law event is still subject to internal reflection, and the concrete suggestions received in this respect, including on the involvement of regional and local authorities, will feed into this reflection.</p>
<p>The Committee ‘stresses the fact that funding conditionality should be seen as a solution only in cases of serious and systemic breaches and calls again on the Commission for measures to ensure that LRAs are not unfairly hit by the sanctions’. <i>(p.1, fourth indent)</i></p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee’s support for the proposed regulation on the protection of the Union’s budget in case of generalised deficiencies as regards the rule of law in Member States², which highlights the importance of ensuring the protection of EU funds. The Commission has called on the European Parliament and the Council to rapidly adopt the proposed regulation.</p> <p>The Commission shares the Committee’s view on the importance of ensuring that final beneficiaries of EU funding are not affected by measures adopted under the proposed regulation. For this reason, the proposed regulation ensures that Member States would continue to be bound by existing obligations to implement programmes and make payments to final recipients or beneficiaries, including regional and local authorities or civil society organisations, where relevant.</p>
<p>The Committee ‘considers that the funds currently allocated for civil society and independent media in the multiannual financial framework should be significantly increased, with part of this funding allocated to local independent media’. <i>(p1, fifth indent)</i></p>	<p>The Commission notes that the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) will provide concrete support to civil society in many key areas. In particular, the Rights and Values programme will aim ‘to protect and promote rights and values as enshrined in the EU treaties, including by supporting civil society organisations, in order to sustain open, democratic and inclusive societies’. The role of non-governmental organisations is recognised in the general objective of the programme and is a key element of the</p>

² COM(2018) 324 final (<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2018/EN/COM-2018-324-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>)

	<p>Commission proposal.</p> <p>Under the new Justice Programme, the Commission will be exploring how to better support civil society organisations and other actors whose activities contribute to facilitating effective access to justice for all. Its aim is to further develop a European area of justice based on the rule of law and to let individuals to better enjoy their rights under EU law.</p> <p>The Commission has conducted a thorough spending review and impact assessments. Within this framework, the Commission believes that the budget put forward for Justice, Rights and Values fund will allow to reply to the challenges identified.</p> <p>Regarding support for independent media, the Commission has proposed a budget of €1.5 billion (in fixed prices) for the Creative Europe programme for the 2021-2027 period. Under the proposal, the cross-sectoral strand of Creative Europe will also be reinforced, in particular including actions supporting media freedom and pluralism and media literacy.</p> <p>The ‘Shaping Europe’s digital future’, Commission Communication of 19 February 2020³ stated that Europe needs greater transparency on the ways in which information is shared and managed on the internet. Trustworthy quality media are key for democracy as well as for cultural diversity. This is why the Commission will present a European Democracy Action Plan and a specific action plan for the media and audio-visual sector. The Commission will support digital transformation and competitiveness of the audio-visual and media sector, to stimulate access to quality content and media pluralism.</p>
<p>The Committee ‘welcomes the Commission's intention to restart the process of the EU's</p>	<p>As announced in the Communication ‘Strengthening the rule of law within the Union –</p>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-shaping-europes-digital-future-feb2020_en_4.pdf

<p>accession to the European Convention on Human Rights'. (p1, sixth indent)</p>	<p>A blueprint for action', the Commission has stepped up work towards restarting the negotiations for the European Union's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights based on the complementary negotiating Directives approved by the Council in October 2019⁴. The amended negotiating Directives are designed to take into account the Court of Justice Opinion 2/13 of 18 December 2014⁵. Accession will be a strong political signal of the Union's commitment to the rule of law and of its support for the Convention and its, notably judicial, enforcement system.</p>
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⁴ COM(2020) 35 final, (<https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-annex-negotiating-directives.pdf>)

⁵ <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/celex.jsf?celex=62013CV0002&lang1=fr&lang2=EN&type=TXT&ancre=>

<p>N°2 Enlargement Package 2019 COM(2019) 260 final COR-2019-02727 – CIVEX-VI/042 138th plenary session – February 2020 Rapporteur: Jaroslav HLINKA (SK/PES) DG NEAR – Commissioner VÁRHELYI</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>5. Urges the European Commission, in this context, to further work with the national governments in candidate and potential candidate countries in order to develop specific instruments towards building the capacities of local and regional governments in the Western Balkans to effectively absorb the allocated funding, as well as to address the structural gap in their capacity to co-finance and pre-finance the preparation and implementation of EU-supported projects;</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of this point and will take it into consideration in the preparation of its future assistance to the candidate countries and potential candidates.</p>
<p>15. Invites the European Commission to address in the accession negotiations with Serbia the allegations of intimidation of democratically elected officials belonging to opposition parties, notably in the municipalities of Paraćin, Šabac and Čajetina;</p>	<p>In the context of Serbia’s accession negotiations, the Commission has a regular dialogue with Serbian representatives from the ruling coalition and the opposition, both at national and local level. This feeds into the Commission’s assessment of the overall progress in Serbia’s EU-related reforms.</p>
<p>36. Recalls its regret over the lack of specific policy proposals regarding local and regional governments, expressed in its Opinion on the Enlargement Package 2018;</p> <p>37. Invites the European Commission to propose concrete policies, tools and instruments to engage local and regional governments in the Western Balkans in order to reinforce their role as the sphere of governance closest to the citizens;</p>	<p>Different measures and programmes already target administrations at local level.</p> <p>Following the Committee’s call to support local administrations, TAIEX⁶ operates since January 2018 a pilot in three Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia), through the ‘TAIEX Strategic support for local authorities’ on targeted topics of human resources management and service delivery to citizens and so serves as a platform for peer-to-</p>

⁶ Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument of the Commission

<p>38. Invites the European Commission to develop a practical tool to support effective capacity-building for local and regional governments in the Western Balkans in view of harmonisation of their local and regional public policies with the acquis through dedicated training, peer-to-peer learning and exchange of best practices across the region, and with their peers in the EU, along the lines of the Local Administration Facility, the Regional Training Programme, or the Erasmus for local and regional representatives;</p>	<p>peer exchanges.</p> <p>Other EU assistance, such as the programmes for Civil Society Organisations and Local authorities (CSO-LA) or Town Twinning, focus on fostering local democracy, increasing cooperation with civil society and raising awareness of the EU in both Member States and partner countries.</p>
<p>39. Once again urges the Commission to extend the Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (SIGMA) initiative to sub-national levels of administration in candidate and potential candidate countries, in order to define decentralised models for public administration reforms, and to support the improvement of local governance and local public management, with a view to applying the acquis;</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of this point and will take it into consideration in the preparation of its future assistance to the candidate countries and potential candidates.</p>
<p>40. Calls again on the European Commission to put in place ad hoc operational methods so that the TAIEX and Twinning mechanisms can be used for cooperation between local and regional governments of the Member States and those of the candidate and potential candidate countries;</p>	<p>The TAIEX instrument facilitates short-term exchanges of best practices dedicated to the local and regional level through coordination with the central administrations. On a pilot basis, TAIEX provides strategic support to local authorities in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. To ensure a high quality of the activities, requests for assistance are based on roadmaps mutually agreed upon between local authorities, TAIEX national contact points and EU Delegations. The achievements of the pilot phase are now being assessed. The peer-to-peer capacity building of public administrations delivered via the Twinning modality is intended for the central government administrations. However, some capacity building support is provided to regional and local governments through central government entities. Due to the legal and financial framework applicable to Twinning, it is currently not foreseen to extend Twinning</p>

	<p>specifically to local and regional governments.</p> <p>The Commission supports local and regional governments in the candidate countries and potential candidates with other modalities for instance technical assistance and grants, in the framework of other initiatives such as the Civil Society Organisations - Local Authorities (CSO-LA) thematic programme, and the Europe for Citizens programme (Town Twinning and Network of Towns measures).</p>
<p>48. Invites the European Commission to recognise the role of local and regional governments in addressing fundamental issues at the local level, to facilitate building their capacities and skills in the area of the rule of law and fundamental rights, and to support them by providing concrete tools and instruments to fulfil this role;</p>	<p>See replies to points 5, 37 and 38.</p>
<p>53. Urges the European Commission to better include the countries of the Western Balkans, and notably their local and regional governments, in the future development of the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, or equivalent national and regional initiatives involving local and regional players, and to draw on the potential of national associations of local and regional governments and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe (NALAS) in facilitating the definition and implementation of local climate action and energy efficiency plans, sustainable urban mobility plans, and other local and regional policy instruments towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.</p>	<p>As outlined in the European Green Deal⁷ there is work underway on a Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Both initiatives envisage to tackle climate change supporting the energy transition in the Western Balkans and Turkey through an increased uptake of the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy Initiative in the region.</p> <p>The initiative will build on similar experiences in the region, but also in Europe and the Neighbourhood. Moreover, the intention is to strengthen the involvement of the municipalities from each of the Western Balkans as well as their umbrella association, the network of associations of local authorities of South East Europe (NALAS).</p>

⁷ COM(2019) 640 final (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_fr.pdf)

N°3 Regions' and Cities' contribution to the development of Africa
COR-2019-03729 – CIVEX-VI/043
138th plenary session – February 2020
Rapporteur: Robert ZEMAN (CZ/EPP)
DG DEVCO – Commissioner URPIAINEN

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>3. notes that large-scale economic and development-related cooperation is one way to tackle the root causes of migration to the EU; underlines that addressing the complex issue of migration with its multiple implications requires and will continue to require a significant amount of public resources in the EU. Such an approach could also help to reduce the negative social and security-related perceptions of migration towards the EU and to alleviate certain tensions in European societies which are fuelling political and social extremism;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that there is a need to ensure a comprehensive, balanced and long-term EU approach on migration. Such approach cannot only address the effects of irregular migration, but it needs to continue focusing on addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement as well. EU development cooperation will continue to play an important role in implementing this approach in our partner countries.</p> <p>In this context, the forthcoming EU Pact on Migration and Asylum should outline the comprehensive approach, including elements of its external dimension.</p>
<p>5. Reiterates its support for the proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) as a vital source of funding for targeted support for sustainable development; calls again for the establishment of specific programmes with their own budget – not only as part of the NDICI⁸ – aimed at supporting the work of EU cities and regions in the development field, including a range of long-term projects in Africa.</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), proposed by the Commission, intends to continue the support to local authorities through geographical programmes.</p> <p>The Committee’s opinion on the NDICI is very relevant for the ongoing negotiations between the European Parliament, the Council. The Commission will keep on supporting Council and the Parliament in bridging their divergent positions with a view to find the necessary compromise and launch timely the new financing instrument.</p>
<p>7. is convinced that the establishment of such</p>	<p>The Commission fully shares this objective.</p>

⁸ Neighbourhood and the World, Hans Janssen, 2018.

dedicated programmes could enable Europe's regions, cities, businesses and NGOs – as well as the citizens that belong to them – to increase their potential to be active in the promotion of sustainable development outside the EU;

The thematic budget line for local authorities (2018–2020), contributes to the achievement of SDG 11, supporting partnerships, peer-to-peer learning and/or exchanges built among local authorities of EU Member States and of partner countries. To this aim, a new call for proposals, with a financial allocation of €111,550,000, has been launched in February 2020. The actions financed will promote partnerships between local authorities of the EU and of partner countries, supporting them to carry out their crucial functions, specifically on urban planning, land management, climate resilience, low-carbon transition and public finance - through twinning arrangements (decentralised cooperation).

The EU also supports local authorities in the Member States to engage in projects on development education and awareness raising of EU citizens through the EU Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) Programme. Under the latest call for proposals launched under the DEAR Programme with a thematic focus on migration and climate change, three projects support activities of local authorities in several EU Member States.

As regards to climate change, the role of women in particular has been remarkable in leading the push for change.

Addressing the gender dimension can have a key role in leveraging the full potential of development, climate, energy and transport policies.

The upcoming Gender Action Plan (GAP III) will ensure their coherence.

11. points out that some of the EU's outermost regions have close historical ties with Africa and experience in fields of interest to their neighbours; calls for opportunities for cross-border cooperation to be maximised, making the most flexible possible

The proposed Interreg Regulation has established a specific strand for territorial cooperation of outermost regions. In this strand, the distinction between cross border and transnational cooperation disappears.

<p>use of the opportunities provided by the next period within the framework of European territorial cooperation and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI);</p>	<p>Therefore, there is no distinction any longer between cross-border and transnational cooperation between outermost cooperation programmes and their neighbours.</p>
<p>14. [...] Local authorities and bodies are among the most respected and legitimate political bodies when it comes to effectively implementing projects aimed at improving quality of life in Africa;</p>	<p>The Commission shares this vision. In the 2013 Communication ‘Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes’⁹, the Commission recognises the local authorities as genuine actors of development cooperation and, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, as key partners to ensure good governance and contribute to sustainable development.</p>
<p>20. proposes that projects administered by EU regions should seek close partnerships with businesses, NGOs or experts from these regions, in cooperation with municipalities, their businesses, local African companies, organisations and workers. Such projects must be based on the SDGs (urban planning, water supply and treatment, waste management and its use in the circular economy, etc.) and respond to the needs of the communities in a flexible and long-term manner;</p>	<p>Following a study, commissioned to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2018, the Commission follows with interest the evolution of decentralised cooperation, which has evolved from traditional bilateral projects, involving a limited number of actors, towards more complex partnerships, engaging various territorial stakeholders, civil society organisations and the private sector.</p> <p>In the context of the current pandemic, the Joint Communication on the Global EU global response to COVID-19¹⁰ outlines that local communities will be beneficiaries and leading actors of the Unions’ support actions. The civil society organisations are the tools that the EU will use to respond to the challenges identified.</p>
<p>26. recognises that the success of projects to support sustainable development should be assisted by information activities on experiences of the EU;</p>	<p>The Commission shares this opinion and keeps cooperating with the Committee in this aspect.</p>
<p>29. [...] This opinion therefore stresses the need to use the experience of European regional and local</p>	<p>See above on point 20. The multi-stakeholders approach is also at the basis of the Territorial</p>

⁹ COM(2013) 280 final (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2013:0280:FIN:EN:PDF>)

¹⁰ JOIN(2020) 1 final (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0011&from=EN>)

authorities, as well as those of businesses and experts to ensure the smooth implementation of activities and projects, in cooperation with their African counterparts;	Approach to Development adopted by the Commission to promote local-authorities-led sustainable development projects.
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N°4 Brain drain in the EU: addressing the challenge at all levels
COR-2019-04645 – SEDEC-VI/052
138th Plenary Session – February 2020
Rapporteur: Emil BOC (RO/EPP)
DG EMPL – Commissioner SCHMIT

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential

European Commission position

18. [...] Further action at Member State and European Union level should focus on coordination and facilitation/support for efforts at the subnational levels, building consensus about how brain drain should be analysed and addressed, so as to create a win-win situation for all stakeholders;

28. recommends that action at the subnational levels be integrated and coordinated with that of the Member States and of the Union while respecting the subsidiarity principle. Integration of efforts undertaken at various levels is crucial to successful EU policy. Policies and programmes should be developed to integrate and facilitate coordination between the action of LRAs on the one hand and that of the Member States and the Union on the other. This applies in all the areas that are implicated in brain drain (education, cohesion, regional development, digitisation, etc.). A mechanism needs to be initiated at EU level that is specifically designed to foster integration and coordination of policy measures on brain drain;

35. highlights the need to develop an integrated European approach to brain drain based on realistic assessments, cooperation and coordination at local/regional, national and Union levels. Similarly, the need for coordinated policies on various scales is needed in areas relevant to brain drain, including education, digitisation, cohesion, and economic policies;

The Commission acknowledges the need for coordinated efforts at various levels. The Commission is in constant dialogue with national administrations across the relevant policy areas in order to foster integration and coordination of policy measures on brain drain. Cooperation among countries and coordination and sharing of practices at the national and regional level could indeed contribute to countering the negative effects of brain drain.

For example, Member States and regions have developed over 180 smart specialisation strategies through partnership and multi-level governance, establishing priorities for research and innovation investments for the 2014-2020 period. National, regional and local priorities have been identified and mapped, resulting in a powerful tool that helps translating horizontal policies and instruments at the EU level to the regional and local level.

As regards labour mobility, the latest developments reflect that intra-EU mobility continued to grow, but at a slower pace than in the previous years, which means that more workers are inclined to remain in the country of residence and find work there. However, it should be noted as well that there is a significant difference between Member States in this regard. An important part of balancing the labour markets is also ensured by the return mobility patterns. The figures have increased

	<p>overall, confirming that for every four persons who leave, three return.¹¹ In this context, the European network of employment services (EURES network)¹² provides for better transparency on EU labour markets, enables workers to take informed decisions on intra-EU mobility and delivers support services that can facilitate fair mobility throughout the Union, including in the context of return mobility.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Commission initiated peer learning on brain drain in 2019, as part of the EU Skills Agenda¹³. The main outcomes were that the main way to stem brain drain and/or to counter its effects must be through cohesion policy. However, as regards skills policies, many of the Member State practices (or elements thereof) could be applied in other Member States as well and more cooperation among countries could counter negative effects of brain drain.</p>
<p>23. suggests that LRAs, in cooperation with national and EU authorities, should promote policies and instruments to develop local entrepreneurship, self-employment and alternative models of business development that increase the attractiveness of sending regions;</p>	<p>The small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe¹⁴, adopted by the Commission on 10 March 2020, aims at making Europe the most attractive place to start a small business, make it grow and scale up in the single market.</p> <p>Regional and local authorities play a key role in the partnerships to implement the strategy. The Commission will launch calls for partnerships among border regions, which aim to enhance cooperation between regional authorities, in order to help SMEs overcome</p>

¹¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8242&furtherPubs=yes>

¹² Regulation (EU) 2016/589 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2016 on a European network of employment services (EURES), workers' access to mobility services and the further integration of labour markets, and amending Regulations (EU) No 492/2011 and (EU) No 1296/2013; OJ L 107, 22.4.2016, p. 1–28; <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L..2016.107.01.0001.01.ENG>

¹³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223#bestpractice>

¹⁴ COM(2020) 103 final (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-sme-strategy-march-2020_en.pdf)

	<p>market barriers in the provision of services.</p> <p>Furthermore, the multilingual Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool¹⁵ invites local and regional authorities (LRAs) to assess and improve entrepreneurship policies, supporting entrepreneurship by people from vulnerable groups as well as social entrepreneurship. A European action plan for the social economy, planned for 2021, also intends to support stakeholders to create enabling conditions for the social economy and social enterprises.</p>
<p>30. believes that quick procedures for recognising diplomas and skills/competencies could help a lot in reducing brain waste. Digitisation and interconnection of records is feasible and necessary here, based on diverse EU initiatives, including the upcoming Europass digitally signed credentials. Furthermore, welcomes the initiative of the European Commission for a European Education Area by 2025, in which learning, studying and doing research would not be hampered by borders. Points at the same time to the need to put in place mechanisms to foster brain circulation and re-migration;</p>	<p>A recent independent study on the movement of skilled labour, carried out for the Commission¹⁶, underlined that transparent and quick recognition procedures help in reducing brain drain and contribute to brain circulation by making the mobility for students and workers easier and faster. The new Europass portal will support increased skills transparency and link up with national networks that support skills, qualifications and career guidance. It is essential that students are able to access academic and non-academic services online, in a trusted, secure and seamless manner. Furthermore, the implementation of the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad¹⁷ (November 2018) is currently underway; the Commission provides support for it from the Erasmus+ Programme. The uptake of the EU Student eCard¹⁸ will also be key in digitalising higher education.</p>

¹⁵ <https://www.betterentrepreneurship.eu/>

¹⁶ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/05079c0e-fc2e-11e8-a96d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-114336449>

¹⁷ Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad; OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1–8; https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/proposal-for-a-council-recommendation-on-the-automatic-mutual-recognition-of-diplomas-and-learning-periods-abroad_en

¹⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/eu-student-ecard>

	<p>Furthermore, the implementation of the 2017 Council Recommendation on tracking graduates¹⁹ will lead to a better understanding of brain circulation in the EU.</p> <p>The Commission welcomes the reference to the European Education Area (EEA) that will make people better equipped for balanced brain circulation. The Commission Communication on the European Education Area is planned to follow in 2020. The Commission agrees on prioritising recognition as a key building block of the European Education Area.</p>
<p>31. recommends that the European Commission steps up its efforts to reduce regional disparities, which are one of the major causes of brain drain. The cohesion funds play a crucial role in supporting our regions and areas that suffer from such disparities. Tailored policies and instruments that directly tackle these disparities between eastern/southern Europe and the western countries, as well as in between regions within Member States are essential in eliminating one of the main causes of brain drain. The political commitment of the Commission²⁰ to a fair minimum wage is very relevant, especially in sending regions, as this would tackle the issue of living standards and working conditions, and have a direct impact on quality of life. The EU's cohesion policy for 2021-2027 should be a long-term policy of investment for all regions, focused on overcoming economic, social and regional divides and in line with the partnership principle and a place-based approach. Cohesion policy should be better coordinated with other EU policies so that there is a level playing-field. Vertical coordination of different funding sources should be improved at EU level in the governance of post-2020 cohesion policy and</p>	<p>Cohesion policy funding for 2021-2027 will continue to reflect regional and local needs and challenges, while reflecting the country-specific policy context even more closely. The Next Generation EU recovery plan, in particular the Recovery and Resilience Facility, will complement cohesion policy funding to mitigate the impact of the crisis following the COVID-19 outbreak. The close link between the challenges identified as part of the European Semester for each Member State, including following the COVID-19 crisis, and the cohesion policy allocations should help steer EU funding towards targeted interventions that complement Member States' efforts to promote socio-economic development. The Commission proposed that all EU regions continue to be eligible for EU funding in the 2021-2027 period, and the partnership principle is carried forward and strengthened in the legal framework. For example, the proposal for a Common Provisions Regulation²² also further fosters synergies and coordination with other EU funding programmes and policies, notably those related to migration, education and</p>

¹⁹ Council Recommendation of 20 November 2017 on tracking graduates; OJ C 423, 9.12.2017, p. 1-4; <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32017H1209%2801%29>

²⁰ Ursula von der Leyen, 'A Union that strives for more. My agenda for Europe', p. 9. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en.pdf

<p>programmes, so as to guarantee more coherence of agendas at different governance and planning levels in the short to medium term²¹;</p>	<p>training, and research and innovation.</p> <p>Digital Innovation Hubs²³, to be financed from the Digital Europe Programme²⁴, are an important tool to combat regional disparities. The idea is that every company has access to a Digital Innovation Hub within working distance where they can experiment with the latest digital technologies, including training courses.</p> <p>In its Communication ‘A strong social Europe for just transitions’ of 14 January 2020²⁵, the Commission stressed that workers in Europe should have a fair minimum wage that allows for a decent living. This is why during its first 100 days the Commission launched a first phase social partner consultation on this issue.</p> <p>Addressing the challenges of brain drain in the EU will also require addressing the root causes of gender inequalities, including women’s lower participation in the labour market, invisible and unpaid work, their higher use of part-time work and career breaks, as well as vertical and horizontal segregation based on gender stereotypes and discrimination.</p> <p>The Commission will table binding measures on pay transparency by the end of 2020.</p>
<p>34. suggests that local, regional, national, and EU authorities need to pay special attention to removing structural factors that exacerbate brain drain (infrastructure/highways, quality of services, access to technology, etc.);</p>	<p>The Commission thinks that reducing disparities within the European Union is one of the main ways to mitigate brain drain. Cohesion policy funding will continue to reflect regional and local challenges and aim to remove structural factors that exacerbate brain drain (see also the reply to point 31). All EU regions will continue to be eligible for EU</p>

²² COM(2018) 375 final (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A375%3AFIN>), as amended by COM(2020) 450 final (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/com2020_450_en_act_part1_v8.pdf)

²¹ ESPON, 2019, ‘Addressing Labour Migration Challenges in Europe’, p. 18. <https://www.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/ESPON%20Policy%20Brief%2C%20Labour%20migration%20challenges.pdf>

²³ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-innovation-hubs>

²⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/digital-europe-programme-proposed-eu92-billion-funding-2021-2027>

²⁵ COM(2020) 14 final; <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0014&qid=1580400520904>

	<p>funding in 2021-2027 for this purpose.</p> <p>Under cohesion policy 2021-2027, EU investments will be driven by main policy objectives, in particular: A Smarter Europe, through innovation, digitisation and support to SMEs; A more Connected Europe, with strategic transport and digital networks and A Europe closer to citizens, by supporting local development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU²⁶.</p> <p>Regional and local authorities should seize the opportunity offered by the European structural and investment funds to address the structural factors that exacerbate brain drain. The Commission will pay particular attention to how the investments under these policy objectives are planned and implemented.</p> <p>The Commission also plans to present report on the impact of demographic change, which will include an analysis of the challenges regarding infrastructure and services and the difficulties of certain regions or areas to match skills and labour market demands.</p>
<p>37. notes that partnerships between private firms (interested in R&D), local authorities and universities are important engines of local growth and development which should be included in the current Commission's objective of making it easier for small businesses to become large innovators through an SMEs strategy;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that we need to help improve the conditions enabling the emergence and scale-up of highly innovative enterprises. This is one of the reasons why a renewed EU small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) strategy was adopted on 10 March 2020²⁷ (see the reply to point 23).</p> <p>The Commission's ambition is to support market-creating innovation more effectively. To reach this ambition, one of the major novelties of Horizon Europe is the European Innovation Council (EIC)²⁸, enabling interaction between key actors on national, regional and local levels, such as universities, start-ups, funding bodies</p>

²⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/2021_2027/

²⁷ COM(2020) 103 final (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-sme-strategy-march-2020_en.pdf)

²⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/research/eic/index.cfm>

	and investors.
<p>39. would argue that digital connectivity and smart specialisation can have positive effects when it comes to brain drain. Regional strategies in smart development and specialisation can focus on the competitive advantage existing or created in one region. Digital connectivity and development of digital literacy should be essential elements in the new Commission's efforts to update the Digital Education Action Plan;</p>	<p>With the 2018 Digital Education Action Plan²⁹, the Commission has already supported connectivity in schools and the development of digital literacy among young people. Towards these objectives, actions such as Wifi4EU³⁰, the Safer Internet Campaign³¹ and the EU Code Week³² have been implemented. The upcoming update of the Digital Education Action Plan planned in 2020 will continue working towards making digital learning and digital literacy a reality for all. Furthermore, the acceleration of the rollout of ultra-fast broadband for homes, schools and hospitals throughout the EU will be a key priority under the next multiannual financial framework (MFF).</p>
<p>41. recommends that the European Commission actively support – in close cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions, the European Parliament and the EU Council of Ministers – the efforts of local and regional public bodies in addressing brain drain. The Union is a complex political and administrative entity, and careful analysis of its responsibilities and capabilities is needed with respect to brain drain. Discussion of the Union's role will entail both determining its responsibilities and identifying the best tools available at EU level;</p>	<p>The Commission finds that reducing disparities and stimulating economic convergence within the European Union is the main way to mitigate brain drain and is already involved in different forms of policy action. In addition to stimulating cooperation between different local and regional organisations and bodies in tackling brain drain, other EU tools - including in the context of labour mobility - are relevant to address this issue. Among these tools are notably the European Semester, the cohesion policy, EU funds, the work of the Public Employment Services and EURES – the European Job Mobility Portal (see the reply to point 18). Furthermore, the upcoming Commission Report on the Impact of Demographic Change and its follow-up work in the form of a Green Paper on Ageing and a Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas will further contribute to identifying and addressing the</p>

²⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/document-library/digital-education-action-plan_en

³⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/wifi4eu-free-wi-fi-europeans>

³¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/launch-saferinternet4eu-initiatives-safer-internet-day>

³² <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/eu-code-week>

	various challenges at local, regional, national and Union level.
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N° 5 Towards sustainable neighbourhoods and small communities – Environment policy below municipal level
COR-2019-03195 – ENVE-VI/043
138th plenary session – February 2020
Rapporteur: Gaetano ARMAO (IT/EPP)
DG ENV – Commissioner SINKEVIČIUS

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>8. asserts that important environmental specificities can be found both at and below the municipal level. Environmental challenges can have specific effects in different sub-municipal units; underlines that it is therefore important to develop holistic approaches at each level that take due account of more localised/differentiated situations which may require specific responses and input;</p>	<p>Cohesion Policy promotes the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) as one of the specific tools to ensure an integrated approach at local level supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). This is also confirmed in the proposals for 2021-2027, particularly as part of the Cohesion Policy’s policy objective 5 ‘a Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas and local initiatives’ by ‘fostering the integrated social, economic and environmental local development [...] also through CLLD’³³.</p> <p>The LEADER programme, as an integrated territorial development tool on sub-regional (‘local’) level, directly contributes to the balanced territorial development of rural areas and peri-urban areas, which is one of the overall objectives of the rural development policy. It can potentially serve any of the six Union priorities for rural development.</p> <p>The LEADER programme will remain an obligatory instrument under the future common agricultural policy (CAP). It is expected to contribute to strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, in particular through promoting employment, growth, social inclusion</p>

³³ COM(2018) 372 final, art.2(1)(e)(ii) (https://www.ita-slo.eu/sites/default/files/Reg_372_ERDF_en.pdf).

	<p>and local development.</p> <p>The implementation of LEADER programme local development strategies (LDS) aims at reinforcing territorial coherence and contributes to the long-term sustainable development of an area. Both the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) funded the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) can also be an appropriate tool to address rural-urban relationships. In the new programming period both can also support small rural communities to uptake the smart villages concept.</p> <p>CLLD remains at the heart of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) programmes as well. While its main objective is to foster economic, social and territorial cohesion at local level and to increase the living standard of coastal communities, for the post-2020 period the Commission proposed to widen its scope to the blue economy. This will enable local initiatives to respond to maritime environmental challenges as well.</p>
<p>12. stresses, in particular, the need to take into account specific territorial situations, which encounter particular environmental challenges. On account of their remoteness, these areas sometimes possess unique natural features that give them disproportionate ecological importance:</p>	<p>The Commission is paying particular attention to specific territorial situations, namely cross border, outermost regions, mountains, islands, peri-urban areas, villages, small towns and sparsely populated areas in the programming of structural funds, but it has to be noted that, due to shared management, the final choices belong to Member States.</p>
<p>a) small islands may face physical separation from the rest of the municipalities of which they are part, which hinders access to services and decision-making processes, generates high dependency on external inputs and weak administrative autonomy. Cooperation with the Interregional group on Insular Regions of the CoR, as well as with other networks such as Clean Energy for EU Islands, the European</p>	<p>European Small Islands Federation (ESIN), Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and similar networks representing the interests of islands are working closely with the Commission in many aspects: policy development, dissemination, capacity building, etc. Commission is also working very closely with the Committee's Interregional group on insular regions.</p>

<p>Small Islands Federation, the European Small Islands Network and with activities connected with the newly established Mediterranean Insularity concept should be promoted and expanded;</p>	<p>EU energy and environmental legislation duly takes into account specific territorial situations, notably providing flexibility aimed at removing possible legal obstacles and requirements for territories with handicaps considering their specific features and context, and paying attention to typical concerns of islands such as the circular economy and biodiversity conservation³⁴. The Commission has also established a dedicated policy framework through the Clean Energy for EU Islands Initiative³⁵. For an adequate energy supply and environmental protection for insular regions, support should focus on energy efficiency and renewable energy. Several financing instruments can provide support, including cohesion policy and the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI). Under Horizon 2020, the ELENA facility and the Islands Facility are available, and the NESOI³⁶ European Islands Facility is mobilising more than €100 million of investment in sustainable energy projects for EU islands and gives the opportunity to test innovative energy technologies and approaches in a cost-competitive way. Under the next multiannual financial framework (MFF), support will be available also under InvestEU, Horizon Europe and the clean energy transition sub-programme of LIFE. The European Green Deal will develop a long-term framework to accelerate the clean energy transition on all EU islands.</p>
<p>b) sparsely populated and underpopulated areas are often at a significant distance from the rest of the municipality. Cooperation with existing networks such as the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas network, the Southern Sparsely</p>	<p>Northern sparsely populated areas (NSPA)³⁷, Southern sparsely populated areas (SSPA)³⁸, Euromontana³⁹ and other similar networks representing the interests of sparsely populated or underpopulated areas⁴⁰ are working closely with</p>

³⁴ e.g. through the BEST initiative: <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/best/>

³⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/clean_energy_for_eu_islands_initiative.pdf

³⁶ <https://www.nesoi.eu/content/nesoi-objectives>

³⁷ <https://www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy/northern-sparsely-populated-areas-policy-highlights.htm>

³⁸ <https://sspa-network.eu/en/about-us/> ; <https://sspa-network.eu/en/home/>

³⁹ <https://www.euromontana.org/en/about-us/>

⁴⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/themes/sparsely-populated-areas/

<p>Populated Areas network and Euromontana should be promoted and expanded;</p>	<p>the Commission in many aspects: policy development, dissemination, capacity building, etc.</p> <p>As for Interreg programmes for 2021-2027, the Commission expects that future operational programmes will take into account priorities devoted to the specificities of transnational regions characterised by wide sparsely populated and underpopulated areas.</p> <p>For example, NSPA include harsh climate, strong natural resource endowment and potential for renewable energy, long distances between settlements and from markets, and a high cost of land transport. In this sense, energy efficiency and increased use of renewable energy solutions in housing and public infrastructures in remote and sparsely populated areas is already a specific objective of the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (NPA) 2014 – 2020. The NPA Interreg programme 2021 – 2027 is likely to stress climate change as a major factor when considering the development of infrastructure in northern sparsely populated areas, then to be addressed through Policy Objective 2 under the next programming for Cohesion Policy.</p>
<p>c) sub-municipal communities in areas with specific geographic profiles, such as mountain or lake areas;</p>	<p>Through relevant operational, cross border and transnational programmes, a wide and active involvement of the very local level in mountain areas, particularly concerning the environmental and climate policies, is also ensured by regional treaties such as the Alpine Convention⁴¹ and the Carpathian Convention⁴². The Alpine Convention (and its protocols on Mountain Farming, Tourism, Energy, Soil Conservation and Transport) is also part of the EU acquis for the concerned area. The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)⁴³ and its accompanying Action Plan is also</p>

⁴¹ [https://www.alpine-region.eu/alpine-convention-observer;](https://www.alpine-region.eu/alpine-convention-observer)
<https://www.alpenstaedte.org/en/collaborations/alpine-convention>

⁴² <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/the-convention-17.html>

⁴³ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/cooperate/alpine/eusalp_it_presidency2019_en.pdf

	<p>supporting climate and environmental actions in mountainous regions.</p>
<p>15. stresses that the sub-municipal level, precisely because of the many varieties of organisational forms across the member states' territories and the often less formalised organisation, offers great potential in terms of participatory and democratic experimentation to develop new forms of involvement and communication (such as neighbourhood communities, village committees, participatory laboratories and fora); recalls that in particular environmental and climate change activities have enormous mobilisation potential for citizens in this sense;</p>	<p>As acknowledged by the Committee with the premise no. 9 to this opinion, the responsibility for sub-municipal communities, and for their involvement, rests with the levels of governance in the Member States that are responsible for the sub-municipal level.</p> <p>On the other hand, as already recalled in the reply to the point 8, policy objective 5 of the cohesion policy is expected to help the local initiatives fostering public participation and CLLD. The partnership principle under cohesion policy offers new opportunities to sub-municipal level, allowing their active participation in the conception of Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes and, more importantly, of local development strategies. The Commission has recently organised a special conference for citizens' engagement in order to foster their involvement more actively.</p> <p>Under cohesion policy, the Monitoring Committees established for national or regional operational programmes usually include associations of large and small municipalities and organisations representing the interests of various inclusive growth-related target groups (women, persons with disabilities, elderly). This list may be complemented with organisations representing Roma and migrant groups, or other specific vulnerable groups (people with mental health problems, children), to name a few examples.</p> <p>In rural development, the LEADER programme, as a bottom-up, integrated territorial development tool on sub-regional ('local') level, has been mobilising communities on locally relevant challenges, including environmental and climate action. Local action groups are called to build capacity of the local actors and build linkages between all relevant human and physical</p>

	<p>resources to support activities requiring citizens involvement. Such approach should help minimise trade-offs and find best solutions for the whole community.</p> <p>As regards fisheries and aquaculture, local action groups (FLAGs) within the EMFF are also encouraged to build their activities on wide partnerships. The Commission assists capacity building within the framework of Fisheries Areas Network (FARNET)⁴⁴.</p>
<p>18. supports the development of a coherent guidance framework below the municipal level and specifically islands, in relation to the mitigation of climate change, facilitating their transition to renewable clean energy. Inspiration could be drawn from the streamlining of the Pact of Islands into the Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, and could involve existing initiatives, such as the Clean energy for EU islands initiative and the Climate Active Neighbourhoods Interreg project;</p>	<p>The sub-municipal level on islands can facilitate further their transition to renewable energy also using the provisions of the Directive for the establishment of Energy Communities.</p> <p>Please refer also to the reply to the point 12a.</p>
<p>19. encourages the involvement of small communities (in particular insular, mountain or rural ones) in the management of natural areas, which frequently do not follow municipal boundaries. Such involvement could increase local ownership of environmental policy choices and reduce conflicts around questions such as land use. Participation could further increase awareness of the socio-economic benefits of protected natural areas, whether Natura 2000 areas or other;</p>	<p>As already outlined in the reply to point 8, within the framework of the EMFF, it is proposed to extend CLLD to blue economy and maritime policy, enabling local communities to actively participate in responding to maritime environmental challenges as well as in maritime spatial planning.</p> <p>See reply to the point no. 15 as regards the role of LEADER/ CLLD in this respect.</p>
<p>20. promotes the role of communities below the municipal level in the implementation of Nature-Based Solutions, including green corridors or belts, urban trees, as well as peri-urban nature</p>	<p>Aware of the importance of green and blue infrastructures for different sectors and for local population, the Commission services issued in May 2019 a guidance on a strategic framework</p>

⁴⁴ https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/cms/farnet2/node_en

<p>areas. These efforts should provide equitable access to nature, and its benefits in terms of human health, climate mitigation and adaptation, and broader resilience to human or natural hazards;</p>	<p>for further supporting the deployment of EU-level green and blue infrastructure.⁴⁵ This Guidance provides extensive information on current financing instruments to support strategic investments in EU-level green infrastructure projects, as well as specific case studies and helpful scientific and technical tools.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Commission is devoting a growing attention to pollinators⁴⁶, including promoting bottom up initiatives, as also testified by the conference ‘Halting the loss of pollinators: the role of the EU agricultural, regional development and cohesion policies’ jointly organised by the Commission and the Committee of the Regions in February 2020.</p> <p>Below the municipal level involvement in such activities could be also accommodated via CLLD use as part of Sustainable Urban Strategies⁴⁷ funded under cohesion policy.⁴⁸</p> <p>Furthermore, an increased attention to human health and the societal resilience to epidemics and pandemics is provided by the recent Communication adopted by Commission on ‘the EU budget powering the recovery plan for Europe’⁴⁹ that is also aimed at preparing a green, digital and resilient recovery.</p>
<p>21. calls for tailored technical support by the competent levels of governance for small communities to implement sustainable</p>	<p>In its European Green Deal⁵⁰, the Commission announced its ambition to strive towards zero pollution and to deal with urban runoff and its</p>

⁴⁵ SWD(2019) 193 final;
https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/pdf/SWD_2019_193_F1_STAFF_WORKING_PAPER_EN_V4_P1_1024680.PDF

⁴⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/pollinators/index_en.htm

⁴⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/urban-agenda-eu/launch-handbook-sustainable-urban-development-strategies>

⁴⁸ During the 2014-2020 programming period, new territorial instruments have been introduced to implement Sustainable Urban Development strategies in urban areas, namely integrated territorial investment (ITI) and community-led local development (CLLD). These emphasise respectively the importance of integrating multiple funds, and of engaging with the local community. The experience has shown a wide use of CLLD for small areas within larger cities, such as deprived neighbourhoods, until now particularly to foster social cohesion, enhance citizen participation and promote capacity-building, but also for urban-rural linkages building of the successful use of CLLD through the LEADER programme.

⁴⁹ COM(2020) 442 final
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/about_the_european_commission/eu_budget/1_en_act_part1_v9.pdf

⁵⁰ COM(2019) 640 final (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_fr.pdf)

<p>wastewater management and waste management practices and to also address marine and coastal pollution via zero-waste strategies, and calls for the promotion of existing initiatives such as for example the OECD project supporting cities and regions on the circular economy;</p>	<p>harmful content. In addition, the 2020 Circular Economy Action Plan⁵¹ announced that the Commission would consider reviewing the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive⁵² in light of its potential to better contribute to the circular economy.</p> <p>Under cohesion policy, Member States are provided with funding for technical assistance linked to the preparation, implementation and monitoring of programmes, local strategies and projects and their beneficiaries.</p>
<p>22. encourages the development of measures to support socially-innovative practices at the sub-municipal level, ranging from loan groups that share objects and tools locally, to repair groups that allow members to repair items that would otherwise be discarded;</p>	<p>Many socially innovative practices are supporting the transition towards a circular economy. These should be also encouraged to support the recovery after the COVID-19 crisis at local level.</p> <p>Many examples on how the cohesion policy supports urban areas and local communities can be found on the Open Data Portal of the European Structural and investments funds⁵³.</p>
<p>23. promotes the spread of microclimate interventions to adapt to climate change, particularly in densely built-up urban neighbourhoods. These can include low-cost solutions, as well as more complex neighbourhood-level ones, such as the disconnection of buildings from sewers for improved storm water management. Interventions of this sort have the potential to increase resilience in sub-municipal areas sensitive to natural hazards by alleviating stress on critical infrastructure;</p>	<p>The Commission promotes local resilience through the 2013 EU Adaptation Strategy⁵⁴, the EU Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy⁵⁵, and knowledge-sharing platforms such as Climate-ADAPT⁵⁶.</p> <p>Local capacity building, infrastructure developments as well as nature-based-solutions⁵⁷ all play a crucial role in enhancing local resilience, and disaster preparedness. Such solutions can include the use of green and blue infrastructure to reduce the microclimatic impact of heatwaves in urban environments, as well as application of infrastructure such as green roofs</p>

⁵¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/>

⁵² Council Directive 91/271/EEC of 21 May 1991 concerning urban waste-water treatment; OJ L 135, 30.5.1991, p. 40–52; (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:31991L0271>)

⁵³ <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/How-does-Cohesion-Policy-support-cities-and-local-rgzr-e44d>

⁵⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/adaptation/what_en

⁵⁵ <https://www.covenantofmayors.eu/about/covenant-initiative/origins-and-development.html>;

<https://energy-cities.eu/project/covenant-of-mayors-for-climate-energy/>

⁵⁶ <https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/about>

⁵⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/research/environment/index.cfm?pg=nbs>

	<p>or reservoirs to enhance systemic storm water management. Such resilience measures should be developed in a manner compatible with other applicable national and EU legislation such as the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive.</p> <p>As foreseen by the Commission Communication on the European Green Deal⁵⁸, the EU will develop a new, more ambitious strategy on adaptation to climate change. This new strategy will include a focus on enhancing and promoting resilience by citizens and local level.</p> <p>Furthermore, within cohesion policy and as part of Sustainable Urban Development, municipalities can have strategies addressing specific neighbourhoods (usually deprived ones) and groups of citizens can be involved in activities via CLLD.</p>
<p>26. urges the EU to recognise the role of the multiple and innovative forms of participatory democracy in promoting sustainable communities, in particular at the sub-municipal level. This potential could be further strengthened by explicitly taking the democratic innovation element into account in relevant pieces of EU environmental policies or as an element of EU project support;</p>	<p>Next than referring to the answer already provided to the point no. 8 of the opinion, the Commission also recalls the public involvement required by the EIA⁵⁹ and SEA⁶⁰ directives. In this sense, the local and regional authorities have to implement these Directives and ensure that the public – regardless of the size of the communities – is given equal opportunities to be informed, consulted and participate. The EIA and SEA directives enable public involvement in decision making and provide legal grounds for access to information and public participation. Furthermore, digital transformation (e.g. promoting the use of digital and electronic means as enabling tools for public participation and consultation in the decision-making process) can help and support the involvement of small communities/ neighbourhoods in the process of</p>

⁵⁸ COM(2019) 640 final (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_fr.pdf)

⁵⁹ Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 amending Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment; OJ L 124, 25.4.2014, p. 1–18. (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32014L0052>)

⁶⁰ Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment; OJ L 197, 21.7.2001, p. 30–37. (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32001L0042>)

	<p>taking decisions.</p> <p>In general, the Partnership Principle under cohesion policy is promoting participatory democracy.</p> <p>Coming to another specific example, LEADER/ CLLD as a governance tool is already perceived as a local democracy mechanism. Its objectives include enhancing structural changes and capacity building of communities by stimulating social innovation. The tool is thus expected to accompany communities in sustainable transition.</p>
<p>28. strongly believes that the EU should consider the specific needs and contributions of small and sub-municipal communities in the formulation and implementation of its environmental policies;</p>	<p>There is a number of platform where the small and sub-municipal communities' specific needs and contributions are welcome, such as the Technical Platform for Cooperation on the Environment⁶¹ between the Commission (Directorate-General for Environment) and the Committee and the European Circular Economy Stakeholder platform⁶².</p> <p>As a further example, under Horizon 2020, the platform of 'Smart and Sustainable cities' is promoting innovative research and innovation (R&I) systemic solutions combining technological, digital, social, cultural, financial, governance innovations for the urban and peri-urban areas (including cultural heritage villages, historic neighbourhoods) related to regeneration climate and water resilience, circular economy, improved air quality, health and well-being.</p>
<p>32. recalls the Union's overall commitment to the promotion of social, economic and environmental cohesion, notably with the aim to reduce disparities between the levels of development of the various regions (both islands and mainland), in accordance with Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and stresses the important role of sub-</p>	<p>Please refer to the reply to point 12, including sub-points.</p>

⁶¹ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/legal/platform_en.htm

⁶² <https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/>

municipal levels of governance in this respect;	
34. calls on the European Commission to assess the possibility of establishing a Sustainable Neighbourhood Award, in order to encourage local communities to get involved in managing their own areas and of organising a single or recurrent event to promote interaction with small communities, such as an annual "European Day of Sustainable Villages and Neighbourhoods";	<p>Towns and villages should be encouraged to follow such an approach. The Commission points out the role played by the Green Leaf Award in reaching out to smaller cities and municipalities across the Union.</p> <p>In any case, it is a point that the Commission will reflect upon having in mind the budget and resources required for such a scheme to be organised.</p>
36. advocates raising awareness of the sub-municipal level via EU research and innovation projects (Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe) as well as by cooperating with the European Environment Agency (EEA) and EU research services;	<p>In order to raise awareness of the importance of the sub-municipal level, the Commission, apart from promoting CLLD, Smart Villages project⁶³ and other sub-municipal related actions, has recently organised a conference on citizens engagement and has established the Partnership Principle and CLLD within cohesion policy that promote the sub- municipal level role and engagement.</p>
37. commits to a dialogue with the European Commission, including in the framework of the Technical Platform for Cooperation on the Environment, to ensure that small communities below the municipal level are adequately taken into consideration in the implementation of specific EU environmental policies. This could build on existing efforts from DG ENV and other DGs to provide guidance documents and tools focused on small communities and neighbourhoods;	<p>Small communities are encouraged, first of all, to take active part in all the public consultations⁶⁴ that the Commission is launching in order to make sure that every Commission's legislative proposal takes their views in consideration.</p> <p>Moreover, the Commission has issued several studies and documents that look also in small communities below the municipal level (e.g. CLLD under ERDF/ ESF in the EU: A stock-taking of its implementation⁶⁵ and Expert analysis on geographical specificities: Mountains, Islands and Sparsely Populated Areas⁶⁶). The Commission welcomes possible comments and</p>

⁶³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/news/smart-villages-pilot-project>

⁶⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations_en

⁶⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/studies/2018/clld-under-erdf-esf-in-the-eu-a-stock-taking-of-its-implementation

⁶⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/reports/2018/expert-analysis-on-geographical-specificities-mountains-islands-and-sparsely-populated-areas

	<p>suggestions on them. The URBACT programme⁶⁷, which fosters European exchange and learning for sustainable urban development as well as ESPON programme⁶⁸, which is also funded by the ERDF, can be sources of inspiration too.</p>
<p>39. commits to assessing ways to promote recognition of environmental achievements at the level of small communities, highlighting best practices and encouraging replication of sustainable solutions. This includes exploring integration with existing recognition systems and EU level awards, in line with practices from the European Green Capital and European Green Leaf Awards, the Natura 2000 Awards, the Transformative Action Award, and the European Week for Waste Reduction Awards;</p> <p>40. underlines the importance of including the topic of environmental implementation in communities below the municipal level in the annual theme or programme of recurring EU level events on the environment such as Green Week, the European Week for Waste Reduction, or the European Week of Regions and Cities;</p>	<p>The EU-level events on the environment represent a good occasion to share the best practice experiences, including the results achieved below the municipal level and remain open to the possibility of hosting events in this sense, too.</p> <p>EU Green Week involves stakeholders from all municipal levels by including partner events, which take place around the EU in all Member States. These events are organised by businesses, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local and regional authorities etc. and are relevant to the theme of EU Green Week for that year⁶⁹.</p> <p>Similar opportunities are ensured by the European Week of Regions and Cities, in which context, as regards the EMFF, FARNET is organising a presentation of project examples of innovative actions supporting biodiversity in fisheries areas.</p> <p>The EMFF has also been recognised for the first time at the CLLD conference of 3-4 December 2019 ‘Post 2020: Local Action in a Changing World’. Amongst others, the ‘best project of ecological transition’ was awarded.</p>
<p>42. emphasises the importance of enabling sub-municipal actors to access EU funding programmes. Some already target the neighbourhood level, such as the URBACT programme, which fosters European exchange and learning for sustainable urban development. In this regard calls for appropriate training for</p>	<p>Community-led local development (CLLD) is ideal for enabling sub-municipal actors to access European funding programmes in order to implement actions linked with the EU goals. CLLD promotes community ownership by increased participation. Moreover, the approach supports multi-level governance by providing</p>

⁶⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/atlas/programmes/2014-2020/Territorial%20co-operation/2014tc16fir003

⁶⁸ <https://www.espon.eu/programme/espon/espon-2020-cooperation-programme>

⁶⁹ <https://www.eugreenweek.eu/en>

<p>the staff of the sub-municipal level communities in order to achieve effective use of EU funding;</p>	<p>local communities with a way to fully take part in shaping the implementation of EU objectives.</p>
<p>44. encourages the European Commission to assess the best way to ensure that small communities can contribute to, and benefit from, EU-funded projects promoting sustainability below the municipal level. This could be achieved through: (i) the inclusion of specific references to small communities in guidance documents and handbooks; (ii) the preparation and publication of calls for interest and/or work programmes specifically targeting communities below the municipal level; and (iii) the simplification and the streamlining of financial and eligibility rules to encourage and facilitate their participation (e.g. re-granting) in order to promote the overall harmonious development of the EU (Article 174 TFEU).</p>	<p>LEADER/ CLLD reaches out to individuals and communities on local level. Local action groups (LAGs) animate the territory and accompany the projects holders in developing their project ideas and applying for support.</p> <p>The common agricultural policy (CAP) proposals post-2020⁷⁰ grant Member States with the necessary flexibility to design adequate delivery mechanisms for LEADER programme. They should enable involvement of local actors in projects, collective and community orientation, as well as innovative approaches. The use of simplified cost options, re-granting and proportionate controls are part of the recommended approaches.</p> <p>As already explained at point 37, coming to the specific proposals, it is important pointing out that:</p> <p>(i) in the recently published handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies⁷¹ there are several examples in this sense;⁷²</p> <p>(ii) under shared management, calls of interest are published by managing authorities of the operational programmes and not by the Commission. However, there are several opportunities for actors/ stakeholders below the municipal level under calls for CLLD and in the framework of sustainable urban development (SUD)⁷³ that will have in several cases neighbourhoods as territorial focus of cohesion policy interventions (as per territorial codes). In addition, participatory approach to sustainable urban development in post-2020 cohesion policy will mean that all relevant urban stakeholders are</p>

⁷⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/key_policies/documents/cap-post-2020-enviro-benefits-simplification_en.pdf

⁷¹ https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC118841/handbook_of_sustainable_urban_development_strategies_pdf_2.pdf

⁷² Please refer also to the footnote no.1.

⁷³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/sustainable-urban-development-2018-feb-09_en

	<p>engaged – the majority are below the municipal level. Support for this will be channelled amongst others through the European Urban Initiative⁷⁴ and future URBACT programme;</p> <p>(iii) there have been several simplification provisions in the legislative proposal for a Common Provisions Regulation for post-2020⁷⁵ such as simplified cost options⁷⁶ etc.</p>
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⁷⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/explanatory_memo_eui_post_2020_en.pdf

⁷⁵ COM(2018) 375 final

(https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-common-provisions_en.pdf)

⁷⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/improving-investment/simplified-cost-options/

N°6 Culture in a Union that strives for more: the role of regions and cities
COR-2019-04646-00 – SEDEC-VI/054
138th plenary session – February 2020
Rapporteur: Vincenzo BIANCO (IT/PES)
DG EAC – Commissioner GABRIEL

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>3. The Committee calls on the Commission to include culture as one of the political priorities to be pursued in the new term.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes this call. Indeed, the mission letter of the Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth⁷⁷ invites her to ensure the full implementation of the New European Agenda for Culture⁷⁸. The letter also asks her to strengthen Europe’s commitment to preserving and protecting its cultural heritage, to promote creative industries as a catalyst for innovation, jobs and growth, as well as to foster cultural cooperation as a part of the European Union’s partnerships with countries around the world.</p> <p>In its recent proposals for a major recovery plan and a revamped multiannual financial framework, the Commission makes a strong pledge for a future EU budget that supports the cultural and creative sectors via several instruments. Further to the future Creative Europe and the Digital Europe programmes, support from REACT-EU and the new Solvency Support Instrument will be available across economic sectors, including culture and creative sectors. The reinforced InvestEU will be able to support these sectors under several of its windows, including support to SMEs operating in these sectors. Finally, these sectors could in principle also be supported from the Recovery and Reform Facility, in line with the key policy priorities of transitioning to a green and digital economy.</p>

⁷⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/comm-cwt2019/files/commissioner_mission_letters/mission-letter-mariya-gabriel-2019_en.pdf

⁷⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/strategic-framework_en

	<p>In addition, the Commission has put forward the Corona Response Investment Initiative (CRII), the temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) as well as the Temporary Framework for State Aid measures to support the economy. Member States can use these instruments also for the cultural and creative sectors.</p>
<p>4. The Committee calls on the Commission to capitalise on and promote the use of cultural resources, particularly by young people, with a view to securing developments in society, the economy and jobs.</p>	<p>The goal of the New European Agenda for Culture⁷⁹ is to harness the power of culture and cultural diversity for social cohesion and well-being, to support culture-based creativity for jobs and growth as well as to strengthen the international cultural relations of the European Union. The Agenda explicitly recognises that cultural employment is an important entry point into the labour market for many young Europeans. Involvement in amateur cultural and artistic activities is also an important way for young people to develop their personal, social and professional skills.</p>
<p>12. The Committee calls on the Commission to ensure that the principle of mainstreaming investments in culture into the different EU policies is also applied in the programming of European funds, so that culture is not seen as just a sector-specific policy and its role in relation to all dimensions of cohesion (economic, social and territorial) is recognised.</p> <p>Underlines to this effect the importance of strengthening synergies between culture and other policies such as tourism, regional policy, education, youth and R&D;</p>	<p>An integrated approach to culture through various specific EU funds and programmes is already current practice, and it will be boosted under the new recovery plan and the revamped multiannual financial framework (see above under point 3).</p> <p>In terms of on-going actions, an example of such mainstreaming is the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage, proposed by the Commission in December 2018. It includes more than 60 specific actions and initiatives related to culture. These initiatives are being funded by a number of EU programmes, devoted to topics as diverse as regional and urban development, research and innovation, support to entrepreneurship and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as education and employment policies. Furthermore, as part of the</p>

⁷⁹ COM(2018) 267 final (https://ec.europa.eu/culture/sites/culture/files/commission_communication_-_a_new_european_agenda_for_culture_2018.pdf)

proposed EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations, the Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy have proposed a mapping of European instruments supporting culture.

Another example is support under the future EU Framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe⁸⁰. Indeed, Horizon Europe's Pillar 2 will be dedicated to Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society. A distinctive intervention area on Cultural Heritage and the Cultural and Creative Industries will ensure mainstreaming of investment in research and innovation to protect and preserve Europe's cultural heritage and to boost the innovation potential and competitiveness of the Cultural and Creative Industries. Similarly, within the context of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, the Commission proposes to launch a new Knowledge and Innovation Community on Cultural and Creative Industry in 2022.

The Erasmus+ programme⁸¹ also supports youth exchanges and other non-formal learning activities for youth with a cultural dimension; and the European Solidarity Corps⁸² supports cross-border solidarity activities, including with a cultural dimension.

The preparatory action 'DiscoverEU'⁸³ (2018-2020) has a strong cultural dimension too. Over three quarters of the young travellers taking part in the initiative visit sites of cultural interest or engage in cultural activities including short-term volunteering. For the integration of DiscoverEU into Erasmus+, the Commission is working on the development of a label for cultural organisations to offer opportunities to the young travellers as

⁸⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe-next-research-and-innovation-framework-programme_en

⁸¹ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/programme-guide_en

⁸² https://ec.europa.eu/youth/solidarity-corps_en

⁸³ https://europa.eu/youth/discovereu_en

	<p>well as cultural routes promoting, among others, European Heritage Label sites⁸⁴.</p> <p>The cultural sectors have considerable say in shaping people's beliefs, values and perception of reality, and are thus further key channels for changing attitudes and challenging stereotypes and promoting gender equality and anti-discrimination.</p> <p>In the cultural sector, women are increasingly impacted by structural barriers, such as gender pay gap, lack of equal and safe working environment, offline and online harassment and violence, and are underrepresented in management and decision-making positions.</p> <p>The Commission will continue supporting projects promoting gender equality under Creative Europe, including under Music Moves Europe, and will present a gender equality strategy in the audio-visual industry as part of the next MEDIA sub-programme, including financial support, structured dialogue, mentoring and training for women filmmakers, producers and screenwriters.</p> <p>The Commission will launch an EU-wide communication campaign combatting gender stereotypes. It will tackle all spheres of life with an intersectional approach and a focus on youth engagement, in collaboration with the Member States.</p>
<p>13. The Committee calls on the Commission and on the Member States and their managing authorities to increase, in the new programming of European funds for areas which are lagging behind, investment in culture, including support for measures to "restore to the public" extensive heritage through not-for-profit public-private partnerships and by building up basic cultural products (in particular public library services).</p>	<p>For the period 2021 to 2027, the Commission has proposed to promote a Europe closer to citizens, making this a priority objective for the European Regional Development Fund. It will foster the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas and local initiatives, including in the field of cultural heritage. The resources allocated to cultural heritage will depend on the specific needs of the areas concerned.</p> <p>Within the framework of the Work Plan for</p>

⁸⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/heritage-label_en

	<p>Culture 2019-2022⁸⁵, adopted by the Council in November 2018, the Commission, together with Member States, will identify new sources of funding for cultural heritage. This will be done through workshops that will examine alternative sources of funding, such as public-private partnerships as well as transferable best practices from across the European Union.</p>
<p>18. The Committee calls on the Commission and on the Member States and their managing authorities to support the protection and physical safeguarding of cultural heritage, in particular in order to actively preserve the extensive heritage located in inner or outlying regions which is difficult to access.</p>	<p>Under the policy objective ‘A Europe closer to citizens’ of the European Regional Development Fund 2021-2027 (see also reply to point 13), cultural heritage sites are recognised as powerful assets for local development. They can stimulate employment and investment, in particular in rural areas.</p> <p>The outermost regions – in the Caribbean, Latin America, Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic – have a unique cultural and natural heritage that should be valued and promoted across the European Union.</p>
<p>Paragraph 29. The Committee calls on the Commission to give Europeans easier access to culture and places of remembrance by encouraging cultural consumerism, particularly among the younger generations, developing integrated lifelong education and training policies and encouraging local communities to take part in cultural initiatives.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees. One of the specific aims of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 was to encourage more people to discover and engage with Europe’s cultural heritage. One of the pillars of the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage, ‘Cultural heritage for an inclusive Europe’, includes specific EU actions and initiatives in relation to this topic.</p> <p>The Commission also recognises the importance of access to culture, including through digital means. The Commission is engaged in extensive policy coordination, as well as funding actions to supplement Member States’ cultural policy in the areas of digitisation and online access to cultural material and digital preservation.</p>
<p>32. The Committee calls on the Commission to support the development of cultural relations</p>	<p>The Commission appreciates the Committee’s call to support the development of cultural relations in</p>

⁸⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/culture/news/2018/new-work-plan-culture-start-2019_en

<p>between the Mediterranean countries, including with regard to cultural diplomacy initiatives.</p>	<p>the Mediterranean region. The overall objective of the European Neighbourhood Policy⁸⁶, reviewed in 2015, is to support the stabilisation of Europe's neighbourhood and its resilience. Intercultural dialogue is part of it as it fosters mutual understanding, societal resilience, the protection of cultural heritage and (cultural) tourism. Using culture as a tool for public diplomacy contributes to making the European Union a more visible and a stronger actor in the Neighbourhood.</p> <p>Furthermore, the concept of the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage in conflict and post-conflict zones as an integral component for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and dialogue is being developed.</p> <p>The New Agenda for Culture contains several actions to strengthen the role of culture in external relations. The Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy are now working on the reinforcement of civil society through culture in Mediterranean countries. To meet this objective, a programme to support Youth and Culture in the Southern Neighbourhood was launched in April 2019⁸⁷ (total amount €12.25 million). The programme aims to build resilience and promote inclusive development and stability in the countries covered under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI)⁸⁸ South⁸⁹. It seeks to promote youth and culture as vectors of democratisation, inclusive economic growth, regional integration and resilience. This includes bolstering cultural cooperation between countries in the region.</p>
<p>33. The Committee points to the importance of cross-border and inter-regional cooperation in the</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee's point of view. Cross-border cooperation focusing</p>

⁸⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/european-neighbourhood-policy_en

⁸⁷ https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/fiji/61102/programme-support-youth-and-culture-southern-neighbourhood_en

⁸⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/e/european-neighbourhood-investment

⁸⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/southern-neighbourhood_en

<p>field of culture since cultural heritage goes beyond borders⁹⁰. It highlights to this effect the key role of local and regional authorities, also in the implementation of the cultural component of macro-regional strategies.</p>	<p>on culture initiatives (in particular the protection of cultural heritage) can promote people-to-people contacts and the fruitful cooperation between local authorities. In this context, the added value of the cross-border cooperation programmes in the Mediterranean under the European Neighbourhood Instrument needs to be reiterated.</p>
<p>35. The Committee calls on the Commission to take specific measures to promote effective participation and use by European citizens of the extensive cultural heritage across the Member States, in particular by facilitating full access to information as a pre-requisite for their active participation and supporting the setting-up of a specific information platform.</p>	<p>In addition to the Commission's reply to point 29, a specific example of such an action is Europeana⁹¹, Europe's unique digital platform for cultural heritage and a common pan-European access point to digital resources of European heritage. Through Europeana, citizens can access European culture for a wide variety of purposes. It gives access to over 58 million items including image, text, sound, video and 3D material from the collections of around 4,000 libraries, archives, museums, galleries and audio-visual collections across Europe. It can be used by teachers, artists, professionals in cultural institutions and creative fields and anyone looking for information or interested in culture. Europeana also helps to inspire a sense of shared history and identity among European citizens.</p>

⁹⁰ For example the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/about>) or the UNESCO World Heritage Journeys – Europe (<https://visitworldheritage.com/en/eu>).

⁹¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/europeana-european-digital-library-all>