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**TO THE OPINIONS OF THE**

**EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**PLENARY SESSION OF JULY 2020**

**91<sup>st</sup> REPORT**

N°	TITLE / LEAD DG	REFERENCES
<b>DG ENV</b>		
1.	<b>The Future of EU Clean Air policy in the framework of the zero-pollution ambition</b> (Outlook opinion requested by the Commission) Rapporteur: János Ádám KARÁCSONY (HU/EPP)	COR-2020-00540-00-03 ENVE-VII/003
2.	<b>Fitness check of the Water Framework Directive, Groundwater Directive, Environmental Quality Standards Directive and Floods Directive</b> Rapporteur: Piotr CALBECKI (PL/EPP)	SEC(2019) 438 SWD(2019) 439 SWD(2019) 440 COR-2020-00541-00-01 ENVE-VII/001
3.	<b>Stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world's forests</b> Rapporteur: Roby BIWER (LU/PES)	COM(2019) 352 SWD(2019) 307 COR-2019-04601-00-00 NAT-VII/002
<b>DG CLIMA</b>		
4.	<b>European Climate Law: enshrining the 2050 climate neutrality objective</b> Rapporteur: Juan Manuel MORENO BONILLA (ES/EPP)	COM(2020) 80 COR-2020-01361-00-00 ENVE-VII/005
<b>DG ENER</b>		
5.	<b>Towards a Roadmap for Clean Hydrogen – the contribution of local and regional authorities to a climate-neutral Europe</b> Rapporteur: Birgit HONÉ (DE/PES)	Own-initiative opinion COR-2020-00549-00-02 ENVE-VII/004
<b>DG REGIO</b>		
6.	<b>Just Transition Fund</b> Rapporteur: Vojko OBERSNEL (HR/PES)	COM(2020) 22 COM(2020) 23 COR-2020-00418-00-00 COTER-VII/002

<b>DG GROW</b>		
<b>7.</b>	<p><b>The services package: An updated view from Europe's local and regional authorities</b></p> <p>Rapporteur: Jean-Luc VANRAES (BE/RENEW E.)</p>	<p>COM(2016) 824  COM(2016) 823  COM(2016) 821  COM(2016) 820  COM(2016) 822/2  COR-2020-00150-00-00  ECON-VII/003</p>
<b>DG TRADE</b>		
<b>8.</b>	<p><b>Implementation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs): The regional and local perspective</b></p> <p>Rapporteur: Michael MURPHY (IE/EPP)</p>	<p>COM(2019) 455  SWD(2019) 370  COR-2019-04764-00-00  ECON-VII/001</p>

<p><b>N°1 The future of EU Clean Air Policy in the framework of the zero-pollution ambition</b>  <b>COM(2019) 640 final and SWD(2019) 427</b>  <b>COR 2020-0540 – ENVE VII-003</b>  <b>139<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – July 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur: János Ádám KARÁCSONY (HU/EPP)</b>  <b>DG ENV – Commissioner SINKEVIČIUS</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>9. [...] The CoR recommends that during such revision the possible inclusion of ultrafine particles (UFP) and black carbon (BC), both with elevated adverse health effects, should be taken into consideration, based on recommendations by the WHO.[...]</p>	<p>As indicated in the European Green Deal<sup>1</sup>, the Commission will propose to revise air quality standards to align them more closely with the World Health Organization recommendations.</p>
<p>9. [...] Also with respect to health effects, the focus should shift from assessing air quality to measuring people's exposure to air pollution;[...]</p> <p>10. [...], monitoring systems designated by individual Member States should be further harmonised [...].</p> <p>27. [...] The current website of the European Air Quality Index gives comprehensive information on air quality in Europe, but is relatively unknown and needs to be more widely publicised. The site should also be improved through modelling to give air quality information for regions, smaller villages, and rural areas, where air quality is not measured by monitoring stations;</p> <p>31. advocates further guidance on air-quality reporting and modelling that is specifically designed for LRAs, given their significant</p>	<p>As indicated in the European Green Deal, the Commission will draw on the lessons learnt from the evaluation of the current air quality legislation<sup>2</sup>. It will also propose to strengthen provisions on monitoring<sup>3</sup>, modelling and air quality plans to help local authorities achieve cleaner air.</p>

<sup>1</sup> COM(2019) 640 final.

<sup>2</sup> SWD(2019) 427 final.

<sup>3</sup> Including by making use of new monitoring opportunities provided by digitalisation.

<p>role in this sector. Reporting tools (including e-reporting) should take local authority needs into account. Local authorities might not always have staff with the necessary technical skills or the required English level. Improvements in e-reporting should allow for the specificities of local and regional users, ensuring consistency between reporting tasks assigned to LRAs and their powers and resources in this sector;</p>	
<p>11. [...] Taking into account the high number of Member States that do not meet current standards, it is appropriate to provide for further assistance for implementation where necessary and appropriate and strictly monitored compliance timeframes. [...]</p> <p>14. points out that there is a general lack of specifically targeted EU funding for air quality measures, for drafting and implementation of Air Quality Plans, and for real-time air quality monitoring and improvement in general. The process of obtaining funding is also considered difficult, so this must be substantially simplified to ensure that calls for funding are successful. Collection of financial resources for this funding should be based on the polluter-pays principle;</p> <p>35. recommends providing easily accessible air-quality funding for local authorities and accredited air quality associations responsible for air-quality plans in designated air-quality zones, with priority for zones with higher air pollution;</p>	<p>The EU and the Commission continue to provide implementation support in the form of funding, such as under cohesion policy and the LIFE programme, as well as through dedicated Clean Air Dialogues with Member States, the Environmental Implementation Review (EIR), and its ‘Peer-to-Peer tool’.<sup>4</sup></p> <p>Furthermore, the Commission is continuing its enforcement action: as of July 2020, this comprises 28 ongoing infringement procedures for bad application of the Ambient Air Quality Directives against 17 Member States (as well as one case addressed to the UK).</p> <p>The Commission is also enforcing the adoption and submission of National Air Pollution Control Programmes (NAPCPs) under the National Emission Reduction Commitments Directive (i.e. the NEC Directive)<sup>5</sup> with four ongoing infringement procedures against four Member States.</p>
<p>12. [...] The CoR considers emissions rules to be a particularly effective approach, and</p>	<p>As indicated in the European Green Deal, the Commission will propose more stringent</p>

<sup>4</sup> Also see COM(2018) 330 final.

<sup>5</sup> Directive (EU) 2016/2284 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2016 on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants, amending Directive 2003/35/EC and repealing Directive 2001/81/EC; OJ L 344, 17.12.2016, p. 1–31.

recommends therefore that more attention be paid to tightening them; [...]

13. emphasises the need to focus more on emissions regulation as a better way of achieving clean air by reducing emissions at source (pollution prevention). [...] . Certain areas where there has been no recent regulation should receive more attention: these include (inland) shipping, non-exhaust road transport emissions (brake and tyre wear), diesel (urban power) generators, aviation, or small (<1 MWth) combustion plants such as residential wood- and coal-burning stoves and boilers. Special attention has to be given to real-drive and real-use conditions;

34. urges the European Commission to further strengthen certain aspects of the emission rules at EU level and to take further steps to ensure effective and enhanced horizontal and vertical cooperation, while urging Member States and LRAs to find better methods of cooperation and communication;

air pollutant emissions standards for combustion-engine vehicles; review EU measures to address pollution from large industrial installations; take action in relation to maritime transport, including to regulate access of the most polluting ships to EU ports and to oblige docked ships to use shore-side electricity; address the emissions of pollutants by aeroplanes and airport operations; propose a ‘renovation wave’ of public and private buildings and rigorously enforce the legislation related to the energy performance of buildings.

New EU eco-design rules apply to solid-fuel boilers that produce up to 500 kW heat from 1 January 2020, and will start to apply to solid-fuel stoves that produce up to 50 kW heat from 1 January 2022.

A review of solid-fuel boilers eco-design rules will start in 2021 and will look at the possible inclusion of solid-fuel boilers up to 1MWh.

Cohesion policy, through the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund, supports Member States and regions in reducing air pollution. Over the 2014-2020 period, €1.9 billion have been allocated to directly support air quality measures, with further indirect contributions potentially beneficial to clean air via some of the investments in the low-carbon economy (which total €44 billion), environmental protection and resource efficiency (€64 billion) and network infrastructure (€58 billion).<sup>6</sup> The multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027, as proposed by the Commission, will continue to support measures to improve air quality.

<sup>6</sup> <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/>

<p>17. calls for the introduction of incentives or recognition for LRAs performing positively;</p> <p>33. welcomes the new European Commission Green City Accord (GCA) initiative to improve implementation of EU environmental legislation. The GCA or the Technical Platform for Cooperation on the Environment set up by the CoR and the European Commission could be useful tools to steer LRAs towards the best initiatives based on their needs. [...] Special expertise and technical support (e.g. development of local emission inventories, designation of low emission zones, SHERPA model use, etc.) should also be provided, as LRAs need training to use these tools;</p> <p>36. draws attention to the need to coordinate and manage the relevant networks, initiatives, tools and guidance, which are already a source of broad knowledge and experience, and which would help LRAs to improve their work to achieve cleaner air based on additional technical expertise and guidance.</p>	<p>Initiatives such as the ‘Peer-to-Peer tool’, the Clean Air Forum and Clean Air Dialogues, as well as the Urban Agenda and its partnership on air quality, have been providing opportunities for sharing good practices on air quality management, including for local and regional authorities, while the European Green Capital and Green Leaf Awards<sup>7</sup> reward environmental action more broadly.<sup>8</sup></p> <p>Funding for air quality action has included funding for innovative actions, such as under the LIFE programme and Urban Innovative Actions under the European Regional Development Fund.</p>
<p>23. notes that agriculture so far is the least effective sector when it comes to decreasing emissions (ammonia is a particulate matter precursor). Although measures to mitigate emissions in agriculture are already available, and technically and economically viable, such measures are not yet widely used. [...] New or stricter measures should be considered during the negotiations on the future of the CAP beyond 2020 including, for example, eco-schemes;</p>	<p>The National Emission reduction Commitments Directive sets national commitments that add up to an EU wide target of 19% less ammonia emissions by 2030 compared to 2005. According to the first Commission report<sup>9</sup> to assess the implementation of the NEC Directive, most Member States are at risk of not complying with their emission reduction commitments. Efforts are especially needed in agriculture to reduce ammonia emissions with almost three quarters of the analysed Member States in <b>high risk</b> of non-compliance with their ammonia reduction commitments both</p>

<sup>7</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/>

<sup>8</sup> Also see COM(2018) 330 final.

<sup>9</sup> COM(2020) 266 final.

	<p>for 2020-2029 and for 2030 and beyond; and all but one of the remaining Member States found to be in <b>medium risk</b> of non-compliance for this pollutant. Consequently, the proposal for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post-2020 requests the Member States, at the moment of the preparation of the CAP Strategy Plan and coherently with the indications of the NAPCPs, to assess the need of enhancing support for farmers to adopt practices and make investments to reduce ammonia emissions of agriculture. The Commission will continue to monitor and support national efforts in this regard also with non-financial tools.</p>
<p>24. [...] harmonisation of Low and even more Zero Emission Zones throughout Europe should be considered [...]</p>	<p>To reduce transport emissions, Member States can choose, among others, to put in place an Urban Vehicle Access Regulation (UVAR) as part of an air quality plan. As part of the upcoming Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy planned for December 2020, the Commission is assessing options for a revamped agenda for sustainable urban mobility including cycling and walking, and welcomes submissions from stakeholders in this regard.</p> <p>The Commission also wants to make sure that UVAR information is available through navigation devices and, therefore, the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/962<sup>10</sup> under the Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Directive is currently under revision.</p> <p>In the meantime, guidance was also provided through the revised Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) guidelines,</p>

<sup>10</sup> Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/962 of 18 December 2014 supplementing Directive 2010/40/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council with regard to the provision of EU-wide real-time traffic information services (Text with EEA relevance), OJ L 157, 23.6.2015, p. 21–31.

	<p>which included a UVARs topic guide, comprising several examples<sup>11</sup>.</p> <p>In the Communication on NextGenerationEU<sup>12</sup>, the Commission highlighted clean mobility in our cities and regions as good priorities for national and European investment plans for the post COVID-19 recovery.</p>
<p>24. [...] public transport companies should be urgently provided with (EU) funding to keep them running, renew fleets with less polluting vehicles and prevent a shift to private motorised transport. Underlines that the competitiveness of EU manufacturers must be taken into account when considering and proposing more stringent emissions standards for petrol and diesel vehicles – while calls for an exit path of internal combustion engines from road traffic and appreciates the Member States, regions and cities that have already set a final date for the admission of cars with internal combustion engines. The CoR opposes premiums for the purchase of vehicles with such engines. Proposes, among others, to further promote zero-emission vehicle technology and accelerate investment in the European rail network also as one of the possible viable alternatives for the commuters;</p>	<p>As indicated in the European Green Deal, the Commission plans to adopt a strategy for sustainable and smart mobility that will address the challenge of providing users with more affordable, accessible, healthier and cleaner alternatives to their current mobility habits, and tackle all emission sources. Transport should become drastically less polluting, especially in cities. A combination of measures should address emissions, urban congestion, and improved public transport. The Commission will propose more stringent air pollutant emissions standards for combustion-engine vehicles. The Commission will also propose to revise, by June 2021, the legislation on CO<sub>2</sub> emission performance standards for cars and vans, to ensure a clear pathway from 2025 onwards towards zero-emission mobility.</p> <p>The Commission continues putting forward measures promoting the decarbonisation of transport including a shift to less polluting means of transport such as rail.</p> <p>On passenger rail, the Commission is working on several initiatives. On infrastructure, the revision of the TEN-T Guidelines offers an opportunity to put more focus on linking European cities by high-speed rail. The Commission supports</p>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.eltis.org/sites/default/files/uvar\\_brochure\\_2019-09-26\\_digital\\_version\\_v2.pdf](https://www.eltis.org/sites/default/files/uvar_brochure_2019-09-26_digital_version_v2.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> COM(2020) 456 final.

better rail services by following up on the implementation of the Fourth Railway Package. The Commission will analyse further initiatives on how to eliminate market access barriers for new entrants, such as availability of rolling stock and ticketing. The Commission services are currently launching a study into cross-border passenger services, which will also look into these questions. Following Parliament's initiative, the Commission is also launching a study for a pilot project, to assess how cross-border night train services can be promoted. All of those initiatives should create opportunities for developing further rail passenger services.

In addition to reducing pollution from road vehicles in cities by creating conditions for improved and extended passenger rail, the Commission believes that rail freight also has the potential to reduce local air pollution, by reducing heavy goods vehicles' traffic and short-sea shipping, which is particularly relevant for port cities. The Commission services are currently working on the evaluation of the Rail Freight Corridors Regulation<sup>13</sup> and the Commission intends to put forward measures to better manage and to increase the capacity of railways.

Most rail (over 80% by traffic distance) is already electric, and therefore zero emission at point of use. Work is rapidly progressing to develop battery and hydrogen fuel cell propulsion to enable diesel traction to be phased out completely.

The renewal of rail rolling stock is crucial to reduce pollution and noise even further. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, national and European investment schemes

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<sup>13</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/rail/consultations/2019-evaluation-rail-freight-corridors-regulation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/rail/consultations/2019-evaluation-rail-freight-corridors-regulation_en)

	<p>for such renewal also boosts jobs, the competitiveness of European rail manufacturers, all the more as rail is instrumental to reaching the Green Deal objectives.</p> <p>In general investments in rail should not be limited to the network, but also improve traffic management) and research and innovation.</p> <p>The same applies to investments in clean vessel renewal, as relevant for air quality in port cities.</p>
<p>25. draws attention to the problem of residential solid-fuel heating. The existing ecodesign legislation does not seem to provide an appropriate solution; therefore expects the European Commission to address this issue in the context of the sustainable product-related initiatives under the circular economy strategy. Moreover, significant support is needed for people on low incomes (energy poverty), not just to replace old appliances but also to ensure affordable operation and maintenance of more energy-efficient appliances; ad hoc incentives for renovating buildings to improve their energy performance should be looked at as well. The European Commission should also consider introducing rules on the quality of fuels used for residential heating and create appropriate incentives, including financial incentives, for this purpose;</p>	<p>As indicated in the European Green Deal, the risk of energy poverty must be addressed for households that cannot afford key energy services to ensure a basic standard of living. Effective programmes, such as financing schemes for households to renovate their houses, can reduce energy bills and help the environment. In the fourth quarter of 2020, the Commission plans to produce guidance to assist Member States in addressing the issue of energy poverty.</p> <p>On 14 October 2020, the Commission published a new strategy to boost renovation called ‘A Renovation Wave for Europe – Greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives’<sup>14</sup>. Its aim is to promote and facilitate the energy renovation of public and private buildings, and rigorously enforce the legislation related to the energy performance of buildings and products.</p> <p>Cohesion policy, through the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund, supports Member States and regions in improving the energy performance of buildings. Over the 2014-</p>

<sup>14</sup> COM(2020) 662 final.

	<p>2020 period, nearly €14 billion have been allocated to energy efficiency renovation of buildings. The multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027, as proposed by the Commission, should continue to support energy efficiency investments in buildings. As stated in the Commission Communication on NextGenerationEU, this is also a good priority for national investment plans in the context of the post COVID-19 recovery.</p>
<p>28. recommends stepping up citizen science efforts. Citizen science applications cannot replace monitoring data, as they provide significantly lower quality of data, which needs to be made clear to the public but they can complement it by providing higher-resolution information on trends in air pollution, while actively involving the public and raising people's awareness. Research activities on enhancing (low-cost) sensor reliability should be supported and accelerated, also current work of the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) on standards for compact air quality monitoring as well as air quality modelling is important and welcomed;</p>	<p>The Commission is supporting research activities on the use of low-cost sensors and air quality modelling, including via the Forum for Air Quality Modelling (FAIRMODE) and the relevant CEN working groups. There are numerous examples of citizen science initiatives that have led to concrete improvements in our knowledge about air quality and that involve cooperation between various stakeholders<sup>15</sup>. The projects can also help to maintain trust in official air quality measurement results, complementing the information obtained from formal monitoring networks and ultimately helping inform decision-makers by providing additional information on levels of air pollution.</p>

<sup>15</sup> For an overview see <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/citizen-science-on-air-quality>

<p><b>N°2 Fitness check of the Water Framework Directive, Groundwater Directive, Environmental Quality Standards Directive and Floods Directive</b>  <b>SEC(2019) 438</b>  <b>SWD(2019) 439</b>  <b>SWD(2019) 440</b>  <b>COR 2020-00541-00-01 – ENVE-VII/001</b>  <b>139<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – July 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Piotr CAŁBECKI (PL/EPP)</b>  <b>DG ENV – Commissioner SINKIEVIČIUS</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1. Welcomes the timely delivery of the fitness check of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Floods Directive (FD). Both are fit for purpose.... However, not all objectives have been fully reached due to inadequate funding, slow implementation and insufficient integration of environmental objectives in sectoral policies;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that not all objectives have been reached, and is determined to work with Member States on overcoming the obstacles.</p>
<p>4. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, calls for improved sterilisation of wastewater, an increased research into better preservation of wastewater and an increased deployment of Nature-Based Solutions, in order to eliminate any epidemiological threats to water quality.</p>	<p>The Commission emphasises the importance of the water sector’s compliance with all hygiene requirements. Waste water collection and treatment systems are not considered to spread the SARS-CoV-2 infection, but the surveillance of waste water to detect non-infectious RNA fragments of the virus has emerged as a reliable approach to identifying the presence of the virus in the population. This example shows the need for increased research on water and sanitation in order to prevent and eliminate any epidemiological threats to water quality.</p>
<p>5. Stresses that considering the emerging challenges and new solutions over the last 20 years, and in the light of the SDGs and the European Green Deal, the WFD should be upgraded;</p>	<p>If ‘upgrade’ is intended to imply a modification of the legislative framework, the Commission does not agree. The Water Framework Directive (WFD) is a holistic, flexible instrument that allows all pressures on the aquatic environment to be considered,</p>

	and all benefits and societal considerations to be accounted for. The 6-yearly management plans and programmes of measures are tools to adapt to changing circumstances in the natural environment, and changing political and societal priorities.
13. Urges less silo-thinking on water and greater coherence and coordination across all interrelated EU legislation, in particular regarding concerns on climate change, the circular economy and emerging pollutants;	The Commission agrees with this recommendation. The state of the aquatic environment is strongly influenced by, for instance, agriculture, fisheries, industrial production and energy generation, each important in its own right. Therefore, more joined-up policy responses are essential, at EU and Member State level.
17. Considers it essential for the European Commission to pursue increased enforcement of the legal obligations covering key pressures on the aquatic environment, such as those stemming from the Nitrates and UWWTD Directives. Vital attention should be paid to new emerging harmful trace substances including microplastics and pharmaceuticals, as current technologies used in waste water treatment plants are not entirely capable of removing micropollutants;	<p>The Commission agrees that the enforcement of legal obligations covering water pollution is critical. Strict implementation and enforcement is a central plank of the Commission's follow-up to the fitness check of water legislation.</p> <p>The Commission agrees that wastewater treatment plants are not yet capable of fully removing all micro-pollutants. In following up the evaluation of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWTD)<sup>16</sup>, the Commission will therefore explore how to address micro-pollutants, at source and at treatment plants.</p> <p>Please see also response to recommendation 28.</p>
18. Underlines that intensive agriculture is amongst the main pressures on surface and groundwater, including abstraction and pollution by pesticides, fertilisers and pharmaceutical residue from livestock antibiotics. The next Common Agricultural Policy must fully account for the impact of	The proposal for the post-2020 common agricultural policy (CAP) includes a series of tools and measures to mitigate the negative impact of agriculture on the environment. The enhanced conditionality includes the requirements of the Water Framework Directive (WFD). The future CAP will

<sup>16</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/1143-Evaluation-of-the-Urban-Waste-Water-Treatment-Directive-91-271-EEC-UWWTD->

<p>agricultural activity on water and foster a shift towards more water friendly practices. Solutions may include proposals to widen the environmental conditionality for access to payments to all provisions of the WFD, promoting more ecological farming through "eco-schemes", as well as encouraging dialogue and exchanges of best practices in which water operators, relevant NGOs and farmers take active part;</p>	<p>support farmers applying eco-schemes and sustainable farming practices, supported by a reinforced Advisory Service for farmers within Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) by which Member States are also obliged to offer advice to farmers on production methods to reduce antimicrobial use.</p> <p>The Commission's Farm to Fork<sup>17</sup> and Biodiversity Strategies<sup>18</sup> set concrete targets to transform the EU's food system and preserve biodiversity and ecosystems. They include several targets on reducing the use of pesticides, fertilisers and antimicrobials, and the pollution caused by them, as well as targets on increasing the area of agricultural land under organic farming or returned to high-diversity landscape. Member States will have to set national values for those targets in their national CAP Strategic Plans, and to identify the measures needed to meet them. By the fourth quarter of 2020, the Commission will make recommendations to each Member State before they formally submit their Strategic Plans.</p>
<p>22. Welcomes the Commission's decision of 13 January 2020 to ban thiacloprid, [...]; also calls for a ban on glyphosate and a CAP that supports the end of pesticide use;</p>	<p>The approval of glyphosate expires on 17 December 2022. An application for renewal has been submitted<sup>19</sup>. The rapporteur Member States<sup>20</sup> have one year to deliver their draft scientific assessment, which will be peer-reviewed by all Member States and the European Food Safety Authority. The outcome of the assessment will be the basis for a decision.</p> <p>The Commission does not agree that the common agricultural policy should support the end of pesticide use; EU agriculture</p>

<sup>17</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en)

<sup>18</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/strategy/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/strategy/index_en.htm)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.glyphosate.eu/>

<sup>20</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/pesticides/glyphosate/assessment-group\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/pesticides/glyphosate/assessment-group_en)

	<p>entirely without pesticides is not a realistic objective, even for organic farming. The safe and appropriate use of pesticides is essential to reach the EU’s objectives on plant health, food safety and food security, especially as global food demand increases due to population growth. EU legislation on pesticides aims to minimise their impact on human health and the environment through reduced dependency, alternative methods and the use of low-risk and non-chemical pesticides. As set out in the Farm to Fork Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy, the Commission will take action to reduce by 50% the overall use of – and risk from – chemical pesticides by 2030 and reduce by 50% the use of more hazardous pesticides by 2030.</p> <p>Actions to reduce chemical pesticide use are part of the proposal for the post-2020 common agricultural policy, which will integrate three new requirements from the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive<sup>21</sup> in the enhanced conditionality. In addition, organic farming and other sustainable farming systems like integrated production, agro-ecology and agro-forestry, will be supported in the national CAP Strategic Plans.</p>
<p>21. Invites the Commission to establish a fully operational monitoring system for the regular collection of updated, measured data on pesticide residue in the environment (especially in soil and water), possibly based on the successful experience of the LUCAS (Land Use/Cover Area frame statistical Survey) soil monitoring system;</p>	<p>An effective monitoring system for pesticide residues in water and soil is essential to assess progress towards achieving the objective of reducing pollution. Therefore, the Commission regularly reviews existing monitoring mechanisms including those under the Water Framework Directive (WFD).</p>

<sup>21</sup> [Directive 2009/128/EC on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides](#)

28. Stresses the need to develop and implement best management practice and innovative technologies for reducing pollution from trace substances including pesticides, antibiotics, microplastics and other dangerous substances.

The Commission has adopted the Circular Economy Action Plan<sup>22</sup>, one of the main blocks of the Green Deal, which tackles micro-plastics, aiming to restrict, the use of intentionally added micro-plastics in products, and to address unintentional releases of micro-plastics by developing labelling, standardisation, certification and regulatory measures. Where reduction of the emissions at source is not possible, measures at later life-cycle stages will be envisaged. Synthetic textiles, tyres and pre-production plastic pellets have so far received the most attention.

As regards practices and technologies to reduce pollution from pesticides, Articles 11 and 14 of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive are cornerstones. They require Member States to adopt specific measures to protect the aquatic environment and drinking water, and to implement integrated pest management.

As regards pharmaceuticals, the Commission is following up on actions included in the 2019 EU Strategic Approach to Pharmaceuticals in the Environment and in the 2017 One Health Action Plan on antimicrobial resistance (AMR). It will also work further on environmental aspects through the forthcoming Pharmaceutical Strategy. The measures in the new Regulation<sup>23</sup> on veterinary medicinal products will help to tackle antimicrobial resistance by, in particular, restricting metaphylactic and prophylactic use of antimicrobials, thus contributing to the Farm-to-Fork strategy's target to reduce by 50% overall sales in the EU by 2030.

<sup>22</sup> [COM\(2020\) 098 final: A new Circular Economy Action Plan For a cleaner and more competitive Europe.](#)

<sup>23</sup> Regulation (EU) 2019/6.

	<p>The Commission is also working to revise the Feed Additives Regulation to encourage innovative products that can help to reduce the environmental impact of animal production.</p>
<p>29. Calls for more research and innovation of water source diversification in order to ensure water security, in particular for European cities that attract a growing number of citizens, and its regions that are increasingly hit by long drought phases;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that, in order to address potential droughts and ensure water security for citizens and economic sectors, the use of non-traditional water sources is part of the solution. The recently adopted Regulation (EU) 2020/741 on minimum requirements for water reuse<sup>24</sup> is an example of a relevant EU instrument. However, other measures such as greater water-use efficiency in agriculture and industry, reduced leakage and restoration of natural river courses can help to increase water availability.</p>
<p>30. Proposes urgent implementation of innovative tools to achieve good ecological status in European catchments, such as Ecohydrological Nature Based Solutions. It upgrades the efficiency of hydrotechnical infrastructure, enhances the catchment sustainability multidimensional potential and promotes a holistic approach by encouraging transdisciplinary sustainability science and education;</p>	<p>Without prejudging any specific innovative tools, it is clear that a significant effort and a multitude of tools will be needed to achieve the objectives of the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Nature-based solutions are favoured, for instance, increased investments and encouraging innovation through research and activities under the Directives' Common Implementation Strategy. This also helps to address recommendation 32.</p>
<p>34. Underlines that the Common Agriculture Policy, the Nitrates Directive, and the Plant Protection Product Regulation should be harmonised with the WFD, aiming at the reduction of non-source pollution (nitrogen and phosphorus), which has recently been generating 20-50% of the nutrient load to lakes, reservoirs and coastal zones. In regions where industrialised livestock farming is concentrated, it seems difficult to achieve this</p>	<p>The Plant Protection Products Regulation and the Nitrates Directive are 'basic measures' under the WFD that protect surface and groundwater by imposing strict approval criteria (for pesticides) and requiring measures to prevent nitrate pollution. The Nitrates Directive is also part of cross-compliance under the common agricultural policy. The Farm-to-Fork strategy includes targets for reducing</p>

<sup>24</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020R0741&from=EN>

objective if the CAP and national policies do not commit – in accordance with the objectives of the Green Deal, and the biodiversity and "farm to fork" strategies – to a significant reduction in this form of farming.

chemical pesticide use and risks by 50% and nutrient pollution by 50% by 2030 (by way of reducing fertiliser use by 20% by 2030).

Livestock farming is an integral part of EU agriculture with an important role to play in the EU food system, including in the preservation of grasslands and the valorisation of by-products. However, the livestock sector does need to further reduce its environmental and climate impacts and quantity of greenhouse gas emissions, by measures such as better use of the nutrients produced, and especially by avoiding the spreading of excess manure on land. The Commission's work on a proposal to revise the Feed Additives Regulation aims at reducing the impacts of animal production.

The post-2020 common agricultural policy integrates concerns regarding excess nutrient use. The enhanced conditionality may include a new standard for GAEC 5 (Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions). The Commission has proposed making available a new Farm Sustainability Tool for Nutrients (FAST), capable of delivering to farmers a nutrient management plan at farm level indicating the right quantity of nutrients to spread on crops. A series of other measures will be made available to farmers in the national CAP Strategic Plans to enable farmers to reduce the use of fertilisers, including: support for eco-schemes, environmental, climate and other management commitments, investments in precision farming, and the a better use of advisory services within the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS).

Furthermore, the Farm to Fork Strategy recognises that moving to a more plant-based diet would reduce not only risks of life-threatening diseases, but also the

	<p>environmental impact of the food system, and foresees action to promote promoting sustainable food consumption, driving the transition to a sustainable food system and encourage consumers to choose sustainable and healthy diets.</p>
<p>43. Calls on the Commission to help step up the implementation potential in cities and regions across the EU by expanding existing platforms for sharing best practice and know-how, as well as providing financial tools to support the transfer of innovative methods and systemic solutions between regions;</p> <p>48. Calls on the Commission to remind all national and local institutions that water is an essential public good and, with a view to this, to better implement water pricing policies in line with the cost recovery principle, enshrined in Article 9 of the WFD, and to refer to households, agriculture and industry as "water users", as well as to recommend the use of pricing measures such as summer tariffs or consumption-based block tariffs to promote the conservation of the resource. Furthermore, the "polluter pays" principle should be fully applied through sustainable financing instruments such as Extended Producer Responsibility.</p>	<p>The Commission considers that cities and regions have an important role to play in achieving water policy objectives and notes that different EU policy instruments currently exist to facilitate sharing of best practices and knowledge.</p> <p>The Commission agrees with this recommendation and, in light of the under-implementation of the cost recovery incentive principles of the Water Framework Directive, continues to support Member States in designing financing strategies, as in the area of water treatment and sanitation. The EU Recovery package offers the opportunity to focus attention on the multiple benefits of investments in water infrastructure and nature restoration.</p>

<p><b>N°3 Stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world’s forests</b>  <b>COM (2019) 352 final</b>  <b>COR-2019-04601 – NAT-VII/002</b>  <b>139<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session - July 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Roby BIWER (LU/PES)</b>  <b>DG ENV – Commissioner SINKEVIČIUS</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1. Welcomes the commitment of the European Commission to stepping up efforts to protect and restore the worlds' forests; notes with regret the limited scope of the proposals put forward;</p> <p>25. Welcomes the new EU-wide Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 which raises the level of ambition for the EU to drive actions to halt biodiversity loss and ecosystems degradation across the whole of Europe and positioning the EU as a leader in the world in addressing the global biodiversity crisis, including, e.g. establishing protected areas for at least 30% of land, introducing legally binding EU nature restoration targets and stricter protection of remaining EU primary and old-growth forests, applying, sustainable management of secondary forests, restoring degraded ecosystems and land by restoring forests, soils and wetlands and creating green spaces in cities ;</p>	<p>The Commission thanks the Committee for welcoming its commitment to step up action to protect and restore the world’s forests and the comments and recommendations regarding the communication ‘Stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world's forests’<sup>25</sup> of July 2019; as well as for welcoming the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030<sup>26</sup>.</p> <p>The Commission is determined to address the broader problem of global deforestation, as well as the EU and world biodiversity challenges.</p>
<p>3. Stresses the importance of primary forests as biodiversity hot spots which provide ecosystem services contributing to human health (pharmaceutical use, nutrition, medicinal plants), social inclusion (mental</p>	<p>Deforestation is a main driver of biodiversity loss and of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. Furthermore, as research shows<sup>28</sup>, it increases the likelihood of novel infectious diseases spreading from animal to</p>

<sup>25</sup> COM(2019) 352 final.

<sup>26</sup> COM(2020) 380 final.

<sup>28</sup> Wildlife Conservation Society, “Links between ecological integrity, emerging infectious diseases originating from wildlife, and other aspects of human health - an overview of the literature”, <https://www.wcs.org/get-involved/updates/wcs-issues-report-on-links-between-ecological-integrity-and-human-health>

<p>health, promoting employment in rural areas, eco-tourism, etc.), as well as their key role in preserving the environment from desertification, flooding, degradation of hydrogeological structure, soil erosion, extreme weather, loss of rainfall, polluted air, etc.; also recognises that sustainably managed, man-grown as well as mature native forests contribute to the protection and conservation of biodiversity;</p> <p>4. Recognises that deforestation is a very complex phenomenon with multiple drivers, increasing demands from a growing global population for food, feed, bioenergy, timber and other commodities being the main ones; stresses that deforestation is the second largest source of anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and a major driver of biodiversity loss<sup>27</sup>;</p> <p>24. Stresses that together with multifunctionality biodiversity is a key theme to take into consideration when discussing the EU's forestry policy framework; points out that every time deforestation occurs by destroying a primary forest or a mature native forest, there is a loss of biodiversity which is typical for forests and difficult to restore because the area would be highly degraded;</p>	<p>humans.</p> <p>The European Green Deal<sup>29</sup> – adopted in December 2019 – and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – adopted in May 2020 – stressed the importance of tackling deforestation in order to fight biodiversity loss and global warming.</p> <p>The EU Biodiversity for 2030 strategy states that the EU trade policy will actively support and be part of the EU efforts to fight deforestation.</p>
<p>6. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to put forward regulatory measures and recommendations tailored to meet national, regional and local specific divergences, to effectively combat all forms of deforestation and degradation of the original forest ecosystems which provide carbon stock and biodiversity, while also providing the appropriate funding;</p>	<p>As announced in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Commission will present in 2021 a legislative proposal and other measures to avoid or minimise the placing of products associated with deforestation or forest degradation on the EU market, and to promote forest-friendly imports and value chains.</p> <p>The Commission is currently conducting an</p>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378018314365#fig0005>.

<sup>29</sup> COM(2019) 640 final.

	<p>impact assessment of measures to tackle global deforestation associated with EU consumption.</p>
<p>9. Stresses that the EU shall guarantee consumption of products from non-EU deforestation-free supply chains as a central point in the process of protecting and restoring the world's forests; calls on the EU to include consumers at the heart of the process to influence markets relying on the problematic conversion of primary forests to produce widely used products such as coffee, cocoa, palm oil and livestock;</p>	<p>The Commission in its European Green Deal, as well as in the EU Biodiversity Strategy, has emphasized that promoting deforestation-free supply chains for products marketed in the EU as well as rising awareness among consumers – are key steps to protect and restore the world's forest.</p>
<p>10. Draws attention to severe human rights violations and environmental destruction in different product supply chains (e.g. soybean, palm oil, sugar, cocoa, beef, raw material for biofuels) and underlines that voluntary initiatives by the private sector and financial industry have so far not been sufficient to halt and reverse global deforestation; therefore calls on the Commission to make compliance with environmental and Human Rights (HRDD) Due Diligence<sup>30</sup> standards mandatory;</p> <p>12. Calls on the Commission to take a variety of actions to incentivise the active involvement of consumers in the selection, promotion and use of more sustainable goods, including, but not limited to, the establishment of specific EU certification schemes for deforestation-free products, integrating the certification scheme already available for forest-based products including both Forest Management and Chain of Custody<sup>31</sup> into a more comprehensive</p>	<p>The values of respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, on which the EU is founded, guide also the EU's external action. The new EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, published in March 2020<sup>32</sup>, proposes enhancing EU leadership in promoting and protecting human rights and democracy worldwide and focuses in particular on environmental challenges and climate change.</p> <p>As mentioned in reply to point 6, the Commission, in currently conducted impact assessment, will assess a wide variety of regulatory and non-regulatory policy options including voluntary commitments, mandatory labelling, approaches similar to the EU system against illegal fishing, green finance, due diligence, verification schemes or a combination of different elements of these different approaches that could work efficiently, while lowering the costs for the</p>

<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Due Diligence HRDD is generally understood as a means by which companies can identify, prevent, mitigate and account for the negative human rights impacts of their activities or those linked to their business relationships. <https://corporatejustice.org/priorities/13-human-rights-due-diligence>.

<sup>31</sup> For example Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®), Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification TM (PEFCTM), etc.

<p>assessment, also applicable to non-forest-based products, encompassing: sustainable forest management; forest management and production systems based on reduced use of natural resources (e.g. water), chemical substances (e.g. pesticides) and energy (fossil fuels and energy from non-renewable sources in general); deforestation-free aspects in producing non-forest-based products; promotion of products with a limited transport footprint (e.g. area brand, carbon footprint); and lifecycle assessments (LCA) of products to quantify their environmental impact and to allow the comparison of their environmental performance;</p> <p>14. Calls upon the Commission to improve the communication and promotion of products from sustainable forestry towards customers by developing a specific label indicating the deforestation rate of a product and improving/integrating the already available European database/information systems (e.g. Ecolabel database) with deforestation-free products which shall be easy to recognise;</p> <p>29. Stresses that the measures put in place by the Commission to protect and restore forests in the EU and globally shall be broadly communicated to European citizens in order to increase the support for and effectiveness of these measures;</p>	<p>industry and authorities.</p> <p>In its Joint Communication on an EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for the period 2020-24, the Commission further committed to engaging with the business sector on upholding and promoting best practices on corporate social responsibility, due diligence and accountability in the supply chains.</p> <p>Furthermore, in the context of the European Green Deal, resources will be invested in informing and engaging EU citizens on environment, including raising awareness among consumers with regard to stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world's forests.</p> <p>Finally, the Commission is currently working on a proposal for a directive on sustainable corporate governance. This initiative aims to improve the company law and corporate governance regulatory framework so that it provides better incentives for companies to focus on longer-term, sustainable value creation, including better identification of the company's sustainability risks, opportunities and impacts and mitigation of adverse impacts in the company's operations and value chains.</p>
<p>11. Points out that forest fires represent the main threat to the conservation of forest ecosystems in many EU Member States and regions. Facilitating local and regional authorities to further enhance their resilience to disasters is crucial considering that they</p>	<p>The Commission, through the Joint Research Centre and other services, supports the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) operational since 2000. It is also a part of the EU Copernicus Program, under the Emergency</p>

<sup>32</sup> Joint Communication from the Commission and from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament and the Council, EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, JOIN (2020) 5 final. 25.3.2020

<p>are the first responders. Containing disasters by local community actions is the fastest and most effective way of limiting damage caused by forest fires;</p>	<p>Management Service (EMS), since 2015. Notably, EFFIS supports the services in charge of the protection of forests against fires in the EU and neighbour countries.</p>
<p>1.13. Calls upon the Commission to step up its efforts in the fight against illegal logging through the full and effective implementation of the EU FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) work plan 2018-2022, in particular by strengthening the implementation of the EU Timber Regulation;</p>	<p>The Commission will continue and strengthen its cooperation with the Member States to achieve a uniform application and effective implementation of the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR)<sup>33</sup>. Furthermore, the Commission is currently conducting a fitness check – i.e. a comprehensive evaluation – of the EU rules in place to fight illegal logging and associated trade (the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) and the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Regulation).</p> <p>Also, the preliminary results of the fitness check will be taken into account in the impact assessment of measures to tackle global deforestation associated with EU consumption that the Commission currently conducts (see also point 6).</p>
<p>15. Calls upon the Commission to institute procedures to check the accuracy of the information and assessments collected in the European information system in order to improve confidence in the information provided, including strong traceability requirements guaranteeing the origin of products, and stronger monitoring and enforcement systems in order to help prevent fraud and mislabelling of products; suggests the consideration of other sourcing policies, particularly in countries with a high rate of deforestation and low certification coverage and/or a high rate of illegal logging, e.g. an obligation to provide proof</p>	<p>As set out in the Communication on ‘Stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world’s forests’, the Commission will create an EU Observatory on Deforestation and Forest Degradation. Its aim will be to monitor and measure changes in the world’s forest cover and associated drivers, with a view to improve the availability and quality of information and access to information on forests and supply chains.</p> <p>This resource will give public bodies, consumers and businesses better access to information about supply chains, encouraging them to become more</p>

<sup>33</sup> Regulation (EU) No 995/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2010 laying down the obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market; OJ L 295, 12.11.2010, p. 23–34.

<p>that products were sourced sustainably, including documentation of material trades between operators and information on the procurement policies of all parties in the supply chain;</p> <p>32. Calls on the EU to further develop research and monitoring programmes like Copernicus, European Earth Observation and other monitoring programmes to supervise the commodity supply chain in order to be able to identify and give early warnings on products which caused deforestation or environmental degradation during their production phase;</p>	<p>sustainable. The Commission will also explore the possibility of strengthening the use of the Copernicus satellite system for forest monitoring.</p>
<p>16. Urges all EU institutions and agencies to lead by example by modifying their behaviour, procurements and framework contracts towards the use of products from sustainable forestry; invites, moreover, its staff and members to offset carbon emissions linked to their CoR related flights by financially supporting sustainable forestry projects;</p> <p>17. Stresses that public procurement, accounting for around 14% of GDP in the EU, offers a potentially strong lever for ensuring more sustainable product supply contracts to purchase work, goods or services from companies. To this end, the introduction, within Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement, of a ban on public purchases of products resulting from deforestation can produce relevant positive impacts on the promotion of deforestation-free products;</p>	<p>As stated in the European Green Deal, public authorities, including the EU institutions, should lead by example and ensure that their procurement is green. The Commission will propose further legislation and guidance on green public purchasing.</p> <p>The Commission is also keen to reduce its environmental impact as an institution and as an employer. It plans to present a comprehensive action plan in 2020 to implement itself the objectives of the Green Deal and to become climate neutral by 2030. It calls on all the other institutions, bodies and agencies of the EU to work with it and come forward with similar ambitious measures.</p>
<p>18. Points out that promoting a shift of consumer behaviour towards more healthy plant-based diets with a high intake of fruit and vegetables (which should be deforestation-free certified), thus reducing</p>	<p>As stated in the Farm to Fork strategy, in order to promote sustainable food consumption and facilitating the shift to healthy, sustainable diets, the Commission will undertake several actions, including</p>

<p>global meat consumption, can promote and preserve the health of citizens and of the planet in line with the C40 Good Food Cities Declaration<sup>34</sup>; this shift must reflect the recommendations of the Farm to Fork Strategy which fosters consumption that is, as far as possible, local and sustainable in terms of the environment and human health;</p> <p>20. Calls for the involvement of European citizens and local and regional authorities, commercial players and stakeholders that sell their products on the European market (e.g. multinational companies) in these activities; points out their role in protecting the forests and the need to increase transparency in their corporate reporting on social and environmental responsibilities (in line with Directive 2014/95/EU);</p>	<p>examining the ways to harmonise voluntary green claims and to create a sustainable labelling framework that covers, in synergy with other relevant initiatives, the nutritional, climate, environmental and social aspects of food products.</p> <p>The Commission has reflected on this objective as part of the Communication on Stepping up EU action to protect the world’s forests, while the impact assessment will study potential measures in that regard.</p>
<p>19. Encourages the Commission to find synergies and connections with ongoing projects and initiatives related to the creation of urban or peri-urban forests and ecological corridors at subnational, national and European level and outside Europe; points out that these initiatives have many environmental and social benefits (ecosystem services) for people living in the connected cities, encompassing clean air, water flow regulation, soil protection from water and wind erosion, restoration of degraded land, resilience to disasters and to climate change, lower summer daytime temperatures, provision of food, higher urban biodiversity, better physical and mental health, higher property values, etc.;</p>	<p>As stated in the Biodiversity Strategy, the new EU Nature Restoration Plan will help improve the health of existing protected areas.</p> <p>In addition, regarding the Trans-European Nature Network, the Biodiversity Strategy underlines the importance of ecological corridors, investments in green and blue infrastructure, including in both rural and urban environment; and cooperation across borders, including through the European Territorial Cooperation.</p>
<p>21. Draws attention to the fact that</p>	<p>As stated in the communication ‘Stepping</p>

<sup>34</sup> Under the C40 Good Food Cities Declaration, cities commit to: align food procurement policies to the Planetary Health Diet ideally sourced from organic agriculture, support an overall increase of healthy plant-based food consumption in our cities by shifting away from unsustainable, unhealthy diets [https://www.c40.org/press\\_releases/good-food-cities](https://www.c40.org/press_releases/good-food-cities).

<p>deforestation mostly happens in non-EU countries. Most of the timber produced in these countries is consumed locally, and yet the uptake of timber certification remains low, as the cost of obtaining certification is too high, particularly for smallholders, who are also competing with cheaper conventional or even illegally harvested timber. Similarly, specific attention needs to be paid to how to certify forest-based products, such as natural rubber, produced by a large number of smallholders;</p>	<p>up EU action to protect and restore the world's forests', the Commission will develop and implement incentive mechanisms for smallholder farmers to maintain and enhance ecosystem services and products provided by sustainable forest management and agriculture.</p>
<p>22. Calls for improving environmental education in developing countries where primary forests are located as a key aspect in raising awareness in these countries of the importance of their own environmental resources; points out that the direct involvement of citizens in these environmental education initiatives could bring many benefits, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) greater knowledge about the importance of the ecosystem services that sustainably managed forests and primary forests provide to society;</li> <li>b) recognition of the direct and indirect multiple benefits of sustainable forest management (SFM);</li> <li>c) a higher chance of deriving beneficial outcomes from local actions to limit deforestation and forest degradation; more opportunities to transform the protection of natural resources into their sustainable management and thus contributing to green jobs and green growth for the local population, etc.;</li> </ul>	<p>The Commission will continue promoting mainstreaming environment and climate change across the EU's international cooperation with partner countries, including, as indicated in the Green Deal communication, through Green Alliances aimed at further integrating environmental concerns and objectives in the EU's relations with partner countries.</p> <p>As stated in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, to help integrate biodiversity and ecosystems into school, higher education and professional training, the Commission will propose a Council Recommendation on encouraging cooperation in education for environmental sustainability in 2021. This will provide guidance for schools and teachers on how to cooperate and exchange experiences across Member States on biodiversity teaching. The Commission will also provide support materials and facilitate the exchange of good practices in EU networks of teacher-training programmes.</p> <p>Forestry is an explicit priority for cooperation in the field of higher education for the flagship Erasmus+ activity 'Capacity Building in Higher Education' (CBHE) with partner countries in almost all world regions (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific; Latin America;</p>

	<p>all of Asia with the exception of Iran, Iraq, Yemen; the entire European Neighbourhood region including the Eastern Partnership, Western Balkans, and South Mediterranean).</p> <p>In addition, climate change, encompassing aspects of environmental husbandry and protection of natural resources is a cross-cutting topic in all world regions. The total budget of the Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) call in 2020 was approximately €160 million. This action establishes partnerships between higher education communities around the world and their European counterparts to modernise and internationalise partner country universities and to work on topics such as forestry, that have been identified as priorities by the partner country governments themselves. This ownership of the priorities established by the partner countries is crucial to effect lasting change, and the tertiary sector is intended to act as a multiplier for wider society.</p>
<p>23. Points out the Commission shall consider the possibility of proposing primary forests as UNESCO heritage sites in order to help protect them from deforestation and to increase the chance of drawing public attention to their protection;</p>	<p>The Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 states that it will be crucial for the EU to ‘strictly protect’ all its remaining primary and old-growth forests.</p> <p>Through its collaboration with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Commission intends to strengthen the mainstreaming of environment into all policy areas, including the UNEP inter-agency mandate and the One UN delivery mechanisms, which include UNESCO.</p>
<p>26. Calls for much stronger efforts to meet the targets related to forestry within the new EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and to agree on an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity policy framework to be adopted at the upcoming 15th Conference of the</p>	<p>The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 includes ambitious measures in order to increase the quantity, quality and resilience of its forests.</p> <p>To make this happen, the Commission will propose a dedicated EU Forest Strategy in</p>

<p>Parties at the Convention on Biological Diversity (UN CBD COP 15), also based on the evaluation of the implementation of the strategy to 2020;</p> <p>28. Calls for an increased contribution of active, adaptive and participatory forestry in the post-2020 EU Forestry Strategy towards maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and thus fully achieving the benefits that biodiversity and ecosystem services can bring. All these activities and efforts should contribute to and promote a more ambitious global biodiversity policy where Europe urges to take responsible leadership;</p>	<p>2021 in line with wider biodiversity and climate neutrality ambitions.</p> <p>In the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Commission has also proposed ambitious commitments for a new global framework for post-2020 at the upcoming 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.</p> <p>In particular, those commitments involve a much stronger implementation, monitoring and review process and that, by 2050, all of the world's ecosystems are restored, resilient, and adequately protected.</p>
<p>27. Insists that trade agreements are assessed against the objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and are based on sustainable development; calls for strengthening their chapters on sustainable forest management and the fight against deforestation, and integrate the deforestation into environmental impact assessments. In this regard, as the deforestation in Brazil's Amazon has reached record levels with an 84 percent jump in rainforest fires<sup>35</sup>, calls on the EU and its Member States to suspend the ratification of the EU-Mercosur until the Brazilian government reverses the trend;</p>	<p>As stated in the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Commission will ensure full implementation and enforcement of the biodiversity provisions in all trade agreements, including through the EU Chief Trade Enforcement Officer. The Commission will better assess the impact of trade agreements on biodiversity, with follow-up action to strengthen the biodiversity provisions of existing and new agreements, if relevant.</p> <p>The EU-Mercosur Agreement has a dedicated Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) Chapter including, inter alia, legally binding commitments related to environmental protection and climate change contained in multilateral Treaties, such as the Paris Agreement.</p> <p>The EU and Mercosur commit to effectively implementing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement on climate change. The TSD chapter is based on the premise that increased trade should not be at the expense of the environment or labour</p>

<sup>35</sup> Brazilian National Institute for Space Research 2019.

	<p>conditions – on the contrary, it should promote sustainable development.</p> <p>Moreover, Sustainability Impact Assessments (SIAs) of EU trade agreements already include an analysis of their impact on greenhouse gas emissions.</p>
<p>29. Stresses that the measures put in place by the Commission to protect and restore forests in the EU and globally shall be broadly communicated to European citizens in order to increase the support for and effectiveness of these measures;</p> <p>30. Calls upon the Commission to set up a European database collecting ongoing and past projects between the EU and third countries as well as bilateral projects between EU Member States and third countries in order to assess their impact on the world's forests; underlines the involvement of local and regional authorities in the implementation of these projects;</p>	<p>As stated in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Commission will establish in 2020 a new Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity in close cooperation with the European Environment Agency. The Centre will: (i) track and assess progress by the EU and its partners including in relation to implementation of biodiversity related international instruments; (ii) foster cooperation and partnership, including between climate and biodiversity scientists; and (iii) underpin policy development.</p>
<p>31. Urges the EU to launch an Industrialisation, Digitisation and Decarbonisation (IDD) strategy to promote wood-based replacement ecomaterials, where consumers are informed of the origin and carbon footprint, and to encourage "zero-deforestation" certification, boosting its use in sectors such as construction, textiles, chemicals and the packaging industry</p>	<p>As stated in the communication 'Stepping up EU action for protect and restore the world's forests', the Commission will encourage the strengthening of standards and certification schemes that help to identify and promote deforestation-free commodities. This will be done through, among other things, studies on their benefits and shortcomings and by developing guidance, including assessment based on certain criteria to demonstrate the credibility and solidity of different standards and schemes.</p>
<p>33. Calls upon the Commission to consider establishing a European Forestry Agency in light of the importance of protecting and restoring the world's forests.</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of forests and their protection, as reflected in the European Green Deal Communication and EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030. As</p>

previously mentioned, a new EU Forest Strategy is planned for 2021.

It is not clear what the role of such European Forestry Agency would be. Environmental monitoring of forests is conducted by the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the Commission plans to reinforce this with information from the Forest Information System for Europe (FISE).

Furthermore, the Commission Communication on ‘Stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world’s forests’ already foresees the creation of a forest observatory, to monitor and measure changes in the world's forest cover and associated drivers, with a view to improve the availability and quality of information and access to information on forests and supply chains.

Finally, taking into account the pressures on the EU Budget that creating such Agency would cause, it does not seem justified taking into account the very good work already done by the European Environment Agency in this field.

**N°4 European Climate Law: enshrining the 2050 climate neutrality objective**  
**COM (2020) 80 final**  
**COR-2020-01361 – ENVE-VII/005**  
**139<sup>th</sup> plenary session – July 2020**  
**Rapporteur: Juan Manuel MORENO BONILLA (ES/EPP)**  
**DG CLIMA – Executive Vice-President TIMMERMANS**

<b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b>	<b>European Commission position</b>
<p><b>Amendment 6</b></p> <p><b>Article 2(2)</b></p> <p>The relevant Union institutions and the Member States shall take the necessary measures at Union and national level respectively, to enable the collective <i>implementation</i> of the climate-neutrality objective <i>in European cities and regions</i>, set out in paragraph 1, taking into account the importance of promoting fairness and solidarity among Member States.</p>	<p>The Commission proposes a Union- and economy-wide 2050 climate-neutrality objective, with all Member States taking the necessary measures to enable its collective achievement. Member States are therefore responsible for encouraging the necessary action and contribution from European cities and regions in view of securing the overall objective.</p> <p>With that in mind, the Commission acknowledges the important role that local and regional authorities will play in contributing to the achievement of that objective. In particular, Article 8 of the Commission proposal provides for the Commission to facilitate engagement, participation and action at all levels – including national, regional and local – towards a climate-neutral and climate-resilient society. This includes drawing on the multilevel climate and energy dialogues established by Member States under Article 11 of the Governance Regulation<sup>36</sup>.</p> <p>In addition, the Mission ‘100 Climate-neutral Cities by 2030’ intends to support, promote and showcase 100 European cities</p>

<sup>36</sup> Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action, amending Regulations (EC) No 663/2009 and (EC) No 715/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Directives 94/22/EC, 98/70/EC, 2009/31/EC, 2009/73/EC, 2010/31/EU, 2012/27/EU and 2013/30/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Directives 2009/119/EC and (EU) 2015/652 and repealing Regulation (EU) No 525/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council; OJ L 328, 21.12.2018, p. 1–77.

	<p>in their systemic transformation towards climate neutrality by 2030 and convert these cities into experimentation and innovation hubs for all cities.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 7</b></p> <p><b>Article 2(3)</b></p> <p><i>As soon as possible and no later than beginning of</i> September 2020, the Commission shall review the Union’s 2030 target for climate referred to in Article 2(11) of Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 in light of the climate-neutrality objective set out in Article 2(1), and explore options for a new 2030 target of <b>at least</b> 55 % emission reductions compared to 1990. Where the Commission considers that it is necessary to amend that target, it shall make proposals to the European Parliament and to the Council as appropriate.</p>	<p>Article 2(3) of the Commission proposal for a European Climate Law Regulation contained a commitment to review, by September 2020 the existing 2030 greenhouse gas emission reduction target of at least 40% and explore options for a new target of 50-55% compared to 1990 levels. On 17 September 2020, the Commission duly adopted a Communication on Stepping up Europe's 2030 Climate Ambition<sup>37</sup>, proposing an EU-wide net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction target of at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. The Communication was accompanied by an impact assessment and amended proposal on the European Climate Law Regulation. This amended proposal<sup>38</sup> introduces a new Article 2a to provide for a 2030 climate target of at least 55% net greenhouse gas emission reductions compared to 1990 levels.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 8</b></p> <p><b>Article 3</b></p> <p>Trajectory for achieving climate neutrality</p> <p>1. The Commission is empowered to <b>propose amendments</b> to this Regulation by <b>proposing</b> a trajectory at Union level to achieve the climate-neutrality objective set out in Article 2(1) until 2050. At the latest within six months after each global stocktake referred to in Article 14 of the Paris Agreement, the Commission shall <b>evaluate the progress</b></p>	<p>In Article 3, the Commission proposes an empowerment to adopt delegated acts to supplement the Climate Law Regulation by identifying the trajectory that would be necessary at Union level to achieve the climate-neutrality objective by 2050. The delegated act would not set intermediate targets between now and 2050. Any such targets would be set by the co-legislators, in the Climate Law Regulation itself. The starting point for the trajectory would be the Union’s 2030 target for climate, referred to</p>

<sup>37</sup> Commission Communication – Stepping up Europe’s 2030 climate ambition, investing in a climate-neutral future for the benefit of our people; COM (2020) 562 final.

<sup>38</sup> COM (2020) 563 final – 2020/0036 (COD).

<p><i>made in achieving the climate-neutrality objective.</i></p> <p>2. The trajectory shall start from the Union's 2030 target for climate referred to in Article 2(3).</p> <p>3. When <i>proposing</i> a trajectory in accordance with paragraph 1, the Commission shall consider the following:</p> <p><b>Amendment 6</b></p> <p><b>Recital number 21</b></p> <p>In order to provide predictability and confidence for all economic actors, including businesses, workers, investors and consumers, to ensure that the transition towards climate neutrality is irreversible, to ensure gradual reduction over time and to assist in the assessment of the consistency of measures and progress with the climate-neutrality objective, the Commission will propose a trajectory for achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions in the Union by 2050. It is of particular importance that the Commission carries out appropriate consultations when drawing up its proposal, in particular with experts and Member State administrations, including regional and local authorities</p> <p>Amendment 18</p> <p>[Deletion of Article 9]</p>	<p>in Article 2(3) of the proposal, and the end point is the climate-neutrality objective set out in Article 2(1) by 2050. The purpose of the trajectory is to serve as a tool to assess progress towards the climate-neutrality objective, on the basis of the criteria set out by the co-legislators in the Climate Law Regulation and of the factual evolution of greenhouse emissions in the EU based on the assessment of progress under Articles 5 and 6.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 11</b></p> <p><b>Article 4(2)</b></p> <p>2. Member States shall develop and implement adaptation strategies and plans that include comprehensive risk management frameworks, based on robust climate and vulnerability baselines and progress assessments.</p> <p><i>Member States shall ensure the integration</i></p>	<p>The adaptation strategies and plans referred to in Article 4(2) of the proposal should improve preparedness and capacity to respond to the impacts of climate change at local, regional, and national level through coordinated action by all relevant stakeholders. Such reference to adaptation strategies and plans is also coherent with Article 19(1) of the Governance Regulation.</p>

<p><i>of the regional, local and outermost regional perspective when developing and implementing their adaptation strategies and plans.</i></p>	<p>As indicated in the adjusted Commission Work Programme 2020<sup>39</sup>, the Commission plans to adopt a new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change in the first quarter of 2021, which will consider the specific vulnerabilities of the EU's outermost regions, in line with the Commission Communication of 2017: 'A stronger and renewed strategic partnership with the EU's outermost regions'<sup>40</sup>.</p> <p>In addition, the Mission on 'Accelerating the transition to a climate prepared and resilient Europe' will work with citizens, communities and regions to accelerate the transition to a climate prepared, more resilient, and fair Europe.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 12</b></p> <p><b>Article 5(2a) new</b></p> <p>2(a) The assessment referred to in paragraph 1 and the review referred to in paragraph 2 shall be carried out on the basis of a common EU information system, accessible to the public, incorporating the information generated by the different actors involved in achieving the objective of climate neutrality and advancing adaptation. Requirements shall be set to ensure standardisation and homogeneity of information by ensuring that it consists of data that are easy to find, accessible, interoperable and reusable. This system will benefit from the opportunities afforded by digitalisation and new technologies.</p>	<p>In Article 7, the Commission proposes common provisions for the assessment foreseen under articles 5 and 6. Such provisions include data generated by a multiplicity of actors and sources in order to gather the best available scientific data.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Commission will submit the conclusions of the assessment to the European Parliament and to the Council.</p> <p>The Commission does not envisage the creation of a common information system such as the one proposed.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 15</b></p> <p><b>Article 7(1)(f) new</b></p> <p>f) additional information from local and</p>	<p>Whereas the Commission is sympathetic to the signal to emphasize the importance of coordination within Member States, this remains within the discretion of Member</p>

<sup>39</sup> COM(2020) 440 final.

<sup>40</sup> COM(2017) 623 final.

<p>regional authorities on progress achieved and territorial effects.</p>	<p>States themselves and is in the Commission's view covered within the scope of the reference to the Governance Regulation under point (a) of the same Article.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 16</b></p> <p><b>Article 7(1)(e)</b></p> <p>any supplementary information on environmentally sustainable investment, by the Union, Member States <i>and local and regional authorities</i>, including, when available, investment consistent with Regulation (EU) 2020/... [Taxonomy Regulation].</p>	<p>The Commission acknowledges the important role of local and regional authorities in providing relevant information in areas such as sustainable finance.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 17</b></p> <p><b>Article 8</b></p> <p>The Commission shall engage with all parts of society to <i>enable them to adopt comprehensive measures to achieve</i> a climate-neutral and climate-resilient society. The Commission shall facilitate an inclusive and accessible process at all levels, including at national, regional and local level and with social partners, citizens and civil society, for the exchange of best practice and to identify actions to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of this Regulation (EU) 2018/1999. <i>Especially, as part of the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, the Commission should rely on and support the direct link between citizens, local businesses and their local and regional authorities, as building a climate-proof society and ensuring the support of the communities will depend on this link.</i> In addition, the Commission may also draw on the multilevel climate and energy dialogues as set up by Member States in accordance with Article 11 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1999, <i>as well as on</i></p>	<p>The Commission considers that the transition to climate neutrality will require the involvement and commitment of all sectors of society, including local and regional authorities.</p> <p>In this context, the Climate Pact proposed under the European Green Deal aims to harness exemplary action on the ground, through the design and showcasing of new climate action, sharing of information and best practice, and the launch of grassroots activities.</p> <p>As indicated in the adjusted Commission Work Programme 2020, the Commission plans to launch the European Climate Pact in December 2020.</p>

<i>the actions under the Climate Pact.</i>	
5. calls on the Commission to consider the impact of the United Kingdom leaving the EU on reaching the aim of climate-neutrality and any interim targets; recalls that the UK is currently the EU's second-largest CO2 emitter, with ongoing and planned reductions well above the EU average and a legally binding national climate target of around 57% by 2030;	The above-mentioned impact assessment published on 30 September 2020, together with the Communication on Stepping up Europe's 2030 Climate Ambition sets out the overall architecture for achieving EU-wide the proposed increase in the 2030 climate target. It therefore takes account of the impact of the United Kingdom leaving the EU on reaching such targets.
7. [...] renews its call to the Member States and the European Commission to establish a permanent Multilevel Energy Dialogue Platform in order to support the active participation of local and regional authorities, civil society organisations, the business community and other relevant stakeholders in the management of the energy transition	As regards multilevel climate and energy dialogues and the Climate Pact, see the comments made in relation to amendments 6 and 17 above.
10. Stresses that the European Climate Law, as the central pillar of the European Green Deal and the framework law to achieve climate neutrality, should ensure that all EU measures adhere to the "do no harm" principle and, in line with the principle of active subsidiarity, fully respect all levels of government as partners in the European decision-making process, not as stakeholders;	Under Article 5(4) of the proposal the Commission is to assess any draft measure or legislative proposal in light of the climate-neutrality objective, and to make the result of that assessment public at the time of adoption. This provision will therefore contribute to operationalising the green oath: 'do no harm'.  Moreover, the proposal fully respects the subsidiarity principle and acknowledges the need for coordinated action between all levels of government. A robust governance of the EU 2050 climate-neutrality objective will help to ensure the cooperation of all sectors in achieving the objective, relying on the substantial framework provided by the Governance Regulation.
14. maintains that the Governance Regulation should lay down provisions to ensure that nationally determined contributions (NDCs) include a breakdown of regionally and locally	The Commission considers that the role of sub-national authorities is key in contributing to the achievement of the climate-neutrality objective and EU

<p>determined contributions in order to recognise the role of sub-national authorities in achieving international climate commitments: <i>Climate governance after 2020: a European and global perspective – a contribution to the UNFCCC COP24</i> by Andrew Varah Cooper;</p>	<p>international climate commitments. However, as the Commission has previously indicated, it is for the Member States as Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to decide to include an aggregation of regionally and locally determined contributions.</p>
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**N°5 Towards a Roadmap for Clean Hydrogen – the contribution of local and regional authorities to a climate-neutral Europe**  
**COR-2020-00549 – ENVE-VII/004**  
**139<sup>th</sup> plenary session – July 2020**  
**Rapporteur: Birgit HONÉ (DE/PES)**  
**DG ENER – Commissioner SIMSON**

**Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential**

**European Commission position**

Given that this own initiative opinion is fully aligned with the Communication ‘Hydrogen strategy for a climate-neutral Europe’ presented in July 2020<sup>41</sup> and that the Commission agrees with the thrust of the opinion and also with most of the details, a reply is deemed not necessary.

Moreover, the Commission welcomes in particular the points stressing the specific role of local and regional authorities in fostering a hydrogen economy.

Hence no follow-up needs to be given by the Commission.

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<sup>41</sup> COM(2020) 301 final.

<p><b>N°6      Just Transition Fund</b>  <b>COM(2020) 22 final,</b>  <b>COM(2020) 23 final,</b>  <b>COM(2020) 460 final</b>  <b>COR-2020-00418 – COTER-VII/002</b>  <b>139<sup>th</sup> plenary session – July 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Vojko OBERSNEL (HR/PES)</b>  <b>DG REGIO – Commissioner FERREIRA</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>7. CoR asks the European Commission to place the new Just Transition Fund under Heading 2 (Cohesion and Values) of the MFF 2021-2027 instead of Heading 3 (Natural Resources and Environment), and reiterates its rejection of the envisaged cuts to cohesion policy; recalls the CoR's call that all of the ESIF national co-financing is excluded from the calculations on the Stability and Growth Pact; considers that the same should be applicable for the Just Transition Fund;</p>	<p>The Commission recalls that the Just Transition Fund is one of the components of the Green Deal Investment Plan. Heading 3 is the appropriate part of the Multiannual Financial Framework to embed a programme that aims at reaching environmental and climate objectives in a just manner.</p> <p>In terms of resources for the Just Transition Fund, the agreement reached at the European Council provides for €7.5 billion under the Multiannual Financial Framework and €10 billion under Next Generation EU, in 2018 prices. Resources for Cohesion Policy under the Multiannual Financial Framework increase in the July 2020 European Council agreement compared to the Commission's May 2020 proposal, to €330.2 billion in 2018 prices. Complemented by €47.5 billion in 2018 prices for ReactEU under Next Generation EU, the total resources to be implemented through Cohesion Policy are higher than those for EU27 (i.e. excluding the UK) within the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework.</p> <p>Regarding the links with the Stability and Growth Pact, the Commission believes that sound fiscal and economic policies are an important condition for sustainable</p>

economic growth and jobs. They ensure a favourable environment for investments, and are a precondition for effective cohesion policy.

Under the preventive arm of the Pact, certain government investments can be eligible for a temporary deviation from the medium-term budgetary objective or the adjustment path towards it, under the so-called ‘investment clause’, provided they lead to the increase in the public investment levels and other eligibility conditions are fulfilled. These investments must be national expenditures on projects co-funded by the European Union under the European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, the Trans-European Networks and the Connecting Europe Facility, as well as national co-financing of projects also co-financed by the European Fund for Strategic Investments. In its Communication on the Economic Governance Review, the Commission has invited all stakeholders to engage in a debate to provide their views on how the economic governance framework has functioned so far and on possible ways to enhance its effectiveness. Originally, the aim was to collect the feedback within the first half of 2020. However, the public debate has been impacted by the need to focus on the immediate challenges of the coronavirus crisis. Therefore, the period of public consultation has been extended and the Commission will return to the review exercise once these challenges have been addressed. The Commission will consider all views and on that basis complete its internal reflections on the scope for any possible

	future steps.
<p>10. CoR requests that no support from JTF or JTM should be granted to investments in NUTS-3 regions where an opening of a new coal, lignite or oil shale mine or of a peat extraction field or a reopening of a temporarily decommissioned coal, lignite or oil shale mine or of a peat extraction field has been granted public authorisation;</p>	<p>The Commission recalls that the draft regulation requires an approved territorial just transition plan for the impacted territory to access the Just Transition Fund (JTF) and the remaining two pillars of the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM). It also establishes that the territorial just transition plan is consistent with the National Energy and Climate Plan of the Member State concerned and the EU objective of climate neutrality by 2050. The opening or reopening of fossil fuel extraction operations would not be compatible with these conditions.</p>
<p>15. CoR is concerned about the delay the JTF may cause to the implementation of the main programmes of cohesion policy; is also concerned about the complexity and red tape that management of this new fund could create for the management of the main programmes of cohesion policy;</p>	<p>The Commission would like to recall that the negotiations between the co-legislators are on-going. The first trilogue took place on 9 November 2020 and a second one is scheduled for 24 November 2020. The Commission is assisting the co-legislators in their effort to conclude the negotiation before the end of the year.</p> <p>The Commission would also like to inform that most Member States have already started the preparation of the territorial just transition plans, in 18 of them with technical support provided by the Commission under the Structural Reforms Support Programme. Many Member States also build on their experience with the Coal Regions in Transition process to further the territorial just transition plans. The Commission staff is also in regular contact with the relevant national regional and local authorities and other stakeholders, including through a technical assistance platform launched in May 2020 to facilitate access to all relevant information, provide assistance and help share best practices and knowledge</p>

	<p>to enhance programming and implementation of these resources.</p> <p>The Commission is also making all efforts to simplify procedures to all stakeholders. The Commission recalls that the provisions of the Common Provisions Regulation will also apply to the Just Transition Fund (JTF), which ensures a substantial alignment of procedures. It also provides for the JTF with procedures with which member states and stakeholders are already very familiar with.</p>
<p>16. CoR finds it regrettable that the Commission's proposal aims to establish programmes at NUTS 3 level instead of NUTS 2, which is the level at which the main programmes of cohesion policy are implemented. This proposal runs counter to the notion of functional areas, which are not necessarily identical to the administrative NUTS 3 areas. The CoR underlines that only one corresponding territorial plan at NUTS 2 level should be required.</p>	<p>The Commission is of the opinion that concentrating the Just Transition Fund support at the level of nomenclature of territorial units for statistics - NUTS 3 territories will ensure its greater focus on the territories effectively impacted by the transition and effectiveness of the interventions envisaged.</p> <p>Enabling support at NUTS 2 level for regions could lead to the dispersion of funding away from the areas most in need.</p> <p>The Commission also believes that it should be each Member State's decision how many territorial just transition plans and at which level should be prepared, depending as well on the number of programmes supported by the Just Transition Fund.</p> <p>In this regard, the Country Reports under the 2020 European Semester process gave a steer for the programming by setting out the Commission's position in this regard.</p>
<p>17. CoR calls for the scope of support of the Just Transition Fund to be expanded so that, in agreement with the European Commission and the Member States, local and regional authorities can include additional eligible projects in their territorial just transition plans. The CoR also requests</p>	<p>The Commission is of the opinion that a broad opening to include any action to be justified through the plans would undermine legal certainty and shift the negotiating burden from the legislative to the programming negotiations (with some guiding policy from the Commission in the</p>

<p>that unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, be taken into account as a key indicator for the distribution of the resources allocated to the fund;</p>	<p>end).</p> <p>The Commission would like to underline that given the wide range of possibilities this would potentially open up, the scope of the Just Transition Fund would be blurred, thus creating the need to significantly extend the list of exclusions.</p> <p>As there are no common indicators linked to these undefined additional actions, it would not be possible to aggregate the results of such support at EU level either.</p> <p>Regarding the allocation methodology, the Commission would like to recall that it is based on economic and social indicators of the Member States and regions concerned which reflect the Fund's aim to target regions and sectors that are most affected by the transition due to their reliance on fossil fuels and energy intensive industries, and which have less resources available to tackle this challenge.</p> <p>The Commission believes that this allocation method helps ensure that the distribution of funds is sufficiently concentrated on Member States where the challenges are more important, while offering a meaningful support to all Member States.</p>
<p>21. CoR calls for transfers to the JTF to be capped at 20% of the operational programme's initial ERDF and ESF+ allocations. The CoR suggests giving managing authorities more flexibility by making transfers on a voluntary basis pursuant to Article 6 (2) of the draft regulation with a maximum amount of up to 1.5 times the amount of support from the JTF and only with the consent of the local and regional authorities involved;</p>	<p>Given that the resources financed from Next Generation EU must be committed before 2023, the transfers from European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) would ensure an appropriate level of support beyond this timeline, complementing the Just Transition Fund resources financed from the budget (Multiannual Financial Framework).</p> <p>Establishing a 20% cap at programme level would lead to arbitrary and possibly</p>

	<p>inconsistent levels across Member States depending on the setup and the budget of individual programmes.</p> <p>Additionally, as proposed by the Commission in Article 21a of the amended Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), resources transferred from either the ERDF or the ESF+ cannot exceed 20% of the respective ERDF and ESF+ allocation to the Member State concerned.</p>
<p>24. CoR welcomes the fact that the Regulation defines specific elements that need to be included in the territorial just transition plans. The CoR calls on the legislative authority to add to those elements a clear commitment to the goals of the Paris agreement, to the EU's goal of climate neutrality by 2050 and to its reduction targets for 2030;</p>	<p>The Commission would like to recall that the Just Transition Fund resources are not granted automatically but subject to approved territorial just transition plans. According to Article 7(2)(a) of the proposed JTF regulation, these need to include a description of the transition process at national level towards a climate neutral economy, including a timeline for key transition steps which are consistent with the latest version of the National Energy and Climate Plans.</p> <p>The European Council Agreement (point 100 of the European Council Conclusions of 21 July 2020<sup>42</sup>) provides that access to the Just Transition Fund will be limited to 50% of national allocation for Member States that have not yet committed to implementing the objective of achieving a climate-neutral EU by 2050, in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement.</p> <p>The Commission will be extremely vigilant on that point when discussing with Member States the future territorial just transition plans.</p>
<p>20. CoR stresses that affected territories should not have to provide exhaustive lists in their territorial just transition plans of</p>	<p>The Commission would like to underline that the list of investments included in the territorial just transition plans, together with</p>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45109/210720-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf>

<p>potential companies and/or operations to which they might grant support, as this could cause delays in their adoption and might lead to unnecessary administrative burdens on managing authorities. The CoR points out in this respect that a separate procedure for the adoption of major projects has been omitted from the Commission's proposal for the new CPR and that such a list of beneficiaries and/or operations could reverse this again;</p>	<p>their tailored justification, will enable the Commission to verify the justification and hence the eligibility of the operations.</p> <p>This list will be limited only to investments where support is provided to productive investments to enterprises other than SMEs or where support is provided to investments to achieve the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from activities listed in Annex I to Directive 2003/87/EC<sup>43</sup> as proposed respectively under points h) and i) of Article 7(2) of the JTF proposal.</p> <p>The corresponding burden is therefore expected to remain limited and is far from the requirements that existed for major project assessments under the 2014-2020 framework.</p> <p>This requirement, which enables also the Commission to verify that the applicable eligibility conditions are met, respects the subsidiarity principle.</p>
<p>26. CoR welcomes in this respect the creation of the Just Transition Platform, which should be built on the positive experiences with the carbon-intensive regions, and other regions that have successfully managed to move from fossil fuels to clean energy sources. The CoR underlines that this platform should make sure that all relevant Commission services and the EIB work closely together to address structural change in the affected regions. The CoR undertakes to engage closely in the operation of the Just Transition Platform, in particular by co-organising an Annual Forum of Just Transition Regions with the European</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee's readiness to engage actively in sharing the positive experiences among the regions to be supported by the Just Transition Fund.</p> <p>A close cooperation of all institutions is necessary for bringing the necessary structural changes in the transition regions.</p>

<sup>43</sup> Directive 2003/87/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 October 2003 establishing a scheme for greenhouse gas emission allowance trading within the Community and amending Council Directive 96/61/EC; OJ L 275, 25.10.2003, p. 32–46.

Commission;	
<p>28. CoR highlights that support via the Just Transition Fund for productive investments in enterprises other than SMEs should not be limited to those areas that are eligible for State aid under Article°107(3)(a) and (c) of the TFEU under the existing State aid rules. State aid law should instead allow all areas benefiting from the Just Transition Fund to counteract the threat of job losses effectively at an early stage. This should also be ensured by adapting the General Block Exemption Regulation accordingly;</p>	<p>The Commission would like to underline that the proposed regulation is not the appropriate legal instrument to introduce any derogations to State aid rules.</p> <p>The Commission notes that, as a cohesion policy fund, the implementation of the Just Transition Fund needs to comply with the applicable State aid rules that apply for all cohesion policy funds. State aid rules have been developed in light of the Commission’s experience, to focus aid on investments where State intervention brings added value. This ensures that State support – including support under the Just Transition Fund – is targeted at those investments that will bring the greatest benefits to society. This is also the case for regional aid, which incentivises certain investments in areas eligible for aid under Article 107(3)(a) and (c) of the TFEU.</p> <p>In order to ensure that State aid remains targeted at the investments that bring the most added value, the Commission regularly revises State aid rules. In this regard, under its communication on the European Green Deal Investment Plan, the Commission has committed to revising a number of State aid rules, with a view to fostering the transition. If regional aid guidelines regulating public support to productive investments are revised, the implementation of the Just Transition Fund will follow the applicable provisions.</p>

<p><b>N°7 The services package: An updated view from Europe's local and regional authorities</b>  <b>COM(2016) 824 final</b>  <b>COM(2016) 823 final</b>  <b>COM(2016) 821final</b>  <b>COM(2016) 820 final</b>  <b>COM(2016) 822/2 final</b>  <b>COR-2020-00150 – ECON-VII/003</b>  <b>139<sup>th</sup> plenary session – July 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Jean-Luc VANRAES (BE/RE)</b>  <b>DG GROW – Commissioner BRETON</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>12. urges the Commission to analyse the most common business and professional activities in each Member State, which could already benefit from the current Services Directive, so that a comprehensive list of unnecessary costs and bottlenecks for entrepreneurs can be put together as soon as possible; also urges the Commission to draw up, as a matter of urgency, a recommendation containing a standard model for points of single contact – provided for in Article 6 of the Directive – so that Member States can follow a common design to make them as easy as possible for providers to use in their different languages, as happens in the area of technical regulations with great efficiency and minimum translation costs;</p>	<p>The Communication<sup>44</sup> (and accompanying staff working document<sup>45</sup>) on identifying and addressing barriers to the Single Market, adopted by the Commission on 10 March 2020, provides an overview of the most important barriers to the single market as reported by businesses.</p> <p>Regarding the points of single contact, Regulation establishing a single digital gateway<sup>46</sup> aims at facilitating online access to the information, administrative procedures and assistance and problem-solving services that businesses need to become active in another Member State. By the end of 2020, business users of the gateway will be able, through a common user interface, to find reliable and comprehensive information on EU and national rules that apply to them when they want to establish or buy/sell products and services in another Member State. This will allow them to know how to carry out</p>

<sup>44</sup> COM(2020) 93 final.

<sup>45</sup> SWD(2020) 54 final.

<sup>46</sup> Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 October 2018 establishing a single digital gateway to provide access to information, to procedures and to assistance and problem-solving services and amending Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012; OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 1–38.

	<p>applicable administrative procedures (including e.g. the steps they need to follow to do so). The information will need to be provided in an official EU language broadly understood by the largest possible number of cross-border users in addition to the national language.</p> <p>The points of single contact are covered by the single digital gateway regulation. Therefore, they will need to comply with the requirements that the regulation establishes on quality, availability and user-friendliness of information; assistance and problem-solving services; and cross-border access to procedures.</p>
<p>33. points to the need to strike the right balance between the efforts required by notification obligations and the added value for reaching the objectives of the Services Directive, taking into account that most local and regional regulations have an insignificant effect on the Single Market and are likely to comply with the Service Directive's requirements;</p>	<p>Regulations adopted at local and regional level are covered by the Services Directive<sup>47</sup> and must comply with the provisions of that Directive.</p> <p>Regulations adopted at local and regional level are part of the legal framework applicable to service providers. The adoption by local or regional authorities of rules that do not comply with Services Directive can constitute an important obstacle to the provision of services on the Single Market, in particular if these authorities are entrusted with competences to regulate service activities or benefit of a certain regulatory freedom in that area. Furthermore, there are no elements to affirm that rules adopted at local and regional level are more compliant with the provisions of the Services Directive.</p> <p>In the view of the Commission therefore, the general statement that <i>'most local and regional regulations have an insignificant effect on the Single Market and are likely to</i></p>

<sup>47</sup> Directive 2006/123/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on services in the internal market; OJ L 376, 27.12.2006, p. 36–68

	<p><i>comply with the Service Directive's requirements'</i> does not fully reflect the reality.</p>
<p>38. emphasises the importance of the principles of non-discrimination, proportionality and public interest as applied in the Services Directive, and underlines in the local and regional regulatory context that Recital 9 of the Services Directive explicitly excludes from its scope rules concerning the development or use of land and town and country planning.</p>	<p>Recital 9 of the Services Directive excludes from that Directive the rules concerning the development or use of land and town and country planning, only in so far as such rules do not specifically regulate or specifically affect the service activity. In case rules related to the development or use of land or town and country planning contain requirements as defined by the provisions of the Services Directive, that Directive is fully applicable and the regional or local rules in question must comply with it. The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruling in the <i>Visser Vastgoed Beleggingen</i> case<sup>48</sup> is also of relevance in this regard.</p> <p>Therefore, the general affirmation that <i>'Recital 9 of the Services Directive explicitly excludes from its scope rules concerning the development or use of land and town and country planning'</i> is not correct since such rules are covered by the Services Directive if they contain requirements which regulate or affect the service activities.</p>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vkd18oekgvyr?d=07-11-2017>  
<http://curia.europa.eu/juris/liste.jsf?language=en&num=C-360/15>

**N°8 Implementation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs): the regional and local perspective**  
**COR-2019-04764 – ECON-VII/001**  
**139<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – July 2020**  
**Rapporteur: Michael MURPHY (IE/EPP)**  
**DG TRADE – Executive Vice-President DOMBROVSKIS**

<b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b>	<b>European Commission position</b>
<p>4. Underlines the importance of free rule-based international trade, which benefits all trade partners. Calls on the Commission to keep defending the EU's trade interests and fight the rising trend of protectionism.</p>	<p>The Commission remains committed to a free rule-based trading system and has been leading initiatives to strengthen World Trade Organization (WTO) reform, including the establishment of an Interim appeal arrangement for WTO disputes. In its current trade policy review (see in more detail point 11 below) the Commission is seeking input on how to promote an 'Open Strategic Autonomy' - reaping the benefits of openness for businesses, workers and consumers, while protecting them from unfair practices and building up resilience to be better equipped for future challenges.</p>
<p>5. Notes that the impact of FTAs in the EU is felt at regional level. The CoR therefore calls on the Commission to keep it systematically informed and to take account of the possible local and regional repercussions of trade at an early stage in the negotiations.</p>	<p>The Commission annually reports to the Committee on the implementation of EU trade agreements; The Commission/DG TRADE systematically engages with the Committee on its opinions on international trade, e.g. on its Opinion of 23 March 2018 on the Trade Package<sup>49</sup>. The Commission also carries out ex ante assessments of the economic, social and environmental impact of the trade agreement in question informed by a public consultation. Information on ongoing negotiations including EU textual proposals are available on the Commission's website<sup>50</sup>.</p>

<sup>49</sup> CDR 5423/2017 - ECON-VI/029

<sup>50</sup> <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1395>

<p>9. Welcomes the fact that, on 22 December 2017, the Commission set up an Expert Group on Trade Agreements with the aim of improving transparency and inclusiveness in EU trade policy; notes that none of the 28 experts in the group<sup>51</sup> represent a local or regional authority or one of their associations; calls on the Commission to maintain the Expert Group in its current form and to preserve the CoR's position as an observer. In case where the general structure of the Expert Group is to change, the CoR asks to be invited as a member</p>	<p>The mandate of the Expert Group on Trade Agreements was tied to the previous Commission's mandate and expired at the end of 2019. The Commission continues to seek input from experts through its Civil Society Dialogue (CSD), which is currently under review<sup>52</sup>. The Chief Trade Enforcement Officer (CTEO), appointed by the College on 24 July 2020, will liaise with all relevant parties in order to improve engagement on implementation and enforcement.</p>
<p>11. Welcomes the Commission's announcement to launch trade policy review proceedings, leading to a new strategy by the end of the year. However, the CoR calls on the Commission to ensure that this review gives due diligence and attention to the issue of implementation of Free Trade Agreements in regions and cities of the Member States.</p>	<p>The Commission launched a public consultation<sup>53</sup> on 16 June 2020 in all official EU languages, open until 15 November 2020. The Commission is particularly interested in getting the views of regional and local players, who are familiar with the needs of small- and medium-sized enterprises, in order to hear how trade policy can best support them in gaining access to third country markets or improving their supply chains.</p>
<p>27. Supports the Commission's view that EU trade agreements offer great potential for EU exports in agricultural products but is concerned that the draft interim report on the sustainability impact assessment for the trade agreement with Mercosur suggests that agriculture and rural areas in the EU are expected to experience negative effects, which is why some Member States have rejected the agreement in its current form; Also insists that the Mercosur agreement is to be assessed against the objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In this</p>	<p>The EU-Mercosur Agreement fully takes into account the sensitivities of European farmers by offering modest market access with well-calibrated Tariff Rate Quotas (TRQs) which only amount to a small fraction of EU production. In addition, thanks to the agreement, important partners like Brazil reaffirmed their commitment to sustainable development objectives and to respecting the Paris Agreement, which for example commits Brazil to fight illegal deforestation and to re-forest 12 million hectares.</p>

<sup>51</sup> [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2017/december/tradoc\\_156487.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2017/december/tradoc_156487.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=2134>

<sup>53</sup> [https://trade.ec.europa.eu/consultations/index.cfm?consul\\_id=266](https://trade.ec.europa.eu/consultations/index.cfm?consul_id=266)

<p>regard, the ratification of the EU-Mercosur should be conditional upon measures reversing the current record level deforestation in Brazil's Amazon.</p>	
<p>34. Recalls, in light of the strong evidence on regional patterns in international trade, that if the EU is to introduce further liberalisation of trade, it is imperative that every significant initiative in the field is preceded by impact assessments focusing on the possible effects on the national and particularly sub-national levels.</p>	<p>The Commission carries out an impact assessment prior to negotiations of any trade agreement with significant effects, as well as a sustainability impact assessment during the negotiations and an ex post evaluation, typically carried out 5 years after its first application. The Commission's focus is on impact at European level; Member States' authorities are best placed to analyse regional and local impacts. The experience and information gathered by the Commission can inform national and regional studies and support regions in understanding and managing expected impacts, in particular between signature and entry into force.</p>
<p>43. Also calls for EU FTAs to include strict rules on transfer mispricing, fraudulent transfer pricing and tax evasion by listed companies.</p>	<p>The Commission is actively engaged in promoting tax good governance in the EU and internationally. To this end, the Communication on tax good governance adopted on 15 July 2020<sup>54</sup> sets out a balanced approach, including improving the EU listing process and supporting developing countries in a framework of dialogue and engagement with the third countries concerned. In the same spirit, in addition to the good governance clause in international agreements, the Commission seeks to include references to the relevant international standards in the services chapter when modernising or negotiating new trade agreements.</p>
<p>45. Welcomes, in that regard, the Commission's decision to appoint a Chief</p>	<p>The Chief Trade Enforcement Officer (CTEO) was appointed at Deputy Director-</p>

<sup>54</sup> Short-term EU health preparedness for COVID-19 outbreaks:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication - short-term eu health preparedness.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication_-_short-term_eu_health_preparedness.pdf)

Trade Enforcement Officer to closely monitor the implementation of climate, environmental and labour protections enshrined in EU trade agreements, and is confident that the Chief Trade Enforcement Officer will establish solid channels of communication with civil society and local and regional authorities; calls on the European Commission to ensure that sufficient resources are assigned to the Office to ensure that it achieves its objectives.

General level in Directorate-General for Trade (DG TRADE) on 24 July 2020. DG TRADE has recently adapted its organisational structure to provide adequate support to the new function. The Chief Trade Enforcement Officer is supported by a newly created single entry point to receive and manage complaints related to market access and to trade and sustainable development commitments, and by a restructured legal team with well-developed expertise in trade and sustainable development matters.