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97th REPORT

N°	TITLE / LEAD DG	REFERENCES
SG.D2		
1.	<u>Delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030</u> Rapporteur: Ricardo RIO (PT/EPP)	Own-initiative COR-2021-00103-00-01-AC-TRA ECON-VII/014
SG.E1		
2.	<u>European Democracy Action Plan</u> Rapporteur: Aleksandra DULKIEWICZ (PL/EPP)	COM(2020) 790 final COR-2021-01278-00-00-AC-TRA CIVEX-VII/008
DG JUST		
3.	<u>Strategy to strengthen the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights</u> Rapporteur: Jean-Luc VANRAES (BE/RENEW E.)	COM(2020) 711 final COR-2021-00433-00-00-AC-TRA CIVEX-VII/006
DG HOME		
4.	<u>Resilience of critical entities</u> Rapporteur: Mario GUARENTE (IT/ECR)	COM(2020) 829 final COR-2021-00570-00-00-AC-TRA NAT-VII/017
DG CNECT		
5.	<u>Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act</u> Rapporteur: Rodi KRATSA (EL/EPP)	COM(2020) 825 final COM(2020) 842 final COR-2020-05356-00-00-AC-TRA ECON-VII/012
DG CLIMA		
6.	<u>Forging a climate-resilient Europe – the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change</u> Rapporteur: Markku MARKKULA (FI/EPP)	COM(2021) 82 final COR-2021-01903-00-00-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/017

7.	<u>Stepping up Europe's 2030 climate ambition towards COP26</u> Rapporteur: Vincent CHAUVET (FR/RENEW E.)	COM(2020) 562 final COR-2020-05068-00-00-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/013
DG ENER		
8.	<u>Revised Trans-European Energy Infrastructure Regulation fit for the Green and Digital Transition</u> Rapporteur: Robert Sorin NEGOIȚĂ (RO/EPP)	COM(2020) 824 final COR-2021-00722-00-00-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/016
DG MOVE		
9.	<u>Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy</u> Rapporteur: Robert VAN ASTEN (NL/RENEW E.)	Own-initiative COR-2021-00497-00-00-AC-TRA COTER-VII/011
10.	<u>The future of regional airports – challenges and opportunities</u> Rapporteur: Władysław ORTYL (PL/ECR)	Own-initiative COR-2021-00471-00-01-AC-TRA COTER-VII/010
DG EMPL		
11.	<u>An Action Plan for the Social Economy</u> Rapporteur: Mikel IRUJO AMEZAGA (ES/EA)	Optional (outlook) COR-2020-05860-00-00-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/016
12.	<u>Future plan for care workers and care services – local and regional opportunities in the context of a European challenge</u> Rapporteur: Heinrich DORNER (AT/PES)	Own-initiative COR-2020-05862-00-00-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/017
DG NEAR		
13.	<u>Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood. A new Agenda for the Mediterranean</u> Rapporteur: Vincenzo BIANCO (IT/PES)	JOIN(2021) 2 final COR-2021-01952-00-01-AC-TRA CIVEX-VII/010

<p>N°1 Delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 Own-initiative opinion COR-2021-00103 – ECON-VII-014 145th plenary session – June/July 2021 Rapporteur: Ricardo RIO (PT/EPP) SG – President VON DER LEYEN</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1. considers the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as essential [...] therefore, urges European leaders to be ambitious and consistent in their domestic and foreign policy agendas and to declare with one clear purpose that, in the context of the UN Decade for Action on Sustainable Development, the European Union must be a leader and visible champion in the implementation of the SDGs at all governmental levels;</p>	<p>Sustainable development is a core principle of the Treaty on European Union and a priority objective for the Union’s internal and external policies. The Commission Staff Working Document ‘Delivering on the UN’s SDGs – A Comprehensive Approach’¹ reaffirms this commitment to sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.</p> <p>Under the leadership of President von der Leyen, the Commission has presented an ambitious policy programme to deliver on sustainability in the EU and beyond. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an intrinsic part of the President’s political programme and lie at the heart of the policymaking on internal and external action across all sectors. This commitment to the 2030 Agenda has also been demonstrated recently by the substantial engagement and high-level representation of the Commission at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2021.</p>
<p>2. believes that this opinion must be seen as encouragement for the European Commission to reinforce the SDGs as an integral part of European core values and identity, and thus give it an appropriately high profile in its overarching narrative and priorities;</p> <p>6. regrets moreover that the SDGs have progressively lost ground in the EU narrative, with a lower profile in EU policy-making,</p>	<p>The SDGs are at the heart of EU’s policy-making, as highlighted by the Commission Work Programme 2020. The Commission is taking forward its commitment to sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in a comprehensive way through its internal and external action policies. The Commission is i.e. designing and applying deeply transformative policies, delivering progress in the areas of the</p>

¹ [SWD\(2020\) 400](#) final of 18.11.2020.

<p>which is jeopardising their chances of implementation by 2030;</p> <p>and</p> <p>9. welcomes the European Commission's Staff Working Document on Delivering SDGs by 2030 as a useful report on implementation, but regrets that it merely lists initiatives labelled under SDGs;</p>	<p>SDGs through the Union's budget, integrating SDGs in the European Semester, mainstreaming the SDGs in policymaking using better regulation tools, monitoring progress at Member State and European Union levels, contributing to the global implementation of SDGs through its external action, as well as engaging civil society, private sector and other stakeholders.</p>
<p>4. continues to support, however, the request [...] to formulate an overarching strategy for the sustainable development goals, replacing the Europe 2020 strategy and realising the shared vision of the sustainable development model that we would like to promote for and from the European Union, enabling all local and regional authorities to share the same objectives and targets through the same language;</p>	<p>As underlined in the Commission Staff Working Document 'Delivering on the UN's SDGs – A Comprehensive Approach', the Commission's approach is to focus on delivering concrete actions that will bring tangible progress in the areas of the SDGs. The President's political guidelines and the Commission's annual work programmes constitute this Commission's strategy to implement the SDGs, putting the onus squarely on the implementation.</p>
<p>5. points out that the EU's trade policy review aims to promote greater sustainability in line with its commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals; only a sustainable and coherent trade model, that meets the fundamental values of the European Union, can contribute to the well-being and prosperity of all, both within the EU and in other parts of the world;</p>	<p>Sustainability is at the centre of EU's trade policy. This is what the EU Trade Policy Review Communication of 18 February 2021² clearly underlines, by further promoting trade policy for sustainability. Trade policy will contribute to EU policies on sustainable development, including in the fight against climate change and on other environmental objectives as outlined in the European Green Deal, while ensuring that the potential contributions of trade are effective and in line with the international obligations of the EU. Furthermore, the initiatives that the EU is taking at the multilateral level, the Trade and Sustainable Development chapters in the EU's Free Trade Agreements, as well as our unilateral trade preferences are all oriented towards contributing to the fulfilment of the SDGs.</p>
<p>7. considers that the communication and peer-learning capacity around SDGs is a crucial element for raising awareness and commitment</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that the potential for mutual learning with respect to policies furthering the achievement of the SDGs is considerable.</p>

² COM(2021) 66 final.

<p>from all counterparts, which requires a stronger alignment between the EU's governance systems in economic, social and environmental matters, such as the European Semester, the European Green Deal and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and sustainable development goals;</p>	<p>Also for that reason, it intends to continue its efforts to integrate the SDGs in the relevant governance processes such as the European Semester for economic policy coordination. The new headline targets for 2030 proposed in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan as well as the revised social scoreboard are in line with the 2030 Agenda and its monitoring framework.</p>
<p>11. welcomes the commitment expressed in the "Communication on Better Regulation" of 29 April 2021 to mainstream the SDGs across all policies as well as to identify relevant SDGs for each proposal and to examine how the initiative will support their achievement, thereby echoing the CoR's previous request . Moreover, the CoR considers transparent and broad-based ex-ante impact assessments as especially important for proposals' sustainability-check;</p>	<p>The Commission thanks the Committee and agrees that broad-based impact assessments, including stakeholders' input, are important for proposals' sustainability-check. The strong green and digital ambitions of this Commission, together with its focus on the 'do no significant harm' and 'digital-by-default' principles and the SDGs will be more prominent in the analysis and more consistently reported. Links to the SDGs will be included throughout evaluations and impact assessments. Linking the relevant SDGs in the analysis of significant economic, environmental and social impacts will help ensure that every legislative proposal contributes to the 2030 Agenda. The integration of foresight in policymaking will also strengthen the future proofing of our regulations.</p> <p>The Commission proposals' explanatory memoranda will summarise the key findings of the impact assessment (or ex-ante evaluation) relevant to the SDGs and ensure transparency for the other institutions and the public.</p>
<p>12. welcomes the focus of the staff working document on the importance of stakeholders' participation and on the recognition of the role and work of both the European Committee of the Regions and local and regional authorities [...] and</p> <p>13. notes that the previously announced means for further exchange and dialogue via</p>	<p>Engaging stakeholders is at the heart of the Agenda 2030 and therefore it is essential to mobilise all stakeholders to ensure broad awareness and collective ownership.</p> <p>In line with the better regulation rules, the Commission will continue to engage in a meaningful way with stakeholders in different policy areas in order to design policies that are fit for purpose, contribute to the implementation of the SDGs and leave no one behind. The Better</p>

<p>conferences and periodic events held by the European Commission have not yet materialised and is calling for closer collaboration between the European Commission, the Council, the European Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions on the implementation of SDGs at EU level;</p> <p>and</p> <p>22. [...] asks the European Commission to renew the SDG platform or create another dialogue platform with clout and structured follow-up to foster expertise from all the different stakeholders from public and private institutions regarding the 2030 Agenda and to advise the EC directly;</p> <p>and</p> <p>57. asks the EU to create incentives to promote participatory measures from the public and local organisations to implement the SDGs. These incentives should improve the dissemination of the 2030 Agenda and promote the SDGs among the general population, both in Europe and beyond through multi-level and multi-stakeholder partnerships;</p>	<p>Regulation Communication of April 2021³ introduced several improvements that will gradually take effect. The Commission will consolidate its consultation steps into a single ‘call for evidence’, an optimized consultation process to engage better with the public and all stakeholders, in a more focused, clearer and user-friendly way, on the ‘Have Your Say’ web portal. Calls for evidence will consist of a description of the initiative and as a general rule, they will all be available in all EU official languages. The Committee can play a significant role both in contributing and in disseminating the public consultations.</p> <p>In addition, the Conference on the Future of Europe is a public forum for an open, inclusive, transparent and structured debate with citizens around a number of key priorities and challenges, including the implementation of the SDGs.</p> <p>While the high-level SDG multi-stakeholder platform’s mandate expired in 2019, the good cooperation that was established is now being taken forward in the European Climate Pact and in the context of preparing individual initiatives. The European Climate Pact is a non-legislative initiative to bring together different stakeholders and civil society with the aim of making them commit to action and more sustainable behaviour. It will support an enhanced coordination in the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the SDGs.</p>
<p>14. underlines that the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of sustainable development and that SDGs can help move towards a coherent, holistic vision within the NextGenerationEU and in the establishment of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) as part of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), in particular;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that the pandemic underlines the interconnectedness of economic, social and environmental spheres as well as the need to pursue its holistic approach with regard to implementing the SDGs. The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) will channel funds to make our society and economy better prepared for challenges that future generations will face. As</p>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/better_regulation_joining_forces_to_make_better_laws_en_0.pdf

<p>and</p> <p>15. considers that the lack of involvement of local and regional authorities in some Member States and the lack of a meaningful consultation process in the formulation of NRRPs, through the designation of priorities and planned action, is compromising the success of the plans in these Member States, as the regional perspectives of far-reaching economic, social and environmental transformation are only partially reflected.</p>	<p>already outlined in the Communication on the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021⁴, the RRF will help to build a more sustainable, resilient and fairer Europe for the next generation in line with the SDGs. This is also reflected in the RRF Regulation and the RRF will play a crucial role in delivering on the ambitious climate objectives and Europe’s sustainable growth strategy set out in the European Green Deal. The Commission underlines the importance of tackling climate change, to which the RRF will contribute significantly since at least 37% of each Recovery and Resilience Plan’s (RRP) financial allocation needs to contribute to the green transition.</p> <p>The Commission agrees that the implementation of the RRP’s can only succeed with strong regional and local ownership, as well as support from social partners and civil society at every stage of the process. As set out in the RRF Regulation⁵, the Commission has strongly encouraged Member States to undertake proper consultations and involve stakeholders prior to the submission of the RRP’s, in order to build the necessary national ownership of the plans. The Regulation also requires Member States to outline how their plan will contribute to enhancing cohesion, taking into account local, regional and national disparities. Regional authorities seem to have been consulted appropriately in the plans we have assessed so far and most plans contain a strong ‘social and territorial cohesion’ dimension. The involvement of the regional and local authorities should not stop at the design phase however. It will be vital throughout the entire implementation process.</p>
<p>24. believes the EC should select a few indicators of social, economic and environmental data at local and regional level, indicators where the local and regional level can have an impact, to examine the evolution</p>	<p>The European Semester Country Reports already include analysis on regional developments and challenges for those Member States where these policy dimensions are considered as relevant for</p>

⁴ COM(2020) 575 final.

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility; OJ L 57, 18.2.2021, p. 17–75.

<p>of the 2030 Agenda across the EU and when possible, the impact at international scale. In this regard, the efforts already made to that end in some countries should be taken into consideration;</p> <p>and</p> <p>26. calls on the European Commission to increase the robustness of its Eurostat SDGs monitoring report, by including levels of achievement of the SDGs that can be easily quantified and determined in a non-bureaucratic way. The Commission should, in the framework of the European Semester, make further use of these reports and enrich them with data and best practice from local and regional authorities, as the current monitoring includes no NUTS-2 level data;</p>	<p>the national economic policy.</p> <p>All the indicators of the EU SDG indicator set, for which data at regional level (by the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics 2 (NUTS2) or by degree of urbanisation) are available, are listed on the sustainable development indicator section of the Eurostat website section dedicated to the EU sustainable development indicators.</p> <p>Whenever targets agreed at political level are available (e.g. 55% reduction of net greenhouse gas emissions by 2030), they are used for the progress assessment in the Eurostat SDG monitoring report.</p>
<p>29. considers it is necessary to better align the priorities of all funding programmes in order to mainstream the SDGs universally. For instance, 100 Climate Neutral Cities in 2030 is a move to accelerate the SDGs. Investment in social issues is beneficial for the climate as well;</p>	<p>The Commission considers the SDGs to be a comprehensive policy framework, with which the EU budget is fully aligned. In 2020, 96% of the EU budget was spent through 45 funding programmes each contributing to at least one SDG, with many programmes contributing to a large number of SDGs. Further detail can be found in Working Document I, the ‘Programme Statements’⁶, attached to the Draft Budget proposal for 2022.</p>
<p>30. therefore encourages the European Commission to reintegrate SDGs explicitly into a reformed European Semester, leading to a place-based sustainable recovery, which should fully involve local and regional authorities and complement reforms and investments in the Member States, which should be SDG-proofed and of European added value;</p>	<p>As indicated above, the Commission acknowledges the need to reflect on the future of the European Semester, also in the context of the RRF. How to take forward the further integration of the SDGs within the Semester framework is part of this reflection, as the Semester will continue supporting the achievement of the SDGs, which are firmly embedded into EU strategies and policies. There will still be a need for a continuous assessment of the macroeconomic challenges in each economy and how these challenges will</p>

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https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/about_the_european_commission/eu_budget/db2022_wd_1_programme_statements_web_0.pdf

	<p>evolve. The interaction between the monitoring of the implementation of reforms and investments Member States have committed to in their national Recovery and Resilience Plans and the assessment of macroeconomic challenges will be a crucial part of the discussions.</p>
<p>31. reiterates against this background the need for the European Commission to provide a definition of "structural reforms" within the context of the European Semester. Such a definition is required in order to ensure that these reforms would be limited to policy areas, which are relevant for the implementation of the EU Treaty objectives and the overarching policy strategies of the European Union, including the SDGs, and which, with due respect to the principle of subsidiarity, relate directly to EU competences;</p>	<p>Structural reforms can refer to any measure that can change the fabric of an economy, the institutional and regulatory framework in which business and people operate. They are designed to ensure the economy is fit to address current challenges, but most importantly fit for the future ones. What is considered to be a structural reform is accordingly of an evolving nature. The European Semester offers sufficient flexibility for the assessment of the structural reforms to take into account the most pressing challenges faced by the European economies.</p>
<p>32. asks the Commission to consider contributions to meeting the SDGs to be a common and crosscutting objective for all EU funding programmes under direct and indirect management;</p>	<p>The new Common Provisions Regulation⁷ (CPR) sets out the policy objectives and specific objectives to be supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and the Just Transition Fund. These policy objectives, as well as the specific objectives of the Funds, which are set out in the Fund-specific Regulations, are fully in line with the SDGs and ensure an effective contribution of the cohesion policy.</p> <p>These Funds shall also promote and respect horizontal principles, such as the respect of fundamental rights, gender equality, non-discrimination. Moreover, Article 9 CPR determines that the objectives of the Funds shall be pursued in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development, taking into account the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the ‘do no significant harm’ principle.</p>

⁷ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021.

	<p>The Funds will also contribute to mainstreaming climate actions. In this context, the ERDF and Cohesion Fund shall contribute with 30 % and 37% respectively of the Union contribution to expenditure supporting the achievement of the climate objectives set for the Union budget.</p> <p>While the overwhelming amount of money spent through the EU budget benefits SDGs, there are some smaller and specifically targeted programmes that are less relevant for the achievement of the SDGs (for example, Protection of the Euro against counterfeiting) which are important for the protection of very specific EU common goods.</p>
<p>34. repeats its call for the adoption of a European Code of Conduct to involve local and regional authorities and their representative associations in the European Semester [...];</p> <p>35. proposes as a first step in this direction the organisation of a stakeholders' conference on the European Semester with the support of both consultative Committees, and/or the consultation of the committees ahead of the publication of the next Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy;</p>	<p>As recalled in the 2021 Spring Package adopted in May⁸, the Commission intends to set out the concrete steps on how the European Semester governance framework is to be structured in 2022, also taking into account the monitoring of the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The Commission will engage in a dialogue with the European Parliament, the Council, Member States, social partners and all other relevant stakeholders.</p>
<p>37. calls on the European Commission, since Europe is at a crossroads, to use the next Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2022 to formally reintegrate SDGs into the European Semester, better link SDGs and the RRF and explicitly affirm SDGs as a way for the EU to shape a sustainable recovery;</p>	<p>The chapeau communication accompanying the 2021 Semester Spring package announced that the forthcoming 2022 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy will outline the key elements of the upcoming European Semester cycle and will set out the concrete steps on how the Semester governance framework is to be structured in 2022. The continued integration of the SDGs will be part of this.</p>
<p>39. encourages the European Commission to start such reintegration during the assessment of the NRRPs by mapping SDGs in the NRRPs</p>	<p>The RRF Regulation sets out the assessment criteria and reporting requirements in the context of the RRP. In particular, Member States are</p>

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_2722

<p>presented by Member States;</p>	<p>required to include in their RRP an explanation how the measures will contribute to gender equality, in line with the SDG 5. The Staff Working Document accompanying the proposal for the Council Implementing Decisions assessing the RRP⁹ includes a dedicated section outlining the Member States performance with respect to SDGs with particular relevance for the four dimensions underpinning the 2021 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy and of relevance to the recovery and resilience plans indicating possible areas where investments and reforms in line with the objectives of the Facility could further accelerate the progress on the SDGs.</p> <p>Moreover, the RRF will help deliver indirectly on many SDGs since there are significant overlaps with SDGs in the six pillars in Article 3 of the RRF Regulation, which are the guiding principles for the RRF. Finally, the Commission will provide a Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard, which will demonstrate the progress in the implementation of the RRP and also report on the common indicators.</p>
<p>40. calls on the Commission to consider establishing a simple, non-bureaucratic environmental scoreboard, which would complement the social scoreboard under the European Semester and prepare for the formal reintegration of the SDGs into the next European Semester cycle;</p>	<p>In the 2020 cycle of the European Semester, the country reports included, for the first time, a chapter on environmental sustainability, and a dedicated annex reporting on Member States' overall SDG performance based on the Eurostat reporting. The Commission has initiated work to expand its toolkit to improve the analysis of the macroeconomic and social implications of the ecological transition in future coordination cycles, including on a set of key indicators.</p> <p>In view of the development of the monitoring and the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the changing role of the European Semester, the future role and format of an additional indicator set is still to be decided, and thereon to be further developed. Complementarity with other monitoring</p>

⁹ SWD(2021) 165 final.

	frameworks will also need to be ensured, including with e.g. the European Green Deal and Energy Union.
<p>41. calls on the Commission to come forward with proposals to better align corporate responsibility requirements with the implementation of the Agenda for Sustainable Development. This could include consideration of a simple, non-bureaucratic European corporate responsibility passport for large companies, setting out requirements relating to the sustainable development goals in terms of industrial relations, gender equality, supply chain management, taxation and financial transparency;</p>	<p>The Commission is working on new legislation on sustainable corporate governance, to be adopted in 2021. This proposal aims to foster more long-term oriented, sustainable value creation by requiring companies to mitigate adverse sustainability impacts in their operations as well as in their value chains, in line with the EU's sustainability commitments. The Commission has also proposed sectoral legislation including due diligence aspects (batteries, forestry).</p> <p>The Commission's tax agenda aims at ensuring that everyone pays their fair share while supporting the recovery by creating an environment conducive to sustainable growth and investment. To promote tax transparency and responsible corporate tax practices, the Commission will come forward with a proposal requiring that certain large companies operating in the EU should publish their effective tax rates.</p>
<p>42. considers that the Commission's proposal for a revision of the Stability and Growth Pact, to be presented in the final quarter of 2021, should pave the way for sustainability-based reform of the EU's budgetary and macroeconomic surveillance mechanisms, with a view to ensuring a sufficiently high level of high-quality public investment in the sustainable transformation of the European Union. This should include proposals to integrate simple and non-bureaucratic indicators into the fiscal framework which reflect the path towards achieving the SDGs more effectively than GDP;</p>	<p>The Commission intends to relaunch the public debate on the economic governance framework as announced President von der Leyen in the State of the Union address 2021. Once relaunched, discussions will focus on several lessons from the pandemic. This would include the best ways to address public investment needs and the appropriate role of the EU fiscal rules in incentivising Member States to achieve adequate investment levels, while ensuring the sustainability of public finances over the medium term. As indicated above, the Commission intends to continue its efforts to integrate the SDGs in the relevant economic governance processes.</p>
<p>45. [...] it is important to reinforce the existing consensus to upscale territorial priorities within the framework of EU policy. [...]</p>	<p>The Commission is supporting and implementing Territorial Impact Assessments of relevant new legislations. To this effect, the April 2021 Communication on better regulation states that</p>

	<p>Territorial Impact Assessment Necessity Checks will be introduced as part of tools so that Commission services can identify when it is relevant to conduct territorial impacts assessments.</p> <p>The Commission Communication on a Long Term Vision for Rural Areas published on 30 June 2021¹⁰ further demonstrates Commission’s commitment to territorial priorities.</p>
<p>49. stresses the need to go local in measuring progress towards SDGs. The EU should help cities and regions to monitor their progress towards reaching SDGs based on their own situation;</p> <p>50. asks the Joint Research Centre to continue its work on Voluntary Local Reviews in the form of handbooks and to integrate this into smart specialisation mechanisms to support cities and local governments in using cohesion and other financial instruments. In addition, the EC should create incentives for cities and regions to localise the SDGs at local and regional level. The CoR should coordinate this broad process;</p>	<p>To help local authorities monitor progress against a set of SDG targets, the Commission produced a European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews¹¹. The Handbook, containing examples of official and experimental indicators to set up an effective SDG local monitoring system specifically targeted for European cities, is a joint venture between the Joint Research Center and Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy on the project URBAN 2030¹². This project is continuing now with pilot projects to analyse the data and monitoring systems in several cities and test the handbook. So far, five EU cities have already participated: Porto, Seville, Reggio Emilia, Oulu and Bratislava.</p> <p>Cities and regions are encouraged to implement the SDGs at local level, notably through Cohesion Policy. The support provided via integrated territorial development strategies and implemented at the relevant territorial level should continue to contribute to the localisation process in the 2021-2027 programming period. Policy objectives set in the Common Provisions Regulation, as well as the specific objectives of the Funds set out in the Fund-specific Regulations, are fully in line with, and inspired by, the United Nations SDGs.</p>
<p>51. notes there is also a need to strengthen capacity-building at local level on</p>	<p>Regulation (EU) 2021/1058¹³ for the 2021-2027 programming period includes the creation of the</p>

¹⁰ COM(2021) 345 final.

¹¹ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC118682>

¹² <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/sdgs/en/>

¹³ Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund; OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 60–93.

<p>implementing SDGs. The CoR considers it is fundamental to jointly develop strategic management models and specific management tools for sustainable development and to offer training courses to the decision-makers and staff of local governments and local stakeholders. The EU could support European networks for joint development and such training opportunities.[...]</p>	<p>European Urban Initiative (Art. 12). It may support intergovernmental cooperation on urban matters, with particular attention given to cooperation aimed at capacity building at local level to achieve the SDGs.</p> <p>Good governance is a crucial element of economic development and requires efficient and effective administrations and administrative capacity at national, regional and local level to prepare, manage and implement investment projects. The Commission has developed a wide range of tools, projects and initiatives to enhance the administrative capacity of authorities implementing Cohesion Policy.</p>
<p>53. requests that the EC create direct incentives for local and regional authorities to cooperate directly with the private sector and civil society to advance the SDGs;</p>	<p>Cooperation opportunities between public authorities, the private sector and civil society are encouraged through the design and implementation of operational and cooperation programmes under Cohesion Policy (Art 8 of CPR on partnership and multilevel governance). In order to facilitate the implementation of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership¹⁴ and the exchange of good practices between various partners and public authorities, the Commission intends to set up European Community of Practice on Partnership 2021-2027.</p>
<p>55. [...] the EU must create a new programme for the exchange of good practice between cities and regions across the EU, including cities from other continents, to identify global good practices and promote bilateral agreements;</p>	<p>In the framework of the 2018 programme ‘Local Authorities: Partnerships for sustainable cities’ (€164.7 million for 2018-2020 implemented through three calls for proposals), a coordination committee was set up in September 2021 aiming to: (i) develop a community of practitioners between the actors involved in the various partnerships to reflect together on lessons learnt and good practices; (ii) injecting this accumulated knowledge into the EU system so as to refine actual policies and practices; and (iii) communicating about these pilot experiences, amongst other to demonstrate the added value of</p>

¹⁴ Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds.

this type of city-to-city partnerships.

This work will be complemented by the EU's strategic partnership with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) established to analyse and determine the enabling conditions for the contribution of city partnerships to the SDGs.

In the context of the G20 initiative on 'Territorial Development and SDGs Localisation', the EU will also contribute for the activities of the planned G20 Platform on SDGs Localisation and Intermediary Cities and proposed compendium of good practices and inspiring examples that promote SDG localisation and intermediary city-to-city partnerships.

Exchange of good practices/ knowledge sharing and regional cooperation between cities both in the EU and in partner countries are at the core of ongoing programmes such as the Covenant of Mayors in Sub-Saharan Africa¹⁵ and the Global Covenant of Mayors¹⁶, in particular for helping achievements under SDGs 7 and 13. Exchange of good practices between cities and regions across the globe will be continued under the new Multiannual Financial Framework.

The International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC) programme funded by the EU enables local and regional authorities in different global regions to link up and share solutions to common problems, by exchanging knowledge and testing new solutions, boosting the implementation of the UN New Urban Agenda as well as the SDGs¹⁷.

¹⁵ <https://comssa.org/en/>

¹⁶ <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/>

¹⁷ <https://iuc.eu/na/home/>

<p>N°2 European Democracy Action Plan COM(2020) 790 final COR-2021-01278 – CIVEX-VII/008 145th plenary session – June/July 2021 Rapporteur: Aleksandra DULKIEWICZ (PL/EPP) SG – Vice-President JOUROVÁ</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>The follow-up given by the Commission to this opinion will be included in a subsequent report.</p>	

<p>N°3 Strategy to strengthen the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU COM(2020) 711final COR-2021-00433 – CIVEX-VII/006 145th plenary session – June/July 2021 Rapporteur: Jean Luc VANRAES (BE/Renew Europe) DG JUST – Commissioner REYNDERS</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>3. agrees that the EU should continue to encourage the exchange of good practice and experience between all levels of government (national, regional and local) and the development of more targeted guidance and training on the Charter;</p>	<p>The Commission’s new Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV)¹ gave priority to awareness and capacity building on the Charter of Fundamental Rights. A dedicated call for proposals to promote this objective is part of the CERV’s Work programme 2021-2022. The aim is to contribute to the effective and coherent application of the Charter, in line with the Charter Strategy, and to foster a culture of fundamental rights in the Member States. The calls for proposals of the programme are open to all levels of public authorities in Member States. The CERV programme will also support the sharing of best practice between cities and local authorities on the use of the Charter, as part of calls for proposals for Networks of towns.</p> <p>A special page was created under the European e-Justice Portal to record Member States’s best practice on use and awareness of the Charter (at all levels of government) and foster exchanges of practice and mutual learning.</p> <p>The Commission will also develop an e-learning tool on the Charter for EU staff that will be made available to all.</p>
<p>6. welcomes the Commission's intention to draw up an annual report, from 2021 onwards, on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the Member States, and</p>	<p>The Charter report will focus on a different theme every year. 2021 report will focus on fundamental rights in the digital age. It will include relevant experiences and best practices in the Member</p>

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-programme_en

<p>calls on the Commission to present in the report the good practices and experiences of cities and regions in applying the Charter. Cooperation with the CoR is important here ;</p>	<p>States in the area, including from the local level where relevant.</p> <p>The Commission would welcome support by the Committee to disseminate the report amongst its Members, once adopted.</p>
<p>8. acknowledges the importance of setting up contact points, which will facilitate the flow of information on the Charter between different levels of government and can also provide guidance for LRAs on how to shape their policies in full compliance with the Charter; <i>(linked also to point 9)</i>;</p>	<p>Vice President Jourová and Commissioner Reynders sent a letter to Member States' Ministers of Justice on 23 June 2021 inviting them to nominate a Charter focal point. One of their roles could be to facilitate communication and the flow of information on Charter use and awareness between the different levels of government.</p>
<p>12. underlines that the European Commission should systematically perform a cross-check against the application of the Charter prior to granting EU funds, using a clear and transparent procedure. Compliance with Article 2 TEU, which encapsulates the Union's values, should constitute a conditionality for eligibility for EU funds. Regulation 2020/2092 of 16 December 2020 on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union budget [1] recalls that "in its conclusions of 21 July 2020, the European Council stated that the financial interests of the Union are to be protected in accordance with the general principles embedded in the Treaties, in particular the values set out in Article 2 TEU". The same regulation stipulates that whenever Member States implement the Union budget, respect for the rule of law, which is intrinsically linked to respect for democracy and for fundamental rights, "is an essential precondition for compliance with the principles of sound financial management enshrined in Article 317 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)". [1] https://eur-</p>	<p>Regulation 2020/2092 on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union budget² aims to protect the EU's budget against breaches of the principles of the rule of law in a Member State that affect or seriously risk affecting its sound financial management or the protection of the financial interests of the EU in a sufficiently direct way. The Commission has been actively working to assess information from all sources in view of building potential cases and initiating the procedure under Article 6 of the Regulation. The Commission has also prepared guidelines on the application of the Regulation, which it shared with the European Parliament and with the Member States for consultation.</p> <p>In addition, under the new Common Provision Regulation for the 2021-2027 programming period³, which sets out rules for Funds under shared management (the next budget 2021-2027), all Member States must fulfil horizontal enabling conditions. This includes one, which requires that Member States put in place effective mechanisms to ensure compliance with the Charter. This is a prerequisite horizontal enabling condition for Member States to fulfil for the effective and</p>

² Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2092 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union budget; OJ L 433I, 22.12.2020, p. 1–10.

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R1060>

lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=NLEX%3A32020R2092

efficient implementation of all specific objectives of the CPR Funds programmes, with the exception of Interreg programmes. The enabling conditions should be fulfilled at both the time of the approval of the programmes, and throughout the programming period. The Commission is working with the Member States on the assessments in order to ensure that this enabling condition is fulfilled, and also issued a Commission notice - Guidance on ensuring the respect for the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union when implementing the European Structural and Investment Funds which is still applicable to the 2021-2027 programming period and will be updated.

Moreover, member States must put in place a comprehensive partnership that should include bodies responsible for the promotion of fundamental rights.

The Commission is ready to assist national and local authorities in this process. The Commission issued the above mentioned guidance and will be developing a training module on the Charter so that those involved in designing and implementing EU funded programmes know how to apply it.

13. calls for the Fundamental Rights Charter to be enacted on Europe Day (9 May) and at the Conference on the Future of Europe, and asks its members to promote local activities explaining and stressing the paramount importance of fundamental rights and the European Charter for our democracies.

The Commission would welcome awareness raising initiatives on the Charter in cities organised by the Committee and its Members around the 9th of May.

The objective of the Conference on the Future of Europe is to bring the EU topics discussed closer to citizens, as a way also to bring the European Union closer to citizens' everyday lives. Registered participants are discussing over 5100 ideas on the multilingual digital platform, with close to 1500 events registered from all corners of the Union.

The Conference addresses fundamental rights within the topic 'Values and rights, rule of law, security', specifically under the category 'European rights and values' on how to fight

	<p>discrimination, promote equality and ensure that rights are guaranteed. Discussions on the multilingual digital platform cover among others issues: human dignity, freedom, equality, human rights, gender parity, solidarity and the right to privacy.</p> <p>Forums on thematic issues started in the autumn 2021 and the first plenary session concentrating on the input from the platform and the Citizen's Panels was scheduled on 22-23 October 2021.</p> <p>The EU Agency for Fundamental rights also organised a Forum on fundamental rights in October 2021 that will contribute to the Conference. Several sessions will be looking into the role of cities in promoting fundamental rights, and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.</p>
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N°4 Resilience of critical entities
COM(2020) 829 final
COR-2021-00570 – NAT-VII/017
145st plenary session – June/July 2021
Rapporteur: Mario GUARENTE (IT/ECR)
DG HOME – Commissioner JOHANSSON

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>2. urges the European Commission to consider further increasing the number of sectors to be covered by the directive to also include the distribution chains of essential items, and in particular the food production, processing and distribution sector;</p>	<p>The proposed Directive on the resilience of critical entities expands the scope from two sectors covered by the European Critical Infrastructure Directive¹ to ten sectors considered key for the provision of essential services in the internal market and where interdependencies across sectors and across borders are pronounced. The selection of the sectors also took into account the approaches in Member States and stakeholder views. Moreover, the Commission sought a coherent approach regarding the sectoral coverage of the Critical Entities Resilience Directive² and of essential entities pursuant to annex I of the proposal for a Directive on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union³. The food sector is mentioned in the review clause of the proposed Directive, which provides for an assessment of whether the sectoral scope should be expanded, in particular to include the food production, processing and distribution sectors⁴.</p>
<p>5. points out that, although the bulk of legislation in this field is set at EU or national level, local and regional authorities do have major tasks and responsibilities with regard to protecting the area in which they are located.</p>	<p>The Commission considers that the local and regional level has an important role to play in contributing to the resilience of critical entities operating in their areas. In the proposed Directive, Member States have to identify one or more</p>

¹ Council Directive 2008/114/EC of 8 December 2008 on the identification and designation of European critical infrastructures and the assessment of the need to improve their protection; OJ L 345, 23.12.2008, p. 75–82.

² COM(2020) 829 final.

³ COM(2020) 823 final.

⁴ Article 22.

<p>Accordingly, they must play a specific and significant role in contributing to the resilience of the critical infrastructures located in their area, bringing their own knowledge and experience to bear;</p> <p>13. considers that when national risk assessments are being carried out, the sub-national level should be taken into account, as the physical location of the infrastructure of a critical entity can also determine the impact and potential consequences on the ground;</p> <p>16. maintains that the strategy for strengthening the resilience of critical entities should be drawn up at national level in consultation with local and regional levels;</p>	<p>competent authorities that will be responsible for the application of the Directive at national level⁵. This designation of competent authorities will be done by each Member State, depending on the organisation and division of responsibilities at national level. In implementing the Directive, each Member State will therefore be able to decide on the most appropriate involvement of local and regional authorities, including where relevant their contribution to national risk assessments and to strategies on the resilience of critical entities.</p>
<p>6. welcomes the shift from protecting the infrastructure to strengthening the resilience of the entities operating it, but stresses that the protection of the structures or infrastructure should not be disregarded, taking into account possible physical damage in the event of natural or man-made disasters and their potentially serious consequences not only at national level but also at local and regional and cross-border levels;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the importance of the protection element. The concept of resilience, as defined in Article 2 of the proposed Directive, encompasses the protection aspects ('the ability to prevent, resist, [...]'). The proposal's focus on resilience aims to ensure that the full cycle of 'before-during-after' an incident is taken into account, i.e. including the protection aspects.</p>
<p>11. considers that it would be useful for the Commission to draw up guidelines to ensure the effective and uniform application of the directive in all Member States, and steer the assessment activities and possible subsequent action on the basis of a holistic approach that takes into account all cross-sectoral and cross-border interdependencies so as to increase resilience to a sufficient degree that covers protection, risk prevention, business continuity and recovery;</p>	<p>The proposed Directive provides for minimum harmonised rules to ensure a coherent approach across different sectors, while leaving flexibility for the Member States to take into account their national specificities. To ensure a uniform implementation of the Directive, the proposal foresees implementing acts to further specify the resilience enhancing measures⁶. Moreover, the Commission may adopt guidelines to facilitate the application of some of the criteria used by Member States when identifying critical entities⁷.</p>

⁵ Article 8.

⁶ Article 11(5).

⁷ Article 6(3).

	<p>The activities of the Critical entities resilience group⁸ will also contribute to a uniform application of the Directive.</p>
<p>14. agrees with the need to reinforce the resilience of the identified critical entities; is concerned, however, about the possibly quite substantial financial burden incurred by compliance with the obligations laid down in the proposed directive;</p>	<p>The proposed Directive follows a risk-based approach both at the level of Member States authorities and of critical entities, making sure that the proportionality principle is respected and that only those entities identified as critical by Member States are expected to take resilience enhancing measures against a range of risks. The proposal stipulates that such measures should be ‘appropriate and proportionate’⁹ to ensure that there is no disproportionate burden on critical entities.</p>
<p>15. stresses that the Commission should provide for specific support in already existing programmes, including financial support, for critical entities, and particularly public critical entities, where this is necessary to promote the adoption of effective and timely measures;</p>	<p>The proposal foresees that the Commission should support, where appropriate, Member States and critical entities in complying with their obligations pursuant to the proposal¹⁰. These supporting activities do not include direct financial support to critical entities. Nevertheless, there are funding possibilities from the EU funds that Member States could use to support critical entities, in full respect of the rules on the types of measures and types of actions that can be funded.</p>

⁸ Article 16.

⁹ Article 11.

¹⁰ Article 17.

N°5 Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act
COM(2020) 825 final and
COM(2020) 842 final
COR-2020-05356 – ECON-VII/012
145th plenary session – June/July 2021
Rapporteur: Rodi KRATSA (EL/EPP)
DG CNECT – Commissioner BRETON

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>7. holds that the business models of information services are driven by data and information, and are time-sensitive. As a result, calls for an efficient provision of information, on access to data as well as on removing illegal content, and in ensuring transparent monitoring and reporting by the European Commission;</p>	<p>The proposal for a Digital Services Act (DSA)¹ provides for several asymmetric due diligence obligations for providers of intermediary services as regards the transparency of their content moderation practices, such as removal of illegal content (Articles 13, 23 and 33 respectively). This should enable Digital Services Coordinators and the Commission to monitor such practices and ensure that they comply with the relevant obligations laid down in the DSA. In addition, Article 31 of the DSA provides an obligation on very large online platforms to, upon a reasoned request from the Digital Services Coordinator of establishment or the Commission, provide access to data to vetted researchers. Such access to data should be ensured for the sole purpose of conducting research that contributes to the identification and understanding of systemic risks as set out in Article 26 of the DSA.</p>
<p>11. notes that the Regulation defines only the formal process of dealing with illegal content and that it remains for the Member States to determine what constitutes illegal content within the meaning of the Regulation;</p>	<p>The DSA, as this is already the case for the e-Commerce Directive², does not define what is to be considered illegal content. While the DSA lays down a number of due diligence obligations that seek to ensure safe online environment (e.g. obligation to put in place an effective notice-and-action mechanism), it is for the applicable EU or national law to determine what content could be</p>

¹ COM(2020) 825 final.

² Directive 2000/31/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 June 2000 on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the Internal Market ('Directive on electronic commerce'); OJ L 178, 17.7.2000, p. 1–16.

	considered illegal.
<p>14. [...]. Emphasises that any content moderation measures should be accompanied by appropriate safeguards to ensure that these practices are proportionate;</p>	<p>The DSA by means of due diligence obligations identifies a number of safeguards to ensure that content moderation practices by providers of intermediary services are proportionate. The proposal envisages that, where possible, third parties affected by illegal content transmitted or stored online should attempt to resolve conflicts relating to such content without involving the providers of intermediary services in question.</p> <p>Where, conversely, it is necessary to involve information society services providers, including providers of intermediary services, any requests or orders for such involvement should, as a general rule, be directed to the actor that has the technical and operational ability to act against specific items of illegal content, so as to prevent and minimise any possible negative effects for the availability and accessibility of information that is not illegal content. Within this context the DSA also envisages that when action against illegal content is taken, the provider of hosting services shall provide the recipient of the service with a statement of reasons for such action and the possibility for the latter to seek redress. Such redress should be possible either by means of an internal complaints mechanism, out-of-court dispute or judicial proceedings.</p> <p>Finally, very large online platforms are required to undertake a risk assessment to identify any systemic risks that the provision of their services could have on the dissemination of illegal content or exercise of fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression, the prohibition of discrimination etc. Where such risks are identified, very large online platforms are required to adopt mitigating measures, which would also be subject to an independent audit.</p>
<p>17. highlights the need to build up effective cooperation between Member State authorities in order to establish Digital Services</p>	<p>The DSA mandates Member States to designate one or more competent authorities for the application and enforcement of the regulation</p>

<p>Coordinators, share data and enforce applicable rules; also points out that local and regional authorities report to relevant Digital Services Coordinators in other Member States and be included in the process;</p>	<p>itself, and requires that they shall designate one of these authorities as their Digital Services Coordinators. The proposal also provides for a system of internal coordination between different competent authorities within a single Member State, which is to be ensured by the respective Digital Services Coordinator, and lays down a system for effective cross-border cooperation between the respective Digital Services Coordinators of different Member States.</p> <p>Such cross-border cooperation includes cooperation between any competent authority that Member States designate under Article 38 of the DSA, including any local and regional authorities that may be designated to this end. Finally, such cross-border cooperation would be relevant for any provider of intermediary services established in the European Union, as well as any provider of intermediary services which do not have an establishment in the Union but which offers services in the Union.</p>
<p>19. is concerned that while notice-and-action procedures and orders are covered in Chapter II (Articles 8 and 9), jurisdiction is covered by Chapters III, giving rise to potential legal issues regarding the enforcement of these provisions; is also concerned that the cross-border cooperation mechanism may not be sufficient;</p>	<p>The DSA maintains the principle of country of origin, as this is the case already in the e-Commerce Directive, which establishes that it is for the competent authority of the court of establishment of the provider of intermediary services to ensure compliance with the DSA itself. This includes any obligations that may derive from Articles 8 and 9 on orders, such as an obligation on the provider of intermediary services to notify the authority issuing the order of the effect given to the order. This is without prejudice to the possibility of any competent authority to issue orders within the meaning of Article 8 and 9 against specific items of illegal content or to obtain a specific item of information, where the framework for issuing such orders and any redress possibilities are regulated under applicable EU or national law.</p> <p>The DSA also provides for a very comprehensive framework of cooperation where powers and roles</p>

	<p>of competent authorities are clearly identified. In addition, the proposal provides for enhanced mechanisms of cooperation, such as joint investigations envisaged in Article 46 thereof. Such cross-border cooperation would be relevant for any provider of intermediary services established in the European Union as well as any provider of intermediary services which do not have an establishment in the Union but which offers services in the Union.</p>
<p>21. calls on the European Commission to advise on a common set of standard requirements for the interoperability of authorities' proprietary systems. Consideration should be given to establishing APIs (application programming interfaces);</p>	<p>On 9 March 2021, the Commission adopted its Communication on '2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade'³, which identified the digitalisation of public services as one of the four 'cardinal points' of a 'Digital Compass' to translate the EU's digital ambitions for 2030 into concrete targets and to ensure that these objectives are met. In this context, the Commission emphasises the importance of ensuring interoperability across all levels of government and across public services. The Commission is committed to this goal and has discussed with Member States the following multi-country digital projects under the Recovery and Resilience Facility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) connected Public Administration- build in complementarity and synergy with the eIDAS framework⁴ and offer a European Digital Identity, to access and use digital services online from the public and private sectors in a privacy-enhancing way and in full compliance with existing data protection laws; and b) build a Once-Only system allowing public administrations at the local, regional and national levels to exchange data and evidence across borders, in full compliance with legal requirements and fundamental rights. <p>Within this context, the Commission adopted on</p>

³ COM(2021) 118 final.

⁴ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/eidas-regulation>

	<p>3 June 2021 a proposal of a framework for a European Digital Identity⁵, which will be available to all EU citizens, residents, and businesses in the EU. The new European Digital Identity Wallets will enable all Europeans to access services online without having to use private identification methods or unnecessarily sharing personal data. With this solution, they will have full control of the data they share.</p>
<p>27. calls on the European Commission to factor the various degrees of digital transformation at regional level into its legislative proposals more effectively. In this context, cooperates with relevant institutions and centres of knowledge to help understand the complexities that are behind the drivers of change at national and regional level in order to build robust yet flexible innovative strategies on digital transformation. These strategies will reduce identified disparities between Member States and regions and divides between isolated, rural, peripheral and urban areas;</p>	<p>As part of the EU’s digital strategy⁶ and its 2019-2024 priority ‘A Europe fit for the Digital Age’⁷ the Commission has been proposing and implementing various actions, including legislative, strategic and funding initiatives.</p> <p>Building on local strengths and opportunities is also an important point in the Commission Communication on ‘2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade’, which paves the way for increased capacities to monitor digital transformation processes across the EU and identifying means for closing the digital divide.</p> <p>Several EU funded instruments are available to support the digital transformation. For instance, digitalisation plays a key role in the development of ‘Smart villages’, i.e. communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience.</p> <p>Moreover, several EU programmes are aimed to help fostering the strengthening of capacities of municipalities and regions to effectively deploy innovative digital technologies, including under the Horizon Europe Programme and the Digital Europe Programme. For instance, platforms in rural and urban communities will be powered by digital technologies and will offer services such as multi-modal intelligent transport systems, rapid emergency assistance in case of accidents, more</p>

⁵ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2021/946 of 3 June 2021 on a common Union Toolbox for a coordinated approach towards a European Digital Identity Framework; OJ L 210, 14.6.2021, p. 51–54.

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_4630

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age_en

	targeted waste management solutions, traffic management, urban and regional planning, smart energy and lighting solutions, resource optimisation, and more.
30. believes that a close look needs to be taken at financing advertisements in paid news content; regulatory changes may have a strong effect on the viable business models of news providers going into the future and so the Committee calls for a greater focus on media pluralism;	<p>The Commission will present a new initiative – a Media Freedom Act⁸ – that would aim to increase transparency, independence and accountability around actions affecting media markets and media freedom and pluralism within the EU.</p> <p>The Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market⁹ provides press publishers with a new right to authorise and prohibit the online uses of their press publications by information society service providers (Article 15).</p>
31. draws attention to the importance of maximum clarity and legislative cohesion, and so as to avoid unintended consequences, emphasises that the DSA should comprise a horizontal framework particularly relevant to sector-specific legislation, e.g. copyright infringements, terrorist content, child sexual abuse material or illegal hate speech, and illegal products; believes that in principle, the Copyright Directive, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AMSD) and the GDPR should be considered <i>lex specialis vis-à-vis</i> the DSA and the DMA;	The DSA and the Digital Markets Act (DMA) ¹⁰ are horizontal frameworks within their identified scopes. Both legal acts also provide clarification of the relationship with relevant sector specific legislation, notably the DSA in Article 1(5) and corresponding recitals (e.g. recitals 9 and 10) and the DMA in Articles 1(3) and 1(4) as well as recital 11.
32. holds that competences at national or sub-national level, depending on the respective breakdown of legal competences, and instruments pertaining to media and information markets should be upheld, in order to account for cultural identities and protect pluralism, effectively combat hate speech and tackle harmful information online as is done offline. The relevant authorities in the Member	The DSA does not mandate which authorities Member States should or could designate as competent authorities supervising the compliance of providers of intermediary services with the DSA itself. The DSA fully harmonises the rules applicable to intermediary services in the internal market with the objective to ensure a safe, predictable and trusted online environment, where fundamental rights enshrined in the Charter are

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/breton/announcements/european-media-freedom-act_en

⁹ Directive (EU) 2019/790 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on copyright and related rights in the Digital Single Market and amending Directives 96/9/EC and 2001/29/EC; OJ L 130, 17.5.2019, p. 92–125.

¹⁰ COM(2020) 842 final.

<p>States should remain entitled to maintain or establish stricter laws in order to pursue legitimate interests;</p>	<p>effectively protected.</p> <p>Accordingly, Member States should not adopt or maintain additional national requirements on those matters falling within the scope of the DSA, unless explicitly provided for in the proposal itself, since this would affect the uniform application of the fully harmonised rules directly applicable to the providers of intermediary services in accordance with the objectives of the DSA, in particular to ensure the proper functioning of the internal market.</p> <p>This does not preclude the possibility to apply other national legislation applicable to providers of intermediary services in accordance with Union law, including the e-Commerce Directive, in particular its Article 3, which pursue other legitimate public interest objectives.</p>
<p>37. considers that the proposals for the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act should also be seen in a broader policy context. This notably includes the fair taxation of the digital economy such as updated taxation rules taking into account that digitalised companies and their business models can engage in business activities in a jurisdiction without a physical presence there. Here, recalls the need to recognise the role end users play in generating value for companies. Endorses therefore the European Parliament's call on the Commission to present proposals by June 2021 to clarify and harmonise the taxation of the digital business activities of all actors, including those established outside the EU. Such a reform should be seen and conducted in a wider international framework, and the G20/OECD Inclusive Framework (IF) in particular. Emphasises the importance of bolstering a level playing field for providers of traditional services and digital services in the EU by ensuring that tax rules are fit for the realities of the modern global economy and</p>	<p>A fair taxation of all businesses, including the digital economy, is a top priority for the Commission.</p> <p>In October 2021, 137 of the 141 members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)/G20 Inclusive Framework joined an agreed statement to reform the global corporate tax framework, subsequently endorsed by the G20 Finance Ministers and the G20 Leaders. The reform is articulated around two pillars: a partial reallocation of the taxing rights of the largest multinational companies to market jurisdictions ('Pillar 1') and the establishment of a global minimum effective corporate tax rate of 15% on multinationals' profits on a jurisdictional basis ('Pillar 2'). Some work remains to finalise the agreement in the coming months. Before the end of the year – subject to the Model Rules for Pillar 2 being finalised at the Inclusive Framework level – the Commission will put forward a Directive for implementing Pillar 2 in the EU. Following the technical work on the design that is still ongoing at the OECD/Inclusive Framework, the Commission will put forward a Directive for</p>

<p>which protect Europe's competitiveness and attractiveness for inward investment;</p>	<p>implementing Pillar 1 in the EU in 2022 in line with the implementation roadmap for the global agreement, as endorsed by the Inclusive framework.</p> <p>Successfully concluding this process will require a final effort from all parties. For this reason, the Commission has decided to put on hold its work on a proposal for a digital levy for the time being.</p>
<p>38. notes that the European Commission is also expected to present a separate legislative proposal on working conditions of platform workers in 2021 and points out that the CoR has been vocal on the local and regional regulatory challenges and issues regarding platform work⁸ , particularly those arising from the COVID-19 pandemic⁹ ;</p>	<p>In its Work Programme for 2021, the Commission announced a legislative initiative on improving the working conditions in platform work by end 2021. In preparing the initiative, the Commission has gathered evidence and analysed the inputs of many stakeholders, including the Committee. The Commission carried out a two-stage social partners' consultation under Article 154 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) on improving the working conditions in platform work. The second-stage consultation closed on 15 September 2021.</p>

N°6 Forging a climate-resilient Europe – the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change
COM(2021) 82 final
COR-2021-01903 – ENVE-VII/017
145th plenary session – June/July 2021
Rapporteur: Markku MARKKULA (FI/EPP)
DG CLIMA – Executive Vice-President TIMMERMANS

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>6. emphasises the crucial importance of local awareness and commitment to action; new innovative ways to create support to local level action are needed. The CoR will cooperate with the European Commission to develop operational action models under the title Green Deal Going Local for municipalities of different sizes and at different stages of development, adapted to their local situations;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the importance of local awareness and commitment to action. That is also why in the EU Adaptation Strategy¹ a section is dedicated to fostering local, individual and just resilience (§ 2.2.2.).</p> <p>The Commission is stepping up support to planning and implementation of local adaptation, among others by launching an adaptation support facility under the EU Covenant of Mayors. This Facility will provide direct technical assistance to local and regional authorities with the development and implementation of their adaptation strategies and plans. The College and, in particular, the Executive Vice-President Timmermans, who attended several Committee plenaries on this topic, are committed to continuing the dialogue on the contribution that the Green Deal going local can make to these efforts.</p>
<p>7. notes the critical importance for the objectives set of ensuring that the latest research knowledge is used, modified and applied to potential operational needs much more rapidly than so far;</p>	<p>The EU programmes and funds continue to create and support new instruments to co-create new solutions to climate challenges and facilitate the scale up and experience sharing.</p> <p>The Commission would also like to draw attention to the European Environment Agency (EEA) assessment report presenting the status quo of adaptation to climate change at the local government level, with particular focus on cities.</p>

¹ COM(2021) 82 final.

	<p>The assessment presents the overview of climate risks to cities, types of adaptation responses, extent of adaptation planning and actions at the local level in Europe and opportunities to scale up and speed up implementation of adaptation to climate change at the local level².</p>
<p>12. believes that, within a year [...], the Commission should adopt guidelines establishing common practices and principles for identifying, classifying and properly managing physical and material climate risks when planning, developing, carrying out and monitoring plans, programmes and projects;</p>	<p>The Commission will support the development of further adaptation solutions, including rapid response decision support tools to enrich the toolbox for adaptation practitioners.¹</p> <p>The Commission adopted in July 2021 the notice ‘Technical guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure in the period 2021-2027’³. This climate proofing guidance will help to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation measures into the development of infrastructure projects and help deal with material climate risks. It includes recommendations to support national climate-proofing processes in Member States. The Adaptation Strategy foresees further development of this guidance and its eventual use in more areas.</p>
<p>17. recognises that the EU's outermost regions face stark adaptation challenges as a result of their specific vulnerabilities, which make them particularly susceptible to the effects of climate change; welcomes all efforts to mitigate these effects, such as the exchange of best practices and global and regional adaptation solutions, to be fostered and supported by the Commission and the Member States;</p>	<p>The Commission recognises that EU’s Outermost Regions, as well as the Overseas Countries and Territories, are particularly vulnerable to climate change and already face stark adaptation challenges.</p> <p>The Adaptation Strategy seeks to foster the exchange of best practices, and in particular solutions to common adaptation challenges among the outermost regions and with their neighbours.</p>
<p>22. calls for swift and ambitious implementation of the measures announced in the strategy to promote nature-based adaptation solutions, including new and innovative financing approaches and products. This concerns in particular the protection and restoration of wetlands and peatlands and the</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that swift and ambitious implementation of nature-based solutions are needed, as well as the development of financial aspects of nature-based solutions and financial approaches and products that also cover nature-based adaptation.</p>

² <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/urban-adaptation-in-europe>

³ C(2021) 5430 final.

greening of cities.	
<p>29. urges the public sector to use their role and assets in many ways to help industries speed up the process of creating new carbon-neutral handprint solutions: shifting the use of public procurement to accelerate demand for and the development of sustainable new products and services, open data to analyse problems and develop climate-friendly solutions, crowdsourcing to create innovation and start-up platforms and networking to develop and disseminate new concepts and solutions to increase sustainability;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the need to accelerate the decarbonisation of cities and regions. The Commission will support access to solutions to adaptation and mitigation. In particular, Horizon Europe would test integrated solutions that address the complex transformation needed for the 2050 climate-resilience vision in view of their scale up with emphasis on cross-border cooperation.</p> <p>The Commission is also supporting the empowerment of consumers and investors, through initiatives like the Circular Economy Action Plan⁴ or the Sustainable Finance Taxonomy⁵ providing tools for informed decisions. This will also push industry to deploy climate- and environment-friendly solutions and to avoid greenwashing.</p> <p>The Commission is also supporting Green Public Procurement⁶ through a variety of tools and initiatives, including guidance, training and dissemination of good practices and the definition of minimum mandatory green public procurement criteria in sectorial legislation.</p> <p>The Commission proposes to establish a Green Deal data space to harness the major potential of data in support of the Green Deal priority actions including climate change.</p>
<p>31. urges the Commission to pay special attention to ensuring an effective CO₂ pricing system, since this is one of the most efficient measures for combating climate change. To attract the investments needed, the price of CO₂ should be predictable and at an</p>	<p>The Commission agrees, and has therefore proposed a package of proposals to make the EU's climate, energy, land use, transport and taxation policies fit for reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, including by strengthening the</p>

⁴ COM(2020) 98 final.

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2020 on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment, and amending Regulation (EU) 2019/2088; OJ L 198, 22.6.2020, p. 13–43.

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/index_en.htm

<p>appropriate level, and take into account the true costs of damage from CO₂ emissions to encourage energy and other companies to invest in climate-friendly solutions;</p>	<p>Emissions Trading System and the Energy Taxation Directive⁷.</p>
<p>32. stresses that the pricing system for CO₂ is likely to include a carbon border adjustment mechanism to create an international level playing field, which is transparent to eliminate free riders;</p>	<p>The higher climate ambition of the proposed amendments of the EU Emissions Trading System will likely imply an increase of the carbon price, thus reinforcing the risk of carbon leakage from the EU. The overarching objective of the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is to address the risk of carbon leakage in order to fight climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the Union and globally.</p>
<p>37. calls on the EU to take a strong lead globally to develop the necessary CO₂ pricing and budgeting systems at the latest by 2030 and to negotiate similar elements with its global trading partners;</p>	<p>Global engagement and international cooperation is key to address the climate crisis and the EU is ready to work with its global trading partners bilaterally and multilaterally. In order to facilitate the global transition to a net zero economy, the EU will continue to show global leadership by action and by example by aligning its external policy instruments with these higher goals.</p>
<p>39. calls for the assistance to cities and regions to find the right combination of public and private funds for adaptation action, from international, European, national, and local sources; calls for red tape to be reduced and access to EU funding to be simplified;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the importance of capacity-building in cities and regions. This includes the capacity to identify, access, and leverage funding from both public and private sources.</p>
<p>40. calls on the EU and other actors to develop ways to measure the potential impact of climate-related risks on public finances, to develop tools and models for climate stress testing, and to take climate change into account in reporting and fiscal frameworks;</p>	<p>National fiscal frameworks in the EU include climate change and natural disaster fiscal risks only to a limited extent. Relief and reconstruction after extreme weather and slow-onset events will increase government expenditure, including via compensation for uninsured losses.</p> <p>The Commission will develop ways to measure the potential impact of climate-related risks on public finances, develop tools and models for climate stress testing, and engage in discussions with Member States on better take into account climate</p>

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3541

	change in national reporting and fiscal frameworks.
39 points out that closing the climate protection gap requires strengthening dialogue between policymakers and their stakeholders, especially industry and investors, including insurers and pension funds;	The Commission will facilitate cooperation and discussion on best practices between the insurance sector's stakeholders and strengthen the dialogue between insurers, reinsurers, public authorities, and other stakeholders, such as real-estate developers and infrastructure operators in the case of the built environment. As part of the recently adopted Strategy for financing the transition to a sustainable economy ⁸ , the Commission proposed further actions in the area of the provision of climate-relevant insurance products.
41. highlights the urgency of updating the national energy mix by using new advanced technologies in order to best serve reaching the goals of the EU decarbonisation strategy, as well as to fully encompass and benefit from the contributions of 'prosumers', local energy communities and new technologies; highlights the importance of the reliable low and medium-voltage electricity grid and the need to increase the share of renewable energies in the base-load power, in particular by developing storage and management technologies and expanding energy networks to better connect new small-scale producers to the low and medium-voltage grids; calls on the Commission to better represent smart grid projects in the list of projects of common interest (PCI) within the new proposed TEN-E framework;	<p>The Commission agrees on the importance of smart electricity grids in achieving the Union's energy and climate policy objectives.</p> <p>In the proposed TEN-E revision⁹, the category of smart electricity grids was updated to reflect technological changes and include elements regarding innovation and digital aspects that could be considered among the equipment or installations for smart grids. The broadened scope of the smart electricity grids has been reflected in the adjustment of the selection criteria. Furthermore, the role of project promoters has been further clarified.</p> <p>Nevertheless, it is important to note that the scope of the TEN-E Regulation¹⁰ is projects with a significant cross-border effect only, and as such, local low voltage distribution grids are therefore not in scope. The Commission supports action on such grids with appropriate instruments for it, such as the Modernisation Fund or the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).</p>
45 underlines the need to continue collecting examples of good practice tested on the ground	The newly established European Climate and Health Observatory under Climate-ADAPT will

⁸ COM(2021) 390 final.

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_2393

¹⁰ Regulation (EU) No 347/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2013 on guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure and repealing Decision No 1364/2006/EC and amending Regulations (EC) No 713/2009, (EC) No 714/2009 and (EC) No 715/2009 ; OJ L 115, 25.4.2013, p. 39–75.

<p>and to make them publicly accessible and easily searchable in a repository set up by the Climate-ADAPT portal and/or the catalogue of Benchmarks on the Covenant of Mayors website; emphasises that knowledge transfer shall also be facilitated through city-to-city cooperation and appropriate peer-to-peer and mentoring activities shall be identified, promoted and financed;</p>	<p>act as a platform combining knowledge from the health and climate communities. Moreover, Climate-ADAPT will be further enriched and interlinked with existing local, regional and national climate knowledge platforms. The Commission will also seek to facilitate access to the platform, for example by exploring ways of translating content into more languages.</p>
<p>46. emphasises the importance of innovative digital technologies, 5G technology, the Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence and data analytics that improve the digital and green transformation of cities and regions; furthermore a sufficient glass fibre supply is especially important for rural areas;</p>	<p>The Commission, through the Digital Europe Programme¹¹ will support cities and regions to make best use of digital technologies to tackle common challenges including climate adaptation, in particular the network of European Digital Innovation Hubs, the AI Testing and Experimentation Facilities for Smart Communities, the Creation of a Data Space for Smart Communities, a toolbox of components for the deployment of Local Digital Twins and identification of digital tools in support of the New European Bauhaus. Cities, communities and regions are also working together through the Living-in.eu community¹² to scale up the digital transformation, supported by the Commission and the Committee.</p>
<p>59. proposes the following three-step approach to the climate-related missions: 1) an open interactive process to get regions and cities involved in different ways in the mission; 2) signing the required number of forerunner communities up for testing the innovative mission solutions in real-life settings and 3) agreeing on the contribution of demonstrator communities to the large-scale deployment of innovative solutions and to the scaling-up of the best solutions for European-wide use;</p>	<p>The Commission will launch the Missions under Horizon Europe in close consultation with national and regional actors. Regional engagement will be particularly important for the Climate Adaptation Mission, given the local specificity of resilience actions. The proposed approach is a useful guide towards a successful deployment of the Missions, and will help them reach their ambitions goals.</p>
<p>60. proposes cooperation between the Climate Adaptation Mission and the Covenant of</p>	<p>The Commission will seek to maximise synergies between the relevant initiatives and instruments</p>

¹¹ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/activities/digital-programme>

¹² <https://living-in.eu/>

<p>Mayors to engage as many cities and regions as possible, with the objective of developing a good understanding of, preparing for and managing climate risks; the CoR covenant ambassadors can play an active role in this process;</p>	<p>supporting the acceleration of adaptation in regions, including between the Covenant of Mayors and the Climate Adaptation Mission (as well as strong interlinkages between Missions, in particular with the Climate-neutral and Smart Cities Mission). The Covenant Ambassadors are crucial partners in this endeavour, also given their direct political interaction with local and regional communities and their expertise at the EU policy level.</p>
<p>61. strongly supports the creation of a Policy Support Facility aimed at providing direct technical assistance to help develop and implement their adaptation strategies and plans; considers that this instrument should include an adaptation helpdesk, hands-on workshops, and other instruments to be created in synergy with the Covenant of Mayors, and stands ready to support the design and implementation of this facility;</p>	<p>The policy support facility will be an important tool for regions to develop their approaches to climate impacts. The Commission welcomes the suggestions and will seek to involve the Committee in the development of this facility.</p>
<p>64. recommends increasing the role of cities and regions in the Climate Adapt Platform and is keen to deepen cooperation, especially with the European Environment Agency, the EIT Climate KIC, and the Joint Research Centre; recommends that they provide regular updates on scientific knowledge and projects relating to climate change, its impact and vulnerability in the main biogeographical regions in Europe</p>	<p>The Commission will increase coordination among the main actors for adaptation at European, national and regional level. As per the new Adaptation Strategy, but also through both the European Climate Law¹³ and Energy Union Governance Regulation¹⁴ obligations, there will be regular updates of the scientific knowledge and assessments of progress made on adaptation in the Union.</p>

¹³ Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999 ('European Climate Law'); OJ L 243, 9.7.2021, p. 1–17.

¹⁴ 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; OJ L 328, 21.12.2018, p. 1–77.

**N°7 Stepping up Europe’s 2030 climate ambition towards COP26
COM(2020) 562 final
COR-2020-05068 – ENVE-VII/013
145th plenary session – June/July 2021
Rapporteur: Vincent CHAUVET (FR/RENEW E.)
DG CLIMA – Executive Vice-President TIMMERMANS**

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>3. [...] nevertheless, takes note that some stakeholders consider it still not sufficient to reach net climate neutrality on time and regrets that the new framework is focused mainly on CO₂ while other greenhouse gas emissions are ambiguously addressed not taken sufficiently into consideration; in this connection, expects the Commission to address all remaining relevant greenhouse gases in order to make the EU the first climate neutral continent by 2050;</p>	<p>EU climate legislation already covers all key greenhouse gases, including methane, nitrous oxide, and F-gases. The Fit for 55 package¹ continues this approach.</p> <p>The Commission is preparing a legislative proposal to address energy-related methane emissions.</p> <p>Climate neutrality as per the European Climate Law² applies to all greenhouse gas emissions and removals regulated under EU law, with the goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2050.</p>
<p>4. urges the EU institutions and the Member States to ensure pricing of fossil emissions through emissions trading and taxation, in order to combat emissions cost-effectively and free up resources for transition. This needs to be addressed in the reviews of the EU's emissions trading system (ETS) and its Energy Taxation Directive (ETD) in the upcoming Fit for 55 legislative package</p>	<p>The ‘Fit for 55’ legislative package is the most comprehensive building block in the efforts to implement the ambitious new 2030 climate target, and ensures that all economic sectors and policies make their contribution. In this regard, the Commission proposes to extend the emissions trading system (ETS) to maritime emissions, and to create a separate ETS for road transport and buildings.</p> <p>The Commission also proposes to strengthen carbon pricing for current sectors under the ETS. For the aviation sector, the Commission proposes to gradually move to full auctioning of allowances and more targeted free allocation rules in general.</p>

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3541

² Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999 (‘European Climate Law’); OJ L 243, 9.7.2021, p. 1–17.

	<p>Finally, a new Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism³ will put a carbon price on imports of a targeted selection of products to ensure that ambitious climate action in Europe does not lead to the risk of carbon leakage.</p> <p>With the extension of the ETS to maritime transport and a new separate ETS for road transport and buildings, emissions trading as a whole would cover 75% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions.</p> <p>Finally, on the use of resources, the Commission proposes that Member States use the entirety of the auction revenues from emissions trading for the climate transition. The Innovation and Modernisation Funds will also be increased. A dedicated part of the revenues from the new system for road transport and buildings should address the possible social impact on vulnerable households, micro-enterprises and transport users.</p> <p>Regarding the Energy Taxation Directive (ETD)⁴, the Commission has proposed to remove fossil fuel subsidies and promote the uptake of less polluting energy products such as renewable hydrogen and advanced biofuels. It is proposed to no longer fully exempt fossil fuels used for intra-EU air transport, maritime transport and fishing from energy taxation in the EU – a crucial measure given the role of these sectors in energy consumption and pollution.</p>
<p>8. considers it would be highly beneficial, in order to achieve effective multilevel governance, to incorporate contributions decided at local and regional level into the process of drawing up national contributions;</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the central role of Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs) in an ambitious climate policy and its implementation, and looks forward to continue the cooperation with the Committee to ensure that LRAs are consulted and have the means for fulfilling their role in making the climate transition happen. Under the EU Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, local governments are already leading the way at</p>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_3661

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12227-EU-Green-Deal-Revision-of-the-Energy-Taxation-Directive_en

	<p>municipal level in engaging citizens and stakeholders in their territories. Actions such as these have helped pave the way for the EU to further increase its climate ambition, now also firmly anchored in the Climate Law. This higher ambition comes with higher responsibilities, also at LRAs so that the EU also ‘walks the talk’.</p> <p>To facilitate the engagement of LRAs and other stakeholders, the present Commission has put forward the Climate Pact⁵. This new initiative supports and encourages local and regional exchanges and dialogues to gather the wealth of climate policy experience as a basis to inspire action. Other regulatory measures recognise the need for LRAs to be closely involved: the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action⁶ states in recital 3 that ‘the goal of a resilient Energy Union with an ambitious climate policy at its core can be achieved only through coordinated action, combining both legislative and non-legislative acts at Union, regional, national and local level’. For this reason, in article 11 it says ‘Member States shall establish a multilevel climate and energy dialogue pursuant to national rules’.</p> <p>Financially, several EU funds are there to help LRAs to take climate action. This is for instance the case for the cohesion funds, the Just Transition Fund and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The latter clearly stipulates that LRAs ‘should be appropriately consulted and involved (in the preparation and implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plans), in accordance with the national legal framework’.</p>
<p>14. [...] calls on the Commission to take the necessary investment into the CO₂ neutrality transitions of the agricultural sector into consideration in the implementation and</p>	<p>Since its announcement in the ‘Farm to Fork Strategy’⁷, the Commission is promoting carbon farming as new green business model that rewards practices by land managers leading to carbon</p>

⁵ COM(2020) 788 final.

⁶ Regulation (EU) 2018/1999.

⁷ COM(2020) 381 final.

<p>possible revision of the Common Agricultural Policy, while not overlooking the economic profitability of farms and their essential role as a food supplier to European society, as demonstrated during the pandemic and, making agricultural land uses compatible with those intended for renewable energy generation on degraded rural land that can be developed and regenerated and stresses the need to reinforce climate-friendly land-use systems. Moreover, highlights that in some Member States, LRAs are major public owners of forests and play a direct role in this economy; against this backdrop, the development of carbon sequestration certification to provide direct incentives for individual farmers or forest managers is to be welcomed;</p>	<p>sequestration and storage. Carbon farming will thus create a new source of income for farmers and foresters that carry out climate-friendly activities, which will also increase their productivity and resilience to climate change. The Commission has already promoted carbon farming in its recommendations on the Member States' Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plans and will continue outlining carbon farming possibilities. In parallel, the shift to sustainable fish and seafood production must also be accelerated. The Commission will also develop a regulatory framework for certifying carbon removals based on robust and transparent carbon accounting to monitor and verify their authenticity and will publish a Communication on carbon farming and carbon removal certification by the end of 2021.</p> <p>Moreover, the Commission has proposed strengthened sustainability criteria for the use of forest biomass for energy in its proposal for a revised Renewable Energy Directive⁸ adopted in July 2021.</p>
<p>16. is aware that, in the building sector, the forthcoming Renovation Wave will launch a set of actions to increase the depth and the rate of renovations at single building and district level [...]</p>	<p>The Renovation Wave Strategy⁹, published on 14 October 2020, includes a set of 23 actions, some of which are part of the 'Fit for 55' legislative package, including in the proposals for the recast of the Energy Efficiency Directive¹⁰, the review of the Renewable Energy Directive and in the upcoming proposal for the revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive.</p> <p>Thanks to those actions, the strategy aims to at least double the energy renovation rate and depth in the next ten years thus contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from the buildings sector.</p>
<p>26. asks the Joint Research Centre to conduct a study to map (up to level 3 of the Territorial</p>	<p>The Joint Research Centre (JRC) is supporting the evaluation of investments in the frame of regional</p>

⁸ COM(2021) 557 final.

⁹ COM(2020) 662 final.

¹⁰ COM(2021) 558 final.

<p>Units for Statistics) the absorption capacity of local and regional authorities and business, with regard to the significant new funding made available by the Green Deal and the Recovery Plan and stands ready to contribute with tools available to the CoR, such as the Regional Hubs;</p>	<p>and cohesion funds at urban and territorial level with an analytical instrument called STRAT-Board, implemented in collaboration with DG REGIO.¹¹</p> <p>The JRC has also developed a funding viewer tool at regional level (NUTS2), specifically related to research and innovation activities.¹²</p> <p>These instruments however do not specifically target the Committee's suggestion and would only be meaningful as contributors to a broader effort and with substantial re-shape, which goes beyond the current JRC work programme articulation. Nevertheless, should the Committee decide to outsource the study to external contractors, the JRC would be pleased to make these tools available to the selected experts.</p>
<p>29. calls however on the European Commission to create an umbrella platform, potentially through the European Climate Pact, promoting their integration and complementarity, guiding LRAs in the choice depending on their characteristics and ensuring coherence, easy access to information, non-competing pledges and simplifying and unifying (to the degree possible) access to the initiatives;</p> <p>30. calls the European Commission to acknowledge the fact that the role of LRAs goes beyond the role of other non-state actors and call for a recognition of this specificity in the frame of the umbrella platform;</p>	<p>LRAs have a key role to play in climate action (including adaptation, not just neutrality, of course) and the Commission would like to support them under the European Climate Pact.</p> <p>As part of the European Green Deal ambition, the Commission launched the European Climate Pact to develop tools and spaces for organisations, and in particular cities, to enable them to find and exchange information, and gain concrete ideas and inspiration on how to mobilise the stakeholders within their urban ecosystems for climate action.</p> <p>This includes helping cities to envision and develop their own 'local climate pact', which forms part of the 2050 commitment, as well as provisions to expand the actions to other areas, such as healthy food and sustainable diets, oceans, rural and coastal areas.</p> <p>The European Climate Pact aims to support cities to leverage, deepen and support important connections with local stakeholders, such as local businesses, schools and universities, non-governmental organisations, community groups,</p>

¹¹ <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/#/where>

¹² <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/en/synergies-tool>

etc. The Climate Pact has started to develop a set of practical tools and activities that can help cities in taking forward their ambitions.

The Climate Pact is also planning a series of themed campaigns across Europe to raise awareness and activate people and organisations around urgent climate and environmental topics. In 2021, two campaigns are taking place, in autumn on Sustainable Mobility and winter on Sustainable Shopping and Giving.

Another powerful way for cities to support and benefit from the Climate Pact is to put forward one or several of its staff as Climate Pact Ambassadors. Ambassadors are supported through a dedicated onboarding programme, country-based and thematic networks, and a support kit.

Cities are in a key position to encourage their local citizens and employees to make an individual pledge towards climate action. The Climate Pact has a dedicated citizen-pledging platform in partnership with Count Us In project¹³. The platform is now available in four European languages (English, French, German and Spanish) and more languages will follow. ‘Count Us In’ has also launched an employee engagement initiative¹⁴, which city staff can be part of.

To enhance mutual learning and exchange, the Climate Pact is planning some online Learning Networks. The idea behind these networks is that interested cities will be able to meet and share information, ideas and learning of how to raise public participatory engagement and connect and implement climate action within their ecosystems. This can include identifying good practice, accessing tools and guidance, taking forward collaboration and action together, being supported through increased communication and visibility, etc. Further details will be available in autumn 2021 and an invitation to join will be sent to all

¹³ <https://www.count-us-in.org/en-gb/businesses/eu-climate-pact/campaigns/euclimatepact/>

¹⁴ [Employee Challenge | Count Us In \(count-us-in.org\)](#)

	<p>2050 commitment signatories (via the Covenant of Mayors Secretariat).</p> <p>The ‘Living-in.eu community’¹⁵, supported by the Commission and the Committee is a useful means of exchanging information on the use of digital technologies at local level including to achieve European Green Deal objectives.</p>
<p>33. stresses that most cities and regions do not know their current and past level of CO₂ emissions, which makes it difficult for them to quantify their efforts and design efficient pathways towards climate neutrality. Urges the Commission to help provide the necessary technical and competence aid to assist LRAs in their emission evaluation, in particular by fully using local and regional energy agencies, local and regional authorities working in the field of climate change and other relevant counterparts;</p>	<p>The Commission is responsible for compiling annually the total EU greenhouse gas inventory and has been aware of difficulties to access data on current and past level of greenhouse gas emissions at local and regional level. Hence, one of the main objectives of the Covenant of Mayors is to support cities and regions on development of Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans and in reporting on achieving and exceeding the EU climate and energy targets.</p> <p>In the Commission’s view, the situation has improved considerably over the last years. In the Commission’s knowledge, most of the Covenant signatories have been able to deliver comprehensive emission inventories. Cities are now able to develop fairly, reliable inventories, at least for emissions in sectors of their own competences / direct emissions.</p> <p>The Commission is conscious that there are sectors for which the challenge is still high such as building, waste, industry, agriculture, etc. either because of the complexity to collect data or because of a remaining lack of data. Efforts are being supported by the Commission to directly observe CO₂ (and methane) emissions with earth observation and in situ measurements. This will also help to greatly improve sub-national greenhouse gas emissions reporting in the mid-</p>

¹⁵ <https://living-in.eu/>

	term.
<p>42. calls for global and European actors to invest in gender-analysis and sex-disaggregated data to understand fully the impact of climate change on all vulnerable groups, implement gender-budgeting techniques and ensure equal access to representation in policy making for all genders and all levels. In this light, supports the call for enhancing the gender balance in national delegations, as well as within the COP26 senior management team and welcomes the work of UNFCCC on the connection between gender and climate policies and calls on the European Commission to work in the same direction;</p>	<p>The European Gender Equality Strategy¹⁶ presents policy objectives and actions to make significant progress by 2025 towards a gender-equal Europe. The Strategy reaffirms the commitment to integrate a gender equality perspective into all EU policies as well as into EU funding programmes.</p> <p>The implementation of the key actions under the strategy will be monitored and progress will be reported on an annual basis, including relevant data, among others from Eurostat and Eurofound, as well as indicators for measuring progress building on annual EU Gender Equality Index prepared by the European Institute on Gender Equality (EIGE). EIGE will also provide data and research to feed into the evidence-based policy-making of EU institutions and Member States. The Technical Support Instrument can support Member States in mainstreaming gender in public administration, state budgeting and financial management.</p> <p>Concretely on climate change, under its work programme for 2021-2023, EIGE will provide research on the European Green Deal. Among others, EIGE will: (i) prepare a research report on the topic to support the Presidencies of the Council of the EU; (ii) focus on climate change and the environment in the Gender Equality Index 2023; (iii) and develop a communications package on the gender perspective to the European Green Deal, based on EIGE's research findings and statistical data.</p> <p>For a long time already the EU has also been committed to promote a gender perspective in climate policies internationally and to support women's engagement and gender equality in international negotiations under the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The Commission has been directly</p>

¹⁶ COM(2020) 152 final.

	<p>involved in shaping the development of a Gender Action Plan under the UNFCCC. Moreover, the European Union's stance in climate negotiations is based on equal participation of women in climate negotiations, with a female representation in the EU delegation at the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP25 in 2019 in Madrid of 41.4 % women and two female EU lead negotiators out of three.</p>
<p>46. welcomes initiatives from the European Commission and the Covenant of Mayors to better present LRAs' activities and involvement in climate neutral policies' design and enforcement at upcoming COPs and to promote leadership in the vertical integration of climate action. In this light, calls the Commission to cooperate with the CoR to organise a thematic day on local Climate Action in the EU, as an opportunity to showcase the different EU initiatives;</p>	<p>The programme of the EU pavilion at United Nations Climate Change Conference COP26 in November 2021 in Glasgow had a number of events dedicated to climate action for cities and regions, including with Committee.</p>

N°8 Revised Trans-European Energy Infrastructure Regulation fit for the Green and Digital Transition
COM(2020) 824 final
COR 2021-00722 – ENVE-VII/016
145th plenary session – June/July 2021
Rapporteur: Robert Sorin NEGOIȚĂ (RO/EPP)
DG ENER – Commissioner SIMSON

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>1. [...] emphasises that climate change that cannot now be prevented will have a significant impact in Europe in spite of the mitigation and adaptation efforts, and therefore calls on the Commission and the Member States to step up their efforts to update energy infrastructure as a key enabler for the energy transition, while ensuring climate action and nature conservation, and compliance with sustainability criteria in line with the SDGs;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee. One of the reasons why the Commission adopted in December 2020 the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure and repealing Regulation (EU) No 347/2013 ('the proposal') is to better support the modernisation of Europe's cross-border energy infrastructure and achieve the objectives of the European Green Deal. Europe's progress towards a climate neutral economy powered by clean energy requires new infrastructure adapted to new technologies. The trans-European energy (TEN-E) policy supports this transformation through projects of common interest (PCIs), which must contribute to the achievement of the EU's emission reduction targets for 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050.</p>
<p>6. highlights that the energy infrastructure has a crucial role to play in energy transition and can have significant environmental and economic impact. Calls, therefore, on the Commission to establish a permanent mechanism for regional groups to dialogue with local and regional authorities concerned which is consistent with the framework for the Multilevel Climate and Energy Dialogue as established by the governance of the energy union regulation;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee as regards the role of energy infrastructure. This is why both the governance of the EU infrastructure planning process and the PCI selection process ensure that the role of infrastructure in the energy transition and its environmental and economic impact are duly taken into account. As an example, the climate and energy targets, the national energy and climate plans and ensuring the energy efficiency first principle are key in the process, in particular, at the level of the scenarios building and cost-benefit analysis. Moreover, the process ensures robust stakeholder participation,</p>

	<p>including local and regional authorities, at all stages: during the scenarios building, for the development of the cost-benefit analysis methodology and when determining the EU infrastructure gaps. Moreover, relevant stakeholders, such as NGOs and local and regional authorities, are invited and can participate to the discussions in the regional groups.</p>
<p>8. calls for the priority status of PCIs to be carefully considered and for priority not to be given to any projects that would have a negative impact on climate or protected habitats or species;</p>	<p>The Commission proposal provides for a priority status for PCIs as regards the permit granting processes. This is without prejudice to any requirements resulting from Union law, including climate protection or environmental law. To recall, PCIs have to comply in full with all the relevant requirements under EU or national environmental law.</p>
<p>11. highlights the need for electrification and the role of clean hydrogen in moving away from fossil fuels and reducing persistent emissions from polluting sectors such as industry and heavy transport, where direct electrification may be limited; recalls that renewable hydrogen should be the priority and low-carbon hydrogen should be used for decarbonisation purposes until renewable hydrogen can play this role alone; calls therefore on the EU institutions, Member States and industry to ramp up renewable electricity and hydrogen capacity in order to avoid a counterproductive competition between electrolyzers for the production of hydrogen and other direct uses of renewable electricity. Furthermore, calls on the Commission for a clear taxonomy of "renewable" gases;</p>	<p>The Commission has adopted in July 2020 strategies for an integrated EU Energy System¹ and for Hydrogen² establishing direct electrification as the priority to provide efficient decarbonisation, however where direct electrification is not feasible or economically viable, renewable hydrogen in the first place, but also low-carbon hydrogen, can play a role. The Hydrogen strategy sets out in particular how to scale up renewable hydrogen production in the EU.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Renewable Energy Directive³ includes a definition and certification of renewable gases and renewable fuels of non-biological origin (RFNBOs) in the transport sector that covers renewable hydrogen and gases produced with renewable hydrogen. The Commission proposes with its amendment⁴ to the Renewable Energy Directive on 14 July 2021 to extend the definition and certification of RFNBOs</p>

¹ COM(2020) 299 final.

² COM(2020) 301 final.

³ Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources, OJ L 328, 21.12.2018, p. 82–209.

⁴ COM(2021) 557 final.

	beyond transport to all other sectors.
<p>13. underlines the importance for activities under the TEN-E regulation to be fully in line with the relevant planning instruments, particularly the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECP). In this regard, reiterates the importance of local and regional authorities being able to contribute fully to their Member State's NECPs and calls for optimum representation of local and regional authorities throughout this process;</p>	<p>Please see the response above at point 6. The governance of the EU infrastructure planning process ensures that the national energy and climate plans are fully included and taken into account in the process, but also that local and regional authorities can be duly represented both in the governance of the EU infrastructure planning process and the PCI selection process.</p> <p>In line with the Governance Regulation⁵ local and regional authorities are able to fully take part in the elaboration of energy and climate policies including the national energy and climate plans.</p> <p>The Commission assessed Member States' national energy and climate plans and published its assessment on 14 October 2020 in Staff Working Documents⁶. The Commission's assessment includes notably a section on public consultation, parliamentary control and involvement of local and regional authorities.</p>
<p>18. stresses that in order to best serve the achievement of the EU's energy and climate targets as well as empowering customers, the TEN-E framework must be revised to fully encompass and benefit from the contributions of "prosumers", local energy communities and new technologies ; highlights the importance of the low and medium-voltage electricity grid, where the required infrastructure for a multitude of new, decentralised producers feeding electricity into the system must be created; underlines that there is also a need to connect new small-scale producers to the low and medium-voltage networks; calls on the Commission to provide a framework for the</p>	<p>The Commission considers that the TEN-E framework already captures and takes into account the benefits brought from the contributions of 'prosumers', local energy communities and new technologies, in particular through the smart grids category. This category has been further enhanced in the proposal by streamlining and modernising the eligibility criteria to reflect technological development, digitalisation and cybersecurity in transmission and distribution networks and to clarify the eligible project promoters.</p> <p>Nevertheless, while the smart grids category provides the framework for aggregating several smaller projects, this aggregation needs to lead to</p>

⁵ 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.

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-strategy/national-energy-climate-plans/individual-assessments_en

<p>aggregation of several smaller projects, in order to allow them to meet the criteria under the current legislation. Flexibility in this regard is of high importance for local and regional authorities to be able to set up certain aggregated projects and to potentially obtain financing for these efforts;</p>	<p>a certain scale and importance ensuring their cross-border nature, as the EU relevance of the projects needs to be ensured.</p> <p>The TEN-E policy, in line with the legal basis provide by Article 172 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (the Treaty), aims at the timely development and interoperability of trans-European energy networks in order to achieve the energy policy objectives of the Treaty. The TEN-E policy is, in fact, the only Union policy addressing the planning and selection of EU relevant energy transmission networks, while a series of other Union policies are more targeted at smaller scale projects.</p>
<p>19. remarks that the TEN-E regulation, as a central pillar of the European Union energy infrastructure development and, as such, a crucial contributor to achieving climate neutrality broadly respects the principles of active subsidiarity and proportionality; stresses the added value of regional cooperation in implementing cross-border projects, transparency, regulatory certainty and access to financing; calls for the full involvement of local and regional authorities as partners, not just stakeholders, in line with these principles of active subsidiarity and proportionality.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that regional cooperation is invaluable for developing cross-border projects and that the regional dimension of the decision making process needs to be ensured. This is why the selection of projects of common interest takes place within regional groups ensuring that regional needs and specificities are taken into account. Moreover, four high-level groups⁷, in principle, facilitated by the Commission, provide the necessary framework for enhanced regional cooperation towards developing cross-border energy infrastructure projects.</p> <p>Local and regional authorities are not only stakeholders in these processes, but they also represent key actors in the development of cross-border energy infrastructure as they directly participate in the infrastructure planning process, including through the permitting process, which is</p>

⁷ The Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan, the Central and South-Eastern Europe Connectivity, North Seas Energy Cooperation, and Interconnections for South-West Europe.

then reflected at a regional and EU level.

Moreover, in accordance with the Governance Regulation⁸ each Member State needs to establish a permanent multi-level energy dialogue, bringing together local authorities, civil society organisations, the business community, investors and other relevant stakeholders to discuss the different options envisaged for energy and climate policies.

⁸ 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>N°9 Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy Own-initiative opinion COR-2021-00497 – COTER-VII/011 145st plenary session – June/July 2021 Rapporteur: Robert VAN ASTEN (NL/RENEW E.) DG MOVE – Commissioner VĂLEAN</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>3. stresses, however, that making mobility sustainable must be combined with related challenges such as accessibility, affordability, road safety, health, spatial planning, the actual existence of alternatives to private transport and demographic change. The strategy lacks concrete measures to make these challenges mutually reinforcing;</p>	<p>The Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy fully recognises the broad range of challenges to the transport sector, which are thoroughly analysed in the accompanying Staff Working Document¹. These different challenges will be taken into account as relevant, when developing the initiatives listed in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy action plan.</p> <p>In particular, the new EU urban mobility framework, planned for end of 2021, recognises that transport continues to produce negative external environmental costs (linked in particular to greenhouse gas emissions, local air pollution, noise, energy production, habitat damage), which together with costs of congestion and road accidents add up to almost €900 billion annually within the EU, with a significant share related to urban mobility. The initiative therefore aims to contribute to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – increasing public awareness, support to, and share of sustainable transport modes (in particular public transport and active mobility) as well as zero-emission urban logistics; – promoting a coherent and integrated approach to urban mobility planning while ensuring its quality and links with EU funding and related processes (e.g. urban development, energy and climate planning); and – strengthening the role of urban nodes on the Trans-European Transport (TEN-T) Network

¹ SWD(2020) 331 final.

	<p>as vital enablers of sustainable, efficient and multi-modal transport.</p>
<p>4. notes that the mobility transition is mainly taking place at regional and local level. The strategy should better take into account cities and regions' knowledge and experience of making mobility sustainable. The transition to sustainable and smart mobility requires a joint approach involving all levels of government (multilevel governance), in line with the principle of active subsidiarity;</p>	<p>Citizens expect progress with regards to air quality, traffic noise, congestion and road safety in their towns and cities.</p> <p>Whilst urban mobility is primarily the responsibility of the competent authorities at local level, the European Climate Target Plan for 2030 recognises its crucial role for reaching the overall climate objectives that the European Union has set for itself, including in the European Climate Law.</p> <p>The Commission supports cities in their transition towards sustainable urban mobility, which is why it features prominently in this strategy. It includes flagship actions to make interurban and urban mobility more sustainable and healthy, by means of a revision of the Urban Mobility Package of 2013 for example.</p> <p>The Urban Mobility Package established concepts such as the sustainable urban mobility plans which have proven an effective and increasingly popular tool, implemented in cities in a large number of countries, and not only in the EU.</p> <p>In addition, the Mission for 100 climate-neutral and smart cities that is being established under Horizon Europe will have a strong transport component as part of a holistic and joint approach based on cities' concrete needs on their path towards climate neutrality.</p>
<p>7. regrets that the strategy does not represent a vision of a holistic European mobility policy, covering all modes of transport in a joint and balanced manner. Stresses, in this regard, that the Commission should put more emphasis on other sustainable modes of transport, such as the bus, which is set to play a key role in the transition towards sustainable, safe and</p>	<p>The strategy is based on the 2011 Evaluation of the White Paper 'Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area – towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system'², as well as on analytical forward-looking work presented in the accompanying Staff Working Document. These cover all transport modes.</p> <p>The European Green Deal calls for a 90%</p>

² COM(2011) 0144 final.

<p>accessible mobility;</p>	<p>reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from transport, in order for the EU to become a climate-neutral economy by 2050, while also working towards a zero-pollution ambition. To achieve this systemic change, the strategy seeks to (1) make all transport modes more sustainable, (2) make sustainable alternatives widely available in a multimodal transport system and (3) put in place the right incentives to drive the transition. These are the three pillars of our future actions.</p> <p>Moreover, on 14 July 2021, the Commission adopted the ‘Fit for 55’ package³ with proposals to make the EU's climate, energy, land use, transport and taxation policies fit for reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. The package included several proposals related to all modes of transport.</p> <p>The Commission recognises the important role of collective transport, including buses. Collective transport will be supported within the flagship action to make interurban and urban mobility healthy and sustainable and the new urban mobility initiative. These actions will cover not only the promotion and support for collective transport, but also the renewal of public transport fleets and the need to deploy associated recharging and refuelling infrastructure. Fora like the Covenant of Mayors and institutions such as the European Investment Bank can support cities in grouping their purchases of zero emission buses, making them more affordable for all. Dedicated research and innovation activities to support public transport will also be launched within the first calls of Horizon Europe.</p>
<p>10. regrets that the European Commission's proposal focuses in its proposal mainly on individual vehicles, thereby neglecting their</p>	<p>In order to meet the EU emission reduction targets, the Commission agree that it cannot simply focus on individual vehicles and that all</p>

³ 'Fit for 55' package: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3541.

<p>impact on congestions and their other negative externalities (noise, air pollution, accidents, greenhouse gases, barrier effects, etc.). This is particularly relevant in transit regions and cities. Moreover, in some Member States the number of journeys is increasing as the population moves away from city centres to outskirts and suburbs;</p>	<p>policy levers must be pulled:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – measures to significantly reduce the current dependence on fossil fuels (by replacing existing fleets with low- and zero-emission vehicles and boosting the use of renewable and low-carbon fuels); – decisive action to shift more activity towards more sustainable transport modes (notably increasing the number of passengers travelling by rail and commuting by public transport and active modes, as well as shifting a substantial amount of freight onto rail, inland waterways, and short sea shipping); and – internalisation of external costs (by implementing the ‘polluter pays’ and ‘user pays’ principles, in particular through carbon pricing and infrastructure charging mechanisms).
<p>13. Good connections are important for economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU; notes, in particular, the absence from the mobility strategy of concrete initiatives from the European Commission for rural, isolated and outermost areas, building on the important role of mobility in ensuring the provision of services of general interest in rural areas with sparse infrastructure.</p>	<p>The strategy clearly states that mobility must be available and affordable for all, that rural and remote regions must be better connected, accessible for persons with reduced mobility and persons with disabilities, and that European transport must offer good social conditions, reskilling opportunities and provides attractive jobs.</p> <p>To this end, the Commission will ensure that possibilities under relevant EU Funds are fully explored to make this new mobility affordable and accessible in all regions and for all passengers including those with disabilities and reduced mobility.</p> <p>The Commission will also continue to help by providing support from the Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, in particular in less developed Member States and regions.</p> <p>Lastly, the European Pillar of Social Rights is the European compass to make sure that the green and digital transitions are socially fair and just.</p>

<p>29. notes that additional EU funding is needed in order to make investments, especially to implement measures provided for in SUMP for liveable cities and regions. Such measures include better collective public transport services and pedestrian and cycle networks, and the construction of sound infrastructure such as publicly accessible charging points for electric and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles, shared mobility systems and smart applications;</p>	<p>The new NextGenerationEU recovery fund and its various financial tools will play a key role in delivering on the European Green Deal and our vision set out in this Strategy.</p> <p>Funding under the new Recovery and Resilience Facility will support more environmentally friendly approaches or digitalisation in transport. Under InvestEU, private investments in transport infrastructure as well as fleet renewal can be supported.</p> <p>For research and innovation, our Horizon Europe program offers further opportunities for instance for research on sustainable and competitive hydrogen, electromobility and low carbon fuels (in particular for public transport), new mobility services, as well as funding and financing that is planned as part of the Mission for 100 climate-neutral and smart cities.</p> <p>Support from our Connecting Europe Facility will remain available during the 2021-2027 period for deployment of alternative fuels infrastructures for example.</p> <p>Finally, the Cohesion policy funds are also supporting the Green Deal agenda by reinforcing sustainable regional development, where public transport and construction of active modes of transport infrastructure play crucial role.</p>
<p>43. supports the European Commission's project to include road transports in the Emissions Trading System. However, is concerned that this inclusion would hit vulnerable consumers. Insists therefore that the product of this new tax should finance a massive public investment programme within the future cohesion policy in order to allow local and regional authorities to develop decarbonised offers of transports for all EU citizens, wherever they live, particularly to connect rural and remote areas with urban centres;</p>	<p>The 'Fit for 55' package includes a Commission proposal for a Social Climate Fund. This Fund will provide dedicated funding to Member States to support European citizens most affected or at risk of energy or mobility poverty, to accompany the introduction of the Emissions Trading to road transport and buildings. It will provide €72.2 billion in current prices for the period 2025-2032. On top of addressing energy poverty, it will also finance access to zero- and low-emission mobility.</p>

44. underlines that various incentives are needed to bring about a modal shift. These include positive incentives such as the expansion of local public transport, tax incentives for the purchase of zero-emission vehicles (bicycles, scooters and cars), and efficient, reliable and affordable rail transport.

As set out in the strategy, the EU needs to make all transport modes more sustainable, make sustainable alternatives widely available in a multimodal transport system and put in place the right incentives to drive the transition. These are the three pillars of our future actions.

More specifically, incentives for transport users to make more sustainable choices must be reinforced. These incentives are mainly economic, namely carbon pricing, taxation, and infrastructure charging, but should be complemented by improved information to users.

Moreover, the shift towards sustainable, smart and resilient mobility must be just that or else it risks not taking place. For example, if transport is to remain affordable, incentivising greener options cannot only be about making polluting modes of transport more expensive, but also about reducing the costs generally on more sustainable alternatives. Public measures including specific compensation, subsidies schemes and the effective use of taxation and subsidies including State aid will be key to ensuring a socially and geographically fair transition.

The Commission will ensure that possibilities under the relevant EU Funds are fully explored to make this new mobility affordable and accessible in all regions and for all passengers including those with disabilities and reduced mobility. The Commission will also continue to help by providing support from the Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, in particular in less developed Member States and regions.

The European Pillar of Social Rights is the European compass to make sure that the green and digital transitions are socially fair and just.

Transformation in Europe will only be successful if we combine market-driven measures with the right social balance. In this spirit, a Social Climate Fund will accompany the climate

	transition. The Fund will enable Member States to support vulnerable households, transport users, and micro-enterprises affected by the extension of emissions trading to building and transport.
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N°10 The future of regional airports – challenges and opportunities
Own-initiative
COR-2021-00471 – COTER-VII/010
145st plenary session – June/July 2021
Rapporteur: Władysław ORTYL (PL/ECR)
DG MOVE – Commissioner VÁLEAN

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>1. underlines that there is no commonly agreed definition at EU level for the term "regional airport". For the purpose of this opinion, it is understood that this term refers to airports that are not airport hubs and whose main catchment area is not the capital of the country concerned. The term should, however, be clarified by the European Commission on the basis of criteria such as the type of connections offered, the number of passengers and the number of connections to other airports. Therefore, the Committee calls on the European Commission to establish criteria defining the different categories of regional airports (those in specific peripheral, island, outermost or less developed regions), and the funding rules and competition policy that should be applied to these categories;</p>	<p>The Commission points out that the relevant criteria as to the eligibility of airports either under the EU funds or State aid rules, are included in the relevant legislation or guidelines.</p> <p>The Commission notes that the particular needs of regional airports are already reflected in its State aid rules in relation to EU airports and airlines and that the specific and varied situation of EU airports (of all categories), will also be taken in due consideration in any future review of the Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines¹.</p>
<p>2. notes that the European Commission has set out its vision for the decarbonisation of aviation in its Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy², the result of which should be a 90% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions relating to transport by 2050. Aviation and airports have to help meet the European Union's decarbonisation objectives. The European Green Deal emphasises that air quality should be improved near airports by tackling the emissions of pollutants by aeroplanes and airport operations, including by gradually increasing the share of alternative fuels that are climate-neutral,</p>	<p>The Commission's Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy³ stresses that airports are key for the Union's international connectivity, for the European economy, and for their regions. The strategy points out that airports should become multimodal mobility and transport hubs, linking all the relevant modes. This will improve air quality locally thereby contributing to improved health of nearby residents.</p> <p>The importance of airports, including regional airports, is highlighted by Flagship 2 (creating zero-emission airports and ports) that</p>

¹ OJ C 99, 4.4.2014, p. 3–34.

² Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy.

³ COM 2020/789 final.

<p>becoming multimodal mobility hubs and creating zero-emission airports. Regional airports could be ideal pioneers of green innovation, as their inherent characteristics include being smaller, more flexible, and more adaptable to newer, greener types of aircraft;</p>	<p>specifically deals with measures aimed at reducing the climate and environmental footprint of airports.</p> <p>The ‘Fit for 55’ package⁴ aiming at reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, proposed as regards aviation a number of initiatives concerning airports, in particular ReFuelEU, sustainable aviation fuels⁵ and the Regulation on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure (AFIR)⁶ with the provision of electricity to stationary aircraft. In this context, regional airports could indeed act as pioneers of green innovation.</p> <p>The Commission has been liaising with a wide range of stakeholders, including regional airports, on how to ensure that that climate objectives of the Union can be met.</p>
<p>7. stresses that, owing to the additional costs of island location, building infrastructure to convert to zero-emission airports on islands will be much more costly than the same type of project in a region on the mainland; calls on the Member States to ensure specific financial support for regional authorities and/or companies to promote the shift towards zero-emissions airports on islands;</p>	<p>The Commission refers to the different possibilities for State support enshrined in the Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines⁷ and in the Commission Regulation (EU) N°651/2014⁸.</p> <p>The aid intensities foreseen for financial support in favour of smaller airports is indeed higher, in recognition of their particular needs. In addition, the aid limits foreseen therein, do not constitute an absolute amount but rather a proportion of the relevant costs that are to be covered by the envisaged support. In other words, the methodology is flexible to accommodate for the more costly regional investment (such as on a remote area or an island) by allowing for the granting of more aid in absolute terms.</p> <p>Moreover, the specific needs for the necessary</p>

⁴ COM(2021) 550 final.

⁵ COM(2021) 561 final.

⁶ COM(2021) 559 final.

⁷ OJ C 99, 4.4.2014, p. 3–34.

⁸ Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty Text with EEA relevance; OJ L 187, 26.6.2014, p. 1–78.

	<p>adaptation of transport infrastructure to reach a zero-emission target, will be taken in due consideration in revising Climate, Energy and Environmental State aid Guidelines⁹.</p>
<p>8. notes that airports are unevenly distributed across Member States and regions. In some regions, like the Benelux countries, Germany or Northern Italy, they are very densely distributed, in others, like Central Eastern Europe, relatively very few regional airports are operating. This encapsulates a broader problem of inequity in the access to transport, both for citizens living and businesses based outside the centrally located areas of the European Union; Steps should therefore be taken to reduce these disparities and reduce the number of regions without a regional airport;</p>	<p>The Commission’s Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy explicitly recognises the importance of cohesion, the need to reduce regional disparities and to improve connectivity and access to the internal market for all regions. The key objective of the strategy is to ensure connectivity in the Union through resilient, digitalised and sustainable mobility options. It is crucial that mobility is available and affordable to all, that rural and remote regions are better connected.</p> <p>The Commission will work towards an overall system where EU investments, State aid support, rules for capacity allocation and public service obligations are geared towards fulfilling mobility needs and looking at different mobility options, rather than assessing mobility within the confines of one transport mode.</p>
<p>12. stresses that in order to facilitate inter-modality and co-modality, attractive train connections, including high speed and freight trains to airports need to be systematically constructed in the near future, and as a service to the passengers, airlines, train and bus companies should be required to sell joint tickets, enabling passengers to purchase one ticket for a combined trip; questions in relation to missed connections need to be dealt within the passengers' rights regulation;</p>	<p>Currently, there is no EU-wide framework for integrated, multimodal information, ticketing and payment services. As announced in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, the Commission services are at present assessing whether the commercial arrangements between transport operators and digital mobility services are fit for purpose.</p> <p>The aim is to make more information available on possible connections and to make digital mobility services (or travel booking systems) more efficient and thus will contribute to our overall transport and mobility objectives. This would also i.e. allow to have more multimodal journeys available for booking under a single transaction.</p> <p>The Commission plans to adopt an action plan</p>

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/competition-policy/public-consultations/2021-ceeag_en

	<p>on long-distance and cross-border passenger services by the end of 2021. The plan will include a set of measures to lift the remaining barriers standing in the provision of more attractive and frequent rail services. This will include the intermodal perspective - that is how to link rail services to other modes of transport through ticketing and interconnections.</p> <p>The passenger rights' legal framework is specific for each transport mode. Services within multi-modal journeys are not regulated from a passenger rights' perspective. However, action 63 of the strategy provides for a: <i>'Review of the passenger rights regulatory framework, including to ensure its resilience to extensive travel disruptions, and including options for multimodal tickets.'</i> The Commission is planning to carry out an Impact Assessment to analyse problems across the modes, including missed connections.</p>
<p>14. recommends to assess the experiences made during the pandemic and to evaluate the impact of the reduced air traffic on the environment and the climate, but also on the economic development of regions and cities, providing evidence for further discussions and decisions in relation to future, sustainable tourism strategies and the future of regional airports;</p>	<p>As part of the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy (Action Plan, Item 56), the Commission will assess the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on connectivity and competition in the market and propose follow-up measures as appropriate. The Commission is also planning to prepare a contingency plan for transport by the end of 2021.</p> <p>The Commission has regular and in-depth contacts with key stakeholders including A4E (Airlines for Europe), ERA (European Regions Airline Association) and ACI-E (Airports Council International – Europe) to monitor the impact of the pandemic on the tourism ecosystem. Evidence collected is integrated in the work done to define a transition pathway towards a more resilient, sustainable and digital European tourism. It will also be taken into account in the new European Tourism Agenda to be co-created with other EU institutions and stakeholders.</p>

	<p>Dedicated specific objective is included under Cohesion policy objective 4, to support investments in resilient and sustainable tourism, eligible otherwise under the policy objective 5. This allows for regions and cities to fully exploit the sector’s potential to drive economic recovery, social inclusion and social innovation, adding to the to the possibilities under the other policy objectives.</p>
<p>16. insists that a condition for public investments in regional airports (through European funding or state aid schemes) should comply with the objectives of the European Green Deal and the principle "no harm for the environment";</p>	<p>The Commission is aware of the specific situation of regional airports. The requisite Green Deal objectives will be taken in due consideration in the context of the future review of the Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines¹⁰.</p> <p>Support to investments in regional airports is largely limited and conditioned under cohesion policy, focusing in particular on environmental impact mitigation measures. Recital (10) of the Common Provision Regulation¹¹ (CPR) besides states that ‘the Funds should support activities that would respect the climate and environmental standards and priorities of the Union and would do no significant harm to environmental objectives within the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council (7)¹².’</p> <p>Article 9(4) of the CPR states that ‘the objectives of the Funds shall be pursued in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development as set out in Article 11 TFEU, taking into account the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the ‘do no significant harm’</p>

¹⁰ OJ C 99, 4.4.2014, p. 3–34.

¹¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy; OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 159–706.

¹² Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2020 on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment, and amending Regulation (EU) 2019/2088; OJ L 198, 22.6.2020, p. 13–43.

	principle. This is reflected also in Recital (6) of the CF/ERDF Regulation ¹³ .
27. stresses the importance of striking a balance between compliance with the environmental requirements aimed at decarbonising the aviation sector and the dependence of certain peripheral, island or outermost regions on their regional airports, for which there are no viable alternatives.	The Commission proposal to revise the EU Emission Trading System for Aviation ¹⁴ envisages a derogation from the EU ETS, until 2030, for emissions from flights between an airport located in an outermost region and an airport in the same Member State. The proposal for a Regulation on ensuring a level playing field for sustainable air transport takes a similar approach ¹⁵ by exempting airports located in outermost regions.
28. considers that, as a first step, Member States could be required by the European Commission to present short- and long-term strategic plans for regional airports, including the development of dedicated support instruments to mitigate the climate impact of the aviation industry and support its ecological transition;	The Commission is proposing to include aviation and regional airports in the scope of its revised Climate, Energy and Environmental State aid Guidelines ¹⁶ to facilitate the granting of environmental aid in the context of transport related activities. Moreover, the specific nature of greening objectives in the aviation sector, will be taken in due consideration in the context of any future review of the Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines ¹⁷ .
30. stresses that regional airports, particularly those located on islands and sparsely populated, peripheral and outermost or less developed regions, are to a large extent structurally unable to cover capital and operating costs and therefore need additional resources.	Outermost regions can use specific allocations under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to help address their additional costs, including for example flights between airports of the various islands of an outermost region (Azores uses its additional allocation e.g. for public service obligation flights between islands). See Article 14 CF/ERDF Regulation.
31. calls on the European Commission, therefore, to develop, as part of the legislative process, even more flexible and more effective public aid rules that enable Member States to provide	The Commission would like to recall that it is regularly revising its State aid rules to reflect the needs and expectations of all sectors of the economy. Most recently, the Commission has

¹³ COM(2018) 372 final.

¹⁴ COM(2021) 552 final.

¹⁵ COM(2021) 561 final.

¹⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/competition-policy/public-consultations/2021-ceeag_en

¹⁷ OJ C 99, 4.4.2014, p. 3–34.

<p>regional airports with the financial assistance in line with the relevant ERDF and RRF provisions for investment in regional airports located in peripheral, island or outermost or less developed regions where a more efficient and sustainable alternative (for instance, rail) does not exist;</p>	<p>proposed to include aviation and regional airports in the scope of its revised Climate, Energy and Environmental State aid Guidelines¹⁸ in facilitating the granting of environmental aid in the context of their related activities.</p>
<p>33. calls on COM in the context of cohesion policy 2021-2027 to permit investment funding to provide aid for regional airports, funding that directly supports processes relating to decarbonisation and the low carbon circular economy mode.</p>	<p>Recital (41) of the CF/ERDF Regulation states that ‘the ERDF should be able to support targeted environmental mitigation, security and safety measures in regional airports as long as the primary objective of the investments would be clearly identified in terms of environmental, security or safety standards of the Union and would be in line with the State aid rules.’</p> <p>Article 7 of the CF/ERDF excludes from ERDF support ‘investment in airport infrastructure, except for outermost regions or in existing regional airports as defined in point (153) of Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 651/2014, in any of the following cases: (i) in environmental impact mitigation measures; or (ii) in security, safety, and air traffic management systems resulting from Single European Sky Air Traffic Management Research’.</p>
<p>34. calls on the European Commission to introduce new rules on state aid for small regional airports not in competition with other airports and with an average annual traffic of up to 1 million passengers, exempting them from the obligation to provide notification of public aid for investment (where they are unable to generate 25% of their own contribution) and operating aid;</p>	<p>The Commission notes that the Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines¹⁹ as well as the Commission Regulation (EU) N°651/2014²⁰ already foresee the possibility of State support being granted -under conditions- without the need for a formal adoption of a Commission decision on the matter. The specific needs of regional airports will continue to be assessed in this context.</p>
<p>35. urges the European Commission to allocate adequate European funds to the development of infrastructure for safety and security, and for the use of innovative technologies and digitalisation</p>	<p>In line with the Commission’s Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy, investment must be coordinated and prioritised within EU funding programmes to focus on the</p>

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/competition-policy/public-consultations/2021-ceeag_en

¹⁹ OJ C 99, 4.4.2014, p. 3–34.

²⁰ OJ L 187 26.6.2014, p. 1.

<p>of airports, helping to meet the objectives of the European Green Deal;</p>	<p>investments with the highest social, environmental, economic and EU added value and direct impact on jobs, growth and resilience. The European Union has put out a number of financial instruments that are relevant for regional airports (e.g. CEF, InvestEU, etc.). According to the Strategy, the EIB should also help to achieve the strategy's objective by offering a comprehensive framework that will attract private investment to improve resilience and accelerate the deployment of sustainable and smart technologies in all modes. As part of its strategy and to ensure the adequate engagement of funds, the Commission has been also revising the relevant taxonomy and State aid rules.</p>
<p>38. furthermore, expects that the European Commission will ensure that regional airports in the outermost regions are encouraged to make use of EU funding under the country/regional programmes to be introduced in the new EU financial perspective for 2021-2027 for investments related to environmental protection or accompanied by investment necessary to mitigate or reduce its negative environmental impact;</p>	<p>Cohesion Policy Funds will contribute to reaching climate targets. Member States will have to provide information on support for environment and climate objectives through a consistent methodology. The ERDF and Cohesion Fund (CF) shall contribute with 30% and 37% respectively to climate objectives. Whereas the support of cohesion policy funds to regional airports is limited and conditioned, specific opening is granted to outermost regions due to their remoteness, although still under the applicable conditions.</p>
<p>44. calls on the European Commission to put in place solutions that would facilitate the free movement of persons within the European Union during the pandemic. Uniform rules, such as the EU Digital COVID Certificate, will undoubtedly help to restore mobility, including by air transport and the tourism sector closely associated with it, but they must not in any way be discriminatory for passengers and their introduction should not only burden regional</p>	<p>The EU Digital COVID Certificate Regulation²¹, ensures acceptance of the EU Digital COVID Certificate in all Member States, which facilitates free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Member States should refrain from imposing additional travel restrictions on the holders of an EU Digital COVID Certificate, unless necessary and proportionate to safeguard public health.</p> <p>To avoid discrimination between travellers, the</p>

²¹ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/953/oj>

airports, including financially	<p>Regulation encompasses vaccination, recovery and test certificates. This allows all passengers to benefit from such an interoperable framework as well, facilitating their free movement. The Regulation also specifies that the possession of a vaccination certificate is not a pre-condition to exercise free movement rights or to use cross-border passenger transport services.</p> <p>Furthermore, on 14 June 2021, the Council amended Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475²² on the coordination of free movement restrictions in the EU²³, which provides further facilitations for holders of an EU Digital COVID Certificate and simplifies travel requirements.</p> <p>On 23 July 2021, the Commission adopted a Communication entitled ‘Reaping the full benefits of EU Digital COVID Certificates: Supporting free movement of citizens and the recovery of the air transport sector through guidelines and recommendations for EU Member States²⁴’, whereby it issued recommendations for a harmonised implementation of processes related to the verification of EU Digital COVID Certificates (EU DCCs). The objective is to ease the recovery of air transport by promoting a common approach to EU DCCs across Member States, to reduce bottlenecks and congestions at airports and to favour a seamless travelling experience for passengers.</p> <p>In this Communication, the Commission recommended <i>inter alia</i> that Member States should ensure that the EU DCC verification is carried out once in the passenger journey and as early as possible, and preferably off airport during the online check-in stage of the airline. Technical and operational guidance for Member</p>
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²² Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 of 13 October 2020 on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; OJ L 337, 14.10.2020, p. 3–9.

²³ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reco/2021/961/oj>

²⁴ C(2021) 5594 final.

	States can also be found on the Commission website of the E-Health network.
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<p>N°11 An action plan for the social economy Own-initiative COR-2020-05860 – SEDEC-VII/016 145th plenary session – June-July 2021 Rapporteur: Mikel IRUJO AMEZAGA (ES/EA) DG EMPL – Commissioner SCHMIT</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1. welcomes the European Commission's commitment to present a Social Economy Action Plan in the fourth quarter of 2021, in line with the requests of the European Economic and Social Committee, the Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament, the Expert group on social economy and social enterprises (GECES), a number of EU governments and European networks committed to the development of the social economy, such as Social Economy Europe and REVES;</p> <p>8. calls on the European Commission to develop a suitable European legal framework for the social economy, which provides for a common definition, and for the organisation and inclusion of businesses that meet certain organisational and operational criteria, and which would mean crucial support for developing this sector;</p>	<p>The Commission thanks the Committee for its opinion on the upcoming Social Economy Action Plan, and in particular for the opinion's useful insights on the regional and local dimensions of the social economy.</p> <p>The Action Plan is one of the key initiatives announced by the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan put forward by the Commission in March 2021¹. The Commission highlighted the critical importance of the social economy to support quality jobs thus, with this action plan, it intends to provide a policy framework at EU level. The action plan will seek to clarify the social economy concepts and take into account the diversity of social economy legal and organisational forms across the EU. Building on ongoing actions, the Commission will foster its support to authorities at all levels in designing adequate legal and policy frameworks for the social economy in order to create a more favourable environment for social economy, social enterprises and social innovation in the longer term.</p>
<p>10. points out that, through the Pact for Skills, the Commission should support the training and life-long learning access of social economy workers in areas such as digitalisation, including media literacy,</p>	<p>As mentioned in the reply to the Committee's opinion 'European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience'², the Commission recognises the need to involve local and regional authorities in skills, education</p>

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (COM(2021) 102 final).

² <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/Documents/Opinions/ec-follow-up-february-2021.pdf>

participatory leadership, resilience and the green transition, in order to support them to enter or remain in the labour market of social economy enterprises. To achieve this objective, the Committee suggests cooperating with the industrial ecosystem of the social economy, which includes in particular public authorities, vocational training centres and universities. Moreover, the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy can support the promotion of training paths geared towards environmental protection and the promotion of the circular economy. Therefore we point out the proposals formulated in the CoR opinion on European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience elaborated with suggestions on the subject from the perspective of local and regional authorities, which is highly important in the matter of social economy as well;

11. calls for the potential of the social economy to be explored in the areas of vocational training and active employment policies, as well as skills and competencies development; while paying particular attention to the groups with the greatest difficulties in entering the labour market, e.g. young people, long-term unemployed persons, persons with disabilities or those living in remote areas with limited access to digital resources;

and training policies. The Commission also agrees with the need to support the access to training and life-long learning of social economy workers, especially in relation to the green and digital transitions. It has already launched several initiatives with this objective.

First, in the context of the Pact for Skills³, stakeholders in the proximity and social economy ecosystem are committing – also financially – to the upskilling and reskilling of people at working age, including disadvantaged groups such as older workers and adults struggling with basic skills. The Commission intends to continue supporting this process through the Erasmus+ programme.

Second, the Commission will continue to help municipalities plan and implement the clean energy transition, climate adaptation action, and address energy poverty through the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy.

Third, with its Digital Education Action Plan⁴, the Commission aims to support a high quality and inclusive digital transition in education and training. The Recovery and Resilience Facility focuses on investments and reforms on digital skills and educational and vocational training for all ages in its ‘Reskill and upskill’ flagship. The ‘Connect’ flagship also addresses inclusion and access to connectivity and digital equipment. Moreover, the new Connecting Europe Facility programme will support high-speed connectivity in schools.

Other important EU funds and programmes can also support direct training provision, including for social economy workers, in particular the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).

The Commission is aware of the role of the social economy in supporting young people,

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1517&langId=en>

⁴ Communication ‘Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 Resetting education and training for the digital age’ (COM(2020) 624 final).

	<p>jobseekers, the long-term unemployed, older people, women, persons with disabilities and possibly other groups, in their efforts to participate in vocational training or other learning opportunities. Different EU initiatives and programmes support this approach: the ESF+, the Youth Guarantee⁵ and Erasmus+.</p> <p>In addition, under its Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030⁶, the Commission will present in 2022 a package to improve labour market outcomes of persons with disabilities, which will look also into the role of the social economy. Furthermore, a study on inclusive enterprises and disability is under preparation.</p> <p>In the Social Economy Action Plan, the Commission intends to build on all these initiatives and suggest new ones to reinforce the role of the social economy in skills development and labour market integration.</p>
<p>12. calls on the European Commission to carry out an examination of transfers of enterprises to employees through social economy formulas. This study should be accompanied by an EU platform for exchange of best practice between Member States, local and regional authorities and social economy networks and should also address the social economy's potential for industrial entrepreneurship;</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the potential of transfers of enterprises to employees and is reflecting on potential new actions in this area. The Commission implemented in 2016 a European Parliament pilot project to promote the visibility, understand bottlenecks and boost such operations in Europe⁷. Awareness raising regarding this type of project has also been carried out in the framework of the European Social Economy Regions scheme⁸.</p>
<p>15. stresses the importance of including the social economy in smart specialisation strategies as a key lever for economic and social development; [...]</p> <p>16. highlights the importance of promoting</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of the social economy as a source and inspiration for the territory, community engagement and economic cooperation, not least because it resonates with the values of communities</p>

⁵ Communication European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (COM/2020/274 final).

⁶ Communication Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (COM/2021/101 final).

⁷ Please see www.transfertocoops.eu and www.savingjobs.coceta.coop

⁸ [ESER - European Social Economy Regions - Social Economy Community - EC Extranet Wiki \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eser/)

<p>interregional cooperation on the social economy as a key instrument for creating transnational business clusters, for ensuring cross-border synergies and distinct cooperation involving the outermost regions in their respective forums for cooperation with third countries, and for supporting the internationalisation of social economy enterprises and organisations in the single market. In this regard, the Committee points out that, in the context of the European Smart Specialisation Platform, the social economy thematic platform is a useful tool for promoting interregional cooperation, bringing together seven European regions, its experience and tried and tested procedures and should be taken into account in the future European Social Economy Action Plan;</p>	<p>aspiring for more fairness and solidarity – notably in areas of the EU such as the outermost and cross-border regions – and contributes to greater social and economic resilience.</p> <p>Cohesion policy funds are already used to promote social enterprises, including through support to social entrepreneurship, social innovation, education and training, experimentation and innovation in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They promote interregional and cross-border partnerships through a specific Smart Specialisation platform for social economy.</p> <p>The Commission is keen on boosting the development of clusters of social and ecological innovation (CSEI) in Europe, including cross-border ones. A report with best practices is being prepared by the Commission’s Expert Group on social economy and social enterprises (GECES⁹). The access of CSEI to the ‘European Cluster Collaboration Platform’¹⁰ is also being facilitated, which will allow them to benefit from support measures developed for the wider EU cluster network.</p>
<p>17. calls on the Commission to make its initiatives to support the role of local and regional authorities in promoting the social economy more ambitious and coherent; notes that many local and regional administrations already have ambitious strategies and action plans to promote the social economy; the Commission should identify these and include them in the expansion of the future action plan for the European social economy the Commission should also support the sharing of best practices and existing initiatives among local and regional authorities (e.g. through a network of local and regional authorities to</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the key role played by local and regional authorities in creating favourable conditions for the development of the social economy. With the Social Economy Action Plan, the Commission intends to build on existing initiatives to better support public authorities at all levels to develop policy and legal frameworks in this area.</p> <p>The Commission, in cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), developed a Better Entrepreneurship online tool¹¹, which allows stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, to assess their inclusive and social</p>

⁹ [Expert groups | Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁰ [Homepage | European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)

¹¹ <https://betterentrepreneurship.eu/>

<p>promote social economy);</p> <p>18. calls on the European Commission to conduct a study into regional and local public policies to promote the social economy in the EU, including examples from other regions and local authorities worldwide;</p> <p>19. acknowledges the substantial impact of the European Social Economy Regions (ESER) initiative and the Social Economy Missions project on the creation of a broad community of local and regional authorities committed to developing the social economy, and calls on the Commission to strengthen this programme as part of the Social Economy Action Plan;</p> <p>25. calls on the Commission to draw up a guide to public social economy policies, which reflects the diversity of legal forms of the social economy in Europe and which will support local and regional authorities;</p>	<p>entrepreneurship policies and programmes and learn about best practices.</p> <p>In addition, the Commission has issued several publications highlighting the role of the local and regional authorities in promoting the social economy in recent years and identifying a number of good practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a policy brief¹² on regional strategies for the social economy prepared in cooperation with the OECD; - a Compendium also prepared in cooperation with the OECD on ‘Boosting Social Enterprise Development’¹³; - the handbook ‘Financial Instruments for Social Impact’¹⁴ on how the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) can support social enterprises, developed by a consortium of regional authorities; - the policy brief ‘The social economy and support to social enterprises in the European Union’¹⁵ shedding light on how Interreg Europe projects improve the local social economy. <p>Moreover, with the European Social Economy Regions (ESER)¹⁶ scheme, the Commission has also developed a thriving community of practitioners across Europe and is supporting the sharing of best practices and success stories through direct contacts and events.</p> <p>With the Action Plan, the Commission will aim to streamline and make these different initiatives better known to stakeholders.</p>
<p>20. calls on the Commission to promote the</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the Committee’s</p>

¹² https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/regional-strategies-for-the-social-economy_76995b39-en

¹³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7996&furtherPubs=yes>

¹⁴ <https://www.european-microfinance.org/sites/default/files/document/file/handbook.pdf>

¹⁵ https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/plp_uploads/policy_briefs/The_social_economy_and_support_to_social_enterprises_in_the_European_Union_Policy_brief.pdf

¹⁶ [ESER - European Social Economy Regions - Social Economy Community - EC Extranet Wiki \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7996&furtherPubs=yes)

<p>involvement of local and regional authorities in GECES, together with Member States and social economy networks. Therefore, the Committee calls for a GECES working group to be set up for regional and local social economy policies;</p>	<p>proposal in view of the upcoming Action Plan. The Expert group on social economy and social enterprises (GECES) was renewed in 2018. It is composed of public authorities (at national, regional or local level) as well as private stakeholders. It provides the Commission with advice in view of elaborating and implementing policy measures to strengthen social economy and social enterprises in Member States, including at regional and local levels.</p>
<p>21. calls for analyses, studies, proposed measures and monitoring and support instruments and mechanisms relating to the social economy, which collect statistical data on workers or the composition of the different types of social economy enterprises, to include the gender perspective, thus providing sex-disaggregated data and including gender indicators;</p> <p>22. calls on the Commission to create a single online platform to support enterprises, organisations and entrepreneurship using different forms of social economy, which links all European studies and reports on the social economy and the opportunities offered by the EU to these enterprises and organisations;</p> <p>23. recommends that this online platform be designed and managed in cooperation with European social economy networks and GECES;</p> <p>24. suggests to the Commission that the Social Economy Action Plan should provide for a broad communication campaign to be designed and implemented with the involvement of the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and social economy networks.[...];</p> <p>27. calls on the Commission to select a</p>	<p>The Commission shares the view that statistics are essential to achieve a better recognition of the social economy. As concerns macro-economic indicators at national accounts level, the Commission (Eurostat) supports the development of satellite accounts¹⁷ for the social economy. Some Member States voluntarily contribute to gathering experimental data via a pilot programme managed by ESTAT. Eurostat awarded grants to Slovenia, Poland, Spain and France. Luxembourg is developing social economy satellite accounts on its own initiative and budget, however in close methodological cooperation with Eurostat. The programme relies on a harmonised methodology consistent with national accounts. Additionally, the Commission considers launching a new study to collect quantitative information on the social economy covering all Member States. Estimations would be done for all Member States individually, allowing to estimate an EU aggregate.</p> <p>The Commission thanks the Committee for its proposals on how to communicate better about social economy funding and actions. These needs have been identified by many social economy stakeholders; therefore, the Committee's proposals will be duly considered in view of the social economy action plan.</p> <p>The Commission is aware that an initiative to</p>

¹⁷ Satellite accounts allow for an additional collection of statistical data on a certain field or aspect of economic and social life in the context of national accounts.

<p>European Capital of Social Economy each year, through a democratic and transparent process involving the Committee of the Regions, the EESC and the GECES;</p>	<p>designate yearly a European Social Economy Capital is already implemented by the Monitoring Committee of the Luxembourg Declaration. The Commission intends to continue supporting the work of the Monitoring Committee, and to develop the social economy action plan in complementarity with other European institutions, bodies and actors.</p>
<p>34. recommends that the Commission include a member of the Committee of the Regions in the Advisory Committee, and that experts in the financing of social economy enterprises and organisations be given a role in the Investment Committee;</p>	<p>The composition of the Advisory Board of InvestEU is set in Article 20.2 of Regulation (EU) 2021/523 establishing InvestEU¹⁸, which provides that the Committee of the Regions appoints an expert.</p> <p>In accordance with Article 24.2, the experts of the Investment Committee have been selected and appointed by the Commission, at the recommendation of the Steering Board of the InvestEU. For recollection, the Investment Committee will meet in four different configurations, corresponding to the four policy windows. Under each configuration, including the social investment and skills window, two experts will have the experience in investment in sectors covered by the corresponding policy window.</p>
<p>35. calls on the European Commission to develop a social and environmental taxonomy of investment that is clear, transparent and effective;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the interest of the Committee for the development of clear, transparent and effective social and environmental taxonomy.</p> <p>As regards the environmental taxonomy, the Commission has adopted on 4 June 2021 the first delegated act – the EU Taxonomy Climate Delegated Act¹⁹ – for economic activities substantially contributing to climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation. The Commission will also adopt next year a delegated act for the remaining four environmental objectives, based on the advice</p>

¹⁸ Regulation (EU) 2021/523 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 March 2021 establishing the InvestEU Programme and amending Regulation (EU) 2015/1017 PE/74/2020/REV/1 OJ L 107, 26.3.2021, p. 30.

¹⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_1804

	<p>from the Platform on Sustainable Finance, the Commission Expert Group.</p> <p>As regards the social taxonomy, the Commission is preparing a report on the possible extension of the Taxonomy Regulation²⁰ to social objectives, taking into account the advice on this topic from the Platform on Sustainable Finance.</p>
<p>41. calls on the Commission to make greater use of the Erasmus+ programme to promote education and training in entrepreneurship and for jobs in social economy enterprises. It therefore proposes that social economy enterprises and organisations explore opportunities to ensure greater take-up of the Erasmus programme for young entrepreneurs, in particular in the most remote European regions where young people face greater barriers to mobility due to the distance from continental Europe;</p>	<p>Several projects funded by the Erasmus programme have contributed to develop the social economy. For example, an action²¹ aiming at improving the development of cooperatives and promote their image among young people is being implemented. It seeks to embed cooperative entrepreneurial education in secondary and higher education as well as outside the educational environment.</p> <p>With Erasmus+, the Commission will strengthen its efforts to involve more participants and organisations, and contribute to more inclusive and cohesive, greener and digitally fit societies.</p> <p>One of the goals of Erasmus+ is to improve the levels of skills for business creation (including social entrepreneurship) and the employability of the persons involved. For example, the Forward-looking Projects initiative will contribute to foster social entrepreneurship in different fields of education and training.</p> <p>In addition, in the field of youth, the cooperation partnerships projects will promote active citizenship, people’s sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship.</p> <p>The Erasmus for young entrepreneurs initiative is also key to boost the development of social entrepreneurship. The Commission has developed a dedicated strand²² to bring together aspiring and</p>

²⁰ Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2020 on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment, and amending Regulation (EU) 2019/2088; PE/20/2020/INIT; OJ L 198, 22.6.2020, p. 13–43.

²¹ [DocsRoom - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://docsroom.europa.eu).

²² [Erasmus for Social Entrepreneurs - Euclid Network](#).

	<p>experienced social entrepreneurs to learn from each other. The programme is available in all the different EU Member States.</p>
<p>42. calls for new opportunities to be explored to promote education, training and the skills upgrading of social economy workers through the Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills and Knowledge Alliances. Moreover, the corpus of knowledge and skills acquired at all levels of education, and through non-formal education, should encourage people to make best use of knowledge, i.e. cultivate "soft skills", and facilitate adaptability to a constantly evolving environment;</p>	<p>The Blueprint Alliances, funded by the Erasmus+ programme, are indeed open to social economy stakeholders and can help ensure that the skills needs of social economy workers are taken into due account.</p> <p>The Commission agrees with the relevance of soft skills. Action 7 of the European Skills Agenda²³ specifically aims at promoting transversal skills. The recognition of all skills, including those acquired through non-formal learning, is supported by a number of EU initiatives, in particular the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning²⁴.</p>
<p>46. calls on the Commission to further promote socially responsible public procurement among European public authorities as a key tool to increase transparency in public procurement, to fight corruption, to foster competition and participation in public procurement by business actors of different sizes, and to promote socially responsible business practices, such as those typical of the social economy;</p> <p>47. calls for the expansion to the other EU Member States of the Buying for Social Impact project, which analysed the transposition of the procurement directive in 15 Member States and organised national and regional events to share opportunities for responsible public procurement;</p>	<p>Promoting socially responsible and sustainable practices in procurement is one of the priorities of the Commission's current procurement strategy. The Commission is working on a cycle of digital talks and outreach initiatives to public buyers to promote the recently published 'Buying Social'²⁵ guide and the report 'Making Socially Responsible Public Procurement Work: 71 Good Practice Cases'²⁶²⁷. The intent is not only to raise awareness, but to proactively engage the wider community of stakeholders having an interest in socially responsible procurement.</p> <p>The Commission will come forward with further awareness-raising, networking and training actions on socially responsible procurement, to be carried out in the EU Member States, and in particular those which were not initially covered by the Buying for Social Impact project. The</p>

²³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en>

²⁴ Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning; OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1–5.

²⁵ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/cb70c481-0e29-4040-9be2-c408cddf081f>

²⁶ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/69fc6007-a970-11ea-bb7a-01aa75ed71a1>

²⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/making-socially-responsible-procurement-work-71-good-practice-cases_en

	<p>Commission will also seek to promote the take-up of socially responsible public procurement through policy-making at national and regional levels.</p>
<p>49. calls on the Commission to ensure that the Social Economy Action Plan has a timescale of at least five years for its implementation, including an ex ante evaluation, as well as mechanisms for annual and ex-post evaluation, and for the renewal of the Plan once it has run its course;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that an adequate timescale, as well as monitoring mechanisms are needed for a proper implementation of the action plan. It therefore thanks the Committee for this suggestion, which will be taken into consideration in view of the Social Economy Action Plan.</p>

N°12 Future plan for care workers and care services – local and regional opportunities in the context of a European challenge

Own-initiative

COR-2020-05862 – SEDEC-VII/017

145th plenary session – June-July 2021

Rapporteur: Heinrich DORNER (AT/PES)

DG EMPL – Commissioner SCHMIT

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential

European Commission position

4. while acknowledging the importance of a life-cycle approach in relation to ageing challenges, in the current context of overstretched health services because of the pandemic, the Committee calls on the European Commission to guarantee financial instruments directly accessible to cities and regions to empower them to effectively address care worker shortages;

44. calls for budgetary prioritisation and targeted allocation of budgetary resources to address the shortage of skilled workers in the health and care sectors, in particular with regard to the European Commission's labour market policy agenda in the European Semester. The European Commission should monitor the implementation and effectiveness of its recommendations.

The Commission shares the view of the Committee about the importance of health care services and related workers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the programming period 2021-2027, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) will invest in sustainable and quality care services in order to enlarge access to those services for dependent persons, including older persons, persons with disabilities and children, and will support the availability of a skilled workforce, including through its up-skilling and re-skilling. Likewise, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), providing large-scale financial support for investment and reforms to support sustainable recovery and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), strengthening cohesion between regions, will equally invest in healthcare and social care sectors.

In 2020, all Member States received Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) related to healthcare, 21 of which refer to the health workforce explicitly. This highlights that this challenge is high on the political agenda. Health care and long-term care are also covered by two of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, whose implementation the Commission follows closely as part of the European Semester. Moreover, the programmes and instruments under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 have a strong link between CSRs and the use of the EU budget. In particular, CSRs

	<p>must be taken into account when cohesion policy funds are programmed, implemented and reviewed. As part of the RRF, Member States' recovery and resilience plans are assessed, among other criteria, on how well they address challenges identified in the CSRs. A majority of Member States have already included such reforms and investments in their recovery and resilience plans.</p>
<p>7. sees the shortage of skilled workers caring for people in need as a potential opportunity to deal with an expected increase in unemployment across Europe, particularly in connection with the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, and thus to take an important step towards preserving the economic and social cohesion of the European Union; points out that creating new care services for older and dependent people leads to new jobs that help invigorate the economy and keep the population in rural and depopulated areas. Local social services in these geographically vulnerable areas play a clear role in revitalising the rural environment and in social and territorial cohesion;</p> <p>19. [...] points to the important role played by regions and cities in developing specific care measures for older and dependent people, with a view to bringing local services closer to rural areas affected by ageing and depopulation. This is a strategy for dealing with the necessary care for these groups who live in geographically vulnerable areas and face greater difficulties in accessing essential local services that guarantee proper social and health care in their usual living environment;</p>	<p>The Commission is of the opinion that the Social Economy, which also includes care services, has an untapped potential to create quality jobs and contribute to fair, sustainable and inclusive growth. The Commission will present by the end of 2021 an Action Plan on the Social Economy.</p> <p>Based on the Long-term Vision for Rural Areas¹, support for vulnerable groups of society will be provided for entrepreneurship, participation in decision-making and investments in work-life balance services. The Commission will also continue supporting Member States' work on improving vulnerable people's situation in rural areas through EU funds.</p> <p>Member States can mobilise the cohesion policy funds to respond to the challenges that people face in rural/geographically vulnerable areas and to foster their access to basic services, including care services. Deprived rural and urban areas might face difficulties due to depopulation and declining numbers of children leading to unsustainable basic services. It follows that the integrated territorial or local development strategies of the concerned urban/rural areas should provide the necessary policy response to this issue, including the potential reorganisation of basic services, as well as when it comes to care workers and care services.</p>
<p>9. welcomes the aim of the European Commission's Green Paper on Ageing, to</p>	<p>The Green paper on ageing² launched a public consultation on the opportunities and challenges</p>

¹ COM(2021) 345 final.

² COM(2021) 50 final.

<p>launch a broad policy debate on ageing to discuss options on how to anticipate and respond to the challenges and opportunities it brings, and refers in particular to the findings and comments set out in point 5.1 of the Green Paper;</p>	<p>of ageing, including on the role of the EU in helping Member States address long-term care challenges, such as accessibility, quality, affordability, working conditions, or access in remote areas. The Commission has published a Synopsis report on the public consultation results in autumn 2021.</p>
<p>11. reiterates its call to the European Commission "to consider a care agreement for Europe, similar to the Youth Guarantee, to satisfy care needs as part of a rights-based approach that puts care at the heart of economic activity, increasing investment in health and care, in line with the wellbeing economy strategy. The CoR also asks the Commission and urges the Member States to include the demands made by domestic workers regarding working conditions in ILO Convention No 189". In the same opinion, the CoR called for the revision and further development of the Barcelona targets, making them compulsory, and introducing "care objectives that go beyond these (Barcelona+) to take account of care needs in ageing societies and recognise that the care sector is largely dominated by women but is not paid in accordance with its social value";</p> <p>38. calls on the European Commission to update the existing 2012 European quality framework for long-term care services, in order to keep pace with latest developments in long-term care provision and related skills requirements, and with a view to facilitating carer mobility. To this effect, proposes that the European Commission and the Member States implement a European quality label for professional "carers of older people and dependent persons", both in institutional and non-institutional care settings, in order to</p>	<p>The Commission Work Programme 2022³ has announced a 'European Care Strategy' to address both carers and care receivers, from childcare to long-term care.</p> <p>In line with what has been announced in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan⁴, the strategy will set a framework for policy reforms to guide the development of sustainable long-term care that ensures better and more affordable access to quality services for those in need. The initiative will take into account the findings of the 2021 Long-term care report⁵ and the input received through the public consultations for the Pillar Action Plan and the Green paper on Ageing.</p> <p>Any target in a policy area needs to be underpinned by robust comparative data. To address the data gaps in the area of long-term care, the Commission is currently working together with the Social Protection Committee on developing common indicators to better measure different dimensions of long-term care. Eurostat is launching a task force on long-term care with the aim to identify possible ways forward for more regular and robust data on long-term care. The Commission proposed new secondary indicators on long-term care as part of the revised scoreboard for the European Pillar of Social Rights.</p> <p>The European Care Strategy will also include a proposal for the revision of the Barcelona targets</p>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2022-commission-work-programme-key-documents_en

⁴ [The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2022-commission-work-programme-key-documents_en)

⁵ [Publications catalogue - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2022-commission-work-programme-key-documents_en)

safeguard the principle that carers providing this type of service should be appropriately skilled and qualified. Common benchmarks need to be established in the current European context by means of a standardised quality certificate adapted to the needs of each Member State. The Committee underlines that the rights of those cared for and their physical and mental wellbeing must remain the top priority, including preventing and alleviating loneliness;

41. calls on the European Commission to draw up a proposal for the establishment of an efficient system of comprehensive data collection and analysis, covering also live-in care, which is largely undocumented, in order to provide Member States and regions with a sound basis for future cross-regional coordination;

to enhance upward convergence across Member States with regard to early childhood education and care. The encouragement of men and women to take up family leaves and flexible working time arrangements throughout the life course is an objective of the Work-Life Balance Directive⁶, with the aim to enhance equal sharing of care between women and men and thus achieving equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities. In addition, it will contribute towards closing the gender employment gap, the gender pay and pension gap. A European-wide campaign on gender stereotypes will include a focus on gender roles concerning work and care.

At the same time, the European Platform tackling undeclared work is undertaking a study to assess the prevalence and characteristics of undeclared work in personal and household services throughout the Union and how to tackle it.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 189 is an important instrument concerning decent work for domestic workers, aiming to ensure adequate working conditions. The Council has adopted a decision regarding the authorisation of Member States to ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention No 189 taking into account its significance for domestic workers' rights⁷. The Commission will continue monitoring its follow-up. In the context of their High Level Meeting of 2 October 2020, the ILO and Commission further agreed to strengthen their cooperation to promote the ratification and

⁶ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU; OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 79–93 ([EUR-Lex - 32019L1158 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

⁷ 2014/51/EU: Council Decision of 28 January 2014 authorising Member States to ratify, in the interests of the European Union, the Convention concerning decent work for domestic workers, 2011, of the International Labour Organisation (Convention No 189); OJ L 32, 1.2.2014, p. 32.

	effective application of Convention 189.
13. is aware that the number of people in the EU potentially in need of long-term care is expected to increase from 19.5 million in 2016 to 23.6 million in 2030 and 30.5 million in 2050 ;	According to the reference scenario in the 2021 Ageing Report ⁸ (jointly prepared by the Commission and Economic Policy Committee), the number of potential dependants in the EU-27 is expected to rise from about 30.8 million in 2019 to 33.7 million in 2030 and 38.1 million in 2050.
23. highlights the large proportion of women who are willing to provide care services despite the precarious working conditions and low pay, because they come from countries where wages are low. Those women are in most cases immigrants and they should therefore have access to integration services in their mother tongue and to information about their rights and accessible services as immigrant workers. Fully implementing the Posting of Workers Directive and ensuring that this specific group of workers is not excluded from the protection of national statutory minimum wages are of particular importance; stresses to this effect "the urgent need for 'upward convergence' of minimum wages, not least given that low wages remain a feature of employment in the European Union" and that "women constitute 59% of minimum wage earners" , underlining that the EU must continue to assist Member States in implementing effective and inclusive social and employment policies and in carrying out the necessary reforms to achieve this	<p>The Commission recognises that employment in the care sector and workers, predominantly women, need to be valued and supported. A more gender-equal sharing of care responsibilities is promoted by the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025⁹ as well as through the implementation of the Directive on Work-life balance¹⁰.</p> <p>The Commission is currently assessing the national measures of transposition of the new Posting of Workers Directive¹¹. Nevertheless, the actual enforcement of the rules is a matter for the Member States. The Commission, assisted by the European Labour Authority, will continue to support Member States in the preparation and timely application of their national measures. The Commission is preparing a study to look into the working conditions of temporary cross border mobile workers and workers in subcontracting chains, mainly in the context of posting of workers. This study shall assess where and why posted workers, including from third countries, suffer from below-standard working conditions.</p> <p>The Commission's proposal for a Directive on a framework for adequate minimum wages¹² in the</p>

⁸ [The 2021 Ageing Report: Economic and Budgetary Projections for the EU Member States \(2019-2070\) | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁹ COM(2020) 152 final.

¹⁰ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU; OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 79–93 ([EUR-Lex - 32019L1158 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#))

¹¹ Directive (EU) 2018/957 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 June 2018 amending Directive 96/71/EC concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services; OJ L 173, 9.7.2018, p. 16–24 ([EUR-Lex - 32018L0957 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

¹² COM(2020) 682 final (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0682&from=EN>).

	<p>EU aims at ensuring that the workers in the Union are protected by adequate minimum wages allowing for a decent living wherever they work. Article 6 requires that any variations from the minimum wage are non-discriminatory. Moreover, effective enforcement of statutory minimum wages is essential for workers to benefit from effective access to minimum wage protection. Therefore, the proposed Directive aims at promoting compliance as well as strengthening enforcement and monitoring in all Member States. Groups of workers that are more likely to earn a minimum wage (like women or people with a migrant background) may benefit more from this initiative since the benefits of minimum wage increases would accrue more to them compared to other groups.</p>
<p>24. stresses the need to address precarious working conditions of "live-in" care workers in the EU, who are mostly women and often migrants from third countries, some of whom working irregularly as undocumented migrants and some being engaged in circular or temporary migration; joins in this regard the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in emphasising that live-in care workers should be treated in a similar way to other care workers and calls for improved safeguards in the Employers' Sanctions Directive (2009/52/EC) to protect labour rights of undocumented workers and for the rigorous application of the Victims' Rights Directive (2012/29/EU) to provide effective support for live-in care workers who are victims of exploitation, regardless of their migration status;</p>	<p>A recent report of Eurofound¹³ on the working conditions of long-term care workers, as well as the 2021 long-term care report¹⁴ reach similar conclusions regarding difficult living and working conditions of live-in carers.</p> <p>The aforementioned study on undeclared work in personal and household services (see § 11) shall provide more transparency on the extent of these problems. While respecting the subsidiarity principle, the Commission observes attentively national efforts to improve the situation of these workers, such as regularisation efforts in e.g. Italy, Spain, Portugal and Germany.</p> <p>The Employers Sanctions Directive¹⁵ provides for minimum standards on sanctions and measures against employers of illegally-staying third country nationals and for measures to protect the rights of those persons, such as those concerning the facilitation complaints against labour</p>

¹³ Eurofound (2020), *Long-term care workforce: Employment and working conditions*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

¹⁴ [Publications catalogue - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁵ Directive 2009/52/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 providing for minimum standards on sanctions and measures against employers of illegally staying third-country nationals; OJ L 168, 30.6.2009, p. 24–32.

	<p>violations and back payment of unpaid wages. The Commission is preparing a Communication that will provide an overview of the implementation of the Directive and set out measures to strengthen its effectiveness.</p> <p>The Commission continues its efforts to ensure full implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive¹⁶. Under the EU Strategy on victims' rights (2020-2025)¹⁷, the Commission will assess legal and practical tools at EU level to improve reporting of crime and access to support services for migrant victims, independently of their residence status.</p>
<p>31. draws attention to the growing importance of digitalisation in the care sector, as well. Calls to this effect for specific technical assistance to be provided for care homes for older people with a view to promoting telemedicine as a way of managing residents' health more effectively. Furthermore, digital and telecare tools, already used during the pandemic for monitoring and checking up on people who are isolated and without any real family support, will continue to develop, improving people's access to care services. However, this development must be accompanied by measures to close the digital divide in all areas, such as the digital divide between genders, in rural areas or among the older population. Similarly, professionals in the sector must be trained to use these new tools through ongoing training schemes. Furthermore, there is a need to develop a new coordinated and integrated communication system between the health system, the care</p>	<p>Digital skills and quality jobs are a key policy priority, as reflected <i>inter alia</i> in the European Digital Strategy, Digital Decade Communication, 2020 European Skills Agenda, the Digital Education Action Plan¹⁸ and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, which set the ambitious target that 80% of adults should have at least basic digital skills by 2030. With the European Skills Agenda and the Digital Education Action Plan, concrete measures are set to support the development of digital skills for all with a focus on gender-balanced participation. Furthermore, the Commission has launched a flagship technical support project on digital skills for the digital transformation of the health and care systems that public authorities in Member States can subscribe to on a voluntary basis. The project aims to support the design of a National/Regional Roadmap for Digital Skills for the digital transformation of health and care systems.</p> <p>To close the digital divide in rural areas, the</p>

¹⁶ Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA; OJ L 315, 14.11.2012, p. 57–73.

¹⁷ COM(2020) 258 final.

¹⁸ Communication 'European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience' (COM(2020)274 final); Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (COM(2020)625 final).;

<p>workers and the families. Access to training in new communication technologies for the care workers in residential facilities and for the residents is crucial;</p>	<p>Commission’s strategies on Shaping Europe’s digital future¹⁹ and the Digital Decade Communication²⁰ have confirmed the Gigabit objectives²¹ for fixed and mobile connectivity for all citizens by 2025 and 2030, also in rural and remote areas. The RRF dedicates at least 20% of expenditure to the digital transition. In the 2014-20 period, Member States have already allocated around € 6 billion of European Structural and Investment Funds to broadband. Moreover, the EU will continue to support the deployment of Gigabit and 5G networks through the new Connecting Europe Facility (CEF2) with a budget of € 2 billion, making connectivity available ‘everywhere’.</p>
<p>34. recalls principle 9 of the European Pillar of Social Rights on work-life balance, which states that "Parents and people with caring responsibilities have the right to suitable leave, flexible working arrangements and access to care services". It points in this regard to the contribution that public support measures for the employment of carers, through subsidies or other forms of funding, can make to safeguarding this principle, which will also help regularise and improve the conditions of workers in the care sector;</p> <p>40. further suggests that the European Commission considers proposals for the recognition of and effective support for relatives acting as carers;</p>	<p>The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030²² recognises that informal care of family members puts persons with disabilities and their families at a higher risk of financial poverty. The 2021 Long-term care report²³ points out that informal care has been essential in long-term care provision in all EU Member States, but this often comes with neglected costs for the carer and society in the short and long term, such as negative effects on carers’ physical and mental health and well-being and difficulties to reconcile care with paid work. Relevant support measures include expansion of formal care options, care benefits, health insurance coverage, counselling and training, validation of skills, respite care and pension credits. EU. The Work-life balance directive²⁴ created the right for each worker to carers' leave of five working days per year and the right to</p>

¹⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_273

²⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en

²¹ Commission Communication ‘Connectivity for a Competitive Digital Single Market – towards a European Gigabit Society’ (COM(2016)587 final).

²² [Publications catalogue - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

²³ [Publications catalogue - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁴ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU; OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 79–93 ([EUR-Lex - 32019L1158 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

	request flexible working arrangements for caring purposes.
<p>39. suggests that the European Commission and the EU Member States consider a EU-wide strategy and a common occupational definition of carers (including of live-in carers, whose service should be considered part of the long-term care provision), involving cities and regions and the social partners. This strategy should raise awareness, also through media promotion, in order to contribute towards a lasting change in the image of the health and care professions;</p>	<p>The classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) contains occupational profiles for various carer occupations, which could also cover live-in carers. The profiles include descriptions and competence profiles, in 27 languages. ESCO has been developed with a wide range of stakeholders including Social Partners.</p>
<p>42. recommends that the European Commission set up a platform for mutual expert exchanges and the opportunity to present examples of best practice in the field of care, as well as of common programmes, such as social care plans or support strategies for relatives acting as carers;</p>	<p>The Open Method of Coordination in the field of social protection and social inclusion is an important channel of dialogue with Member States in the area of long-term care. Member States have agreed on common objectives for healthcare and long-term care accessibility, quality, and sustainability. These objectives guide collaboration on long-term care issues in the Social Protection Committee, which is a vehicle for dialogue with and among the Member States. A number of mutual learning exchanges in the area of long-term care have already been organised.</p> <p>The Commission is also supporting social innovation projects in the area of long-term care and facilitates exchanges of information regarding the progress of these projects.</p>

N°13 Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood - A new Agenda for the Mediterranean
JOIN(2021) 2 final
COR-2021-01952 – CIVEX-VII/010
145th plenary session – June/July 2021
Rapporteur: Vincenzo BIANCO (IT/PES)
DG NEAR – Commissioner VÁRHELYI

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
5. calls on the EU and its partner countries to make specific and appropriate use of local and regional authorities as drivers for territorial development close to the people.	The Commission agrees that local authorities can be drivers for integration and contribute to the reduction of inequalities. The Joint Communication ¹ reiterates that initiatives to foster socio-economic sustainability at the local level could also contribute to strengthening national systems. In addition to ongoing bilateral programmes working with local authorities, programming for the period 2021-2027 foresees initiatives to deepen local empowerment and increased dialogue with local authorities.
6. notes that the European Committee of the Regions and the local and regional associations active in this context set up the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) in 2010 to give local and regional authorities (LRAs) a voice in the Euro-Mediterranean process;	The Commission will maintain its engagement through the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), in line with past practices. Its services remain available to present initiatives and brief members during relevant ARLEM meetings.
7. highlights that efforts will continue to enhance regional, sub-regional and inter-regional cooperation, with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) as a focal point and its Agendas as common reference;	The European Union as a Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) co-President will continue to engage actively in the regional policy dialogue process. The Commission will also continue to support financially the UfM Secretariat in fulfilling its mandate.
9. also proposes that the process for a Mediterranean Charter of Human Rights open to signature by the members of the partnership	The Commission takes note of the proposal. It notes that human rights issues are discussed during regular Sub-Committee meetings with

¹ Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood A new Agenda for the Mediterranean (JOIN(2021) 2 final).

<p>be set in motion. Incorporating the content of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, this would be the basis for a substantial convergence with the EU in terms of human rights.</p>	<p>Southern Partners.</p>
<p>10. proposes that ad hoc forums for dialogue and multilevel exchange be set up between representatives of local, regional and national authorities and representatives of civil society from European and Southern Neighbourhood countries or that existing multilateral forums be promoted, such as the Three Cultures of the Mediterranean Foundation, in which entities from the three shores of the Mediterranean Basin take part, in order to promote good governance and involvement in decision-making processes.</p>	<p>The Commission reiterates that such exchanges take place in the context of the UfM. In addition, the EU engages in structural dialogue with civil society representatives, including on the ground in EU Delegations. Ongoing support includes programmes with the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures and the Med Dialogue for Rights and Equality. In line with the priorities set out in the Joint Communication and Joint Documents with Southern Partners², new initiatives could be developed to address specific needs.</p>
<p>11. is committed to promoting women's empowerment and gender equality, in terms of rights and opportunities, as an essential resource to promote regional stability and socio-economic development. Women and girls should participate equally in leadership positions, both in the public and private sphere, to achieve a fully functioning democracy and economy, and to fulfil human rights for all. The conditions need to be created for increasing participation and leadership by women in politics and public life in the region and in local, regional, national and international decision-making.</p>	<p>The Commission aims at reflecting gender equality as one of the priorities in the Joint Documents (Partnership Priorities and equivalent documents) with its Southern Partners. Plurality and equality are EU fundamental values and the EU will continue to raise these in its political and policy dialogue on human rights when relevant. The EU is already promoting enhanced engagement of women in public life. In addition to the ongoing programme with the Council of Europe 'South Programme IV - Regional Support to Reinforce Human Rights', further actions are foreseen at the bilateral and regional levels in the programming for 2021-2027.</p>
<p>15. calls on the EU to make it easier for citizens in the Southern Neighbourhood to be involved in EU programmes involving exchanges in the areas of research, innovation, culture and education.</p>	<p>The Commission is ensuring that adequate visibility is provided to such programmes, including Erasmus and Horizon Europe. EU Delegations are actively promoting EU actions; additionally, the new EU spokesperson in Arabic contributes to driving engagement on EU programmes in those areas.</p>

² SWD(2021) 23 final.

<p>16. calls on the EU to strengthen the role of local and regional authorities in promoting digitalisation and e-government services, as they are in a position to connect better with the local private sector, helping to make central government programmes more effective and efficient.</p>	<p>The Commission is committed to continue supporting Public Administration Reform in the Southern Neighbourhood³. For example, its programme with the OECD-SIGMA will include dedicated actions linking the digital transition to good governance practices. Furthermore, at the bilateral level, based on demand from Southern partners TAIEX and Twinning could be utilised to support the design and implementation of digital transformation initiatives, bearing in mind data protection considerations.</p>
<p>19. calls for an EU initiative to facilitate job creation by improving the local business environment, stimulating entrepreneurship and attracting investment to promote sustainable economic development in the Southern Neighbourhood.</p>	<p>The Commission confirms that decent job creation is a key objective of its support to sustainable and inclusive economic development in the Southern Neighbourhood. Initiatives such as the cooperation with the International Labour Organisation on mainstreaming employment in trade and investment are testament to our commitment to support the private sector and policy makers in creating more and better jobs.</p> <p>Moreover, the Commission intends to address urgently the crucial issue of youth unemployment, especially young women, and those Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) in the region. The EU Youth Guarantee and the European Alliance of Apprenticeship inside the EU could serve as a source of inspiration for similar actions.</p>
<p>23. advocates synergy between the instruments provided for in the United Nations Charter and the EU Strategy for the Security Union, to bring about a secure environment sufficient for the needs of the future to tackle the developing threats (protection from terrorism and organised crime);</p>	<p>The Commission encourages efforts to intensify political dialogue across the Mediterranean to build trust, reduce tensions and help solve conflicts. In its regional and bilateral programming it also foresees cooperation with relevant partners and organisations in order to develop actions that would help tackle transnational and hybrid threats that impact adversely both shores of the Mediterranean.</p>
<p>25. with regard to migration, considers that the</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the point. In</p>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/european-neighbourhood-policy/twinning-and-sigma_fr

<p>positive measures recently adopted by the EU in this area are not yet sufficient. In the absence of further joint instruments at European level, including an appropriate distribution mechanism to relocate migrants, the burden of managing the migrant emergency falls primarily on the local and regional authorities of the European countries on the front line, in particular the border regions and communities in the south of the EU, which are under greater pressure from migratory flows in the Mediterranean; at the same time, considers local and regional authority involvement and EU support to be essential for the EU to raise European public awareness on issues such as solidarity, tolerance, and respect for legality and dialogue, in order to improve the way migrant-related issues are perceived;</p>	<p>September 2020, the Commission adopted the New Pact on Migration and Asylum⁴, covering all of the different elements needed for a comprehensive European approach to migration. Following extensive consultations and a holistic assessment of the situation, the Commission has presented proposals to reform the EU's asylum and migration system. The Commission encourages the European Parliament and Council to continue their work on the proposals so as to reach an agreement as quickly as possible. In line with its comprehensive approach, the New Pact also places a strong focus on building mutually beneficial partnerships with countries of origin and transit.</p> <p>In its relations with its Southern partners the New Pact will be the reference on actions related to migration, as proposed in the regional multi-annual programming on migration.</p>
<p>29. considers that EU cooperation on migration with third countries, in particular its southern neighbours, needs to be stepped up, and welcomes the intention to support migration and asylum policies, including partner countries' border management capacities. Moreover, calls for the European Union to allocate sufficient funds to the regions and local authorities to enable them to develop their own integration and inclusion policies; suggests encouraging cooperation with third countries of origin or transit with a view to the acceptance of returns of irregular migrants, albeit with the exception of access to international protection for refugees who need it.</p>	<p>The Commission will continue its efforts to support third countries in the North of Africa and the Middle East to deal with the management and governance of migratory flows, including irregular migration towards Europe. As part of its response to the Syrian crisis, the EU will continue to support partner countries hosting refugees from Syria, through both humanitarian and non-humanitarian support. A multi-annual indicative programme for a regional migration programme under the new NDICI-Global Europe is being prepared.</p>
<p>35. calls for regional policy networks to be set up to strengthen social and economic ties based on the fundamental principles of the blue economy. In addition, advocates encouraging the creation of Mediterranean biospheres with</p>	<p>The thematic areas connected to sustainable blue economy are addressed in the Joint Communication, such as greener maritime transport, circular and resource efficient economy, pollution reduction, biodiversity, integrated</p>

⁴ COM(2020) 609 final.

<p>a view to improving the relationship between economic activities and nature conservation, and working towards introducing regional monitoring systems for assessing the health of marine and coastal ecosystems and the impact of different industries on the Mediterranean biosphere, as well as developing initiatives aimed at raising public awareness of the importance of improving the situation of our marine and coastal ecosystems, understanding the benefits this brings to the present and to future generations;</p>	<p>coastal zone management etc. The Commission will continue to support transition towards a sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean and cooperation with non-EU countries, both at UfM level and at sub-regional level (WestMed initiative⁵ and EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)⁶). Among others, a project aimed at developing environmental indicators and reinforcing the capacity of partner countries was in place with the European Maritime Safety Agency, and a follow-up is being considered.</p> <p>The new strategy adopted on 9 July 2021, in the framework of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) – General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)⁷ – will contribute to strengthening cooperation between the EU and the Southern Neighbourhood countries, with a view to ensuring the sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture in the Mediterranean, the protection of the marine ecosystem and the protection of communities living in fishing activities.</p> <p>This sustainable approach of fisheries is also linked to the global achievement of the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies⁸.</p> <p>Civil society involvement is indispensable for environmental awareness and climate action. Both regional and bilateral programmes on environment and climate action contain and will continue to contain awareness-raising components, and will support civil society engagement as well as dissemination of good practices.</p>
<p>38. points to the recommendation made by ARLEM in its report on agriculture and food security in the context of climate change in the</p>	<p>As indicated in the Joint Communication, the Commission intends to develop projects on sustainable food systems. Their design will be</p>

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/mare/items/639929/en>

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/adriatic-ionic/

⁷ https://gfcmsitestorage.blob.core.windows.net/website/4.Publications/GFCM%202030%20STRATEGY_FINAL.pdf

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_fr

<p>Mediterranean and, consequently, calls on the European Union and the Union for the Mediterranean to consider the development of a joint strategy for food security and food sovereignty in the Mediterranean, to promote an agro-ecological transition to practices that preserve soil and agro-biodiversity, and to consider introducing a "Mediterranean products" or "Mediterranean diet" label as part of a broader macro-regional strategy for the whole of the Mediterranean</p>	<p>based on the priorities and specific needs determined through regular policy and political dialogue. Regional projects on agriculture have also existed in the past, however it was concluded that the regional dimension is less effective than bilateral cooperation.</p>
<p>44. agrees that at least EUR 500 million of the total amount earmarked for EU cooperation with neighbourhood countries under the geographical pillar of the NDICI -Global Europe should be awarded to local and regional authorities; calls for these measures and resources to be sufficiently increased. Flexible funding should be promoted through local and regional authorities playing an active role, specifying the needs of the regions according to their relevance. Calls for an increase in funds dedicated to climate-related objectives under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI);</p>	<p>The Commission informs that discussions on allocations for the Southern Neighbourhood and their breakdown are ongoing. It takes note of the suggestion and confirms that, in line with policy priorities and identified needs, local authorities will continue to participate in EU-funded programmes, both as beneficiaries and, where relevant, as implementing partners.</p>