



**European Committee
of the Regions**

The CoR Impact

Current Achievements

Executive Summary

June 2021

1. Introduction

We are the institution that represents local and regional authorities in the EU decision-making process. In a year like no other in the history of the EU, the European Committee of the Regions focused on supporting the thousands of regional and local authorities on the frontline of the response against the coronavirus pandemic.

While continuing to pursue its mission of better law making and strengthening EU democracy from the bottom up, the CoR maximised the outreach and visibility of Europe's one

million local and regional politicians working day and night to provide emergency services, contain the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate the economic and social impact of the crisis.

Reporting on the CoR's impact in 2020 means going back to the start of the new term of office and the agreement on the three political priorities: 'Bringing Europe closer to its people'; 'Building resilient communities'; and 'Cohesion, our fundamental value'.

This report explains how the CoR worked without a break to



ensure that its priorities were followed up in the EU legislative process and placed on the European agenda.

2. Overview of main achievements

2.1. Bringing Europe closer to people

2.1.1. Barometer: equipping politicians and media with the facts

The first EU Annual Regional and Local Barometer showed how important local and regional authorities are in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as in mitigating its socio-economic impact and ensuring sustainable recovery in the EU.

- To do so, the CoR mobilised all its services and many partner organisations like the OECD and the JRC, organised several webinars, carried out surveys, commissioned external studies and conducted a territorial impact assessment (TIA). The Barometer report provided essential input to the CoR president's speech on the state of the regions and cities in the COVID-19 crisis and their outlook.
- The *EU Annual Regional and Local Barometer* convinced

the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen to integrate a territorial dimension into future measures to mitigate the crisis. Media and stakeholders' interest was particularly high and confirmed the need for a more granular analysis of the impact of the crisis and of recovery measures. The 100-page report and its 10-page summary in all languages was downloaded 3 000 times. The Barometer webpage had 18 600+ views. Live streaming and "video on demand" from EBS were significant, with 8 600 views for the president's

presentation of the Barometer report. With its first Barometer report, the CoR has firmly positioned itself as a solid provider of regional and local information, and has strengthened its position in the EU policy debate.

- A second edition – as exhaustive as the first one – is being prepared and the European Commission has been open to include its findings when it drafts the European Commission president's own State of the Union address scheduled for mid-September 2021.

2.1.2. Fit4Future and Reghub

For the CoR, better regulation means that all decisions are taken as close as possible to citizens, in line with the principle of active subsidiarity. The CoR's impact work focuses on better impact assessments taking into account the experience of regions and cities, simplifying EU legislation and reducing the administrative burden and implementation costs for businesses. The CoR works for an open, transparent and inclusive decision-making process based on evidence.



- In May 2020, the European Commission established the Fit for Future (F4F) Platform as the main instrument of the EU Better Regulation Agenda. Due to its work in the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing less more efficiently", in the REFIT Platform and in its RegHub network, the CoR was given a much more prominent role in the new F4F Platform. Three CoR representatives participate in the Government Group (composed of 27 Member States and the CoR). The RegHub network is one of the four sub-groups of the Platform, contributing to F4F's annual work programme and carrying out targeted

surveys for its opinions.

- The F4F Platform identified the final report of the Task Force on Subsidiarity and Proportionality as one of the main sources when selecting topics for the Platform's work programme.
- At the platform's first plenary session, Commission vice-president Maroš Šefčovič referred to the CoR as a key partner of the European Commission in implementing the EU Better Regulation agenda. He highlighted the valuable expertise and experience of LRAs in implementing EU legislation on the ground and their potential to contribute to the objectives of the F4F Platform.
- The CoR had a strong impact on the platform's 2021 work programme and thus contributed to setting the agenda for the European Commission.
- The CoR's new role and enhanced participation in the F4F Platform has contributed to further strengthening cooperation with the European Commission, increasing the CoR's visibility and outreach.

- The RegHub network organised six consultations during its pilot phase (2019-2020) that produced comprehensive implementation reports, which were distributed to a broad audience. This included CoR members and other LRAs, the European Commission (line DGs), the European Parliament (including EPRS) and the Council. The reports were distributed in close cooperation with the European Commission (SecGen), the EPRS and the Council (better regulation working group). The findings of its consultations have fed into the CoR's opinions and policy work and were very well received by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council.
- After a positive evaluation of RegHub, a successful application procedure was launched at the end of 2020 and the network was subsequently expanded and mainstreamed (RegHub 2.0), allowing for enhanced contributions to F4F, to the CoR's political work and to any relevant review, evaluation and/or fitness check of EU policies.

2.1.3. Pillar of Social Rights

In 2020, the CoR worked closely with the European Commission on preparing the action plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and the Porto Social Summit in 2021. In January 2020, the Commission published its Communication on A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions, to which the CoR contributed by means of an opinion drawn up by the SEDEC chair.

- Following on from Commissioner Schmit's contribution to the SEDEC meeting on 9 July 2020, on 2 November SEDEC members adopted an enhanced cooperation procedure between DG EMPL and the CoR which will ensure close coordination with the Commission on matters within Commissioner Schmit's remit. As a result of these efforts, the Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights identifies local and regional authorities as key actors, the CoR was invited to the Porto Social Summit and the Porto Commitment adopted at the event refers clearly to territorial cohesion. The impact achieved in 2020/2021 is the CoR's stronger involvement in the drafting of the EPSR action plan and the CoR's participation in the 2021 Porto Social Summit.
- The cooperation with DG EMPL also provides for the organisation of European Local Job Fairs, which will be regular local events to support local labour markets. A pilot online event is being prepared for the second half of 2021. The lessons learned from the pilot scheme will be put to use in subsequent events.



Box 1 – Tackling the problems of the past: BREXIT

The CoR has followed the Brexit negotiation process closely. It addressed the consequences of Brexit for local and regional authorities at a very early stage. The CoR gathered evidence and fostered dialogue with the EU regional and local governments most affected by Brexit. It provided the EU's negotiators with a comprehensive picture of the ongoing situation and the anticipated impacts at local and regional level. In June 2020, the CoR set up a CoR-UK Contact Group. This group provides a framework for political cooperation with other EU institutions and the representatives of UK local government and devolved parliaments and assemblies. In 2020, the CoR organised several high-level debates at contact group meetings and CoR plenary sessions with high-level speakers, such as MEPs McAllister and Piri and Mr Barnier. The contact group will examine policies and issues relating to EU-UK relations at sub-national level, from both a thematic and geographical perspective. It will focus on cross-border and inter-regional cooperation. The group's proposals and recommendations will be sent to the other EU institutions.

2.2. Building resilient communities

2.2.1. Health emergency mechanism/COVID platform

It is its opinions on An EU health emergency mechanism, EU4Health and cross-border healthcare systems and Experiences and lessons learned from COVID-19, the CoR put forward the views of local and regional authorities as actors in the fight against COVID-19. The NAT commission and the CoR Interregional Group on Health and Well-being have been actively working with DG SANTE and WHO Europe and produced studies and impact assessments on this issue.

The EU4Health opinion calling for a robust budget for health in the next MFF was partly taken on board in the European Council Agreement of December 2020. Although lower than hoped, the final budget is still three times larger than the Council's initial proposal. The second action

plan agreed by the CoR and WHO Europe was signed on 4 February 2021.

The work carried out by the NAT commission in 2020 did a great deal to ensure that the European Union drew the right lessons from the COVID-19 crisis in the area of public

health. Recognising the role of regions and local authorities in the fight against the pandemic, on 2 July 2020 the European Commission asked for an outlook opinion on Experiences and lessons learned from COVID-19. Adopted in spring 2021, this opinion fed into the June 2021 European



Commission report requested by the Council in its statement of 25 February 2021.

A RegHub consultation on the implementation of the cross-border healthcare directive in Europe's regions highlighted the many barriers to cross-border healthcare cooperation.

A NAT study on regional health policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis showed asymmetric incidence and impact of COVID-19 across EU regions and provided recommendations for better management of health crises in Europe. The findings of these works were shared with

other EU institutions and fed into CoR opinions, particularly the CoR outlook opinion requested by the European Commission.

2.2.2. Green Deal Going Local

In 2020, the ENVE commission had a major impact on the EU legislative process regarding the European Green Deal, particularly as regards climate change and the environment. On the latter issue, the key messages of the CoR opinion on biodiversity are now included in the early draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Regarding climate change, the CoR played an important role in the European Climate Pact, especially thanks to the opinion. The Commission executive vice-president, Frans Timmermans took part in the CoR October plenary session and called on local and regional governments to take ownership of and shape the Green Deal.

The main legislative impacts have been:

- The rapporteur, Rafał Kazimierz Trzaskowski (PL/EPP) was invited to the European Commission's Climate Pact launch event in December 2020 as a starting point for the joint action with DG CLIMA on Climate Pact Ambassadors;
- The CoR now has a seat in the Covenant of Mayors' Political Board, and a new political Chamber of national ambassadors is being set up with 27 CoR members, following the opinion by Ms Brighenti (IT/PES) on the Covenant of Mayors post-2020;

- Through the opinion on the European Climate Law, the CoR was the first to propose "at least 55%" for 2030 targets. This was relayed to Jytte Guteland MEP and the ENVI chair, Pascal Canfin, who were leading what later became the agreement on the Climate Law calling for a 60% emission reduction by 2030;
- The CoR opinion on clean hydrogen by Birgit Honé (DE/PES) was referred to in the Hydrogen Strategy released by the European Commission in July 2020;
- CoR members presented a first set of 200 CoR best practices on the Green Deal in 2020.



Box 2 - Making a difference beyond Europe's borders: Nicosia

The Nicosia Initiative is the CoR's platform which seeks to strengthen local authorities in Libya.

In the absence of a unified government at national level, Libyan municipalities play a key role in providing basic services to citizens in a context of instability, economic crisis and state fragility.

The key objective is to create mutually beneficial and sustainable partnerships that improve the living conditions of Libyan citizens by strengthening administrative capacity, improving public services delivery, and fostering local economic development.

Since 2016, a total of 35 study visits, meetings and training actions have been organised for over 500 Libyan participants from all parts of the country.

Beyond the workshops on core municipal tasks such as water and waste management and the training initiatives mentioned above, activities included peace training for 200 young Libyans (with 11 follow-up community projects funded) and a three-month vocational training course for 100 young fishers to foster local economic development.

After incremental funding at the start of the initiative, 2020 was the turning point, marking a shift to more structural funding. This is a major success for the CoR, turning one of its own pilot projects into a long-term European Union project. In December, the European Commission signed contracts for the next three to four years' worth over EUR 7 million with the projects Towards A new Multilevel Shared Approach for Libya Local governance (TAMSALL) and Research and Education Building Urban Institutions for Local Development (REBUILD).

2.3. Cohesion as a fundamental value

2.3.1. #CohesionAlliance and the MFF (cohesion policy and JTF)

In December 2020, the co-legislators finally agreed on most parts of the cohesion policy legislative proposals for the years 2021-2027. The CoR had put forward its recommendations for legislative amendments with the objective of securing a strong and effective cohesion policy beyond 2020¹.

- The co-legislators took on board many of the CoR's key recommendations, resulting in a significant impact on the final text of the documents.
- The CoR ensured that a strong partnership principle and the reference to the European Code of Conduct on partnership are retained in the Common Provisions Regulation. All Member States must draw up partnership agreements. This ensures that the funds actually address the needs on the ground. The co-financing rates have been increased in comparison with the initial Commission proposal, although in some cases are not as high as suggested by the CoR. The following CoR recommendations were taken on board in the final text of the Common Provisions Regulation:
 - maintain the n+3 rule,
 - allow for an integrated approach to address demographic challenges in the partnership agreements and operational programmes, and
 - make it clear that Member States will prepare and implement the programmes at the appropriate territorial level, in accordance with their institutional, legal and financial framework.
- In line with CoR proposals, the European Regional Development (ERDF) regulation:
 - will consider and define territories that suffer from demographic decline (population reduction of at least 1% between 2007-2017), and not only demographic density, at NUTS 3 level,



- ensures that ERDF resources for sustainable urban development will be increased from 6% to at least 8%.

The new European Urban Initiative will cover all urban

¹ Opinions on the Common Provisions Regulation, the Regulations on the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, European Territorial Cooperation, and the European Cross Border Mechanism adopted in December 2018.

areas, including functional urban areas. The co-legislators included the CoR proposal to support Erasmus for local representatives under the Urban Agenda for the EU. The CoR also succeeded in ensuring that it was possible to finance capacity building actions at local level to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

- As regards thematic concentration, the CoR position coincided with that of the co-legislators regarding the importance of dedicating at least 30% of the ERDF budget to green investments in all categories of the regions and Member States. The final text was in line with the CoR's recommendation to exclude the specific financial allocations assigned to the Outermost

Regions from the thematic concentration requirements and authorise the possibility of supporting productive investments in big companies in the Outermost Regions.

Regarding the thematic aspects of the ERDF/CF Regulation, the co-legislators took on board some proposals put forward in the CoR opinion, such as the inclusion of energy poverty, the promotion of resilience to prevent natural disasters, and the promotion of sustainable multimodal urban mobility as part of the transition to a carbon-neutral economy. The possibility of investments in culture and tourism was retained, as was support for the localisation of the SDGs.

- Through its opinions on *European Territorial Cooperation*

and *People-to-people and small-scale projects in cross-border cooperation programmes* and the effective cooperation with the European Parliament rapporteur on the matter, the CoR managed to make the Interreg programme stronger than initially proposed by the European Commission. The new programme continues the Interreg Europe and Urbact programmes. Several points mentioned in the opinions were taken up in the final legislative text. The REACT-EU Regulation, adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, provides flexible support to counter the negative impacts of the pandemic on border regions; this was a key request raised in the CoR opinion.

2.3.2. Promoting regional innovation ecosystems and the synergetic use of EU funds: Horizon Europe and ERA

The CoR succeeded in accentuating the importance of regional innovation ecosystems and the synergetic use of EU and national funds in the fields of research and innovation, but also in Europe's industrial and digital policies.

- During 2020, the CoR's SEDEC commission engaged in the field of research and innovation (R&I), focusing on the final stages of the negotiations on the implementation of FP9 Horizon Europe and the European Research Area (ERA).
- A landmark achievement for the CoR in 2020 was that it was mentioned in the European Commission communication on the European Research Area (ERA). This communication referred to the inter-institutional projects with DG RTD and JRC (Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP) and Science meets Regions), with the KEP being proposed as an initiative for strategic cooperation. As a consequence, the Council conclusions on ERA, adopted on 1 December 2020, also referred to

the role of the regions and the CoR, while the KEP and the principle of multilevel governance were explicitly mentioned.

- The CoR and its rapporteur were formally consulted on the design and promoted the inclusion of a number of local innovation indicators in the Regional Innovation Scoreboard, one of the tools most widely used by the European Commission and national institutions in the field of research and innovation.
- A joint action plan with Commissioner Mariya Gabriel's services (DG RTD, DG EAC and JRC) was negotiated throughout 2020 and adopted at the SEDEC meeting on 25 November attended by Ms Gabriel and the CoR president.



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Box 3 – Legislative example, the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP)



Following the adoption of the CoR opinion on the reform of the CAP, the rapporteur worked with the Coalition of AGRI Regions to secure the support of the European Parliament to amend the CAP strategic plans regulation.

The amendments to Articles 94, 107 and 110 of the CAP strategic plans regulation supported by the rapporteur and the Coalition of AGRI Regions were adopted by the Parliament on 23 October.

Following the debate on the CAP with Mr Burtscher, Director-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, during the November NAT commission meeting, a series of meetings has been organised between the rapporteur, the Coalition of AGRI Regions and DG AGRI to secure the support of the European Commission. The consultations led by the CoR resulted in the European Commission tabling legislative compromise amendments to include the role of the regions in the design, implementation and monitoring of the CAP Strategic Plan ahead of the CAP trilogues in May 2021.

2.4. Future impact of the CoR

2.4.1. Enhancing oversight on impact

On 7 December 2020, Ulrika Landergren, Chair of the NAT commission, presented a report to the CoR Conference of Presidents setting out a definition of "impact" based on achieving three objectives:

- impact on the EU legislative process, i.e. preparatory or final legal texts;
- visibility of local and regional authorities in EU agenda setting and policy making;
- changes in EU working methods or day-to-day life due to EU legislation that the CoR has promoted or initiated

to enable Europeans to see the added value of the EU.

The following steps were taken with a view to the report:

- measures have been developed to increase the follow-up given to CoR opinions;
- the CoR's internal information system (KIKLOS) has been revised so that the impact of opinions can be evaluated more effectively, including assessment of past opinions;
- flagship projects on key priorities and "early markers" for key opinions have been identified in order to assess their

possible impact in advance;

- the future Annual Impact Report will include a list of additional CoR products that were prepared for its consultative work, including the number of:
 - declarations and resolutions addressed to the EU institutions;
 - letters addressed to the EU institutions linked to legislative proposals;
 - exchanges with high-level representatives of the EU institutions;

- CoR reports, consultations and policy assessments, such as the Annual Regional and Local Barometer report, the TIA reports or the RegHub implementation reports.
- The next Annual Impact Report will also look into the CoR's outreach work, particularly in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe and the organisation of local debates.
- In 2022, the CoR will carry out a "CoR consultative works survey" to gain first-hand quantitative and qualitative feedback from the EU institutions about our performance.
- The CoR will also work on amending its Rules of Procedure to allow for quick political responses to EU decision-making processes.
- In the medium and long term, the CoR will develop a system of key performance indicators for its consultative work through an inter-service working group.

The whole process will be accompanied by a comprehensive training policy to allow all CoR staff in the administration and the political groups to improve their capacity to achieve impact. This will go hand in hand with reinforcing the CoR's consultative work, particularly with regard to better and



more comprehensive service to CoR members to achieve better impact.

2.4.2. The CoR's impact beyond opinions

As mentioned above, the impact of the CoR as a consultative body goes beyond its opinions. This fact has been highlighted recently by the European Parliament in its discharge report on the budget year 2019 adopted on 28 April 2021. The report notes that beyond opinions, the CoR was originally established "to close the widening gap between the public and the process of European integration by involving regional representation".

The CoR gives a voice and visibility to the one million elected

politicians at subnational level through communication and engagement activities, such as the annual European Week of Regions and Cities and the European Public Communication Conference. Both regularly attract thousands of participants from all over the EU. These events are organised together with the EU institutions and facilitate real "European" and less institutional communication, for example, in the run-up to European elections or the Conference on the Future of Europe.

In December 2020, the CoR launched new initiatives to reach out to the one million elected politicians at subnational level, such as the European Network of Regional and Local EU Councillors or the Former CoR Members Network. The CoR also decided to participate in the EU's outreach efforts to foster dialogue with citizens by organising local debates in 2021 in connection with the Conference on the Future of Europe.

2.5. Conclusion

Despite the challenging context in which the CoR and its members operated in 2020, the European Committee of the Regions adapted quickly by continuing its work and actively participating in and influencing EU legislation while assisting, informing, engaging and representing regions and local authorities across Europe.

In 2020, the CoR adopted nine resolutions and 48 opinions. The CoR continued to host high-level debates with major EU political figures such as Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, Angela Merkel, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, and several Members of the European Commission.

- In 2021, the CoR continued these debates with key figures such as Charles Michel, President of the European Council, António Costa, Prime Minister of Portugal and

former CoR member, and David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament.

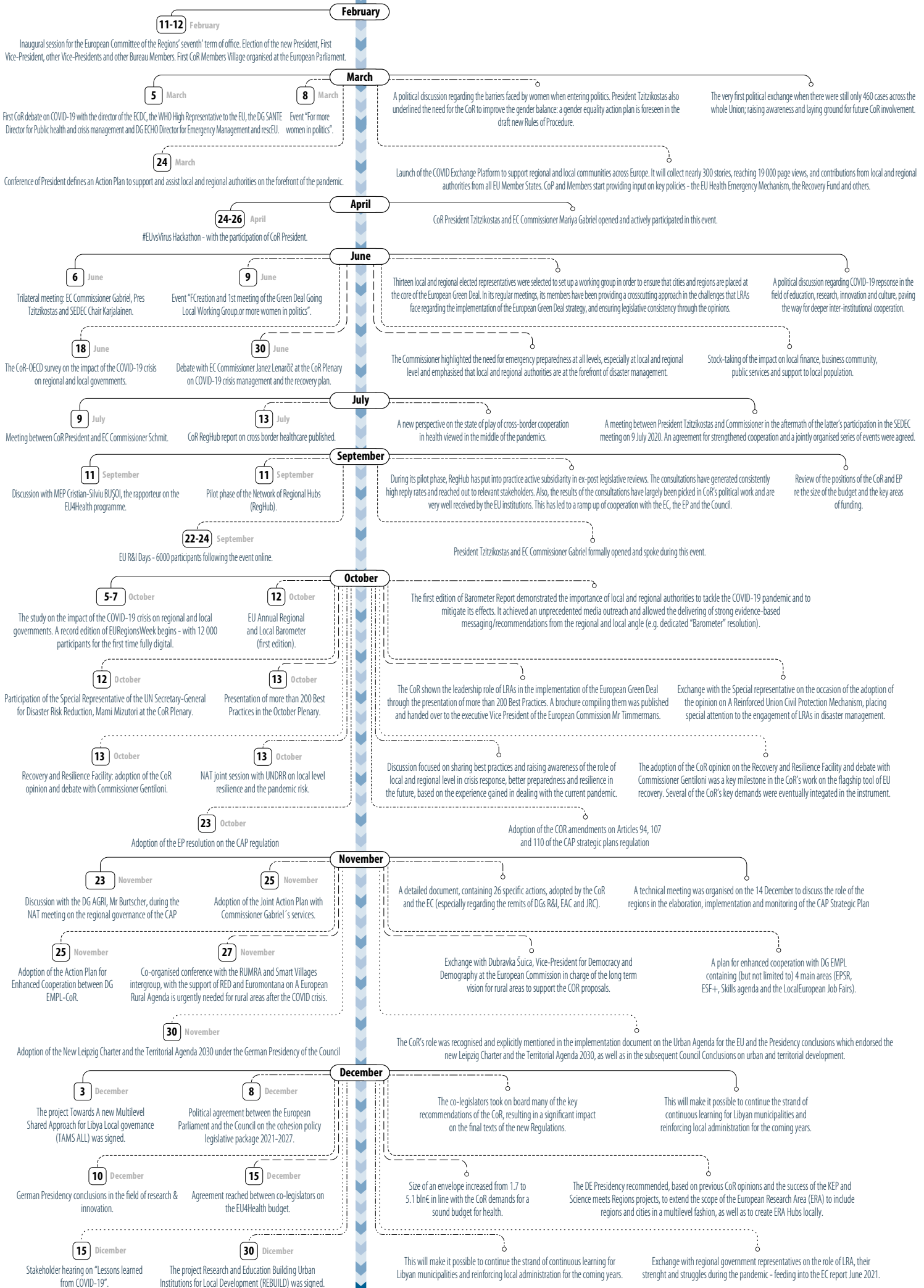
- CoR products such as the Annual Barometer report, the Territorial Impact Assessment reports and RegHub implementation reports will continue.
- The Conference on the Future of Europe will be at the heart of the CoR's political action in 2021. In spring, the CoR established a High-Level Group on European

Democracy (HLG) led by Herman Van Rompuy, former President of the European Council. The HLG supports the delegation of 18 CoR members as they contribute to the Conference. The recently launched Future of Europe survey and 9 May celebrations with a hybrid CoR event in Strasbourg kick-started the CoR contribution to the Conference.

PROCESS

IMPACT

2020 CoR activities





European Committee of the Regions

Created in 1994, after the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty, the European Committee of the Regions is the EU's assembly of 329 regional and local representatives from all 27 Member States, representing over 447 million Europeans.

Its main objectives are to involve regional and local authorities and the communities they represent in the EU's decision-making process and to inform them about EU policies. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council have to consult the Committee in policy areas affecting regions and cities. It can appeal to the Court of Justice of the European Union as a means of upholding EU law where there are breaches to the subsidiarity principle or failures to respect regional or local authorities.

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Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 101 | 1040 Bruxelles/Brussel | BELGIQUE/BELGIË
Tel. +32 22822211 | e-mail: PublicationsCDR@cor.europa.eu | www.cor.europa.eu

 @EU_CoR |  /european.committee.of.the.regions |  /european-committee-of-the-regions |  @EU_regions_cities

