

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

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

PLENARY SESSION OF FEBRUARY 2017

73rd REPORT

| N° | TITLE | REFERENCES |
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| SG | | |
| <p>1.</p> <p>(EEAS, DG DEVCO, DG HOME associated)</p> | <p>Partnership Framework with third countries on Migration</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council and the European Investment Bank</p> <p>Rapporteur: Peter BOSSMAN (SI/PES)</p> | <p>COM(2016) 385 final</p> <p>COR-2016-04555-00-02-PAC-TRA</p> <p>CIVEX-VI/016</p> <p>Own-initiative opinion</p> |
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| <p>2.</p> | <p>Copyright in the digital single market</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Promoting a fair, efficient and competitive European copyright-based economy in the Digital Single Market</p> <p>Rapporteur: Mauro D'ATTIS (IT/EPP)</p> | <p>COM(2016) 592 final</p> <p>COM(2016) 593 final</p> <p>COR-2016-05114-00-01-PAC-TRA</p> <p>SEDEC-VI/019</p> <p>Own-initiative opinion</p> |
| <p>3.</p> | <p>Review of the telecom package</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Connectivity for a Competitive Digital Single Market - Towards a European Gigabit Society</p> <p>Rapporteur: Mart VÕRKLAEV (EE/ALDE)</p> | <p>COM(2016) 588 final</p> <p>COM(2016) 587 final</p> <p>COM(2016) 589 final</p> <p>COR-2016-05113-00-00-PAC-TRA</p> <p>SEDEC-VI/018</p> |

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| 4. | Bridging the Investment Gap: How to Tackle the Challenges Rapporteur: Markku MARKKULA (FI/EPP) | COR-2016-04165-00-01-PAC-TRA ECON-VI/014 Own-initiative opinion |
| 5. | Fiscal Capacity and Automatic Stabilisers in the Economic and Monetary Union Rapporteur: Carl Fredrik GRAF (SE/EPP) | COR-2016-04164-00-01-PAC-TRA ECON-VI/018 Own-initiative opinion |
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| 6. | Supporting young European farmers Rapporteur: Arnold HATCH (UK/ECR) | COR-2016-05034-00-00-PAC-TRA NAT-VI/012 Own-initiative opinion |
| DG MARE | | |
| 7. EEAS co-lead | Union policy for the Arctic Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council - An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic Rapporteur: Pauliina HAIJANEN (FI/EPP) | JOIN(2016) 21 final COR-2016-04295-00-00-PAC-TRA COTER-VI/017 |

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| 8. | <p>Reform of the Common European Asylum System – Package II and a Union Resettlement Framework</p> <p>Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council</p> <p>Proposals for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council</p> <p>Rapporteur: Vincenzo BIANCO (IT/PES)</p> | <p>COM(2016) 465 final/2</p> <p>COM(2016) 466 final</p> <p>COM(2016) 467 final</p> <p>COM(2016) 468 final</p> <p>COR-2016-05807-00-03-PAC-TRA</p> <p>CIVEX-VI/017</p> |
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| 11. | <p>Proposal for a new European Consensus on Development – Our World, our Dignity, our Future</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions</p> <p>Rapporteur General: Jesús GAMALLO ALLER (ES/EPP)</p> | <p>COM(2016) 740 final</p> <p>COR-2016-06940-00-01-PAC-TRA</p> <p>CIVEX-VI/019</p> <p>Own-initiative opinion</p> |

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| 12. EEAS co-lead | <p>Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations</p> <p>Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council - Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations</p> <p>Rapporteur: Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS (EL/EPP)</p> | <p>JOIN(2016) 29 final</p> <p>COR-2016-05110-00-00-PAC-TRA</p> <p>SEDEC-VI/017</p> |
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| 14. | <p>Mid-term evaluation of the LIFE Programme</p> <p>Rapporteur: Witold STĘPIEŃ (PL/EPP)</p> | <p>COR-2016-04126-00-02-PAC-TRA</p> <p>ENVE-VI/016</p> <p>Outlook opinion</p> |
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| 16. | <p>The need for and way towards an EU strategy on alcohol-related issues</p> <p>Rapporteur: Ewa-May KARLSSON (SE/ALDE)</p> | <p>COR-2016-01831-00-01-PAC-TRA</p> <p>NAT-VI/010</p> <p>Own-initiative opinion</p> |

N°1 Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration
COM(2016) 385 final - CoR 2016/4555 – CIVEX-VI/016
121st Plenary Session - February 2017
Rapporteur: Mr Peter BOSSMAN (SI/PES)
SG – First Vice-President TIMMERMANS

| Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential | Commission position |
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| <p>1. The Committee of the Regions (...) urges the European Union and the Member States to set up safe, legal routes for refugees such as humanitarian corridors, visas on humanitarian grounds and enhanced family reunification. The Member States should examine the possibility for asylum applications to be submitted in their embassies and consulates.</p> | <p>The European Court of Justice in ruling ECJ C-638/16 PPU stated that the European Union legislature has not adopted to date any measures on the basis of Article 79(2)(a) TFEU with regard to long-term visas of residence permits on humanitarian grounds, and therefore national law applies. The ruling thus confirms that the provisions of the Visa Code do not impose a legal obligation for Member States to issue short-stay visas for the purpose of seeking international protection.</p> <p>The Partnership Framework calls for a balanced approach and includes the possible development of paths for legal migration, including for students and researchers. Further progress can be made at Member State level, having larger competence on legal migration matters.</p> |
| <p>3. The Committee of the Regions notes that local and regional authorities can and should play a role in the joint effort with the European Union and national level and with third countries to implement comprehensive migration partnerships (compacts), especially those regions and municipalities with a significant diaspora population from the countries covered by</p> | <p>The Partnership Framework aims to include all national (including local and regional) policies in the comprehensive approach. Engagement with the diaspora, as indicated by the Committee of the Regions, is useful and important in this context.</p> <p>The importance of using all relevant policies was again highlighted in the</p> |

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| the Partnership Framework. | fourth Progress Report ¹ . |
| <p>5. The Committee of the Regions urges the Commission to encourage all actors – Member States, European Union Institutions and key third countries - to work together in partnership to bring order into migratory flows and to prevent dangerous sea journeys for asylum seekers and undocumented economic migrants in the hands of human smugglers or traffickers.(...)</p> | <p>Partnership is at the heart of the Partnership Framework approach. The Communication of 7 June 2016 on establishing a new Partnership Framework² underlines that all actors – Member States, European Union Institutions, and key third countries - need to work together in order to bring order into migratory flows. It also emphasises the need to set up a coordination mechanism, and Member States to ensure that the European Union and the Member States work in tandem. The First Progress Report of 18 October 2016³ emphasised that a joint approach by the European Union and the Member States was central to the success of the compacts. Moreover, it was also made clear that migration management needs to reconcile the interests and priorities of both parties, i.e. European Union and third countries, to deliver mutual benefit.</p> |
| <p>8. The Committee of the Regions states that there is a need to further strengthen the European Union's strategic, long term approach vis-a-vis third countries and enhance internal coherence and coordination with European Union Member States. A more coordinated, systematic and structured approach to maximise the synergies and leverages of the Union's internal and external policies is required. Moreover, direct access by regional and local authorities to European Neighbourhood Policy funds and other funds relevant to the Mediterranean region</p> | <p>The Partnership Framework creates a long term strategic approach vis-à-vis third countries while also looking at short term deliverables. Migration is now firmly embedded in the European Union's foreign policy and its overall relations with third countries.</p> <p>As stated in the Second Progress Report of 14 December 2016⁴, synergies between external and internal policies have proved crucial for success.</p> <p>On the suggestion of the Committee of</p> |

¹ COM (2017) 350 final.

² COM(2016) 385 final.

³ COM(2016) 700 final.

⁴ COM(2016) 960 final.

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| <p>must be guaranteed.</p> | <p>the Regions that direct access to European Neighbourhood Policy funds and other funds relevant to the Mediterranean region must be guaranteed to regional and local authorities, it must be noted that those institutions can already benefit from these funds. This comes out clearly from Article 8.1. of the Common Implementing Rules which sets out the sort of entities which can apply for European Union funding under external action instruments, and from Article 4.5 of the European Neighbourhood Instrument Regulation⁵ which establishes that local authorities can benefit from European Neighbourhood Instrument funding. Additionally, it is worth noting that regions and municipalities already benefit largely from direct funding under the European Union's Cross-Border Cooperation programmes or from the non-State Actors and Local Authorities' budget lines funded under the Development Cooperation Instrument.</p> |
| <p>10. The Committee of the Regions calls for establishment of hotspots to third countries, for people requesting international protection. These hotspots should be set up in third countries, managed by the European Union and international bodies (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and tasked with examining the legitimacy of requests for asylum. For people recognised as entitled to asylum or international protection, regular means of transport to the European countries of their choice</p> | <p>The European Commission notes the Committee of the Regions' opinion. The concept of establishing hotspots in third countries contains a number of practical, legal and not least humanitarian elements which would need to be examined and developed. It is currently not an option the European Commission is considering.</p> |

⁵ Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument, OJ L 77, 15.3.2014.

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| <p>should be provided, so as to avoid crossings made in fragile craft operated by traffickers.</p> | |
| <p>12. The Committee of the Regions urges the European Union and the European Commission to insist on better cooperation between the various bodies and agencies fighting against traffickers and smugglers – European Border and Coast Guard Agency, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, European Union Naval Force Mediterranean, European Migrant Smuggling Centre in Europol, and on a better sharing of intelligence data between these agencies and agencies of Member States.</p> | <p>The European Commission reaffirms that fighting trafficking and smuggling is an absolute priority and welcomes the suggestion of the Committee of the Regions. In this context, it has set out in its Communications on the Partnership Framework that cooperation among all actors involved is essential to the success of the Partnership Framework approach.</p> |
| <p>13. The Committee of the Regions calls upon the European Union to provide extra support to organisations such as the International Organization for Migration (...).</p> | <p>The International Organization for Migration is indeed a key partner for the European Union. A Strategic Cooperation Framework was established in 2012. In this context, the International Organization for Migration is a key implementing partner, for example on projects related to Assisted Voluntary Return, and is already a key recipient of European Union (and Member State) funds.</p> <p>The fourth Progress Report has highlighted the success of assisted voluntary returns.</p> |
| <p>15. The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to continue working on the question of unaccompanied minors in the migration process, as dealing with them is often the responsibility of the regions. It eagerly awaits the European Commission's new comprehensive strategy, which is to be implemented as a follow-up to the Action Plan on</p> | <p>The European Commission in April 2017 adopted a Communication on protection of children in migration⁶. The Communication builds on the progress achieved under the Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors (2010-2014). In line with the European Agenda on Migration and the Communication on the state of play of</p> |

⁶ COM(2017) 211 final of 12.4.2017.

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| <p>Unaccompanied Minors (2011-2014), so that the situation of missing and unaccompanied children is taken into account.</p> | <p>its implementation of February 2016, the Commission is engaged in developing a comprehensive approach to the protection of all children in migration, with a focus on strengthening cross-border cooperation. This includes action aimed at prevention and follow-up to the disappearance of migrant children.</p> |
| <p>18. The Committee of the Regions suggests facilitation of information exchange between European Union local and regional authorities and countries of origin of economic migrants that would significantly reduce incentives for irregular migration; such information exchanges should include, awareness-raising on readmission agreements, informing those people wishing to reach the European Union regarding the real work opportunities in the European Union (...).”</p> | <p>The role of local and regional authorities is very important, and this was also recognised in the Joint Communication JOIN (2017)4 of 25 January 2017, which, for example, lists as a key action to step up work and engagement with Libyan municipalities to promote alternative livelihoods and support the resilience of local communities hosting migrants.</p> |
| <p>20. (...) the Committee of the Regions considers that the use of Official Development Assistance should focus on projects in the field of security and border management only when they are clearly beneficial for the recipients. Partner countries unable to implement migration arrangements should still benefit from financial and other instruments aimed at achieving operationalisation of European Union migration compacts.</p> | <p>The Partnership Framework, as was mentioned in the First Progress Report, implies a joint effort of the European Union and Member States drawing on the full range of European Union levers to find short-term solutions to immediate migration pressures, to address the root causes of irregular migration, to foster sustainable development and stability, and opening opportunities for regular migration. Migration will thus be part of the genuine partnership with each third country, which will be tailor-made to take specific needs and interests into account and targeted on results. Several third countries have demonstrated a strong interest in assistance on border management, in the interest of their security and migratory situation.</p> |

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| <p>21. The Committee of the Regions therefore urges the European Union to try to develop tailored partnership arrangements with third parties that genuinely reflect the needs, concerns and capacities of the third parties, taking into account the fact that different partners face different challenges and different circumstances.</p> | <p>Communication COM (2016)385 final is clear that under the Partnership Framework, engagement with third countries in the field of migration takes into account the specific needs and interests of the country.</p> |
| <p>23. The Committee of the Regions encourages the European Commission to finalise the new Partnership Priorities with Jordan and Lebanon following the European Neighbourhood Policy Review of 2015 as soon as possible.</p> | <p>The European Union has signed the Partnership Priorities documents (and their annexed Compacts) on 11 November 2016 with Lebanon and on 19 December 2016 with Jordan.</p> |
| <p>24. The Committee of the Regions is concerned with regard to the European Union-Turkey Agreement of 18 March 2016 on refugees, in particular because of several serious human rights issues relating to the detention of asylum seekers in "hotspots" on the Greek Aegean islands, but also in view of the return of asylum seekers to Turkey as a "first country of asylum" or "safe third country", and because of fears that Turkey may be returning refugees to Syria itself. The Committee of the Regions is also worried by the slow build-up of the Greek asylum systems' capacity to administer the asylum process in the hotspots and delays in the provision of support to Greece, the so far very low level of resettlement of refugees from Turkey, and delays in the disbursement of European Union financial assistance to Turkey's efforts in supporting Syrian refugees.</p> | <p>The European Union-Turkey Statement, set out by the European Union Heads of State or Government and their Turkish counterpart, is being implemented in full accordance with international and European law. In particular, the returns of all new irregular migrants and asylum seekers from Greece to Turkey are only carried out in line with existing refugee protection safeguards.</p> <p>While the Asylum Reception Conditions Directive⁷ and the Return Directive⁸ contain rules on the possibility to detain asylum-seekers and irregular migrants, detention must remain a proportionate last resort measure. In this context, the European Commission has been asking the Greek authorities to pay particular attention to the needs of vulnerable people and unaccompanied minors, who in</p> |

⁷ Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection, OJ L 180, 29.6.2013.

⁸ Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals, OJ L 348, 24.12.2008.

principle should not be detained, and is following this issue closely.

Turkey has provided written assurances that all returned persons will be treated in line with the relevant standards. Turkey has provided assurances that Syrians will be granted temporary protection upon return and that each non-Syrian who seeks international protection in Turkey will enjoy protection from refoulement. Turkey has also agreed to allow the European Union to regularly monitor the situation of returnees, including access to refugee camps and centres, and concluded an agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for similar purposes.

The European Commission has been continuously calling for Member States to make available staff required to respond to the needs identified by the European Asylum Support Office and the European Border and Coast Guard, including the profiles identified and for longer-term deployments, to support the relevant Greek authorities that remain responsible for asylum processing. As regards the 1:1 scheme (as of 9 June 2017), the number of resettled Syrians from Turkey to European Union Member States (6 254) is almost 31 times higher than the number of Syrians who have been returned to Turkey (201). The total amount disbursed has increased already to EUR 811 million under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey for both humanitarian and non-humanitarian assistance. Out of the EUR 2.9 billion already allocated for 2016-2017, contracts have now been signed for 47 projects for an amount of EUR 1.572

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| | <p>billion – over half of the EUR 3 billion – all of which have started being implemented.</p> |
| <p>25. The Committee of the Regions is critical of the establishment, without real guarantees, of the 16 priority countries identified in the Communication for the new agreements as not all of them can be considered "safe third countries" and/or have acceptable human rights records. Even if the "safe third country" rule does not apply in these agreements, the example of Turkey sends worrying signals in this respect. Mechanisms for the European Union to monitor reception in these countries should be set up.</p> | <p>The 16 countries mentioned in Annex 2 of the June 2016 Communication are not all priority countries for the partnership framework. In addition, the Communication does not imply that these countries are automatically considered as "safe third countries". In its work with third countries, the European Commission pays due attention to the social and political situation. In all cases, the humanitarian and human rights imperatives of European Union policy stay at the core of the Partnership Framework approach.</p> |
| <p>26. The Committee of the Regions is looking forward to the adoption of the strategic Communication on Tunisia.</p> | <p>The Joint Communication JOIN (2016) 47 final was adopted on 29 September 2016.</p> |
| <p>27. The Committee of the Regions recalls that the situation in Libya requires particular attention and strategic steps, and welcomes the engagement in this respect foreseen in the Commission Communication. The Committee of the Regions stresses the importance of the cooperation with the Libyan Local and Regional Authorities and asks the Commission to give full support to the efforts made by the Committee of the Regions and the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly to promote the cooperation initiatives between European Union local and regional authorities and their Libyan counterparts, started at the last Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly Plenary in Nicosia (the Nicosia Initiative).</p> | <p>The specific situation of Libya as the main country of departure for migrants travelling to Europe has been further acknowledged in the Joint Communication JOIN (2017)4 of 25 January 2017, which puts strong emphasis on the importance to cooperate with municipalities and local communities in Libya. As a follow-up to the Communication, it is indeed envisaged to support local authorities in a way which does however not undermine efforts towards the reinforcement of the capacities and role of national authorities. Close cooperation with the Committee of the Regions within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly and the Nicosia initiative is ongoing through our Public</p> |

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| | Administration Facility, including capacity building support for Libyan Local Actors |
| 28. (...) local and regional authorities of transit countries should benefit from European Union-led capacity building, financial assistance and information sharing. The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Union to include facilities that support direct peer-to-peer cooperation between local and regional authorities from the European Union and partner countries to increase planning and governing capacities at the local and regional level. | <p>Several projects funded under the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa focus on local and regional authorities in transit countries (notably Niger and Ethiopia), including peer-to-peer cooperation. A number of projects (local and regional authorities and city to city /decentralised cooperation) are funded under the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities thematic Budget line.</p> <p>The fourth Progress Report emphasised the importance of further stepping up coordination and information sharing.</p> |
| 29. (...) everyday questions of reception, integration and reintegration of migrants are felt particularly at local and regional level. Thus, compacts should seek to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of the return process and provide adequate funding for voluntary returns, as well as to help countries of origin in reintegrating readmitted nationals. | <p>The European Commission agrees that local and regional authorities, in Europe and in the countries of origin, in the area of return, readmission and reintegration play a key role, and as highlighted for example in the First Progress Report, a key action for example in Niger is stepped up financial assistance for reintegration of returning migrants and host communities. A EUR 100 million initiative on protection, return and reintegration of migrants in the Sahel-Lake Chad region and Libya is supported by the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa in partnership with the International Organization for Migration. A particular emphasis is laid on the sustainability of reintegration through this Initiative but also through complementary programmes.</p> |
| 31. The Committee of the Regions recalls that best practices must be shared among | The European Commission agrees with the importance of sharing of best |

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| <p>local and regional authorities in the European Union and in third countries regarding all aspects of migration, including but not limited to, integration and reintegration policies, tackling irregular migration, recognising early warning signs and/or early prevention of crisis situations, fighting human smuggling and trafficking of migrants (...). The Committee of the Regions is well placed to reach out to cities and regions in partner countries to facilitate and encourage the exchange of innovative ideas and practices and to promote more effective involvement of local and regional authorities in the design and the implementation of migration and integration policies, in line with multilevel governance and the subsidiarity principle.</p> | <p>practices, and welcomes the Committee of the Regions' proposed contribution on this issue.</p> |
| <p>32. The Committee of the Regions agrees that the expertise and resources of Member States are essential in delivering the compacts and that effective cooperation depends on networks of European Union experts on the ground including those with knowledge of the local and regional dimension of migration. Therefore, the Committee of the Regions welcomes the deployment of European Migration Liaison Officers to priority source and transit countries to help coordinate European Union cooperation against migrant smuggling and urges Member States to quickly nominate the appropriate experts for this task.</p> | <p>European Migration Liaison Officers have already been deployed in 12 European Union delegations (Sudan, Serbia, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Senegal, Tunisia, Turkey, Nigeria, Niger, Ethiopia and Mali). Positions in Egypt and Bangladesh remain un-filled.</p> |
| <p>33. The Committee of the Regions supports the use of existing financial instruments and existing trust funds to achieve the short term objectives of the compact, but calls on Member States in this context to provide their respective contributions to these funds as agreed</p> | <p>The European Commission notes that resources currently allocated to the European Union Trust Fund for Africa amount to more than EUR 2.5 billion, including EUR 2.4 billion from the European Development Fund and several European Union budget</p> |

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| <p>without delay.</p> | <p>financing instruments and EUR 152 million pledged so far by Member States and other donors (Switzerland and Norway).</p> |
| <p>34. The Committee of the Regions highlights the importance of exploiting synergies between existing funds such as: the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (EUR 3 billion), the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUR 1.8 billion), the European Union Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis (EUR 1 billion) as well as other financial instruments which potentially could provide up to EUR 8 billion over 2016-2020 to deliver the compacts. Possible synergies with the structural funds should also be examined.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees that synergies among different funding possibilities need to be ensured.</p> <p>The Facility for Refugees in Turkey is not a (Trust) Fund, it is a coordinating mechanism.</p> |
| <p>35. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the European Commissions' proposal for an ambitious External Investment Plan that would tackle root causes of irregular migration and support partner countries in managing consequences of irregular migration in Africa and in the European Union Neighbourhood countries, while contributing to the achievement of other United Nations development goals, and calls on the European Commission to develop this tool as quickly as possible, in close dialogue with Member States and international partners.</p> | <p>The European Commission proposed the External Investment Plan and its European Fund for Sustainable Development to encourage investments in Africa and the Neighbourhood to strengthen our partnerships and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The External Investment Plan is also expected to be a key tool to support the Partnership Framework approach.</p> <p>The proposed Regulation is clear in indicating that the European Fund for Sustainable Development shall contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, in particular poverty eradication with a focus on sustainable, inclusive growth, decent job creation with focus on youth and women, socio-economic sectors and the support of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises; and thus address root</p> |

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| | <p>causes of irregular migration.</p> <p>The European Commission actively cooperates with both legislators on the approval of the draft European Fund for Sustainable Development Regulation with a view to making the External Investment Plan operational during 2017.</p> |
| <p>37. The Committee of the Regions welcomes stepping up European Union technical assistance and support for economic and structural reforms to improve the business environment. The Committee of the Regions particularly calls for the proposed technical assistance to involve local authorities and companies, and support them in developing a higher number of bankable projects which improve the general business environment, and making them known to the international investor community.</p> | <p>Partner countries and relevant regional organisations, amongst others, may be given observer status, where appropriate. In addition, for blending operations the Financial Institutions will involve partner countries from the start. Also, European Union delegations will be involved in the monitoring, also ensuring close exchange with civil society organisations at local level. The External Investment Plan with its three pillars emphasizes the need for a functioning regulatory framework as well as improved business environment. Reactions from partner countries have been very positive so far. Support is available via technical assistance under pillar 2.</p> |
| <p>40. In this regard, the Committee of the Regions calls for the European Commission's initiative to be implemented via the signature of a specific agreement with the Member States and other international partners, requiring them to match the total contributions made available by the European Union, as incentives for further public and private investment.</p> | <p>The funding made available by the European Union budget and other instruments is expected to trigger additional public and private investments, mobilising total investments up to EUR 44 billion. The European Commission has also called on Member States and other partners to contribute in cash or guarantees.</p> |
| <p>41. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the plan presented in September 2016 which is based on three pillars: mobilising private investment, stepping up</p> | <p>The External Investment Plan three pillars need to go hand in hand: a new investment fund (European Fund for Sustainable Development as pillar 1);</p> |

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| <p>technical assistance, and improving the general business environment; it regrets the absence of any reference to local and regional authorities in the European Commission Communication and stresses the importance of directing assistance and resources to local and regional authorities. The second pillar must clearly also involve the local and regional authorities, and the Committee of the Regions should be a partner in its implementation. The Committee of the Regions Atlas of Decentralised Cooperation can be a useful tool to help to identify projects in need of financing and possible cooperation partners. The Committee of the Regions calls for representation of local and regional authorities in the governance structure of the External Investment Plan.</p> | <p>technical assistance (pillar 2), to help local authorities and companies to develop a higher number of sustainable projects and attract investors and to support development of a regulatory framework and business environment conducive to investments; and finally a range of dedicated thematic, national and regional European Union development cooperation programmes combined with structured political dialogue targeted at improving the investment climate and overall policy environment in the countries concerned (pillar 3). Indeed, the technical assistance will include local and regional authorities. The Atlas has been jointly funded by the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission. However, only a few Member States fed information on Decentralised Cooperation Partnerships. This information is therefore partial. The proposal to have local and regional authorities' representatives in the governance Committee of the External Investment Plan could effectively increase relevance on projects funded.</p> |
| <p>43. The Committee of the Regions urges the European Commission to explore ways to engage different diaspora groups in Member States in being partners in financing investments in their countries of origin.</p> | <p>The European Commission notes the suggestion made. The role of diasporas is duly taken into account in the Mediterranean region. It is an important focus of the activities taking place under the regional Euromed Migration IV Programme. The creation of incubators facilitating investments of the diaspora in their country of origin will also be supported under a programme adopted for Tunisia under the North of Africa window of the European Union Trust Fund for Africa.</p> |

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| <p>46. People and companies in the countries of destination should be informed about the benefits of migration and be properly trained to help with migrants' integration. This information can best be achieved at local and regional level where the authorities have the greatest proximity to citizens. Good legal migration and long term integration policies at local and regional level are means against the phenomena of racism and xenophobia.</p> | <p>The Commission agrees with the very important role played by local and regional authorities in these issues.</p> |
| <p>47. The Committee of the Regions recalls that, while the proposed Partnership Framework does mention the need to reinforce local capacity building through the development and neighbourhood policies in its introduction, it does not elaborate further on concrete measures to fulfil this need. The Committee of the Regions can and should be a partner in local and regional capacity building efforts in partner countries.</p> | <p>The inclusive Partnership Framework approach aims for engagement with suggestions to be considered – speaking with one European voice, and involving different policies at European Union and Member State level. An important element in this is engagement with local and regional actors in partner countries.</p> |
| <p>48. The Committee of the Regions underlines the need to invest in local capacities and in actions of local and regional governments of partner countries. Local governments should be made partners in all pillars of the External Investment Plan, and the Committee of the Regions supports Platforma's suggestion on European Union city-to-partner-country-city cooperation as a key instrument for the implementation of the new approach and building capacity and sharing technical expertise in local migration management; in this sense, the Committee of the Regions believes the External Investment Plan should fund city-to-city and region-to-region cooperation.</p> | <p>The European Commission supports capacity development and actions by local and regional governments of partner countries in accordance with European Union policy objectives. Partnership of local governments is also addressed in paragraphs 37 and 41 above.</p> |
| <p>49. The Committee of the Regions emphasises that cooperation among the</p> | <p>Local and regional authorities benefit from a number of projects under the</p> |

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| <p>European Union, Member States, European Union-local and regional authorities and local and regional authorities in the countries of origin and transit of migrants can help manage migration more efficiently to the benefit of all parties. To this end, the European Union and Member States need to support the local and regional authorities both financially and politically.</p> | <p>European Union Trust Fund for Africa, and the European Commission agrees they play a crucial role both in countries of destination and of origin.</p> |
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| <p>N°2 Copyright in the Digital Single Market COM(2016) 592 final, COM(2016) 593 final – CoR 2016/5114 - SEDEC-VI/019 121st Plenary Session - February 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Mauro D'ATTIS (IT/EPP) DG CNECT – Vice-President ANSIP</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions welcomes the proposed measures to ensure that copyright rules are modernised in light of the digital revolution and changes in consumer behaviour and considers that they comply with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.</p> | <p>The European Commission appreciates the positive reception of the proposal for a Directive on copyright in the Digital Single Market by the Committee of the Regions.</p> |
| <p>Amendment 1: The Committee of the Regions suggests amending Recital 13 to allow Member States to provide for compensation with regard to the text and data mining exception.</p> | <p>As clarified in the impact assessment accompanying the proposal, the European Commission considers that there is no need for compensation as regards the exception for text and data mining, in view of the nature and scope of the exception. In particular, the lawful access condition would allow rightholders to continue protecting access to their content and revenues linked to it. It is specified that the exception would also apply in the framework of public-private partnerships. However, even in that case, only beneficiaries could carry out text and data mining under the exception. Inclusion of public-private partnerships was deemed necessary in view of their increasing importance in today's scientific research world. Even if some non-beneficiaries that are part of a public-private partnership could get some benefits from the application of the exception, such benefits would only</p> |

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| | <p>be indirect. The European Commission considers that such indirect and minimal benefits should not give rise to compensation, given the strict conditions of the exception.</p> |
| <p>Amendment 7: The Committee of the Regions suggests amending Article 14(1) and replacing "on a regular basis" by "at least once a year" with regard to the periodicity of the transparency obligations laid down in Article 14.</p> | <p>The European Commission takes note of the Committee of the Regions' suggestion of instituting an annual reporting, which in most cases may be considered relevant to allow creators to have an overview of the exploitation of their rights while not creating unnecessary burden for companies. Yet, since the proposed Article defines general transparency requirements for all creative sectors, the European Commission believes that the periodicity of the reporting should depend on the specificities of the different sectors and should be consistent with the exploitation of a work over time (e.g. by taking into account the different release windows for the exploitation of an audiovisual work). Therefore, the European Commission considers that it should be decided at national level, following a sector-specific strategy.</p> |

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| <p>N°3 The review of the telecom package COM(2016) 587 final, COM(2016) 588 final, COM(2016) 589 final - CoR 2016/5113 – SEDEC-VI/018 121st Plenary Session – February 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Mart VÕRKLAEV (EE/ALDE) DG CNECT – Vice-President ANSIP</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>(Recital 11) Given Internet connectivity needs within the European Union and the urgency of promoting access networks that can deliver, throughout the European Union, an Internet experience of high quality based on very high-speed broadband services, financial assistance should seek to attain a geographically balanced distribution <i>that contributes - within the limits of the actually received proposals, and in full compliance with the principles for specific financial forms of assistance as defined in the Financial Regulation - to the European Union's economic, social and territorial cohesion by taking particular account of the needs of local communities.</i></p> | <p>The European Commission agrees on the need to take account of the needs of local communities to ensure the European Union's economic, social and territorial cohesion; the purpose of this proposal is to provide the selected geographical areas with a foretaste of the benefits of Gigabit society, thus stimulating demand for fast and ultrafast internet connections locally.</p> <p>Local communities are encouraged to use other European Union funds that are specifically targeted for economic, social and territorial cohesion to complement this initiative.</p> |
| <p>(Recital 11) <i>To ensure that local wireless access points are also installed in smaller towns and rural areas, a dedicated communication campaign about this financial assistance needs to be implemented in cooperation with Member States, regional authorities and relevant associations of local authorities.</i></p> | <p>Due to the limited budget of the amount, no specific communication campaign is foreseen. However, the European Commission will use its existing communication resources to drive the attention of all municipalities to this initiative.</p> <p>In particular, the emulation among local authorities and among other providers of public services will be promoted through the European Union network of Broadband Competence Offices.</p> |

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| <p>(Article 2.3) 3. Article 5 is hereby amended as follows: (...)</p> <p>b) the following paragraph is added:</p> <p>'5a. Action contributing to the projects of common interest <i>and complying with defined minimum technical standards</i> in the field of providing free local wireless connectivity in local communities shall be supported by:</p> <p>(a) grants; and/or</p> <p>(b) forms of financial assistance other than financial instruments.</p> <p><i>(c) The Commission sets the minimum technical standards referred to in paragraph 5a by means of a delegated act.'</i></p> | <p>In order to speed up the process, the minimum requirements (including standards where appropriate) will be published in the web portal for beneficiaries. These requirements will include not only minimum technical standards but also others, such as financial and audit.</p> <p>These requirements will balance a user-friendly experience with a wide range of vendors to choose from.</p> <p>The requirements (including the technical ones) will be discussed with Member States in the context of the Connecting Europe Facility work programme.</p> |
| <p>(Article 2.6.) 'Section 4. Wireless Connectivity in local communities (...)</p> <p>2) build on very high-speed broadband connectivity and complying with the minimal technical specifications referred to in Article 5b, enabling delivery of high quality Internet experience to users that:</p> <p>a.) is free, easy to access, and uses state-of-the-art equipment, and</p> <p>b.) supports access to innovative digital services, such as those offered via digital service infrastructures;</p> <p>c) use the common visual identity to be provided by the European Commission and link to the associated online tools.</p> <p>Projects duplicating already existing private or public offers of similar characteristics, including quality, in the same area shall not be covered.</p> <p>The available budget shall be allocated to projects meeting the above conditions in a geographically balanced manner that contributes - within the limits of the actually</p> | <p>The parameters to ensure a geographical balance will be introduced in the Connecting Europe Facility work programme and consulted with the Member States.</p> <p>See also the European Commission position to recital 11 and article 2.3.</p> |

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| <p>received proposals, and in full compliance with the principles for specific financial forms of assistance as defined in the Financial Regulation - to the European Union's economic, social and territorial cohesion by taking particular account of the needs of local communities.</p> | |
| <p>Policy recommendations</p> | |
| <p>3. The Committee of the Regions understands that significant changes have taken place since the European Union telecoms regulatory framework was revised in 2009. Though it contributed to ensuring European Union-wide availability of basic broadband, new needs and ways of consumption are dramatically proliferating and will continue to do so in the coming years. The development of the Internet of Things, virtual and augmented reality, cloud computing, massive data management, sharing economy services and applications, 4.0 industries, all of it will accentuate the demands on high-capacity networks and connections.</p> | <p>The 2002 European Union Telecom regulatory framework, revised in 2009⁹, focused on creating competitive markets, opening up bottlenecks and enabling access to key infrastructure. It has greatly facilitated market entry and ensured more competition, lower prices and better quality of service to consumers and businesses.</p> <p>As rightly pointed out by the Committee of the Regions, to unleash the next wave of competitiveness opportunities and innovation potential, and to allow Europe's businesses and citizens to harvest the full benefits of the Digital Single Market, the European Union will require the ubiquitous availability of high-capacity fixed and mobile networks. While continuing to safeguard competition, end-user choice and the appropriate level of consumer protection, the new European Electronic Communications Code, proposed by the Commission in 2016¹⁰, will also foster competitive investments in such high capacity fixed and wireless networks. The review of the universal service regime in the proposed Code aims at ensuring the affordability of available basic broadband access and voice</p> |

⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/telecoms-rules>.

¹⁰ COM(2016) 590 final.

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| | communications services. |
| <p>8. The Committee of the Regions shares the European Commission's view that all urban areas and the most important land transport routes should have full Fifth Generation Mobile Networks (5G) coverage; it supports the interim target whereby a Fifth Generation Mobile Network (5G) connection should be available as a commercial service in at least one major city in each Member State by 2020. In order to avoid piecemeal solutions, the European Commission must complete the standardisation that is still required for this new wireless technology as quickly as possible</p> | <p>From a European Union strategy perspective, the timely availability of full Fifth Generation Mobile Networks (5G) standards which are globally accepted is a priority. This being said, the initial focus on ultra-fast broadband services (availability of the initial global Fifth Generation Mobile Networks (5G) standards by the end of 2019 at the latest to enable a timely commercial launch of Fifth Generation Mobile Networks (5G)) should ensure compatibility with further development of standards beyond ultra-fast broadband, notably for innovative use cases related to massive deployment of connected objects and the Internet of Things. The standards must address the future evolution of the overall network architecture and need for "flexibility", in particular in response to new use cases arising in key industrial sectors. Member States and industry should therefore endorse, and promote, a comprehensive and inclusive approach to Fifth Generation Mobile Networks (5G) standardisation.</p> |
| <p>20. the Committee of the Regions suggests, from the next financial period, setting aside funds for developing access networks in rural and outermost areas in addition to the funds earmarked for developing a basic network.</p> | <p>In the current 2014-2020 programming period, European Structural and Investment Funds are already stimulating the investment in high-speed broadband roll-out. Under the European Structural and Investment Funds, the European Union is mobilising around EUR 6 billion up to 2020 to provide more than 14.5 million households with high speed broadband access. Instruments such as the European Fund for Strategic Investments (around EUR 3.2 billion of public and private investment) and the Connecting Europe</p> |

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| | <p>Facility are also contributing.</p> <p>The European Commission and European Investment Bank are working on the launch of a fund for broadband infrastructure open to participation of National Promotional Banks and Institutions and of private investors. This "Connecting Europe Broadband Fund" will help private investors to join up the efforts to support digital network infrastructures in under-served areas and trigger up to EUR 1.7 billion of additional investment up to 2021. The establishment of this investment platform responds to the growing demand for financing of smaller-scale, higher-risk broadband projects across Europe, which currently do not have access to European Union finances.</p> <p>This being said, given the substantial investment required, in particular to meet the new connectivity targets for 2025 (which include universal coverage, both in urban and rural areas, offering a downlink of at least 100 megabits per second (Mbps), with a further development path to higher capacity data provision), when preparing the financial programming post-2020, the European Commission will weigh up future financial support needs under the various European Union investment programmes in light of the objectives for 2025. Against this background, the European Commission welcomes the call of the Committee of the Regions for additional financial support for the deployment of high speed broadband in rural and outermost areas.</p> |
| <p>10. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the European Commission's proposal to set up – by the end of 2016 and</p> | <p>The European Commission would like to start working with the Committee of the Regions on the broadband Platform</p> |

in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions – a participatory broadband platform to ensure that public and private bodies cooperate and firmly commit to investing in the development of the broadband network and to taking further steps to implement national plans for developing the broadband network; the Committee of the Regions is open to comprehensive and constructive cooperation in setting up the platform.

11. The Committee of the Regions suggests that the topics to be discussed at the Platform meeting should focus on: policy choices by exploring the best policy options with regard to the different local and regional competences and the specific needs at local and regional level; technology choices by discussing the application of the best technologies adapted to those areas; financial opportunities by engaging the European Investment Bank in the discussion and by investigating synergies of funds (Connecting Europe Facility, European Fund for Strategic Investments, European Structural and Investment Funds) and the new voucher scheme proposed for Free Wi-Fi for Europeans (WIFI4EU) and other matters with regard to capacity building measures for the local and regional level, mapping of Information Technology investments and broadband coverage and the promotion of e-skills and e-government services.

36. The Committee of the Regions firmly believes that it should play a decisive role with a view to involving local and regional authorities and to fostering exchange of information and best practice.

as soon as possible and include issues such as local and regional implementation of for Free Wi-Fi for Europeans (WiFi4EU).

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| <p>N°4 Bridging the Investment Gap: How to tackle the Challenges (own-initiative opinion) CoR 2016/4165 – ECON-VI/014 121st Plenary Session – February 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Markku Markkula (FI/EPP) DG ECFIN – Commissioner MOSCOVICI</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions urges the need to work on removing the obstacles to reaching pre-crisis investment levels in Europe and invest in the true potential that regions and cities hold as the powerhouses of Europe. The Committee of the Regions also points out that a significant share of obstacles to investment are "territory related" in the sense that they either are relevant to the functions of Local and Regional Authorities as regards investment, or there is potential for Local and Regional Authorities to contribute towards easing or removing them.</p> | <p>Through the European Semester the European Commission has identified a number of obstacles which hinder the recovery of investment in the European Union. While some of them are mostly of a typically national or European Union-wide nature (i.e. debt overhang, labour market legislation, financial sector instability), some are of a rather sub-national nature where regions and cities can make a difference.</p> <p>These are for instance the obstacles related to sector specific regulations such as retail, construction or the functioning of public administration.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions notes that the synergies between the European Fund for Strategic Investments and European Cohesion Policy through the European Structural and Investment Funds need to be further clarified.</p> | <p>The European Commission sees significant potential in the combination of European Structural and Investment Funds with the European Fund for Strategic Investments. To promote the combination, the Commission published, in 2016, a brochure which aims to help local authorities and project promoters fully exploit the possibilities of combining the European Structural and Investment Funds with the European Fund for Strategic Investments¹¹.</p> <p>In addition, the European</p> |

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/thefunds/fin_inst/pdf/efsi_esif_compl_en.pdf.

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| | <p>Commission's Omnibus proposal of September 2016¹² contains new provisions which will widen and simplify the possibilities for this combination.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions demands that more detailed information be made publicly available on European Fund for Strategic Investments-financed projects, in particular highlighting their additionality.</p> | <p>The European Commission's proposal on the extension of the European Fund for Strategic Investments¹³ proposes a more detailed definition of additionality, and specifies that operations under the European Fund for Strategic Investments have to address clearly identified market failures or sub-optimal investment situations as part of the eligibility criteria.</p> <p>In addition, the European Commission's proposal foresees an even more transparent decision-making process for the European Fund for Strategic Investments Investment Committee, so that all stakeholders can easily identify the additionality and added value of European Fund for Strategic Investments projects. In particular, the Commission proposes the publication of the scoreboard for European Fund for Strategic Investments projects as soon as they are signed, with the exception of commercially sensitive information.</p> |

12 Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and the Council on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and amending Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002, Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, EU No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1305/2013, (EU) No 1306/2013, (EU) No 1307/2013, (EU) No 1308/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014,(EU) No 283/2014, (EU) No 652/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Decision No 541/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, COM(2016) 605 final 2016/0282 (COD)

13 Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulations (EU) No 1316/2013 and (EU) 2015/1017 as regards the extension of the duration of the European Fund for Strategic Investments as well as the introduction of technical enhancements for that Fund and the European Investment Advisory Hub, COM(2016), 597 final, 2016/0276 (COD)

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| <p>The Committee of the Regions calls for the European Fund for Strategic Investments not to be financed by other funds or competing programmes.</p> | <p>The European Commission's proposal on the extension of the European Fund for Strategic Investments is constructed so as to ensure that its impact is financially neutral to the greatest possible extent. Most of the financing comes from a recalibration of existing instruments, with a very limited use of the unallocated margins of the European Union budget.</p> <p>Moreover, the European Commission proposed¹⁴ to transfer EUR 1.1 billion of the Connecting Europe Facility debt instrument to the Connecting Europe Facility grant budget¹⁵, for the purpose of blending with the European Fund for Strategic Investments or other financial instruments.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions observes that Local and Regional Authorities can be catalysts bringing together different public and private actors for investment projects; it considers, however, the need to further promote cross-border connections and multi-level cooperation by actively promoting cross-regional investments.</p> | <p>Good transport connections are a vital pre-condition for both the functioning of the internal market and the creation of better integrated cross-border regions. While major European transport infrastructure links the continent's main economic centres and ensures the flow of goods, people and services at a pan-European scale, regional cross-transport connections have great impact on local and regional economies, in particular in cross-border areas. The European Commission actively supports both aspects. Regional cross-border investment is actively supported by European Structural and Investment Funds, in particular Interreg programmes. In addition, the Connecting Europe</p> |

¹⁴ idem

¹⁵ Regulation (EU) No 1316/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing the Connecting Europe Facility, amending Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 and repealing Regulations (EC) No 680/2007 and (EC) No 67/2010, OJ L 348, 12.2013

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| | <p>Facility puts the elimination of cross-border bottlenecks along the Trans-European Transport Network corridors to the forefront. The European Commission's proposal for the extension of the European Fund for Strategic Investments furthermore proposes that cross-border infrastructure projects should be considered as additional by definition.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions supports the proposal that under the European semester, Country-specific Recommendations should also contain minimum public investment targets, particularly in relation to current expenditure.</p> | <p>The European Commission notes that it is up to Member States to decide their fiscal policy mix. In its proposals for recommendations however, the European Commission stresses the need to design fiscal policy in a growth-friendly manner, for example by safeguarding productive investment and by minimizing its growth-distorting impact.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to present a White Paper setting out a European Union-level typology for quality of public investment in the accounts of public expenditure according to its long-term effects.</p> | <p>The European Commission does not intend to publish a White Paper on the accounting of public investment as this is already covered by a Regulation. The accounting of public expenditure is notably based on the European System of Accounts (ESA 2010) Regulation¹⁶, a comprehensive framework which entered into force relatively recently.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions recalls the need for further simplification of European Union shared management funds.</p> | <p>The European Commission's Omnibus proposal¹⁷ already includes elements which aim at simplifying the implementation under shared</p> |

¹⁶ Regulation (EU) No 549/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2013 on the European system of national and regional accounts in the European Union Text with EEA relevance, OJ L 174, 26.6.2013.

¹⁷ Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and amending Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002, Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, EU No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1305/2013, (EU) No 1306/2013, (EU) No 1307/2013, (EU) No 1308/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, (EU) No 652/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Decision No 541/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council

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| | <p>management (such elements are for example the clarification on the possibility for direct award to bodies implementing financial instruments or on the possibility for replacement of individual irregularities, introduction of ready-to-use flat rates in the regulations, simplifying the methodology for establishing simplified cost options, reducing the number of requirements applicable to joint action plans, simplifying the process of amending Partnership Agreements). However, the European Commission's goal was not to introduce fundamental changes of the rules, as such changes would require Member States adjusting their implementation models in the middle of this programming period. More substantial changes to the rules, if needed and justified, can be looked at in the context of the post-2020 discussions.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions points out that lack of administrative capacity is not limited to a few of the European Union's less developed Member States and regions, since in the 2016 Country-specific Recommendations, 20 out of 28 Member States were addressed recommendations to improve quality of public administration.</p> | <p>According to the 2016 Country-specific Recommendations, only 14 out of 27 Member States received recommendations to improve the quality of public administration. Nine out of those 14 Member States are cohesion countries and four are countries heavily hit by the crisis.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions highlights that strategic investments in complex global settings call for new types of administrative and managerial capacities to enhance future business model development and value creation, engaging the for-profit and non-profit organisations in the local and regional value creation</p> | <p>The European Commission believes that this applies as well to organisations in charge of managing cohesion policy programmes (managing authorities, intermediate bodies, audit authorities, certifying authorities), who are confronted with increased challenges to select and/or manage complex projects, requiring</p> |

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| <p>ecosystems.</p> | <p>very specific skills. The European Commission has taken the initiative to develop a Competency Framework for the management of the funds. The Competency Framework covers the institutions involved in the implementation of the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund and it identifies the competences necessary for management and implementation of these two funds. The competences are not only based on the requirements in the regulatory framework, but are also going beyond these in order to achieve efficient and effective implementation. The Competency Framework includes a Self-Assessment Tool which enables individual assessments of required and achieved competencies, as well as an analysis at institution level yielded by aggregation of individual assessments. The tool provides an important basis for both developing individual development plans and overarching human resources strategies for an organisation as a whole, which can be used for identifying and addressing competency gaps at individual and institutional level. The tool is currently tested in seven pilot projects across Europe, will be rolled out after the pilot phase and made available widely.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions highlights that the model used by the "TAIEX REGIO PEER 2 PEER" tool deserves to be emulated and broadened.</p> | <p>The European Commission welcomes the support for TAIEX REGIO PEER 2 PEER, which is now running for almost two years and has been extended until 2020, following its pilot phase. Until now, 171 applications have been submitted, 124 approved and over 103 exchanges have taken place with over 1 541 participants from 25 Member States. The most popular themes in demand for</p> |

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| | <p>exchange of know-how and experience are smart specialisation, financial instruments, public procurement, state aid and financial management and control.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions stresses the difficulty to effectively make use of financial instruments regarding the administrative capacity of local and regional authorities.</p> | <p>The European Commission fully supports efforts to increase administrative capacity on the ground with regard to financial instruments. Fi-compass has proven to be a valuable tool in this regard by producing useful material and organising events dedicated to financial instruments. "Off-the-shelf" instruments, which were developed by the European Commission as ready-made solutions to help managing authorities in the design of their financial instruments and are a useful source of inspiration for regional stakeholders.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions describes the lack of awareness regarding funding, financing and investment opportunities, underlines the role of local and regional authorities in the successful implementation of the European Fund for Strategic Investments and calls on the Commission and the European Investment Bank to improve awareness and understanding of the European Fund for Strategic Investments.</p> | <p>For a European Union budget tool, there has been an unprecedented level of information made available about the European Fund for Strategic Investments. There have been a very large number of stakeholder events and conferences on the European Fund for Strategic Investments since its launch in July 2015, while significant resources of the European Commission and the European Investment Bank communications departments have been mobilised to promote the Investment Plan for Europe, including the European Fund for Strategic Investments. Targeted communication efforts are being made to support local authorities, financial intermediaries, project promoters and sector organisations.</p> <p>The European Investment Project</p> |

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| | <p>Portal is a highly innovative way of presenting investment projects to potential investors, collecting projects from multiple different project promoters (both public and private, businesses and non-governmental non-profit organisations). Regions and Local Authorities can exploit the European Investment Project Portal to promote their investment project and reach out to potential international investors. To this effect, as part of its ongoing communication efforts, the Commission has reached out to the Committee of the Regions who plans to organise several events this year to promote the European Investment Project Portal to regional authorities. A first lunchtime briefing was organised on 30 May to explain how the Portal can support regions and cities to successfully promote their projects to investors worldwide.</p> <p>The European Commission however recognizes that even more can be done in this respect and encourages the Committee of the Regions to support the European Commission's and the European Investment Bank's joint efforts to effectively reach Member States and project promoters at the local and regional level, such as the proposal contained in the European Fund for Strategic Investments 2.0 (EFSI 2.0) to reinforce the advisory available at local/regional level through a local presence of the European Investment Advisory Hub.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions suggests working with Local and Regional Authorities, the Committee of the Regions, its networks, and national and</p> | <p>The European Commission welcomes this initiative. In addition, the European Commission would like to highlight that a database of case studies for</p> |

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| <p>regional promotional banks and other institutions, in order to identify national and regional examples of successful projects.</p> | <p>financial instruments (related to the previous and the current programming periods) is also available on the fi-compass website (https://www.fi-compass.eu). These and further examples of financial instruments are presented at the fi-compass events, where managing authorities and/ or fund managers explain the practical details and respond to questions raised by their peers.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions points out a mismatch of advisory and awareness-raising strategies.</p> | <p>A wide range of well-designed and complementary technical assistance facilities is available for financial instruments under shared management,:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technical assistance under the operational programmes - Fi-compass - Guidance notes from the European Commission - TAIEX PEER 2 PEER <p>On top of the technical assistance provided, the European Investment Advisory Hub also plays an important role in signposting the requests received to suitable information sources through pointing project promoters and other stakeholders to the appropriate source of assistance available.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions stresses that services and incentives should be put in place to address the geographical imbalance of European Fund for Strategic Investments projects, including by improving or even decentralising advisory and expert services and strengthening the</p> | <p>The European Commission's proposal on the extension of the European Fund for Strategic Investments proposes an enhancement of technical assistance services provided through the European Investment Advisory Hub, including: (i) the facilitation of the</p> |

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| <p>role of the European Investment Advisory Hub.</p> | <p>provision of advisory support at local level, (ii) proactive support on the establishment of Investment Platforms and (iii) advice on the combination of other sources of Union funding with the European Fund for Strategic Investments.</p> <p>The European Commission and the European Investment Bank will continue to work very closely with National Promotional Banks who have local expertise and understand the local financing needs.</p> <p>The Commission’s proposal also provides for an enhancement of the support to less-developed regions and transition regions in Europe by adding in the Regulation an explicit reference to any industry that would otherwise not be covered in the general objectives. The proposal also foresees the explicit mention of agriculture, fishery and aquaculture in the general objectives eligible for European Fund for Strategic Investments support.</p> <p>An easier combination of the European Fund for Strategic Investments with other European Union funds, in particular the European Structural and Investment Funds, is another objective, addressed in the Omnibus proposal amending in particular the Common Provisions Regulation for Structural Funds.</p> <p>Finally, the European Commission agrees with the Committee of the Regions on the importance of the European Investment Project Portal, a key element of the second pillar of the Investment Plan for Europe aimed at helping investment finance reach the</p> |
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| | real economy. |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions states that there should be a fixed real deficit for public investments or local and regional governments, and reiterates the demand for public spending by Member States and local and regional authorities under European Structural and Investment and European Investment Bank co-financing not to be included in structural expenditure as defined in the Stability and Growth Pact.</p> | <p>At the beginning of 2015, the European Commission adopted a Communication on "Making the Best Use of the Flexibility within the Stability and Growth Pact"¹⁸, in order to clarify the implementation of flexibility already built into the Pact; to support growth along three main axes, to encourage structural reforms and investment and better modulate the required fiscal effort to reflect the business cycle.</p> <p>Both the so-called structural reform and investment clauses contain safeguards regarding their application and eligibility. These are necessary to ensure that the use of these clauses is not abused and that they ultimately contribute to improving a Member State's fiscal sustainability, as requested by the legislation.</p> <p>Member States with fiscal space could increase investment expenditure. At the same time, the introduction of a golden rule is not considered desirable or feasible, as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - it would generate calls for exempting other expenditures, thereby weakening the enforcement of the Stability and Growth Pact; - any general exemptions would provide incentives for governments to shift some spending below this certain label to relax fiscal surveillance, i.e. it would incentivise creative accounting practices; - a golden rule on physical investment would indicate a belief that a certain minimum level of such |

¹⁸ COM(2015) 12 final.

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| | <p>investment by the government is considered to be the best way of using taxpayers' money. In consequence, this would penalise other future-oriented expenditure, such as in the area of education and Research and Development;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - focusing on net investment expenditure would raise important implementation issues. Net investment as such is a non-observable variable, inevitably leading to measurement issues. <p>A golden rule whereby (net) investment is systematically removed from the budget balance for the purposes of fiscal surveillance could compromise the long-term sustainability of public finances and hamper resource allocation.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions highlights the importance of data on currently existing investment projects at grassroots level and proposes the establishment of a European Scoreboard on local and regional investment.</p> | <p>As far as the European Structural and Investment Funds are concerned, the European Commission does not collect data at project level (except for major projects). This is done by the Managing Authorities themselves. Managing Authorities report yearly on the performance of the Operational Programmes, as regards actual achievements as measured by financial, output and result indicators. The progress on financial implementation is reported three times a year. The data between the national and regional authorities and the European Commission is exchanged through a common Information Technology platform – SFC2014.</p> <p>In order to provide tangible evidence of the drive towards enhanced transparency and accountability of the</p> |

use of European Structural and Investment Funds, the European Commission launched the European Structural and Investment Funds Open Data Platform in December 2015 covering the five European Structural and Investment Funds (European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund, Cohesion Fund, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund). The data is derived from more than 530 national, regional or interregional programmes adopted under these European Structural and Investment Funds by the European Commission. The platform presents visualisations of key information on plans and progress in implementing the finances and delivering achievements - on the European Structural and Investment Funds programmes, also aggregated at European Union level, by Member State, by thematic objective and by Fund.

In 2017 the Open Data Platform was awarded "The excellence in open administration" prize by the European Ombudsman in recognition of its achievements in enhancing EU's transparency and accountability with respect to ESI funds.

As to the establishment of a database on currently existing investment projects, it should be borne in mind that while this would be of great added value, its creation could generate high administrative costs. Therefore the possible benefits should be evaluated in view of these costs.

The Committee of the Regions stresses the importance of targeting investment at human capital, skills, education, research and innovation, smart energy networks, housing, social and health facilities, and in support for the start-ups and scale-ups of innovative and dynamic enterprises.

Under the European Fund for Strategic Investments Infrastructure and Innovation window, a number of projects have been signed in support of social infrastructures, including hospitals or educational facilities and affordable housing. Under the small and medium-sized enterprises window, a range of financial instruments reinforced by the European Fund for Strategic Investments has enabled increased volumes of support to start-ups and innovative small and medium-sized enterprises, social enterprises and self-employed micro-entrepreneurs that create training and/or employment opportunities.

In the European Fund for Strategic Investments small and medium-sized enterprises window, efforts are ongoing to enhance the volume and range of investment support through complementary products. For instance, the frontloading of the Employment and Social Innovation guarantee facility based on the European Union guarantee under the European Fund for Strategic Investments has been launched in December 2016. The European Commission also reinforced support to social impact intermediaries that help social enterprises, as well as support to microfinance and social service providers through innovative mechanisms.

Moreover, the European Commission proposal to extend the European Fund for Strategic Investments foresees that small and medium-sized enterprises will remain key beneficiaries, with an even larger share of financing being geared towards them.

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| <p>N°5 Fiscal capacity and automatic stabilisers in the Economic and Monetary Union (own-initiative opinion) CoR 2016/4164 – ECON-VI/018 121st Plenary Session - February 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Carl Fredrik GRAF (SE/EPP) DG ECFIN – Commissioner MOSCOVICI</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions believes that in order to regain trust, the euro must deliver on its promise of stability, convergence, growth and jobs. A fiscal capacity could help in achieving such goals. Differences in the business cycles of euro area Member States stemming from structural factors could be smoothed out by the creation of an instrument to address asymmetric shocks.</p> | <p>The European Commission takes note of the Committee of the Regions' recommendations on the design of a euro area fiscal capacity. As stated in the Five Presidents' Report¹⁹ and the Reflection Paper on deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union²⁰, a common stabilisation function would complement the national budget stabilisers in the event of severe asymmetric shocks. It would also allow running smoother aggregate fiscal policies for the euro area in unusual circumstances when monetary policy reaches its limits.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions reiterates its request that in all decision-making regarding the development of the Economic and Monetary Union, such as the introduction of a fiscal capacity and automatic stabilisers, the role of local and regional authorities in creating the conditions for sustainable growth should be fully recognised, and strengthened wherever possible, particularly as concerns the implementation of economic and social policies and structural reforms, the creation of a business-friendly environment which</p> | <p>In the 2016 Annual Growth Survey²¹, the European Commission reaffirmed its position that there is still room for a wider dialogue with and better involvement of the stakeholders at different levels in the Member States. The European Commission strongly encourages Member States to involve regions in discussions on the National Reform Programmes and stresses the essential role that the regions can play in strengthening the ownership and the implementation of the country-specific</p> |

¹⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/5-presidents-report_en.pdf.

²⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/reflection-paper-deepening-economic-and-monetary-union_en

²¹ COM(2015) 690 final.

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| <p>facilitates the creation of jobs, and the promotion of investment.</p> | <p>recommendations.</p> <p>This message was reinforced in the Communication on assessing the progress in implementation of the structural reforms and addressing macroeconomic imbalances²², in which the European Commission called on Member States to involve national parliaments and social partners closely and ensure the ownership of the reform process by a wider range of stakeholders. Given that the success of the implementation often relies on lower levels of government, the European Commission also called on the Member States to explain in their national reform programmes how regional and local authorities, depending on the division of competences in individual Member States, were involved in the preparation of the Programme and in the implementation and/or elaboration of reforms.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions reiterates its belief that, in the short term, completion of the Banking Union is the most effective instrument for preventing crises in the financial system and minimising the negative effects of economic shocks.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees that the completion of the Banking Union is a priority for stability and convergence in the Economic and Monetary Union. Following the Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the economic policy for the euro area²³, the Reflection Paper confirms that in the area of financial union, the first priority should be to complete the Banking Union. The package to reduce risks in the banking sector put forward in November 2016 represents a priority and needs to be concluded swiftly. An agreement on the backstop to the Single Resolution Fund is essential to</p> |

²² COM(2017) 90 final.

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| | <p>make the new European Union framework for bank resolution effective. Equally crucial is the setting up of the European deposit insurance scheme to ensure that deposit accounts are protected to the same extent across the euro area. The two measures should be adopted as soon as possible – ideally by 2019 – to be operational already in 2025.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions considers however that a fiscal capacity at the European Union level should not be designed in such a way that the risk of permanent transfers would arise, thus undermining the incentives for sound economic and social policy making and policy implementation at national or regional levels or incentives to address national or regional structural weaknesses.</p> | <p>The Reflection Paper confirms that the guiding principles for a stabilisation function, as specified in the Five Presidents' Report, remain valid. The function should not lead to permanent transfers, minimise moral hazard, and not duplicate the role of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) as a crisis management tool. It should be developed within the European Union framework and could be open to all European Union Member States. Access to the stabilisation function should be strictly conditional on clear criteria and continuous sound policies, in particular those leading to more convergence within the euro area. Compliance with European Union fiscal rules and the broader economic surveillance framework should be part of this. Any decision to set up such an instrument would need to take due account of possible legal constraints.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions points out that a high level of ownership of structural reforms on the ground by the relevant local and regional authorities is essential for their success, and highlights the territorial dimension of the European Semester. The Committee of the Regions reiterates its call for the European Commission and the European Parliament to adopt a code of</p> | <p>The links between Regional and Cohesion Policy and economic governance are significantly reinforced in the current financial framework, including through thematic concentration and macroeconomic conditionality. At the same time, Member States are asked to consult the partnership agreements and operational</p> |

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| <p>conduct to guarantee that local and regional authorities are involved in a structured way in the European Semester, which is also a means of preparing structural reforms²⁴.</p> | <p>programmes on the one hand, and the national reform programmes on the other, with the social partners, stakeholders and regional and local authorities. In the European Commission's view, this process already ensures appropriate involvement of the regional and local authorities. While the European Commission is open to help for improving further the process, the European Commission does not foresee at this stage developing a code of conduct that the Committee of the Regions has suggested in its resolution.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to allow for the option of using economic indicators for each region which identify its economic well-being in terms of public debt and its contribution to the growth of Europe's Gross Domestic Product, when framing future European economic and financial policies.</p> | <p>The dedicated Eurostat website http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/europe-2020-indicators provides a detailed overview of progress towards the Europe 2020 targets. Many of these are available also for the regional level.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions considers that Member States' structural reforms could be incentivised in good economic times in order to foster economic and social convergence within the euro area and improve its economic competitiveness and resilience. The Committee of the Regions points out that it would be worth examining whether an additional tool to enhance structural reform, designed to provide funding in the form of loans for a Public Investment Strategy, would be useful.</p> | <p>The implementation of structural reforms is of vital importance to increase the resilience of Member States' economies. Currently, the policy coordination under the European Semester aims to foster the implementation of structural reforms, while ex-ante conditionality under the European Structural and Investment Funds provides incentives for the implementation of reforms. The European Commission stands ready to reflect on possibilities to create an even more enabling environment for implementation of reforms.</p> |

²⁴ COR-2016-05386-00-00-DT.

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| <p>N°6 Supporting young European farmers (own-initiative opinion) CoR 2016/5034 – NAT-VI/012 121st Plenary Session - February 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Arnold HATCH (UK/ECR) DG AGRI – Commissioner HOGAN</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>1.5. The Committee of the Regions reiterates its call on the European Commission and Member States to be more proactive in encouraging and facilitating the establishment of young people in rural areas, particularly women, by promoting activities that help farmers to achieve a work/life balance more easily.</p> | <p>Generational renewal in the agricultural sector and rural areas is a key priority for the future; particular attention will be given to equal opportunities for female farmers.</p> <p>The current process on "simplification and modernisation of the Common Agricultural Policy" will pay special attention to this issue.</p> |
| <p>1.6. The Committee of the Regions considers that further work should be done to identify and address the barriers women continue to face when starting and building a career in the sector.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees and takes note of the demand.</p> |
| <p>1.10. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the creation of an agricultural guarantee instrument, proposed by the European Commission and the European Investment Bank in March 2015, which should make it easier for young farmers to access credit.</p> | <p>The European Commission will continue to work to facilitate the access to credit.</p> |
| <p>1.19. The Committee of the Regions calls upon the European Commission to evaluate the effect of policy on land concentration and grabbing; for example, the Common Agricultural Policy favours large farmers and marginalises small farmers.</p> | <p>The European Commission takes note of the demand for further analysis on the issue.</p> |
| <p>Changes to the Common Agricultural Policy</p> | <p>Certain simplification steps have already been taken:</p> |

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| <p>1.11. Bureaucracy and red tape may be inhibiting take up of new measures to support young farmers under the Common Agricultural Policy 2013 reform.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young Farmer's Scheme in Pillar I: sole control instead of joint control of legal persons; - significant simplification of conditions for Young farmers applying for the business start-up support under rural development: access to Financial Instruments, 'initial establishment', duration of support, are technical improvements proposed by the Commission in the Omnibus Regulation. |
| <p>1.14. The Committee of the Regions calls for change to Article 50.5 to avoid deduction of payments to young farmers by the number of years they were already set up prior to application for Young Farmer Payment, and an interim solution should be found in the meantime.</p> | <p>The rationale behind the Young Farmer Payment under Pillar I is the creation and development of new economic activities in the agricultural sector and not the provision of an operating aid. Hence, it is beyond the purpose of the scheme to cater for all farmers of young age.</p> |
| <p>1.21. The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - stimulate use of Rural Development to support new actions to foster land mobility (land banks etc.); - broaden scope of support actions to include new business models (innovative types of partnerships); - the European Union recommendations on best practice with regard to access to land. | <p>Member States have the possibility to support cooperation actions to foster land mobility and new business models under Rural Development programmes (Cooperation, Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Article 35²⁵)</p> |
| <p>Employment and Training</p> <p>1.5. The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to be more proactive in encouraging establishment of</p> | <p>Several measures under Rural Development programmes already contribute to employment and establishment of young persons in rural</p> |

²⁵ Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013.

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| <p>young people in rural areas, especially women.</p> | <p>areas, e.g. Farm and Business Development (Article 19 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013), Advisory services, farm management (Article 15 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013), Cooperation (Article 35 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013).</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions calls for increased European Social Fund funding allocated to vocational training in rural areas.</p> | <p>The European Commission takes note of the demand. It is however important to recall that the European Social Fund is under shared management. The European Social Fund aims at promoting high levels of employment. As part of the Cohesion Policy, funds are allocated per category of regions. Beyond this, the European Social Fund does not have a territory-based approach, i.e. it does not target specific territories such as rural areas. It focuses on people. Member States should therefore assess where resources should be allocated to better achieve the objective based on their needs and their national strategies and in line with the country-specific recommendations.</p> |
| <p>1.23. The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to introduce incentives for entrepreneurship, and labour market in agriculture /forestry to create new jobs.</p> | <p>Several measures under Rural Development programmes can contribute to the various activities proposed, in particular, Farm and Business Development (Article 19 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013), Cooperation (Article 35 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013), Article 22 to 26 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013).</p> |

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| <p>N°7 An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic JOIN(2016) 21 final – CoR 2016/4295 - COTER-VI/017 121st Plenary Session – February 2017 Rapporteur: Ms Pauliina HAIJANEN (FI/EPP) DG MARE – High Representative/ Vice-President MOGHERINI</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>2. The Committee of the Regions stresses that the challenges facing the Arctic region require concerted efforts at local, regional and international level, and praises the European Commission for ensuring that integrated policies to help meet regional needs and objectives are based on the region's specific geographical and demographic characteristics</p> | <p>The Joint Communication envisages the setting up of a temporary European Union Arctic Stakeholder Forum, bringing together European Union Institutions, indigenous peoples, governments, and regional and local authorities to identify key investment priorities in the region for the coming years. In addition, engagement with relevant stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, will continue from 2018 through an annual Arctic Stakeholder conference.</p> |
| <p>10. The Committee of the Regions points out that the definition of the Arctic region used in the Joint Communication refers very narrowly to the region north of the Arctic Circle. The impact of the European Union's integrated policy will extend far beyond this region. The Committee of the Regions proposes that the geographical definition of the Arctic region given in the Communication be broadened, in light of issues such as promoting sustainable development, adapting to climate change and fostering European competitiveness and taking account of the needs and potential of local communities and indigenous populations.</p> | <p>The Joint Communication does not contain a precise geographical definition of the Arctic. In the Arctic Council several definitions have been established: the area north of the Arctic Polar Circle (<i>latitude of 66°33'45.9" N</i>); another definition covers those areas that have an average temperature of below 10° Celsius in July; a further definition defines the Arctic as areas without forests due to permafrost and cold temperatures. It is thus clear that a flexible concept of the Arctic is being applied already. The Commission is aware that the European Union Arctic policy has impacts far beyond, both for European Union Member States and at international level but does not consider it necessary to further broaden</p> |

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| | the geographical definitions beyond those established by the Arctic Council. |
| 12. The Committee of the Regions recognises the importance – both now and in the future – of the research activity and scientific collaboration relating to the Arctic region, which are highlighted by the European Commission. The European Union-PolarNet initiative set out in the Joint Communication is a good example of wide-ranging, significant scientific cooperation involving universities and research institutes from across Europe (...). The Committee of the Regions believes that, when deciding on the goals and means of carrying out research into the multidimensional reality of the Arctic region, it is particularly important for there to be cooperation with local and regional representatives too. | <p>The European Commission welcomes the positive remark on the European Union-PolarNet initiative. Local and regional representatives are always invited to stakeholder workshops organised within the project. Additionally, the national representatives of the project are always encouraged to interact on a regular basis with their local and regional representatives.</p> <p>Furthermore, the cohesion policy also finances research and innovation activities in the Arctic region.</p> |
| 13. The Committee of the Regions would like to place greater emphasis on the role played by Arctic towns and cities in development work. Towns and cities are key players in this work and in adaptation to the changing context. Investments in municipal infrastructure and energy-efficient solutions, for example, and the solutions needed for public services especially in sparsely populated regions, are giving rise to new business activities. The Committee of the Regions points out, however, that the particular challenges posed by long distances, sparsely populated areas and an ageing population will continue to require special attention within the framework of development policy. | The European Union Arctic Stakeholder Forum aims at strengthening dialogue and cooperation between regions and cities for a better development of the Arctic region. The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas network, composed of 14 regions, is actively involved in the European Union Arctic Stakeholder Forum, and the European Commission maintains a continuous dialogue with them. Moreover, the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas in Finland and Sweden continue to receive a special allocation from Cohesion Policy due to the specific challenges of the region recognized in the Accession Treaty of Finland and Sweden. |
| 14. The Committee of the Regions views sustainable exploitation of natural | Any extension of the Trans-European Transport Network depends on the |

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| <p>resources as a key aspect of sustainable economic growth and efforts to increase prosperity in the Arctic region. A prerequisite for this is efficient transport and telecommunications links. It is important to develop more comprehensive north-south transport connections, such as the Trans-European Transport Network connection from Finland to the Arctic Ocean via Norway, as well as east-west connections to link regions in northern Norway, Sweden and Finland to the European Union's transport network. Investment in the Arctic region – including investment in roads, railways, broadband and electricity networks – generally ripple out into the broader region and so have a positive impact on business conditions throughout the country in question, including those in industry.</p> | <p>proposals made by Member States in the context of the 2023 revision of the core network.</p> <p>Any proposal has to be approved by Council and the European Parliament through co-decision, therefore a final decision about a new scope of the core network is to be expected at the earliest in 2026/2027.</p> <p>It should be noted that rail connections are expected to be of a higher priority than road connections.</p> |
| <p>18. The Committee of the Regions stresses that implementation of the future Cohesion Policy should also make a variety of financial instruments available for development efforts in the Arctic region, instruments that can be used to find ways of promoting local industry, and for improving the know-how, innovation, products and services that enhance the competitiveness of the European Union as a whole. New issues that are of central importance include developing the circular economy in the Arctic, as well as the general concept of Arctic design. It is important for the European Union to be closely involved in research and investment activity in the Arctic region, including in the future programming period.</p> | <p>Cohesion Policy provides funds for small and medium-sized enterprise support and Research and Development and Innovation activities in the Arctic regions (for example, in the Finnish Lapland region, the investments are based on the regional Arctic Smart Specialisation strategy within which one cluster is Arctic design).</p> |
| <p>19. The Committee of the Regions highlights the Joint Communication's</p> | <p>The European Commission recognises the importance of ensuring that the</p> |

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| <p>reference to the potential of new technology associated with electronic communications, for instance in maintaining and developing local business, know-how and culture. This is especially important for the representatives of indigenous peoples. The Joint Communication mentions the Commission's annual meetings with representatives of indigenous peoples of the Arctic region. Taking the views of Arctic indigenous peoples into account and involving them in decision-making is particularly important, including in national and regional affairs.</p> | <p>views and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities are respected and promoted. The European Commission will therefore continue to engage with Arctic indigenous peoples through the annual dialogue meeting with representatives of Arctic indigenous peoples.</p> |
| <p>20. Another issue highlighted is the need for more effective use of the various funding instruments to promote investment in the Arctic region, which is why the European Commission proposes a temporary forum for European cooperation in the Arctic (European Arctic stakeholder forum). (...)The Committee of the Regions proposes that the precise configuration and remit of the forum be specified, as the forum is still in its initial stages.</p> | <p>The European Union Arctic Stakeholder Forum has met several times so far and has developed and agreed on a common action plan to carry out a consultation process at local, regional and national levels. The results of these consultations were discussed at the occasion of a high-level event organised by the High Representative/ Vice-President and the Commissioner responsible for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries together with Finland on 15-16 June 2017 in Oulu. The event hosted the Arctic Stakeholder Forum which held two panel discussions: (1) Common investment needs for a sustainable Arctic and (2) Innovative solutions for sustainable regional development in the Arctic.</p> <p>The outcome of the discussion will feed into the report which will be prepared and further discussed with the members of the Forum in the coming months. The final report will be finalised by the end of 2017 and submitted to the European Commission</p> |

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| | to feed into the preparation of the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework. |
| 21. The Committee of the Regions proposes that, as part of the cooperation forum's work, the Commission put together a guide on the funding opportunities available in the Arctic region (as was the case for the European Union's Baltic Sea Strategy) and that it provide information on the subject through various events and networking meetings. This should also include providing input, alongside the work carried out by the European Arctic Stakeholder Forum, to the annual Arctic forum, which the European Commission proposes to set up as of 2018. | As part of the consultation process in the framework of the European Union Arctic Stakeholder Forum, the Commission has developed a mapping of European Union funding opportunities for the Arctic region. This document serves as a background document for stakeholders and will be used as a supporting document for the annual Arctic stakeholder conference discussions. It will be updated as needed in the coming years. |
| 23. The CoR stresses the importance of ongoing cooperation with Russia in the framework of the Northern Dimension. The possibilities for bringing enterprises, researchers and citizens together afforded by cooperation have helped develop specific environmental, business and cultural projects. | The European Commission and the High Representative continue to promote the Northern Dimension policy facilitating dialogue with the Partners (Iceland, Norway, Russia), which can enable concrete results with positive cross-border effects in the form of projects under the four Partnerships (Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership, Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being, Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics and the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture and promoting business (Northern Dimension Business Council) and academic cooperation (Northern Dimension Institute). |
| 25. Finally, the Committee of the Regions notes that the Arctic region's strategic importance to the European Union is increasing all the time, as is the need for the European Union to take steps | The European Union is indeed engaged in various Arctic-specific fora and policy frameworks (Arctic Council, Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Northern Dimensions) as well as a range of fora |

to overcome the challenges posed by the Arctic region's natural environment and specific socio-economic conditions. The European Union should promote cooperation between Member States and non-European Union countries to ensure the stability of the Arctic region's overall environment. It is important to bolster the integrated approach not least by seeking out links and synergies between the various funding programmes and other funding tools. Local and regional authorities must be involved in key programmes and projects to promote regional cooperation, transport links and sustainable economic development in the Arctic region.

which touch upon issues with relevance for the Arctic (climate change, fisheries, shipping, science and research, etc.) with a view to promoting cooperation and stability.

The Arctic Stakeholder Forum seeks to address the objectives advocated by the Committee of the Regions regarding links and synergies between funding programmes and local and regional authorities.

Moreover, under the Cohesion Policy, the special status and challenges of the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas are recognised by an additional special European Regional Development Fund allocation granted for these regions equal to EUR 30 per inhabitant per year in the 2014-2020 programming period. This allocation is distributed per region and Member State in a manner proportional to the total population of those regions (point (e) of Article 92(1) of the common provisions of the European Regional Development Fund).

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| <p>N°8 Reform of the Common European Asylum System – Package II (CEAS II) and a Union Resettlement Framework COM(2016) 465 final, COM(2016) 466 final, COM(2016) 467 final, COM(2016) 468 final – COR 2016/5807 - CIVEX-VI/017 121st Plenary Session - February 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Vincenzo BIANCO (IT/PES) DG HOME - Commissioner AVRAMOPOULOS</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>3. The Committee of the Regions stresses, as it did in the opinion on the first package of proposals, the need for sustainable solutions that tackle the issue in a structural way, letting go of the illusion that it is a question of dealing with individual emergencies; therefore, while appreciating the Commission’s effort to provide solutions to an urgent situation generating political pressure, the Committee of the Regions believes that a more in-depth reflection is necessary which goes to the roots of the issue, taking into account international obligations, migrants’ rights and the needs of the different levels of government, throughout the European Union, without overburdening the border countries or countries most exposed or prized by asylum seekers for the sake of form or principle.</p> | <p>On 6 April 2016, the European Commission set out its priorities for a structural reform of the European asylum and legal migration framework in its Communication 'Towards a reform of the Common European Asylum System and enhancing legal avenues to Europe'²⁶, outlining the different steps to be taken towards a more humane, fair and efficient European asylum policy as well as a better managed legal migration policy.</p> <p>On 4 May 2016, the European Commission presented a first set of proposals to reform the Common European Asylum System delivering on three priorities identified in its Communication: establishing a sustainable and fair Dublin system for determining the Member State responsible for examining asylum applications, reinforcing the Eurodac system to better monitor secondary movements and facilitate the fight against irregular migration and establishing a genuine European Agency for Asylum to ensure the well-functioning of the European asylum</p> |

²⁶ COM(2016) 197 final.

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| | <p>system. These proposals are the first building blocks to reform the structure of the Common European Asylum System.</p> <p>With the second package, the Commission is completing the reform of the Common European Asylum System by adopting four additional proposals: a proposal replacing the Asylum Procedures Directive with a Regulation, harmonising the current disparate procedural arrangements in all Member States and creating a genuine common procedure; a proposal replacing the Qualification Directive with a Regulation, setting uniform standards for the recognition of persons in need of protection and the rights granted to beneficiaries of international protection as well as a proposal revising the Reception Conditions Directive to further harmonise reception conditions in the European Union, increase applicants' integration prospects and decrease secondary movements. Finally, following-up on the commitment to enhance legal avenues to the European Union, the European Commission is also proposing a structured Union resettlement framework.</p> <p>The reform of the Common European Asylum System as proposed by the European Commission is designed to ensure full convergence between the national asylum systems, to decrease incentives for secondary movements, strengthen mutual trust between Member States and lead overall to a well-functioning Dublin system.</p> |
| <p>4. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the convergence and</p> | <p>The Common European Asylum System proposals, including the</p> |

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| <p>standardisation of conditions for assistance granted to applicants, including with a view to discouraging secondary movements within the European Union; it considers, however, that an approach based solely on ensuring equal material conditions and on penalties related to unauthorised secondary movements is insufficient.</p> | <p>proposal for a revised Dublin Regulation, need to be seen as a comprehensive package where the measures proposed to harmonise reception conditions and sanction unauthorised secondary movements are complementary with other measures meant to limit secondary movements, such as providing proper information and assistance to applicants and taking all measures required to facilitate the integration of beneficiaries of international protection into our societies.</p> |
| <p>5. The Committee of the Regions considers that, in order to further integration and uproot the causes of secondary movements, it is important and necessary to take into account the effective connections, work-related skills and preferences of applicants regarding one or more Member States, as has already been emphasised in the opinion on the first package of European Commission proposals, and, to this end, stresses the importance of collecting the relevant data, with applicants' help, to facilitate their social and professional integration.</p> | <p>The Qualification Regulation proposal²⁷ provides incentives for the active integration of beneficiaries while protection is granted by allowing Member States to make the granting of certain social assistance conditional on effective participation in integration measures. Access to education, access to employment and access to integration measures constitute the rights conferred on beneficiaries and are based on the equal treatment principle.</p> |
| <p>6. While it is pleased to see that the procedures for examining applications for international protection have been speeded up, the Committee of the Regions stresses that this must not result in reduced fundamental rights and that the summary procedures provided for in the package of proposals must be able to be used with extreme caution and be subject to careful verification that the conditions for their use have been met.</p> | <p>The European Commission's proposal strikes the right balance between having efficient procedures and fully respecting fundamental rights. In particular, Member States will need to ensure that applicants whose applications are examined in the accelerated or border procedures will fully enjoy the procedural guarantees set out in the Directive and in full compliance with the Charter. This is</p> |

²⁷ COM(2016) 466 final.

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| | <p>the case in particular for the right to be heard in a personal interview, the provision of interpretation and free legal assistance and representation. Moreover, the application of the accelerated and border procedures is limited with regard to unaccompanied minors and they cannot be applied to applicants in need of special procedural guarantees unless those applicants can be provided with adequate support in the framework of those procedures.</p> |
| <p>7. The Committee of the Regions is extremely concerned at the legislative solution adopted for the Union Resettlement Framework - COM(2016) 468 final - (adoption of a reference framework with a Council act and implementation with a European Commission decision), which excludes the European Parliament and is rare in this sector, unlike in the foreign policy and security sector.</p> | <p>While the aim of the proposal is to establish a permanent and predictable framework for resettlement in the European Union, such framework should be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances annually. Certain elements relating to the implementation of the framework are therefore not spelled out in the basic act. The implementation of the basic acts on international protection is the responsibility of Member States (Article 291 TFEU). Nevertheless, in order to ensure uniform conditions for the implementation of the proposed Regulation, implementing powers are conferred on the Council and the European Commission, as foreseen by Article 291 TFEU, which is common practice in the area of international protection.</p> <p>It was deemed necessary to preserve a key role for Member States in determining their participation in the implementation of the Union resettlement framework. The maximum total number of persons to be resettled to the European Union every year under the Union resettlement framework, the details about the</p> |

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| | <p>participation of the Member States and their contributions, as well as the overall geographical priorities is therefore to be set by the Council. When adopting such annual Union resettlement plans, the Council should take into account the discussions within a High-Level Resettlement Committee, where all Member States and the Parliament are represented (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration will be invited).</p> |
| <p>8. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the European Commission proposals aiming at facilitating access to the labour market and occupational and other training for beneficiaries of international protection. The Committee of the Regions also urges the European Commission and Member States to adopt effective and flexible mechanisms to allow for the recognition of degrees and diplomas and professional qualifications which would facilitate access to the labour market for those seeking international protection.</p> | <p>The proposal for a revised Reception Conditions Directive²⁸ includes provisions on the recognition of degrees, diplomas and professional qualifications for applicants of international protection mirroring those of beneficiaries of international protection.</p> |
| <p>11. The Committee of the Regions recommends that implementation of the measures on reception conditions be supported with greater access to and provision of European Union funds, facilitating access for the regions and local authorities, which must be given the right conditions for the proper reception of asylum-seekers and new arrivals.</p> | <p>As stated in the recitals of the proposal for the Reception Conditions Directive, the resources of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and those of the European Union Agency for Asylum should be mobilised to provide adequate support for Member States' efforts in implementing the standards set in the Directive.</p> |
| <p>12. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the fact that the European</p> | <p>The European Commission proposes a system of guardianship which will</p> |

²⁸ COM(2016) 465 final.

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| <p>Commission's proposals take account of the interests and well-being of unaccompanied minors and, inter alia, make provision for the rapid appointment of a representative or sponsor. At times when large numbers of unaccompanied minors are being taken in, it might, however, be necessary to avoid setting rigid time scales for making this appointment which in many Member States involves a court procedure. A procedure of this kind entails appropriate procedural guarantees, such as the appointment of an interpreter, and certain investigative requirements, which cannot be carried out within the timeframe proposed by the European Commission.</p> | <p>guarantee that procedural safeguards are adhered to and that minors receive adequate care and assistance throughout the asylum procedure in line with their best interests. The system should limit the risk of them being exposed to risks or precarious situations and possibly leading them to abscond. The role of the guardian is to assist and represent an unaccompanied minor with a view to safeguarding the best interests of the child and his or her general well-being in the procedure for international protection. It is important to ensure the appointment of a guardian for unaccompanied minors as early as possible and it is for this reason that the European Commission provides for short deadlines in its proposals.</p> |
| <p>14. The Committee of the Regions recommends that the definition of "guardian" (Article 4(2)(f) highlights independence from the administration of the person or organisation as a third party appointed to assist and represent an unaccompanied minor in the procedures provided for by the regulation.</p> <p>15. The Committee of the Regions recommends that the minor always be assisted by a lawyer in interviews with the administrative authority dealing with their application (Article 22).</p> <p>16. The Committee of the Regions recommends, moreover, (also with regard to Article 22) that the minor's representative be a person or body independent of the administration and appointed on a legal basis or by a legal authority to act solely in the interests of the minor;</p> <p>18. The Committee of the Regions</p> | <p>The European Commission considers that the Member States should be responsible for ensuring that a guardian is appointed to assist and represent an unaccompanied minor. That guardian may be a natural person or an organisation. The organisation would, in turn, need to designate a person to carry out the duties of the guardian. The guardian may be from the Member States' administration. To guarantee the independence of the guardian, the European Commission proposal provides that organisations or individuals whose interests conflict or potentially conflict with those of the unaccompanied minor shall not be appointed as guardian.</p> <p>The European Commission takes note of this idea.</p> |

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| <p>recommends that the provision in Article 22(4) of the draft regulation that the person acting as guardian shall be changed only when the responsible authorities consider that he or she has not adequately performed his or her tasks as a guardian be revised. The appointment of a different local representative might, for example, be appropriate in the event of a change in the minor’s place of residence.</p> | |
| <p>17. The Committee of the Regions recommends, with reference to subsequent applications (Article 42), stipulating that the preliminary examination assessing the admissibility of the application must ascertain whether the applicant effectively received information and legal assistance during the previous application, and that the lack of information or legal assistance is considered justification for lodging the subsequent application.</p> | <p>The European Commission considers that reduced guarantees for subsequent applications are justified since the applicant would have already benefited from all the guarantees throughout the procedure for the first application. The objective of this provision is to prevent abuse, while nevertheless ensuring full protection of fundamental rights.</p> |
| <p>19. The Committee of the Regions recommends, with regard to the concept of first country of asylum, that the phrase “has enjoyed protection” be interpreted in the sense that this protection was formally recognised and not merely provided in practice.</p> | <p>The European Commission would like to stress that the Geneva Convention itself does not contain any provision on formal recognition as a refugee.</p> |
| <p>20. With reference to the first level of appeal (Article 55), the Committee of the Regions stresses and recommends that the time limits provided for should not be seen as set in stone and that (as explicitly stated in the article) they do not preclude an adequate and complete examination of an appeal.</p> | <p>The proposal addresses the overall procedure for international protection, and for this reason it sets out time limits for lodging appeals and for decisions at the first appeal stage. This is necessary to ensure equity and effectiveness in the procedure and to meet the overall objective of greater harmonisation in the procedure. The European Commission recognises that more time may be needed in cases involving issues of fact or law and it is for this reason that it provides for a</p> |

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| | possible extension of the time limit by three months in such cases. |
| 21. The Committee of the Regions is categorically opposed to the introduction of the regular review and the procedure for withdrawing international protection: these may not only potentially increase the burden for administrations (including local and regional administrations) in implementing practices and carrying out tasks related to the integration of refugees, but also cause insecurity for applicants. In this respect, the Committee of the Regions condemns the political, xenophobic and populist speeches that lead to violence and the criminalisation of all asylum seekers, thereby creating unnecessary social tensions, and calls on political authorities and actors to behave responsibly. | For a well-functioning Common European Asylum System, substantial progress should be made regarding the convergence of national asylum systems with special regard to differing recognition rates and type of protection status in the Member States. Rules on status review should therefore be strengthened to ensure that protection is only granted to those who need it and for so long as it continues to be needed. Moreover, divergent practices regarding the duration of the residence permits should be avoided, and the rights granted to beneficiaries of international protection should be further clarified and harmonised. |
| 22. The CoR is extremely concerned at the introduction of a maximum time limit for international protection and with regard to the legitimacy of this constraint, and calls on the co-legislators to reflect further on this point. | |
| 23. The Committee of the Regions recommends considering the possibility, in the event of withdrawal of international protection, of allowing a longer period of time than that provided for in the European Commission proposal (e.g. six months) to obtain a residence permit on other grounds (e.g. seeking work), given that the proposal specifies a relatively short time limit (three months). | A reasonable period of time should allow the third-country national or stateless person the possibility to apply for residence on the basis of other grounds than those having justified the granting of international protection, such as family reasons, or reasons related to employment or to education, in accordance with relevant Union and national law. |
| 24. The Committee of the Regions recommends reconsidering the provision laid down in Article 17(a) of the European Commission proposal to the effect that applicants do not have the right to any of | Withdrawal of all material reception conditions, even when absence cannot be justified, would be contrary to European Union law and international obligations. In accordance with |

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| <p>the material assistance conditions set out in the regulation in Member States other than the Member State responsible, and stipulating that, should an applicant justify their absence on grounds of necessity or force majeure, these conditions, possibly with the reductions provided for in Article 19, can be provided to them for a limited period.</p> | <p>European Union law and international obligations, Member States must provide for the applicants' subsistence and basic needs both in terms of physical safety and dignity, with due regard to the inherent vulnerabilities of applicants for international protection.</p> |
| <p>25. The Committee of the Regions recommends that the provision in Article 23(1) of the draft Directive that the person acting as guardian shall be changed "only when necessary" be revised. The appointment of a different local representative might, for example, be appropriate in the event of a change in the minor's place of residence.</p> | <p>The European Commission takes note of this idea.</p> |
| <p>26. The Committee of the Regions recommends reconsidering the provision laid down in Article 17a of the European Commission proposal to the effect that Member States must ensure a dignified standard of living for all applicants and committing the European Union and the Member States to support – including financially – the local authorities that help to guarantee this.</p> | <p>In accordance with European Union law and international obligations, Member States must provide for the applicants' subsistence and basic needs both in terms of physical safety and dignity, with due regard to the inherent vulnerabilities of applicants for international protection.</p> |
| <p>27. The Committee of the Regions recommends reconsidering the decision to exclude from resettlement applicants who have entered the European Union irregularly during the last five years; in view of the pervasive illegal circumstances causing them to leave neighbouring countries, this decision seems to penalise applicants, who are often victims of this situation, excessively.</p> | <p>According to the proposal, persons who have irregularly stayed, irregularly entered, or attempted to irregularly enter the territory of the Member States during the five years prior to resettlement, shall be excluded from targeted Union resettlement schemes. Resettlement is an integral part of a larger objective to ensure that protection can be offered to those who need it while reducing the irregular and dangerous routes that are used to obtain such protection. The proposed</p> |

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| | provision should be read in this context. |
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| <p>N°9 Missing transport links in border regions (own-initiative opinion) CoR 2016/4294 - COTER-VI/016 121st Plenary Session – February 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Michiel SCHEFFER (NL/ALDE) DG MOVE – Commissioner BULC</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>4. This opinion focuses on cross-border rail and road links, and to a lesser degree, water links. It only deals with border regions within Europe. However, and having regard to its opinion on aviation strategy, the Committee of the Regions has not forgotten the importance of both air and sea connections between the peripheral and island regions and neighbouring cross-border regions, and calls on the European Commission to ensure that the forthcoming review of the Trans-European Transport Network will take this into account.</p> | <p>The European Commission has foreseen a specific priority in the 3rd Connecting Europe Facility Transport call for proposals (annual work programme 2016): EUR 40 million were earmarked for cross-border connections to neighbouring countries on core and comprehensive networks. One project, with an allocation of Euro 11,4 million, was actually selected for funding.</p> <p>Especially on those core network corridors that cross third countries (namely the Rhine – Danube, the Orient/ East/ Med and the Mediterranean corridors), the Trans-European Transport Network Coordinators in charge aim at stimulating cooperation between different European Union and non-European Union actors, and to combine European Union funding from different sources (such as the Connecting Europe Facility, Cohesion Fund, Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance). The possibility of the blending of funds within the Western Balkan Investment Framework can be used in order to finance cross-border projects between the European Union and the Western Balkans.</p> <p>Concerning sea links, motorways of the</p> |

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| | <p>sea may already include connections with third countries, and corresponding projects have been funded under the Connecting Europe Facility.</p> |
| <p>6. In recent years, the European Union has primarily focused on delivering centralised solutions for the large-scale trans-European transport network, specifically through the Connecting Europe Facility, but also Horizon 2020. There are relatively few resources available for decentralised tools such as the Interreg Programme for bridging missing small-scale links in Europe's border areas, even though these programmes are much better at taking into account the local needs of the cross-border region in question.</p> | <p>During the adoption of the current Multiannual Financial Framework, it was decided to dedicate a major part of Connecting Europe Facility support, as mentioned in paragraphs 9 and 34, to projects with high European Union added value along the core network corridors. The European Structural and Investment Funds as well as the European Fund for Strategic Investments may support certain projects in border regions as they have a wider eligibility.</p> <p>Within such an approach, cross-border projects are a strong priority. They receive the highest co-funding rate for rail and inland waterways works (40%) and, for road, only cross-border projects are eligible in principle (except for Member States with no rail network or an isolated rail network).</p> <p>The European Commission's services responsible for Transport and for Regional Policy & Urban Development are also cooperating closely to assess needs and opportunities for the development of smaller scale cross-border transport connections.</p> |
| <p>7. The Connecting Europe Facility for the 2014-2020 seven-year period has already funded numerous projects of significant value for European Union mobility, and most of the relevant resources have already been allocated. It would therefore be highly advisable to renew the Connecting Europe Facility's economic commitment by increasing its finances, in part by</p> | <p>In the framework of the 3rd call for proposals under the Connecting Europe Facility, for the first time EUR 110 million have been earmarked for cross-border infrastructure projects in the Trans-European Transport Network comprehensive network and in the core network. Given the high quality of the submitted project proposals, even about</p> |

encouraging initiatives to implement the comprehensive network and the system for linking up with the Trans-European Transport Network in border areas.

140 million Euro were allocated to such projects. This is a response to common efforts of the Committee of the Regions, the European Parliament TRAN Committee and the European Commission to stimulate the implementation of smaller cross-border projects (notably rail) that promise significant economic effects for border regions. Further possibilities are offered by the 'Blending Call' (aiming at a combination of grants and innovative financial instruments), published on 8 February 2017.

Overall, the Connecting Europe Facility has proven to be particularly effective in supporting projects of high European added value in the context of a Europe-wide multi-modal transport network which constitutes the backbone of the internal market and – through its smart and innovative dimension – also is a key enabler of the transport sector's decarbonisation agenda.

In this respect, core and comprehensive networks complement each other – with the core network providing the most strategic links and nodes, and the comprehensive network ensuring accessibility for all European Union regions and their citizens.

This implies that the Trans-European Transport Network policy can only achieve its objectives in full when all the projects at stake are implemented in time. In order to complete the core network by 2030 and comprehensive network by 2050, appropriate financial resources will be needed (i.e. an estimated EUR 740 billion for 2014-2030 for the core network alone).

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| <p>9. The Trans-European Transport Network is crucial for the sustainable development of Europe's regions. The overwhelming majority of financial resources go to the key corridors of the Trans-European Transport Network, but links with local and regional comprehensive networks should not be forgotten. The European Commission's Connecting Europe Facility call made in October 2016 specifically for cross-border links is greatly welcomed as a first step.</p> | <p>For the nine corridors of the core network alone (representing about 75% of the core network), investment needs of EUR 740 billion have been identified to complete these corridors by 2030. These investments have to go along with the implementation of projects along the comprehensive network (to be completed by 2050) and secondary transport networks.</p> <p>These financial challenges underpin the need for increased Connecting Europe Facility support. For projects of the comprehensive network – including smaller scale cross-border projects – more use should also be made of a targeted combination of different EU sources (e.g. the Connecting Europe Facility and the European Regional and Development Fund).</p> |
| <p>15. Tourism can serve as a driving force for improving infrastructure. Conversely, improvements in infrastructure can also lead to more tourism. These kinds of catalyst should be used for development. In particular, it is important not to neglect the role of cross-border cycle networks when developing tourism.</p> | <p>Clearly there is a link between investment in infrastructure and economic and social development including in the tourism sector. In the period 2014-2020, already EUR 13.7 billion are planned for urban mobility projects via the Structural Funds, with around EUR 1.5 billion planned for walking and cycling infrastructure (for comparison, in 2007-2013 an estimated budget of EUR 670 million was made available for investments in cycle infrastructure). Horizon2020 funds can also be used for this but only if there is a strong research and development need.</p> <p>Under the Connecting Europe Facility, EUR 200 million have been earmarked to support studies and works in urban nodes of the Trans-European Transport Network, an area which is not directly related to tourism but certainly is of</p> |

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| | <p>benefit to it.</p> <p>There are also new financing opportunities in the context of the European Structural and Investment Funds. This is a way of using public funds to stimulate also private investment. A European Investment Advisory Hub - Europe's gateway to investment support – was also put in place.</p> |
| <p>19. A first step is to improve the coordination of public transport timetables in border regions. A second step could be to create cross-border concessions for public transport.</p> | <p>To enable the growth of inter-connected mobility across the European Union, the provision of comprehensive, accurate and reliable travel information services is essential. The enabler of such services includes a wide range of travel and traffic planning information including timetables, not just for public transport but also other scheduled modes including rail, ferries, long-distance coach etc. Through the forthcoming Delegated Regulation supplementing the Intelligent Transport Systems Directive²⁹ for the provision of European Union-wide multimodal travel information services, an enabling framework will be established to facilitate the access and exchange of travel and traffic data across the European Union including timetables.</p> |
| <p>20. Slow means of transport such as cycling can play an important role in border regions. Cycling often serves as a complementary mode of transport alongside public transport. It is becoming more and more popular and competitive, especially in towns and cities suffering from congestion.</p> | <p>Cycling in urban areas as well as in cross-border regions is important and can be an enabler for the development of tourism. Further efforts to develop cycling as a true mode of transport and complementary with public transport are therefore encouraged.</p> |

²⁹ Directive 2010/40/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on the framework for the deployment of Intelligent Transport Systems in the field of road transport and for interfaces with other modes of transport Text with EEA relevance, OJ L 207, 6.8.2010, p. 1.

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| <p>A cross-border approach and a cross-border network of high-quality cycling infrastructure are therefore necessary. Developing transport linked to the EuroVelo cycle route networks also helps to improve the accessibility of tourist destinations and as such can be considered a social and economic objective.</p> | <p>Cohesion Policy can provide tangible European Union co-financing for investments into cycling tracks (and footpaths) when these investments are linked to one of the Thematic Objectives of Cohesion Policy - such as supporting a shift to a low-carbon economy in all sectors, preserving and protecting the environment, or promoting sustainable transport - and when they fit into the intervention logic of the Operational Programme concerned. Cycling tracks can be funded as stand-alone projects or in conjuncture with investments in other transport infrastructure such as roads, bridges, or tunnels. The latter is also possible under the Connecting Europe Facility, and a few such projects have already been funded (e.g. on the EuroVelo route 6).</p> |
| <p>30. Technical, regulatory and funding-related harmonisation is necessary to ensure well-connected cross-border infrastructure which the various Member States approach in the same way. Above all, railway lines and links need to be standardised, e.g. Electrification and European Safety Systems, or problems relating to different railway track gauges in many eastern European countries. As far as standardisation of technical aspects is concerned, it is also worth mentioning the removal of obstacles to the communication and dissemination of information and the creation of a common platform to provide information to users, online ticket sales and modernising transmission of data relating to infrastructure.</p> | <p>Technical and regulatory harmonisation and standardisation enables the growth of innovative solutions in transport.</p> <p>Article 12 of the TEN-T Regulation³⁰ sets out transport infrastructure requirements for railway lines which entail standardisation. Within this framework, the European Coordinator Karel Vinck coordinates the implementation of action related to Electrification and European Safety Systems deployment.</p> <p>As a result, Electrification and European Safety Systems, together with rail interoperability, is a strong priority of the Connecting Europe Facility. The European Commission has earmarked (indicative budget) EUR</p> |

³⁰ Regulation (EU) N° 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network

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| | <p>70 million in the 3rd Connecting Europe Facility call and 150 million EUR in the Connecting Europe Facility Blending Call for related actions.</p> <p>Concerning data exchange related to infrastructure, the delegated regulations of the Intelligent Transport Systems Directive provide the appropriate framework conditions to facilitate the access and exchange of relevant travel and traffic data. Concerning an online platform to provide online ticket sales, the European Commission is exploring, through stakeholder engagement and research activities, the appropriate measures to support cross-border ticketing whilst still addressing competition issues.</p> |
| <p>36. Alternative financing models can help. The simplification of public procurement rules and state aid rules is essential in this context. When planning the use of direct Union resources, uncertainty may arise – from the development phase of the project onwards – about the guarantees of own contributions from state and non-state entities. Given the large scale of infrastructure investments, it could be worth considering setting up a fund of own resources for the development of transport and aid for the development of projects, as well as common and national funds. In the case of cross-border cooperation projects, problems may arise for partnerships from the planning stage onwards due to a lack of own contributions.</p> | <p>The Commission is aware of the importance of regulatory aspects for the implementation of Trans-European Transport Network infrastructure projects (as this was already shown through the Investment Plan for Europe as well as in the Christophersen-Bodewig-Secchi report).</p> <p>Currently, the European Commission's services are working on streamlining the implementation of cross-border projects, including by easing administrative obstacles. The European Commission also takes note of the idea of setting up a single fund for large scale investment projects.</p> <p>The European Commission may consider adapting current rules to better respond to the needs for the development of projects.</p> |

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| <p>N°10 Regeneration of Port Cities and Port Areas CoR 2016/5650 - COTER-VI/018 121st Plenary Session – February 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Stanislaw SZWABSKI (PL/EA) DG MOVE – Commissioner BULC</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions examines the issue of regeneration of port cities and port areas, taking account of the interaction of transport and industrial needs and urban development problems.</p> | <p>The European Commission welcomes the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on this important issue. Port cities and areas play an important role for the European Union economic and social system, as recalled in the Communication on "Ports: an engine for growth"³¹.</p> <p>In full respect of the subsidiarity principle, there is a strong common interest in the regeneration of ports for achieving sustainable development goals at European Union level.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions invites the European Commission to provide further guidance for the implementation of the principles laid down by Article 15 of the Ports Regulation³².</p> | <p>The European Commission will consult with the concerned parties with a view to provide possible further guidance regarding the implementation of the principles of Article 15 of the Ports Regulation.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions suggests that the European Commission takes account of the different kinds of problems that cargo-handling businesses create for local, regional and metropolitan coastal cities and ports.</p> | <p>The European Commission is aware of the different impacts of cargo-handling activities for the local, regional and metropolitan coastal cities and ports. The European Union Transport Policy actively promotes better hinterland connections and better use of transport modes with the lowest external costs</p> |

³¹ COM(2013) 295 final.

³² Regulation (EU) 2017/352 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2017 establishing a framework for the provision of port services and common rules on the financial transparency of ports (Text with EEA relevance), OJ L 57, 3.3.2017.

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| | <p>for reducing those impacts.</p> <p>The Trans-European Transport Network Guidelines (Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013³³) take account of those problems and establish specific objectives in the horizon of years 2030 to 2050.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions calls for the support of legal and financial instruments, in the framework of coordinated European Union sectoral policies, for tackling the problems that arise in the port-city complex.</p> | <p>The Trans-European Transport Network Guidelines and the Connecting Europe Facility (Regulation (EU) No 1316/2013³⁴) provide legal and financial instruments that can be used for tackling those problems. Important investments in ports cities and areas have also been supported by the European Fund for Strategic Investments.</p> <p>The Horizon 2020 work programme 2016-2017 call "The Port of the Future" will support the analysis of the port-city relation and the drafting of recommendations aimed at guiding city authorities in urban planning towards the achievement of Smart Port Cities.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions calls for Trans-European Transport Network Corridor Forums to address links between port cities and areas.</p> | <p>The European Commission welcomes the suggestion and has already invited the Trans-European Transport Network Corridor Forums to establish ad-hoc working groups for examining the particular needs of ports and inland waterways.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions calls for legal instruments providing legal and financial support for the technical and environmental upgrading of port areas</p> | <p>As stated above, the Connecting Europe Facility and the European Fund for Strategic Investments provide financial instruments that can be used</p> |

³³ Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network and repealing Decision No 661/2010/EU Text with EEA relevance, OJ L 348, 20.12.2013.

³⁴ Regulation (EU) No 1316/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing the Connecting Europe Facility, amending Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 and repealing Regulations (EC) No 680/2007 and (EC) No 67/2010 Text with EEA relevance, OJ L 348, 20.12.2013.

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| <p>where port industrial activities have been reduced or have disappeared.</p> | <p>for investments regenerating ports. The European Investment Advisory Hub, hosted by the European Investment Bank, provides technical assistance to project promoters. It is important to stimulate the initiatives of the private sector and of the public authorities to use the instruments that have been put in place by the European Union.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions highlights the opportunities for making use of existing experience and public-private partnership solutions developed at European Union and Member States levels to promote investment in port areas.</p> | <p>The Commission agrees with the views of the Committee of the Regions. The European Centre for Public Private Partnership, an initiative of the European Investment Bank and the European Commission, actively promotes those opportunities.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to draw up measures providing for private investment in port areas, including financial transparency and clear criteria for public aid, while also taking into account long term regional and local interest.</p> | <p>The newly adopted Ports Regulation requires the transparency of the public funding and financing of ports. The European Commission' services have also recently provided guidance on the application of State aid rules to the port sector in the Analytical Grids published in December 2016³⁵. Following two public consultations, it will also adopt shortly a review of the General Block Exemption Regulation to identify the port investments that do not need to be notified to the European Commission. In general, State aid cases are examined taking into account all relevant factors, including those mentioned by the Committee of the Regions.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions considers that the European Commission should support projects to improve transport links</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees that supporting projects to improve the links between ports and their hinterland</p> |

³⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/modernisation/notice_aid_en.html

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| <p>between existing and planned ports and their hinterland, particularly by creating a legal framework and new financial instruments; it recalls the role that the Trans-European Transport Network can play in that regard.</p> | <p>should remain an important priority. The Trans-European Transport Network Guidelines establish legally binding priorities for maritime and inland waterways infrastructures, including hinterland connections and multi-modal requirements. The Connecting Europe Facility provides funding and financial instruments in support of projects needed to complete the Trans-European Transport Network.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions considers that the measures resulting from Directive 2014/94/EU³⁶ to install alternative fuels infrastructure in ports require European financial support which should be included in the transport package in the post-2020 programming period.</p> | <p>The European Commission supports deployment of alternative fuels via different funding opportunities such as Horizon 2020 or the Connecting Europe Facility. In addition, the European Investment Bank provides financing support by means of the Clean Transport Facility.</p> <p>As the multiannual financial framework is under preparation, the European Commission expects that the needs for further supporting the decarbonisation of transport, including investments in ports, are taken into account in the budget allocation for Connecting Europe Facility in the next programming period.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions considers that it is important to continue to develop the Trans-European Transport Network in the transport, energy and telecommunications sector also in respect of the problems of ports and port cities.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees. Port and port cities are important nodal points in the Trans-European Transport Network core and comprehensive networks. Socio-economic and environmental impacts have to be taken into account.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions recommends that European Union policies</p> | <p>This is precisely the goal of the European Integrated Maritime Policy</p> |

³⁶ Directive 2014/94/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure Text with EEA relevance, OJ L 307, 28.10.2014.

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| <p>in the areas of transport, maritime economy and protection of the marine and aquatic environment take account of the development challenges of ports and port cities.</p> | <p>promoted by the European Commission. The European Union Transport Policy takes account of those challenges and consistently contributes to the goals of the Integrated Maritime Policy.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions recommends that, in the course of further work on the implementation of the Urban Agenda and the Pact of Amsterdam, account is taken of the challenges of ports and port cities.</p> | <p>The European Commission takes note of this recommendation and would like to recall that the Urban Agenda is implemented through partnership between the European Union, Member States and cities. Therefore, such proposal cannot be decided by the European Commission alone. The Committee of the Regions is invited to submit this proposal at the next meetings of the Urban Development Group (of which the Committee of the Regions is a member).</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions recommends that the rail links of ports and port cities in peripheral regions be expanded and upgraded</p> | <p>The Trans-European Transport Network core and comprehensive networks aim to ensure adequate rail links between ports and their hinterlands, with particular focus on connections important for cross-border traffic. The particular case of peripheral regions and the needs for rail links have to be examined on a case-by-case basis, taking appropriate account of socio-economic cost benefit analysis.</p> |

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| <p>N°11 Proposal for a new European Consensus on Development - Our World, our Dignity, our Future" COM(2016) 740 final – CoR 2016/6940 - CIVEX-VI/019 121st Plenary Session - February 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Jesús GAMALLO ALLER (ES/EPP) DG DEVCO - Commissioner MIMICA</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>23. In brief, the Committee of the Regions draws attention to the importance in the partner countries of decentralised public administration in putting the 2030 Agenda into practice; the Committee of the Regions emphasises the role that decentralised cooperation can play in transferring know-how and skills between these actors; and argues that the new Consensus on Development should acknowledge and foster the potential of this type of cooperation.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will also depend on the active involvement of local authorities. The new European Consensus on Development³⁷ affirms that the European Union and its Member States will support decentralisation reforms, where appropriate, to empower regional and local authorities for better governance and development impact. They will strengthen their cooperation with local and other sub-national authorities, including through decentralised cooperation.</p> |
| <p>26. The Committee of the Regions emphasises that the European Union and its Member States should facilitate the processes of coordination, division of tasks and coherence between actors within such a Global Partnership; it considers that this objective will be more easily achieved if the European Union and its Member States step up joint programming in the area of development cooperation, based on shared visions, and negotiated between the partner countries. The Committee of the Regions draws attention, however, to the need for</p> | <p>Under the framework of the new Consensus, the European Union and its Member States will enhance joint programming in development cooperation to increase their collective impact by bringing together their resources and capacities. Joint Programming should be led by the partner country's development strategy and aligned to the partner country's development priorities. The European Union and its Member States will take into account available means for</p> |

³⁷ Joint Statement by the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission: "The new European Consensus on Development: Our World, our Dignity, our Future", signed 7 June 2017.

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| <p>regional and local authorities to take part in this process of dialogue and consultation.</p> | <p>development financing, in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development.</p> <p>Inclusive national planning in developing countries will be crucial for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The European Union and its Member States will promote open government dialogues with all stakeholders at the planning, implementation and review stages.</p> |
| <p>28. The Committee of the Regions urges that, in the partner countries, wherever possible use is made of form of cooperation, such as direct budget support or European Union Trust Funds that make coordination between actors easier and facilitate more integrated and flexible use of resources in the partner countries.</p> | <p>The new European Consensus for Development underlines that the principles of development effectiveness (as adopted in Busan in 2011 and renewed at the Nairobi High Level Forum in 2016) apply to all forms of development cooperation. Budget support, when applicable and with those willing to participate, will be used to strengthen partnership, political dialogue, country ownership and mutual accountability with developing countries, based on shared principles, objectives and interests and in response to partner countries' political, economic and social contexts. European Union Trust Funds used for emergency, post-emergency or thematic actions, may provide opportunities for effective joined-up action by the European Union, its Member States and other development partners.</p> |
| <p>30. The Committee of the Regions underlines the importance of the European Union and Member State development cooperation reaching out to, mobilising and drawing in as many actors as possible in support of the Sustainable Development Goals, including local and regional authorities, the private sector, civil society</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees that stronger partnerships must be at the heart of the European Union's approach to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The European Union and its Member States will support decentralisation reforms, where appropriate, and expand</p> |

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| <p>and academia among others, each of them contributing its own capacities, know-how and resources; it points out that decentralised cooperation is a particularly apt form of cooperation for promoting and coordinating such territorial-based multi-stakeholder partnerships; the Committee of the Regions urges the European Commission and the Member States to support local and regional public administrations, so that they are able to mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals into their policies; and stresses that decentralised cooperation provides a favourable environment for creating spaces for global citizenship so as to encourage citizens to reflect upon the Sustainable Development Goals, participate in public policies to achieve these goals, and monitor the application of the 2030 Agenda.</p> | <p>partnerships with actors beyond governments. The European Union and its Member States will also support processes to help people interact effectively with local governments at all stages of policy planning and implementation.</p> |
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N°12 Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations
JOIN(2016) 29 final – COR 2016/5110 – SEDEC-VI/017
121st Plenary Session - February 2017
Rapporteur: Mr Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS (EL/EPP)
DG EAC – High Representative/Vice-President MOGHERINI

| Points of the CoR opinion considered essential | Commission position |
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| <p>3. The Committee of the Regions stresses that culture must lie at the heart of the European Union's international relations, not least because in today's globalised environment, international diplomacy has been enriched with new responsibilities, and alternative forms and approaches have emerged. These include cultural diplomacy, something to which limited reference is made in the Communication.</p> | <p>The European Commission shares the Committee of the Regions' opinion concerning the central role of culture in European Union external relations. The Joint Communication proposes a paradigm shift away from a traditional cultural diplomacy based on showcasing and promoting the excellence of one country. Far from being unidirectional, the "new" approach to international cultural relations that is advocated in the Joint Communication is a process of mutual learning and "co-creation" based on an equal partnership, people-to-people relations and exchanges.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions agrees with the emphasis placed on Member States' obligation to respect, protect and promote the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including artistic and cultural expression. The purpose of cultural policy is to ensure the potential of culture to be a free, independent and challenging force in society. This should form the basis of efforts to foster mutual respect and inter-cultural dialogue.</p> | <p>The European Commission shares and welcomes this reference to cultural rights.</p> |
| <p>5. The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to prioritise the further development of cultural diplomacy with a view to introducing it into the European Union's foreign policy.</p> | <p>"The Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy" issued in June 2016 already acknowledged the role of culture in European Union external relations. In</p> |

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| | <p>line with this, the Joint Communication proposes a more strategic European Union approach towards cultural diplomacy.</p> |
| <p>6. The Committee of the Regions is appreciative of the fact that throughout the Communication, culture and cultural heritage are recognised as instruments for regional and local development. Putting in place a comprehensive framework and consistent approach to enhancing cultural activities will on the one hand create strong European added value and, on the other, can encourage the design and development of programmes at regional and city level in the Member States and with third country partners, which will be of mutual benefit for all those involved.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees with the Committee of the Regions and shares the positive assessment on the current and potential role of local authorities in cultural policy, also in the follow up to the Habitat III New Urban Agenda.</p> |
| <p>7. The Committee of the Regions stresses that cultural diversity is an integral part of the European Union's values and that the European Union is firmly committed to promoting an international order based on peace, the rule of law, freedom of expression, mutual understanding and respect for fundamental rights.</p> <p>Moreover, as a key partner of the United Nations, the European Union should continue to cooperate closely with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) to protect the world's cultural heritage.</p> <p>As a party to the 2005 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) Convention, the European Union should also live up to its commitment to promote the diversity of cultural expression in its international</p> | <p>As a party to the 2005 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the European Union is committed to promoting the diversity of cultural expressions as a key component of its international cultural relations. The European Union works to advance the ratification and implementation of the Convention, by deepening policy dialogues with partner countries and strengthening systems of governance.</p> <p>The European Union cooperates closely with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) to safeguard the world's cultural heritage, a commitment that was also reaffirmed in the 2014 Communication on Cultural Heritage³⁸. This work remains urgent in view of</p> |

³⁸ COM(2014) 477 final.

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| <p>cultural relations.</p> | <p>the destruction of cultural heritage in conflict zones such as Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. The Commission will continue to contribute to international efforts led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) for the protection of cultural heritage sites.</p> |
| <p>9. European cultural diplomacy focuses on promoting Europe and its Member States, including educational and cultural exchanges. However, it also targets public opinion in third countries, with a clear interest in promoting a positive image of Europe and its Member States. The importance of cultural diplomacy also covers dialogue between countries, the promotion of peace and cultural diversity, and economic exchange;</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees with the role that cultural diplomacy plays in promoting a positive image of the European Union and its Member States in third countries.</p> <p>The European Commission recalls the active role played by European Union Delegations already now in promoting the European Union's image. The Joint Communication foresees an enhanced role for European Union Delegations, inter alia through support for joint European Union cultural events.</p> |
| <p>15. The Committee of the Regions emphasises the intrinsic value of artistic and cultural production and stresses that culture should not be seen purely as a means to an end. Exchanges between culture professionals should therefore be a priority. Promoting the mobility of artists and of cultural content is an important task for the European Union in the area of cultural policy, since it has a European added value.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees and refers to the point made for paragraph 21. Since 2008, the Commission has been working on the topic of artists' mobility through the Open Method of Coordination with Member States and experts groups, facilitating the exchange of good practices and peer-learning. A legislative proposal to amend the Regulation on the Visa Code³⁹ (the so-called Visa Code Recast⁴⁰) and a legislative proposal for a Regulation establishing a touring visa⁴¹ were part of the package proposed by the European Commission in April 2014 to change the Schengen Area visa rules. Both legislative</p> |

³⁹ Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code), OJ L 243, 15.9.2009.

⁴⁰ COM(2014) 164 final.

⁴¹ COM(2014) 163 final.

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| | proposals are currently being examined by the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament. |
| <p>16. The Committee of the Regions is of the view that the proposed European Union strategy on international cultural relations needs to be targeted in close coordination with the Member States, and thus to include provisions for: a) specific operating and enforcement policy mechanisms, based on a common coordination framework involving all parties and b) specific objectives and a clear implementation deadline for its various policies.</p> | <p>Recognising complementarity and subsidiarity as guiding principles in the field of European Union international cultural relations, the Joint Communication proposes a more strategic approach through enhanced cooperation with Member States, their National Cultural Institutes, and other relevant cultural actors. To ensure policy coherence and avoid duplication, the proposed approach builds upon existing thematic and geographic cooperation frameworks and financing instruments. The strategy relies on a gradual approach to identify specific geographic priorities and objectives, together with the relevant actors.</p> |
| <p>17. The Committee of the Regions reiterates its previous positions on the cultural and creative sectors for growth and employment, and its calls on the one hand for the cultural and creative sectors to be better incorporated into the Europe2020 strategy and, on the other, for the importance of the links between these sectors and other policy areas, such as industry, tourism, the environment, education and financing, to be recognised.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees and refers to the point made for paragraph 23.</p> |
| <p>18. The Committee of the Regions maintains that a priority for Member States and European Union partner countries must be to make cultural activities truly inclusive and accessible to all, irrespective of people's age, gender, disability, nationality, race, ethnic origin, religion, or socio-economic background. Encouraging greater involvement and participation of young</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees with the Committee of the Regions that intercultural dialogue and culture may have a very important role in promoting social inclusion and social cohesion and are a very important aspect of the Joint Communication as regards, for example, development policy.</p> |

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| <p>people in the design and roll-out of inclusive cultural activities is key to social integration.</p> | |
| <p>19. Cultural industries (cinema, art, literature, etc.) are one of the sectors with the greatest influence on cultural diplomacy and reach very diverse audiences due to the way in which they are disseminated. Cultural diplomacy should provide strong support for the dissemination of these industries abroad, with the aim of strengthening Europe's image in the world.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees and recalls the key role attributed to the cultural and creative sectors in the Joint Communication.</p> |
| <p>20. The Committee of the Regions considers that one particular aspect of the European Union strategy on international cultural relations is coordinating European Union actions with those of its partner countries in the area of refugees and migrants. The recent crisis and increase in refugee flows into the European Union pose new challenges which need to be properly addressed. The development of cultural activities could play a pivotal role by: a) alleviating anxiety, unrest and distrust; b) promoting a closer understanding of cultural identities and backgrounds; c) reinforcing the process of integrating refugees into society; d) consolidating and safeguarding the established European Union model of a free, democratic and tolerant society; e) fostering mutual respect between refugee and host communities and f) demonstrating to European society the welcome enjoyed by our ancestors in the past when they were forced to emigrate outside the continent for economic, political or religious reasons or due to war.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees with the Committee of the Regions on the role culture can play in strengthening social cohesion with particular reference to the integration of migrants and refugees. The European Commission recalls in this regard the work carried out in 2016 in the context of the open method of coordination in culture, where a group of experts from the Member States has drawn up a report on how culture and the arts can promote intercultural dialogue, in the context of the migratory and refugee crisis. A special call under the Creative Europe Programme in 2016 was devoted to projects supporting Refugee Integration.</p> <p>In line with the Communication "Lives in Dignity: from Aid-Dependence to Self-Reliance" adopted in April 2016⁴², the European Commission puts forward a holistic and development-focused policy framework to address forced displacement situations. The Communication aims in particular to prevent forced displacement from becoming protracted and to gradually</p> |

⁴² COM(2016) 234 final.

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| | <p>end dependence on humanitarian assistance by fostering self-reliance and enabling the displaced to live in dignity, including as contributors to their host societies, until a durable solution is found. With the right conditions in place, refugees and displaced people can give positive social and economic contributions by, for instance, accessing labour markets, importing new skills, and increasing demand for food and services.</p> <p>This approach is fully embedded in the <i>ad hoc</i> tools implemented by the European Commission to address the challenges of the refugee crisis, such as the European Union Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis, the Facility for Refugees in Turkey and the Emergency Trust Fund addressing root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement in Africa.</p> |
| <p>21. The Committee of the Regions considers [...] that there is an urgent need to step up cultural activities aimed at promoting better knowledge of artistic and cultural expression and of the cultural heritage that exists in Europe. It believes that important tools here are mobility programmes, such as Erasmus+, inter-university cooperation and Horizon 2020, the largest multilateral research and innovation Programme in the world, as they serve to keep channels of communication open and facilitate the exchange of ideas, independently of people's cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees on the importance of the European Union mobility programmes, highlighting the contribution of programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 and acknowledging the role of European Union Alumni as the best ambassadors of European values. The 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage will also contribute to promote better knowledge, sharing and appreciation of Europe's cultural heritage, history and values.</p> |
| <p>23. The Committee of the Regions reiterates its previously expressed views on</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees with the Committee of the Regions and</p> |

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| <p>the cultural and creative sectors for growth and jobs⁴³, according to which if economic benefits are to be maximised, it will be necessary to facilitate the production and consumption of cultural products and to stimulate creativity. The Committee of the Regions underscores the importance of cultivating creative skills from an early age, both in education and as a recreational activity, so that the young generation can fully benefit from the new forms of access to culture.</p> | <p>refers to the role of cultural and creative industries as a lever to economic growth, e.g. in development cooperation policy. This aspect may be fostered.</p> <p>The European Commission welcomes this paragraph and stresses the need to cultivate creative skills and also skills for global citizenship, and intercultural competence, to enhance reflexive and critical thinking, mutual understanding and tolerance.</p> <p>In 2012 the European Commission presented a vision for a coherent policy to support the cultural and creative sectors⁴⁴, and identified several drivers for their growth. Working on this basis, the European Commission promotes investment and innovation within the sector and focuses its action on addressing four main challenges - access to finance, an adequate regulatory environment for the Cultural and Creative Industries, better cross-sectoral cooperation, and skills development.</p> |
| <p>26. The Committee of the Regions considers it essential to develop a tool that specifically targets young talent, promoting their mobility and opportunities for training and exchanges with other countries, not only in the European Union but also further afield. It could take as a starting point the idea of an Erasmus Programme for young creators, which would in turn pay special attention to young people in the most remote regions, such as the outermost regions, who, due to the special characteristics of the regions in which they reside, often have</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees and refers to the point made for paragraph 21.</p> |

⁴³CDR181-2010_FIN_AC.

⁴⁴ COM(2012)537 final.

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| <p>limited access to mobility programmes under the same conditions as young people on the continent.</p> | |
| <p>32. The Committee of the Regions draws attention to the fact that the future strategy could contribute to laying the foundations for sustainable tourism in the European Union's neighbouring countries and promote recognition of the significant benefits generated by cultural heritage at local and regional level.</p> | <p>The European Union has already provided support for rehabilitation of cultural heritage in the Western Balkans notably via the Regional Cooperation Council - Task Force on Culture and Society. Overall, some EUR 3.2 million was granted for Preserving and Restoring Cultural Heritage in the Western Balkans.</p> <p>In addition, the European Commission plans to support the development of tourism in the Western Balkan region by supporting the endorsement of the South East Europe Tourism Expert Group, working under the auspices of the Regional Cooperation Council. Support worth EUR 5 million will be granted to activities related to development and promotion of joint regional tourism products for international travellers, mitigation of main sector barriers, and implementation of small-scale pilot projects so as to create an adequate local infrastructure for development of regional tourist products.</p> |
| <p>33. The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to include the Committee of the Regions in the planning phase, and regional and local authorities in the development and implementation of the strands of action and measures proposed in the Joint Communication, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.</p> | <p>The European Commission appreciates the Committee of the Regions' support and acknowledges the positive role that regions and local authorities could play in the successful implementation of the initiative.</p> |
| <p>36. The Committee of the Regions suggests including regional and local stakeholders in the European Union Cultural Diplomacy Platform set up in</p> | <p>The Cultural Diplomacy Platform aims at carrying out activities enhancing the European Union's cultural engagement with third countries and their citizens,</p> |

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| <p>February 2016, focusing on strategic partners.</p> | <p>mostly by supporting and advising European Union Institutions, including the European Union Delegations across the globe, and setting up a global cultural leadership training programme. The consortium implementing the platform has been selected following a call for tender; however, in carrying out its activities the platform takes into account the role of local and regional stakeholders</p> |
| <p>37. The Committee of the Regions recalls previous Committee of the Regions positions in which it considered the European Capitals of Culture as a valuable initiative that highlights the wealth, diversity and common aspects of European cultures. Together with the European Heritage Label initiative, they could be further used as laboratories for cooperation and citizen participation.</p> | <p>The European Commission shares the view of the Committee of the Regions on the value of initiatives such as European Capitals of Culture and the European heritage label and intends to develop their potential as laboratories for cooperation and citizen participation, as suggested by the Committee of the Regions.</p> |
| <p>38. The Committee of the Regions maintains its previous position in favour of opening the European Capitals of Culture initiative to the participation not only of cities from candidate countries and potential candidate countries, but also European Neighbourhood Policy countries and European Free Trade Association countries⁴⁵. The European Capitals of Culture initiative represents a potential contribution to the European Neighbourhood Policy as well as to relations with other European countries, since not only does it help strengthen cultural cooperation within the European Union, it also helps develop even closer ties between the European Union and the eastern and southern neighbouring</p> | <p>On 17 June 2016, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Decision amending Decision No 445/2014/EU⁴⁶ with the view to opening the European Capitals of Culture action to European Free Trade Association/ European Economic Area countries participating in Creative Europe or subsequent Union programmes supporting culture. This proposal is under negotiation by the European Parliament and the Council. Regarding European Neighbourhood Policy countries, the European Commission considers that their participation in the Creative Europe Programme in line with the provisions of Article 8 of the Programme's legal base would be a</p> |

⁴⁵ CDR2077-2012_00_00_TRA_AC.

⁴⁶ COM(2016) 400 final.

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| <p>countries, with the aim of promoting prosperity, stability and security on the European Union's external borders.</p> | <p>better and more appropriate way to develop closer ties between them and the European Union.</p> |
| <p>39. The Committee of the Regions underlines that local and regional authorities have important remits in promoting intercultural dialogue, as many intercultural initiatives are coordinated at local and/or regional level. Local and regional authorities are, on account of their proximity to citizens, strategically well-placed to respond to the specific needs and demands of the different cultural groups within their territories, and to effectively mobilise them to promote greater intercultural dialogue.</p> | <p>The European Commission acknowledges the fundamental role of local and regional authorities. A successful implementation of this strategic approach to international cultural relations includes government at all levels, local cultural organisations and civil society, as well as of the European Union Institutions, Member States and their cultural institutes.</p> |
| <p>40. The Committee of the Regions keenly awaits the European Commission's legislative proposal with a view to combating trafficking of heritage; it underlines that this proposal should cover not only illicit imports of cultural goods into the European Union but also illicit exports of European Union cultural goods with a view to combating trafficking and protecting national treasures with artistic, historic or archaeological value; it insists, however, that this proposal must not foresee disproportionate restrictions on legitimate trade in cultural goods and must keep administrative burden for legitimate traders to an absolute minimum. The Committee of the Regions considers it essential that strict measures be also proposed in relation to unauthorised excavations in the European Union.</p> | <p>The 2017 Commission Work Programme envisages a Regulation on the import of cultural goods into the European Union. The European Commission also recalls that Council Regulation (EC) No 116/2009⁴⁷ already provides rules for the export of cultural goods with a view to their protection. It ensures that uniform controls are carried out on these exports at the external borders of the European Union.</p> |

⁴⁷ Council Regulation (EC) No 116/2009 of 18 December 2008 on the export of cultural goods (Codified version), OJ L 39, 10.2.2009.

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| <p>N°13 Effective water management system: an approach to innovative solutions (own-initiative opinion) CoR 2016/3691 – ENVE-VI/014 121st Plenary Session - February 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Cees LOGGEN (NL/ALDE) DG ENV – Commissioner VELLA</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>10. The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to ensure, as part of a balanced and coherent approach, that water reuse is only employed as an additional water supply option and in parallel with improvements in efficiency on the demand side, and that the possible impacts of reduced availability of water have to be analysed and taken into account.</p> | <p>The "Guidelines on Integrating Water Reuse into Water Planning and Management in the context of the Water Framework Directive"⁴⁸, endorsed by the Water Directors of the Member States and the European Commission in June 2016, provide information and assistance to relevant Member State authorities to support planning for the reuse of treated wastewater, where appropriate. It is therefore for the competent authorities in the Member States to decide, in each case, whether water reuse is necessary or is the most adequate tool to deal with problems of water scarcity. The legislative instrument that is being prepared concerns the establishment of common minimum quality requirements for the reused water and will not touch on whether or not water reuse will be one of the measures chosen by Member States.</p> |
| <p>18. The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to explore the possibilities for adaptive policy within the area of water policy as part of the upcoming review of the Drinking Water Directive, the</p> | <p>The ongoing impact assessment for the Drinking Water Directive⁴⁹ revision is looking at different options related to the aspects highlighted by the Committee of the Regions, and their</p> |

⁴⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/pdf/Guidelines_on_water_reuse.pdf.

⁴⁹ Council Directive 98/83/EC of 3 November 1998 on the quality of water intended for human consumption, OJ L 330, 5.12.1998.

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| <p>measures relating to the use of water, the possible review of the Urban Waste Water Directive and ultimately the review of the Water Framework Directive. This exploration should focus on the most important requirements for adaptive policy, i.e. comprehensiveness, information exchange, flexibility and differentiation in objectives and the efforts to be made, and innovation. When exploring possibilities for a new policy, the Commission should consult with local and regional authorities to ensure any future proposals are in the best interest of local and regional authorities, supporting rather than reducing their competencies.</p> | <p>various impacts will be taken into due account when formulating a legislative proposal. At all stages of the process, and starting in follow-up of the European Citizens' Initiative "Right2Water", the public and stakeholders (including representatives of local and regional competent authorities and public water services suppliers) have been consulted and actively involved.</p> <p>The planned evaluations of the Urban Waste-Water Directive⁵⁰ and of the Water Framework Directive⁵¹ – when started – will apply the same principles of comprehensive consultation.</p> |
| <p>19 The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to convert its largely sectoral water policy into comprehensive policy and therefore asks the European Commission to ensure that water management is included as a horizontal element in other policy areas that are closely connected with this resource, such as human consumption, energy, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, the environment, etc.</p> | <p>This kind of integration of water policy with other European Union policies is seen by the European Commission as absolutely necessary for an adequate implementation of the Water Framework Directive. The ongoing work on the links between water policy and agricultural policy, within the European Commission but also among the senior decision makers in the Member States in the two sectors concerned, is a good example of significant progress being made in this domain. Integration work is also progressing significantly in the other domains mentioned by the Committee of the Regions.</p> |
| <p>22. The Committee of the Regions draws attention to the increasing use of medicines such as antibiotics, for example, the active ingredients of which find their way into surface water via the sewer system. This</p> | <p>The European Commission acknowledges that pollution of the environment by human and veterinary pharmaceutical substances is an emerging environmental problem. It is</p> |

⁵⁰ Council Directive 91/271/EEC of 21 May 1991 concerning urban waste-water treatment, OJ L 135, 30.5.1991.

⁵¹ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, OJ L 327, 22.12.2000.

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| <p>creates more work for the sector producing drinking water from surface water, but may also lead to a greater risk of antibiotic resistance. The solution to this problem lies in an approach focusing on the diffuse sources of residual medications: leftover medicines and drug residues in urine and faeces.</p> | <p>committed to developing a strategic approach to address the issue, and a study is underway to support the process.</p> |
| <p>27. The Committee of the Regions asks the European Commission to boost the exchange of information from those who implement water policy, i.e. local and regional authorities, to policy-makers in Brussels and to factor this information, e.g. about conflicting objectives, into its new policy or any adjustments to its policy.</p> | <p>The European Commission would like to refer to the statement provided above, on point 18, concerning the participation of all the relevant stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, in the development of new policy or in modifications of existing policies.</p> |
| <p>28. The Committee of the Regions expects the planned revision of the Drinking Water Directive to improve the monitoring systems and analysis parameters, ensure better access to information on drinking water quality for citizens, address the problem of leakages, develop the regulatory framework for small or individual drinking water supplies, propose solutions to the problems caused by materials in contact with drinking water, and update the existing derogations from the legislation.</p> | <p>Further to the information provided in the European Commission's position on point 18, and as can be seen in the inception impact assessment that was published on 28 February 2017, the concrete issues highlighted by the Committee of the Regions are duly considered in the review process.</p> |
| <p>29. The Committee of the Regions insists that a future revision of the Urban Waste-Water Treatment Directive should aim in particular at improving the monitoring, reporting and public dissemination of data, and strongly recommends that links to the circular economy and resource efficiency in the European Union be taken into account. Member States should have their reporting requirements relaxed at least to the extent of the obligations they have already met.</p> | <p>In the first instance, the European Commission has the intention to carry out an ex-post evaluation of the Urban Waste-Water Treatment Directive, following the rules of the Better Regulation procedures. The performance of all the elements of the Directive will be evaluated, in view of the achievement of its objectives. The aspects listed by the Committee of the Regions will be investigated in so far as they are relevant for that evaluation. Depending on the outcome of the</p> |

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| | <p>evaluation, the European Commission will decide if an impact assessment in view of a possible revision is warranted. Should that be the case, the potential to address the issues listed by the Committee of the Regions in a revision will be taken into due account.</p> |
| <p>32. The Committee of the Regions notes that there is tension between the water quality objectives and the Common Agricultural Policy and asks the European Commission to ensure better alignment between these two policy areas. The European Union should avoid increasing such conflicts and the related administrative burdens of having to implement potentially conflicting legislation, but rather seek the most efficient, cost-effective and mutually reinforcing compromises.</p> | <p>As mentioned above on point 19, the European Commission recognises the importance of promoting an active cooperation between the water and agriculture authorities at all levels, to ensure a full understanding of the needs of the two sectors and manage those different needs in the most efficient way.</p> |
| <p>34. The Committee of the Regions asks the European Commission to explore the possibilities for a more flexible, differentiated water policy. Flexibility is necessary due to the uncertainty surrounding future water problems. Water policy – both its objective and approach – will therefore need to find a balance between the necessary legal certainty to allow long-term planning and multi-annual, cost-intensive investments on the one hand, and the need to adapt to new circumstances when necessary, on the other. It is therefore necessary to differentiate objectives in terms of time and place in order to boost the effectiveness of measures and increase ownership, without this leading to more modest ambitions.</p> | <p>The European Commission takes note of the views expressed. It will carry out an evaluation of the Water Framework Directive in 2019, as foreseen in Article 19 of the Directive. It will only be after the conclusion of this evaluation that the European Commission will be able to take a position on whether or not modifications are needed and, consequently, whether a proposal for a revision of the Directive will be made.</p> |
| <p>35. The Committee of the Regions asks the European Commission to develop an alternative to the "one out = all out" monitoring standard in the Water</p> | <p>The European Commission considers the "one-out, all-out" principle as a fundamental principle in the Water Framework Directive. At the same</p> |

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| <p>Framework Directive. The "one out = all out" principle does not provide as good a picture of the actual ecological and chemical situation and of the efforts already undertaken to improve water quality. It is necessary to develop a monitoring tool that reflects the results already achieved in the Member States, in order to ensure ownership of the necessary measures among other things".</p> | <p>time, the European Commission also recognises the need to present the state of implementation of the Directive not only in terms of the global status of water bodies but also in terms of the progress made on individual parameters. In this sense, the European Commission produced a document on indicators of progress, which was endorsed by the Water Directors of the European Union in November 2015. These indicators will be reviewed in the face of the actual reporting from Member States and will then be used by the European Commission and Member States to show the progress in implementation of the Directive even in situations in which the global status has not improved.</p> |
| <p>36. The Committee of the Regions is convinced that, alongside innovation in policy, further technical innovations are of the utmost importance in order to face current and future water problems⁵². In order to support this kind of innovation, the Committee stresses the possible benefit of a European Union-level European water innovation action agenda towards a sustainable and circular water-smart society. Such a framework would help to encourage Member States and local and regional authorities, with support from the European Commission, to apply systemic innovative approaches and set up or facilitate partnerships in water innovation projects. Although existing knowledge platforms and financing opportunities for innovation are developing, increasing and expanding significantly, the Committee of the Regions identifies two obstacles hampering the</p> | <p>The European Union regulatory framework is a key enabler for innovation and competitiveness. In this respect, in the context of Better Regulation (designing new, reviewing existing European Union policies), the European Commission is taking actions in designing more innovation-friendly legislation. This is done by using an innovation principle assessing impacts to innovation in water and water-related sectors in any relevant European Union policy initiatives by explicitly using the research and innovation tool in the Better Regulation toolbox. In this context, an additional practical step, such as the Directorate-General for Research, Science and Innovation's initiative on "Research and Innovation projects for policy" on water reuse, for example, has been</p> |

⁵² For example, after secondary purification, waste-water is a good source for drinking water production, particularly when compared to desalination. The task here, though, is to win public acceptance.

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| <p>implementation of innovative solutions. The Committee of the Regions therefore calls on the European Commission to:</p> <p>a) further reduce the administrative burden involved in accessing European innovation funds through collaboration and investment to prevent major long term challenges to water management across the European Union. An important point of concern is the conflicting legislation on state aid and the difficulty businesses experience in accessing innovation funds;</p> <p>b) explore the possibility of allowing room for experimentation in situations where restrictions from other policy areas are hampering the implementation of innovative solutions.</p> | <p>started. This process is expanding and will cover other European Union policy-relevant sectors.</p> <p>It should be underlined that Research and Innovation is one of the key drivers for Europe in rising growth and competitiveness. Therefore, the European Commission is taking a new initiative in analysing barriers to innovation in the pilot "Innovation Deals" initiative.</p> |
| <p>37. The Committee of the Regions stresses that water management is a capital-intensive policy area in which major investments are made, and that these investments will only increase further in the future. Adopting a broader scope to defining problems and approaching problem-solving and improving the integration of related policy areas (such as agriculture, energy, health), as already advocated by the existing legislation, reduces the chance of disinvestment and creates new opportunities and a breeding ground for innovation. The challenge lies in making sensible decisions that do justice to what we wish to preserve now, but that also provide sufficient scope for tackling uncertain future challenges, in order to manage the source of life.</p> | <p>In the context of Horizon 2020, the European Commission is promoting research and innovation activities in the field of water that prioritise actions which take a systemic approach. This approach calls for the adoption of a challenge-driven, solutions-oriented research and innovation strategy that crosses disciplinary boundaries and involves co-creation of knowledge and co-delivery of outcomes with economic, industrial and research actors, public authorities and/or civil society. In this context, integrated approaches, including nature- and ecosystem-based solutions, recognizing the critical nexus between water, energy and food and the complex interactions between ecosystems and human activity, especially in a changing climate, are considered.</p> |

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| <p>N°14 Mid-term evaluation of the LIFE Programme (outlook opinion) CoR 2016/4126 - ENVE-VI/016; 121st Plenary Session - February 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Witold STEPIEŃ (PL/EPP) DG ENV – Commissioner VELLA</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions calls for a delegated act, in accordance with Article 9(4) Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) Regulation⁵³, to increase the allocation of funds to action grants under the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) for Nature and Biodiversity, and for increasing LIFE's contribution to Natura 2000 funding substantially after 2020.</p> | <p>The services of the European Commission can confirm that the total funds requested over two consecutive years by way of proposals that fall under the priority area of Nature and Biodiversity and that meet minimum quality requirements exceed by more than 20% the corresponding amount calculated for the two years preceding those years.</p> <p>On this basis, the European Commission considers an increase of the percentage of the budgetary resources allocated to projects supported by way of action grants under the sub- programme for Environment for projects supporting the conservation of nature and biodiversity. This would allow contributing to the envisaged action plan in relation to the Habitats⁵⁴ and Birds Directives⁵⁵. With regards to the 'Fitness Check' of the European Union Birds and Habitats Directives (the 'Nature Directives'), the European Commission published the final Staff</p> |

⁵³ Regulation (EU) No 1293/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the establishment of a Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) and repealing Regulation (EC) No 614/2007 Text with EEA relevance, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013.

⁵⁴ Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, OJ L 206, 22.7.1992.

⁵⁵ Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds, OJ L 20, 26.1.2010.

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| | <p>Working Document in December 2016⁵⁶. The Fitness Check concluded that, within the framework of broader European Union biodiversity policy, the Nature Directives are fit for purpose, but fully achieving their objectives and realising their full potential will depend on substantial improvement in their implementation in relation to both effectiveness and efficiency, working in partnership with different stakeholder communities in the Member States and across the European Union, to deliver practical results on the ground.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions recommends maintaining and strengthening the sub-programme on climate in the 2nd Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) Multiannual Work Programme and after 2020, and strongly reinforcing the role of the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) in tackling the uneven and inadequate implementation and enforcement of European Union environment legislation, by further implementing the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) integrated projects and the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) priority area of Environmental Governance and Information.</p> | <p>The European Commission can confirm that the sub-programme on climate will be in the 2nd Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) Multiannual Work Programme. The 2nd Multiannual Work Programme is under preparation and should be adopted by the end of 2017 after consultation of the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) Committee.</p> <p>The mid-term evaluation on the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) is ongoing and at this stage it is too early to provide indications for the period after 2020.</p> <p>It is envisaged to continue implementing the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) Integrated Projects, and special attention will be devoted to the new Governance and Information priority area in the 2nd Multiannual Work Programme.</p> |

⁵⁶ SWD(2016) 472 final.

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| <p>The Committee of the Regions calls for an increase of the co-financing rate in the next Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) and suggests that the ongoing phasing out of the national allocations for the traditional Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) projects should be re-considered; and calls for further simplification of application and administration procedures.</p> | <p>The mid-term evaluation is ongoing and at this stage it is too early to provide indications for the period after 2020.</p> <p>The European Commission takes note of the concern of the Committee of the Regions regarding the rate of co-financing. The phasing out of the national allocation for traditional Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) projects will start in 2018. It is therefore too early to make an assessment of this measure.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to consider an appropriate financial model to strengthen marketing of prototypes and solutions developed in Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) projects to an industrial scale; and to consider extending the financial instruments (Private Finance for Energy Efficiency, Natural Capital Financing Facility) or introducing a new financial instrument, appropriately funded, with the aim of also attracting investors to the Environment and Resource Efficiency priority area.</p> | <p>Since the call in 2016, the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) environment priority area focusses on close to market solutions. This should allow improving prototypes and environmental solutions, including industrial upscaling.</p> <p>It is indeed envisaged to extend the pilot phase of the two existing Financial Instruments.</p> <p>Further measures to support successful prototypes and environmental solutions include making use of other instruments, for example phase three of the small and medium-sized enterprise instrument or innovation funds.</p> |
| <p>The Committee of the Regions welcomes the emphasis given in Article 3 of the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) Regulation and the 1st Multiannual Work Programme 2014-2017 for measuring the success of the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE), with new qualitative and quantitative environmental, social and economic indicators; the Committee of the Regions</p> | <p>Certain improvements may not be implemented immediately through the 2nd Multiannual Work Programme, due to legal constraints of the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) Regulation. It is not envisaged to make use of a delegated act as foreseen in Article 3.</p> |

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| <p>calls, however, for their further simplification, as several indicators cannot be credibly assessed within the timeframe of the projects. They should also be made more flexible and adapted to local or regional specifics, and the time spent on reporting minimised.</p> | |
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| <p>N°15 Towards a new EU climate change adaptation strategy – taking an integrated approach (own-initiative opinion) CoR 20162430 – ENVE-VI/015 121st Plenary Session - February 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Sirpa HERTELL (FI/EPP) DG CLIMA – Commissioner ARIAS CAÑETE</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>3. The Committee of the Regions acknowledges that, whilst the European Commission and Member States are key players in setting up the policy and regulatory frameworks, local and regional authorities stand at the frontline of reducing the vulnerability of their territories to the various impacts of climate change through concrete adaptation actions, and therefore stresses that a well-functioning multi-level governance framework is of crucial importance.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees on the overall approach of the Committee of the Regions' opinion as well as on the fact that a well-functioning multi-level governance framework is of crucial importance.</p> <p>The European Commission also agrees on the need for involvement of cities and regions in the preparation and implementation of the national adaptation strategies and plans.</p> <p>The European Commission has been encouraging and continues to encourage coordination between the different levels of governance as well as multi-stakeholder involvement, e.g. in the Guidelines on developing adaptation strategies, within the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy initiative or within the European Union Urban Agenda Partnerships.</p> <p>The Commission agrees on the essential role of regions and aims to strengthen their role, for example within the Covenant of Mayors.</p> |
| <p>8. The Committee of the Regions points out that the absence of a legislative prescriptive framework is perceived by local and regional authorities as an obstacle</p> | <p>The European Commission encourages Member States to adopt National Adaptation Strategies and Plans. Currently, around three quarters of</p> |

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| <p>to action in certain Member States. These would therefore welcome a clearer mandate from the European Union and national authorities to take action on adaptation. At the national level, the Committee of the Regions welcomes the recent efforts taken by some Member States in mainstreaming adaptation considerations into specific legislation (e.g. following the Water Framework Directive⁵⁷ and Floods Directive⁵⁸).</p> | <p>these countries have adopted such strategies/plans. In the evaluation of the European Union Adaptation Strategy, the European Commission will assess actions taken at national, regional and local level.</p> |
| <p>9. The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to examine how many local and regional authorities, in the European Union and per Member State, have an adaptation strategy or plan. On this basis, the European Commission, in cooperation with local and regional authorities, could propose European Union-wide and national targets to foster further development of local and regional adaptation strategies/plans by local and regional authorities.</p> | <p>The European Commission will examine how to foster further development of local and regional adaptation strategies/plans.</p> |
| <p>13. The Committee of the Regions highlights the importance of building further capacities and addressing knowledge gaps in European cities and regions.</p> | <p>The European Commission agrees on the importance of capacity-building in cities and regions and aims to continue strengthening it through the increased dissemination of best practice examples, the upscaling of city-to-city cooperation and the reinforcement of synergies with other relevant initiatives. The European Commission looks forward to the contribution of the "Committee of the Regions Covenant Ambassadors" in this area.</p> |
| <p>18. The Committee of the Regions acknowledges that all levels of government</p> | <p>The European Commission supports vulnerability assessment through</p> |

⁵⁷ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, OJ L 327, 22.12.2000.

⁵⁸ Directive 2007/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 on the assessment and management of flood risks (Text with EEA relevance), OJ L 288, 6.11.2007.

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| <p>– including cities and regions – need a sound understanding of the climate risks and vulnerabilities on their territory to guide their decision making and policy shaping processes. In this regard, the Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to further support regional- and local-level risk and vulnerability assessment frameworks.</p> | <p>different funding instruments, such as the European Structural and Investment Funds and the Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE). The European Commission will further contribute to support regional- and local-level risk and vulnerability assessment, through improved climate services under Horizon 2020 and the Copernicus Climate Change Service, which will provide climate projections at regional scales.</p> |
| <p>29. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the existing European Union financing instruments to support local and regional climate action (e.g. European Structural and Investment Funds, but also Horizon 2020, Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE), European Union Solidarity Fund, Natural Capital Financing Facility), but stresses that accessing those funds is still the biggest challenge faced by cities and regions. The Committee of the Regions calls therefore on the European Commission to provide European local and regional authorities with 1) easily-accessible and understandable information on funds and financial instruments available for the development and implementation of their action plans and 2) further guidance and support on how to access and apply the existing instruments, and also possibly combine them.</p> | <p>The European Commission aims to continue facilitating access to funding for local and regional authorities, e.g. through the "One-stop shop" portal for cities⁵⁹. The European Commission also intends to continue and increase the existing funding and innovative instruments for local and regional adaptation.</p> |
| <p>38. The Committee of the Regions acknowledges that, over the last years, the international dialogue on climate issues has intensified and led to new international agreements – such as the Sendai</p> | <p>The European Commission intends to continue embedding its action in the relevant global frameworks, e.g. through the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the Global Climate</p> |

⁵⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/eu-regional-and-urban-development/cities>.

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| <p>Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change – and therefore invites the Commission to embed its action further in these global frameworks, reinforce its exemplary role as well as help to build synergies between them.</p> | <p>Action Agenda as well as the contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The European Commission also aims to continue facilitating the management of trans-boundary risks as well as encouraging region-to-region cooperation.</p> |
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| <p>N°16 The need for and way towards an EU-strategy on alcohol-related issues (own-initiative opinion) CoR 2016/1831 – NAT-VI/010 121st Plenary Session – February 2017 Rapporteur: Ms Ewa-May KARLSSON (SE/ALDE) DG SANTE - Commissioner ANDRIUKAITIS</p> | |
| <p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p> | <p>Commission position</p> |
| <p>1. The Committee of the Regions calls for a new European Union alcohol strategy.</p> | <p>At the present time, the European Commission is not planning a new strategy. The European Commission remains fully committed to supporting Member States' efforts to reduce alcohol abuse and the harm that it causes and to achieve the relevant World Health Organization targets and Sustainable Development Goals.</p> |
| <p>2. The Committee of the Regions asks to cover preventive aspects of alcohol-related harm and/ or alcohol's harm to others, which are missing in the current concept of alcohol prevention measures included in the European Commission's future action on chronic diseases.</p> | <p>The European Commission is working on a holistic approach towards tackling chronic diseases, which involves addressing the main risk factors (unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, tobacco and alcohol) together.</p> <p>This approach does not preclude alcohol-specific action unrelated to non-communicable diseases. The European Commission will continue to support action on important policy areas related to alcohol such as drink driving, drinking during pregnancy, labelling, reducing alcohol content, alcohol at the workplace, training and age limits, marketing and advertising. The European Commission will continue supporting Member States by convening the Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action and by using the Health Programme.</p> <p>In addition, alcohol use/abuse will be</p> |

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| | <p>included, as appropriate, as a topic in the November 2017 country health profiles developed by the Commission, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Observatory for Health Systems and Policies, as part of the "State of Health in the European Union" cycle.</p> |
| <p>3. The Committee of the Regions stresses that future action on alcohol should seek greater synergies with the World Health Organization's action plan and the United Nation's sustainable development goals.</p> | <p>The European Commission is reinforcing the link between the European Union Alcohol and Health Forum with the World Health Organization action plan and Sustainable Development Goals by requiring all voluntary commitments made within the Forum to be directly linked to the World Health Organisation action plan and Sustainable Development Goals.</p> |
| <p>4. The Committee of the Regions points out that both the Action Plan on Youth Drinking and on Heavy Episodic Drinking and the Joint Action on Reducing Alcohol-Related Harm will conclude in 2016; it notes that it is essential to extend the Joint Action and/ or put in place a new action plan for children and young people.</p> | <p>The European Commission is coordinating the implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan on Youth Drinking and on Heavy Episodic Drinking, which the Member State Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action has prolonged until 2020. World Health Organization plans to carry out and publish work in the area of the Action Plan on Youth Drinking and on Heavy Episodic Drinking in 2018.</p> <p>Two projects are currently running with the support of the Health Programme to tackle youth drinking and heavy episodic drinking with a budget of about EUR 1 million and two more are to start in 2017. The 2017 work plan of the Health Programme makes available another EUR 1 million to support Member State action to</p> |

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| | reduce alcohol abuse and the harm that it causes. |
| <p>5. The Committee of the Regions underlines the importance of providing European Union-level support for research and suggests that a science group be established to support the process of scientific evidence gathering.</p> | <p>The European Commission has increased the involvement of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre in the provision of scientific support to its action to reduce alcohol-related harm and in the support of the European Union Alcohol and Health Forum. In this context, the establishment of a separate science group is not considered to bring any additional benefits.</p> <p>In addition, the European Commission has been actively promoting the knowledge transfer of some of the most relevant alcohol-related projects that were funded under its research programmes and via the Health Programme. The two last meetings of the Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action included discussions on the projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alcohol Measures for Public Health Research Alliance (AMPHORA) that provided new scientific evidence for the most effective public health measures to reduce alcohol-related harm; - Addiction and Lifestyles in Contemporary Europe - Reframing Addictions Project (ALICE RAP) that contributed with trans-disciplinary research to advanced synergy among sciences that address substance use and addictive behaviours; and - Optimising Delivery of Health Care Interventions (ODHIN) that focused on research on the implementation of identification and brief intervention programmes for hazardous and harmful |

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| | alcohol consumption in primary health care. |
| 6. The Committee of the Regions asks to reduce the exposure of children and young people to alcohol marketing and advertising. The Committee of the Regions questions the effectiveness of self-monitoring and self-regulation in alcohol marketing and advertising. | <p>The European Commission's proposal to revise the Audiovisual Media Services Directive⁶⁰ is under discussion in the European Parliament and the Council. The proposal reinforces the provisions as regards the development of self- and co-regulation to protect minors from alcohol advertising. Those tools can be effective if they are based on clear premises and adequate and transparent monitoring and control of its performance and outcomes, including sanctions for non-compliance.</p> <p>The European Commission supports reducing the exposure of children and young people to alcohol marketing and advertising, and will contribute constructively to the legislative process on revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive.</p> |
| 7 The Committee of the Regions urges the European Union's Institutions to improve alcohol labelling at European Union level. | <p>The labelling report (Report from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council regarding the mandatory labelling of the list of ingredients and the nutrition declaration of alcoholic beverages)⁶¹ has been adopted. The European Commission requests the industry to develop, within a year, a self-regulatory proposal aiming to provide the list of ingredients and nutrition information on all alcoholic beverages, enabling consumers to make informed choices. Should the European Commission consider the self-regulatory approach proposed by the</p> |

⁶⁰ COM(2016) 287 final.

⁶¹ COM(2017) 58 final.

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| | industry as unsatisfactory, it would then launch an impact assessment to review further available options. |
| 8. The Committee of the Regions stresses that alcohol consumption should be addressed in the workplace, through early intervention. | The European Commission will continue to support the sharing of best practice in the Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action, including workplace-related actions. It will also emphasise alcohol issues in other sectors, including workplace, through a Health In All Policies approach. A framework contract to support Member States to tackle alcohol-related harm will be launched in 2017 and may include a specific action related to collecting best practice on addressing alcohol consumption and related harm at the workplace. |
| 9. The Committee of the Regions asks to improve road safety in the European Union. | In 2010, the European Commission launched a Communication "Towards a European road safety area: policy orientations on road safety 2011-2020" ⁶² . Within this framework, the European Commission adopted in 2015 the Directive (EU) 2015/413/EU ⁶³ facilitating the cross-border exchange of information on road safety-related traffic offences, including on driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. In addition, the European Commission will continue to support the sharing of best practice in the Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action, including actions related to drink driving. A framework contract to support Member State action will be launched in 2017 and include this |

⁶² COM(2010) 389 final.

⁶³ Directive (EU) 2015/413 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2015 facilitating cross-border exchange of information on road-safety-related traffic offences Text with EEA relevance, OJ L 68, 13.3.2015.

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