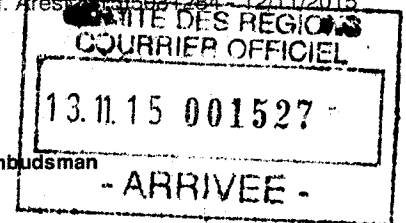


EUROPEAN COMMISSION
SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

Direction F – Relations with other Institutions
SG.F.3 - National Parliaments, Consultative Committees, Ombudsman

Ref. Ares(2015)5021284 - 12/11/2015



Brussels, 11 November 2015
SG F3/ESZ/

Dear Secretary General,

In conformity with the Protocol on Cooperation between the Commission and the Committee of the Regions, I am pleased to send you the follow-up given by the Commission to the opinions adopted by the Committee of the Regions during the plenary sessions of June and July 2015.

Yours faithfully,

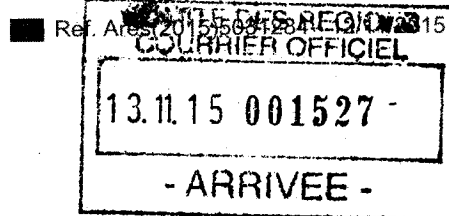
[signed]
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Director

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SUIVI ACCORDÉ PAR LA COMMISSION AUX AVIS DU

COMITÉ des RÉGIONS

SESSIONS PLENIERES DE JUIN ET JUILLET 2015

65^{ème} RAPPORT

N°	Titre	Références	Mois plénière
SG			
1. DG ECFIN associé	Utiliser au mieux la flexibilité offerte par les règles existantes du pacte de stabilité et de croissance Communication de la Commission au Parlement européen, au Conseil, à la Banque centrale européenne, au Comité économique et social européen, au Comité des régions et à la Banque européenne d'investissement - Utiliser au mieux la flexibilité offerte par les règles existantes du pacte de stabilité et de croissance Rapporteuse: M ^{me} Olga ZRIHEN (membre du Parlement wallon, BE/PSE)	COM(2015) 12 final COR-2015-01185-00-00-PAC-TRA - ECON-VI/002 Avis d'initiative	juillet
EMPL			
2.	Lignes directrices pour les politiques de l'emploi des États membres Proposition de décision du Conseil Rapporteur: M. Mauro D'ATTIS (conseiller de la commune de Brindisi, Italie/PPE)	COM(2015) 98 final – 2015/0051 (NLE) COR-2015-01419-00-00-PAC-TR SEDEC-VI/001	juin
ENV			
3.	Mieux protéger le milieu marin Rapporteur: M. Hermann KUHN (membre du parlement de la ville de Brême, Allemagne/PSE)	COR-2014-07256-00-02-PAC-TRA ENVE-VI/001 Avis d'initiative	juin

DEVCO			
4. DG ENV co-lead	Une vie décente pour tous: de la vision à l'action collective Communications de la Commission au Parlement européen, au Conseil, au Comité économique et social européen et au Comité des régions Rapporteur: M. Hans JANSSEN (maire d'Oisterwijk, Pays-Bas/PPE)	COM(2014) 335 final COM(2015) 44 final COR-2014-05701-00-03-PAC-TRA CIVEX-VI/001 Avis d'initiative	juin
TRADE			
5. DGs DEVCO, GROW, REGIO associés	Le soutien local et régional au commerce équitable en Europe Rapporteuse: M ^{me} Barbara DUDEN (membre du parlement de la ville de Hambourg, Allemagne/PSE)	COR-2014-05704-00-01-PAC-TRA CIVEX-VI/003 Avis d'initiative	juin
FISMA			
6.	Construire l'union des marchés des capitaux Rapporteur: M Tadeusz TRUSKOLASKI (maire de Białystok, PL/AE)	COM(2015) 63 final COR-2015-01184-00-01-PAC-TRA - ECON-VI/001 Avis d'initiative	juillet
NEAR			
7. co-lead EEAS	Vers une nouvelle politique européenne de voisinage Rapporteur: M. Nikolaos CHIOTAKIS (conseiller municipal de Kifissia, EL/PPE)	JOIN(2015) 6 final COR-2015-02671-00-02-PAC-TRA CIVEX-VI/004	juillet

REGIO			
8.	Résultats des négociations portant sur les accords de partenariat et les programmes opérationnels Rapporteur: M Ivan ŽAGAR (maire de la municipalité de Slovenska Bistrica SI/PPE)	COR-2014-06248-00-00-PAC-TRA COTER-VI/001 Avis d'initiative	juillet

N°1 Making the best use of the flexibility within the existing rules of the Stability and Growth Pact (own-initiative opinion)
COM(2015) 12 final – COR 2015/1185 - ECON-VI/002
113th Plenary Session - July 2015
Rapporteur: Ms Olga ZRIHEN (BE/PES)
SG – Vice-President DOMBROVSKIS

Points of the CoR opinion considered essential	Commission position
<p>1. The CoR questions the legal certainty provided by the "interpretative communication", given the fact that it is non-binding and that the SGP does not explicitly provide for use of this kind of legal instrument.</p>	<p>The Communication provides guidance for the implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP). It gives an interpretation of the existing rules, without altering the rules themselves. Indeed, due to the variety of economic and budgetary circumstances to be considered, the SGP provisions leave a margin of appreciation to the Commission and the Council. With the aim to provide transparency and predictability, the Commission provided further explanations of the SGP provisions without changing or replacing them.</p>
<p>2. The CoR considers that the conditions imposed on the application of flexibility, including the fact that flexibility is essentially limited to the preventive arm of the SGP, are too restrictive and that the flexibility in the area of investment should be extended to all the Member States, including those in the corrective arm, and calls on the Commission to make proposals to this end; all national co-financing for the EFSI should be exempt from SGP calculations irrespective of the Member States' situation with regard to the pact.</p>	<p>The Commission stresses in its Communication that the main purpose of the corrective arm of the Pact is to ensure the prompt correction of excessive deficits. Still, several elements of flexibility apply also to the corrective arm, as explicitly indicated in the Communication, namely i) the consideration of relevant factors (including structural reforms) when deciding whether opening an Excessive Deficit Procedure and when setting the extension of deadline for correcting excessive deficits; ii) the consideration of changed economic circumstances to</p>

	<p>distinguish between the policy effort and the budgetary outcome when assessing action taken to correct excessive deficits (so-called 'effective action methodology'). It is true that the existing rules do not allow taking account of structural reforms or investment when assessing whether a Member State has taken effective action in response to the Council recommendations to correct the excessive deficit.</p> <p>However, the Communication clarifies that initial national cash contributions to the EFSI will be considered as one-offs and will not be taken into account by the Commission when defining the structural fiscal adjustment under either the preventive or the corrective arm of the Pact.</p> <p>Moreover, in case of an excess over the deficit reference value, the Commission will not launch an Excessive Deficit Procedure (EDP) if this excess is only due to the contribution and is small and expected to be temporary. When assessing an excess over the debt reference value, initial national cash contributions to the EFSI will be considered by the Commission.</p>
<p>3. The CoR calls for public spending by Member States and local and regional authorities under Structural and Investment Fund co-financing not to be included among national or equivalent structural expenditure as defined in the SGP, without other conditions.</p>	<p>The Commission reiterates that, according to the TFEU, budgetary discipline is assessed against reference values that do not differentiate amid different kinds of expenditure. This reflects the fact that all deficit-financed expenditure must be repaid in future taxes and that any rule that grants special treatment to certain kinds of public expenditure creates spurious incentives for creative accounting.</p>

	<p>Therefore, a permanent exclusion of certain types of investment expenditure (such as those co-financed by European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds)) from the deficit and/or debt figures is not compatible with the SGP.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the Communication provides guidance on the conditions under which the Investment Clause can be applied, thereby also taking into account national expenditures on projects co-funded by the EU under the Structural and Cohesion policy.</p>
<p>4. The CoR believes that the structural reform clause applied under the preventive arm and the way structural reform plans are taken into account under the corrective arm can provide strong incentives, provided that the types of structural reform eligible under this new system are clearly defined.</p>	<p>The Commission underlines that the structural reform clause only concerns the preventive arm of the SGP. Yet, the Commission has leeway to consider structural reforms as part of the "relevant factors" when deciding to set the deadline for the correction of the excessive deficit. In the case of pension reforms it can also take these reforms into account at the point of closing an EDP.</p> <p>In all cases, the growth and budgetary implications of the structural reforms concerned by the clause should be detailed by Member States. In the case of an ex-ante invocation of the clause, Member States will be expected to present a comprehensive and detailed structural reform plan with well-specified measures and credible timelines for their adoption and implementation. The implementation of the reforms will be monitored in the context of the European Semester. In the specific case of a Member State in the Excessive Imbalances Procedure, the implementation of the reforms will be</p>

<p>5. The CoR strongly regrets that the Communication does not delineate more precisely the kind of "unusual event" beyond the control of a Member State that would be grounds for it to temporarily deviate from the corrective path with regard to its medium-term budgetary objective (MTO) and thus leaves the European Commission very considerable political discretion, which could lead to preferential treatment for one or other Member State.</p>	<p>monitored under this specific procedure.</p> <p>The Commission reiterates that a deviation from the consolidation path towards the MTO may not be considered significant in the case of severe economic downturn for the euro area or the EU as a whole or when resulting from an unusual event outside of the control of the Member State concerned which has a major impact on the financial position of the general government, provided that this does not endanger fiscal sustainability in the medium-term.</p> <p>The activation of this provision would not mean putting on hold the fiscal adjustment, but rather re-designing the adjustment path on a country-specific basis, both in terms of the adjustment effort and the deadlines to achieve the targets, to take into account the exceptional circumstances for example of a severe economic downturn in the euro area or the Union as a whole. The use of this provision should remain limited to exceptional, carefully circumscribed situations to minimise the risk of moral hazard.</p>
<p>6. The CoR calls for the methods of calculating the structural deficit to be revised, in that in its current form the concept fails to take into account either the individual characteristics of national economies or structural differences in national and regional public spending, and is based on theoretical calculations of growth potential that are not empirically verifiable and therefore disputable, opening the door to discretionary implementation of the SGP.</p>	<p>The Commission stresses that the (change in the) structural balance has the advantage over the headline budget balance figure that it tries to approximate the extent to which developments in public finance variables are the result of policy actions by governments, net of cyclical conditions. Nevertheless, the Commission is aware that the (change in the) structural balance is unobservable, and as such its calculation remains an estimate. That is</p>

	<p>why since the 2011 reform of the SGP, the (change in the) structural balance in the preventive arm of the Pact is complemented by another indicator based on the implemented measures: the expenditure benchmark. The assessment of compliance under the preventive arm is based on a two-pillar approach where both indicators are taken into account and are equally relevant. The interplay between the two allows the Commission to gauge a more precise view of the true underlying situation of public finances in the Member States concerned. In the same vein, for Member States under the EDP, the assessment of effective action is also based on two metrics, i) with the analysis of the budgetary impact of (new) measures the Member State has introduced to raise revenue, and ii) the savings it has made on public expenditure complementing the change in the structural balance.</p>
<p>7. The CoR calls on the Commission to assess whether the current 1/20 debt reduction rule is still viable or whether it ought to be revised.</p>	<p>The 'debt rule' is meant to operationalize the debt criterion of the EDP, applying to Member States with the debt level above 60% of GDP. Strictly speaking, its role is to trigger a report under Article 126(3), not to foreshadow the placing of the concerned Member State in EDP. This distinction is underscored by the provisions of the Pact excluding automaticity in case of apparent breach of the debt criterion.</p>
<p>8. The CoR suggests the use, under the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP), of auxiliary indicators covering regional disparities with the aim of taking account of any structural imbalances in terms of territorial cohesion that Member States might be facing and that might</p>	<p>The Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure has a macroeconomic focus and therefore the scoreboard used in the Alert Mechanism Report does not include indicators defined at the sub-national level. However, the procedure does not preclude the use of such</p>

<p>impact on the level and pace of budgetary adjustment and of possible structural reforms.</p>	<p>indicators should they be relevant for the analysis of macroeconomic imbalances in a particular context.</p>
<p>9. The CoR stresses that the Investment Plan should be part of a broader European strategy that is closely linked to the review of the Europe 2020 Strategy, with the aim of facilitating sustainable and job-rich growth through stimulating public and private investment, improving the competitiveness of Europe's economy and introducing structural reforms that have positive social and economic effects and help to improve administrative capacity.</p>	<p>The Commission stresses that the Investment Plan was already part of an ambitious Jobs, Growth and Investment Package announced as a first priority in the Political Guidelines of President Juncker. In that context, the 2015 Annual Growth Survey stressed the need for a three-pronged approach for growth and jobs, concretely by (i) boosting investment, (ii) accelerating structural reforms and (iii) pursuing fiscal responsibility.</p>
<p>10. In the context of quality of public investment, the CoR proposes i) to add an indicator relating to the investment rate to the macroeconomic scoreboard; ii) to publish a white paper setting out an EU-level typology for the quality of public investment in public spending accounts on the basis of long-term effects; and iii) to include a chapter on quality of public investment in every annual report on Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) public finances.</p>	<p>i) The scoreboard is used in the Alert Mechanism Report of the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP). The MIP does not focus on the quality of public investment. Nonetheless, an investment variable is already part of the auxiliary indicators to the scoreboard in the MIP (gross fixed capital formation in percent of GDP).</p> <p>ii) the Commission is of the opinion that it is not possible at the moment to create a sound typology for the quality of public investment due to the lack of data concerning detailed, individual category of investments, their costs, and their expected financial and social productivity;</p> <p>iii) the annual Report on Public Finances in EMU covers developments related to the Stability and Growth Pact and various research-oriented topics. A chapter on the quality of public investment can certainly not fit in the part concerning the Stability and Growth Pact and could not be</p>

	<p>repeatedly the subject of a chapter in the Report. It should be noted that this format allows the Commission to cover, as appropriate, topics that are relevant for the CoR, like for example the chapter on “Fiscal decentralisation in the EU - main characteristics and implications for fiscal outcomes” which was published in 2012 and raised a lot of interest with the CoR.</p> <p>In the Investment Plan, the Commission committed to propose actions that provide greater regulatory predictability and remove barriers to investment. This should be done at EU level and at national level in the context of the European Semester. During 2015, the ECOFIN committees will launch a series of thematic reviews on investments bottlenecks. The Economic Policy Committee started assessing public investment in infrastructures in September 2015.</p>
<p>11. The CoR requests that the Commission assess the impact of the ESA 2010 rules on public investment capacity and safeguard the principle of non-discrimination between public and private investment, in accordance with Article 345 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.</p>	<p>The rules applicable to recording of investments – private or public – did not change fundamentally between ESA 95 and ESA 2010, with the main change being capitalisation of Research and Development (R&D).</p> <p>Article 345 of the TFEU requires that the Treaties shall in no way prejudice rules governing the system of property ownership. ESA 2010 does not regulate property rights; it provides a framework for comprehensive and systematic description of an economy.</p>
<p>12. The CoR recommends that local and regional authorities be more closely involved in the framework of the European Semester, along the lines of the</p>	<p>In the 2015 Annual Growth Survey, the Commission published proposals on how to open up the European Semester process and increase engagement with</p>

<p>partnership principle governing the Structural Funds.</p>	<p>other actors. The Commission has repeatedly stressed that, in spite of positive developments in the recent past, there is room for wider dialogue with and better involvement of the different levels of the Member States, not only regarding Parliaments and official authorities, but also social partners. For example, National Reform Programmes can play an important communication and ownership role at national level if they are focused and different actors in the Member States are involved in their formulation.</p>
<p>13. The CoR calls for follow-up to the 2012 Commission Communication on strengthening the social dimension of EMU and the 2013 Social Investment Package. While meeting the need to maintain the existence and co-existence of the various social models within EMU, this follow-up should, for instance, consider incentives for reforms to accelerate achievement of the social objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and coordination between the automatic stabilisers at EMU level.</p>	<p>The Commission underlines that among the President's priorities is the need for a deeper and fairer EMU, while keeping the social dimension in mind. Efforts in that direction, as outlined in the Five Presidents' Report, are accompanied by actions to reinvigorate social dialogue at all levels. The high level summit with Social Partners in March 2015 was a good opportunity to re-launch this engagement. Moreover, a 'Labour Mobility Package' will be presented to support labour mobility and better coordinate social security systems. The Commission will also present a package to promote integration and employability in the labour market, especially targeting the longer-term unemployed and younger people through measures to promote skills development. Overall, the Commission acknowledges the need to look into establishing employment and social benchmarks to both re-establish convergence and to limit employment and social spill-overs in the euro area.</p>

**N°2 Opinion on Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States
COM(2015) 98 final – COR 20158/1419 - SEDEC-VI/001
112th Plenary Session - June 2015
Rapporteur: Mr Mauro D'ATTIS (IT/EPP)
DG EMPL – Vice-President DOMBROVSKIS**

Points of the CoR opinion considered essential	Commission position
<p>5. The CoR reminds the Commission that public investment by local and regional authorities (LRAs) plays a key role in encouraging economic growth. Such investment should therefore be included fully in the new European investment policy set out in the Juncker Plan. The Committee of the Regions believes therefore, that public spending on investment must be reorganised, thereby encouraging expenditure which produces long-term benefits and earmarking resources available under the Juncker Plan not only for large projects, but also for local initiatives which directly involve LRAs.</p>	<p>The Commission recalls that boosting investment is a priority for ensuring long-term growth, employment, social cohesion and convergence. It is one of the key pillars of its new approach to economic policy making.</p> <p>As to the priorities of the European investment policy set out in the European Fund for Structural Investment (EFSI), the Commission refers the CoR to the fact that the EFSI aims to leverage investment in new projects with a higher risk profile which also have a positive impact at regional and local level. It in no way excludes participation by LRAs.</p>
<p>13. The CoR regrets that in the current updated Employment Policy Guidelines, gender issues are less prominent than in the previous guidelines and points out that the crisis has affected women differently from men. It must be emphasised that recognising gender disparities would allow for the adoption of more targeted, more effective policy measures.</p>	<p>The Commission reaffirms that the gender dimension in employment and social security remains important and felt the issue was appropriately incorporated in its original proposal.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the Council text to be adopted will now – with the support of the Commission – more explicitly refer to female labour market participation and gender equality (GL 6) as well as to modernised social protection systems and the adequacy of pension systems for men and women (GL 8).</p>

<p>Amendment 11</p> <p>Member States should make full use of the European Social Fund and other Union funds' support in order to improve employment, social inclusion, education and public administration in full compliance with the revised rules that govern those funds. Specifically, the European Social Fund should be more outcome-oriented, easier to measure (employment, social inclusion, cohesion) and less weighed down by particular administrative formalities. At the same time impact and outcomes should be subject to tighter checks. Moreover, the European Fund for Strategic Investments and its investment platforms should be used to encourage the development of ambitious projects with a strong regional impact, guaranteeing local business projects, encouraging small, medium and micro-enterprises, innovative start-ups and high-risk projects, while ensuring that quality jobs are created and workers are equipped with the skills needed for the Union's transition towards a sustainable growth model.</p>	<p>The Commission refers the CoR to the changes in the 2014-2020 European Strategic and Investment Funds (ESIF) rules, and notably the concentration of European Social Fund (ESF) funding for achieving results. The ESF will focus its interventions on a limited number of priorities in order to ensure a sufficiently high critical mass of funding to make a real impact in addressing Member States' key challenges (e.g. 20% minimum on social inclusion interventions which are close to areas of interest of LRAs). The ESF will be implemented in close cooperation between public authorities, social partners and bodies representing the civil society at national, regional and local level throughout the whole programme cycle. The ESF will be at the forefront of innovative managing rules to simplify implementation of projects at all levels, notably through simplified cost options or joint action plans.</p>
<p>Amendment 14</p> <p>Mobility of workers should be ensured as a fundamental right, while remaining a matter of free choice, with the aim of exploiting the full potential of the European labour market, including by enhancing the portability of pensions and social security rights, and the recognition of qualifications. Member States should at the same time guard against abuses of the existing rules.</p> <p>However, Member States should also consider that comprehensive and long-term social investment by regional and local</p>	<p>The Commission reiterates that the mobility of workers should be promoted with the aim of exploiting the full potential of the European labour market. However, in line with the observations of the CoR, the Council text to be adopted will now, with the support of the Commission, also request Member States to recognise potential "brain drain" from certain regions.</p>

authorities – which are best placed to understand the specific features of their own regions and communities – may address the crisis in a more sustainable manner, preventing too many highly qualified people, who would be able to stimulate growth, from leaving these areas.

Creating a set of instruments at local and regional level to mitigate the excessive exodus of skilled labour may also contribute to economic growth and employment at local level.

<p>N°3 Better protecting the marine environment (own-initiative opinion) COR 2014/7256 - ENVE-VI/001 112th Plenary Session - June 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Hermann KUHN (DE/PES) DG ENV – Commissioner VELLA</p>	
<p>Points of the CoR opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>5. The CoR reiterates its positive assessment of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD, 2008) as an environmental pillar of the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy, which makes the achievement of "good environmental status" by 2020 a binding target.</p>	<p>The Commission appreciates the support by the Committee of the Regions for the implementation of the MSFD.</p> <p>The Commission welcomes this assessment.</p>
<p>8. The CoR welcomes the Common Implementation Strategy pursued by the Commission and the Member States within the Marine Strategy Coordination Group and expects their work to give rise to a better common understanding of the implementation of the MSFD; it calls on the Commission to present, as soon as possible, its revision of the criteria and methodological standards on good environmental status (2010/477/EU).</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the positive assessment of the Common Implementation Strategy.</p> <p>The Commission agrees that a review of the Commission Decision on Good Environmental Status (Commission Decision 2010/477/EU) is necessary. Such a review process is currently on-going.</p>
<p>19. The CoR would like the Commission to submit regular assessments on MSFD implementation, including in particular the identification of best practices; in order to facilitate the sharing of local solutions; it also offers to make available the existing common Technical Platform for cooperation on the environment between the Committee of the Regions and the Commission.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the suggestion to facilitate the sharing of best practices regarding local solutions, including via the common Technical Platform, and will raise this with the Member States in the framework of the Common Implementation Strategy.</p>
<p>27. The CoR suggests that the</p>	<p>The Commission is aware of some</p>

<p>Commission should draw up proposals as to how to further the objectives of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive in the waters of the Member States' overseas territories and the areas of the Mediterranean and Black Sea that are not directly within its scope.</p>	<p>Member States' initiatives to implement MSFD approaches in certain overseas territories.</p> <p>The Commission is cooperating with Mediterranean and the Black Sea coastal Member States, the Bucharest and the Barcelona Conventions and the third countries involved, for promoting MSFD concepts and methods in these regions.</p>
<p>34. The CoR highlights the need to review whether existing marine protected areas form a consistent, representative network which provides appropriate coverage of marine ecosystems in all their diversity; it is convinced that the cross-border regional establishment and management of such areas is more cost-effective and environmentally more beneficial than unilateral national measures.</p>	<p>The Commission shares the views of the Committee of the Regions.</p> <p>Under Article 13.4 of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Member States are required to include in their Programmes of measures spatial protection measures contributing to coherent and representative networks of marine protected areas, adequately covering marine ecosystems.</p> <p>Member States are currently drawing up their Programmes of measures which shall be submitted to the Commission by 31 March 2016.</p> <p>The Commission will then assess these programmes, including the measures required by Article 13.4.</p> <p>Concerning cross-border Marine Protected Areas and their management, the Marine Strategy Framework requires Member States to cooperate when implementing the Directive – this may include the establishment of spatial protection measures contributing to the networks of MPAs.</p>
<p>42. The CoR therefore welcomes the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy and now expects the newly defined objectives,</p>	<p>The Commission agrees, pointing out that the wording "restrictions on use" should be understood as "fishing</p>

<p>in particular the restrictions on use, to be set in such a way that the populations of harvested species are maintained or restored above the level of the maximum sustainable yield, and that landing requirements are met and monitored effectively.</p>	<p>opportunities", for which the maximum sustainable yield exploitation rate shall be achieved by 2015 where possible and, on a progressive, incremental basis at the latest by 2020.</p>
<p>43. The CoR urges that the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) be used in such a way that they do not contradict the MSFD objectives; among other things is in favour of promoting the use of new selective fishing techniques to reduce bycatch mortality (including the bycatch mortality of birds) and to protect seabed habitats</p>	<p>Articles 38, 39, and 40 of the EMFF promote the development and testing of new selective fishing techniques and low impact fishing gears to reduce bycatch mortality with a particular emphasis on reducing incidental catches of species such as seabirds and cetaceans, as well as on reducing the impact of fishing gears on the seabed. It is up to Member States to include these measures in their Operational Programmes.</p>
<p>45. The CoR believes that the use of fertilisers should be significantly reduced as part of a forthcoming review of the nitrate directive and its implementation; the use of alternative, less harmful fertiliser methods should be promoted under the Common Agricultural Policy</p>	<p>There is no scheduled review of the Nitrates Directive. This piece of legislation provides for the necessary flexibility to integrate the most recent scientific evidence and takes into account the progress in technologies and agronomic practices. The Directive, as confirmed by the "Fitness-Check" of the EU Freshwater Policy (2012) and by the findings of the "Blueprint to safeguard Europe's waters", is a key tool for the protection of waters against agricultural pressures.</p> <p>The excessive use of fertilisers constitutes a health and environmental risk. Improving efficiency in the use of fertilisers is important to manage the nutrient cycle in a more cost-effective and sustainable way. This is fundamental to tackling eutrophication and excessive nutrient releases in the</p>

	<p>environment.</p> <p>Proper implementation of the existing Directives (e.g. 91/676/EEC, 2000/60/EC, etc.) and the Common Agricultural Policy, for instance through the cross compliance regime, are key to achieving the EU water quality objectives and protect the marine environment.</p>
<p>46. The CoR calls for a substantial expansion of the funding for organic farming so that it accounts for more than 10% of farming by 2020.</p>	<p>By adopting the Action Plan for the future of organic production in the EU, the Commission set a direction for the sustainable growth of organic farming by 2020, with actions already showing results: a major conference on research and innovation priorities of the sector took place in May 2015, electronic certification of imported organic products should become operational at the end of 2015, a call for a study on the distribution of added value in the organic supply chain has been launched. With these measures, along with others included in the plan, the Commission intends to improve the sector in terms of its competitiveness, consumer awareness and external trade.</p> <p>In terms of funding, the EU supports organic farming through several measures: Organic farmers qualify ex officio for the greening payment in the first pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy. The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development provides for support through several measures such as encouraging conversion to and maintenance of organic farming methods to active farmers; training or investments. However, it is for Member States to decide whether to</p>

	<p>include the funding for organic farming: according to the latest estimates, almost 6% of rural development funding has been allocated by the Member States for this measure. The Commission also stresses that the responsibility for further development of the organic farming is jointly shared by the EU, regional and national authorities and stakeholders.</p>
<p>47. The CoR calls for the mandatory imposition of a ban on farming and fertilisation in the vicinity of water bodies, so that nutrient inputs into these and ultimately into the marine environment can be cut significantly.</p>	<p>Under Directive 91/676/EEC (Nitrates Directive), in areas draining into waters affected by pollution and waters which could be affected by pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources, specific compulsory measures must be in place for land application of fertilisers near water courses.</p>
<p>48. The CoR calls for the authorisation of open aquaculture systems in European marine waters to be made conditional on the nutrient inputs they cause not jeopardising the objective of good environmental status.</p>	<p>Under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Member States are required to adopt measures to achieve or maintain good environmental status (GES). The authorisation of activities that might have an impact on this objective – including aquaculture – should be consistent with the programme of measures. However, the exact definition of the characteristics of GES in each sea basin, and of the specific measures to achieve it, is the responsibility of the Member States.</p>
<p>49. The CoR takes the view that SECA (Sulphur Emission Control Area) agreements must, as a matter of priority, be broadened to cover all EU marine regions; it expects the Commission and Member States to energetically pursue efforts to establish NECA (NOx Emission Control Areas) too.</p>	<p>The impact assessment that underpinned the Commission's Clean Air Policy Package of 2013 confirmed again that also air pollution from shipping leads to significant health and environmental impacts. Emissions from maritime transport are contributing significantly to poor air quality in EU</p>

ports and elsewhere. The analysis also showed that the designation of new NECAs remains a cost-effective policy option and the Commission encourages Member States to jointly consider the creation of new emission control areas in their territorial seas.

The Commission has meanwhile launched (as part of the wider set of policies to address air pollution from shipping in the EU), concrete actions to strengthen the cost-effective implementation and enforcement of the 'Sulphur Directive' 1999/32/EC as last amended in 2012. This amendment sets stricter requirements on the sulphur content of marine fuels, and has recently been complemented via a Commission Implementing Decision on sampling strategies and reporting last year. Under the Sulphur Directive, the SECA requirement (i.e. 0.1% sulphur content in fuels used for shipping) applies to the Baltic Sea, the North Sea and the Channel as of 2015, and the global sulphur standard of 0.5% sulphur content (from the previous 3.5% standard) applies to all other EU waters outside SECAs from 2020 onwards.

The Commission also established the European Sustainable Shipping Forum to work on matters related to sustainable shipping with key stakeholders. This includes a focus on the cost-effective implementation of the Sulphur Directive and the uptake of alternative fuels as well as innovative emission abatement technologies. In the near future, the forum will also address a wider set of key shipping pollutants including the accurate estimation of

	<p>their inventories. Furthermore, the Commission supports projects on the transition to clean maritime shipping through 'Marco Polo' and the 'Connecting Europe Facility' programmes.</p> <p>Finally, the Commission participates actively in the international discussion at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and HELCOM towards designating soonest a NO_x Emission Control Area in the Baltic and North Seas.</p>
<p>51. The CoR points out that the increasing pollution of the coastline by paraffin wax from the flushing of tanks at sea means that a ban on this kind of discharge at sea is urgently necessary.</p>	<p>The Commission is closely following the discussion, which is ongoing in the IMO to strengthen the discharge rules for certain liquid chemicals, in particular the "high-viscosity and persistent floating products" like paraffin and vegetable oils.</p> <p>A new work item has been agreed by MEPC 68 for the PPR group (pollution prevention and response).</p> <p>The Commission in principle supports any initiatives on the topic for finding a solution for the matter in the context of the MARPOL Convention, and will consider its position in light of developments in that forum.</p>
<p>52. The CoR calls for a revision of the limit values for oily waste water (from shipping, oil production, industry, etc.)</p>	<p>Norms for the legal discharges of oily waste water are provided in Annex I of the MARPOL Convention.</p> <p>Oily waste water falls within the definition of "ship generated waste" provided in Directive 2000/59/EC on port reception facilities. The Directive requires that the master of a ship calling at an EU port delivers all such waste to a port reception facility before</p>

the ship can leave the port, unless the ship has sufficient dedicated storage capacity on board until the next port of delivery.

The Commission encourages Member States to fully implement Directive 2000/59/EC on port Reception Facilities, so as to ensure handling of these residues in a way that does not harm the marine and coastal environment. Concerning oily mixtures from offshore oil extraction installations, the Commission supports the implementation of relevant regional arrangements where they exist (e.g. in the Northeast Atlantic under the OSPAR Convention) or the development of such arrangements (e.g. in the Mediterranean, under the Offshore Protocol of the Barcelona Convention).

Finally, it remains the responsibility of the Member States to ensure that liquid residues containing oil, irrespective of the source, are managed in a way that does not endanger achieving or maintaining good environmental status by 2020, as required by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC).

Moreover, the Commission is in the process of setting up an exchange of information to draw up a Best Available Techniques (BAT) reference document on Hydrocarbons exploration and extraction (BREF). It aims at summarising BAT already applied under economically viable conditions in the hydrocarbons sector and, as such, helping the sector share a

	<p>common understanding of high-level performance.</p>
<p>53. The CoR repeats its call for a European action plan for the disposal (primarily recovery and destruction) of munitions on the sea floor, which are presenting an increasing danger to shipping, offshore activities and tourism.</p>	<p>The disposal of dumped munitions on the sea floor is an important issue, both from a security and environmental point of view, especially in the Baltic and Mediterranean marine regions. The European Commission relies on and supports the work done at regional level for the protection of human health and the marine environment from the threats posed by dumped chemical warfare. In that regard, the HELCOM 'Submerged' group is leading the work in the Baltic region (cf 2013 report, including recommendations for action http://helcom.fi/Lists/Publications/BSE_P142.pdf).</p> <p>Dumped munition is also an important issue from a security perspective, and a number of actions in this regard have therefore been included in the EU maritime Security Action Plan which was adopted by the General Affairs Council in December 2014, see further http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/maritime-security/index_en.htm. The purpose of this Action Plan, which is jointly owned by Member States and EU institutions, is to reinforce the cross sectorial cooperation of some of the already existing initiatives to dispose of dumped munition. This Action Plan is therefore an appropriate platform to address the security aspects of dumped munition.</p>
<p>54. The CoR reiterates its position that sea pollution must be reduced at source (production and consumption); it believes,</p>	<p>The Commission notes that potential requirements for micro-pollutants in the sea cannot necessarily be compared</p>

however, that measures such as the "fourth phase" should be promoted in sewage treatment plants which are capable of reducing micro-pollutants in wastewater. At the same time, the spreading of sewage sludge on agricultural land must be stopped.

with requirements for inland pollution. The dilution is normally much higher in the sea. In addition, the Water Framework Directive sets standards for micro-pollutants in rivers and water-courses but not for waste water treatment plants. Thirdly, the sources of micro-pollutants include not only waste water treatment plants but also others such as the agriculture sector.

Overall, the term micro-pollutants relevant for the sea is not clearly defined and may cover different relevant parameters than for inland waters, like for example pharmaceuticals, plastics, hormones, etc. The term also needs to be specified as treatment procedures in waste water treatment plants may be different for single groups of micro-pollutants. In addition, treatment at the source (e.g. in hospitals) may be more effective than a general introduction of a 'fourth phase'.

The Commission recognises that pollution reduction at source is preferable and more resource efficient than end-of-the-pipe action.

The introduction of a total ban on the spreading of sewage sludge on agricultural land is not envisaged. However, it is acknowledged that when applying sewage sludge to agricultural land, care should always be taken to prevent any form of adverse environmental and health impact. Sludge should be used in a way that accounts for the nutrient requirements of plants and so that the quality of the soil and of the surface and groundwater is not impaired.

	<p>The Sewage Sludge Directive, (86/278/EEC), regulates the use of sewage sludge in agriculture in such a way as to prevent harmful effects on soil, vegetation, animals and man. In addition, the spreading of sewage sludge on agricultural land is also regulated by the relevant provisions of the Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC).</p>
<p>55. The CoR points out that single-hull tankers are still endangering European waters and calls for tight oversight and even stricter rules to eliminate these risks.</p>	<p>The Commission considers that the EU existing acquis is effective and is not aware of the perpetuating risks associated with single-hull tankers in EU waters.</p> <p>Regulation (EU) 530/2012 on the accelerated phasing-in of double-hull or equivalent design requirements for single-hull oil tankers already provides sufficiently strict rules. The Port State Control regime in place within the EU continues to ensure tight oversight of this aspect.</p>
<p>56. The CoR is convinced that emergency port strategies should be drawn up to protect damaged ships, primarily those carrying hazardous cargo, and that adequate response capacities should be ensured to prevent shipping accidents caused by already damaged ships, not least in the vicinity of the growing number of off-shore wind farms. Regional, cross-border coordination is essential here.</p>	<p>The Commission would like to refer to the related provisions in the Vessel Traffic Monitoring Directive (2002/59/EC) regarding Places of Refuge and the availability of Places of Refuge Plans to accommodate vessels in distress. The Directive requires cooperation among Member States. The Commission has initiated with Member States and Industry the drafting of operational guidelines, building on existing EU legislation and the IMO Guidelines on Places of Refuge, but also covering cases, like the MSC Flaminia, beyond any coastal State's jurisdiction. These guidelines will achieve full involvement and cooperation of all interested parties, for a more expeditious</p>

	<p>EU-wide approach in addressing such situations in the future.</p> <p>In addition, the European Maritime Safety Agency offers operational support to Member States to increase their response capability in case of incidents involving ships in distress. This support is two-fold. It involves pollution response resources (i.e. anti-pollution vessels/equipment) being placed at Member States' disposal to minimise the threat of pollution in case of maritime emergencies, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 100/2013. Moreover, EMSA offers electronic tools – such as the Union Maritime Information and Exchange System ('SafeSeaNet') or the more specialised Marine Chemical Emergency Information Service ('MAR-ICE Network') – that allow prompt and effective information exchange and support decision-making in case of such incidents.</p>
<p>57. The CoR calls for a general ban on waste disposal at sea – in principle incineration too, since this cannot be monitored. The costs of on-shore disposal should, as far as possible, be included in port charges on the basis of a flat rate.</p>	<p>Waste disposal operations consisting of release to seas and oceans are regulated by international conventions (in particular the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter).</p> <p>The EU Waste Framework Directive prohibits the abandonment, dumping or uncontrolled management of waste.</p> <p>Directive 2000/59/EC on port reception facilities requires that all ship generated waste is delivered to a port reception facility before a ship departs from an EU port, except when the ship has sufficient dedicated storage capacity on board until the next port of</p>

	<p>delivery.</p> <p>The Directive furthermore requires that the costs of such facilities are covered through the collection of a fee from ships and that the cost recovery systems provide no incentive for ships to discharge their waste into the sea. To this end, all ships shall contribute significantly to the costs irrespective of the actual use of the facilities. Arrangements to this effect may include incorporation of the fee in the port dues or a separate standard waste fee, and the fees may be differentiated based on the category, type and size of the ship.</p>
<p>61. The CoR recognises the serious impact of micro-plastics on marine organisms; it calls, therefore, as a first step, for an EU-wide ban on the use of micro-plastics in cosmetics and cleaning products.</p>	<p>The Commission is studying options to reduce impacts on human health and the marine environment from the use of micro-plastics in cosmetics. Any follow-up steps, including extension of investigation to other product categories, will take into account the results of this study as well as of other relevant studies and information.</p>
<p>63. The CoR is of the opinion that, following the establishment of international criteria and standards for noise mapping, a noise register should be set up for the European Union's maritime waters. The aim should be to develop legal standards and limit values to reduce noise in the marine environment.</p>	<p>The Commission notes the suggestion of setting up a noise register for EU waters, and will consider action in this area in the context of implementing the Marine Strategy Framework Directive which addresses noise as part of Descriptor 11.</p>
<p>67. The CoR continues to support the implementation of the "European Maritime Day" (EMD) and expects that, in the coming years, the EMD will contribute to the successful implementation of the MSFD as a forum for scientific and political</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the support for the EMD, but points out that the EMD's remit is wider than the MSFD alone - it is the opportunity for all stakeholders (including local and regional authorities) in the blue</p>

<p>exchange with local and regional authorities too.</p>	<p>economy to share their ideas.</p> <p>The Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries will continue to organise the EMD in the context of European maritime policy and blue growth. This includes discussions in connection with the MSFD, and MSFD implementation updates.</p> <p>The EMD does not, however, serve to implement the MSFD. The instruments to implement MSFD are the Programmes of Measures and other instruments mentioned in the Directive.</p>
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<p>N°4 A decent life for all: from vision to collective action COM (2014)335 final and COM (2015)44 final – COR 2014/5701 CIVEX-VI/001 112th Plenary Session - June 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Hans JANSSEN (NL/EPP) DG DEVCO – Commissioner MIMICA</p>	
Points of the CoR opinion considered essential	Commission position
<p>The CoR have considered two Commission Communications¹ which helped form the basis for the EU position in the intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the CoR's engagement on this important topic. The UN outcome document (entitled "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development") was formally adopted at the UN Summit on 25-27 September 2015.</p> <p>The Communications did not focus on future arrangements for the implementation of the Agenda within the EU. As announced in the Commission Work Programme for 2016, this will be considered in a future initiative which will present a new approach to ensuring economic growth and social and environmental sustainability beyond the 2020 timeframe, taking into account the Europe 2020 review and the internal and external implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, supported by an inclusive consultation process.</p>
<p>The CoR is keen to see a specific objective retained on inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements.</p>	<p>The Commission identified cities as a key priority for the new framework in its Communication (COM (2014) 335)</p>

¹ COM (2014) 335, 2 June 2014: "A Decent Life for all: from vision to collective action" and COM (2015) 44, 5 February 2015: "A Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015".

	<p>of June 2014 and is pleased to see that the UN outcome document retains Goal 11 on cities and human settlements, as originally proposed by the UN General Assembly's Open Working Group.</p>
<p>The CoR would like to see more emphasis placed on the territorial approach to development.</p>	<p>The Commission's position is that action is required at all levels, local, national, regional, and global, in order to tackle issues that are common, universal, and interlinked. The Commission has emphasised the need for all countries to take ambitious action and for countries to work together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.</p> <p>The Commission Communication (COM (2015) 44) of February 2015 made reference to unlocking the development potential of local authorities and local stakeholders as part of the global partnership for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This formed the basis for the EU position in the Third International Conference on Financing for Development held in Addis Ababa in July 2015. The Commission also welcomes the numerous references to local authorities in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda as a key element of the global partnership.</p>
<p>The CoR takes issue with the passage in the 2014 Communication under point 3, "Accountability", which gives local authorities "a key role" in monitoring national governments (among others) and holding them accountable. The CoR feels that this is not an accurate reflection of the relationships within the government, and</p>	<p>Point 3 "Accountability" states: "Civil society, local authorities and the private sector should play a key role in advancing action and accountability." Commission services see this as neither limited to local authorities nor limited to monitoring. For implementing the 2030 Agenda the Commission stresses</p>

<p>would instead seek to strengthen cooperation and consistency in the actions of the government as a whole.</p>	<p>the necessity for broader relationships and cooperation between local authorities and national governments, along with other stakeholders.</p>
<p>The CoR calls on the Commission to specifically add "decentralised cooperation" to the array of means of implementation.</p>	<p>The Commission Communication (COM (2015) 44) of February 2015 stressed the importance of local authorities. Specifically related to the issue of decentralised cooperation, the 2013 Communication on Local Authorities has insisted on the importance of decentralised cooperation as a means of implementation for bringing added value to the implementation of development actions, through continuous peer-to-peer learning, transfer of know-how and enhancement of local actors' participation in the public space at local level. The term decentralised cooperation is not specially mentioned in the two Communications of 2014 and 2015 but it is definitely a means of implementation particularly used by the thematic Civil Society Organisations-Local Authorities 2014-2020 programme.</p> <p>Finally, the Commission welcomes the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, including paragraph 34 on local authorities and cities.</p>
<p>The CoR recommends continuing to make use of existing networks of local and regional authorities in the coming years to get the public involved in the transformative agenda, with a view to participation and acceptance, accountability and inclusiveness, as well as its contribution to sustainable change.</p>	<p>The Commission will take account of the recommendation in its consideration of the future arrangements for implementation of the Agenda within the EU.</p>

N°5 Local and regional support for fair trade in Europe (own-initiative opinion)
COR 2014/5704 - CIVEX-VI/003
112th Plenary Session - June 2015
Rapporteur: Ms Barbara DUDEN (DE/PES)
DG TRADE – Commissioner MALMSTRÖM

Points of the CoR opinion considered essential	Commission position
<p>The Committee of the Regions</p> <p>11. would like to see a European fair-trade strategy drawn up to promote a consistent and coordinated approach to fair trade across all EU policy areas, in particular trade, development and sustainable consumption and production;</p> <p>12. is looking forward to the recently announced Communication on Trade and calls on the Commission to make use of this opportunity to outline the concrete measures which it envisages to move towards a coherent framework for EU fair trade;</p> <p>13. emphasises that such a strategy should promote the active involvement in fair trade of local and regional authorities, as well as other key players such as the European Parliament, the European External Action Service and the European Economic and Social Committee. To this end, the possibility of setting up an interinstitutional working group might be considered, in order to coordinate measures on fair trade and guarantee their consistency and to ensure that EU initiatives and policies in this area are mutually complementary;</p>	<p>The Commission intends to continue its engagement on sustainable production and consumption issues including with regard to fair and ethical trade-related schemes and initiatives.</p> <p>It agrees on the importance of the active involvement of all relevant actors in this area including local and regional authorities.</p> <p>The Commission is currently reflecting on the best way to address fair and ethical trade, notably in the upcoming trade strategy communication.</p>
<p>19. calls on the Commission to draw up practical guidelines that provide a real-world explanation of fair trade, alongside other social criteria, in the public procurement</p>	<p>With the exception of certain obligations indicated in the new public procurement rules (e.g. Article 18(2) and Article 42(1) fourth subparagraph of Directive</p>

system, thus promoting these criteria;

20. appreciates the growing interest in sustainable food production, and above all the demand for locally produced food, among municipalities throughout Europe. This welcome approach is wholly in tune with the consumption of fair-trade products, as many local and regional initiatives in this area demonstrate;

21. considers it very useful for examples of public contracts that take social and ethical criteria on board to be made available to local and regional authorities. Here too, the Commission should encourage closer cooperation between local authorities, for instance when drawing up common criteria and guidelines, negotiating with suppliers, working on long-term supply contracts, and ensuring the coordinated monitoring of public procurement practice for environmental, social and ethical criteria;

2014/24/EU – OJ L 94 of 28.03.2014), whose compliance needs to be ensured, it is for the contracting authorities to decide on a case-by-case basis which considerations – including those related to fair trade – are relevant to their procurement procedures and linked to the subject matter of the contract. Such considerations will depend on the needs and objectives to be addressed by the procurement.

Similarly, contracting authorities are also free to decide the modalities and procedures which best suit their procurement, in compliance with EU public procurement rules.

In this context, the Commission remains available to discuss the possibility to provide those Member States and contracting authorities who choose to pursue certain fair trade objectives through procurement, with guidance on the correct application of the legal tools made available by the new public procurement Directives. The Commission could also play a role in disseminating best practices.

It should be stressed that any measure or procedure requiring contracting authorities to purchase only locally produced products through procurement would be per se discriminatory and therefore incompatible with the EU internal market legislation in force. However, public procurement rules include a number of tools allowing contracting authorities to legitimately support fair trade and local productions through procurement where appropriate. These include, for example, the possibility to take into account life-cycle costs when identifying the best offer in terms of price-quality ratio and establishing contract award criteria linked to a certain production

	process (e.g. organic or environmentally-friendly).
<p>28. points out that fair-trade criteria can be applied when providing support for SMEs, as well as business start-ups, from public funding, such as the European Fund for Regional Development (EFRD). Another step towards this would be the organisation of fair-trade events, such as the one held in Dortmund, which is currently the largest specialist and consumer fair-trade event in a German-speaking country;</p>	<p>The Commission considers that the existing criteria for SME support, with focus, among others, on innovation and regional dimension, are sufficiently robust and targeted for the overall purpose of SME support.</p> <p>The Commission welcomes entrepreneurial activities that maximise the creation of shared value for society at large such as the uptake of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices including with regard to participation in fair and ethical trade schemes.</p> <p>These actions are complemented by actions on social entrepreneurship – like the European Social Innovation Competition – that call for new business models.</p>
<p>29. proposes that, with a view to expanding the concept of fair-trade regions, the EU should examine the extent to which the "German capital of fair trade", modelled on the European capital of culture, would provide a suitable example to give European local and regional authorities the incentive to promote fair trade. Such an initiative should specifically take into account the particular challenges posed in central and eastern Europe;</p> <p>30. is convinced that the title of European Fair Trade Town/Region would give local authorities a further reason to make a name for themselves beyond their region or country through fair-trade initiatives. The idea would be to directly involve citizens and local grassroots organisations;</p>	<p>The Commission considers that awareness raising activities have a role to play in promoting fair and ethical trade. In this context, the Commission will reflect on the proposal formulated in the opinion.</p>

<p>31. emphasises that the role of local authorities in framing the development agenda post-2015 should be strengthened, as the high-level panel recommends. The post-2015 development goals must recognise the role of local authorities as important players in development policy, and the sustainability goals that are currently being discussed must be translated into coordinated national, regional and local strategies;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the opinion. It has long been a firm position of the EU that all stakeholders, including local authorities, should be involved in implementing the post-2015 agenda, as well as monitoring and reviewing progress. The Commission will continue efforts to ensure this is reflected in the final agreement.</p>
<p>34. believes that hard indicators must be devised to measure whether the goals have been achieved. Fair trade should serve as a benchmark for the sustainability of production and consumption, especially in public procurement; it could also, and above all, be a benchmark for achieving "solidarity partnerships", since very positive experience has been gained with involving different interest groups in this area;</p>	<p>The Commission notes the Committee's opinion. The work to identify indicators for the post-2015 agenda is continuing and is likely to be concluded in 2016.</p> <p>The Commission recognizes the crucial role of indicators in the reporting and monitoring of the post-2015 development agenda. Indicators need to provide a measure of the overall progress in each target. They need to be policy relevant, understandable, and clearly communicated. They should, to the extent possible, build on relevant international indicators and monitoring systems in order to avoid duplication and to make efficient use of resources. These indicators may be further refined and new indicators may be developed in selected areas to follow technical and other progress.</p>
<p>39. points out that the EU is a key player in world trade and is also intent on consolidating its leading position in the sustainability debate. The European institutions are therefore urged to shape EU external trade in such a way that it contributes to sustainable development;</p> <p>40. is pleased to note certain measures taken by the EU, such as requiring the inclusion of a detailed chapter on</p>	<p>As set out by the Lisbon Treaty, sustainable development is an overarching goal to which all EU policies should contribute.</p> <p>With regard to EU trade policy, this objective has been translated into several key initiatives including the inclusion of Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) Chapters in all EU bilateral trade and investment agreements concluded after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. These</p>

<p>sustainable development in trade agreements with non-EU countries; some bilateral agreements even explicitly mention that the signatories support free and fair trade. This opening of markets should also benefit small-scale farmers;</p> <p>41. stresses the importance of ensuring when such accords are implemented that small-scale farmers in these countries receive help in promoting fair trade, for instance by organising visits of business delegations, in cooperation with local and regional authorities and the EU delegations in partner countries, specifically to small farms so that they can gain an understanding of local situations;</p>	<p>agreements include provisions on inter alia the promotion of trade and investment practices favouring sustainable development such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as well as fair and ethical trade-related schemes.</p> <p>The Commission welcomes the opinion's support for this approach and will continue to aim at the inclusion of similar provisions in its ongoing trade and investment agreements negotiations.</p> <p>The Commission is also addressing fair and ethical trade in the framework of the implementation of TSD chapters. Initiatives in this regard include among other things the organisation of a workshop on "fair trade and sustainability in agricultural value chains" back to back to the meetings under the Trade and Sustainable Development Title of the EU-Central America FTA in May 2015. Another event with small farmers organisations involved in fair trade was held in June 2015 in the context of the EU Trade Agreement with Colombia and Peru.</p> <p>Finally, the Commission is also supporting small producers and fair trade in its development cooperation. For example, since 2011, the Commission contributes to the Standards Map of the International Trade Centre, a project aimed at providing information on voluntary sustainability schemes, including through an online database and training activities for local producers organised in cooperation with EU Delegations.</p>
<p>42. notes that the general public and many consumers have become more concerned in recent years about the issue of unacceptable working conditions and human</p>	<p>The Commission is actively involved in discussions on responsible supply chain management in international fora including with regards to the uptake and</p>

rights violations in producer countries. For instance, both the German and the Dutch governments are working with companies, unions and civil society on similar initiatives in the textile sector to achieve better and more sustainable living and working conditions for employees along the whole supply chain in the global clothing industry, and a similar initiative is currently being considered by the European Commission at EU level;

43. explicitly welcomes such initiatives and calls on the European Commission, as well as the competent national authorities, to develop such projects, in which local and regional authorities should be involved as partners.

implementation of internationally agreed principles and guidelines on CSR such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, UN Global Compact and Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Tripartite Declaration of principles for multinational enterprises.

The Commission welcomes initiatives by Member States and the private sector to improve social and environmental conditions in international supply chains, including in the textile sector. The Commission recently brought together stakeholders to informally consult them on possible actions and initiatives on responsible supply chains in the garment sector. These contacts will feed into the preparation process of a possible initiative at EU level on this issue, which would be open to all relevant stakeholders including local and regional authorities from Member States and third countries, particularly garment producing ones.

<p>N°6 Building a Capital Markets Union COM(2015) 63 final – COR 2015/1184 - ECON-VI/001 113th Plenary Session - July 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Tadeusz TRUSKOLASKI (PL/AE) DG FISMA – Commissioner HILL</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>The Opinion welcomes the actions outlined in the Green Paper on Building a Capital Markets Union and underlines that it is essential to take initiatives which would bring benefits to all Member States, including to regions with less developed financial markets.</p>	<p>The Commission adopted on 30 September 2015 an Action Plan on Building a Capital Markets Union ('the CMU Action Plan') which sets out the steps that the Commission will take in order to build a Capital Markets Union by 2019.</p> <p>The Commission's goal is that the CMU benefits all 28 Member States, in particular those where capital markets are less well developed and where SMEs need additional investment to grow.</p> <p>CMU will provide a wider range of finance opportunities to companies with high-growth potential and strong commercial prospects, regardless of where they are located. It will also provide an increased capacity to attract investment through the removal of barriers which prevent a better allocation of capital across borders, such as reduction in tax deterrents, more efficient business insolvency procedures, and more efficient clearing and settlement processes.</p> <p>For EU investors, the CMU should bring greater choice and higher potential returns for investors across the EU through efforts to enhance the range of</p>

	<p>retail investment products on offer, and increased efficiency and service quality in the intermediation chain.</p>
<p>The Opinion strongly supports all actions aimed at strengthening the potential of SMEs, recognising their role in promoting entrepreneurship and creating innovation at local level.</p>	<p>The CMU Action Plan encompasses a comprehensive package of actions targeted to improve the financing of SMEs by developing and diversifying market-based sources of funding. These include: modernising the Prospectus Directive to make it less costly for businesses to raise funds publicly, review regulatory barriers to small firms listing on equity and debt markets; developing the capacity to link SMEs in search of funding with potential non-bank investors; and promoting advisory capacity in all Member States to assist SMEs that could benefit from alternative sources of finance.</p>
<p>The Opinion calls for diversifying the sources of funding for EU companies, SMEs in particular, and calls for strengthening SMEs' access to alternative sources of finance. The Opinion calls for enhancing the comparability of financial information between Member States and for creating a business friendly environment, while avoiding excessive regulatory burden on SMEs.</p> <p>It also encourages the Commission to promote good practices in alternative forms of financing which are well developed in some Member States.</p>	<p>The Action Plan proposes a comprehensive package of measures to support venture capital and equity financing to address structural weaknesses in the European venture capital market, such as lack of critical mass and market fragmentation.</p> <p>This will include a review of the existing legislation on venture capital – the Regulations on the European Venture Capital (EuVECA) and European Social Entrepreneurship Funds (EuSEF) regulations, pan-European funds-of-funds which would combine public with private investment, as well as the promotion of best practice on tax incentives for more venture capital and business angle investment.</p> <p>The Commission also intends to promote innovative forms of financing,</p>

	<p>such as loan origination by funds. In the area of private placements, the Commission will seek to draw on best practices and promote them across the EU through appropriate initiatives. As regards crowdfunding, the Action Plan announces the Commission's intention to assess national regimes and best practice and monitor the evolution of the crowdfunding sector before deciding on the best means to enable the development of this new funding channel across the Union.</p>
<p>The Opinion underlines the importance of supporting long-term investment projects with key regional significance to create conditions for effective local and regional development.</p>	<p>The Action Plan recognises that good infrastructure is a key factor for competitiveness and sustainable growth in the EU. It therefore includes actions aimed at attracting additional private capital from institutional investors for more investments in infrastructure. The Commission proposed on 30 September 2015 reductions of capital requirements in Solvency II for investments in infrastructure to better reflect the level of risk in such investments and therefore provide incentives for insurance companies to invest in such projects.</p> <p>The Commission will also analyse the treatment of infrastructure investments in the Capital Requirements Regulation and propose changes, if appropriate.</p>
<p>The Opinion calls upon the Commission to consider also the supply side, in particular to analyse and address the causes which prevent retail and institutional investors from mobilising sufficient capital to finance the real economy.</p> <p>The Opinion points out the low level of financial knowledge and investment culture among retail investors and owners of small</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that a successful CMU is not possible without attracting more retail investment into capital markets. The Action Plan announces the Commission's intention to publish a Green Paper on retail financial services by the end of 2015 to consult on ways to boost consumer choice and competition in cross border retail</p>

<p>businesses. It calls for intensifying the efforts to enhance financial knowledge and educate the public on investment possibilities.</p> <p>The Opinion welcomes the Commission's efforts to bring down barriers to investment in business in order to unlock the potential of the capital market and thus create sustainable local and regional growth and jobs.</p>	<p>financial services and insurance.</p> <p>To enable European households to save more effectively for their retirement, the Commission will look into the possibilities of developing a policy framework to establish a successful European market for simple and competitive personal pensions to complement existing national solutions.</p> <p>For institutional investors, in addition to amendments to the capital requirements in Solvency II for investments in infrastructure, the Commission will gather evidence on the main barriers to the cross-border distribution of investment funds with a view to eliminating them.</p>
<p>The Opinion considers that there is a need for strong EU-wide and national supervision, including by strengthening ESMA's role in improving supervisory convergence, in order to avoid excessive risk taking and instability in financial markets.</p>	<p>The Action Plan recognises that deeper financial integration needs to be accompanied by an increased focus by the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) on achieving convergence of supervisory outcomes across the EU. The Commission will work with ESMA to develop and implement a strategy to strengthen supervisory convergence, and to enhance the effectiveness of ESMA's thematic and country peer-review decision-making.</p>

<p>N°7 New European Neighbourhood policy JOIN(2015) 6 final – COR 2015/2671 - CIVEX-VI/004 Rapporteur: Mr Nikolaos Chiotakis (EL/EPP) DG NEAR – Commissioner HAHN/EEAS – High Representative/Vice-President MOGHERINI</p>	
<p>Points of the CoR opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission and HR/VP position</p>
<p>The CoR notes that the ENP cannot simply be a process between governments and EU institutions, but should involve other players from partner countries, with local and regional authorities (LRAs) in particular playing an important role. It points to the setting up of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) and to the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP). It sees specific objectives and a clear timeframe as essential to the new ENP. It flags up migration as a key issue: organised migration from non-EU states to EU Member States has a positive impact, whereas irregular migration presents new challenges and opportunities which must be properly managed. The CoR strongly believes that the local border traffic (LBT) mechanism has been an effective tool for developing cooperation between the EU and its neighbouring countries and should be used on a greater scale. It stresses the importance of LRAs to the ENP and believes that decentralisation and the territorial dimension within the new ENP will make it more attractive and increase its effectiveness. As a political institution, the CoR should facilitate and promote confidence-building and low-profile cooperation at grassroots level with</p>	<p>The Commission and the HR/VP would like to thank the Committee of the Regions for its contribution submitted in response to the Joint Consultation Paper 'Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy' (JOIN(2015) 6 final). The Commission also thanks ARLEM and CORLEAP, two bodies constituted under the auspices of the Committee and also including representatives of the partner countries.</p> <p>In the context of the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the Commission and the HR/VP have been actively seeking the views of EU institutions and bodies, Member States, parliaments, partner countries, civil society, social partners, business, academics and other interested parties.</p> <p>The Committee's opinion is therefore a welcome contribution to this exercise and will be duly taken into account by the Commission and the HR/VP when detailing proposals for the future direction of the ENP in their Joint Communication to be adopted in the autumn of 2015.</p>

politicians who share European values and respect freedom of speech and the rule of law.	
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N°8 Outcome of the negotiations on the partnership agreements and operational programmes (own-initiative opinion)
COR 2014/6248 – COTER-VI/001
113th Plenary Session - July 2015
Rapporteur: Mr Ivan Žagar (SI/EPP)
DG REGIO – Commissioner CREȚU

Points of the CoR opinion considered essential	Commission position
<p>6. The CoR already sees cause for concern, however, that the requirements laid down by the Commission still fail to set the objective of reducing the burden of administration and control. The CoR therefore urges the Commission, when developing the administrative and control systems and carrying out audits, to avoid further measures that would create even more red tape for beneficiaries and administrators in the Member States and which would reduce the potential contribution of the European Structural and Investment Funds to meeting the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy.</p>	<p>The Common Provision Regulation (CPR) provides for a number of means of incentivising Member States to reduce administrative burden and undertake simplification measures in the programmes. The Commission services are currently assessing their uptake. Furthermore, on 10 July 2015, the Commission formally set up a High Level Group of Independent Experts on Monitoring Simplification for Beneficiaries of the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds. The expert group will advise on how to improve the uptake of simplification measures for the 2014-2020 period and on the way forward for the post-2020 regulatory framework for ESI Funds. Members were selected and appointed in their personal capacity following a call for applications which closed on 20 August 2015.</p>
<p>11. The CoR notes that strategic planning is crucial for the successful implementation of cohesion policy. In this respect, the most important strategic elements of cohesion policy are the PAs and OPs as they outline how the Structural and Investment Funds</p>	<p>The Commission acknowledges that the partnership principle has been implemented differently in the Member States (please see reply to points 24 & 26). However, as regards Partnership Agreements, a common methodology</p>

are to be spent in a particular Member State or region. The CoR regrets that the late adoption of the cohesion policy legislative package and the curtailment and underestimation of the time Member States and LRAs need for highly complex programming (multi-instrument, multi-level and multi-actor) in the adoption of the PAs and OPs have led to purely superficial partnerships being established and have delayed the start of the new programming period. The CoR regrets that no clear, common methodology or methodologies have been created for drafting Partnership Agreements that would help to meet the objectives. The absence of this methodology means that each Member State has taken its own entirely individual approach to drafting Partnership Agreements, so that they are not comparable with one another and their implementation will also be difficult to compare (particularly with regard to implementation of Integrated Territorial Investments, in terms of actual use and an appropriate implementation and management structure). For the 2014-2020 development policy period, the Committee proposes that a uniform methodology for the amendment of Partnership Agreements be drawn up.

was laid out in the detailed template and guidelines on PAs², which was discussed and was made available to Member States. The way the content of PAs is structured does in fact allow their key elements to be compared.

17. The CoR underlines that effective and well-functioning partnership means better anchored and appropriate efforts that meet needs and requirements at different levels of society. Ultimately this will also lead to more effective use of funding. In countries where the partnership is not properly established and is purely superficial, the European Commission should also assist in examining mechanisms to put the

Please see reply to points 24 & 26.

<p>partnership on the right track and avoid complexity and excessive and disproportionate administrative burdens that might further delay implementation of structural and investment funds across the EU.</p>	
<p>20. The CoR is concerned that the partnership principle cannot be applied appropriately in all Member States. The negotiations on the PAs and OPs showed that while LRAs were consulted in most cases, their involvement did not amount to full partnership as outlined in the European Code of Conduct on Partnership. In fact, the Committee regrets that LRAs have rarely been sufficiently involved in drafting the PAs and OPs as their role is often more that of a stakeholder rather than that of a partner. The European Commission should also consider partnership mechanisms and the time needed for talks with multi-level institutional structures to allow for more in-depth and informed discussion, matching the time needed for the procedure. This would strike a balance between the time needed for adoption at European level and that for presentation of the programmes at national level.</p>	<p>Please see reply to Points 24 & 26.</p>
<p>21. The CoR regrets the fact that no methodology for using Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) was set out clearly before Partnership Agreements were drafted and adopted. As a result, each country takes a completely different approach to ITIs, if it takes any approach at all. In those cases where the ITI instrument has, however, been used in a Partnership Agreement, those drawing up the individual ITIs continue to encounter a lack of clarity at both national and Commission level. Added</p>	<p>Since the use of ITI is indeed optional, not all Member States will use it in their programmes, although 20 out of 28 Member States do.</p> <p>The Commission has provided programming guidance on ITI³ and sees the flexibility of this tool as one of its strengths.</p> <p>Furthermore, following up on requests it received, the Commission published in October 2015 a report describing four</p>

<p>to this in many cases is reluctance on the part of managing authorities to include ITIs in their Operational Programmes at all. The CoR therefore calls on the European Commission to make sure that, in countries that have opted to use the ITI instrument, it will be possible to use it to the appropriate extent in all Operational Programmes, and that appropriate implementation and management systems will be quickly created so that ITIs really can be used and effects of synergy generated.</p>	<p>examples of the possible use of ITI⁴.</p> <p>The Commission will continue to monitor the use of ITI in the ESIF programmes, and will support authorities that are setting up ITIs by giving advice and through the organisation of workshops in the framework of the Urban Development Network.</p>
<p>23. The CoR asks the European Commission to provide for the possibility for LRAs to elaborate their own "Regional" PA as an integrated part of the general PA concluded at national level. Doing this, the Commission will give full recognition to Article 4 TEU respecting the internal constitutional order of the Member States, whilst giving maximum effect to the subsidiarity principle.</p>	<p>The CPR Regulation does not foresee a development of PAs at administrative levels other than the national one.</p>
<p>24. The CoR asks the European Commission to speak with one voice during the negotiations on the PAs and OPs and notes in this respect that several LRAs have complained that during the negotiations, different services of the European Commission had different, sometimes contradictory, demands which were not justified by real, practical requirements and/or existing legislation. The CoR calls on the Commission to involve local and regional authorities, which develop and implement a significant part of the programmes, earlier in the negotiations, and to provide a clear, standard interpretation of the fundamental provisions of the Regulation right from the start of the process of developing operational</p>	<p>The partnership principle has been stepped up for 2014-2020. With the introduction of the European Code of Conduct on partnership (ECCP) which reaches across programming periods, the Commission has outlined the minimum standards of how a well-functioning partnership should be organised. The Commission also provided a collection of good practices to support Member States in the implementation of the partnership principle.</p> <p>In the context of the preparation of the PAs and OPs, the Commission paid special attention to the way Member States involved the relevant partners. Commission opinions were clearly laid</p>

programmes. The Commission's late submission of comments to the programmes submitted, and the short deadline for updating the programmes, have undermined political ownership at local and regional level.

26. (...) therefore the CoR believes that the partnership principle can be strengthened by the Commission helping to examine the operating mechanisms and identifying best practices, including assessment of the time needed for discussion given the complexity of the institutions and the programme. Welcomes, in this respect, that the European Commission has launched a study on the partnership principle and plans to hold regular "structured dialogue" meetings which aim to discuss the implementation of the partnership principle with stakeholders. Points out that the CoR, as the representative body of LRAs, needs to be the key strategic partner in this process;

out in the position papers by Commission services and the observations adopted by the Commission. Feedback has been generally positive and concerns brought to the attention of the Commission have been addressed with national authorities.

Furthermore, the Commission set up a Structured Dialogue expert group for ESI funds for the programming period 2014-2020, with the aim, inter alia, to debate on the implementation of the partnership principle. The Committee of the Regions has been invited to attend the group's meetings.

The Commission also launched a study to take stock of how the new, reinforced, legal provisions on partnership have been integrated into the programming process and to look on the planned involvement of partners in implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The study seeks to identify the benefits and challenges of the partnerships, including the value of informal dialogue between Commission and Member States, and will also benchmark the findings against the previous programming period.

However, cohesion policy, including the implementation of the partnership principle, is heavily built on subsidiarity as defined in the Treaty. Indeed, the partnership principle is implemented very differently in the Member States, depending on differences in national administrative structures and different cultures with

	<p>regards to the involvement of partners.</p> <p>Extension of the culture and practice of partnership is a long-standing process, which will bear fruit in the mid- and long term. Commission, on its side, will continue efforts to encourage Member States' commitment. To this end, as provided for in the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP), a community of Practice on Partnership will be set in the context of transnational cooperation under the European Social Fund (ESF), which will be open to all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the ESI Funds</p>
<p>27. The CoR asks the Commission to consider in particular the extent to which the partnership principle and the territorial dimension are upheld in the national programmes framed under cohesion policy. There is a trend in the majority of Member States towards more explicit centralisation of cohesion policy implementation, with national programmes being introduced at the expense of regional ones. It is essential to defend the primary goal of cohesion policy, which is to reduce regional differences and imbalances, and to promote regional growth.</p>	<p>The Commission cannot confirm an overall tendency towards centralisation in all Member States. Indeed, while some Member States opted for a more centralised approach, others have gone the other way.</p> <p>As for the territorial dimension, national programmes do take into account regional aspects. The 2014-2020 Regulation promotes a place-based approach to ensure an effective delivery of the Europe 2020 strategy by means of a greater awareness of the territory. Dedicated instruments, such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and ITI provide a specific framework for implementing some of the place-based principles, notably integration of sectors and territorial dialogue. The Commission is closely monitoring the implementation of this place-based approach. It will be covered in the report provided for in Article 16(3) CPR, to be submitted to the</p>

	<p>European Parliament, the Council, the EESC and the CoR by 31 December 2015. Moreover, the Commission strongly believes that the active involvement and participation of regions is paramount in promoting balanced regional growth. In the recently published Better Regulation Guidelines⁵, there is increased attention placed on the assessment of potential territorial impacts of EU policies and early stakeholder involvement. The Commission encourages local and regional stakeholders and their representatives to make use of this opportunity.</p> <p>For the recommendation related to the partnership principle, please see the reply to Point 26.</p>
<p>31. The CoR points out that difficulties arise when implementing Structural Funds through financial instruments. In many cases, implementation remains very complex, and even the relevant Commission departments do not always interpret these provisions identically or consistently, particularly during the verification and control phase. Despite efforts by the European Commission to provide guidance, in most cases setting up financial instruments still necessitates the use of external consultancy firms, which implies additional costs.</p>	<p>In addition to the legal texts, all Commission's DGs have a common interpretation note⁶ which has been improved in 2011 both in terms of content and clarity. This ensures an equal view and understanding, at EU and national level, of the EU legal framework applicable to financial instruments. Some changes in interpretation over time were due to the lack of precision in the initial 2007-2013 legal base and demands from the European Court of Auditors.</p> <p>Moreover, Member States can directly request guidance from the Commission. External consultants are often involved but not necessarily and not systematically.</p> <p>For the programming period 2014-2020, a technical assistance service, fi-compass⁷, has been set up.</p>

	<p>It will provide "how-to" manuals, factsheets for quick reference, e-learning modules, face-to-face training seminars and networking events. The website will progressively become the knowledge & networking hub. Some material can already be found there, such as EC guidance, factsheets explaining the benefits of financial instruments and how they work under the different ESI Funds, or several case studies presenting how financial instruments were implemented in 2007-2013 and what they have achieved. Fi-compass also organises multiple events and seminars covering all Member States. The full calendar and the registration tools are available on the fi-compass website.</p>
<p>35. The CoR draws attention to the fact that owing to internal regional disparities, it may still be necessary, even in more developed regions, to invest in infrastructure providing basic services in the areas of environment, transport, information and communication technologies (ICT), social services, health and education.</p>	<p>The Regulation for the 2014-2020 programming period brings a clear shift in terms of funding priorities in more developed regions, giving priority to R&D, innovation, SMEs, low-carbon economy, but also ICTs, over basic infrastructures. The new Regulation also puts the emphasis on inclusive growth by calling upon Member States and regions to invest more in ESF priorities, notably employment, social inclusion, education, and institutional capacity-building.</p>
<p>48. The CoR notes that in the past, cohesion policy has received considerable criticism for its complex implementation system. Most of the managing authorities still see the new regulations as bureaucratic and complex. In this respect, simplifying eligibility rules, avoiding gold-plating and</p>	<p>The Commission notes that two out of three key elements where respondents to the CoR consultation see the highest need for simplification are areas where principal competence lies at national level. The eligibility rules are determined at national level within the</p>

<p>focusing on results were considered as most essential by respondents of the CoR consultation.</p>	<p>framework provisions established by the CPR, and the level of gold-plating by definition depends on the national rules coming on top of the EU level legislative requirements. With a view to focus on results and to facilitate implementation, the Commission also promotes the use of simplified cost options.</p>
<p>49. The CoR points out that gold-plating is still one of the main reasons for the administrative burden. This overly strict national interpretation of EU rules, coupled with the fact that in many Member States each Fund is subject to separate Ministerial and management lines, leads to unnecessary administrative requirements, silo approaches, and an additional bureaucratic burden on beneficiaries and managing authorities, as well as hampering the use of integrated territorial development instruments such as ITI or CLLD.</p>	<p>Pertaining to the request for EU level monitoring of national application of EU rules, the Commission has a good practical knowledge of how EU regulatory provisions are translated into the national legislations. However, systemic monitoring and control mechanisms would undermine the principle of shared management and would ultimately lead to intrusion into areas of national competence. The Commission is in favour of organising fora for sharing good practice examples.</p>
<p>50. The CoR asks the European Commission to monitor national application of EU rules and, in the event of gold-plating, to convince national authorities to apply EU rules in a less onerous way. Cases of gold-plating should be made publicly available for mutual learning processes.</p>	
<p>51. (...) however, there is ample room for simplification within EU rules as well (regulations, implementing and delegated acts). The CoR therefore insists on further simplification in the management of EU-funded projects. This should include a reduction in the time period for reimbursement for beneficiaries, the creation of one set of common auditing rules for projects, simpler rules for projects which generate their own revenue, consistent rules concerning the eligibility of costs, the wider use of simplified costs, a closer connection between payments and results, E-cohesion, the "one-stop-shop" principle for beneficiaries, and a proportionate and</p>	<p>In the framework of the public procurement action plan (cooperation between ESIF DGs (REGIO in the lead, with GROW and EIB)), the Commission has developed 12 actions of which some directly target beneficiaries, especially LRAs. For example, the hands-on guide for practitioners on the avoidance of most common errors in public procurement⁸, available in all EU languages from October 2015.</p> <p>Regarding the connection between payments and results, the regulation for the 2014-2020 programming period, in particular CPR articles 104-109 on</p>

<p>unified approach to supervision, the harmonisation of procedures as part of first-level monitoring of territorial cooperation programmes, and simplification of public procurement controls. The CoR stresses the importance of providing local and regional authorities, as well as companies, with appropriate expert assistance in their search for answers and advice relating to legislation (particularly in the area of public procurement) and its correct application. The CoR urges the European Commission to include representatives from the local and regional authorities in the high level group of experts monitoring simplification for beneficiaries, thus making use of the practitioners' experience on implementation of projects with the aim of reducing the administrative burden, increasing funds absorption and improving the impact of programmes.</p>	<p>Joint Action Plans, provides for the possibility to accumulate experience in the field of payments against achievements. It is important to establish such links specifically for those achievements that are under the direct control of the programme managers.</p> <p>On simplification, please also see reply to Point 6.</p>
<p>52. The CoR draws attention to the excessive burden placed on local and regional authorities by the large number of uncoordinated controls, which could lead to a decrease in interest in implementing European projects. If necessary, combined controls should be carried out or controls should be mutually recognised by the relevant authorities. The CoR proposes making use of the results of controls or audits to prevent errors, thus making implemented projects more successful.</p>	<p>The CPR introduces several provisions with the aim of reducing the burden on beneficiaries:</p> <p>Article 148 puts in place proportional control arrangements that avoid having recurrent audits to the same projects. There is also an increase in the cooperation between the Commission and the national audit authorities to coordinate audit methodologies and strategies. The national authorities should in addition make sure at their level that there is no overlapping of national audits.</p> <p>Concerning first level control, the CPR allows for on-the-spot management verifications on a sample basis. The frequency and coverage of these verifications shall be proportionate to</p>

	<p>the amount of public support to an operation and to the level of risk identified.</p> <p>Also introduced by the CPR, E-cohesion allows for further simplification for beneficiaries, as the documents only need to be submitted once to the national authorities.</p> <p>Finally, the substantial reduction of the documents retention period further alleviates the burden on beneficiaries (the reference moment for the 2007-2013 programming period is the closure of the OP, while for 2014-2020 it is the annual submission of the accounts).</p>
<p>54. The CoR firmly believes that specific measures are immediately required to simplify territorial cooperation programmes. The results of European territorial cooperation programmes and projects also need to be made more visible. Complexity is a source of delay and errors which hamper the effectiveness of EU cohesion policy. Rules that are clearer, more transparent and simpler to apply lead to fewer problems downstream, at the expenditure certification stage and during control and audit operations; ex-post controls by the European Commission should also be harmonised and in any case meet the criteria of consistency, subsidiarity and, most importantly, proportionality.</p>	<p>To improve the visibility of the results of European territorial cooperation programmes, the CPR provides for a communication strategy to be adopted by each programme monitoring committee within six months of programme adoption. The implementation of these provisions goes in the right direction and the Commission is carefully monitoring the evolutions. In addition, harmonized rules on eligibility of expenditure have been established to simplify the implementation of European territorial cooperation programmes.</p> <p>Please also see reply to Points 6 and 52.</p>
<p>59. The CoR welcomes the European Commission's Lagging Regions Initiative whose objective is to identify key drivers and bottlenecks for growth and investment at regional level, in particular in less developed regions. The CoR calls on the European Commission to use the knowledge of regional and local experts and take into</p>	<p>The exchange system for regional policy experts PEER 2 PEER ⁹ is being used to exchange experience between Member States on their practices. The Commission will encourage especially the lagging regions to take part in this initiative.</p>

account the specific needs of lagging regions when providing recommendations on how to unlock their growth potential.	
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Fougeray Laetitia

From: Hagemann Annette on behalf of Burianek Jiri
Sent: jeudi, 12 novembre, 2015 19:14
To: adonis
Cc: Burianek Jiri; Thieule Laurent; Wobben Thomas; dir-b-contact-point; dir-c-focal-point; Spinaci Gianluca; Gsodam Christian; Essender Boris; Boele Klaus; Passera Anna; Jouglain Marie-Pierre
Subject: FW: Ares(2015)5031284 - Suivi des avis du Comité des Régions - sessions plénières de juin et juillet 2015
Attachments: Note de couverture_suivi CdR juin_juillet 2015.pdf; 65e rapport final.pdf

Pour enregistrement dans Adonis.
Annette

-----Original Message-----

From: EC ARES NOREPLY [<mailto:DIGIT-NOREPLYARES@ec.europa.eu>]
Sent: jeudi, 12 novembre, 2015 15:46
To: Burianek Jiri
Subject: Ares(2015)5031284 - Suivi des avis du Comité des Régions - sessions plénières de juin et juillet 2015

Veillez trouver ci-joint le document Ares(2015)5031284 concernant "Suivi des avis du Comité des Régions - sessions plénières de juin et juillet 2015" envoyé par M/Mme LEARDINI Pascal le 12/11/2015.

Please find attached document Ares(2015)5031284 regarding "Suivi des avis du Comité des Régions - sessions plénières de juin et juillet 2015" sent by Mr/Ms LEARDINI Pascal on 12/11/2015.

Note: This e-mail was automatically generated by the European Commission's central mail registration system. Replies by e-mail must be addressed to the original sender LEARDINI Pascal (<mailto:pascal.leardini@ec.europa.eu>).
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