

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

Brussels, November 2008

**RESOLUTION OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS
on the
Priorities of the Committee of the Regions for 2009
based on the
Legislative and Work Programme of the European Commission**

POLITICAL PRIORITIES

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. **stresses** the importance of a new momentum towards structural reforms in the EU, aiming at solutions to overcoming the present financial crisis and its impact on the European and world economies; **considers** that, even though emergency measures are important to help Europe over the present crisis in the short term, long term actions, are necessary to also generate sustainable jobs and growth, quality infrastructure, public transport and investments in energy efficient technologies are therefore of outmost importance;
2. recalls in this context its specific Resolution on the financial crisis which sets out the main steps to be taken at European, national, regional and local level to address the financial crisis and to limit as far as possible its negative consequences;
3. **welcomes** the explicit will and the proposals to strengthen the European Union's territorial dimension and its democratic nature; **signals** its intention to continue developing the CoR's political and institutional role in the European decision-making process; and announces that a White Paper will be drawn up on multi-level governance which it intends to present during 2009;
4. **reaffirms** its intention to follow closely the EU budgetary review in order to contribute to a better integration and coordination of EU policies at territorial level and **calls for** this process to reflect the needs of all levels of governance , and to improve the quality, equality, stability, visibility and simplicity of EU measures; to this end, **suggests** to align the budget programming period with the European electoral cycle on a 5+5 years basis, to provide effective support to the least developed regions to help them catch up, to ensure that the budget in the future reflects better all the EU competencies and to avoid the re-nationalisation of EU policies which would endanger the effectiveness of the European integration project¹;

For more jobs and growth

5. **emphasises** the need for confidence building measures to win back the trust of the EU citizens facing uncertainty and high pressure on their jobs, confronted with fluctuating energy prices, financial instability and a loss of confidence in the banking sector and **recalls** that it is also necessary to look at mechanisms which would help to avoid such crises in the future;
6. **underlines** the need for sustainable development for citizens and the generations to come; **recalls** also the importance of a social Europe and **stresses** that these goals should not be compromised but that, on the contrary, common efforts are needed from the EU and the

¹ CoR Opinion CdR 16/2008 fin, "Reforming the budget, changing Europe", rapporteurs Mr. Van den Brande and Mr Delebarre.

Member States as well as regional and local political actors. To this end, central government and local and regional authorities should be further encouraged by the EU – inter alia through a more lenient application of the rules on permitted deficit levels in the Member States – to also pursue these objectives by making ambitious long-term investment in education, training, research and innovation as well as in the development of quality infrastructures, public transport networks and investment in energy efficient technologies;

7. **welcomes** the decision of the European Council to ensure support to the economy, giving wider attention to long terms needs such as energy efficiency and innovative clean technology, as well as measures aimed at simplifying and reducing administrative burdens in view of better law making;
8. **supports** a relaunched EU Strategy for Growth and Jobs post 2010, which aims to create new jobs in the face of the crisis by a concerted effort at European level to combine public investment, support for research, innovation, sustainable technology and SMEs, comprehensive social dialogue, sound financial regulation, non-protectionist trade rules and close cooperation on fiscal and monetary policy in the EU;
9. **underlines** the need for coordinated actions among all levels of government to support SMEs to stronger connect fundamental research to the applied research and to support cooperation with the private sector in order to promote innovation and technological leadership; **welcomes** measures aimed at launching and supporting Creativity and Innovation initiatives, especially those targeting university-enterprises cooperation because innovation and creativity are keydrivers for change and competitiveness in the regions, contributing to quality of life and economic cohesion;
10. **recalls as** crucial in particular the role of local and regional authorities as public investors and buyers and **underlines** that local and regional authorities, enterprises and universities play a key role in creating active networking and clusters policy in the EU;
11. **firmly believes** that investing in youth is vital for the achievement of the goals of the European Union in terms of employability and social inclusion of young people;
12. **calls for** equal opportunities in employment and for a special attention to the potential contribution of elder workers who possess precious knowledge for product and system innovation;
13. **welcomes** that the European Commission will present an assessment of the EU's demographic future at the Spring European Council and **asks** the European Commission to consider how best to take into account the needs of an ageing population; **underlines** that demographic trends at the level of regions, cities and municipalities should be considered in a more differentiated way because of the diversity of the regions and the migration flows they are

facing; **stresses** that, in the context of the Social Agenda for Opportunities, Access and Solidarity, vulnerable groups of citizens require special attention and targeted measures;

14. **calls** for a review of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EAGF), in order to make this instrument more operational; this could be done through: more flexible EAGF thresholds, allowing these funds to be used in conjunction with other EU financial instruments applicable to mass redundancies and increasing the EAGF budget from EUR 500 million to EUR 1 billion;
15. **points out** that it is of vital importance for citizens, especially in the context of the financial crisis, that high quality public services are guaranteed; **express** therefore its concern that the current situation of legal uncertainty for the local and regional authorities who often provide such services, is not addressed in the Commissions work programme.

For Cohesion

16. **regrets** to see that the importance of cohesion policy is not reflected in the priorities of the European Commission's work programme, despite the financial and political weight of this policy area making it a core objective of the EU; and **supports** a large debate on the future of the cohesion policy within the EU budget review process, in order to consolidate this major policy around its central objective: the harmonious development of EU territories between them, more specifically the reduction of their economic, social and territorial disparities; therefore, **expects** the consultation on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion in 2009 to be followed up by a White Paper on Territorial Cohesion;
17. **recalls** that an ambitious cohesion policy, which makes serious efforts to translate territorial cohesion objectives into concrete policy actions, will allow the consolidation of the European integration process and to meet future challenges affecting all European regions; in this context, **sees the need** for flexible earmarking of funds to adapt structural cohesion instruments to the diversity of local and regional situations;
18. **underlines** that Cohesion policy has become one of the highest profile success stories in the European Union. Its leverage effect for regional development has been proven. Based on this positive experience, it is necessary in 2009 to reinforce the exchange of ideas and cooperation on new approaches and models for regional policies; **proposes** that the CoR works with the European Commission to provide adequate mechanisms for such actions; **emphasizes** that to this end further debates will be organised on the future of Cohesion Policy during the Summit of Cities and Regions organized by the Committee of the Regions in Prague on 5-6 March 2009, as well as in the context of the "Open Days – 2009" (on 6-9 October);
19. **underlines** that territorial cooperation is an essential element in achieving the objective of territorial cohesion; **therefore recalls** that the new legal instrument "European Grouping of

Territorial Cooperation" (EGTC) has a great potential on the ground. Member States therefore should adopt all necessary measures to implement the regulation's provisions.

For combating climate change effectively and for a sustainable Europe

20. **urges** the European Commission to maintain a strong political focus on energy and climate change policy, ensuring the effective involvement of local and regional authorities in the drafting and implementation of legislation;
21. **strongly supports** a high profile role of the EU in the framework of the negotiations of the 2009 Copenhagen UN Climate Change Convention aiming to agree on a leap forward in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from 2012;
22. **proposes** that mitigation and adaptation to climate change to be treated as priorities in the debate of the EU Budget Review; Furthermore, **calls** for complementarities between territorial cohesion and climate change measures to be sought, notably through the use of existing financial instruments;
23. **underlines** the role of regions as an essential link between national and local energy efficiency plans and promotion of renewable energy, and considers that without the support of regions Member States may not be able to live up to their commitments for greenhouse gas reductions by 2020; **stresses** that the negotiations of a post-Kyoto international climate agreement should focus both on comprehensive policies and their implementation as well on emissions' targets; **reaffirms** its support to initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors and **suggests** to complement it with a direct involvement of the regions;
24. **reaffirms** its commitment to halting the loss of biodiversity and hopes the European Commission's midterm review of the EU Biodiversity Action Plan will provide new momentum;
25. **strongly suggests** that synergies be fostered between rural development policy and other EU policies, particularly cohesion policy; **asks** the European Commission to analyse the consequences of the world economic crisis on agricultural markets and the rural sector in order establish the appropriated measures to preserve this sector from decline and to maintain alimentary independence;
26. **recalls** its request to be involved as a logical follow-up to its contribution to the Commission's maritime action plan in developing and implementing the European Union's new integrated maritime policy;
27. **welcomes** the Commission's activities in the field of green transport; **reiterates** the importance of supporting measures which soften the impact of transport on the environment, giving priority to maritime transport policy and to an ambitious action plan on urban mobility;

28. **welcomes** the European Commission's announcement to give fresh impetus to the TEN-T projects in Europe; **insists** that local and regional concerns should not only be taken on board, but that local, regional and national planning instruments should be coordinated within this European framework in order to optimise the Trans-European Networks.

For a Europe closer to citizens

29. **emphasizes** its role as a key institution in the European Unions's efforts to communicate with citizens and **reminds** the European Commission that the CoR's direct access to Europe's local and regional authorities, through its members, creates a valuable relay network to inform citizens about EU benefits and to listen to citizens and their concerns; **reminds** the European Commission and member states that integrating the European dimension into daily action and communicating in an understandable language is the joint responsibility of European Institutions as well as of national, regional and local elected representatives who are situated at the grassroots level of communication close to the citizens;
30. **considers** that the European elections in 2009 must be taken as an opportunity to step up a decentralised European communication policy in order to raise awareness of the European Union's shared values by maintaining permanent dialogue with European citizens and demonstrating the added value of European integration;
31. **underlines** that the CoR will pursue its efforts for better recognition at the European level of the role of local and regional authorities in the further development of the area of Freedom, Security and Justice, especially with regards to designing and implementing the Multi-annual post-The Hague Programme; **supports** the pursuit of an integrated and comprehensive approach to migration and asylum, since it is only through this approach that Europe will reach a stable and sustainable immigration policy; to this end, the CoR stresses also the importance of intercultural dialogue initiatives; **welcomes** in this respect the new timetable of legislative actions – so called "Stockholm programme" – aimed at strengthening a European area of freedom, security and justice;
32. **backs** the goal of combating terrorism and violent radicalisation to enhance the security of EU citizens, recognising that local and regional authorities are central to the implementation of the EU Counter Terrorism Strategy and **insists** that this fight, in order to be successful, has to be carried out in full respect of fundamental rights and freedoms;
33. **welcomes** that the Third Strategic Review of Better Regulation will report on the three core components of the Better Regulation Agenda – impact assessment, simplification and reduction of administrative burden; **underlines** its ongoing contributions to the debate in the High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders on Administrative Burden, ("Stoiber-Group") with special regard to cost cutting measures for local and regional authorities; **keeps supporting** the application of a joint methodology for assessing administrative burdens,

which explicitly takes into account the local and regional dimension and **reaffirms** its commitment to inter-institutional cooperation, in order to attain the objectives set in this domain;

34. **reaffirms** that the implementation of the subsidiarity and proportionality principles in the legislative process is at the heart of an effective and democratic multilevel governance and **underlines** the importance of contributing to a subsidiarity culture in the EU institutions that will benefit a better decision making.

For a stronger Europe in the World

35. **reiterates** that local and regional authorities play a crucial role in the enlargement process and continues its cooperation with elected local and regional representatives from EU candidate and potential candidate countries;
36. **welcomes** the re-launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership through the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean and **stresses** the important contribution of local and regional authorities to its implementation; **announces** the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), which shall be a permanent political body representing local and regional authorities with the goal of being recognised as a consultative body of the Union for the Mediterranean;
37. **emphasizes** the importance to balance the relations with the EU's neighbours to the East and the South and **welcomes** the initiative of the Eastern Partnership; **invites** the European Commission to develop further regional and territorial cooperation components within the Eastern Partnership;
38. **appreciates** the European Commission's increasing recognition of the decentralised cooperation method and activities; **commits itself** to organise "EU Decentralised cooperation days" in the end of 2009 to facilitate exchange and political dialogue of local and regional authorities of the EU and developing countries; **welcomes** the creation of an information exchange platform - "stock exchange" - which will allow matching between local and regional authorities in the EU and in development countries aiming at the creation of new decentralised cooperation projects
39. **reiterates** its commitment to foster local and regional democracy in Europe and third countries; and **stresses** its willingness to continue its involvement in election monitoring missions with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and **wishes to be** more closely involved in election observation missions organised with the support of the European Commission;

40. **instructs** its president to forward this resolution to the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council, the current French presidency and the presidencies of the European Union in 2009, namely the Czech and Swedish presidencies.

Brussels, 27 November 2008.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Luc Van den Brande

The Secretary-General
of the Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl
