

**Committee of the Regions****ENVE-V-037****103rd plenary session, 7-9 October 2013****OPINION****EU STRATEGY FOR ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE**

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- recognises that the effects of global climate change impacts could be as equally significant as local impacts to some European cities and regions and therefore, sees the need for a wider focus for adaptation strategies beyond the EU;
- views green infrastructure as providing a classic "low regrets, low-cost adaptation" option that will help increase resilience in urban areas;
- is extremely concerned about the impact of climate change on agricultural, forestry and fisheries production;
- contends that greater attention is required in the SACC to driving adaptation forwards at the local level, where impacts are experienced most acutely and first responders are located;
- recognises that funding is key to the implementation of adaptation responses at a local level;
- recognises the importance of local and regional networks in the promotion of adaptation measures, and believes that EU funding should be used to provide appropriate financial support for such networks. However, the CoR does not recommend a new organisation or voluntary commitment for adaptation, as suggested in the SACC, as it would create duplication, be confusing to participants and could waste valuable resources. The existing Covenant of Mayors should be better resourced, and re-launched as a network focused on climate action in both its aspects, mitigation and adaptation;
- concludes that, due to the urgency required, the proposed review of the strategy in 2017 should focus not only on progress with national adaptation strategies and whether legislation is necessary in the future, but also should be the target date for achievement of a number of implementation milestones at all governance levels, and that the SACC should be accompanied by guidance and support for sub-national bodies as well as Member States to achieve these milestones;

Rapporteur

Mr Neil Swannick (UK/PES), Member of Manchester City Council

Reference document

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change
COM(2013) 216 final

**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions
EU Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change**

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. acknowledges that the expected 2015 UN agreement on climate change will cover not only mitigation but also adaptation. Building resilience to climate change – particularly amongst the poorest and most vulnerable nations of the world – is absolutely crucial if the agreement is to be equitable;
2. stresses that climate change mitigation is the best way to address many of the key challenges of adaptation in a preventive way, and that stronger and more ambitious climate-change mitigation measures will enable adaptation measures to remain more limited;
3. notes that the world has crossed a perilous threshold, with atmospheric carbon dioxide levels now at 400 ppm;
4. calls on the EU negotiators to move forward on raising ambition and enlisting international support for a 2015 Agreement, which unambiguously includes the transformation of the world's energy system;
5. is acutely aware that many developing countries are threatened by slow-onset climate change processes such as sea-level rise and increasing temperatures which are exacerbating the threats posed by extreme weather events and seriously undermine prospects for achieving global sustainable development;
6. stresses that water resources are directly impacted by climate change, and the management of these resources affects ecosystems and plant and animal production, socio-economic activities and human health;
7. calls on the Council and the Commission for the CoR to be associated not only with work on climate change mitigation, but also with the technical work related to the Nairobi Work Programme focusing on ecosystem-based adaptation and biodiversity;

Adaptation and resilience

8. welcomes the references to resilience within the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change (SACC) and its overall aim to support progress towards a "climate-resilient Europe". The CoR believes that locating climate change adaptation as a dimension of resilience is a valuable approach. A city can recover from a shock to the urban system (climatic or otherwise) if underlying resilience is high, but can be severely weakened, if low;

9. views building links between climate change adaptation and the disaster risk management and emergency planning communities as essential;
10. in the context of resilience, considers adaptation to be:
 - a holistic agenda, cutting across systems, sectors, spatial scales and timescales,
 - one element of a broader strategy needed to build the resilience of Europe and the cities and regions within it, and
 - a process of identifying and subsequently reducing risks from extreme weather and climate hazards, thereby lessening the intensity of related shocks;
11. understands that negative impacts can be expected from climate change even where strong adaptation responses are developed and the objective of limiting warming to an average of 2°C is respected. The priority is to become resilient to these events and therefore the use of the term "climate-resilience" is more appropriate than "climate-proofing";
12. recognises that the effects of global climate change impacts could be as equally significant as local impacts to some European cities and regions through the effects on global logistics and supply chains, food security and migration (of humans, flora and fauna and diseases) and therefore, sees the need for a wider focus for adaptation strategies beyond the EU. In the same manner that development and cooperation, food and energy are supported globally, it is appropriate that adaptation is supported, given its potential risks and benefits for the EU;
13. notes the body of research focusing on the impact of climate change on cultural heritage, and contends that adaptation strategies should include assessments of the vulnerability of heritage assets, such as buildings, art and archives, to extreme weather events and environmental degradation;
14. views green infrastructure as providing a classic "low regrets, low-cost adaptation" option that will help increase resilience in urban areas through moderating surface temperature and reducing rainwater run-off. An adaptation approach based around natural and urban systems is essential: for example, ecological corridors which cross administrative boundaries to support wildlife migration in a changing climate. It is therefore helpful to promote ecosystems or green infrastructure as critical infrastructure;
15. maintains that healthy ecosystems and rich biodiversity will strengthen local and regional resilience to climate change, whilst emphasising that these systems themselves are also threatened by the changing climate. This theme should be recognised more forcefully within the SACC, national adaptation strategies and EU programmes;

Adaptation and economic competitiveness

16. welcomes the connection made within the SACC between adapting to extreme weather and climate change hazards and safeguarding Europe's future economic prosperity, but warns that measures to promote adaptation in order to maintain growth and competitiveness must not be at the expense of social welfare and health;
17. recognises the significant direct costs associated with weather and climate hazards, such as damage to buildings and infrastructure. Therefore, adaptation responses that include both retrofitting existing assets and embedding resilience into future schemes, such as rail lines and housing developments, should be encouraged;
18. notes that insurance providers may consider that a city or region's land, buildings and infrastructure are not sufficiently protected from climate change risk. This may result in limitations on insurance availability or increased cost of cover. Areas experiencing such difficulties may find meeting their growth aspirations difficult to achieve and some urban areas may become "uninsurable". The fact that the Commission's Green Paper on the Insurance of Natural and Man-made Disasters will discuss this area is therefore welcome;
19. identifies the importance of assessing climate impact costs so that the value of pre-emptive adaptation actions can be compared. This would bring a better understanding of the economic opportunities of adaptation and costs avoided. Economic aspects of climate change were already analysed in the Stern Review. Further research in this field should be encouraged to support the development of business cases for mainstreaming adaptation across policy and strategy;
20. promotes a "whole lifecycle" approach to assessing costs and benefits of capital to secure long term payback associated with climate-resilient investments. Accounts and risk registers should be required to include the economic, environmental and social implications of actions and capital investments that fail to account for the changing climate;
21. views the potential for extreme weather and climate change to disrupt networked infrastructure systems to be a key focus of adaptation strategies. A weather or climate hazard, such as of the loss of an electricity sub-station or ICT hub, can have indirect implications or "cascading" effects across many economic sectors and services;
22. observes that the links between socio-economic systems, climate change and infrastructure may lead to changes in travel preferences or energy consumption habits, significantly affecting the demand for and supply of infrastructure services;
23. is extremely concerned about the impact of climate change on agricultural, forestry and fisheries production; asks that EU policies on these matters help to increase the resilience to

climate change of these vital primary production sources and of the ecosystems which make this production possible;

The adaptation target

24. recognises the uncertainty associated with future atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases and their associated temperature rises and impacts. The SACC focuses on adapting to the implications of a world that is 2°C warmer. However, the current science, as well as the IPCC's AR4¹, suggests that current atmospheric concentrations (if simply maintained) will lead to warming of more than 2°C. Therefore, under the precautionary principle, we advocate putting in place measures that meet the adaptation needs of a higher projected future temperature rise;

Vulnerability to extreme weather and climate change hazards

25. welcomes the references to vulnerability within the SACC as an important element of understanding and adapting to climate change; reducing the vulnerability of "receptors" (including people, infrastructure and economic sectors) to harm from extreme weather and climate change hazards is the primary goal of adaptation;
26. promotes a vulnerability focused approach to adaptation, because:
 - it is methodologically difficult, time-consuming and expensive to provide climate change projections at the local level whilst data on factors affecting vulnerability is generally more readily available. A vulnerability-focused approach allows immediate progress to be made in the absence of detailed localised climate change projections,
 - the World Health Organization notes that climate change is the greatest public health challenge of the 21st century,
 - the most vulnerable groups, including the elderly, very young and socio-economically deprived, are particularly threatened by extreme weather and climate change because of their lack of resources and access to insurance. A vulnerability-based approach supports the inclusion of health and social justice as part of the rationale for climate change adaptation action;
27. states that the SACC would benefit from developing a clearer use of terms such as risk, vulnerability, exposure and resilience, including the provision of basic definitions;

¹ Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change Assessment Report 4.

Multilevel governance

28. notes that the SACC focuses on integrating adaptation into EU action and the development of national adaptation strategies, but pays less attention to the importance of supporting Member States in embedding adaptation regionally and locally;
29. stresses that a more explicit recognition of the role of multilevel governance in delivering climate change adaptation responses is needed. This would help to:
 - enhance awareness that adaptation roles and requirements differ according to the spatial scale considered,
 - form a clearer understanding of responsibility for adaptation responses at different spatial scales, e.g. responsibility for strategic and local highways,
 - recognise the importance of Member State and regional scale trans-boundary adaptation issues, for example flood risk management, and
 - support the translation of Member State adaptation policies through to the regional and local level where implementation will take place;
30. recognises that national strategies can provide a high-level overview of impacts and risks but, understandably, will often miss regionally and locally relevant insights and issues;
31. emphasises that national adaptation strategies should provide governance pathways to support the process of adapting regionally and locally, and that Member States, in partnership with local and regional authorities, should monitor the development and implementation of adaptation strategies at regional and local levels: guidance should be provided by the EU on how to perform these tasks;
32. Member States should be encouraged to establish networks that bring together stakeholders from a diverse range of sectors to co-produce adaptation strategies across spatial scales;
33. contends that regional adaptation strategies are best placed to provide background context, signposting of relevant resources and guidance to support local action. Regions and municipalities can also highlight prevalent climate change impacts, which are often regionally specific due to variations associated with areas such as islands, mountain regions, conurbations and coastal areas;
34. recognises the differences in governance structures between Member States for implementing strategies locally, with some, but not all, having relevant regional planning structures but argues that in all cases some form of sub-national adaptation governance framework is needed to transmit Member State adaptation investment, legislation and policy down to the local level;

35. contends that greater attention is required in the SACC to driving adaptation forwards at the local level, where impacts are experienced most acutely and first responders are located. The success of Europe's climate change adaptation response will be measured by the extent to which local areas have developed and implemented adaptation responses to reduce extreme weather and climate change risk;
36. acknowledges that cities are areas where adaptation responses are crucially important. The majority of EU citizens live in cities. Cities magnify climate change impacts (e.g. the urban heat island effect), contain vulnerable receptors and are key economic and cultural centres;
37. emphasises that adaptation should be mainstreamed especially in fields such as spatial planning given its key role in securing long-term changes to the landscape and built environment;

Implementation of adaptation responses regionally and locally

38. welcomes the commitment to at least 20% of the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework for increasing climate-related expenditure and to integrate adaptation within EU level funding, policy and research programmes including structural funds, Horizon 2020, Life+ and the rural development programme;
39. acknowledges that the principle of subsidiarity requires that Member States ultimately have responsibility for encouraging the integration of adaptation in regional and local policy and practice;
40. recognises that the level of adaptation will vary between Member States, regions and cities due to the extent of climate change hazards, vulnerability to those hazards and capacity to adapt. This will, in turn, influence their ability to prepare for and respond to extreme weather and climate change;
41. promotes the development of "adaptation typologies" to support city-scale strategy formation. Identifying similarities between cities, such as current and projected climate hazards, and socio-economic characteristics, can help form networks of broad city types that share similar adaptation needs. These city groups would encourage more effective strategic adaptation planning and policy making, resource allocation, provision of appropriate guidance and establishment of learning networks. Notes that some voluntary associations already exist and should be supported;
42. points out that given the diversity of adaptation demands and capacities, such as differing governance arrangements, access to resources and biophysical characteristics, that influence the development and implementation of adaptation responses, the term "best practice" is misleading. In this context, as practice is not wholly portable, the term 'good practice' would be more helpful;

43. identifies the building of adaptive capacity as an important foundation upon which to develop and implement adaptation responses. Therefore establishing Member State and sub-national hubs, to deliver adaptation capacity building, training, exchange of information and experience between cities and regions is vital;
44. underlines the importance of environmental education and communication and the key role of local and regional authorities in this respect; stresses that it is important to tailor communication, in particular on climate change, to local audiences and conditions, and that financial support should be made available for such communication and education campaigns;
45. recognises that funding is key to the implementation of adaptation responses at a local level. Clarity is needed on where to source the large capital sums needed to progress adaptation, especially since the EU ETS auction revenues referred to are in some doubt. There is a specific need for the inclusion of adaptation in the use of structural funds such as ERDF during the next programming period, and this must be done without reducing the budgets necessary for climate change mitigation;
46. recognises the importance of local and regional networks in the promotion of adaptation measures, and believes that EU funding should be used to provide appropriate financial support for such networks. However, the CoR does not recommend a new organisation or voluntary commitment for adaptation, as suggested in the SACC, as it would create duplication, be confusing to participants and could waste valuable resources. The existing Covenant of Mayors should be better resourced, and re-launched as a network focused on climate action in both its aspects, mitigation and adaptation;
47. emphasises the need for the SACC's adaptation vision to be more proactive than reactive: in developing and implementing adaptation response, attention must be paid to both strategies to reduce long-term risks and enhance preparedness and capacity to respond to present-day weather and climate extremes;

Adaptation/mitigation synergies and conflicts

48. recognises that adaptation and mitigation are essential elements of an integrated climate change strategy. Whilst adaptation to current and inevitable future extreme weather and climate change is crucial, it should not be seen as a substitute for mitigation. The Cancun Agreement, developed under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, stresses that parties should treat adaptation and mitigation with the same level of priority. However, how resources are allocated sub-nationally will vary;
49. points out that encouraging societies and economies to become more resilient to the changing climate is a crucial aspect of strengthening Europe's competitiveness and quality of life over

the coming decades. However it is vital, as a matter of urgency, to step up measures to significantly cut the harmful gas emissions that are responsible for climate change;

50. identifies that whilst climate change adaptation and mitigation are closely linked in principle, integrated adaptation/mitigation activity is at present rare, and that there is an urgent corresponding need for policy, practice and research to recognise and encourage synergy. It is also important that all of the policies conducted by the European Union help to further these two objectives;
51. acknowledges the benefits that can be realised from measures that address mitigation and adaptation in a complementary manner, otherwise there may be significant dis-benefits arising from adaptation and mitigation measures that conflict, for example the provision of mechanical cooling to respond to higher temperatures in buildings that increases greenhouse gas emissions;
52. concludes that, due to the urgency required, the proposed review of the strategy in 2017 should focus not only on progress with national adaptation strategies and whether legislation is necessary in the future, but also should be the target date for achievement of a number of implementation milestones at all governance levels, possibly using the adaptation preparedness scoreboard approach, and that the SACC should be accompanied by guidance and support for sub-national bodies as well as Member States to achieve these milestones;
53. considers the European Commission's proposals for an EU strategy for adaptation to climate change to be consistent with the subsidiarity and proportionality principles.

Brussels, 8 October 2013

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso

The Secretary-General
of the Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl

II. PROCEDURE

Title	EU strategy for adaptation to climate change
Reference(s)	COM(2013) 216 final
Legal basis	Article 307 TFEU. Optional referral.
Procedural basis	Simplified procedure, rule 26 (1) CoR rules of procedure
Date of Commission letter	16 April 2013
Date of President's decision	26 April 2013
Commission responsible	Commission for the Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE)
Rapporteur	Mr Neil Swannick (UK/PES), Member of Manchester City Council
Analysis	17 June 2013
Discussed in commission	2 September 2013
Date adopted by commission	2 September 2013
Result of the vote in commission	Unanimity
Date adopted in plenary	8 October 2013
Previous Committee opinion	CoR opinion on <i>Regional-specific approaches to climate change in the EU based on the example of mountainous regions</i> , CdR 89/2012 fin CoR opinion on <i>Adaptation to climate change and regional responses: the case of coastal regions</i> , CdR 1751/2012 fin CoR outlook opinion on <i>Climate change mainstreaming and the future EU budget</i> , CdR 104/2011 fin CoR opinion on the <i>White Paper - Adapting to climate change: towards a European framework for action</i> , CdR 72/2009 fin
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	n/a