



Committee of the Regions

COTER-VI-002

111th plenary session, 16-17 April 2015

DRAFT OPINION

**The improvement of the implementation of the Territorial Agenda of the
European Union 2020**

Rapporteur: **Marek Woźniak (PL/EPP)**
President of the Wielkopolska region

Deadline for tabling amendments:

3 p.m. (Brussels time) **on Friday, 27 March 2015**. Amendments must be submitted using the online tool for tabling amendments (available through the Members' Portal at <http://cor.europa.eu/members>).

Number of signatures required: **6**

Reference document

Draft opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – The improvement of the implementation of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. emphasises that since the beginning, the EU Territorial Agenda (TA) has defined itself as an action-oriented policy framework, developed to promote polycentric territorial development of the EU. Responsibility for political action lies mainly with European Institutions;
2. points out that the goal of the TA is to ensure strategic guidelines concerning territorial development, support for inclusion of the territorial dimension in various policy areas at all levels of government and guaranteeing that the Europe 2020 strategy is implemented in accordance with the principles of territorial cohesion¹;
3. regrets that the territorial agenda was missing from the political arena for several years, but enthusiastically welcomes the interest shown by the current presidency trio, Italy-Latvia-Luxembourg;
4. emphasises that the (place-based) territorial approach is the only policy model through which the Union can address the expectations of European citizens². This is also why the European Union, with the active commitment of the Committee of the Regions as well as local and regional authorities and other stakeholders, must play a bigger role in the development of a place-based approach that will improve the way the EU Territorial Agenda is implemented;
5. points to the need for joint strategic planning for the whole of Europe based on a general vision of future development with the aim of supporting better coordination of EU policies, generating synergy between sectors and clearly indicating which institutions are responsible for implementing the TA at European, national, regional and local levels;
6. in this context, in addition to providing planning and coordination mechanisms, it is essential to raise awareness and provide territorial information and methodological support for local and regional authorities in order to achieve more sustainable and socially inclusive development. In that regard there is still significant work to do to obtain comparative data at local and sub- local level across all of the EU;

¹ Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020. Towards an Inclusive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions.

² Barca Report, p. 108.

7. calls therefore for the drawing-up of an integrated spatial development strategy at the European level while ensuring that the existing planning powers at local and regional level are respected³;
8. with a view to cohesion policy after 2020, recommends strengthening the territorial dimension in connection with the effective implementation of Europe 2020 and beyond, which particularly takes into account the territorial impact of EU policies; to this end, recommends conducting a review of sectoral policies in terms of their territorial impact, and introducing on a permanent basis into the process of enacting laws on individual EU policies a territorial impact assessment, which would constitute one of the basic elements of assessing the impact of regulation;
9. points out the need to monitor steps taken at the EU level that are necessary for counteracting the growing regional disparities throughout the whole EU in the context of the recent crisis, given that these constitute a serious threat to territorial cohesion;

General comments

10. declares that the EU needs a place-based development strategy and that efforts made to this end within the new cohesion policy legislative package should be stepped up. In other words, cohesion policy must reconcile conditionality with subsidiarity, paying greater attention to the latter;
11. reiterates that the EU's territorial policy must take into account the impact of the different EU policy strategies on the regions and ensure that ongoing challenges can be dealt with comprehensively, going beyond just the structural and investment funds to cover the Environment, Transport, Internal Market, to name just a few other EU policies with a clear territorial impact. The spatial aspect should be taken into account when formulating policies to maximise synergy, take advantage of development opportunities and prevent negative policy impacts;
12. restates its recommendation for the establishment of a Cohesion Policy Council comprising the ministers responsible for regional development at the relevant level of government in each Member State and a representative of the European Committee of the Regions as coordinator of cooperation, with the aim of strengthening the system of checks and ensuring balance. The Committee would be willing to play an active role in the political discussions on the establishment of such a structure with a view to ensuring that the point of view of local and regional authorities is fully taken on board;
13. stresses that partnership is an essential prerequisite for enhancing the effectiveness of cohesion policy and that only a system of multilevel governance can ensure effective linkage

³

"Making Europe Open and Polycentric" in: "Scenarios and Vision for European Territory 2050", ESPON.

between the strategic guidelines set by the European Union and local and regional challenges⁴;

14. renews its support for new mechanisms and instruments for strengthening the territorial approach through Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI). These create excellent possibilities to empower local authorities, cities and regions to use EU funds to achieve growth and prosperity and get back on the path to convergence. Therefore regrets that, while many Member States have considered implementing them in practice their deployment is being marred by the regulatory barriers that remain in the EU Regulations and the reluctance of Managing Authorities to let go the delivery of EU down to the regional and local levels;
15. given the very different degrees of implementation of the above-mentioned instruments in the individual Member States, the system for managing, implementing, monitoring and overseeing these instruments which support territorial development must be simplified and coordinated as much as possible;
16. indicates, however, that the territorial approach to development extends far beyond these instruments and must be taken into account in all aspects of cohesion policy;
17. calls for greater compliance with the provisions of Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) on territorial cohesion. This Article provides that the Union shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions, paying particular attention to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions; indeed one of the keys to the eventual success of the TA2020 would be to enable these territories to overcome their structural handicaps to development;
18. consideration should also be given to other demographic challenges that have a major impact on regions, such as depopulation, an ageing population and highly dispersed populations; asks the Commission to pay particular attention to the most geographically and demographically disadvantaged areas when implementing cohesion policy⁵;
19. calls for a renewed debate on measuring the quality of life using indicators other than GDP, emphasising that territorial cohesion is complementary to economic and social cohesion and therefore cannot be measured solely by economic indicators. "The smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of the EU involves much more than just increasing GDP. It encompasses

⁴ CoR 2012/1683.

⁵ CoR 2014/4896

also territorial, social, cultural and especially environmental aspects which are particularly significant in rural or less populated regions";

20. calls for implementation of a set of comparable and reliable indices and indicators which could be used to measure, support and monitor territorial cohesion, comprehensive territorial development, structural problems, territorial challenges and opportunities and the territorial effects for different geographical levels and types of region⁶. This will enable decision-makers to make informed spatial planning decisions in accordance with proportionality requirements;
21. also points out the need to launch discussions on the future of cohesion policy after 2020, to look in particular at whether the initial objectives, including support for the place-based approach, have been achieved;

Polycentric territorial development

22. considers polycentric development of the EU to be of key importance for achieving territorial cohesion;
23. notes that the Europe's effectiveness and quality rely on creating networks of contacts between cities of all sizes, from the local to the global level, as well as on empowering people and conducting local activities promoting an area's strengths within Europe and worldwide;
24. stresses that openness towards neighbouring countries and the rest of the world is an essential condition for all European regions and cities wishing to take advantage of the development opportunities provided by global growth and technological advances. Support for cross-border cooperation especially at the EU's external borders has proved an effective instrument in this respect. The long-term development of Europe depends on its global image and on the exploitation of the competitive advantages of each city and region in the process of completing the single market and establishing effective joint development strategies, particularly in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean and Eastern partnerships, as well as the transatlantic partnership⁷;
25. points out that cooperation between the most developed cities and regions will provide added value and contribute to the development of the surrounding areas. The Committee therefore stresses that the role of local and regional authorities and their opinions and suggestions must be taken into account when these authorities are directly impacted by European policies;

⁶

"Making Europe Open and Polycentric" in: "Scenarios and Vision for European Territory 2050", ESPON

⁷

"Making Europe Open and Polycentric" in: "Scenarios and Vision for European Territory 2050", ESPON.

The role of second-tier cities and of small and medium-sized urban areas and rural areas

26. emphasises the benefits of the polycentric regional development model and in this context highlights the importance of links between urban and rural areas;
27. calls for the adoption of a policy approach favourable to the creation of functional regions, both within countries and at cross-border level, given that functional regions include both urban and rural areas and their role in maintaining a critical mass for development and reducing susceptibility to external shocks has been frequently highlighted in economic and spatial studies;
28. notes that pockets of social exclusion occur in urban, suburban and rural areas which are often adjacent to areas with a decent standard of living. Sub-regional characteristics must be taken into account in order for the territorial agenda to be implemented better;
29. calls for a greater focus of EU policies and funding on effective and efficient connections between urban regions, access to knowledge and education and the effective creation of networks of cities and functional areas⁸ in order to share best practices and effective policy solutions and projects;
30. welcomes the fact that the Territorial Agenda 2020 call for states, regions and cities (including small and medium-sized towns) to contribute to common European territorial priorities, but at the same time regrets that local and regional authorities are not yet treated on the same level as other entities in the process of making decisions on these issues. Efforts should be made to enable these authorities to react more effectively to the most important territorial challenges in Europe;
31. recognises that the effective functioning of small and medium-sized towns and the diversification of rural economies are essential steps towards fully implementing the Territorial Agenda. In this regard, strategies should focus on fair access to services of general economic and social interest, enlargement of functional areas (building upon the Rural-Urban initiatives which have already been developed) and promotion of the accessibility and interconnection of small and medium-sized towns⁹;
32. notes the role of small and medium-sized urban areas as one of the elements of polycentric territorial development. In this context, is pleased that the trio of presidencies has taken up this common topic in the area of small and medium-sized urban areas concerning analysis of urban-rural linkages and presenting mechanisms for cooperation between different areas and achieving more balanced territorial development;

8

"How to strengthen the territorial dimension of Europe 2020 and the EU Cohesion Policy".

9

"How to strengthen the territorial dimension of Europe 2020 and the EU Cohesion Policy".

33. small and medium-sized urban areas play an active role in ensuring well-being and prosperity to the inhabitants of surrounding rural areas; they are centres for employment, services, local transport hubs, etc. They therefore play a role in limiting depopulation of urban and rural areas. However, they can also contribute to development of metropolitan areas through participation in a common polycentric network. They help to solve the environmental and quality issues that result from excessive concentration of populations in large cities;
34. in the light of the above, calls for further development and a better coordination of the urban dimension of cohesion policy with other policies affecting urban areas in the framework of an integrated urban agenda and for strengthening the formal system of cooperation between European urban areas and their rural hinterland¹⁰; reiterates its call for a white paper for an integrated urban agenda;

Connecting European regions: the territorial perspective

35. considers European territorial cooperation, operating with support from cross-border, interregional or supranational initiatives (e.g. EGTCs) and the development of macroregional strategies to be the basic instruments which will allow the Territorial Agenda to be implemented better. Therefore welcomes the plan by the trio of presidencies to analyse the needs in terms of legal provisions for creating integrated cross-border areas. Notes that the involvement of sub-national bodies in establishing and managing these instruments should continue to be a key element for achieving their objectives;
36. considers that it is necessary to promote polycentric growth that is geographically balanced between the various regions, *inter alia* through decisive actions to eliminate the digital divide and a sustainable transport policy underpinned by a strategy adapted for specific regional features;
37. highlights the role of transport infrastructure as an instrument of territorial cohesion. Geographically and demographically challenged regions require particular attention in this respect¹¹. In this context, the Committee points out the possibility of using European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation as a tool for supporting cross-border links, including those with third countries and financial instruments such as the Connecting Europe Facility;
38. calls on the Commission to continue and to step up its efforts to complete the TEN-T core network, particularly in terms of removing bottlenecks and facilitating cross-border connections, and to strengthen the involvement of local and regional authorities in the corridor platforms;

¹⁰ "Polycentric Territorial Development at EU, national and regional level" – round-table discussion at the COTER meeting in Fabriano, 10 July 2014.

¹¹ For specific recommendations, see Committee of the Regions opinion on Mobility in geographically and demographically challenged regions (CdR 1691/2014).

39. emphasises, as pointed out in the Sixth Cohesion Report, that the guidelines for developing the Trans-European Transport Network established the goal of developing a genuine multimodal network at EU level, including rail links, by creating new infrastructure, and upgrading existing infrastructure. In this context, the Committee considers it necessary to have sustainable, competitive, energy-efficient and more environmentally friendly means of transport, to encourage intermodality, to make complementary use of different modes of transport and to carry out infrastructure projects in less developed regions, cross-border regions, regions which have to contend with physical barriers to access to the internal market and those which are experiencing territorial cohesion problems;

Territorial Agenda and the Europe 2020 Strategy

40. notes that the importance of the territorial approach to implementing the Europe 2020 strategy is confirmed in the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020. Thus the EU objectives defined in the Europe 2020 strategy can only be achieved if the territorial dimension of the strategy is taken into account, as the development opportunities of the different regions vary¹²;
41. calls again for a white paper on territorial cohesion based on an analysis of interdependencies between the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020 and the Europe 2020 strategy to counteract the growing disparities between territories in the EU¹³;
42. recommends that EU cohesion policy, with its objectives of economic, social and territorial cohesion, should continue to make a significant contribution to achieving the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy in future. By strengthening the links between targets for growth and convergence, cohesion policy can help to reduce disparities within the European Union with a view to achieving the strategy's key targets, and thus to increase prosperity throughout Europe. This potential needs to be systematically exploited using the partnership-based approach to cohesion policy within the framework of a strategy based on the specific features of a region, undertaking specific activities geared to local conditions and opportunities;
43. therefore supports the idea of proposing a Code of Conduct on Europe 2020¹⁴ based on the European Code of Conduct on Partnership which will ensure that local and regional authorities and other relevant stakeholders are involved in the planning and implementation of long-term strategic documents that affect territorial development;

¹² Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020. Towards an Inclusive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions.

¹³ CoR 2014/2333.

¹⁴ Blueprint for a revised Europe 2020 Strategy.

Vision for Europe

44. highlights the actions undertaken by ESPON with the aim of drawing up a set of indices and indicators relating to European territorial development which could be used to support decision-makers in terms of measuring and monitoring territorial cohesion;
45. believes that it is urgent to develop comparable statistical data on local and sub-local areas as well as translate the existing OECD and Commission urban-rural classification into Eurostat categories that can, drawing from reliable information from the ground, assist both EU policymaking and evaluation;
46. considers that building an open and polycentric Europe is the most cohesive territorial strategy that supports economic growth and competitiveness, social cohesion and the targets relating to sustainable development promoted by the Europe 2020 strategy and the Territorial Agenda 2020 for the coming decades¹⁵. The Committee expresses support for a strategy which combines development and cohesion and creates places that are pleasant to live in;
47. acknowledges the need for joint strategic planning of the European territory based on an overall vision of future development to support the better coordination of European regional development policies¹⁶.

Brussels,

¹⁵ "Making Europe Open and Polycentric" in: "Scenarios and Vision for European Territory 2050", ESPON.

¹⁶ "Making Europe Open and Polycentric" in: "Scenarios and Vision for European Territory 2050", ESPON.

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Improvement in the implementation of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020
Reference(s)	
Legal basis	Art. 307 TFEU
Procedural basis	Rule 41 §b)i of CoR Rules of Procedure
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	25 September 2014
Date of Bureau/President's decision	15 October 2014
Commission responsible	Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER)
Rapporteur	Mr Marek Woźniak (PL/EPP) President of the Wielkopolska region
Analysis	22 January 2015
Discussed in commission	2 March 2015
Date adopted by commission	2 March 2015
Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	Majority
Date adopted in plenary	Scheduled for 16-17 April 2015
Previous Committee opinions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opinion on Contribution of the Cohesion Policy to the Europe 2020 Strategy (CdR 223/2010)¹⁷ • Opinion on 6th Cohesion Report (CdR 4896/2014)¹⁸ • Opinion on Community Led Local Development (CdR 1684/2012)¹⁹ • Opinion on Territorial Impact Assessment (CdR 29/2013)²⁰ • Opinion on an Integrated Urban Agenda for the EU (CdR 6902/2013)²¹ • Opinion on Urban Mobility Package (CdR 90/2014)²² • Opinion on Mobility in geographically and demographically challenged regions (CdR 1691/2014)²³
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	N.A.

¹⁷ [OJ C 15, 18.1.2011, p. 10.](#)

¹⁸ [OJ C 19, 21.1.2015.](#)

¹⁹ [OJ C 17, 19.1.2013.](#)

²⁰ [OJ C 280, 27.9.2013.](#)

²¹ [OJ C 271, 19.8.2014.](#)

²² [OJ C 271, 19.8.2014.](#)

²³ [OJ C 415, 20.11.2014.](#)