



**European Committee
of the Regions**

ENVE-VI/037

135th plenary session, 26-27 June 2019

OPINION

A Clean Planet for all – A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- welcomes the communication on A clean planet for all and calls on the European Commission to frame an even more ambitious and achievable roadmap by adopting measures to limit global warming to 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels and prioritising the most ambitious scenarios; also calls on the Commission to evaluate the impact of the different scenarios on climate health, environmental, economic and social aspects and to propose a corresponding comprehensive regulatory framework based on this evaluation and in line with the strategy to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- reiterates its call on the Member States and the European Commission to establish a permanent multi-level platform for dialogue on energy as defined in the regulation on the governance of the energy union, including climate and environmental aspects, to support regions and local authorities, civil society organisations, businesses and other stakeholders in the energy transition; states in this context its willingness to set up, if requested by the European Commission, a structure for technical exchanges on implementing the Clean Energy Package at local or regional level;
- calls on the Commission to guarantee that the national energy and climate plans (NECPs) and national long-term plans are harmonised with the Paris Agreement and the 2050 strategy and the SDG's; considers it crucial that they are drafted using participatory, multilevel dialogue and are based on best regional and local practice; also suggests shortening the interval for periodical review of these plans and providing an institutional framework for the system of locally determined contributions (LDC) to link it with the system of nationally determined contributions (NDC);
- calls on the Commission to actively take into account the particular vulnerability of certain areas, such as the outermost regions, and people undergoing transition to a climate neutral Europe so as to avoid the rejection of the transition process; also calls for the establishment of a European Climate Neutrality observatory to contribute to the fulfilment of national reporting obligations under the Energy Union governance and to assist in mapping and monitoring such vulnerabilities, together with a renewed EU skills audit under the EU Skills Panorama. These measures, aimed at achieving a climate neutral Europe, must take account of regional and local skills needs: the aim is to align the roll-out of sustainable policies with skills growth for future-proof quality jobs in the most vulnerable regions and to facilitate effective exchange of best practices between these regions, building also on the existing composite indicators and on any others that may be identified;
- welcomes the recent Communication by the European Commission on "a more efficient and democratic decision making in the EU energy and climate policy" and believes that many of the suggestions in this document, notably with regard to the crucial element of energy taxation, are essential in order to ensure a coordinated, coherent and timely response to the enormous challenges the EU faces;

Rapporteur:

Michele Emiliano (IT/PES) President of the Puglia Region

Reference document

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank: A Clean Planet for all – A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy

COM(2018) 773 final

**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions –
A Clean Planet for all – A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern,
competitive and climate neutral economy**

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Implementation of the 2050 long-term strategy

1. welcomes the communication on A clean planet for all and supports the goal of achieving greenhouse gas neutrality (net-zero emissions) in the EU by 2050; to achieve this goal, calls on the European Commission to frame an even more ambitious roadmap by adopting measures to limit global warming to 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels and prioritising the most ambitious scenarios; calls on the Commission to evaluate the impact of the different scenarios on climate, health, environmental, economic and social aspects and to propose a corresponding comprehensive regulatory framework based on this evaluation and in line with the strategy to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); also welcomes in this context the ongoing work at EU level on the reflection paper on sustainable Europe, including in the Committee of the Regions on how to involve local and regional authorities in the essential transformation processes;
2. underlines the need to invest in education and awareness raising about climate issues among citizens in general and focused on young people in particular, who are increasingly concerned by what they see as too slow progress in addressing this challenge; stresses that local and regional authorities, in cooperation with educational institutions and civil society organisations, have an important role to play in fostering this engagement, and in responding to the expectations of young people;
3. reiterates its call on the Member States and the European Commission to establish a permanent multi-level platform for dialogue on energy as defined in the regulation on the governance of the energy union¹, including climate and environmental aspects, to support regions and local authorities, civil society organisations, businesses and other stakeholders in the energy transition¹; states in this context its willingness to set up, if requested by the European Commission, a structure for technical exchanges on implementing the Clean Energy Package at local or regional level;
4. notes the crucial role that regions and local authorities play in delivering public policy on climate and energy and in nurturing the behavioural changes necessary for their effective implementation and ensuring the acceptance of these changes by all citizens, following a defined decarbonisation strategy geared to achieving the zero emissions goal; in this connection highlights the initiatives undertaken by the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy and calls on the Commission to continue promoting this and endorse similar initiatives to boost

1 Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Energy Union Governance and Clean Energy (2017/C 342/13), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017AR0830>.

action at local level and to set up a permanent consultation mechanism based on the Talanoa Dialogue²;

5. draws attention to support for initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. By directly linking the local authorities and the Commission, the covenant promotes the bottom-up development of a specific plan which leverages the SECAP and thus is becoming an integrated territorial management plan for combating climate change, in coordination with other territorial interest groups involved in the NECPs and in supporting the SDGs;
6. calls on the Commission to guarantee that the national energy and climate plans (NECPs) and national long-term plans are harmonised with the Paris Agreement, the 2050 strategy and the SDG's; considers it crucial that they are drafted using participatory, multilevel dialogue and are based on best regional and local practice; also suggests shortening the interval for periodical review of these plans and providing an institutional framework for the system of regionally determined contributions (RDC) and locally determined contributions (LDC) to link it with the system of nationally determined contributions (NDC);
7. calls on the Commission to actively take into account the particular vulnerability of certain areas, such as the outermost regions, and people undergoing transition to a climate neutral Europe so as to avoid the rejection of the transition process; also calls for the establishment of a European Climate Neutrality observatory to contribute to the fulfilment of national reporting obligations under the Energy Union governance and to assist in mapping and monitoring such vulnerabilities, together with a renewed EU skills audit under the EU Skills Panorama. These measures, aimed at achieving a climate neutral Europe, must take account of regional and local skills needs: the aim is to align the roll-out of sustainable policies with skills growth for future-proof quality jobs in the most vulnerable regions and to facilitate effective exchange of best practices between these regions, building also on the existing composite indicators and on any others that may be identified;
8. draws attention to the diversity of Europe's regions when it comes to climate, environment, landscape, mobility and economic and social structure, highlighting the importance of tailoring implementation of the strategy to geographical geopolitical and economic characteristics and seeing beyond mere administrative boundaries;
9. underlines the need to ensure a holistic approach bringing together the instruments and strategies under the EU's general policies on the SDGs, cohesion and the circular economy, but also specific action regarding for example energy policy, climate mitigation and adaptation and the transition of coal regions;

2 <https://unfccc.int/topics/2018-talanoa-dialogue-platform>.

Climate neutrality of the energy system

10. noting the crucial role that regions and local authorities play in the participatory implementation of energy and climate policies, recognises the role of public authorities in setting an example in all sectors, starting with management of public buildings and publicly run companies; in the light of this, accentuates the importance of energy efficiency plans for public buildings, along with application of the Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) criteria and energy and environmental management systems, while respecting minimum environmental requirements³;
11. calls on the European Commission to continue promoting energy efficiency of buildings as a priority in order to cut the emissions from existing buildings and to ensure that public subsidies and financial instruments enable owners to improve the energy efficiency of buildings by renovating them. In addition, the necessary investments and state aid should be classified as capital costs so as to increase the room for manoeuvre for local and regional authorities. This plays a major role in raising the average annual rate of building renovation;
12. signals the importance of protecting the vulnerable from energy poverty and of ensuring equal access to basic energy services for all Europeans;
13. calls on the Commission to promote a circular approach in the designing, erection and operation of new buildings, which will need to be sustainable or include energy efficiency and the use of renewable sources, starting with the example of the Level(s) initiative⁴. Climate and environmental performance standards must also be set from a life-cycle perspective for building materials and processes and for the documentation of materials used, which will require continued investment in standards, ecodesign requirements, environmental product declarations, and information systems for life-cycle analyses;
14. believes strongly that the 32% target for renewable energy at EU level should be revisited further in the future in the light of technological developments with a view to reaching 40% by 2030 in order to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, and that, in any case, European regions that manage to exceed that threshold should be incentivised and supported appropriately;
15. welcomes the formal establishment of local energy communities in the Clean Energy Package⁵, calls on the Member States to harness their potential⁶ and highlights the need to set up targeted financial support schemes, which prioritise regions that may be affected by obstacles such as those with electric systems that are isolated and not connected to major European networks. Public and private energy companies are important vehicles for energy transition at local and regional level;

3 European Commission communications COM(2008) 397 – *Sustainable Consumption and Production and Sustainable Industrial Policy Action Plan*, COM(2008) 400 – *Public procurement for a better environment* and COM(2015) 614 – *Closing the loop – An EU action plan for the Circular Economy* adopted by the Council of Ministers of the European Union.

4 <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/buildings.htm>.

5 <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/energy-strategy-and-energy-union/clean-energy-all-europeans>.

6 Models of local energy ownership and the role of local energy communities in energy transition in Europe (CDR 2515/2018), <https://cor.europa.eu/EN/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opId=CDR-2515-2018>.

16. stresses the importance of fostering decarbonisation, pursuing the zero emissions goal and calling on the Member States to establish, together with the regions, specific roadmaps for the conversion of plants and infrastructure using fossil fuels and of nuclear power plants, in so doing encouraging the use of renewable sources (such as hydrogen) and technologies to decarbonise the European gas sector and drawing on BREFs as the basis. Notes that appropriate pricing of fossil-based energy through emissions allowances and socially acceptable taxation is a key element of the transition to renewable energy; welcomes therefore the recent Communication by the European Commission on "a more efficient and democratic decision making in the EU energy and climate policy" and believes that many of the suggestions in this document, notably with regard to the crucial element of energy taxation, are essential in order to ensure a coordinated, coherent and timely response to the enormous challenges the EU faces;

Land-use planning and climate neutrality

17. notes the central role of regions and local authorities in implementing policies for the sustainable mobility of people and goods, including through urban and regional planning aimed at modal rebalancing and through a reduction in the use of motor vehicles and land take;
18. reaffirms the need to make transport climate neutral, this being the only sector where CO₂ emissions still top 1990 levels⁷, including by increasing financial and technical support to European platforms such as S3P Energy⁸;
19. calls on the Commission to unlock European funding to speed up the roll out of recharging points for vehicles to ensure that current infrastructure does not hamper the uptake of clean mobility across Europe to meet the future demand;
20. underscores the importance of encouraging and funding the transition towards collective, shared, multimodal and intermodal transport modes, including through the development of local and regional logistics platforms and mobility management plans, while also bearing in mind the distinct traits of sparsely populated and outlying, outermost and island regions;
21. stresses that it is important that mobility plans tie in with increased production and distribution of green electricity and renewable fuels⁹, that they are channelled to achieving zero traffic emissions and that they are backed up by urban and territorial planning and, where relevant, the Action Plans for Sustainable Energy and Climate; notes that these policies have a crucial role to play in improving the lives and health protection of the public;
22. highlights the need to pay particular heed to potential decarbonisation measures in the transport system by promoting the use of renewable energy sources and alternative fuels, and thus the deployment of specific infrastructure to ensure an environmentally friendly and diversified supply, especially by strengthening local distribution network operators;

7 Promoting seamless mobility solutions (CDR 3560/2017), <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opId=CDR-3560-2017>.

8 <https://e3p.jrc.ec.europa.eu/articles/smart-specialisation-platform-energy-s3p-energy>.

9 Delivering on low-emission mobility (CDR 6151/2017), <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opId=CDR-6151-2017>.

23. stresses the importance of the interplay between land use, climate change mitigation and the adaptation potential, as well as the importance of addressing the enormous climate impact of agriculture as essential elements of any strategy to reconcile compliance with the Paris Agreement and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) with better environmental, health and economic and social well-being;
24. highlights the role of island communities as potential laboratories for climate neutrality policies and the need for measures to decarbonise maritime transport, taking into consideration the vulnerable territories which are highly dependent on maritime transport;

Climate neutrality of the economic system

25. highlights the role of SPP in promoting the development of the green economy and of behavioural change and the importance of moving swiftly towards circular public procurement and of using environmental management systems in the private sector, starting with full implementation of the IED¹⁰ and BREFs for each production sector and the EMAS and ISO environmental certification system¹¹;
26. stresses the lack of reference in the strategy to the waste sector to the European hierarchy of waste and to the principles of the circular economy¹² and proposes, therefore, that measures be introduced to quickly specify uniform end-of-waste criteria, with a view to reducing disposal operations, promoting recovery and minimising pollutant emissions from related industrial processes; points out that waste should also be minimised by setting ecodesign requirements for products in respect of chemical content and recyclability, and through investment in waste sorting and recovery of materials and energy;
27. points out the importance of paying special attention to regions that have energy-intensive industries and energy infrastructure in order to ensure a rapid start to the transition, as well as the fair and inclusive management of this transition, by limiting or offsetting social and environmental impacts, and stresses the importance of guaranteeing that local and regional authorities, individuals and relevant NGOs, the business sector, universities and research institutes are involved in shaping measures to offset the potential negative impact of the energy transition;
28. notes the need to ensure a fair distribution of environmental costs and health, environmental, economic and social benefits for people affected by the location of energy infrastructure and the changes which are necessary in the transition. In particular, it stresses the importance of involving local and regional authorities in areas of transit for large energy flows together with the national authorities responsible, in establishing criteria for the distribution of environmental

10 Directive 2010/75/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 on industrial emissions (integrated pollution prevention and control) (Text with EEA relevance) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32010L0075>.

11 Commission Regulation (EU) 2017/1505 of 28 August 2017 – <https://www.iso.org/home.html>.

12 Directive (EU) 2018/851 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Directive (EU) 2018/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Directive (EU) 2018/850 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Directive (EU) 2018/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

costs and benefits, ensuring a fair share of the revenues generated for the benefit of the citizens most affected; also stresses that all EU policies, including EU trade policy with non-EU partners need to be brought in line with the goal of climate neutrality;

Emission absorption and offsetting strategies

29. welcomes the update of the EU Bioeconomy Strategy¹³, which supports the development of production systems that deliver GHG emission reductions;
30. notes the crucial role of urban and rural green areas in the fight against climate change, as ecological systems acting as natural equivalents of carbon sinks, particularly in the more vulnerable regions, including the outermost and island regions; highlights the importance of improving the management of organic soils, restoring peatlands and wetlands, and of all farming practices and systems for emissions capture in reducing emissions; also stresses the need to promote and support the protection and proper management of forest assets, as well as the full integration of agricultural and forestry policies with hydrogeological and climate risk management policies;
31. calls on the European Commission to bring regions and local authorities on board in implementing the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) and the regulation on the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF)¹⁴, setting emission reduction targets for 2030 and configuring realistic initiatives with which to achieve them;
32. highlights the competences cities and regions have in collecting the data needed to carry out the inventory of GHG emissions in sectors covered by LULUCF and ESR and recommends that the Member States and the Commission support them in promoting their capacities¹⁵;
33. stresses the need to further develop all techniques and technologies for full mass and energy recovery in production systems and all forms of environmental compensation for diffuse and fugitive emissions, including carbon dioxide, which will have to be compensated for with natural ecological systems and, if no other possibilities exist, using carbon capture and storage (CCS) techniques; stresses, however, that such technologies have yet to prove that they are effective and safe and that, therefore, absolute priority must be given to measures designed to avoid emissions;

Financing climate neutrality

34. notes the importance of ensuring sufficient financial coverage to achieve a zero GHG emissions economy, by increasing the percentage of GDP invested annually in the energy system and its

13 A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: strengthening the connection between economy, society and the environment (2018).

14 Regulation (EU) 2018/842 of 30 May 2018 – Decision No 406/2009/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009, <https://unfccc.int/topics/land-use/workstreams/land-use--land-use-change-and-forestry-lulucf>.

15 Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Legislative proposals for an Effort Sharing Regulation and a LULUCF Regulation (2017/C 272/08), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016AR5780>.

infrastructure, and welcomes the action plan on financing sustainable growth published by the Commission in 2018¹⁶;

35. reiterates the need to raise the EU climate budget spending target to at least 30% and fully implement the commitments made under the Paris Agreement, including long-term dedicated funding by national governments¹⁷;
36. underlines that, given the important social consequences to be expected from the transition to a zero GHG emissions economy, it will be necessary to envisage a dedicated just transition fund to support those regions or sectors of society where the short-term effects of moving away from fossil fuels will be felt most acutely;
37. notes that substantial financial resources are required to develop innovative solutions including renewable energy sources and bring them to market: it is important to frame an integrated and common approach between authorities at all levels in order to bring together the various funding sources and trigger a multiplier effect, increasing awareness about the existence of different instruments and improving their overall accessibility; also points out that EU rules on renewable energy and state aid must be revised to be progressive and push on with the development of new zero-emission technologies with respect to climate benefits and sustainability. For example, the Energy Tax Directive and state aid rules should be adapted so as to reduce energy taxes on renewables and make them competitive with fossil-based energy;
38. points out that investment in environmentally sustainable infrastructure has proven to be highly profitable in the long term, since it can usher in strong growth in both GDP and employment rates; also notes that this investment yields economic savings by enabling lower energy consumption and reduced fossil fuel imports;
39. reiterates the importance of laying down clear, streamlined and uniform rules for public procurement and for legal procedures to encourage investment¹⁸ and welcomes the Commission's ambitiousness in simplifying the rules for the 2021-2027 programming period and moving to a single regulation to cover both the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund¹⁹;
40. notes the importance of making climate neutrality, environmental sustainability and climate change adaptation cross-cutting components in all funds and funding programmes that are required to include climate neutral economy targets to be met through the fixing of specific indicators and welcomes the Greening the European Semester initiative²⁰, while calling for further efforts on this front; in this context, also suggests the inclusion of climate-related indicators in the Commission's Alert Mechanism Report framework;

16 European Commission communication COM(2018) 97 final – Action Plan: Financing Sustainable Growth.

17 The InvestEU Programme (CoR 2018/03766), rapporteur: Konstantinos Agorastos (EL/EPP).

18 Directive (EU) 2014/23 of the European Parliament of the Council, Directive (EU) 2014/24 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Directive (EU) 2014/25 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

19 European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund, rapporteur Michiel Rijsberman (NL/ALDE).

20 http://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/green_semester/index_en.htm.

41. suggests that ex ante impact assessments of EU legislative proposals be accompanied by a climate impact assessment and an assessment of how they will help to meet the Paris Agreement goals²¹; also calls for an appropriate impact assessment of European funds devoted to sectors and regions affected by the energy transition to be conducted, so as to ensure that they support this process effectively;
42. stresses the importance of having high rates of EU co-financing in order to guarantee access for small local and regional authorities, highlighting the need to determine specific methodologies and indicators that take into account climate neutral economy targets in assessing projects to be funded;
43. highlights the role of the insurance industry in coping with loss and damage and so strengthening local resilience;
44. welcomes the reference to expected savings in the health sector as a consequence of climate and environmental policies and calls on the Commission to further explore the possibility of quantifying such savings by identifying specific indicators, including with the involvement of the WHO²²; in this regards points to the experience of a structure like the WHO Healthy Cities Network and calls for more efforts to create synergies between such initiatives and those focused on the energy transition and climate change in cities;
45. endorses the goals of the Sustainable Finance Action Plan to support sustainable growth and the desire to enable the financial sector and private investors to play their part in achieving ambitious and common climate and environmental sustainability goals recognises that the mobilisation of private capital requires long-term planning and regulatory stability at EU, national, but also at local and regional level;
46. stresses the importance of having a sound financing framework for research and in the field of climate neutrality technology and welcomes the establishment of the Innovation Fund, calling for swift approval of the implementing regulation²³ and the establishing of "free knowledge spaces" benefiting from significant tax breaks;
47. points out that it is important for regions and local authorities to have a coherent and manageable integrated framework for obligations and best available techniques using a portal that hosts the BAT for each sector, H2020 projects and Covenant of Mayors initiatives.

Maintaining the links with international commitments and existing legislation

48. welcomes the EU's ambitious goal of promoting the adoption of policies and initiatives at global level to reverse the current unsustainable emissions trajectory and calls on the EU institutions and Member States to further a stable, lasting and systematic involvement of regions and local

21 Opinion on Climate finance: an essential tool for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, (COR2108/2017), <https://cor.europa.eu/EN/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opId=CDR-2108-2017>.

22 <https://www.who.int/publications/guidelines/en/>.

23 Proposal for a Commission Delegated Regulation of 26.2.2019 with regard to the operation of the Innovation Fund (C(2019) 1492 final).

authorities in the implementation of the Global Agenda for Sustainable Development and the related 17 Sustainable Development Goals²⁴, as well as the Paris Agreement, including by involving the CoR in preparatory work on COP25, in order to ensure that the EU's negotiation position is supported by all tiers of government;

49. calls for a representative of the CoR to have observer status in all preparatory work of the UNFCCC bodies in order to make sure that the needs and the potential of contributing with concrete measures of local authorities and the regions are taken properly into account and can feed into the open, inclusive and transparent evaluation of the joint work carried out within the overall review.

Brussels, 27 June 2019

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Karl-Heinz Lambertz

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

Jiří Buriánek

24 Sustainable Development Goals = SDGs.

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank: A Clean Planet for all – A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy
Reference	COM(2018) 773 final
Legal basis	Article 307(4)
Procedural basis	Rule 41(a) RP
Date of Commission letter	29/11/2018
Date of President's decision	10/12/2018
Commission responsible	Commission for the Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE)
Rapporteur	Michele Emiliano (IT/PES) President of the Puglia Region
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Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	Majority
Date adopted in plenary	27 June 2019
Previous Committee opinions	
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	