



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

**ENVE-VI/039**

**136th plenary session, 8-9 October 2019**

## **OPINION**

### **Sustainable Europe by 2030: Follow-up to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, ecological transition and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change**

- Regions and cities have to be recognised and formally involved in the process implementing (localising) the SDGs at international (Paris Agreement, Taichi targets), European and national level. Of the 169 targets of the 17 SDGs, 65% require the firm engagement of regions and cities in implementing and monitoring the SDGs in order to be achieved.
- There are concrete challenges: cities and regions stress the urgency to take action, the need for good indicators, governance mechanisms and resources, and the role of cities and regions to take all the community on board and leave no one behind.
- The CoR welcomes the "European Green Deal" announced as the first priority of the new European Commission, in particular the renewed dynamic of the debate about an ambitious EU climate policy and increased EU 2030 targets announced by the President-elect of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and calls on the new European Commission to take local and regional authorities on board as real partners for sustainability and climate action when developing the Green Deal with the 2050 climate neutrality targets.
- The CoR welcomes the transition to a resource-efficient, low-carbon, climate-neutral and bio-diverse economy and stresses the urgency of taking action and the need to engage governments at all levels, economic players, universities, research centres, civil society and citizens.
- The CoR underlines the key importance of commitment from young people. Regional and local youth councils and youth movements should be involved in the design and implementation of climate and SDG policies.
- The CoR commits itself to raising the voice of local and regional authorities in upcoming international fora, such as the UNFCCC COP25 on climate change and the UN CBD COP15 on biodiversity advocating an ambitious, time-bound, science-driven post-2020 global biodiversity framework integrated with the SDGs; calls on the parties to apply multi-level governance, which formally includes LRAs, in planning, implementation and monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV).

Rapporteur:

Sirpa Hertell (FI/EPP) City Councillor of Espoo

Reference document:

Reflection paper "Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030" (COM(2019) 22 final)

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions –  
"A Sustainable Europe by 2030: Follow-up to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, ecological  
transition and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change"**

**I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030 – "There Is No Planet B"**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. highlights the Council conclusions<sup>1</sup> on the importance of sustainable development and its own keen interest in continuing to play a leading role in implementing the 2030 Agenda, as an overarching priority, for the benefit of EU citizens and their well-being, and as an essential element of rebuilding and strengthening the EU's credibility within Europe and globally;
2. welcomes the renewed dynamic of the debate about an ambitious EU climate policy and a proposal of the "European Green Deal" with increased EU 2030 targets announced by the President-elect of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and calls on the new European Commission to take local and regional authorities on board as real partners for sustainability and climate action when developing the Green Deal with the 2050 climate neutrality targets;
3. stresses the importance of defining the new European strategy "Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030", as a basis for a long-term European Future. Europe is, already a forerunner in sustainability, but it faces complex global challenges, which the European Union must tackle. The CoR is convinced that achieving a sustainable European Union, including the goal of reaching climate neutrality by 2050, requires fundamental changes which must be reached using joint efforts on all levels of government and with all parts of our societies;
4. highlights that the main policy foundations for a sustainable and resilient future include a decisive transition towards a circular economy, including non-toxic material cycles, a robust commitment to climate neutrality and to tackling climate change, protecting our natural heritage, biodiversity and ecosystems, the sustainability of the agriculture and food systems, the coherence and consistency between agriculture and environmental and climate policies, as well as safe and sustainable low-carbon energy, buildings and mobility sectors, and that this transition is estimated to create over 200 million new jobs globally, worth over EUR 4 trillion by 2030;
5. points out the importance of people, new technology, products, services, business models and support for businesses and public and private financing – and all the EC defined "horizontal" enablers in implementing a sustainable and resilient Europe by 2030;

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<sup>1</sup> [Conclusions of the General Affairs Council. "Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030". 09.04.2019.](#)

6. recalls the importance of the CoR's recommendations on the long-term EU strategy for a Sustainable Europe by 2030<sup>2</sup> and European Commission suggestions on strengthening the rule of law, improving EU governance, providing better policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) and linking the better regulation approach to sustainability;
7. clarifies that the Agenda 2030 consist of five pillars: peace, planet, people, prosperity and partnership but this opinion will focus on the "planet" pillar, setting out the strategic view for paving the way towards sustainable European cities and regions by 2030;

### **Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030: Path for Cities and Regions**

8. welcomes the transition to a resource-efficient, low-carbon, climate-neutral and bio-diverse economy and stresses the urgency of taking action and the need to engage governments at all levels, economic players, universities, research centres, civil society and citizens;
9. calls on all the decision-makers, at all levels of governance, to recognise the active and, in many cases, innovative role of local and regional authorities, each with its own range of competences, in meeting the targets since these are on the front line and are responsible for 65% of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Europe;
10. endorses the existing evidence that the SDG targets and implementation cannot be achieved by a top-down approach only, that above all, bottom-up activities are crucially needed – all regions, cities and citizens need to be taken on board as active change makers;
11. recalls that implementing the SDGs throughout Europe requires a comprehensive and systemic approach to ensure policy coherence between the SDGs' diverse dimensions; stresses that the all SDGs are inter-related and cross-cutting and that the four dimensions of sustainable development, that is economic, ecological, social and cultural, are closely interlinked with each other and will require careful balancing;
12. underlines that seven out of 17 SDGs<sup>3</sup> can be related to the ecological and climate transition; notes in this context that SDG 11 on *sustainable cities and communities* is directly addressed to local and regional authorities and includes important targets which require political action and multilevel governance;
13. points out that cities account for 70% of world greenhouse emissions, with local governments being responsible for more than 70% of climate change reduction measures and up to 90% of climate adaptation actions;

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<sup>2</sup> COR-2019-00239, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): a basis for a long-term EU strategy for a sustainable Europe by 2030, ECON-VI/044, rapporteur Arnoldas Abramavičius (LT/EPP).

<sup>3</sup> Ensuring by 2030 access for all to safe and affordable housing; safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport; a significant reduction of deaths from exposure to disaster risks, air and water pollution; as well as the horizontal targets of improving citizens' involvement in decision making, developing strategies for integrated urban and rural planning and social integration, protecting the cultural heritage and reducing the per-capita environmental impact of cities.

14. points out that regions and cities are climate leaders; emphasises the need for multi-level cooperation and more decentralisation and calls on the EU to officially recognise an active role of local and regional authorities in the drafting of climate mitigation and adaptation policies and regulations; reiterates therefore its call to the Member States to fully include LRAs in the drafting of the integrated National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs);
15. stresses that localising and "territorialising" sustainable development actions in climate, energy and environmental policies is crucial to achieve the targets of the 2030 Agenda. Therefore calls to further enhance European partnerships<sup>4</sup>, networks of cities and regions<sup>5</sup>, such as the Under2 Coalition, and cross-border cooperation<sup>6</sup> and platforms, to develop common strategies, coordinate actions, implement more efficient strategies and pooling resources, especially in climate change adaptation and mitigation, environmental actions and preservation of biodiversity;

### **Sustainable Europe 2030: circular, low-carbon, climate-neutral and bio-diverse economy**

16. calls for the EU climate change policy to be holistic, and based on a systemic approach; notes that so far EU policies are often fragmented between different sectors and between urban and rural areas and into different categories like the emissions trading sector (ETS), the non-ETS sector and the land use, land-use change, and forestry (LULUCF) sector; encourages regions and cities to drive the gradual transition to a new systemic model and pilot new and more comprehensive solutions before 2030;
17. supports the call by the European Parliament for Member States to put in place appropriate policies and financing in order to efficiently reduce emissions; underlines that EU spending from relevant funds could provide additional support where appropriate<sup>7</sup>;
18. calls for a combination of appropriate market mechanisms, tax changes, funding measures, legal provisions and voluntary public-sector commitments at Member State level and at local and regional authority level, to attract climate change investment for the non-ETS sector to deliver emission reductions in a cost-effective manner; looks forward in this context to the proposals announced by the Commission President-elect, Ursula von der Leyen, on a European Green Deal and a European climate bank;
19. is convinced, however, that in addition to the ETS, effective measures to gradually end direct and indirect subsidies to fossil fuels (such as for example the existing tax exemptions for aircraft-fuel) is necessary in order to create a level playing field for renewable energies, encourage behavioural change and generate the necessary resources to support a just transition;

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<sup>4</sup> e.g. EIT Climate KIC, European Innovation Partnerships, Energy Platform, EU Urban Agenda Partnerships and Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. ERRIN, Eurocities, Climate Alliance and the Covenant of Mayors.

<sup>6</sup> Such as the cross-border climate change observatories of the Alps and the Pyrenees and, in particular, the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs).

<sup>7</sup> European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2019 on climate change – a European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy in accordance with the Paris Agreement (2019/2582(RSP))

welcomes in this context the debate launched by the Commission President-elect, Ursula von der Leyen, with regard to carbon pricing and carbon border tariffs;

20. suggests strong market-based incentives to attract the development of new carbon sinks and sustainable substitutions of material from high to low carbon footprint as well as additional efforts to support Research & Development to further develop new CO<sub>2</sub>-reduction technologies and measurement methods;
21. requests the tightening of the EU climate targets according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 1.5C objective to an implementable level, proposes to set up a carbon budget and to introduce other mechanisms to reduce the remaining greenhouse gas emissions as well as to revise and align the 2030 and 2040 targets with a carbon neutrality target for 2050; highlights the importance of ensuring social fairness and Member States' competitiveness, as well as international cooperation;
22. calls on the EC to initiate, in cooperation with the CoR, a study during Finland's EU presidency on how a more systemic solution could be planned and implemented for the period after 2030;
23. encourages the regions and cities to drive the gradual transition to the new systemic model and pilot new solutions before 2030;
24. notes that the effectiveness and cost efficiency of climate actions must be key guiding principles in developing a more systemic solution for the EU, including for via measures such as extending and strengthening the emission trading system while simultaneously improving its longevity and predictability;
25. points out that the delivery of sustainable development goals and climate goals will need a substantial increase in the investments for clean solutions. For example, if the required GHG emission reductions by 2050 were to be over 90%, the annual clean investment would need to be more than tripled from the current level;
26. proposes to extend and strengthen the emission trading system in mitigation of climate change. However, notes that balancing cost-benefit efficiency should be a guiding principle;
27. emphasises the importance and influence of European local and regional authorities and the strong role of citizens at the global level through initiatives such as the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy and the UN SDG 25+5 Cities Leadership Platform in encouraging the exchange of best practices to ensure the implementation of the SDGs at local level;
28. emphasises that local actors and citizens are the best-placed to raise awareness and to fight against climate change; highlights also that local and regional authorities have a responsibility to take action so that citizens can live in line with the SDGs, but also to support citizens' mobilisation to work towards the targets;

29. commits itself to raise the voice of local and regional authorities in upcoming international fora, such as the UNFCCC COP25 on climate change and the UN CBD COP15 on biodiversity advocating an ambitious, time-bound, science-driven post-2020 global biodiversity framework integrated with SDGs; calls on the Parties to apply multi-level governance, which formally includes LRAs in planning, implementation and monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV); reiterates its call for comprehensive strategies for coordinated awareness raising and engagement at all levels;

**In detail: circular, low-carbon, climate-neutral, bio-diverse economy and socially fair transition**

30. advocates the international development of an ambitious, time-bound, science-driven post-2020 global circular economy and biodiversity framework that aligns and integrates with SDGs;
31. welcomes the recent progress in the EU with regards to the transition towards a circular economy included improved waste management, but notes that the financial and regulatory frameworks at European level still need to become more effective in order to achieve the circular economy strategy; therefore calls on the European Commission, as part of the new circular economy action plan it has announced, to come forward with concrete proposals for the missing elements of such a coherent framework with due regard to the central role of local and regional authorities and, in particular, to proposals for resource-intensive sectors such as construction and changes in product design; considers that the social benefits of transitioning to a circular economy should be more clearly emphasised;
32. welcomes the EU's next strategic agenda 2019-2024<sup>8</sup> including sustainable consumption and production, fighting climate change and reversing environmental degradation, transition towards a more resource-efficient circular economy by promoting green growth, bio-economy and sustainable innovation, addressing energy security and energy costs for households and businesses;
33. calls for a holistic place-based approach in environmental policy through multi-level governance, enhancing the role of cities and regions, impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment, environmental reporting, access to environmental information and the enforcement of environmental law;
34. highlights the fundamental role of regions and cities in the transition towards a circular economy. "Circular regions" need an integrated and holistic approach, as the CoR opinion on the Directive on single-use plastics shows<sup>9</sup>;
35. highlights the urgency of adapting the national energy mix, in the different Member States to the requirements of the long-term decarbonisation strategy; this will also mean the need to increase the share of renewable energies beyond the currently agreed EU target of 32% by 2030, especially in the base-load power, in order to dramatically reduce GHG emissions;

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<sup>8</sup> [COM\(2019\) 218 final "Europe in May 2019: Preparing for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union in an increasingly uncertain world"](#).

<sup>9</sup> COR-2018-03652.

36. calls on public sector and industrial decision-makers to speed up the use of new strategic energy technologies, EU SET Plan, in tackling the climate change by increasing the role of consumers through better awareness and using smart energy grids;
37. stresses that climate transitions require significant green and blue investment and innovation; advocating more synergies between funding sources and stronger links between public and private funding for environment; and welcomes in this respect also the CoR opinion addressing the specific issues for regions heavily dependent on fossil fuels<sup>10</sup>;
38. calls for any evaluation or fitness-checks, evaluation of the existing environmental legislation on water, soil, noise and air quality to also include a focus on the crucial need to improve policy coherence in the sense of the SDGs by promoting the circular economy, fostering sustainable production and consumption and addressing emerging pollutants such as micro-plastics, pharmaceuticals and personal care products, pesticides, disinfection by-products, and industrial chemicals;
39. is deeply concerned by the ecological emergency the world is now facing, as reported in the recent Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services; stresses that biodiversity loss undermines the possibility by many countries to achieve the SDGs and therefore exhorts cities and regions to immediate and urgent action on including biodiversity<sup>11</sup> in different sectoral policy fields, including agriculture as well as urban and regional development, indicating clearly, even at a legally binding level, the importance of biodiversity protection objectives. calls on the Commission to support innovative nature-based solutions and green infrastructures developed and implemented at subnational level to tackle biodiversity loss and climate change;
40. reaffirms the call for the establishment of a European climate neutrality observatory<sup>12</sup> and highlights the active role of local and regional authorities to develop climate change observatories;
41. calls for the adoption of the recast of the Drinking Water Directive to ensure access to water for all, which will entail maintaining water bodies with a good ecological status, to reduce the health risk to below 1% and to lower bottled water consumption, saving money, reducing plastic waste and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the process;
42. calls for the recast of the Water Framework Directive to pursue the same level of ambition if not to raise it, thereby ensuring that water bodies are preserved and recovered and that the status of water ecosystems in the EU is adequate;

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<sup>10</sup> COR-2019-00617. Opinion on "Implementing the Paris Agreement through innovative and sustainable energy transition at regional and local level", ENVE-VI/040, rapporteur Witold Stępień (PL/EPP).

<sup>11</sup> UN Environment Programme – Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services [IPBES in the recent Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#).

<sup>12</sup> As stated in the opinion COR-2018-05736 on "A Clean Planet for all – A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy", ENVE-VI/037, rapporteur Michele Emiliano (IT/PES).



43. reiterates its call to improve the effectiveness of water management in the EU by increasing the scope of the EU regulation on minimum requirements for water reuse so that it applies not only to agricultural irrigation, but also to irrigation of green spaces in urban areas such as parks and grounds for public use<sup>13</sup>;
44. points out that the Territorial Impact Assessments as supported by the CoR can be a useful tool to estimate the potential and possibly very differentiated impact of legislation on the climatic, energy and ecological transition in different regions in the EU. In this context, the CoR could enhance its cooperation with the impact assessment tools of the Joint Research Centre to further strengthen its action in the field;
45. considers that the principle of just transition "no-one left behind", is one of the guiding principles for the climate and ecological transition, from a social, territorial and political point of view. In this context, fighting energy poverty has to be considered one of the priorities when designing energy-related policies and programmes establishing specific objectives to reduce it by 2030 and to eradicate it by 2050<sup>14</sup>;
46. underlines the key importance of commitment from young people. Regional and local youth councils and youth movements should be involved in the design and the implementation of climate and SDG policies;
47. emphasises that the ecological transition creates quality businesses and jobs in circular economy, clean energy, food and agriculture sectors and calls on the EU to increase the coherence of climate objectives through cohesion policy, the European Social Fund (ESF+) and InvestEU, while ensuring that SDG implementation is localised and regionalised;

### **Targets, indicators and data**

48. reiterates the crucial need, in the context of an overarching EU sustainability strategy and of Member States' sustainability strategies implementing Agenda 2030, for jointly agreed tangible milestones, indicators, real time measuring of data related to climate change and SDGs of local municipalities, cities and regions to achieve the economic, ecological, social and cultural sustainability targets;
49. highlights the need for a set of local and regional headline indicators for the Agenda 2030, and for robust subnational climate data and the importance of the use of new technology like artificial intelligence to shed light on the climate actions by the local communities. In this regard it recalls the importance of making the most out of the Covenant of Mayors database and the opportunity of creating a bridge between local and regional data and Nationally Determined Contributions through the establishment of Locally Determined Contribution;

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<sup>13</sup> COR-2019-03645. Opinion on the "Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on minimum requirements for water reuse", ENVE-VI/034, rapporteur Oldřich Vlasák (CS/ECR).

<sup>14</sup> As stated in the opinion COR-2018-05877 on "Multilevel governance and cross-sectoral cooperation to fight energy poverty", ENVE-VI/038, rapporteur Kata Tüttő (HU/PES)

50. points out the earlier experience of cities and regions in developing specific indicators related to environment, quality of life and well-being of the citizens; it is important that they are tailor-made to meet the local needs;
51. emphasises that knowledge transfer and knowledge co-creation, peer-to-peer, twinning and mentoring activities need to be identified, promoted and financed adequately by the EU;

### **Future actions**

52. commits to renew its own processes and practices to better support local and regional authorities in localising and implementing SDGs under the EU-wide Sustainable Development Strategy, replying in this way to citizens' requests to take more action and deliver concrete results to tackle climate change;
53. calls for enhancing the use of public-private partnerships, green public procurement and the implementation of pilot projects related to ecological transition and the fight against climate change;
54. notes with concern the EU's free trade agreements with other countries and insists that they comply with the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and EU environmental standards;
55. stresses that by using their purchasing power to choose goods and the providers of services and work, local and regional authorities can make a significant contribution to sustainable consumption and sustainable production, to a more resource-efficient economy and thus to the achievement of the SDGs;
56. agrees with the aim of the 2030 Agenda to achieve environmentally sustainable conditions and processes by enhancing the natural resources and protection of the most fragile ecosystems, recalling the importance of the subnational and local actions related to environment and climate change in line with the Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development. Highlights decentralised cooperation, multi-stakeholder partnerships, learning and sharing experiences in the process of reducing and remediating the footprint of the territories in terms of consumption of resources and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions;
57. welcomes the commitment of the European Parliament with the Sustainable Development Goals and in particular the Manifesto of the Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development, and calls for a fruitful cooperation with the competent committees and with the Intergroup during the mandate 2019-2024;

58. calls for the integration of these recommendations in the future work of the EU institutions in the next mandate, in cooperation with the CoR.

Brussels, 8 October 2019

The president  
of the European Committee of the Regions

Karl-Heinz Lambertz

The secretary-general ad interim  
of the European Committee of the Regions

Pedro Cervilla

## II. PROCEDURE

<b>Title</b>	Sustainable Europe by 2030: Follow-up to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, ecologic transition and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
<b>Reference</b>	Article 307(4) TFEU
<b>Legal basis</b>	Optional, first paragraph of Article 307 TFEU
<b>Procedural basis</b>	Rule 41(b)(i) CoR Rules of Procedure
<b>Date of Council/EP referral</b>	-
<b>Date of Commission letter</b>	31 January 2019
<b>Date of Bureau/President's decision</b>	
<b>Commission responsible</b>	Commission for the Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE)
<b>Rapporteur</b>	Sirpa Hertell (FI/EPP), City Councillor of Espoo
<b>Analysis</b>	10 April 2019
<b>Discussed in commission</b>	4 April 2019
<b>Date adopted by commission</b>	12 June 2019
<b>Result of vote in commission (majority, unanimity)</b>	Majority
<b>Date adopted in plenary</b>	8 October 2019
<b>Result of vote in plenary (majority, unanimity)</b>	Unanimity
<b>Previous Committee opinions</b>	"Next steps for a sustainable European future - European action for sustainability" (2017/C 342/03) Rapporteur: Franco Iacop (PES/IT)
<b>Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation</b>	–