



**European Committee
of the Regions**

ENVE-VII/013

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OPINION

Stepping up Europe's 2030 climate ambition towards COP26

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- fully supports the agreement reached between the European Parliament and the Council on the Climate law, updating the target to "at least 55% reduction" in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared to 1990 levels and requesting a proposal for a 2040 target at the latest six months after the first global stocktake of the Paris Agreement;
- sees that delivering the target of at least 55% of CO₂ emissions by 2030 is going to radically change the way we organise cities, regions and communities of people. The COVID-19 outbreak, the new climate targets and the ongoing consequences of climate change will bring structural changes to European societies that will pose challenges to LRAs as they are the closest administrations and public authority to both people and territories;
- reiterates its support for a system of Regionally and Locally Determined Contributions (RLDCs) to formally acknowledge, monitor and encourage the reduction of carbon emissions by cities, local governments and regions globally;
- sees the UNFCCC's COP26 as a crucial milestone in cementing the EU at the forefront of global climate action and stresses that ongoing activities and commitments by regions and cities should have a strong role in the preparation for, and gain official visibility at, COP26;
- considers the Edinburgh Declaration on biodiversity as the strongest ever document in recognition, engagement and empowerment of local and regional governments in any UN process; suggests that a similar approach must be replicated and extended to other UN bodies.

Rapporteur: **Vincent Chauvet (FR/RE)**, Mayor of Autun

Reference document

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Stepping up Europe's 2030 climate ambition – Investing in a climate-neutral future for the benefit of our people (COM(2020) 562 final)

Own-initiative opinion

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions –
Stepping up Europe's 2030 climate ambition towards COP26**

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Stepping up the EU's emission targets to effectively achieve climate neutrality by 2050

1. remains deeply concerned about the current world's climate emergency and fully engaged to effectively achieve irreversible climate neutrality in the EU by 2050; welcomes the realistic pathway set out by the European Climate Law, which should provide a gradual emission reduction path that is fair for future generations and will shape the EU's green recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath, avoid carbon lock-in, ensure territorial resilience and set a framework for more ambitious climate change policies should build on the positive and negative experiences from previous decades;
2. recognises that the EU has a leading voice on international climate negotiations and should set a positive example on how climate change could be tackled, by building on multilevel governance;
3. fully supports the agreement reached between the European Parliament and the Council on the Climate law, updating the target to "at least 55% reduction" in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared to 1990 levels and requesting a proposal for a 2040 target at the latest six months after the first global stocktake of the Paris Agreement; nevertheless, takes note that some stakeholders consider it still not sufficient to reach net climate neutrality on time and regrets that the new framework is focused mainly on CO₂ while other greenhouse gas emissions are ambiguously addressed not taken sufficiently into consideration; in this connection, expects the Commission to address all remaining relevant greenhouse gases in order to make the EU the first climate neutral continent by 2050;
4. urges the EU institutions and the Member States to ensure pricing of fossil emissions through emissions trading and taxation, in order to combat emissions cost-effectively and free up resources for transition. This needs to be addressed in the reviews of the EU's emissions trading system (ETS) and its Energy Taxation Directive (ETD) in the upcoming Fit for 55 legislative package. In this light, welcomes also the upcoming proposal of the European Commission on the Border Adjustment Mechanism, as there is a need for effective action to avoid carbon leakage, reflect more accurately the carbon contents of the imports, and ensure that the EU's green objectives are not undermined by production relocation to countries with less ambitious climate policies;
5. stresses the importance of enabling and promoting a variety of different solutions, taking into account technological development and the different circumstances in the EU's regions in terms of climate, geography, infrastructure, energy systems, etc. The EU's regulatory framework should, as far as possible, be technology-neutral in relation to emission reduction and

sustainability, and avoid overregulation and heavier administrative burdens for sustainable solutions;

6. notes, on the other hand, that the specific nature of some regions means that meeting the new targets will be a particular challenge for them. The energy and economic transition of these regions must take place in a just way, hence the important role of the Modernisation Fund and the carbon border adjustment mechanism;
7. recognises that, as put forward in the impact assessment to the Commission's *Stepping up Europe's 2030 climate ambition. Investing in a climate-neutral future for the benefit of our people*, all sectors will have to contribute to the EU climate policy. In this light, welcomes the Green Deal as the Growth strategy and the Green Oath as an essential tool, aimed at ensuring this goal is reached;
8. stresses that, in Europe and abroad, many cities and regions have shown themselves to be more climate ambitious than Member States. In some cases like Japan, locally determined contributions from local and regional authorities have even pushed national governments to update their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC). We therefore consider it would be highly beneficial, in order to achieve effective multilevel governance, to incorporate contributions decided at local and regional level into the process of drawing up national contributions;

Achieving the 55% target means including local and regional authorities actively in climate policymaking.

9. points out that local and regional authorities implement 70% of all EU legislation, 70% of climate mitigation measures and 90% of climate adaptation policies¹. In addition, European cities and regions with net-zero targets today cover over 162 million people (36 percent of the EU population)². Therefore, local and regional authorities are and will be in charge of handling and executing most European Green Deal strategies on the ground;
10. sees that delivering the target of at least 55% of CO₂ emissions by 2030 is going to radically change the way we organise cities, regions and communities of people. The COVID-19 outbreak, the new climate targets and the ongoing consequences of climate change will bring structural changes to European societies that will pose challenges to LRAs as they are the closest administrations and public authority to both people and territories;
11. acknowledges that LRAs have a double role as opinion leaders and as access points for citizens' priorities; the COVID-19 crisis has shown how local and regional authorities are at the frontline of people's lives. Involving stakeholders, businesses and citizens in the decision-making process of climate policies is particularly important for ensuring trust and the acceptability and success of these policies, including the impacts of the climate neutrality transition. Potential negative

¹ CoR Resolution - *The Green Deal in partnership with local and regional authorities*, December 2019.

² According to information published by the New Climate Institute, December 2020.

impacts have to be anticipated and managed, including plans for upskilling or reskilling the local workforce, especially in rural communities and less developed regions. Locally elected politicians are the most legitimate to anticipate and accompany these concerns;

12. stresses that most of the main sectors targeted by the stepping up of 2030 climate ambition have direct connections with local or regional competences; after the first large emissions reductions from closing coal power stations and cleaning up the energy-intensive industry, transport, agriculture and buildings – particularly important at local and regional levels in both urban and rural areas – are next in line for emission reduction;
13. acknowledges that conventionally powered cars will need to gradually be replaced by low-emission and zero emissions vehicles with low emissions over their lifecycle and a greater use of sustainable collective transport services, which implies regional coordination and locally the expansion of publicly accessible charging facilities for alternative fuels, as well as high-quality infrastructure for public transport such as bus and rail, so that the path to zero-emission mobility is attractive and affordable for the public;
14. is concerned that, in the agricultural sector, the decline of emissions has stagnated over the past years and in some cases emissions have increased. Combined with carbon removals and sinks management, this puts farmers and forest managers at the frontline in the fight against climate change, while their activities which are also strongly affected by its effects, are essential to food production and for the region both socially and economically. Thus calls on the Commission to take the necessary investment into the CO₂ neutrality transitions of the agricultural sector into consideration in the implementation and possible revision of the Common Agricultural Policy, while not overlooking the economic profitability of farms and their essential role as a food supplier to European society, as demonstrated during the pandemic and, making agricultural land uses compatible with those intended for renewable energy generation on degraded rural land that can be developed and regenerated and stresses the need to reinforce climate-friendly land-use systems. Moreover, highlights that in some Member States, LRAs are major public owners of forests and play a direct role in this economy; against this backdrop, the development of carbon sequestration certification to provide direct incentives for individual farmers or forest managers is to be welcomed;
15. considers that, in the energy sector, large-scale deployment of renewables must be backed up by ambitious expansion targets and measures in the near future and that this requires both large-scale and decentralised infrastructure planning. This implies specific management by LRAs, e.g. of projects, and infrastructure acceptance by populations at a local level, as well as raising awareness and encouraging citizen participation in shared projects, for example, through local energy community schemes;
16. is aware that, in the building sector, the forthcoming Renovation Wave will launch a set of actions to increase the depth and the rate of renovations at single building and district level, the latter specifically implying monitoring and investment by LRAs; they also have a crucial role to play in ensuring that the renovation of buildings adheres to land use and town planning rules, promotes policies to combat depopulation and meets the criteria of social justice and respect for the environment;

17. points out that all regions and cities are not equal in the path towards climate neutrality: some have already reduced their emissions, some are in the process, some are struggling. Therefore, territorial specificities such as isolated energy systems, historic or environmental protected areas, carbon-intensive regions, islands status, etc. need to be taken into account in climate policymaking to ensure a just transition acceptable to all European citizens and regions. Strongly believes that tools such as the European Regional Scoreboard³ or the European Climate Neutrality observatory⁴, as already called upon by our institution, are key instruments to achieve this;
18. welcomes the creation of the European Islands Facility – NESOI (New Energy Solutions Optimised for Islands) and the Clean Energy for EU islands Secretariat, as part of a process to take into account territorial specificities;
19. reiterates its call for strong inclusion of local and regional authorities in European climate policymaking in general and the design, implementation and monitoring of the Fit for 55 package, in particular to ensure it is effective, accurate and accepted on the ground, as they do not represent specific interests but have the mandate to work for the common interest of citizens;

Multi-level governance and subsidiarity are key to delivering climate neutrality and involving EU citizens in the process.

20. stresses the importance of active subsidiarity⁵ for climate policies, taking timely into account the local and regional level and not solely focusing on a dialogue between the EU and national levels;
21. points out that European cities and regions have gained momentum as actors involved in climate policymaking and stresses that they have sometimes gone further at EU level compared to the national one, through movements such as the Covenant of Mayors and other active initiatives involving the local and regional level. Thus reiterates its call for a functioning, inclusive multi-level dialogue with the aim of mainstreaming climate objectives in sectoral policies;
22. supports the initiatives and efforts of the Covenant of Mayors to better include subnational, sectoral and topical associations of mayors in the Covenant's activities; calls for an increase of the CoM's embedment and visibility at national, regional and local levels;
23. welcomes the initiative to include the CoR in the European Covenant's Political Board, and stands ready to ensure a stronger link between the EU-level management of the Covenant and the 2nd chamber of the Covenant of Mayors, in order to provide political support for the initiative, promote the Covenant and assist dialogue with national bodies and ensure cohesion

³ [The impact of climate change on regions: an assessment of the European Green Deal.](#)

⁴ [A Clean Planet for all – A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy.](#)

⁵ Active Subsidiarity should be understood as defined by the European Commission Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing Less More Efficiently".

and coherence for the local and regional authorities' assistance and representation at the European level, in a landscape already quite complex for most of them;

Giving local and regional authorities the tools to deliver climate neutrality

24. stresses that access to information and funding for climate initiatives and projects is still considered difficult by many local and regional authorities. Difficulties concern the following points:
 - lack of knowledge of the available funding and existing initiatives that are best suited for the city or region's project,
 - complexity of the European and national landscape and confusion around the different existing platforms and initiatives,
 - lack of technical competence at a local level to apply, manage and monitor the funds,
 - lack of competitiveness with the private sector to attract and keep experts,
 - ambiguous signals sent to the market for energy communities and local projects,
 - lack of absorption capacity by local authorities and businesses.
25. is worried that the difficulties mentioned in the previous points could create a reluctance among LRAs to embrace local green deals and commit to 2030 pledges;
26. asks the Joint Research Centre to conduct a study to map (up to level 3 of the Territorial Units for Statistics) the absorption capacity of local and regional authorities and business, with regard to the significant new funding made available by the Green Deal and the Recovery Plan and stands ready to contribute with tools available to the CoR, such as the Regional Hubs;
27. alerts the Commission that LRAs are extremely challenged by the current health crisis management and find it difficult to allocate financial and human resources to climate neutrality initiatives and paths; therefore, calls for sufficient resources to be allocated to support LRAs in this challenge for the decade to come and taking into account the whole life-cycle of projects (including monitoring);
28. points out the need to improve the implementation capacities of LRAs and the importance of having enough and skilled staff especially at the municipal level and in rural areas. The necessary workforce must be systematically provided for the coordination of the many fields of work and areas of responsibility associated with the implementation of climate action goals;
29. welcomes the European Climate Pact and the local approach of a Just Transition Platform, as key tools to support and accelerate the transition to climate neutrality, together with other existing initiatives. Calls however on the European Commission to create an umbrella platform, potentially through the European Climate Pact, promoting their integration and complementarity, guiding LRAs in the choice depending on their characteristics and ensuring coherence, easy access to information, non-competing pledges and simplifying and unifying (to the degree possible) access to the initiatives;

30. calls the European Commission to acknowledge the fact that the role of LRAs goes beyond the role of other non-state actors and call for a recognition of this specificity in the frame of the umbrella platform;
31. supports the creation of local Climate Pacts to ensure climate neutrality pathways are participative, well accepted and supported by the population, and inclusive of European citizens' concerns and needs;
32. recognises the important role semi-formal institutions, such as citizens' city councils, local consultative bodies, and citizens' conventions drawn by lot have on creating the right momentum and accelerating the energy transition. Calls therefore for every municipality of at least 10 000 inhabitants to consider creating, as part of their local governance structure, citizens' parliaments that would look at the concrete means to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change;
33. stresses that most cities and regions do not know their current and past level of CO₂ emissions, which makes it difficult for them to quantify their efforts and design efficient pathways towards climate neutrality. Urges the Commission to help provide the necessary technical and competence aid to assist LRAs in their emission evaluation, in particular by fully using local and regional energy agencies, local and regional authorities working in the field of climate change and other relevant counterparts. It is also recommended that local authorities employ a "Climate Manager" to promote the Climate Pact in the municipality and to coordinate and implement the sustainable climate and energy action plans (SECAPs). This manager may be shared by smaller authorities;
34. supports in this light the Common Reporting Framework by the Global Covenant of Mayors as a step towards the harmonisation of local and regional voices;
35. reiterates its support for a system of Regionally and Locally Determined Contributions (RLDCs) to formally acknowledge, monitor and encourage the reduction of carbon emissions by cities, local governments and regions globally; the European Commission is asked to work with the CoR to explore how SECAPs or equivalent plans could act as RLDCs providing local contributions to the UN Paris Climate Agreement and be officially recognised as a complement to NDCPs;
36. welcomes the initiatives on Race to Zero and Race to Resilience at a global level⁶ and calls on the UNFCCC to cooperate with the CoR and other relevant counterparts from the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities Constituency (LGMA) towards the formal recognition of the contribution from subnational governments to climate action and to create a specific dialogue with subnational governments;
37. stresses that LRAs have a particular potential for both social and technical climate innovation and often participate in research and innovation projects. To ensure this potential is fully developed and used as a tool to find new solutions towards carbon neutrality, calls on the

⁶ <https://racetozero.unfccc.int/race-to-resilience/>.

Commission to pay due attention in the Fit for 55 package to creating a flexible framework that would guarantee innovation and experimentation initiatives at a local level, resulting in bottom-up and place-based solutions;

38. stresses that freedom in the choice of the decarbonisation path at a local level must be ensured, from technological, policy and democratic perspective; exogenous decisions create reluctance to enforce them;

Bringing local and regional authorities' voice to the COP26

39. acknowledges that, though NDCs are the primary vehicle to hold states accountable, society at large must be involved in emission reductions in order to achieve a climate-neutral and resilient area;
40. stresses that the voice of local and regional authorities has become stronger in international negotiations and initiatives on climate change and welcomes existing initiatives of LRA networks such as CPMR, ICLEI, C40, Under2Coalition, Regions4, Climate Alliance, FEDARENE United Cities and Local Governments(UCLG) and the Global Covenant of Mayors and their input to the UNFCCC Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA);
41. sees the UNFCCC's COP26 as a crucial milestone in cementing the EU at the forefront of global climate action and stresses that ongoing activities and commitments by regions and cities should have a strong role in the preparation for, and gain official visibility at, COP26;
42. calls for global and European actors to invest in gender-analysis and sex-disaggregated data to understand fully the impact of climate change on all vulnerable groups, implement gender-budgeting techniques and ensure equal access to representation in policy making for all genders and all levels. In this light, supports the call for enhancing the gender balance in national delegations, as well as within the COP26 senior management team and welcomes the work of UNFCCC on the connection between gender and climate policies⁷ and calls on the European Commission to work in the same direction;
43. considers the Edinburgh Declaration on biodiversity as the strongest ever document in recognition, engagement and empowerment of local and regional governments in any UN process; suggests that a similar approach must be replicated and extended to other UN bodies and calls on our partners in the UNFCCC to establish a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Committee of the Regions, as the institutional representative of European cities and regions;
44. calls for a more intensive multi-level policy dialogue on climate change mitigation and adaptation in sectors where governance is already strongly including LRAs and where powers are already devolved in several parts of the world, such as energy supply and demand, transport, agriculture and building;

⁷

<https://unfccc.int/gender>

45. calls for a more intensive multi-level policy dialogue on climate change mitigation and adaptation in sectors where climate actions must take into account other environmental issues, such as the preservation of biodiversity or food production, clean water, sustainable agriculture and forestry concerns. Spatial strategy regarding compatibilities in land use is especially concerned and critically involves local and regional authorities; it also concerns the decision on implementing the strategies that the Commission is adopting and that affect the agricultural sector, which must undergo an impact assessment to evaluate their consequences;
46. welcomes initiatives from the European Commission and the Covenant of Mayors to better present LRAs' activities and involvement in climate neutral policies' design and enforcement at upcoming COPs and to promote leadership in the vertical integration of climate action. In this light, calls the Commission to cooperate with the CoR to organise a thematic day on local Climate Action in the EU, as an opportunity to showcase the different EU initiatives;
47. calls on CoR members to organise local and regional COPs in their communities prior to COP26, aimed at spreading awareness of the climate emergency, but also at gathering the views of citizens and businesses on their needs and their best practices that could accelerate the green transition and reaching the Paris Agreement goals;
48. recalls that the EU has set itself to be a leader in COP negotiations and must thus deliver impactful actions towards its target, which implies co-creation and cooperation with LRAs: in this sense, it calls on UNFCCC to cooperate with the CoR to further promote the frontrunner experience of local and regional COPs.

Brussels, 1 July 2021

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Apostolos Tzitzikostas

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

Petr Bližkovský

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Stepping up Europe's 2030 climate ambition – Investing in a climate-neutral future for the benefit of our people
Reference(s)	COM(2020) 562 final
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Commission responsible	Commission for the Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE)
Rapporteur	Vincent Chauvet (FR/RE), Mayor of Autun
Analysis	
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Previous Committee opinions	
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	
