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Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions on the priorities of the European Committee of the Regions for 2025-2030

(C/2025/3472)

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR)

HAVING REGARD to:

— The Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 of the European Council;

— The Political Guidelines of the European Commission 2024-2029;

— The cooperation agreements of the European Committee of the Regions with the European Parliament and the European Commission;

The CoR considers #Cohesion, #Resilience and #Proximity to be its key priorities for the 2025-2030 mandate.

I. *#Cohesion*

The CoR stresses that:

1. economic, social and territorial cohesion are key objectives of the European Union and that the involvement of local and regional authorities (LRAs) is essential for achieving these objectives through multilevel governance as also expressed in the Cohesion Alliance;

Competitiveness

2. LRAs are key drivers of competitiveness given their close links with citizens, economic actors, academia and other stakeholders. LRAs deliver the EU strategic agenda on the ground and effectively support innovation ecosystems through investment and public procurement, provide quality public services to encourage regional development and enable a placed-based industrial policy to achieve decarbonisation, competitiveness and high-quality jobs;

3. it strongly supports a bold, place-based and territorially inclusive FP10 and European Research Area (ERA) with enhanced support for local and regional innovation ecosystems, improved synergies between cohesion and R&I funding, and the full recognition of LRAs as enablers of the knowledge economy;

4. underlines the importance of empowering youth through education and equipping them with the skills needed to succeed in the future labour market and to address labour shortages; legal migration can also be a fundamental driver of growth and enrich local economies and enhance regional competitiveness;

5. European competitiveness requires a well-developed territorial dimension and enhanced multi-level governance structures for the coordination of industrial policy as there cannot be competitiveness without competitive regions;

6. the completion of the Single Market, including the free movement of services, the capital markets union and boosting investment are key ingredients to ensure Europe's long-term competitiveness. A strong, innovative and resilient single market requires a strong cohesion policy with a strong competitiveness component;

7. making the European economy more competitive requires renewed efforts to achieve active subsidiarity with constructive cooperation across all levels and building on the experiences of cities and regions, which are implementing most EU legislation, while upholding its economic, social and environmental standards and ensuring regulatory stability;

8. small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of local communities, providing training, employment and essential goods and services while fostering resilience and diversification;

9. It will promote a competitive and SME-friendly environment in EU regions through place-based policies, simplification, administrative burden reduction and investments in skills and innovation;

EU budget

10. the EU budget must ensure meaningful place-based policies in the long term if it is to act as a key investment tool and stabiliser for addressing the EU's evolving priorities in a challenging geopolitical context with increasing economic inequality and the accelerating climate crisis;

11. the EU must be equipped with sufficient financial means to deliver so that highly important new objectives do not endanger long-standing priorities and Treaty goals;

12. an effective post-2027 MFF must be developed in coordination with LRAs as strategic partners, due to their unique understanding of local investment needs. The partnership principle and multilevel governance are therefore essential success factors to making the EU more competitive, inclusive, secure, resilient and sustainable. Any centralisation of the design or delivery of multi-annual programmes is to be rejected;

13. fiscal decentralisation remains key for achieving efficient public services, promoting competitiveness and empowering citizens;

14. new own resources as well as incentives to attract private capital for the European Union should be part of the broader discussion on the financing of the EU's long-term budget to respond to the fundamental new challenges facing it;

Just transition

15. a comprehensive and holistic strategy with a targeted place-based approach is crucial to manage the socio-economic impacts of the triple transition (green, digital and demographic) given the diverse starting points, strengths and asymmetric vulnerabilities of EU regions. Support for just transition within cohesion policy must remain robust, as it can unfold potential and positive dynamics for sustainable development;

Sustainable and affordable housing

16. everyone has the right to a decent and affordable place to live. Many EU citizens struggle to access the property and rental markets, impacting EU cohesion, quality of life and urban planning, as well as the accessibility and safety of our cities. There is an urgent need to address the severe housing crisis in many parts of the EU and to eradicate homelessness by 2030;

II. ***#Resilience***

The CoR emphasises that:

17. resilience in a broad sense is the ability to react to natural and human-made disasters, security threats and economic and political instability within the EU and in the wider world. Achieving resilience depends on close cooperation across all levels of governance and must include strengthening the EU's and LRAs' ability to react to different forms of crises through appropriate instruments and financial means;

Cross-border cooperation

18. it believes that, as the epitome of European added value, European territorial cooperation plays a key role and needs to be recognised as a priority and strengthened in the next MFF;

Climate change

19. the growing exposure of EU cities and regions to the consequences of climate change and ongoing environmental degradation is of serious concern, requiring more focus on and financial means for prevention and adaptation. The EU's climate neutrality target by 2050 must be achieved through a legally binding 2040 target of 90 % CO_2 reduction and ambitious as well as realistic efforts, as outlined in the Green Deal framework;

20. there is an urgent need to strengthen the structural and financial capacity of LRAs to synergise climate action and biodiversity preservation, while enhancing research and innovation, and to mitigate and adapt to climate change, while managing risks and improving their preparedness for climate disaster;

Water resilience

21. water resilience as a critical global challenge is crucial for EU competitiveness and key to deliver on climate adaptation, biodiversity protection, pollution reduction, food security, the circular economy and public health. It must therefore be integrated into all other relevant EU policies;

22. integrated water management strategies combining nature-based innovative solutions must be developed and implemented at local and regional levels;

Clean, secure and affordable energy

23. an efficient, economically sustainable, clean and fair local energy transition is key to reduce strategic dependencies, and to combine environmental targets and competitiveness;

24. in an increasingly complex geopolitical situation, it is of crucial importance to promote micro production of energy and decentralised and renewable energy systems;

25. the completion of the European Energy Union with a fully integrated and interconnected market across the EU and a well-functioning governance system at its core will be fundamental to enhance the EU's energy security and avoid energy prices becoming a major constraint for EU industry and a burden for citizens;

26. the role of LRAs is key to achieve a sustainable and socially just energy transition, ensuring the competitiveness of local businesses and fighting energy poverty, but in order to increase energy efficiency and local energy production, they must rely on adequate funding, including direct funds for LRAs;

Health

27. a healthy population and a strong, universally accessible and innovative healthcare sector are important factors in the EU's societal resilience and a central pillar of the EU's strategic autonomy;

28. building and implementing the European Health Union by the EU, together with its Member States, regions, cities and rural areas, must address challenges such as a shrinking healthcare workforce, supply problems of critical medicines, the high vulnerability of healthcare infrastructure to cyberattacks, persistent health inequalities and rising numbers of chronic diseases and mental health problems in times of instability and crises;

Agriculture

29. a strong Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) will be essential to increase the EU's resilience, sustainability, competitiveness, food sovereignty and security and the protection of its farmers, and must direct public funds towards environmentally sustainable farming practices;

30. rural development must also be a core element of the CAP, supporting vibrant rural areas with strong public services and infrastructure and addressing demographic and economic challenges;

31. regions must play a prominent role in the governance of the future strategic plans to ensure that specific territorial and sectoral characteristics are taken into account and that the CAP will be focused on supporting sustainable food production adapted to local conditions, on generational renewal and on maintaining the agro-food sector as a strategic asset;

Security

32. Europeans and the EU are facing evolving and multi-dimensional threats and the response to these challenges must become a shared and collective responsibility, as highlighted by the Niinistö report. More needs to be done to ensure Europe's preparedness and defence capabilities. The CoR's unwavering support to Ukraine's cities and regions, which is expressed through the Alliance for the Reconstruction of Ukraine, is also an investment in the resilience of the EU's cities and regions as it provides the opportunity to learn from the experience of the Ukrainian partners;

33. crisis preparedness, whether in relation to geopolitical tensions or natural disasters, is essential and local and regional perspectives need to be fully reflected in EU policies so that they can be effective on the ground. The active involvement of cities and regions, specifically in strengthening the defence industry, protecting public spaces and critical infrastructures and building resilience and cybersecurity through a whole-of-society approach, is crucial;

III. ***#Proximity***

The CoR points out that:

34. local and regional governments are uniquely positioned to address the evolving needs of citizens. Reinforcing the capacity of local governments is essential for maintaining cohesion, fostering inclusive communities and enhancing citizens' trust in public institutions;

Demographic change

35. demographic change with an aging population and problems such as brain drain, land abandonment and desertification, growing dependency ratios, certain regions falling into development traps and an overall shrinking population result in severe inequalities between territories and communities, which undermine cohesion. Cohesion policy remains central to addressing and mitigating demographic change, and to creating opportunities for the populations of less developed and disadvantaged regions. The focus on demographic challenges within cohesion policy should encompass promoting family friendly policies and intergenerational fairness and developing smart and sustainable pathways for shrinking regions. This means making it easier for those who want to remain in or return to their regions and cities by promoting a good business environment that can provide jobs and by offering high quality public services and infrastructure;

Local democracy

36. the capacity of LRAs to address systemic threats against democracy needs to be strengthened;

37. bridging the gap between institutions and citizens and the protection of fundamental rights and the rule of law are key concerns which need to be addressed across all levels of governance;

38. it is equally important to foster citizen participation, especially youth participation, ensuring that all generations have a voice in decision-making processes. This is essential for building a just, transparent and accountable system of governance;

39. through its members and its networks and initiatives such as the EU Local Councillors, the Young Elected Politicians or the European Week of Regions and Cities, the CoR has unique tools at its disposal to bring Europe closer to citizens and to channel their input to the EU level;

40. safeguarding local democracy remains imperative, both within the EU borders and in enlargement countries and countries in the southern and eastern neighbourhoods;

Gender Equality

41. contributing to the next EU gender equality strategy and translating the EU Roadmap for Women's Rights into tangible outcomes on the ground will be a cross-cutting priority for the CoR in 2025-2030; the CoR will actively support local and regional authorities as strategic partners to achieve equal pay for equal work and economic empowerment, equal access to quality health services, accessible childcare, work-life balance and equal employment opportunities. The CoR also supports the mainstreaming of gender equality across all EU policies - from design to implementation - in close cooperation with all governance levels; this includes a commitment to intersectionality, particularly the inclusion of women from marginalised and vulnerable groups, including LGBTIQ+ people; the CoR underlines the importance of increasing women's participation in political life, and calls for their equal representation with regard to composition and leadership positions in the EU institutions; calls on political institutions to adopt gender-sensitive codes of conduct and enforce anti-harassment safeguards; this is essential to safeguarding local democracy and ensuring that equality is not just a principle but a lived reality across Europe;

Youth

42. the current EU Youth strategy, focusing on active participation and better opportunities for young people to learn and work, benefiting young peoples' economic and social development, deserves enhanced visibility and a stronger focus on its implementation. It goes together with strengthened EU support for education as a key aspect of the Union of Skills, which is essential for future generations to access quality jobs and housing;

The CoR, in view of the coming five years:

43. points out that LRAs are key actors in addressing the above-mentioned challenges and policy objectives because of their political legitimacy, their constitutional roles, their knowledge and their investment powers, and through their commitment to cohesion, resilience and proximity;

44. is convinced that cities and regions must not be considered as just stakeholders in this process but as active participants in preparing the European Union for the future in the context of an ambitious reform agenda in view of its enlargement;

45. makes it clear that engaging LRAs in the development of the EU's future and policy process based on the principles of active subsidiarity, partnership and multilevel governance is the only way to effectively achieve the EU's goal of putting regions 'at the centre of the EU's work'.

Brussels, 15 May 2025.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Kata TÜTTŐ