

THE ReppORTER

February - March
2017

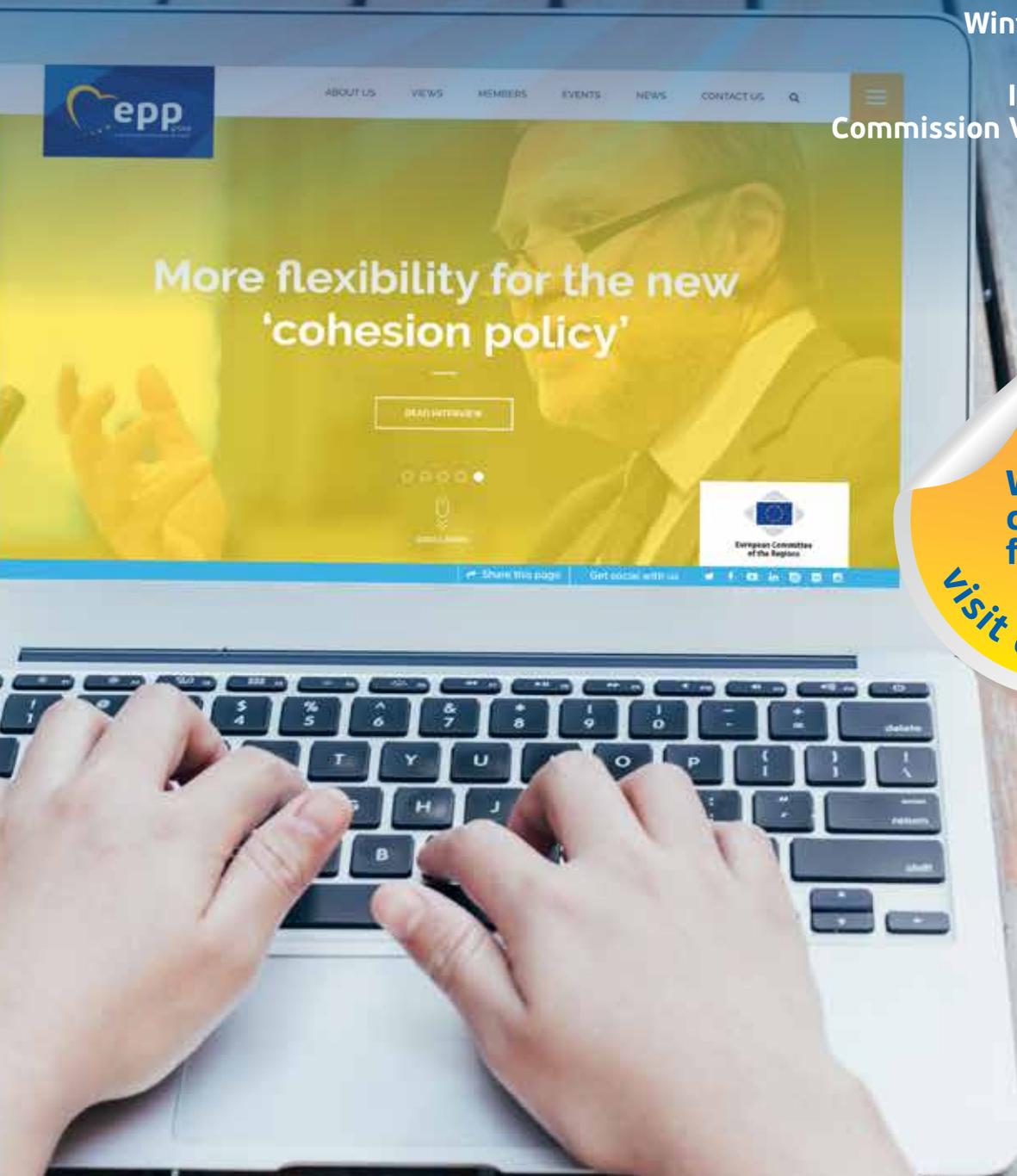
Activity report of the EPP Group in the European Committee of the Regions



EPP-CoR Political
Priorities for 2017

Winter University

Interview with
Commission Vice President
Katainen



Foreword

by **President Schneider**

Dear Members,
Dear friends,

We leave year 2016 behind with a great dose of mixed feelings. On one hand our Group enjoyed successes, with many important dossiers delivered in high quality by our rapporteurs, relations with the EPP and EPP Group in the Parliament further strengthened, our 2 very successful events: in Thessaloniki and Dubrovnik and an initiative to bring Europe closer to the citizens through local events implemented. On the other hand however, history will unfortunately remember the passing year rather for the least pleasant outcomes:

like the Brexit vote - bringing unprecedented divisions within our European project, for the terrible acts of terror that scattered fear on the streets of our European cities, as well as the further outbreak of populism or birth of fake news at an unprecedented scale in the social media.

Thus, as we walk into 2017 with uncertainty caused by these events, we should definitely not allow ourselves to forget about our common values, beliefs and ideals that led our founding fathers to build foundations to our peaceful project in the post-war Europe of last century. Only by standing together in unity we won't allow Europe and ourselves to be torn apart, alienated or illusioned. The European project seems to be at some decisive crossroads. We need to fight back growing populism at our home, we need to answer openly questions or concerns raised by public and tackle the incertitude for the future of young generations. The European Union has to regain credibility and trust in the eyes of the people and remain our safe and secure harbour. The anniversary of the Treaty of Rome signing this year should be a key moment for a wide reflection on the future of the European Union and an opportunity to promote a greater debate on citizens' best involvement in it. A bottom-up Europe, which works together with local and regional authorities, is the only way to re-build trust.

In times of growing concerns against raising societal inequalities, we need to secure more cohesive Europe for the future generations. To achieve that, we must tackle obstacles to investment and maintain a strong, result-oriented Cohesion policy beyond 2020. Furthermore, the migrant crisis will remain a key challenge in 2017. Solutions need to be found by identifying the root causes in the places of origin and by supporting solutions outside the EU in order to protect the Union's and Schengen's external borders.

I truly hope we can together bring some inspiring thoughts into European mainstream, through our daily work in regions, our activities at the CoR and thorough debates we planned for this year: one in Brindisi, Italy – on Trans-European Networks and other on EU's demographic change in Budapest. In this new year, I wish us all to deliver Europe a bit more optimism and good ideas to leverage the great potential that lies at each of EU's corners.



Michael Schneider
President of the EPP-CoR Group

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Winter University 2016:

Using European open data for more efficient and engaging cities and regions



The 9th edition of the EPP-CoR Winter University gathered 60 journalists, journalism students and media makers to Brussels on November 23-24 to discuss the hot topic of open data – and how to use it for better European storytelling. Many of the issues raised were of special importance also to the local and regional authorities, especially on the key questions of opening up data and the benefits it can bring to European cities and regions.

In the aftermath of the US Presidential elections and the discussion on post-factual societies and politics, the role of **accessible data, fact-checking and the media literacy of citizens** rose as important subjects throughout the sessions.

EPP-CoR President **Michael Schneider** emphasised that *“in the EPP Group, we believe that data made public by local and regional authorities increases the transparency and*

accountability of them. Simultaneously, it enhances the active participation of citizens – since once they are better informed on aspects that matter in their everyday life they can be more involved by taking action in ameliorating it.”

The long-term **benefits** for cities and regions in opening up data for the public are big especially **in gaining more efficiency and transparency**. *“The breadth and diversity of information in open sources could make open data a highly cost-effective source of critical insights in many policy fields and in the development of a more proactive citizenship”,* EPP-CoR Vice President **Arnoldas Abramavicius** stressed.

The role of **frontrunner cities** in **supporting** also the **smaller municipalities** in opening up their data, as well as **returning local and regional data** delivered up to the national level to the use of cities and regions came as suggestions for immediate actions.

However, **data must** not only **be** accessible but **also understandable** – here the representatives of media have an important role to play working together with the public sector.



Former CoR President **Luc van den Brande** gave a forward-looking vision for the conference in stating that *“we are particularly interested in the untapped potential of publicly held data because of its ability to transform cities and regions and give us a better understanding of the places we live and work in”.*

**

The **EPP group in the European Committee of the Regions will issue a publication on Open data and best practices during spring 2017** to follow-up on the event and provide more tools for our Members as well as European cities and regions to better use the opportunities provided by open data.



The Political Priorities of the EPP Group in the European Committee of the Regions for 2017



Since the beginning on its creation, the European People's Party Group has been a driving force of the European Committee of the Regions. As part of the largest political group in the institution, EPP-CoR Members are vitally positioned in all Commissions and bodies of the institution.

Migration still plays a central role in European policy-making in 2017 and the EPP-CoR gives its full support for the revision of the EU's asylum policy and emphasises that the solution to the migrant crisis can only be found by identifying the root causes in the places of origin, by supporting solutions outside of the EU in order to protect the Union's external borders. Safeguarding the **Schengen Area** and emphasising that all four freedoms of

the EU's Single Market must be preserved equally is also an important issue for the Group. The EPP strongly supports the development of ARLEM and CORLEAP as innovative tools to promote decentralisation and a multilevel approach in the **European Neighbourhood Policy**.

The growing threat of terrorism requires better protection of people and local and regional authorities are central for successful **integration** measures. The EPP believes that providing answers to the uneasy relationship between migration and **security** is crucial to save the EU from disruptive political forces and the re-nationalisation of the EU policies. Europe's development can no longer be imposed from the top and needs to grow from the

bottom instead – therefore the EPP Group highlights stepping up communication and putting the **citizens first** through high level town hall debates and local events.

Subsidiarity is key in bridging the gap between Europe and its citizens. Moreover, the Group continues to promote **multilevel governance** and active partnerships for **increased cooperation** across all levels of governance for more results on the ground. The EPP believes that the **REFIT** Programme can make a positive contribution for local and regional authorities, as long as the EU's high standards are protected and the objective is not simply deregulation.

Cohesion Policy, the second largest funding tool of the EU, is in the spotlight in 2017. **Michael Schneider**, President of the EPP-CoR Group, leads on the opinion of the Future of the Cohesion Policy for a strong and effective results-oriented policy post-2020 covering all EU Member States. In addition, the EPP priority for the welcomed **EFSI** extension is to maintain its nature of additionality as well as synergies with other financing instruments.

The EPP Members will work on the implementation of the **Energy Union** package focusing on energy efficiency and renewable energy - working towards decentralised energy production, distribution and consumption. On the **implementation of the Paris Agreement**, special attention will be paid to local adaptation strategies





alongside the mitigation goals. Furthermore, the EPP-CoR will closely follow the implementation of the **circular economy** action plan in line with social market economy rules.

The EPP local and regional authorities will work on the **Common Agricultural Policy** - its simplification and modernisation, following the situation of farmers in terms of price volatility on the markets. **Sustainable food policy** is one of the current topics for the Group, in particular trying to build synergies between food and other policies including agriculture, employment, health, and consumer policy. Moreover, the Group will also focus on **health policy**, especially the prevention and treatment practices across EU regions and cities.

The Members of the EPP Group will continue leading the CoR opinions related to the implementation of the **Digital Single Market** strategy, as they have done so far. This will include not only the follow-up and completion of recent opinions such as eGovernment and Copyright in the Digital Single Market but also prioritising on future proposals on topics such as the mid-term review of the implementation of the Digital Single Market Strategy and addressing the issue of unjustified barriers to the free flow of data within Europe.

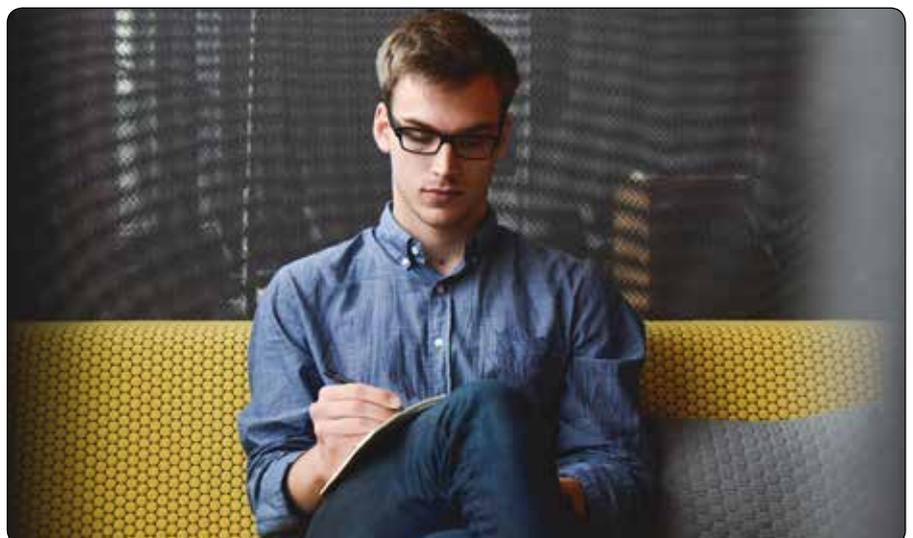
EPP Group will also focus its work on important issues such as the **Horizon 2020** mid-term evaluation, future initiatives to address the challenges of work-life bal-

ance faced by working families, as well as initiatives referring to youth employment (e.g. implementation of youth aspects in the Skills agenda and a quality framework for apprenticeships) as Europe's youth deserves better prospects. Finally, the EPP group will follow closely the progress of the proposed EU strategy for international cultural relations, on which a decision is expected by June 2017.

The Members of the EPP Group will continue contributing to initiatives related to the Five Presidents' report on the completion of the **Economic and Monetary Union** (EMU) and in particular on the preparation of the second stage which will be included in the White paper on the Future of Europe "A strong Union built on a strong EMU". Moreover, the EPP Group

will focus on issues such as the mid-term review of the **Capital Markets Union** and the implementation of EFSI. Finally, the EPP Group will focus on initiatives to strengthen the **industrial competitiveness** of the EU.

Investment is in the future of Europe: the CoR's Bratislava Declaration stresses the urgent need to enhance the investment capacity of regional and local authorities, provide citizens with the benefits of the European Structural Funds, cut red tape, promote a friendlier environment for investment and small businesses, promote growth and jobs as well as empower citizens. The EPP Group will continue its work as the leading proponent of bridging the persistent investment gap in Europe's regions and cities.



FEBRUARY PLENARY SESSION

Overview of the February Plenary Session

The 121st Plenary Session of the European Committee of the Regions takes place February 8-9 with opinions and discussions on several EPP priority topics such as migration, investment, the Digital Single Market and climate change adaptation.



Hon. **Ian Borg**, MP and Parliamentary Secretary for EU funds and the 2017 Maltese Presidency, joins the CoR Members to present the priorities of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first half of the year. The country highlights six topics during their first Presidency since the country's accession in 2004: migration, security, the single market, social inclusion, neighbourhood policy

and the maritime sector. CoR President **Markku Markkula** met with the Maltese Prime Minister **Joseph Muscat** in January to discuss common themes for cooperation and reinforcing the social pillar was one of the emphasised issues.

EIB Vice President Vazil Hudák joins the Members in a debate titled 'Regions and Cities investing in Smart Sustainable Development' - connected with President **Markkula's** (EPP/FI) own-initiative opinion Bridging the Investment Gap: How to Tackle the Challenges. You can read more about investment from Vice President Katainen's interview in the back cover of this issue.

Commissioner for agriculture and rural development, Mr **Phil Hogan**, will appear on the second day of the plenary to give a statement connected to the opinion on Supporting young European farmers (**Hatch** ECR/UK).

Out of the sixteen opinions to be adopted during the two days, altogether eight are from Rapporteurs of the EPP Group. Each EPP opinion will be presented in the following pages in more detail.

Migration continues to be a permanent fixture on the CoR plenary agenda. Reform of the Common European Asylum System – Package II and a Union Resettlement Framework (**Bianco** PES/IT), Partner-

ship Framework with third countries on Migration (**Bossman** PES/SL) and A new European Consensus on Development (**Gamallo Aller** EPP/ES) are the opinions to be adopted this time.

In addition to the opinion by President Markkula, one on Fiscal Capacity and Automatic Stabilizers in the European Monetary Union (**Graf** EPP/SE) as well as the Resolution on the Annual Growth Survey 2017 cover economic affairs for February plenary. Another resolution on the plenary agenda is the Resolution on the 60th anniversary of the signature of the Rome Treaties joint with a statement by a representative of the YO!FEST2017.

The completion of the Digital Single Market is high on the EU agenda and the Review of the telecom package (**Vörklaev** ALDE/EE) and the Copyright in the digital single market (**D'Attis** EPP/IT) opinions combine several Commission proposals to push the digital agenda forward. The opinion Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations (**Tzitzikostas** EPP/GR) highlights for the recognition of culture as an important tool of international diplomacy.

The CoR has always held the viability of remote and rural regions as an important subject in its work. This plenary session looks at Missing transport links in border regions (**Scheffer** ALDE/NL), Regeneration of Port Cities and Port Areas (**Szwabski** EA/PL) and the Union policy for the Arctic (**Haijanen** EPP/FI).

The second day of the plenary highlights environmental and health themes through opinions Effective water management system: an approach to innovative solutions (**Loggen** ALDE/NL), Towards a new EU climate change adaptation strategy – taking an integrated approach (**Hertell** EPP/FI), Mid-term evaluation of the LIFE Programme (**Stępień** EPP/PL) and The need for and way towards an EU strategy on alcohol-related issues (**Karlsson** ALDE/SE).



➔ EPP Opinions

in the upcoming Plenary Session



Markku Markkula, President of the European Committee of the Regions and City Councillor of Espoo, EPP/FI

Bridging the Investment Gap: How to Tackle the Challenges ECON-VI/014

Narrowing the 15% gap in European investments and kick-starting the EU economy has been a top priority for the European Committee of the Regions in the past few years and the opinion stresses the role of local and regional

authorities in tackling the challenges, as LRAs are responsible for more than half of the public investment.

The opinion proposes a few support measures from the cities' and regions'

perspective in order for the process to succeed: stimulating targeted investment based on local needs, to continue the EU's work on cutting excessive red tape, and by facilitating peer-to-peer benchmarking for best grass roots practices. Investment also needs to be regarded in a wider context – not only focusing on infrastructure and transport – but also in human capital, research and innovation, as well as smart energy networks; ensuring sustainable and human development across Europe.



Jyrki Katainen,
Commission Vice
President for Jobs,
Growth, Investment and
Competitiveness

"I recognise the crucial role that local authorities can help play in bringing investment projects to fruition. Our proposal for extending and reinforcing the Investment Plan for Europe (the so-called "EFSI 2.0") proposal places a stronger emphasis on leveraging local knowledge to facilitate EFSI support across the EU. The European Investment Advisory Hub (EIAH) will be in a position to provide more targeted technical assistance services at local level, including to local and regional authorities, across the EU."



Carl Fredrik Graf, Member of Halmstad Municipal Council, EPP/SE

Fiscal capacity and automatic stabilisers in the Economic and Monetary Union - ECON-VI/018

Since the financial and euro crises, the EU has worked continuously to improve the stability of the Economic and Monetary Union. The fiscal capacity and automatic stabilisers in the EMU are about address-

ing and adapting to asymmetric shocks in the Monetary Union and Single Market.

The opinion emphasises that despite the improvements in EMU governance and

the financial sector, the mere coordination of national fiscal policies has not enhanced the national capacity to absorb economic shocks - nor prevented the emergence of an investment gap. Moreover, the existing policies have proved insufficient to trigger growth-enhancing, sustainable and socially balanced structural reforms. Local and regional authorities should be more involved in the EMU governance as they are often responsible for the implementation policies to asymmetric economic shocks.



Burkhard Balz, MEP and
EPP ECON Committee
Coordinator

"The CoR opinion rightly emphasises on conditionality and compliance with the Stability and Growth Pact. Regional and local authorities have a crucial role in contributing to sustainable structural reforms and fiscal consolidation in order to foster competitiveness, stability and growth in Europe. To point to the national and regional ownership is therefore the right thing to do. The EPP priority is to strengthen the credibility in applying the existing economic governance and to avoid further politicizing of the system. This includes maintaining the institutional and political independence of the ESM and its firepower. Any fiscal capacity would have to aim at supporting reforms in the Member States and be linked to the Structural Reform Support Programme."



Apostolos Tzitzikostas, Governor of Central Macedonia, EPP/EL

Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations SEDEC-VI/017

The role of culture has been recognised as an important aspect in its international setting, as outlined in the joint communication by the European External Action Service and the European Commission,

proposing a strategic framework for deeper and more effective international cultural relations as well as a new model for cooperation for increased opportunities, synergies and socio-economic benefits.

The opinion welcomes the communication and appreciates the recognition of culture and cultural heritage as instruments for local and regional development. The European Committee of the Regions should be included in the planning phase and regional and local authorities in the development and implementation of the strands of action and measures. Specific mechanisms for operation and enforcement, measurement tools and objectives and deadlines should also be developed.



Silvia Costa, MEP and Co-Rapporteur in the European Parliament

"As co-rapporteur of the Culture Committee of the European Parliament on the report on Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations I believe that the role of local authorities, of cities and of their networks has to be strengthened in order to guarantee a larger participation of citizens and associations to cultural cooperation and intercultural dialogue. They have to be key players also for the ambition of EU to become a strong global actor. The experience on decentralized cooperation, on cultural and educational partnerships and on the program European Capitals of Culture will have a strong value in this new European strategy."



Mauro D'Attis, Member of Brindisi Municipal Council, EPP/IT

Copyright in the Digital Single Markets SEDEC-VI/019

The issue of copyrights has long been one of the key components in building a truly European Digital Single Market and the opinion combines two proposals by the European Commission - stressing better

choice and access to content online and across borders, improving copyright rules on research, education and inclusion of disabled; as well as a fairer and sustainable marketplace for creators and press.

The opinion welcomes the proposed measures concerning the internal market for e-communications designed to speed up dynamic and sustainable growth in all economic sectors and to create jobs, as well as to ensure that copyright rules are modernised in light of the digital revolution and changes in consumer behaviour. It also emphasises the importance of transparency and the publishers' recognition as right holders.



Therese Comodini Cachia, MEP and Rapporteur in the European Parliament

"Achieving a Digital Single Market will foster growth and development in all the regions within all MS since the digital interface does not have any frontiers. Enhanced use of digital technologies can improve citizens' access to information and culture, while empowering regions and cities to become active in planning and pursuing their own digital strategies."



Sirpa Hertell, City Councillor of Espoo, EPP/FI

Towards a new EU climate change adaptation strategy – taking an integrated approach ENVE-VI/015

Effective adaptation to the effects of climate change by EU's local and regional authorities can reduce the overall costs from damages and save European natural and human resources. Thus, support of the European Commission is necessary to encourage stronger collaboration between the different levels of government

in that area – argues the opinion.

The rapporteur believes that such cooperation would help to align priorities, minimise contradictory or parallel disconnected processes and maximise synergies between the strategies or plans developed at the EU, and national levels

as well as those developed at the regional and local levels.

European Commission in preparation of the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change should facilitate support to knowledge transfer through city-to-city cooperation, such as twinning programmes proposed by the Covenant of Mayors initiative. They have proven to be successful and valuable. Local and regional levels need to be also equipped with the appropriate monitoring, reporting and evaluation tools – argues the rapporteur.



Witold Stepień, Marshal of Łódzkie region, EPP/PL

Mid-term evaluation of the LIFE Programme
ENVE-VI/016

Protection of the natural environment and biodiversity continues to be one of the European Union's main objectives. The LIFE environment programme strengthens Europe's natural capital and the ecosystem services associated with it, and helps generate green jobs, local entrepreneurship and smart and sustainable

economic growth that promotes social inclusion – states the opinion.

Document reiterates its strong support for LIFE, as an independent, directly managed funding programme, entirely dedicated to the environment, to be continued after 2020, and for a serious increase in

its budget. However it calls for limiting the administrative burden related to the preparation and submission of the projects, as it often discourages the regions from applying for LIFE support.

The rapporteur is also concerned about the limited budget of the LIFE programme, which during the Multi-Annual Work Programme 2014-2020 represents only about 0.3% of the total amount of commitment appropriations. Regions and cities support a substantial increase in the programme's budget, to be applied after 2020.



Dubravka Šuica, MEP and Co-Chair of EP LIFE working group

"As a co-chair of the LIFE working group in EP, I think we need to focus on the quality, not just on the quantity of the projects in the Member States. And we need to be aware that there is always room for improvement to ensure the long-term sustainability of the projects financed."



Jesús Gamallo Aller, Galicia DG for External Relations and the EU, EPP/ES

European Consensus on Development
CIVEX-VI/019

The proposal for a new European Consensus on Development reflects a paradigm-shift in development cooperation under the 2030 Agenda, responding to the more complex and interconnected challenges the world faces today.

Institutions and all Member States, with particular emphasis on cross-cutting drivers of development, such as gender equality, youth, sustainable energy and climate action, investment, migration and mobility.

policy, based on shared analysis, common strategies, joint programming, joint action and improved reporting.

The new Consensus should frame all development policy activities of the EU and its Member States. An example of this approach is the proposed European External Investment Plan which will use Official Development Assistance to leverage funding from other sources to generate sustainable growth for the benefit of the poorest.

The proposal puts forward shared vision and framework for action for all EU

The aim is to increase the credibility, effectiveness and impact of EU development



Bogdan Wenta, MEP and Rapporteur in the European Parliament

"Now, as we have a common vision of the European development policy until 2030, the revised framework for the EU external cooperation has to follow. Our report puts the SDGs and the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development at the very heart of the European Consensus and calls for further efforts to be made by the EU and its Member States towards joint programming and implementation in order to improve aid effectiveness and promote country ownership of development strategies. It refers also to the central role of development policy in addressing root causes of forced migration, such as state fragility, conflicts, insecurity and marginalisation, poverty and the violation of human rights"



Pauliina Haijanen, City Councillor of Laitila, EPP/FI

Union policy for the Arctic COTER-VI/017

The third Arctic Communication highlights three priorities for a future integrated EU policy: climate change and safeguarding the Arctic environment, sustainable development, and international cooperation on Arctic issues.

The opinion stresses that one of the biggest challenges is sustainable socio-economic development. Sustainable exploitation of natural resources is a key aspect of economic growth and efforts to increase prosperity in the Arctic region. A prerequisite for this is efficient trans-

port and telecommunications links. The European Committee of the Regions also proposes that the geographical definition of the Arctic region given in the communication be broadened, in light of issues such as promoting sustainable development, adapting to climate change and fostering European competitiveness as well as taking account of the needs and potential of local communities and indigenous populations.



Sirpa Pietikäinen, MEP and Rapporteur in the European Parliament

"Sustainable development is the only feasible way of development in the Arctic region. The role of the Arctic regions and local people in safeguarding sustainable development is in the core of all Arctic policies."

The screenshot shows a website banner with a blue background and a grid pattern. At the top left is the EPP group logo with the text 'epp group' and 'in the european committee of the regions'. To the right is a navigation menu with links: ABOUT US, VIEWS, MEMBERS, EVENTS, NEWS, CONTACT. Below the logo is the URL 'epp.cor.europa.eu'. The main heading reads 'EPP-CoR activities this week' in large white letters, followed by the dates '30 January – 5 February 2017'. A 'READ MORE' button is centered below the dates. At the bottom of the banner, it says 'VISIT OUR NEW WEBSITE!' in bold. Below this is a scroll indicator with five dots and a downward arrow, with the text 'SCROLL DOWN'. At the very bottom, there is a 'Share this page' button and the URL 'epp.cor.europa.eu'.

MARCH PLENARY SESSION



Arno Kompatscher, President of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano and Regional Councillor, EPP/IT

Towards a sustainable EU food policy that creates jobs and growth in Europe's Regions and Cities
NAT-VI/014

Sustainable and overarching European food policy has long been a focus for European decision-makers and the European Committee of the Regions brings forward its contribution to not only build a comprehensive food policy but at the same time contribute to the fight against climate change, preserving biodiversity and the environment, the improvement of health and nutrition facts as well as create jobs and growth.

The opinion proposes the development of standardised definitions, methodologies and practical measures to provide transparent and harmonised information and good practices towards sustainable food production. It encourages the use of "green" public procurement guidelines, to help public and private organisations to purchase foods on the basis of sustainable criteria and promotes the healthy functioning of ecosystem services that sustain agricultural productivity and its resilience.



Phil Hogan,
Commissioner for
Agriculture and Rural
Development

"I firmly believe we must all adhere to a more sustainable system of agricultural production. At a time when there is so much debate around climate change, it is more vital than ever that Europe holds the line in this global existential challenge. And, in addressing that challenge, agriculture must play its full part. We have to ensure that

food is produced more sustainably. We have to encourage smart farming that can, for example, make the best use of chemical inputs, contributing to soil and groundwater protection and air quality, while increasing production efficiency.."



Birgitta Sacrédeus, Member of Dalarna County Council, EPP/SE

Integration, cooperation and performance of health systems
NAT-VI/0147

Today's EU citizens live longer and healthier lives than their predecessors. Nevertheless, while life expectancy has increased, large health disparities persist between different Member States and regions. Furthermore, Member States possess different healthcare and social care systems with divergent access to resources. The European Committee of the Regions affirms that health is a crucial component to the prosperity and well-being of society and works to improve public health, prevent diseases and eliminate health risks.

sustainable financing is vital in guaranteeing adequate quality, coverage and access to healthcare. It also raises attention to the burden of chronic diseases and mental illness and calls for increased readiness in order to provide a sustainable healthcare platform. The opinion also stresses that more influence needs to be given to patients and a greater focus needs to be placed on quality of care and medical outcomes. It also considers that better planning and coordination between the health and education sectors would provide sound opportunities for professional development.

The opinion considers that adequate and

Ongoing opinions

CIVEX

European Consensus on Development – **Jesús Gamallo Aller**
Adoption foreseen February 2017

COTER

Union policy for the Arctic – **Pauliina Haijanen**
Adoption foreseen February 2017

The future of Cohesion Policy beyond 2020 – **Michael Schneider**
Adoption foreseen May 2017

An European Strategy for Low-Emission Mobility – **Jozséf Ribányi**
Adoption foreseen July 2017

ECON

Bridging the Investment Gap: How to Tackle the Challenges – **Markku Markkula**
Adoption foreseen February 2017

Fiscal Capacity and Automatic Stabilisers for the Economic and Monetary Union – **Carl Fredrik Graf**
Adoption foreseen February 2017

Smart regulation for SMEs – **Christian Buchmann**
Adoption foreseen May 2017

SEDEC

Towards an EU Strategy for international cultural relations – **Apostolos Tzitzikostas**
Adoption foreseen February 2017

Copyright in the Digital Single Market – **Mauro D'Attis**
Adoption foreseen February 2017

ENVE

Towards a new EU climate change adaptation strategy – **Sirpa Hertell**
Adoption foreseen February 2017

Mid-term evaluation of the LIFE programme – **Witold Stępień**
Adoption foreseen February 2017

Combined opinion on Energy Governance – **Bruno Hranic**
Adoption foreseen July 2017

NAT

Towards a sustainable EU food policy that creates jobs and growth in Europe's Regions and Cities – **Arno Kompatscher**
Adoption foreseen March 2017

Integration, cooperation and performance of health systems – **Birgitta Sacrédeus**
Adoption foreseen March 2017

Health in cities: the common good – **Roberto Pella**
Adoption foreseen May 2017

Interview with Commission Vice President Jyrki Katainen

European Commission Vice President Jyrki Katainen, responsible in his portfolio for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, focuses on economy and security during 2017. In his interview with the rEPPorter, Vice President Katainen shares some of his key topics for the year as well as a glimpse on how local and regional authorities can best be a part of boosting investments and sustainable growth.



What is the key priority for you under your own remit as Commission Vice President for 2017?

My focus this year will be on modernising the European economy and improving security. In the field of economy, we are working to extend the Investment Plan for Europe, key initiative of the Juncker Commission for jobs and growth in Europe. For example, the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) has already concluded 175 larger-scale infrastructure projects as part of the Plan, and close to 385 000 SMEs and midcaps are expected to benefit from the financing agreements with intermediary banks. Furthermore, I want to make sure, that European companies understand the business opportunities offered by Circular Economy and that our legislative framework is ready for this.

In the field of security and defence, we adopted in December the European Defence Action Plan, which proposes more resources for defence research, helps Member States to

use their defence budgets in a more efficient manner and improves the functioning of the Single market in defence to step up security in Europe. This year we will make concrete proposals to put the European defence fund in place.

We will take forward the projects mentioned above, and initiate new ones, to strengthen a Europe that protects, empowers and defends. We are working to create a better future for us all

How can the local and regional authorities be best included and involved in boosting our investment capacity and bringing results on the ground?

I recognise the crucial role that local authorities can help play in bringing investment projects to fruition.

Our proposal for extending and reinforcing the Investment Plan for Europe (the so-called “EFSI 2.0”) proposal places

a stronger emphasis on leveraging local knowledge to facilitate EFSI support across the EU. The European Investment Advisory Hub (EIAH) will be in a position to provide more targeted technical assistance services at local level, including to local and regional authorities, across the EU. The Commission will also encourage the EIB to extend its local outreach in the Member States so as to provide a point of contact for local authorities to determine how to interact with the EIB in order to help realise local investment projects.

What is concretely done by the European Commission to produce real impacts in improving the synergy between EFSI and other EU funds?

There is great potential for further complementarities and synergies between the EFSI and other EU funding sources, including European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds. Further developing such complementarities will help to get more projects off the ground and maximise private sector contributions. The Commission has therefore proposed a simplification of the Common Provisions Regulation and the Financial Regulation to facilitate combining the EFSI with ESI Funds.

The Commission, EIB and national authorities are currently developing a first set of projects to illustrate the beneficial outcomes which stem from combining the EFSI with ESI Funds. The TRI – Nord-Pas-de-Calais project, a new company which invests in low-carbon economy projects in the Nord-Pas de Calais region to support the region’s zero emissions plan, is an example of one such project. Further combinations are also possible. In Latvia, for instance, an EFSI loan is being combined with grant funding from the Connecting Europe Facility to allow a Riga transport company to upgrade its fleet with hydrogen fuel cell buses. The “Green shipping” guarantee programme was launched on 8 November and makes use of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Debt Instrument and EFSI resources. The Commission representations and the European Investment Bank local offices are also ready to help local and regional authorities.

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