

**Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions — The outcome and follow up of the
Conference on the Future of Europe**

(2022/C 375/02)

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Having regard to:

- its Resolutions on the Conference on the Future of Europe of 12 February 2020 ⁽¹⁾ and of 7 May 2021 ⁽²⁾, as well as on the contribution of local and regional authorities to the Conference on the Future of Europe of 27 January 2022 ⁽³⁾;
 - the CoR Marseille Manifesto of local and regional leaders: 'Europe starts in its regions, cities and villages' of 4 March 2022 ⁽⁴⁾;
 - the Report on the final outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe of 9 May 2022 ⁽⁵⁾;
 - the European Parliament Resolution of 4 May 2022 on the follow-up to the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe ⁽⁶⁾;
 - the report of the CoR High Level Group on Democracy ⁽⁷⁾;
 - the European Parliament Resolution of 9 June 2022 on the call for a Convention for the revision of the Treaties ⁽⁸⁾;
 - the European Commission Communication on the Conference on the Future of Europe, of 17 June 2022 ⁽⁹⁾;
1. welcomes the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) as endorsed by the CoFoE Plenary on 30 April 2022 and presented to the Council Presidency, to the Presidents of the European Parliament and of the European Commission on 9 May 2022, while acknowledging the challenge of an effective outreach and a genuine bottom-up approach;
 2. strongly supports citizens' call for a more democratic, transparent, fair and sustainable EU and considers that it requires a prompt and effective follow-up, translating the CoFoE objectives and proposals into political initiatives and concrete actions, including through a more active inter-institutional cooperation;
 3. highlights that many of the proposals made in the final CoFoE report refer to an active involvement of regions and local authorities, both in the design and the delivery of initiatives that have the potential to bring the EU closer to the citizens;
 4. considers that an ambitious reform of the functioning of the EU to meet the challenges ahead and ensure greater transparency and accountability in the EU decision-making process, duly empowering citizens and local and regional authorities, requires Treaty revisions; thus welcomes the call of the European Parliament to call for a Convention by activating the procedure for the revision of the Treaties (Article 48 TEU);
 5. considers that the future Convention should fully involve members of the European Committee of the Regions to represent the voices of the over 1 million regionally and locally elected politicians in Europe, and this should be reflected in its composition, taking also into consideration the fact that some of these politicians represent regions with legislative powers;

⁽¹⁾ COR-2020-00192-00-00-RES-TRA.

⁽²⁾ COR-2021-01674-00-00-RES-TRA.

⁽³⁾ COR-2021-06503-00-00-RES-TRA.

⁽⁴⁾ The Marseille Manifesto of local and regional leaders: 'Europe starts in its regions, cities and villages'.

⁽⁵⁾ 20220509RES29121.pdf (europa.eu).

⁽⁶⁾ 2022/2648(RSP).

⁽⁷⁾ <https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/Report-of-the-High-Level-Group-on-European-Democracy.aspx>

⁽⁸⁾ 2022/2705(RSP).

⁽⁹⁾ COM(2022) 404 final.

6. nevertheless, it regrets that many of the ideas presented in the Multilingual Digital Platform, such as those related to the official status of languages, and the response to the aspirations of sub-state entities have not been taken into consideration in the final report, despite having obtained a very significant number of endorsements;

European Democracy

7. **(40)**⁽¹⁰⁾ welcomes the fact that the CoFoE has acknowledged the multi-level nature of European representative democracy, and has proposed reforming the CoR by giving it 'an enhanced role, in the institutional architecture, if matters with a territorial impact are concerned'. The CoR considers that this reform should lead to enhancing the scope of policy areas of territorial relevance for which its consultation becomes mandatory; this implies a review of Articles 43 (CAP/fisheries), 79 (migration) and 114 TFEU (single market general clause), as well as a review of Articles 13 TEU and 294, 300 and 307 TFEU;

8. is of the opinion that in areas of mandatory consultation, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the EU should provide substantiated reasons if those opinions are not taken into account. The CoR should also be given access to the co-decision trilogues, based on a review of the Inter-institutional Agreement on Better Lawmaking;

9. **(39.3)** welcomes the COFE proposal suggesting changing the names of the EU institutions, to clarify their functions and respective role in the EU decision-making process for citizens; to this end, the Committee proposes to change its own name in order to better reflect the political and legal responsibilities of its members as well its role as the European assembly of regions and municipalities;

10. calls for enhanced inter-institutional synergies involving the CoR in the work of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (e.g. committees, commissions and working groups) because of its ability to provide a good knowledge and better understanding of how the EU functions on the ground;

11. **(40, 40.2, 40.4)** applauds the recognition that 'active subsidiarity and multi-level governance are key principles and fundamental features for EU functioning and democratic accountability', the plea for a 'systematic use of a subsidiarity definition commonly agreed by all EU institutions' to clarify the level — European, national, regional or local level — at which decisions have to be taken and the proposed enlargement of the subsidiarity warning mechanism 'to all regional parliaments within the EU that have legislative power'. The CoR supports the call for national and regional parliaments with legislative power to be granted the possibility to suggest legislative initiatives at EU level in the future. These proposals should help to clarify that subsidiarity is not about preventing the European level from taking action, but about identifying which level of government should have the lead role, whether via formal exclusive powers, or via formal shared powers, with the other levels supporting the policy objectives;

12. further considers that the aforementioned subsidiarity-related proposals should lead to a review of Article 5(3) TEU, of Protocol No 1 on the role of national parliaments in the EU and Protocol No 2 on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Such a review should encompass granting the principle of proportionality equal consideration as that for subsidiarity, giving the CoR a role in the *ex-ante* phase of subsidiarity monitoring, as defined above, and also applying the subsidiarity and proportionality principles to EU governance processes more often and in a better way. In the meantime, the Inter-institutional Agreement on Better Lawmaking in the EU should be adapted to already enhance the role of the CoR in the current institutional framework to help identify which level of governance should have the lead role, taking account of the CoR's territorial impact assessments, its work on rural-proofing, and its newly enhanced Better Regulation and Active Subsidiarity governance scheme;

13. **(36)** supports the CoFoE proposals aimed at complementing representative democracy by increasing citizens' participation in European democracy at all levels. This should be implemented by institutionalising new forms of citizen participation at the level of the European Union through citizens' dialogues with randomly selected citizens on specific topics. The CoR reiterates its call to set up a permanent and place-based mechanism for dialogue with citizens, supported by local and regional authorities that would ensure a two-way communication between the citizens and the EU institutions, thus leading to a better understanding of the local and regional impact of EU policies across the EU; stresses the need to

⁽¹⁰⁾ The numbers in bold and in brackets at the beginning of various points correspond to the CoFoE Plenary proposals and measures, included in the Report on the final outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe of 9 May 2022.

guarantee that this mechanism reaches citizens from all age groups, origins and backgrounds; further emphasises that in border regions, a cross-border orientation of the dialogue is necessary to create veritable European added value; considers that streamlining existing citizens' participation mechanisms requires amending Article 11 TEU, as well as Articles 24 and 227 TFEU;

14. commits to continuing to organise local dialogues with citizens and structured initiatives of participatory democracy that could feed into the permanent mechanism;

15. **(37)** welcomes the idea of communicating more actively about EU policies and politics not only in the framework of European elections but also in the context of national, regional and local elections;

16. **(36.6)** welcomes the CoFoE proposal to 'create a system of local EU Councillors' as a way to reduce the distance between the EU institutions and citizens, and commits to implementing this proposal in cooperation with the European Commission through its own fast-growing European Network of Regional and Local Councillors ⁽¹¹⁾ and through the project 'Building Europe with Local Councillors' ⁽¹²⁾;

17. looks forward to an eventual European Commission proposal to 'help to build capacity amongst national, regional and local actors to launch a new generation of decentralised citizens' dialogues based on deliberative approaches' ⁽¹³⁾;

18. **(39)** welcomes the CoFoE proposal to improve the EU's decision-making process in order to ensure the EU's capability to act, especially with a view to extending the application of decision-making by qualified majority voting;

19. **(39.2)** supports the CoFoE proposals to involve national parliaments more closely in the legislative procedure; calls for the needs of second chambers to be taken into account in this context;

Values and rights, rule of law, security

20. **(25.1, 25.3)** welcomes the call to ensure that the values and principles enshrined in the EU Treaties and in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights are fully upheld in all Member States and are non-negotiable, irreversible and *sine qua non* conditions for EU membership and accession. Considering that the more than 80 000 local and regional governments in the EU are a fundamental level of democratic legitimacy, the CoR calls for the continuous involvement of local and regional authorities in promoting the Charter's values and monitoring compliance with the principles associated with it. The CoR therefore believes that its participation in the inter-institutional dialogue on the Charter and the Rule of Law monitoring process is essential;

21. **(25.4)** agrees with effectively applying and evaluating the scope of the 'Conditionality Regulation', considering that breaches of the rule of law principle must result in the suspension of payments or financial corrections. The Committee reiterates its conviction that 'in the event of such measures, those beneficiaries of EU funding, including local and regional authorities, not responsible for the breaches of the rule of law should continue to receive financial support from the Member State concerned' ⁽¹⁴⁾; it also welcomes the call to evaluate the other rule of law instruments and consider the necessary legal avenues to punish breaches of the rule of law principle;

22. **(29.2, 29.4, 29.5)** applauds the call to increase and facilitate public investment in education, health, child and elderly care, work/life balance and other key areas for advancing in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, thus demonstrating to citizens the social dimension of the European Union and its work to improve their quality of life; stresses the importance of ensuring a Union of Equality, in which discrimination has no place, through legal tools, policies, EU-wide criteria and other relevant instruments;

⁽¹¹⁾ <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/Network-of-Regional-and-Local-EU-Councillors.aspx>

⁽¹²⁾ https://building-europe-with-local-councillors.europa.eu/index_en

⁽¹³⁾ COM(2022) 404 final.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Resolution on the contribution of local and regional authorities to the Conference on the Future of Europe (COR-2021-06503).

Climate Change, Energy and the Environment

23. **(3.1, 2.3)** highlights the recognition of the role of local and regional authorities for an inclusive and just green transition;

24. shares the ambition to speed up the green transition; welcomes the push for greener cities through urban planning and construction, the use of nature-based solutions to promote biodiversity and strategies to eradicate energy and mobility poverty. In this context, underlines the importance of the involvement of local and regional authorities in the New European Bauhaus initiative;

25. **(3, 4.1, 4.4, 31.2)** underlines the need, within the framework of a just ecological and digital transition, to take into special consideration the peripheral and insular regions, including all archipelagos and outermost regions, especially ensuring their connectivity and use of public infrastructures on an equal footing with the rest of the territories of the Union;

26. **(3)** supports the CoFoE objective of enhancing European energy security and achieving the EU's energy independence, leaving no region behind, providing its citizens with sufficient, affordable and sustainable energy, and calls in this context for direct access to EU funds for LRAs implementing Green Deal projects, paying special attention to regions with isolated energy systems;

27. is convinced that, in order to follow up on the CoFoE proposals, a more prominent interinstitutional cooperation should be channelled through, inter alia, the CoR's Green Deal Going Local Working Group, the CoR communication campaign on the European Green Deal and the Multilevel Energy and Climate Dialogues; considers that the current CoR cooperation with stakeholders such as the EU Covenant of Mayors (on the Cities' Energy Saving Sprint campaign) and other EU institutions (such as the European Commission's Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform) should be reinforced;

28. commits to continuing to promote the role of local and regional authorities in climate and biodiversity policies through sub-national climate diplomacy actions and in the UNFCCC framework; considers that the different UN frameworks on climate, environment and SDGs should be as consistent and interconnected as possible, with a view to promoting systematic implementation and avoiding redundant planning. The CoR asks the European Commission to support the multilevel governance principle and promote a bottom-up approach in the definition of the global goal on adaptation;

29. **(3.8)** welcomes the call for a just transition to protect workers and jobs, which requires a strong territorial component in all its dimensions, in order to assure the place-based approach according to the specific needs of the different communities. The CoR calls, in this context, for a European mechanism to support a just, clean and successful transition for the European automotive and supply industry regions by establishing a multi-level governance and partnership approach for appropriate and effective policy planning and budgetary action;

Health

30. **(10.2, 10.3)** welcomes the call for an enlarged EU competence on health, and calls for revising Article 4 TFEU to include health and healthcare among the shared competencies between the EU and the Member States. As stressed in the CoFoE proposals, this change should take 'full account of the principle of subsidiarity and of the key role of local, regional and national players in health matters';

31. **(10.6, 12.15)** shares the call for open access to existing treatments and for medicines across the EU to be of equal quality, and of fair local cost. The CoR stresses, in this regard, the crucial role of cross-border healthcare cooperation;

A Stronger Economy, Social Justice and Jobs

32. **(11.3)** expresses strong support for the CoFoE call to review the EU's economic governance framework and the European Semester to better promote its main economic and fiscal coordination objectives alongside the just green and digital transitions, as well as social justice. The CoR echoes the CoFoE call for a stronger role for local and regional authorities, which must be implemented through a 'Code of Conduct' to ensure their involvement in the European Semester, modelled on the Code of Conduct for Partnership in the structural funds. Such a Code for the European Semester would improve both the efficacy of the process and its democratic legitimacy. Furthermore, the CoR calls for the explicit reintegration of the SDGs into a reformed European Semester, with a view to a place-based sustainable recovery;

33. **(13, 14)** shares the strong call of the CoFoE to ensure the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its headline targets for 2030 at EU, national, regional and local levels while respecting the division of competences and the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and the existing competences at national, regional and local level as well as the autonomy of the social partners. The CoR also supports the CoFoE proposal of including a Social Progress Protocol in the Treaties, which would imply reviewing Article 3 TEU as well as Articles 9, 151, 152/157 TFEU;

34. **(15)** insists that the demographic transition should be dealt with urgently and efficiently. Further stresses the dangers for the economy, and for democracy as a whole, of the rising social, economic, territorial, and digital inequalities, leading inter alia to brain drain, and thus emphasises the need to increase the attractiveness of depopulated, ageing regions via investment and support, in particular for young people and families; the CoR also underlines the need to pay attention to those regions with population imbalances derived from high population densities, especially in peripheral and insular areas, which are very vulnerable to high human pressure and with public infrastructure management difficulties;

35. underlines the several references in the CoFoE report to the need for more cohesion, and highlights the role of cohesion as an overall value of the EU and the 'do no harm to cohesion' principle recently put forward in the 8th Cohesion Report. The CoR sees the need for close cooperation between the CoR (and its Cohesion Alliance) and the EU institutions to put the principle into practice in future EU policy-making and in the 2021-2027 cohesion policy programming period;

36. **(12)** strongly supports the call for the strengthening of cross-border cooperation in order to enhance the cohesion and resilience of border regions, and supports the reference to the European Cross Border Mechanism Regulation, which has the potential to significantly improve cross-border cooperation and the livelihoods of citizens living in border regions. The CoR, however, regrets the lack of proposals related to the problems border regions face on a daily basis, and refers to its 2021 Resolution 'Vision for Europe — Future of Cross-Border Cooperation', which outlines a number of proposals to support border regions and improve cross-border cooperation in general;

37. regrets the lack of proposals regarding the regions that suffer from severe and permanent natural handicaps, such as islands — including archipelagos and outermost regions — or mountain regions, which require specific support from the EU and a thorough impact assessment of policies in order to ensure their development under conditions equal to those for the rest of the territories of the European Union;

Digital Transformation

38. **(4.4, 12.14, 31)** welcomes the recognition by the CoFoE of digital cohesion as complementary to economic, social and territorial cohesion, and recommends the mainstreaming of digital cohesion across European Union policies and calls for Article 175 TFEU to be reviewed accordingly. The CoR further underlines the persistent issue with availability of data on digital transformation at sub-national level, and therefore will continue to develop and implement, together with the European Commission, a system of measuring digital maturity at local and regional level;

Migration

39. **(43.2)** highlights the vital role that municipalities and regions play in successfully integrating migrants and refugees, and calls for a greater focus on integration policies in EU-level discussions about migration. The CoR strongly supports the CoFoE proposal to increase EU financial, logistical and operational support, including for local authorities, regional governments and civil society organisations, for the management of the first reception of migrants and asylum seekers, including dedicated support for the reception of unaccompanied migrant minors, which would lead to the effective integration of refugees and regular migrants in the EU or the repatriation of irregular migrants; points out that Article 79(4) TFEU ought to be amended in this sense to enable incentives and support not only for the action of the Member States, but also, in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity, for their local and regional authorities, with a view to promoting the integration of third-country nationals residing legally in their territories, irrespective of their country of origin;

40. **(44.2)** agrees with the CoFoE proposal to revise the Dublin system in order to guarantee solidarity and the fair sharing of responsibility among Member States, coordinated at European level and helping to alleviate migratory pressure on the EU's frontline regions;

Education, culture, youth and sport

41. welcomes the CoFoE proposals concerning the importance of education as a means of promoting active European citizenship. In this context, is committed to developing its pilot project on Promoting European Values through Education and Culture, including mapping the best practices at local and regional level throughout the EU. The CoR values the CoFoE proposals aimed at coordinating the level of all different education programmes in the EU, with acceptance of the national, regional and local contents;

42. **(47.7)** welcomes the call for special efforts to avoid brain drain from certain regions and countries within the EU due to insufficient opportunities being available, especially for young people. To this end, supports the plea of the CoFoE for more decisive action for job security, quality and fair remuneration of jobs and traineeships, equal access to social protection and affordable housing opportunities for young people (especially those from vulnerable groups). These measures should be aimed at closing the existing territorial gaps in youth opportunities in life and wellbeing in the EU;

43. welcomes the many references to research and innovation in the CoFoE report and underlines the need to close the innovation divide and to combine place-based innovation strategies with territorial missions, as recently done with the Pilot Action on Regional Innovation;

44. **(36.9)** supports the introduction of a 'youth check of legislation', which should consist of a youth focused impact assessment mechanism applicable to EU legislation and policies in areas relevant for young people. This mechanism should be aimed at better taking into account long-term interests and the need for the active participation of young people in EU decision-making, and should measure the positive impact of European legislative proposals on the lives of young people. Against this background, the CoR points to its contribution to this endeavour through the CoR network of Young Elected Politicians (YEPs) and the co-drafting of a European Charter for Youth and Democracy together with the European Youth Forum;

45. **(48.2)** welcomes citizens' expectations towards the promotion and protection of European diversity; in that respect, shares the CoFoE recommendations on promoting multilingualism and regional languages, and underlines that minority and regional languages, which are the mother tongues of many Europeans and valuable cultural heritage, require additional attention and protection;

EU in the World

46. **(25.1, 38.1)** welcomes the call for the EU institutions to act as 'ambassadors of our democratic model' in other countries, emphasising that it encapsulates in essence what the CoR has been doing for a number of years in its cooperation with the candidate countries, potential candidates and partner countries from the EU's Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods;

47. **considers** that the reconstruction of Ukraine will be one of the most challenging processes for the EU and its international partners. In this context, the CoR points to its initiative of establishing an Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine bringing together local and regional authorities in Europe and in Ukraine, with a view to giving self-government a pivotal role in the reconstruction strategic planning, further implementing the devolution process and multi-level governance in Ukraine and improving good local/regional governance, including through facilitating peer-to-peer cooperation;

48. instructs its President to forward this Resolution to the European Commission, the European Parliament, the French, Czech and Swedish Presidencies of the Council of the EU and the President of the European Council.

Brussels, 30 June 2022.

*The President
of the European Committee of the Regions*
Vasco ALVES CORDEIRO