REPORT

on cohesion policy and regional environment strategies in the fight against climate change
(2020/2074(INI))

Committee on Regional Development

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CONTENTS

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION............................................3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT ............................................................................................17
MINORITY POSITION ........................................................................................................19
OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT, PUBLIC HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY..................................................................................................................................................................................20
OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND TOURISM...............................26
OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT.....33
INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE ................................44
FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE .........................................45
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

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The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Treaty on European Union, in particular Articles 3 and 21 thereof, to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), in particular Articles 4, 11, 173 to 178, 191 and 194 thereof, and to Protocol No 28 to the Treaties on economic, social and territorial cohesion,

– having regard to the agreement adopted at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015 (the Paris Agreement), in particular Articles 7(2) and 11(2) thereof, which recognise the local, subnational and regional dimensions of climate change and climate action,

– having regard to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015, and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 on the European Green Deal (COM(2019)0640),

– having regard to its resolution of 14 March 2019 on climate change – a European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy in accordance with the Paris Agreement¹,

– having regard to its resolution of 28 November 2019 on the climate and environmental emergency²,

– having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Green Deal³,

– having regard to its resolution of 17 April 2020 on EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences⁴,

– having regard to the European Council conclusions of 11 December 2020 on climate change,

– having regard to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report on global warming of 1.5 °C, its fifth assessment report (AR5) and its synthesis report thereon, its special report on climate change and land, and its special report on the ocean and cryosphere in a changing climate,

– having regard to the European Environment Agency Indicator Assessment on economic

losses from climate-related extremes in Europe published on 20 December 2020,

– having regard to the General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 ‘Living well, within the limits of our planet’, the Commission’s proposal for the General Union Environment Action Programme to 2030 and its vision to 2050,

– having regard to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity,

– having regard to its resolution of 16 January 2020 on the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity,


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Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006\(^8\),

– having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal\(^9\),


– having regard to the 2021 European Parliament study entitled ‘Cohesion Policy and Climate Change’,

– having regard to its resolution of 13 June 2018 on cohesion policy and the circular economy\(^12\),

– having regard to Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, as interpreted by the Court of Justice in its Mayotte judgment of 15 December 2015 (Joined Cases C-132/14 to C-136/14), which allows specific derogations to be adopted for the outermost regions of the European Union,

– having regard to the Commission communication of 5 March 2020 on the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (COM(2020)0152),

– having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the opinions of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, the Committee on Transport and Tourism and the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A9-0034/2021),

A. whereas climate change is a challenge that transcends boundaries and requires immediate and ambitious action at global, European, national, regional and local levels to limit global warming to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels and prevent biodiversity loss on a massive scale; whereas urgent measures are required to ensure that the

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increase in the global average temperature is kept below 2 °C compared to pre-industrial levels as any loss of biodiversity will have a major impact, including on the quality of agricultural production;

B. whereas an increase of 1.5 °C is the maximum the planet can tolerate; whereas, should temperatures increase further beyond 2030, humankind will face even more droughts, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people, the likely demise of its most vulnerable populations and, at worst, may risk its long-term survival altogether, as pointed out in the EU interinstitutional report entitled ‘Challenges and Choices for Europe’;

C. whereas the European Environment Agency estimated that between 1980 and 2019 climate-related extremes caused economic losses totalling an estimated EUR 446 billion in the EEA member countries; whereas this is equivalent to EUR 11.1 billion per year and the cumulative deflated losses are equal to nearly 3 % of the GDP of the countries analysed;

D. whereas recent studies show that the global warming potential (GWP) from fossil natural gas (methane – CH\(_4\)) is significantly higher than previously assumed;

E. whereas global warming may reach 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels during the current programming period, necessitating immediate action to tackle the climate emergency, in accordance with the EU policies on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the European Green Deal, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Paris Agreement;

F. whereas the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050 at the latest poses both a great opportunity and a challenge for the Union and for its Member States, regions, cities, local communities, people, workers, businesses and industry; whereas a balance nevertheless needs to be struck between the ambitious climate objectives and preserving the competitiveness of the economy, without undermining the achievement of the 1.5 °C goal;

G. whereas achieving this objective will require an overall transformation of European society and the economy as some sectors will experience an irreversible decrease in production coupled with a loss of jobs in economic activities based on the production and use of fossil fuels, while other sectors will succeed in finding a technological alternative;

H. whereas sustainability should be seen as a balanced approach to bringing sustainable growth, social progress and environment together;

I. whereas the Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020\(^{13}\) provides for an overall target of at least 30 % of the total amount of Union budget and European Union Recovery Instrument expenditure supporting climate objectives and a new annual

\(^{13}\) Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020 between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management, as well as on new own resources, including a roadmap towards the introduction of new own resources, OJ L 433I, 22.12.2020, p. 28.
biodiversity target of 7.5% from 2024, with a view to reaching 10% in 2026 and 2027;

J. whereas islands, especially small islands, and the outermost regions are the EU territories most exposed and vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and must also tackle specific and additional challenges and costs during the transition; whereas climate change and its multiple impacts affect European regions in different ways, with different degrees of severity and in different timeframes, and the management of the transition will lead to significant structural changes; whereas citizens and workers will therefore be affected in different ways and not all countries will be affected equally or be able to respond adequately; whereas it is essential, when drawing up a long-term vision for rural areas in Europe, to emphasise the need to strengthen rural areas and make them attractive as places to live and work;

K. whereas islands, outermost and peripheral regions have an enormous potential in the production of renewable energy and are strategic laboratories for implementing innovative policy measures and technical solutions to deliver the energy transition, reduce CO2 emissions and boost the shift towards the circular economy;

L. whereas cohesion policy not only offers investment opportunities to respond to local and regional needs through the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds, but also provides an integrated policy framework to reduce developmental disparities between the European regions and to help them address the multiple challenges to their development, including through environmental protection, high-quality employment and fair, inclusive and sustainable development;

M. whereas the economic, social and territorial disparities which cohesion policy has the primary goal of addressing may also be impacted by climate change and its long-term consequences, and EU climate policy measures should also support the objectives of EU cohesion policy;

N. whereas cohesion policy is key to supporting less developed regions or areas that suffer from natural and geographical handicaps, which are often at the forefront of the impacts of climate change but have fewer resources to tackle it;

O. whereas cohesion policy is a crucial tool in delivering a fair transition to a climate-neutral economy that leaves no one behind; whereas women and men may be differently affected by green policies tackling climate change; whereas the impact on vulnerable and marginalised groups should be also considered;

P. whereas local and regional authorities, but also other relevant stakeholders, are key actors for implementing cohesion policy, delivering an effective response to the urgent threat of climate change; whereas they are responsible for one third of public spending and two thirds of public investment and it is therefore essential to create mechanisms such as the ‘Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy’, aimed at bringing together local and regional authorities responsible for implementing the EU’s climate and energy objectives;

Q. whereas the climate crisis is closely linked to other crises such as biodiversity, as well as the health, social and economic crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic; whereas, while these have to be addressed in parallel, each must be handled differently and adequately;
R. whereas, since its creation in 2002, the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) has been activated in response to more than 90 catastrophic events and has mobilised over EUR 5.5 billion in 23 Member States and one accession country; whereas, as part of the EU response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the scope of the EUSF has been extended to cover major public health emergencies and the maximum level of advance payments has been raised;

S. whereas the transition to a climate-neutral, sustainable and circular economy must involve all stakeholders in society, particularly the private sector, social partners and citizens, together with elected officials, including local and regional authorities, and must be backed by robust and inclusive social measures to ensure a fair and just transition that supports businesses, job retention and job creation, particularly green and blue quality jobs;

T. whereas Member States have adopted National Energy and Climate Plans and regions should submit regional plans accordingly in order to achieve emission mitigation and adaptation, with the aim of establishing a pathway towards climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest;

U. whereas the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050 at the latest can be achieved through a combination of public financing at EU and national levels and by creating the right conditions for private financing;

V. whereas energy sources derived from fossil fuels, and particularly from solid fossil fuels, undermine efforts to achieve climate neutrality, and the European Union should thus provide a consistent regulatory framework to further promote the use of renewable energy sources, such as solar and biomass energy, rather than those derived from fossil fuels; whereas, in this regard, cohesion policy should guarantee the principle of ‘energy efficiency first’, which aims to improve the efficiency of energy supply and demand, and which should be applied and observed in all energy-related investments made under cohesion policy; whereas for many Member States the transitional use of energy sources based on natural gas until 31 December 2025 could be essential in achieving a fair energy transition that does not harm society and leaves no-one behind; whereas regional environment strategies should be linked with ambitious climate targets that may go beyond the overall target of achieving a climate-neutral EU by 2050 and should, by 31 December 2025, phase out fossil fuels, including gas infrastructure projects, support their substitution with sustainably produced renewable energy, materials and products, and promote resource efficiency and sustainable development in general, in line with the provisions of the ERDF-CF Regulation;

W. whereas regional environment strategies should serve the pursuit of full and stable employment together with social progress and non-discrimination in order to better tackle the effects of climate change and fight the loss of biodiversity;

X. whereas waste-management plans should follow the circular economy principles and form part of regional environment strategies;

Y. whereas a multilayered European governance model built on an active and constructive partnership between the various levels of governance and stakeholders is key to the climate neutrality transition; whereas community and citizens’ initiatives can strongly support the ecological transition and combat climate change;
Z. whereas EU macro-regional strategies can help identify key sectors and areas of cooperation between different regions facing common challenges such as climate change, climate adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity, transport, waste management, cross-border projects and sustainable tourism;

1. Underlines the importance of tackling climate change in line with the Union’s commitments undertaken under the European Green Deal to implement the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, fully in line with the EU Taxonomy Regulation, taking into consideration social, economic and territorial aspects to ensure a just transition for all territories and their people without leaving anyone behind; points out the need to enshrine the ‘do no significant harm’ principle of the Taxonomy Regulation for all investments;

2. Welcomes the Commission’s proposal on the European Climate Law, a cornerstone of the European Green Deal which enshrines the 2050 climate neutrality target into Union legislation and the need to translate it into concrete local actions that respect the constraints and emphasise the assets of each territory, including the intermediate targets for 2030 and 2040, as called for by the European Parliament; recalls in this regard that the aim of the European Green Deal is to protect, conserve and enhance the Union’s natural capital, as well as to protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts;

3. Emphasises the need for local and regional authorities to make a clear political commitment to achieving the climate targets, and stresses the need to step up multi-level dialogue among national, regional and local authorities on the planning and implementation of national measures on climate, direct access to funding for local authorities and monitoring the progress of the measures adopted, as well as the urgency of equipping them with relevant financial and administrative tools to reach those targets; believes, furthermore, that regional and local authorities have a key role to play in all stages of project planning, preparation and implementation;

4. Calls on national and regional programming authorities to maximise the transformational impact of climate and environmental protection during the ongoing preparation of national and regional programmes;

5. Notes that possible policy adjustments in relation to the fulfilment of the Paris agreement and its five-year reports should be taken into consideration in a manner that is appropriate and adequate to cohesion policy, as in the mid-term ERDF-CF review;

6. Calls on all local and regional authorities to adopt local and regional climate strategies translating EU-level targets into concrete local targets, based on a holistic place-based or area-oriented approach that would provide a long-term vision for climate transition and the better use of financial resources under the cohesion policy; stresses that regional environment strategies should cover and include waste-management plans;

7. Highlights the crucial role for cohesion policy, in synergy with other policies, in fighting climate change and achieving climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest and the intermediate target by 2030 and 2040 respectively, as well as the role of local and regional authorities in a far-reaching reform of investment policies;

8. Calls for efforts to ensure greater coherence and coordination between the cohesion
policy and other EU policies in order to improve the policy integration of climate aspects, design more effective source-based polices, provide targeted EU funding and, consequently, improve the implementation of climate policies on the ground;

9. Recalls that climate policies should serve the pursuit of full and stable employment, including green and blue jobs and training that can contribute to fair social progress, and considers that climate policies must protect the jobs most affected by climate change by creating new green jobs so that workers are not left behind when certain sectors transition to the green economy; urges the Member States to prioritise the fight against climate change along with the fight for inclusive and sustainable development and social justice and the fight against poverty, energy poverty and policies that burden vulnerable and marginalised groups; stresses in this context that further action should be envisaged to fight energy poverty;

10. Welcomes the European Council’s position and acknowledgement of Parliament’s position that EU expenditure should be consistent with the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the ‘do no harm’ principle of the European Green Deal; recalls also that the new cohesion policy legislative framework includes the ‘do no significant harm’ principle of the Taxonomy Regulation among the horizontal principles applying to all Structural Funds;

11. Stresses that sustainability and the transition to an economy that is safe, climate neutral, climate resilient, more resource efficient, affordable, circular and socially balanced are crucial to ensuring the long-term competitiveness of the Union economy, as well as to preserving its social cohesion, thereby helping to create new investment opportunities in agriculture, trade, transport, energy and infrastructure, promoting safer and more eco-friendly consumption, as well as preserving our living environment and the well-being of European citizens;

12. Points out that it is paramount to fully uphold multi-level governance and partnership principles under cohesion policy, including also the gender perspective, as local and regional authorities have direct competencies on the environment and climate change, implementing 90 % of climate adaptation and 70 % of climate mitigation actions; recalls that they can also develop actions that aim to promote climate-friendly behaviour among citizens, including those linked to waste management, smart mobility and sustainable housing; insists that the transition towards climate neutrality must be just and inclusive, with a particular focus on people living in rural and remote areas; recognises the need to support those territories most affected by the transition towards climate neutrality, to avoid any increase in regional disparities and to empower workers and local and regional communities; calls on all levels of government to do their utmost to encourage cross-administrative cooperation, including cross-vertical government cooperation, interregional, inter-municipal and cross-border cooperation, to share knowledge and examples of best practice on climate change projects and initiatives financed under the cohesion policy;

13. Calls for holistic regional environment strategies to guarantee sustainable development and mitigate the consequences of climate change by supporting energy transition to renewable sources, biodiversity and climate adaptation; believes that these regional strategies should support civic engagement and locally initiated and owned projects, and should boost cooperation between the regions, also through cross-border projects; calls
on the Commission to provide support and facilitate cooperation between regions and
the exchange of know-how and best practices; emphasises the importance of upholding
the partnership principle in all programming, implementation and monitoring of EU
cohesion policy and of setting up strong cooperation between regional and local
authorities, citizens, NGOs and stakeholders; underlines that public consultations should
be thorough and meaningful, ensuring the active and representative participation of
communities and stakeholders in the decision-making process in order to inspire
ownership of decisions and plans, initiatives and engagement in actions; stresses the
importance of locally-led initiatives and projects contributing to climate neutrality;

14. Believes that cohesion policy should contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable
Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Climate Agreement, the Convention on
Biological Diversity and the European Green Deal in order to tackle climate change,
particularly through an effective, transparent, comprehensive, result-oriented and
performance-based methodology for monitoring climate spending that takes into
consideration the negative effects of climate change for all people and regions in the
EU; calls for this methodology to be used in all programmes under the multiannual
financial framework and the European Recovery Plan, particularly for basic
infrastructure in key economic sectors such as energy production and distribution,
transport, water and waste management, and public buildings; believes that further
action might be needed in case of insufficient progress towards achieving the Union’s
climate targets;

15. Underlines the key role of local and regional authorities in achieving a fair transition to
a climate-neutral economy for all, with social, economic and territorial cohesion at its
core, and calls for increased employment of green and blue investment and innovation
under the cohesion policy, as well as for expanded use of nature-based solutions;
stresses that greater synergies between various funding sources at the EU, national and
regional levels are needed, as well as stronger links between public and private
financing to increase the effectiveness of regional environment strategies in the fight
against climate change; recalls that this process would not be possible without a strong
focus on skills; is of the opinion that regional environment strategies should also be
aimed at enhancing the administrative capacity of the local and regional institutions and
at developing their potential as enablers of economic, social and territorial
competitiveness;

16. Stresses that community and citizens’ initiatives can strongly support the ecological
transition, as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation, and that Local Action
Groups and the LEADER programme can serve as primary tools to achieve this;
encourages Member States and regional authorities, therefore, to coordinate these
programmes with their regional environment strategies;

17. Emphasises the importance of the Smart Villages concept in tackling the Union’s
climate-related challenges and welcomes its integration into the Union’s future CAP,
Cohesion and regional policies; insists that Member States include the Smart Villages
approach in their programmes for the implementation of the EU cohesion policy at
national and regional level, as well as in their national CAP Strategic Plans, which will
require the preparation of Smart Villages Strategies\(^\text{14}\) at national level; emphasises the role of the LEADER/CLLD approach while implementing Smart Villages Strategies, which should have a strong focus on digitalisation, sustainability and innovation;

18. Points out that EU macro-regional strategies should contribute to building cooperation aimed at solving regional issues linked to climate mitigation and adaptation, and should therefore be considered when adopting the new programmes as an integrated approach and strategic planning are of the utmost importance;

19. Calls for environmental and social criteria and preservation of the natural heritage to be given the same consideration as economic criteria when calculating project eligibility in the case of projects involving cultural and natural heritage;

20. Stresses the need to support projects linking science, innovation and citizenship, such as the New European Bauhaus project which is focused on the resilience of culture and architecture to climate change;

21. Recalls that the success of the regional environment strategies depends as well on robust research and innovation policies also at the local and regional level; encourages collaboration among local authorities, research institutions and enterprises, such as the initiatives within the European Institute of Innovation and Technology and its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs);

22. Calls on the Commission to monitor and publish reports using a common standard for all Member States about the progress of national governments and local and regional authorities in addressing climate change at all levels, as well as to assess the interlinkages between environmental policies and the economy; emphasises that local and regional authorities at national level should be effectively involved in the climate change policies assessment in the context of the European Semester; stresses the need to enhance the effectiveness and complementarity of ESI Funds, as well as other EU programmes and instruments, such as the EAFRD, the EMFF, LIFE, Horizon Europe or Creative Europe, in tackling climate change; encourages the Member States to ensure this complementarity by providing an ambitious territorial application of their national recovery plan, involving all the relevant actors in the regions; further invites the Member States to issue a regularly updated scoreboard measuring the territorial impact of national and European recovery measures, paying particular attention to the contribution of these measures to the fight against climate change;

23. Supports the agreement on the multiannual financial framework for the period 2021-2027 with the aim of avoiding harmful subsidies, supporting the phasing out of both direct and indirect fossil fuel subsidies by 2025 at the latest, ensuring overall funding and programme priorities which reflect the climate emergency and contribute to mainstream climate actions and to the achievement of an overall target of at least 30% of EU budget expenditure in support of climate objectives, which means that at least

EUR 547 billion of new EU financial resources will be made available for the green transition; stresses the importance of following principles such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, a fair and socially inclusive transition, a legally binding climate-related spending target of 30%, as well as a biodiversity spending target of 10% by the end of the programming period, when implementing cohesion policy; stresses, therefore, that the adoption of a transparent, comprehensive and meaningful tracking methodology could be considered, and adapted if necessary during the MFF mid-term revision, for both climate-related spending and biodiversity-related spending;

24. Welcomes policy objective 2 (PO2) of the proposed new Common Provisions Regulation which aims to establish ‘a greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation and risk prevention and management’; recalls that the ERDF thematic concentration for PO2 would be best served if applied at regional level in order to reflect the different regional specificities in terms of climate;

25. Welcomes the agreement reached in trilogue on the Just Transition Fund including additional funds from Next Generation EU, and the two additional pillars of the Just Transition Mechanism, namely a dedicated scheme under Invest EU and a public sector loan facility, which will contribute to alleviating the socio-economic effects of the transition to climate neutrality on the Union’s most vulnerable regions; stresses that the Just Transition Fund will be a new instrument in supporting the territories most affected by the transition to climate neutrality and avoiding an increase in regional disparities; regrets the fact, however, that the top-up amount proposed by the Commission has been cut by two thirds – from EUR 30 to 10 billion – under the Council agreement on Next Generation EU; underlines that these cuts are detrimental to the achievement of the fund’s core objectives and create a supplementary pressure on national budgets; calls on the Member States to programme the funds as quickly as possible and calls on the Member States concerned to give special consideration to the outermost regions in the distribution of funds as they are significantly affected by climate change and are exposed to natural disasters such as cyclones, volcanic eruptions and drought, as well as flooding and rising water levels;

26. Welcomes the REACT EU programme as it continues and extends the crisis response and crisis repair measures by providing additional resources to existing cohesion policy programmes;

27. Reaffirms that the specificities of all regions as defined in Article 174 of the TFEU need to be fully reflected in the transition process so that no region is left behind, in particular by focusing on rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps in order to ensure the overall harmonious development of all areas; considers it necessary in this regard to evaluate the specificities of the regions as listed in Article 174 of the TFEU in the event of any revision of the state aid guidelines; stresses the need for local and regional authorities to make full use of all funding instruments (from the European budget as well as from other European financial institutions such as the EIB) with a view to combating the climate crisis and making local communities more resilient, while paving the way for recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic; stresses, more specifically, that additional instruments granting direct access to EU funds such as Urban Innovative
Actions under the ERDF (Article 8) or the future European Urban Initiative-post 2020 under the ERDF/CF Regulation (Article 10) should be set up, especially for the Green Deal projects;

28. Considers that innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions to strengthen rural areas and make them more attractive as places to live and work should constitute a key element in the implementation of the cohesion policy;

29. Points out that, under Article 349 of the TFEU, the outermost regions benefit from special rules allowing the adoption of tailor-made measures that take account of their specificities; calls for the necessary financial resources to be allocated to those regions so that they can achieve a green transition and adapt to the effects of climate change from which they particularly suffer due to their vulnerability; calls, too, for the creation of an observatory focusing on sustainable development and ecological transition in the outermost regions in order to identify best practices and develop sustainable solutions to tackle climate change, which could be adopted and adapted in other EU regions;

30. Is concerned by economic losses due to natural hazards and damage to EU-funded infrastructure projects caused by the weather and climate-related extremes; calls for support to be given to activities and infrastructure projects that respect the climate and environmental standards and that are more resilient to natural hazards;

31. Underlines the key role of islands, in particular small islands, and the outermost and peripheral/remote regions in the transition towards climate neutrality as innovation laboratories for the development of clean energy, smart mobility, waste management and the circular economy if their full potential is unleashed by adequate tools, support and funding, allowing them to play a crucial role for the purposes of research into climate change and biodiversity; recalls that they should be able to access sufficient economic resources and adequate training in order to deliver integrated, sector-coupled and innovative interventions for sustainable infrastructure and local economic development; underlines the renewable energy potential of the peripheral and outermost regions, linked to their geographical and climatic characteristics;

32. Highlights the need to build on the outcome of initiatives such as the New Energy Solutions Optimised for Islands (NESOI), Smart Islands Initiative and Clean Energy for EU Islands (CE4EU), which also includes islands that have the status of Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs), to ensure a functional transition between the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 programming periods; calls on the Commission, in this regard, to produce user-friendly guidelines to give regional and local governments the opportunity to acknowledge and capitalise on consolidated best practices on energy transition and the decarbonisation of economies; welcomes the Memorandum of Split, which recognises the leading role for island communities in the energy transition; underlines in this regard the importance of exchanging best practices and of promoting mutual learning;

33. Underlines that regional environment strategies should also support renewable energy production and resource efficiency in the farming, food and forestry sectors while taking into account the competitiveness of these sectors; suggests that the relevant authorities prioritise all renewable energy production options that are beneficial for the environment and regional economy, as well as for the inhabitants of the relevant
regions; insists that regional environment strategies should pay special attention to supporting the replacement of fossil-intensive materials with renewable and bio-based materials deriving from forestry and agriculture, as these two sectors function as both carbon emitters and carbon sinks; emphasises that sustainable and close-to-nature forest management is crucial for continuous greenhouse gas absorption from the atmosphere, and also makes it possible to provide renewable and climate-friendly raw material for wood products which store carbon and can act as a substitute to fossil-based materials and fuels; underlines that the ‘triple role’ of forests (sink, storage and substitution) contributes to the reduction of carbon emissions released into the atmosphere, while ensuring that forests continue to grow and provide many other services, and should therefore be part of regional environment strategies;

34. Emphasises that all sectors need to be represented and supported in the transition towards climate-neutral industrial processes, thus contributing to the sustainability of the Union while maintaining international competitiveness and preserving economic, social and territorial cohesion among different European regions; underlines the strategic role of renewable, sustainable and decentralised energy in the development of the EU regions and their enterprises, in particular SMEs; is of the opinion that effective regional environment strategies will be also beneficial to the tourism sector since they could help enhance the appeal of many European regions as sustainable destinations and could more generally promote a new kind of responsible and sustainable tourism;

35. Emphasises that a reduction in land use, in particular soil sealing, should be taken into account as an important and key criterion for the implementation of the cohesion policy, in addition to regional environment strategies, with a view to achieving, where possible, the potential for, and diversity of, land uses in combating climate change (water and CO₂ storage, filtering, buffering and processing materials, food supply, production of biogenic resources);

36. Stresses the need for the Energy Taxation Directive¹⁵ to be revised in line with the polluter pays principle, so as to promote sustainable energy sources to the detriment of fossil fuels by 2025 at the latest, paying particular attention to the social impact;

37. Stresses that gender mainstreaming should be fully implemented and integrated as a horizontal principle into all EU activities, policies and programmes, including cohesion policy;

38. Welcomes the presentation of the ‘Renovation Wave Strategy’ as one of the crucial strategies contributing to making Europe climate neutral by 2050; emphasises the need to address energy poverty through a programme of building renovation that targets vulnerable and low-income households, as part of a wider European Anti-Poverty Strategy;

39. Calls for the updated Circular Economy Action Plan to continue to support the transition towards a circular economy geared towards re-use and repair in order to promote resource efficiency and to drive sustainable consumption, by providing consumers with information on the durability and reparability of products through mandatory labelling, in addition to offering an adequate regulatory framework and a set

of concrete, wide-ranging and ambitious measures to boost the circular economy at EU level; stresses that it is crucial to create and strengthen regional economic cycles, especially those based on biogenic raw materials from the rural and forestry economy, in order to generate sustainable growth and greener jobs; underlines the urgent need to further support the principles of the circular economy and to prioritise the waste hierarchy; calls for local circular economy plans to be developed and for public contracts awarded by local and regional authorities to be green and ambitious in terms of durability of goods and services, which will increase the industrial resilience and strategic autonomy of the European Union;

40. Calls for further investment in sustainable mobility such as railways and sustainable urban mobility for greener cities with a better quality of life for citizens;

41. Welcomes the efforts by the European Investment Bank (EIB) to revise its energy lending policy and to devote 50% of its operations to climate action and environmental sustainability; calls on the EIB to commit to the sustainable transition towards climate neutrality while devoting particular attention to the regions most affected by the transition;

42. Promotes the strong involvement of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the transition process, as well as in the design and implementation of the regional environment strategies, since these actors are not only well-grounded in the local economic fabric but will also be affected by the Green Deal policies; believes it crucial to help MSMEs grasp the opportunities of the environmental transition through tailor-made support in the upskilling and reskilling processes;

43. Invites the Commission to benchmark draft spending plans against highest possible climate ambition;

44. Highlights the proposal set out by the Commission in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 that cities with at least 20,000 inhabitants should prepare urban greening plans to create biodiverse and accessible urban forests, parks and gardens, urban farms, green roofs and walls, and tree-lined streets; reiterates the positive impact of such a measure on urban microclimate and health, in particular for vulnerable groups; encourages this action and calls for the mobilisation of policy, regulatory and financial tools for its implementation;

45. Calls for the establishment of effective regional and interregional cooperation mechanisms in the field of natural disaster prevention, including a capacity for reaction, management and mutual assistance in the event of disasters;

46. Calls for a greater role for cohesion policy in supporting risk prevention efforts to adapt to the present and future impacts of climate change at regional and local levels;

47. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the Member States.
Climate change is the key challenge for the 21st century and the aim of this report on Cohesion Policy and regional environment strategies in the fight against climate change is to outline the role of this policy for the next years. The upcoming years are especially crucial as we currently have already 1.2 °C more average global temperature (compared with pre-industrial levels) and the 1.5 °C goal of the Paris Agreement might be reached by the end of the year 2027 and therefore within the Cohesion Policy framework of 2021 – 2027. By continuing our current pathway without reducing Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), the 2 °C limit might be reached in the decade of the 2040s and would pass then a tipping point with no return at least with the technology we have nowadays. A rise of temperatures by 4 °C by the end of this century and by 8 °C by the end of next century cannot be a way forward. The EU-interinstitutional study ‘CHALLENGES AND CHOICES FOR EUROPE – GLOBAL TRENDS TO 2030’ puts the limits in clear words: “An increase of 1.5 degrees is the maximum the planet can tolerate; should temperatures increase further beyond 2030, we will face even more droughts, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people; the likely demise of the most vulnerable populations – and at worst, the extinction of humankind altogether.”

Cohesion Policy is the biggest and most important investment tool in Europe and plays therefore a crucial role in tackling climate change. The next ten years will design the way forward and the political possibilities for the upcoming decades. The European Parliament called out on 28 November 2019 a “climate and environmental emergency” and puts the focus on the investment programme, by “urgently take the concrete action needed in order to fight and contain this threat before it is too late” and more concretely by “a far-reaching reform of its agricultural, trade, transport, energy and infrastructure investment policies”.

The European Green Deal and the commitment for a climate neutral Europe by 2050 at the latest requests urgent and concrete measures on the ground in order to reach the intermediate climate goals for 2030 and 2040 and to fulfil the legal obligations from the Paris Agreement and to respect the commitments towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Climate change is not only a matter of environment; it is also a matter of economic and social change. The transition towards climate neutrality can only be reached in a socially fair and just pathway forwards, leaving no one behind. Economic, social and territorial cohesion means in this regard to put a special focus on this three elements:

- On an economic cohesion with sustainable growth and green jobs, respecting the needs of the different sectors;
- On a social cohesion with a just transition, social fairness, an understanding for energy poverty and special needs. The wealthiest 10 % of the population emits 52 % of CO₂, while the poorest 50 % of the world population is only for 7 % of the CO₂ emission responsible;
- On a territorial cohesion with an understanding of the different needs of EU regions, especially insular and boarder regions and the rise of sea levels, but also urban areas with its faster growing temperatures;

Cohesion Policy and regional environment strategies are a relevant and important factor in the fight against climate change for the upcoming years. This own-initiative report outlines the necessary steps from a regional perspective.
MINORITY POSITION

Ms Mathilde Androuët and I tabled many amendments, which were not adopted, concerning measures in favour of the French outermost regions of Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Réunion, Martinique, Mayotte and Saint-Martin.

These amendments take account of the specific climatic characteristics of these outermost regions, the electrical interconnection of small islands, the encouragement of photovoltaic solutions in the islands, the acceleration of funding for the conversion of freight, road, rail and maritime fleets or, on the model of the Space Agency in French Guiana, the creation of a European Maritime Agency located in the outermost regions.

André Rougé, Shadow Rapporteur of the Identity and Democracy Group.
10.12.2020

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT, PUBLIC HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

for the Committee on Regional Development

on Cohesion Policy and regional environment strategies in the fight against climate change (2020/2074(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Susana Solís Pérez

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Underlines the importance of Cohesion Policy, cohesion funding and regional environmental strategies in the fight against climate change and the fulfilment of our commitments under the Paris Agreement; stresses that, as the Union’s main investment policy and one of the main sources of EU support for many Member States, Cohesion Policy should be fully aligned with the Union’s climate and environment objectives, and ensure in particular that all EU-funded projects should respect the ‘do no significant harm’ principle as set out in the Taxonomy Regulation; welcomes policy objective 2 (PO2) of the proposed new Common Provisions Regulation, as set out in Article 4(1)(b) thereof, which aims to establish ‘a greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation and risk prevention and management’;

2. Calls for the creation of ambitious environmental, climate and development policies at regional level that will build on the 2030 Agenda, the European Green Deal, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework; considers that Cohesion Policy and PO2 in particular should fully contribute to the Union’s more ambitious 2030 climate target and the objective to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions as early as possible and by 2050 at the latest, as set out in Parliament’s position on the European Climate Law; highlights the importance of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) for achieving the objective of 30 % of new investments for climate-related expenditure and 10 % for biodiversity-related expenditure, and for its role in the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) and recovery fund instruments; recalls its position that at least 35 % of resources under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and 40 % under the Cohesion Fund should support the Union’s climate objectives; notes that the European Council agreement to contribute at
least 30% of the ERDF to the ‘Greener Europe’ policy objective is an important step; encourages the Commission to establish common output and input indicators to ensure that projects deliver the EU’s climate objectives, applying the criteria set by the Taxonomy Regulation where applicable; stresses that the transition to a sustainable and climate-neutral economy must leave no one behind and must be achieved through measures that make economic activities compatible with the protection of the environment and create high-quality employment in the long term;

3. Highlights the role that Cohesion Policy can play in, inter alia, advancing a twin digital and green transition towards a more circular economy that is climate-neutral, environmentally sustainable, and energy and resource efficient, and that offers sustainable solutions to waste reduction, water management, energy efficiency, the renovation of buildings, the development of renewable energy, emissions reduction, the transition towards zero-emission mobility, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation; calls for the next generation of Cohesion Policy to be climate-proof and believes that no programme which has a negative impact on the efforts to meet the EU’s climate targets should be financed and supported under Cohesion Policy; welcomes the introduction of a climate proofing instrument in Cohesion Policy for 2021-2027;

4. Underlines the strategic role of renewable, sustainable and decentralised energy in the development of territories and their enterprises, in particular SMEs; emphasises the renewable energy potential of the peripheral and outermost regions linked to their geographical and climatic characteristics; highlights the role of Cohesion Policy to enhance the use of renewables and the availability of clean energy sources, and in particular to support the deployment of alternative energy sources, such as clean hydrogen;

5. Insists on creating a balanced, sustainable and inclusive development of the Union through Cohesion Policy that takes into consideration the specificities and needs of all Member States, their regions and their citizens; calls for Cohesion Policy, in coordination with other EU policies and in cooperation with the national or regional civil protection authorities, to have a greater role in supporting risk prevention efforts to adapt to present and future impacts of climate change, with particular attention for the most vulnerable areas, such as islands, coastal areas and the outermost regions, which present further difficulties due to their geographical location, through ecosystem-based approaches, by developing new infrastructure or retro-fitting existing infrastructure and through the adoption of disaster resilience measures at regional and local levels while fully taking into account and contributing to the biodiversity-related targets; calls for the establishment of effective regional and interregional cooperation mechanisms in the field of natural disaster prevention, i.e. a capacity for response, management and mutual assistance in the event of disasters; calls for climate adaptation stress tests for EU-funded projects that are deemed particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change;

6. Recognises the key role of regional authorities in the successful management of environmental and development policies; recognises the importance of place-based sectoral initiatives for achieving social and environmental sustainability and resilience in all places through tailor-made policy mixes, and encourages the use of instruments such as community-led local development projects (CLLDs) and Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs) to promote a multi-level governance of initiatives to fight climate change.
change; stresses that the tailored allocation of funds for locally and regionally adapted measures would not only have a strong impact on the economy, but would also have a mobilising effect on the community’s involvement in participation structures; encourages public-private partnerships and further blending between European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds and other programmes, such as Horizon Europe, to develop innovative solutions to fight climate change and create a more resilient and sustainable European economy; calls on the Commission and managing authorities to simplify the procedures associated with Cohesion Policy to ensure that private actors, and especially SMEs, can access EU funding under Cohesion Policy; recalls and welcomes, in this context, the Commission’s ambition to launch the European Climate Pact;

7. Highlights the proposal set out by the Commission in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 that cities with at least 20 000 inhabitants should prepare urban greening plans to create biodiverse and accessible urban forests, parks and gardens, urban farms, green roofs and walls, and tree-lined streets; reiterates the positive impact of such a measure on urban microclimate and health, in particular for vulnerable groups; encourages this action and calls for the mobilisation of policy, regulatory and financial tools for its implementation;

8. Recalls the importance of involving local and regional authorities in the drafting of national energy and climate plans (NECPs) and territorial Just Transition plans for meeting the EU’s climate and energy priorities, fulfilling international commitments under the Paris Agreement, and taking into consideration the social aspects of the transition; highlights the role of local and regional authorities (LRAs) and private actors, such as SMEs, in mitigating and adapting to climate change; calls on the Commission to bolster effective multi-level governance in action planning and implementation, guaranteeing a structured dialogue with LRAs, and to secure the alignment and complementarity of climate and energy action plans and measures across levels of government, to improve the coordination among Member States and transparency on climate and energy-related actions, to monitor their progress in addressing climate change and to provide technical guidance and support to mobilise funds and capacity-building;

9. Calls for holistic regional integration strategies in order to guarantee sustainable development, mitigate the consequences of climate change and fully contribute to the objectives of the Paris Agreement; highlights the importance of relying on smart specialisation strategies to develop strong competitive advantages and to establish synergies between the different EU regions and Member States through the European Territorial Cooperation Goal with a view to developing European answers to climate change challenges;

10. Recognises that Cohesion Policy directly affects the quality of life of EU citizens and helps them face new challenges, such as demographic changes, the industrial transition and climate change;

11. Highlights that the EU is facing serious challenges, especially in the field of economic recovery, and that the role of Cohesion Policy in this context will be essential;

12. Insists on creating a balanced, sustainable and inclusive development of the Union
through Cohesion Policy that takes into consideration the specificities and needs of all Member States, their regions and their citizens;

13. Emphasises that regional environmental policies must contain measures to adapt to the damage caused by unavoidable negative consequences of climate change, the provisions of which should be incorporated into all other relevant policy areas;

14. Recalls that improving the quality of life of EU citizens requires the further development of policies that will create better working and living conditions and contribute to the protection of the environment and the fight against climate change;

15. Recalls that Cohesion Policy seeks to reduce territorial inequalities across the Union and to foster the economic development of its least developed regions; considers, therefore, that effective and focused spending of the Cohesion Fund is needed in regions where economies are more carbon intensive;

16. Stresses that it is paramount that cohesion funding helps more carbon-intensive regions to move faster towards clean energy and zero-carbon infrastructure, which is not yet guaranteed despite the positive developments over recent years.
INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

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### Key to symbols:
- **+**: in favour
- **-**: against
- **0**: abstention
OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND TOURISM

for the Committee on Regional Development

on cohesion policy and regional environment strategies in the fight against climate change
(2020/2074(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Gheorghe Falcă

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Transport and Tourism calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Highlights that cohesion policy investments must continue to be targeted at all regions based on the three existing categories – less-developed regions, transition regions and more-developed regions – and that environmental strategies for climate neutrality must be adapted and woven into the relevant targeting, in line with the three aforementioned categories and the European Green Deal, with a particular focus on mitigation measures with a view to a just transition for regions with carbon-intensive economic sectors; notes that particular attention should be given to the cohesion-related needs of and challenges faced by peripheral, rural and outermost regions, as well as islands, sparsely populated areas and other geographically disadvantaged territories;

2. Recalls that under cohesion policy, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund have been the major sources of funding for transport intervention, with an allocation of over EUR 70 billion in the financing period 2014-2020, and that the management of cohesion policy is shared between the EU and its Member States, which makes this process more decentralised;

3. Notes that transport projects supported by the cohesion envelope, the transfer of funds from the Cohesion Fund to the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), under the next multiannual financial framework 2021-2027 will be subject to climate proofing and that 60 % of the overall financial envelope of the CEF must go towards meeting climate objectives;

4. Underlines that cohesion policy funds must respond, first and foremost, to the needs of the diverse regions targeted and must support common EU policy objectives, and therefore that cohesion funds must be used for projects that contribute to socio-economic growth and job creation and hence to the well-being of citizens/communities, improve their living standards and stimulate local economies, as the primary mission of these funds is cohesion, while also enhancing research and innovation, growth and competitiveness, thereby promoting sustainable mobility and connectivity and thus
ensuring territorial, social and economic cohesion throughout the regions of the Union;

5. Emphasises the role of cohesion policy in addressing the main challenges facing the Union’s transport sector, including developing a well-functioning Single European Transport Area, connecting Europe through modern, multi-modal and safe transport infrastructure networks and shifting to low-emission mobility, inter alia through support for the completion of missing small cross-border rail links, thereby contributing to the European integration of rural and border regions; stresses that cohesion policy should focus in particular on regions with underdeveloped and various other types of infrastructure that lack investment, with a particular focus on gas infrastructure which will enable a smooth energy transition and ensure the energy security of regions; believes that cohesion policy must remain one of the main instruments for European action in the post-2020 period with regard to the outermost regions and their struggle to narrow persistent regional disparities; stresses the importance of the effective use of cohesion funds in the outermost regions and believes that European investments in these regions bring benefits in economic, social and environmental terms, not only for the regions themselves, but also for the EU as a whole, and that it is important for these regions to continue to benefit from special EU support;

6. Stresses that cohesion policy should contribute to the sustainable recovery of the transport and tourism sectors, especially in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic; underlines that from a social perspective, ensuring the affordability, reliability and accessibility of transport for everyone is of the utmost importance;

7. Highlights that climate proofing of infrastructure, including tourism and transport infrastructure, will help to enhance the resilience of infrastructure to the impacts of climate change, improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions during the lifetime of the infrastructure; notes that transport infrastructure can positively influence cross-border interactions as well as regional, urban and local development, including in the case of the outermost and island regions; recalls that the aim is to identify areas where infrastructure improvements can lead to greater social, economic and environmental benefits; considers that regions should have all the means necessary to share good practices;

8. Recalls that the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) policy ensures socioeconomic and territorial cohesion, as well as accessibility across the EU and its regions, including remote, outermost, insular, peripheral, mountainous and sparsely populated regions, thus stimulating economic growth and job creation; highlights that the full completion of TEN-T is crucial to accelerating the shift towards sustainable transport modes and smart mobility in line with the goals of the European Green Deal, i.e. from road to rail and inland waterways, and an increase in the deployment of alternative fuels and recharging and refuelling infrastructure; calls for the priority allocation of cohesion funds to actions that support multimodal and digital solutions and that build, upgrade and complete rail and inland waterway infrastructure connections to ports and other multimodal hubs in order to facilitate the modal shift; stresses, in this context, that cohesion policy should have a stronger role in supporting risk prevention measures focused on adaptation to the current and future impacts of climate change;

9. Considers cohesion policy to be the best ally in the implementation of regional environment strategies aiming at a real mobility shift towards more sustainable mobility
in our cities and regions; believes that in order to be fully eligible and have priority access to the related EU funds, strategies in the field of both urban and inter-urban mobility should support rail and cycling infrastructure in particular, including multimodality enablers;

10. Points out that there are significant inequalities among regions when it comes to the accessibility of transport, in particular rail transport; calls, therefore, for a strategy to open up isolated or abandoned areas;

11. Notes, however, that improved transport systems are also associated with adverse externalities, such as road accidents, emissions, climate change and other environmental and social impacts, which can be substantial;

12. Reiterates that the revision of TEN-T policy should continue to give particular attention to facilitating cross-border connections and missing links, which will foster socioeconomic and territorial cohesion across the EU; highlights that the revision of TEN-T policy should also address the elimination of bottlenecks, particularly in urban nodes, and enhance multimodality and last-mile delivery infrastructure, which will considerably reduce traffic congestion and improve efficiency and sustainability on transport routes;

13. Believes that passenger rail transport should be made more attractive to users and more competitive; calls on the Commission, therefore, to promote a unified and transparent ticket booking system; encourages the reintroduction of a European network of night trains;

14. Calls for green infrastructure and sustainable and intelligent mobility solutions to be implemented and notes their importance not only in urban environments, where approximately 70 % of the EU population lives, but also elsewhere; welcomes in this respect the increasing ambition in many cities and towns of considerably reducing congestion and improving road design in favour of pedestrians and cyclists; underlines that in cities, green infrastructure features such as green walls and roofs, urban woodlands, meadows, gardens and allotments deliver health-related benefits with a direct impact on our well-being, such as clean air, better water quality and soundproofing; stresses that investments in rural areas are equally important in reducing climate impact and ensuring regional accessibility and should not be overlooked, especially in the context of poor air quality in some areas; stresses, moreover, that green infrastructure also creates opportunities to connect urban and rural areas and provides appealing places to live and work; believes, furthermore, that the re-purposing of land in cities for green infrastructure can be a cost-effective and economically viable way of making them more sustainable, resilient, environmentally friendly and healthy;

15. Recalls that the transport sector’s greenhouse gas emissions represent 27 % of EU global emissions, and that the transport sector must contribute to reaching climate neutrality by 2050; highlights that innovation and digitalisation play a key role in the decarbonisation of the transport sector in line with the ambitions of the European Green Deal; stresses the need to strengthen financial support from the cohesion funds for research on and innovation in low- and zero-emission mobility solutions, in particular with regard to advanced technologies and smart mobility across all modes of transport, including alternative fuel and hydrogen mobility and sustainable infrastructure projects;
16. Calls on the Commission to support renovation and energy efficiency improvement schemes for housing in European cities in order to improve building efficiency, bearing in mind that one third to half of the energy in cities is spent on heating; stresses that, given the large number of old residential and other buildings in cities, renovation rates need to be increased by three to five times their current levels if we are to approach the 1.5°C degree scenario outlined in the Paris Agreement;

17. Stresses the role of the tourism sector in the transition towards a more sustainable and low-carbon economy; calls for this sector to be strongly incorporated into regional climate strategies and planning; emphasises that, in this context, rural tourism has the potential to help develop less-developed regions; recalls the importance of supporting the tourism sector, in particular through investments that contribute to the recovery, long-term competitiveness, digitalisation and sustainability of the sector and its value chains; calls for a dedicated budget line to be earmarked for tourism in order to give small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) a firmer foothold and ensure better opportunities in the sector;

18. Takes note of the conclusions of European Court of Auditors’ Special Report 06/2020 on sustainable urban mobility in the EU, which say that EU cities are not moving far enough towards more sustainable and environmentally friendly modes of transport and that the EU funds dedicated to sustainable mobility are not yet being put to effective use in fulfilling their objectives; highlights the investment needs of the regions and municipalities moving towards more sustainable and smart mobility; stresses, in this regard, the funding opportunities provided by EU programmes, such as the ERDF, the Cohesion Fund, the LIFE programme, Horizon and the Just Transition Fund, for achieving a fair, inclusive and socially acceptable transition to climate neutrality in which no one is left behind; stresses the need to support the up- and reskilling of workers and jobseekers in the transport sector, while paying specific attention to diversity and gender balance;

19. Highlights the role of local and regional authorities in mitigating and adapting to climate change through regional integration strategies at all stages of the project process, with a view to achieving sustainable and inclusive development; highlights the need to consult civil society organisations and other stakeholders, including regional and local authorities, with a view to the more efficient, sustainable and proper implementation of transport infrastructure projects; encourages the enabling of more direct EU funding for local and regional authorities in order to improve efficiency, ensure consistency and reduce the administrative burden; recalls that transparency and proactive communication on the available funds is also key to ensuring their effective use;

20. Highlights that rural development is key to territorial and socioeconomic cohesion; asks the Commission to come up with a Rural Agenda that takes a holistic approach so as to empower rural communities to address, among other issues, the transition towards climate neutrality, including the shift to more sustainable and smart transport modes, and to identify areas where infrastructure improvements can lead to greater benefits, in particular digital and connectivity infrastructure in rural areas to support tourism, access to employment and remote working, and improvements to multi-modality in areas with

no access to public transport; believes, in this context, that efficient and affordable public transport is central to achieving sustainable urban and rural mobility; calls on the Commission, therefore, to include quality transport infrastructure and services in sparsely populated areas in the smart and sustainable mobility proposal;

21. Recalls that the management of cohesion policy is shared between the EU and its Member States; highlights the need to ensure a consistent approach to environmental mainstreaming in transport investments by aligning programming with the project implementation phase; calls on Member States to ensure that managing authorities promote and encourage the integration of environmental considerations into projects beyond the programming stage, for instance by issuing guidelines or by organising awareness-raising activities for applicants; believes, furthermore, that cohesion policy funding should strengthen the integration of the transport sector with the energy and digital sectors, in order to capitalise on and maximise potential synergies;

22. Welcomes the single rulebook that now covers seven EU funds implemented in partnership with Member States (‘shared management’); welcomes also the Commission proposal for lighter controls for programmes with a good track record, with an increased reliance on national systems and the extension of the ‘single audit’ principle, to avoid duplication of checks; welcomes the new framework for projects which introduces an annual performance review in the form of a policy dialogue between programme authorities and the Commission.
### INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

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| Substitutes present for the final vote | Josianne Cutajar, Clare Daly, Roman Haider, Anne-Sophie Pelletier, Markus Pieper |
## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

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Key to symbols:
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0 : abstention
OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

for the Committee on Regional Development

on cohesion policy and regional environment strategies in the fight against climate change (2020/2074(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Francisco Guerreiro

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

A. whereas for 2021-2027 cohesion policy is expected to contribute 37 % of the overall target of at least 30 % of the total Union budget and NGEU expenditure dedicated to climate expenditure;

B. whereas, according to the European Court of Auditors, the implementation of the EU target of a 20 % reduction in GHG by 2020 has led to more, and better-focused, climate action funding in the European Regional Development Fund and in cohesion policy, but that in the areas of agriculture, rural development and fisheries, however, there has been no significant shift towards climate action and not all potential opportunities for financing climate-related action have been fully explored¹;

C. whereas between 8 and 10 % of all greenhouse gas emissions are estimated to originate from food loss and food waste²;

1. Notes that the agricultural sector is of strategic importance for EU and global food security and that farming communities are the most critically exposed to the consequences of climate change;

2. Emphasises therefore that cohesion policy must support strong climate mainstreaming in agriculture and food-related sectors, and ensure that all EU funding programmes and projects are embedded in strategies that support ambitious climate objectives, to ensure an equitable transition to a climate-neutral and circular economy and to boost farmers’ capacity for sustainable development; notes that cohesion policy must take into account

¹ https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR16_31/SR_CLIMATE_EN.pdf [Special report, 2016: Spending at least one euro in every five from the EU budget on climate action: ambitious work underway, but at serious risk of falling short p.7]
² https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/chapter-5/
environmental, social and economic sustainability and ensure climate justice, poverty reduction and enhanced rights for workers in this sector;

3. Stresses that preventing and reducing food waste and food loss, as well as strengthening local structures and regional value chains, are essential for reducing all emissions associated with growing, manufacturing and transporting;

4. Underlines that, in line with Article 2 of the Paris Agreement, climate mainstreaming in agriculture must be applied in a manner that does not threaten food production and safeguards food security in the European Union;

5. Recalls that the aim of the European Green Deal is to protect, conserve and enhance the Union’s natural capital, as well as to protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts;

6. Emphasises the need for efficiency and the supplementation of European structural and investment funds, both in combating climate change and in improving the quality of life in rural areas;

7. Underlines that efficient livestock production can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance sinks and increase productivity;

8. Welcomes the adopted Multiannual Financial Framework of the Union 2021-2027 (MFF) and Next Generation EU (NGEU), which form a solid financial basis for supporting policies that would enable the Union to reach the target of at least a 55% reduction in GHG emissions in 2030;

9. Underlines that, in order to work towards that goal, allocations from ESI funds supporting the transition towards climate neutrality in all eligible sectors would need to be ultimately set at a higher level, as well as the ERDF resources allocated to the ‘green, low-carbon objective’;

10. Stresses the need to respect the ‘do no harm’ principle in regional environmental strategies;

11. Stresses that the scarcity of financial resources in EU, Member State and regional budgets is becoming more eminent in the foreseeable future due to the unprecedented economic recession caused by the pandemic-related measures and Brexit;

12. Emphasises that expenditure from the MFF 2021-2027 and the NGEU for the climate target is set at at least 30% of all expenditure, meaning that at least EUR 547 billion of new EU financial resources will be made available for the green transition;

13. Highlights the importance of linking urban and rural regional environmental strategies to ambitious climate targets that go beyond the overall target of achieving a climate-neutral EU by 2050, taking into account the significant contribution of the farming, food

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1 See also the European Parliament’s initial position defending a target of a 65% reduction in GHG emissions in 2030.
and forestry sectors, considering that soils and forests are the largest CO₂ reservoirs in the world and their potential is underused;

14. Notes that these targets have to be in line with the overall EU targets in this regard;

15. Stresses that cohesion policy should be in line with the aims of the European Green Deal, and its Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies; underlines that regional environmental strategies need to take a balanced approach that considers existing trade-offs between climate change mitigation, protection of biodiversity and the economic and social aspects in order to address these crises in a coordinated manner;

16. Believes that the EU’s ambitious policies should be implemented by all economic and social actors and should notably be aimed at safeguarding food security and preserving food affordability;

17. Calls on the Commission to re-examine the role of biotechnology; notes that biotechnology helps to mitigate climate change by offering solutions for substituting fossil materials with bio-based materials; points out that sustainable use of farmland is essential to ensure that the various models of agricultural production are effective in their efforts to mitigate climate change;

18. Insists that the transition towards climate neutrality must be just and inclusive, with a particular focus on citizens living in rural and remote areas;

19. Points out that innovations in plant breeding, using tools such as gene editing, have enormous potential in terms of developing varieties with a greater capacity to mitigate climate change;

20. Believes that climate-smart agriculture depends on the use and development of new farming technologies, especially in the case of small, organic farmers and producers;

21. Calls on the Commission, in the interest of climate change mitigation, not to concentrate its efforts exclusively on developing organic farming but to also provide incentives for integrated production models, precision agriculture or soil conservation techniques;

22. Calls for robust data, better access to information and comprehensive training for farmers in order to facilitate the identification and adoption of best practices in the area of climate change mitigation;

23. Underlines that regional environmental strategies should exclude any kind of support for fossil fuels and fossil gas infrastructure projects and should support renewable energy production and resource efficiency in the farming, food, agroforestry and forestry sectors, ensuring the equal treatment of all potential beneficiaries; highlights that such a move would not only be beneficial for biodiversity and GHG emissions, but might also decrease farm input costs and have a positive impact on the regional economy;

24. Suggests that the relevant authorities prioritise the most sustainable options with the carbon payback time relevant for the EU climate targets, such as wind, wave or solar, and subject bioenergy projects to strict and scientifically up-to-date sustainability and eligibility criteria which also take into account the availability of the respective type of
biomass, restoration and protection targets;

25. Highlights that the agricultural sector has the potential to produce renewable energy such as biogas from agricultural waste and residues such as manure, or from other sources of waste and residues from the food industry, sewage, wastewater and municipal waste;

26. Stresses the importance of keeping phosphorus in the fields by recycling it, in order to avoid pollution and the need to add phosphorus, and calls for cohesion policy to support projects towards this goal, notably by recycling human excrement;

27. Notes the importance of unlocking the potential of the circular economy which contributes to a more efficient use of resources and promotes sustainable consumption; underlines the significant role of a circular bioeconomy in the fight against climate change;

28. Notes that the development of the circular economy and the bio-economy will create more jobs in primary production, and stresses that the bio-economy requires new skills, new knowledge and new disciplines be developed and/or integrated further in training and education in this sector in order to tackle bio-economy-related societal changes, promote competitiveness, growth and job creation, meet the needs of the sector, and ensure that skills and jobs are better matched;

29. Stresses that the production of renewable energies such as biogas offers huge potential for farmers to increase their climate efficiency, as well as helping to make sustainable farming a profitable business model that offers growth and (skilled) job opportunities in rural areas; underlines that the necessary investment is substantial and farmers thus require accessible funding;

30. Insists that regional environmental strategies should pay special attention to supporting the replacement of fossil-intensive materials with renewable and bio-based materials deriving from forestry and agriculture, as two sectors that function as carbon emitters as well as carbon sinks;

31. Stresses that a concept of phasing out fossil-based energy for each sector is necessary in order to contribute towards the aims of the Green Deal and climate neutrality;

32. Highlights that developing cohesion policy and regional environmental strategies would require aligning genuine business incentives with policy goals to combat climate change;

33. Emphasises that sustainable and close-to-nature forest management is crucial for continuous greenhouse gas absorption from the atmosphere and also makes it possible to provide renewable and climate-friendly raw material for wood products which store carbon and can act as a substitute to fossil-based materials and fuels;

34. Underlines that the ‘triple role’ of forests (sink, storage and substitution) contributes to the reduction of carbon emissions released into the atmosphere, while ensuring that forests continue to grow and provide many other services, and should therefore form an integral part of regional environmental strategies;
35. Recalls the importance for climate change mitigation of re-localising and enhancing European food and feed production, including plant proteins¹ and effective use crops such as perennial grass, as well as of promoting the consumption of local produce in order to shorten transport distances and limit deforestation; highlights the opportunities offered by cohesion policy and regional environmental strategies in supporting this re-localisation;

36. Highlights the positive impact of short food chains which help to reduce food waste; recalls that urban agriculture enriches urban biodiversity, better manages waste through neighbourhood composting, retains rainwater and improves air quality, and calls for cohesion policy to strengthen domestic, neighbourhood and territorial food systems in and around cities; emphasises the need to support sustainable agricultural practices, and to help small-scale farmers and local producers obtain the necessary financing, and to identify and make efficient use of funding instruments available at local, national and European level;

37. Highlights the fact that, for livestock farming, permanent grassland is an essential instrument in achieving the ambitious climate objectives laid down;

38. Points out that, in addition to carbon sequestration, forests have a beneficial impact on the climate, the atmosphere, the preservation of biodiversity, and river and waterway management, that they protect soil from erosion by water and wind, and they possess other useful natural properties;

39. Considers that the cohesion policy funds should preserve the multifunctional role of forests, ensure strong diversity of forest species, and conserve and expand forest resources for the well-being of the population and improvement of the environment;

40. Stresses the importance of keeping young people in rural areas and attracting them back in order to use their contemporary knowledge and perspective on environment protection and climate change and to turn the demographically challenged rural areas into blooming, lively, sustainable communities; emphasises, therefore, the importance of having adequate support from cohesion policy programmes for young people;

41. Expresses its concern that it will be essential to continue to produce a great deal of food with less fertile land, polluted soil and water, much smaller fishing areas and sometimes extreme weather conditions;

42. Notes with concern that the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the vulnerability of cities if supplies, especially food supplies, are disrupted;

43. Underlines that it is absolutely essential for the Union to adopt a policy of resilience in relation to the effects of climate change, particularly in the agricultural and food sectors; believes that cohesion policy can play a leading role in this regard;

44. Considers that cohesion policy should support the establishment of shorter supply chains for our food systems, notably through the relocation of our agricultural production; stresses that the aim of this relocation is to produce, process and consume

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food locally in order to strengthen the food security of European regions, create local jobs and drastically reduce our use of fossil energies and, thus, our impact on the climate;

45. Believes that cohesion policy should support regional projects aimed at building future agricultural systems that focus on mixed farming, combining several plant species (crop associations), arable crops and trees (agroforestry), and even mixtures of crops, trees and animals (conservation agriculture and permaculture); emphasises that such agro-ecosystems would have increased biodiversity and heterogeneity, thereby reducing their vulnerability to disease and climate disruption;

46. Calls urgently for cohesion policy to strengthen urban and peri-urban agricultural systems by developing urban gardens, roof gardens, and urban permaculture and aquaponics systems; stresses, however, that although it significantly increases food security among urban populations, urban farming will continue to be a complement to food supply in large cities; underlines, therefore, the need to protect and encourage peri-urban agriculture;

47. Considers that the development of urban forests is of significant interest in terms of mitigating the effects of global warming in cities, especially during heatwaves; emphasises that, according to the UN, shaded areas created by urban vegetation could reduce air conditioning needs by 30 %;

48. Points out that the development of revegetation in cities can help to create biodiversity refuges, reduce sound and air pollution, restore degraded soils, prevent droughts and establish significant carbon sinks;

49. Underlines, however, that it is essential to ensure broad biodiversity of the tree species planted in cities and to promote native species;

50. Underlines, too, the limits on the use of avenue trees; stresses the need to ensure the diversity of tree species, chosen according to the roles that they must play on a complementary basis, alongside shrubs, grasses and areas of loose soil; calls, too, for priority to be given to the planting of fruit trees in cities; believes that the cohesion policy funds should support projects that meet these conditions;

51. Underlines the benefits of developing conservation grazing in urban areas; calls for the cohesion policy funds to support existing projects in this regard;

52. Stresses that EU macro-regional strategies should help build cooperation in order to solve regional and river basin issues linked to climate mitigation and adaptation in the farming, food, agroforestry and forestry sectors, in fields such as flood, drought and fire protection, river restoration and improvement of river connectivity, efficient collective waste management, notably through new recycling technologies in agricultural waste management, including with the aim of energy production, making farms more resilient against common risks and the development of sustainable EU and local food production, notably by establishing and strengthening short supply chains, whose importance was highlighted by the consequences of the COVID-19 crises;

53. Underlines that environmental strategies should support and complement EU macro-regional strategies in this regard; calls for a European plan to combat desertification and
the degradation of agricultural land, supported by macro-regional strategies;

54. Highlights the importance of upholding the partnership principle in all programming, implementation and monitoring of EU cohesion policy and of setting up strong cooperation between regional and local authorities, NGOs and stakeholders, including farmers’ organisations and environmental NGOs; stresses that this process should take into account the gender perspective;

55. Notes that community and citizens’ initiatives can strongly support the ecological transition, as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation, and that Local Action Groups and the LEADER programme can be primary tools to achieve this; encourages Member States and regional authorities to coordinate these programmes with their regional environmental strategies;

56. Stresses that cohesion policy should support investment in education and training, helping local authorities, workers and companies to take greater account of the challenges posed by climate change, and the role they can play in climate change mitigation and adaptation in their respective sectors;

57. Highlights the importance of facilitating synergies between cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy aimed at supporting rural areas that are extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and ensuring the transition to a climate-neutral economy centred on social and economic cohesion;

58. Emphasises the importance of structural funds in supporting small and medium-sized businesses in the agri-food sector so that they become more competitive and environmentally friendly;

59. Emphasises the importance of the Smart Villages concept in tackling the Union’s climate-related challenges and welcomes its integration into the Union’s future CAP, cohesion and regional policies; insists that Member States include the Smart Villages approach in their Operational Programme for the Implementation of EU Cohesion Policy at national and regional level, as well as in their national CAP Strategic Plans, which will require the preparation of Smart Villages Strategies at national level; emphasises the role of the LEADER/CLLD approach while implementing Smart Villages Strategies, which should have a strong focus on digitalisation, sustainability and innovation;

60. Highlights the possibilities of brownfield developments and rehabilitation, which can create new industrial parks and incubator centres with soil decontamination and the environmental improvement of old industrial sites, in reducing the need for further greenfield site building and attracting companies and regional investment, thereby also creating jobs;

61. Welcomes the Commission’s intention to present a strategy for rural areas and stresses

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the need to reinforce the synergies between the different structural and investment funds with the objective of helping agri-food sectors to improve their economic resilience and environmental sustainability;

62. Emphasises that investment in sustainable green infrastructure at local and regional level through EU cohesion policy is essential to combat the impacts of climate change on agriculture and forestry and to improve the climate resilience of people, nature and the economy;

63. Highlights that cohesion policy must focus on the comprehensive transition of the European economy towards a bioeconomy based on biogenic resources from agriculture and forestry;

64. Highlights the advantages of building a Mediterranean macro-region, especially in bolstering the production and exportability of local products;

65. Highlights the importance of a bottom-up approach to cohesion and regional development, where initiatives should be made at regional and/or Member State level;

66. Highlights that cohesion policy and regional environmental strategies need to pay particular attention to increasing the use of wood from sustainable forestry in all parts of economy (especially the construction sector), as wood has the unique property of storing huge amounts of CO$_2$ while substituting energy-intensive resources such as steel and concrete;

67. Believes that digitalisation and AI technologies can lead to more sustainable, resilient and resource-efficient agriculture and can also create new types of jobs, but require appropriate training and education, to which everybody should have access;

68. Highlights the need to strengthen EU investment in broadband in rural areas to enable farmers to integrate digital technologies in order to develop precision farming, as this will be essential for their ecological transition;

69. Stresses that ongoing agricultural practices and green infrastructure initiatives in the agriculture and forestry sectors have a positive effect on carbon stocks and the greenhouse gas balances in the Member States;

70. Recalls that current EU policy initiatives must take into account the long-term competitiveness of the European economy and the concerns of small and medium-sized enterprises;

71. Emphasises the need to improve all types of connectivity (broadband, transport, etc.) in rural areas in an affordable, sustainable and environmentally friendly way;

72. Highlights that the uptake of climate-change-oriented cohesion policy and regional environmental strategies must be underpinned and supported by science, research and innovation;

73. Underlines that research and investment in climate-effective and biodiversity-fostering agricultural solutions should therefore be integrated into regional environmental strategies;
74. Highlights the need for cohesion policy funds to support more training projects, notably on agro-ecological farming.
INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

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- 0 : abstention
## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

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| Substitutes present for the final vote | Rosanna Conte, Bronis Ropė, Veronika Vrecionová |
### FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

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| ID | Rosanna Conte, Francesca Donato, Alessandro Panza |

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