



## Committee of the Regions

CIVEX-VI-001

2nd Commission meeting, 24 February 2015

### DRAFT OPINION

#### Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs

#### A decent life for all: from vision to collective action

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Rapporteur: **J.F.M. (Hans) Janssen** (NL/EPP)  
Mayor of Oisterwijk

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This document will be discussed at the meeting of the **Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs** to be held **from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on 24 February 2015**. To allow time for translation, any amendments must be submitted through the online tool for tabling amendments (available on the Members' Portal: <http://cor.europa.eu/members>) **no later than 3 p.m. (Brussels time) on 16 February 2015**. A user guide is available on <http://toad.cor.europa.eu/CORHelp.aspx>.

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Reference document

COM(2014) 335 final

**Draft opinion of the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External  
Affairs – A decent life for all: from vision to collective action**

**I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

**Preliminary remark**

1. This draft opinion relates to the communication from the European Commission entitled "A decent life for all: from vision to collective action"<sup>1</sup>, on the European Union's input into the United Nations' efforts to develop a new transformative post-2015 agenda. It also covers the expected content of the forthcoming Commission communication on means of implementing this transformative agenda. The schedule of CoR meetings, combined with the international decision-making process, means that it is not possible to wait until the communication on means of implementation has been published before adopting the draft opinion, as it would then be too late to provide effective input into the decision-making process.

**General comments**

2. welcomes the Commission's commitment to making an active and constructive contribution to the adoption of a new, ambitious and necessary transformative post-2015 agenda, which will lay the foundations for addressing a range of connected key global challenges;
3. also welcomes the willingness of the EU and its Member States to work with all partners and stakeholders to reach consensus on this transformative agenda. The CoR endorses the view that this presents a unique opportunity to renew and strengthen cooperation within the international community;
4. shares the Commission's view that the agenda should be rights-based and that it is intrinsically linked to good governance, democracy and the rule of law. This ties in well with the previous communication on "increasing the impact of EU development policy: an agenda for change" and the associated CoR opinion<sup>2</sup>;
5. agrees that the principle of universality applies to the proposed priorities and goals, while taking account of national circumstances, capacities and levels of development and also recognising that the challenges can only be faced with the commitment and involvement of all stakeholders. This therefore also places demands on the EU's Member States, both in their own countries and in their cooperation among themselves and their contribution to international cooperation;

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2014) 335 final.

<sup>2</sup> CDR 364/2011.

6. welcomes the fact that the process of developing this agenda has so far proceeded in close consultation with, for example, local and regional authorities, and notes the importance of translating that consultation into structural cooperation, not only in the run-up to the summit in September 2015 at the General Assembly of the United Nations but also in the subsequent implementation and monitoring of the transformative agenda;

## Priorities

7. acknowledges the importance of all thematic priorities referred to in the Commission's communication, and notes that the objectives set by the UN have since evolved<sup>3</sup>, while preserving the essence of the priorities mentioned by the Commission;
8. points out that one striking difference between the priorities chosen in the communication and those set out by the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals<sup>4</sup> is the fact that the communication does not include strengthening the global partnership as a "priority". However, the CoR agrees with the Commission's approach of developing effective and extensive partnership as part of the means of implementation. In the CoR's view, it is in any case quite clear that a global partnership of this kind is now more necessary than ever in order to achieve the priorities or goals set;
9. consequently recommends broadening the priority of combating inequality. The text of this section currently refers only to inequality within countries; in line with the goals proposed by the OWG, the CoR suggests expanding this to include reducing inequality both within and between countries;
10. notes that, like the United Nations, the Commission has previously worked on the basis of sticking to a manageable number of goals, not least for communication reasons. This is one reason for proposing clustering. The Commission also quite rightly refers to "the strong interlinkages between priority areas and their related target topics" and the need to take account of these interlinkages;
11. in this context, once again highlights the importance of taking a territorial approach to development. The linkages between many of the goals and the problems on which they are based necessitate taking an integrated approach in terms of coherent geographical and administrative areas. This concept is not adequately emphasised in the communication;
12. precisely because this concept is barely visible in the communication, has mixed feelings concerning the suggestion, in point 4 on "possible clustering of priority areas", that the topic

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<sup>3</sup> As set out, *inter alia*, in *The Road to Dignity by 2030; Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet. Synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post- 2015 agenda*. New York, December 2014.

<sup>4</sup> <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>.

of "sustainable cities could be mainstreamed throughout the framework". The CoR considers the involvement of local and regional authorities to be absolutely indispensable in many of the goals, given their competences and the nature of the issue. However, the significant growth of urbanisation worldwide – which is set to continue in the coming decades – and its impact on the surrounding countryside also justify retaining "sustainable cities and human settlements" as a separate priority. We need to put this into practice in Europe, too<sup>5</sup>;

13. notes that, in point 3(2), the communication's approach to "sustainable cities and human settlements" also focuses too much on just the "challenges for sustainable development". Cities are also drivers of growth<sup>6</sup>, which helps to increase the potential for domestic resources and thus contributes to the financial basis for achieving other goals;

### **Local and regional involvement**

14. believes that the Commission is quite right to start from the basis that the transformative agenda requires the commitment and involvement of all stakeholders. Many of the listed priorities will require commitment at local level, in terms of both policy and decision-making and planning and implementation. This is not the place to analyse all of the priorities and target topics separately, but the communication could still be strengthened when it is translated to local level. The CoR calls for the process of "localising the post-2015 agenda" to be continued, and is keen to make its own contribution to this process;
15. welcomes the fact that the Commission acknowledges the need for a multilevel governance approach. Policies and action at international, national, regional and local level thus need to be properly tailored, on the basis of the subsidiarity principle. However, the CoR notes that the Commission does not always seem to consider local and regional authorities to be part of government, and in a significantly different position from NGOs and the private sector, and urges the Commission to give this due consideration in the forthcoming communication on means of implementing the post-2015 agenda;
16. points out that, in order to make the best possible use of all levels of government and ensure that they interact effectively, there needs to be cooperation between national governments and local and regional authorities. This starts with the development of goals, indicators and targets at country level, but also covers the choice of measures and their implementation, and monitoring and evaluation with a view to learning lessons and making improvements. The communication too often dismisses local and regional authorities as simply implementing bodies;
17. therefore considers it worth emphasising once again the political role played by local and regional authorities, as so well expressed in Commission communication COM(2013) 280

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<sup>5</sup> [CdR 7987/2013](#).

<sup>6</sup> COTER-V-046.

final. Local and regional authorities weigh up policy issues and take political decisions, as well as implementing policies set at national level in some areas;

18. for that reason, and without wishing to detract from the importance of accountability *per se*, would take issue with the passage in point 3 "Accountability", which gives local authorities "a key role" in monitoring national governments (among others) and holding them accountable. The CoR feels that this is not an accurate reflection of the relationships within the government, and would instead seek to strengthen cooperation and consistency in the actions of the government as a whole;

### **Progress, monitoring and accountability**

19. agrees that it is important for the future framework to be based on accountability, transparency and effective review of progress. The CoR also shares the Commission's view that participation and accountability, as well as high-quality rules and institutions, are crucial in this regard;
20. stresses that effective monitoring of progress starts with clear objectives and targets. As stated in the communication, these do indeed need to take account of differences in national circumstances. However, the Communication also quite rightly states that, "ultimately, the work at target level, including indicators should be framed so as to drive the necessary transformation in all countries at various levels of development in order to achieve the universal goals". In other words, diversity does not provide *carte blanche* to evade commitments: the interdependence of the challenges we are facing makes that impossible. There is thus a need for genuine horizontal accountability;
21. points out that there are variations in circumstances not only between countries but also within individual countries that justify differences in indicators, approaches or targets. This needs to be discussed between national governments and local and regional authorities. Here, too, there needs to be horizontal accountability: learning from each other through benchmarks, peer reviews, etc., is often a better approach in this context than vertical accountability and penalties;
22. believes that the transformative agenda will, in part, draw its strength from the broad base of support for it, and from the willingness of all stakeholders at all levels to engage with it. The local level is also important in terms of participation and accountability. Local and regional authorities are keen to commit to this, and are willing to contribute to data collection with a view to monitoring and further implementation of the transformative agenda. The CoR urges the Commission and Member States to ensure that data collection remains proportionate, in terms of the objective it serves and of the financial and time investment it requires;
23. therefore shares the Commission's view that it is crucial to improve use of existing data. Data collection should, as far as possible, be embedded in existing structures, which should be

strengthened where necessary for that purpose. This could include the civil registry, the land registry, chambers of commerce, tax authorities, etc.;

### **Means of implementation**

24. points out that such a comprehensive agenda requires a whole range of associated implementation means: financial and non-financial; legally binding or based purely on a firm voluntary commitment; initiated by science and technology, by industry, or by NGOs; economic mechanisms such as fair trade, etc. The CoR supports the Commission's commitment to ensuring the necessary mix of instruments, and is focusing in this opinion on certain aspects that are of specific interest to local and regional authorities;
25. considers it to be quite clear that local and regional authorities will need to play a significant role in implementing the transformative agenda. It should therefore be equally clear that one of the key factors in effective implementation is for said authorities to have real clout. Among other things, this requires legitimacy and clearly defined powers and responsibilities: in other words, fully-fledged decentralisation. This concept appears to be absent from the means of implementation;
26. stresses that responsibilities can only be fulfilled if the necessary resources are also provided. This could take the form of transfers from national government to local and regional authorities, but could also involve allowing the necessary scope to mobilise local resources, e.g. via local taxation. This is another aspect of fully-fledged decentralisation. This is another point where, in the CoR's view, the means of implementation – the mobilisation of domestic resources alongside international aid – focus too narrowly on the national level;
27. notes that the means of implementation also include technical assistance and capacity building. In many countries, there is still little or no decentralisation, which means that the capacities of local and regional authorities are often also limited. The CoR therefore considers it indispensable to provide these countries with comprehensive and sustained support in technical assistance and capacity building, so that the local level can make the necessary contribution to the transformative agenda. Success or failure at this level has a significant impact on public perception of the government as a whole. The EU therefore needs to highlight the importance of technical assistance and capacity building, and make them an even more prominent part of its programmes;
28. sees decentralised cooperation as an important conduit for capacity building in local and regional authorities. The exchange of knowledge between local authorities also brings added value, both within the EU and between other more developed countries, in terms of implementing the transformative agenda. With reference to its earlier opinions<sup>7</sup>, the CoR therefore calls on the Commission to specifically add "decentralised cooperation" to the array

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For example, CDR 732/2012.

of means of implementation. Decentralised cooperation currently represents just 0.3% of the Commission's development budget, and the CoR calls for this to be increased;

29. once again offers the resources it has at its disposal to contribute to the implementation of the transformative agenda and the ongoing exchange of views, knowledge and experience in that connection: the information and discussion platform (portal) for local and regional authorities for development<sup>8</sup>, the atlas of decentralised cooperation, the biannual dialogue on decentralised cooperation (known as the "Assizes"), and two international forums – the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) and the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP);
30. stresses, finally, that implementation of the transformative agenda requires broad public acceptance. Institutions cannot do it alone, even if they run the gamut from governments, via businesses and knowledge institutions, to NGOs. Once again, the importance of the local level is not to be underestimated. In recent years, activities relating to the Millennium Development Goals have been held in countless towns and villages throughout Europe. There are 1200 Fair Trade Towns<sup>9</sup> in Europe so far, and we now have the first Fair Trade Regions as well; for decades, hundreds of twinning agreements between European municipalities and their partners in other parts of the world have been drivers for inclusion, understanding and insight in international relations; and in many areas local and regional authorities are helping to shape the European Year for Development 2015. The CoR recommends continuing to make use of this network in the coming years to get the public involved in the transformative agenda, with a view to participation and acceptance, accountability and inclusiveness, as well as its contribution to sustainable change;
31. considers the transformative agenda to be comprehensive, ambitious and necessary. It will require commitment from everybody, at all levels and in all parts of the world. Local and regional authorities in Europe are standing ready to make their contribution, alongside the others.

Brussels,

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<sup>8</sup>

<http://lra4dev.cor.europa.eu/portal/EN/Pages/welcome.aspx>.

<sup>9</sup>

See also the draft opinion on local and regional support for fair trade in Europe (rapporteur: Barbara Duden).



## II. PROCEDURE

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|---|---|
| <b>Title</b>  | A decent life for all: from vision to collective action   |
| <b>Reference(s)</b>   | COM (2014) 335  |
| <b>Legal basis</b>  | Own-initiative opinion (Art. 307(1)), Rule 41 b)i) RoP)   |
| <b>Procedural basis</b>                                       |   |
| <b>Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter</b>  |   |
| <b>Date of Bureau/President's decision</b>                    |   |
| <b>Commission responsible</b>                                 | Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs  |
| <b>Rapporteur</b>   | J.F.M. (Hans) Janssen (NL/EPP)  |
| <b>Analysis</b>   | 16 October 2014   |
| <b>Discussed in commission</b>                                | 24 February 2015  |
| <b>Date adopted by commission</b>                             | 24 February 2015  |
| <b>Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)</b> |   |
| <b>Date adopted in plenary</b>                                | Scheduled for 16-17 April 2015  |
| <b>Previous Committee opinions</b>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– CdR 2010/2013, opinion on <i>empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes</i>. Rapporteur: Hans Janssen (NL/EPP) – adopted at the session of 7-9 October 2013</li> <li>– CdR 732/2012, opinion on <i>global Europe: a new approach to financing EU external action</i>. Rapporteur: Lotta Håkansson Harju (SE/PES) – adopted at the session of 8-10 October 2012</li> <li>– CdR 364/2011, opinion on <i>increasing the impact of EU development policy: an agenda for change</i>. Rapporteur: Jesús Gamallo Aller (ES/EPP) – adopted at the session of 15-16 February 2012</li> <li>– CdR 408/2010, opinion on <i>EU development policy in support of inclusive growth and sustainable development – increasing the impact of EU development policy</i>. Rapporteur: Jesús Gamallo Aller (ES/EPP) – adopted at the session of 11-12 May 2011</li> </ul> |
| <b>Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation</b>           |   |