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(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

123RD PLENARY SESSION, 11-12 MAY 2017

Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions on the European Commission White Paper on the Future of Europe — Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025

(2017/C 306/01)

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR)

1. takes note of the European Commission's 'White Paper on the future of Europe: Reflections and Scenarios for the EU27 by 2025' as one of the important contributions to the current round of debates on the Union's future development, which must lead to tangible results ahead of the June 2019 European elections and beyond;
2. welcomes the Rome declaration in which the signatories state that they 'will work together at the level that makes a real difference, be it the European Union, national, regional, or local, and in a spirit of trust and loyal cooperation, both among Member States and between them and the EU institutions, in line with the principle of subsidiarity';
3. is committed to unconditional respect for the founding values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights as well as respect for the objectives of the EU, including the aspiration to create an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, as defined in the Treaties and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;
4. highlights the fact that the supposedly key role of devolved local and regional bodies envisaged by the Lisbon Treaty has not been fully realised in a genuine approach of subsidiarity and participation in the European legislative process. As it is, regional bodies still tend to be almost always on the receiving end of EU policies rather than playing a meaningful role in drawing them up, particularly as regards the legislative process;
5. recalls that the EU's policies and institutions were not created as aims in themselves, but must be at the service of citizens if they are to achieve the overarching aims and values of the European Union; underlines that these institutions and policies are based on the compromises needed to balance different interests and views and reflect the outcome of democratic processes; therefore hopes that in the search for the broadest possible consensus, rather than allowing minimalist compromises to prevail, political solutions anchored in common solidarity — the fundamental principle of a united Europe — will be pursued, an approach that will also serve to overcome the current sense of scepticism and thus restore people's faith in the European project;
6. as the EU's political assembly of local and regional representatives, believes in the importance of decisions being taken as close to citizens as possible and with shared sovereignty at EU level as a way to improve the capacity of each and every EU citizen to shape his or her destiny;

7. stresses that economic, social and territorial cohesion within the EU is essential, and underlines that effective and balanced economic and social development is crucial to reducing disparities between EU regions; in this respect, cohesion policy is the policy which most directly enables local and regional authorities to take part in the European integration process and build solidarity, as well as demonstrating the benefits of EU membership at local and regional level. Cohesion policy is an indispensable EU policy that offers particular European added value, therefore the CoR strongly rejects any scenario for the future of the EU, which would limit cohesion policy or abolish it altogether and expresses its dismay that an official document of the Commission could even consider such a hypothesis;

8. understands that the scenarios presented in the White Paper are a wake-up call, highlighting the risks and opportunities for the EU as well as providing a warning that no part of the so-called 'acquis' can be taken for granted; stresses that the debate on the speed or intensity of EU integration should not detract attention from the fact that the real challenge is to avoid a multi-directional Europe; is convinced that the focus must be on the unity and respect for diversity and for local specificities needed to ensure a sustainable future for all EU citizens;

9. emphasises that one of the unique aspects of the European Union is its multi-level governance structure and regrets that this aspect is not recognised in the White Paper; also regrets that the White Paper does not present the territorial implications of the different scenarios presented. Highlights the fact that cities and regions on the whole enjoy greater trust from citizens; therefore believes that citizens and their hopes, expectations and concerns must be at the centre of all political actions and stresses that any discussions about the future of the European Union and reforms resulting from these debates must be bottom-up, involving all levels of governance; points out that in any event, the 'Community' method and spirit of working must take precedence over the 'intergovernmental' approach in all the EU's decision-making processes;

10. agrees with the key priority areas identified in the White Paper and in the Rome declaration, and strongly believes that the European Commission, as the supra-national guardian of the EU Treaties and the institution entrusted to promote the general interest of the Union, should put forward detailed proposals on these matters; the CoR stands ready to provide its political response and suggestions from a local and regional perspective;

11. so as to enable a stronger European representative and participatory democracy, calls for a revision and simplification of the European Citizens Initiative. Underlines the need to introduce a legal obligation for the European Commission not only to examine but to open a debate followed by a vote in the Council of the EU and the European Parliament on a successful ECI which gathers 1 million signatures, and suggests exploring other means of facilitating the exercise of participating in EU decision-making ⁽¹⁾;

12. highlights a number of elements that are vital for defining a credible and ambitious scenario for the future of the European Union from the viewpoint of regions and cities:

12.1 an active European citizenship which encourages exchanges and cooperation with and between citizens in order to foster a European identity and a sense of ownership of the European project;

12.2 applying the principles of partnership, multilevel governance and subsidiarity across all policy areas, as well as encouraging collaboration between all sectors in society, in order to achieve a more democratic, effective and reformed EU;

12.3 strengthening the social dimension of the EU and of the Economic and Monetary Union; expects that a legislative proposal for a European Pillar of Social Rights would allow labour rights and labour mobility in a changing labour market to be addressed while respecting the principle of subsidiarity; this proposal should not consist of soft law, complementing the existing acquis, but should contain measures with the same force as those taken in connection with the Economic and Monetary Union, as this would help increase citizens' perception of a more social EU that is capable of resolving their problems;

⁽¹⁾ Resolution on Improving the functioning of the European Union: Lisbon Treaty and beyond (RESOL-VI/005).

12.4 a fully accountable and transparent EU, where citizens are able to recognise clearly who is politically responsible and accountable for the decisions taken in the European Union and where all levels of governance take their share of the responsibility for taking and implementing decisions;

12.5 a comprehensive, properly financed, long-term and credible strategy to achieve and strengthen the foundations of economic and social cohesion and convergence between regions in the EU, and ensure upward social convergence, with human security as its cornerstone and incorporating the UN sustainable development goals into the EU's own short and medium term programmes and implementing actions that are in line with the Agenda 2030 parameters;

12.6 greater involvement of the regions in European decision-making — the process of drafting legislation and taking political decisions, as well as that of implementing and disseminating — is a prerequisite for positive and tangible European integration and for gaining greater trust on the part of the people of Europe. To this end, it would be advisable for any plans for a new European political and institutional framework to also look into the possibility of establishing a representative legislative chamber of the regions and autonomous areas;

12.7 a social EU that promotes equality between women and men and equal rights and opportunities for all; that combats unemployment, discrimination, social exclusion and poverty; an EU in which young people receive the best education and training and are able to study and find work throughout the continent; an EU that preserves our cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity;

12.8 an innovative, digital and entrepreneurial Europe with cities and regions acting as catalysers and enablers for the creation of new jobs and sustainable growth, particularly for young people;

12.9 an EU budget based on genuine own resources, that is adequate to the EU's ambitions and that strengthens the role of public and private investments in boosting growth and jobs for EU citizens;

12.10 a deeper, fairer and more inclusive European Monetary Union, endowed with the necessary policy instruments to prevent asymmetric shocks and promote social, economic and territorial cohesion, including a fiscal capacity complementary to the EU budget;

12.11 a fully integrated area of freedom, security and justice based on fundamental rights, complete freedom of movement, joint protection of external borders, and a common migration and asylum policy based on human rights, as well as shared commitments particularly in efforts to deal with the current migration situation;

12.12 ensuring full transparency and democratic control at all levels of governance in shaping fair and balanced international trade agreements;

12.13 a common foreign, neighbourhood and defence policy for global stability and a commitment to projecting the EU's values; openness to enlargement when conditions are met, while respecting the EU's integration capacity.

12.14 an EU close to its citizens and able to transmit to them its achievements and future challenges in a clear and understandable manner;

13. is committed to engaging in a bottom-up process with citizens and elected representatives in the EU's regions, cities, towns and villages, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to identify their needs and expectations in relation to the EU over the coming months; underlines that the outcome of this exercise, together with concrete recommendations, will be included in the CoR opinion on 'Reflecting on Europe: the voice of regional and local authorities in rebuilding trust in the European Union';

14. calls on the European Parliament to repeat the *Spitzenkandidaten* process for the European elections of 2019, and offers to help raise awareness of the process and its importance via its network of local and regional politicians;

15. is determined to contribute to a transparent and democratic process of institutional and political reform, with EU citizens at its core and taking into account the EU, national, regional and local levels of governance in time for the results to be put to Europe's citizens in the European elections 2019;

16. underlines that local and regional government, as the level closest to citizens and the main provider of public services, need to have a more prominent role in the EU's decision-making process if the EU is to continue working on areas of local and regional government competence. Therefore, calls for legislation impacting local and regional government to be subject to CoR consent;

17. recalls that some of the changes which citizens may consider a priority could necessitate a revision of the Treaties and insists that in that case, the Convention method according to Art. 48.3 must be used and the CoR should have full representation in such a Convention.

Brussels, 12 May 2017.

*The President
of the European Committee of the Regions*

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