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Brussels, 27 November 2020

**200th MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS BUREAU**

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**- 7 DECEMBER** **2020 -**

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**ITEM 9 B**

**CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE:
MOBILISING LOCAL AND REGIONAL POLITICIANS TO ENHANCE
THE COR'S IMPACT**

*Submitted by the secretary-general*

**FOR DECISION**

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| **SUMMARY** |
| **Bureau meeting:** | **200** | **Date:** | **7/12/2020** |
| **Item 9 b****Conference on the Future of Europe:Mobilising Local and Regional Politicians to enhance the CoR's impact** |
| **Type:** |
| [ ]  | **Document for information / debate** |
| [x]  | **Document for decision** |
| [ ]  | **Recommendation to the Assembly** |
| **Short description:**The Conference on the Future of Europe is due to be launched before the end of the year. The CoR is already preparing for its political participation in the institutional strand. This document sets out the measures proposed for the outreach strand. In addition to the possibilities for members to propose local dialogues, the document explains the measures to mobilise all local and regional politicians to support the Conference. This includes stepping up our cooperation with the associations of local and regional authorities (LRA) at EU and national level, conceiving a network of EU councillors for the conference and creating a network of former CoR members.  |
| **The Bureau is invited to:*** **endorse the initiatives outlined in this document.**
 |
| **Remarks:****-** |

# **Introduction**

The Conference of Presidents has consistently highlighted the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) as possibly the most important political opportunity of the current mandate. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) will have its own important political role to play in the institutional strand as the voice of local and regional politicians. This document explains how the CoR will engage with local and regional politicians throughout the conference process.

We know that there are more than a million such politicians elected in the 250 regions and 90 000 municipalities of the 27 Member States. In political terms, the CoR's mandate is to voice their European interests – from the most powerful regional presidents and city mayors to councillors from rural areas and outermost communities. In communication terms, they are the target audience for the outreach work of the CoR, including raising awareness of the conference. The CoR should partner with other European institutions and with European and national associations of LRAs to engage with the million politicians and the conference gives renewed focus to this endeavour, which builds upon what has already been done in previous years and which must continue to expand and grow.

# **Cooperation with European and national associations of LRAs in the context of the CoFoE**

Following the recommendation of the outgoing Bureau of the last CoR mandate, the secretary general will present in December an update of the framework under which the CoR cooperates with associations of LRAs. An accompanying document also focuses on the role associations can play to enhance the outreach of the CoR in view of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

# **A network of local and regional EU Councillors across Europe**

*The Project*

In July 2018, The European Commission adopted the **"**[**Active Subsidiarity: A New Way of Working**](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/files/report-task-force-subsidiarity-proportionality-and-doing-less-more-efficiently_en)**"** report. This was the fruit of the work of the Task Force on Subsidiarity, proportionality and doing less more efficiently, a major political exercise in which the CoR participated actively. Recommendation 4 of the report in particular stressed the need to raise awareness among local and regional authorities of their opportunities to contribute to EU policy-making.

Among eight concrete actions in the report, the CoR was called on to play its part in developing and promoting innovative actions to communicate better with citizens (the example of the programme of EU local councillors (Europagemeinderäte) developed in Austria was quoted). The CoR echoed this request in its opinion on "Rights and values" on the Commission's Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Rights, Values and Citizenship programme (COM(2018) 383 final) adopted in October 2018[[1]](#footnote-1). In its opinion the CoR asked for "the establishment of a network of 'municipal councillors' in charge of Europe on the Austrian model to collect information on matters of topical European interest and serve as an interface between the public and the European Union.".

Regional and local councils across the Union could be invited to nominate one of their members as an EU local/regional Councillor and inform the CoR. Those authorities already having councillors responsible for European affairs would be invited to inform the CoR and join a dedicated network. The EU councillors would receive a rough "job description" of what would be expected from them and what support he/she may be expecting to carry out the function. This could be done in close cooperation with the main European Political Families and with the national associations of authorities in the Member States. The European Parliament and the European Commission shall be invited to join this initiative as well. Synergies with the €800k pilot project proposed by the AFCO committee of the EP 'Building Europe with Local Entities' should be explored.

The project should be supported by a narrative in all official languages and could also integrate a number of existing initiatives or proposed new initiatives involving politicians who accept to become also involved as EU councillors such as:

* **regional politicians being active in the RegHubs initiative:** although formally a response to Recommendation 8 of the Subsidiarity Task Force, this newly created CoR network can have an awareness-building effect well beyond the 36 members. With the announcement on 11 May 2020 of its inclusion in the Fit 4 Future platform by the European Commission, it gained an important credibility boost ahead of the next phase of implementation (review process ongoing). The Bureau decided at its last meeting on the extension of this network, bringing in yet more politicians;
* **the regional and local politicians supporting the #CohesionAlliance:** engagement with the other European Associations on #CohesionAlliance 2.0 focuses on applying cohesion principles to other areas of the EU budget, including the participation of local and regional authorities in the design and implementation of EU spending programmes. One particular priority is showcasing cross-border collaboration and building on the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation.
* The **Young Elected Politicians programme**, also known as Erasmus for young politicians, was inaugurated at the Bucharest Summit in 2019. Already over 250 YEPs have taken part and an online portal "YEPcommunity.eu" enables them to keep in touch, sharing best practices and experiences. More than 100 YEPs took part in the (fully-digital) programme for European Week of Regions and Cities which ended on 22 October;
* **Regional and local politicians in charge of a Europe Direct Information Centre (EDIC)**; funded by the European Commission, this EU network provides information to the public through 440 information centres. Many of these centres are hosted in local or regional authorities and thus provide a link on the ground with regional and local elected politicians. In several cases, the EDIC is managed directly by a CoR member. A European Commission pilot project involving the CoR will run between November 2020 and March 2021 in 14 regions in eight Member States[[2]](#footnote-2).

The project would include:

1. establishment of the network of European local councillors by the CoR;
2. the progressive establishment of a contact point within the CoR administration helping to establish two-way communication and link EU Councillors among themselves and to channel positions to the CoR and other EU institutions;
3. the "app for the members" proposed in the 2019 CoR Digital Strategy; a prototype of this app is now ready for testing. The investment put in the development of this app could be even more valuable, if the CoR uses it also for reach out purposes beyond its membership. In this way, synergies between a better service to CoR members and the reach out to the one million of elected local and regional politicians could be used. The app could be offered to the local and regional "EU Councillors". They would be able to use the communication features of app without having access to those functions that will remain accessible only for CoR members. Through the app they would be reached by the CoR during the work of the CoFoE insofar allowing the CoR to collect their position on the main topics at stake and, in a further step, could be used by the CoR to collect data and trends during the drafting process of a limited but politically relevant CoR opinions.

*The link to the Conference on the Future of Europe*

In relation to the Conference, the CoR has the ambition to be a clearing-house for input from local and regional politicians. The EU Councillors network could be a valuable tool to inform the 1 million elected local and regional politicians about the work of the conference and to get input from the councils for the CoR's delegation in the Conference. Stronger engagement with key politicians further reinforces the credibility of the CoR's participation through the delegation of its members in the Conference's plenary.

A **tailor-made offer to the councillors in the network** during the CoFoE would be made. This would include:

* Information via e-newsletters;
* Information about political debates and events (in particular linked to the Conference on the Future of Europe) and possibility to follow them online and to provide input from the ground;
* Information about and participation in surveys and consultations organised by the CoR, the European Parliament, the Council Presidency or the Commission;
* Support in the organisation of citizens' dialogues in cooperation with CoR members, the EC or EP Representation Offices or the European Direct Information Centres (EDIC);
* Distribution of information material on the political work of the CoR and promotional material;
* Cooperation with the CoR visitors service to receive visitors groups, hosted events etc.

# **A Network of Former Members of the CoR**

During the last Bureau meeting of the previous mandate (held on 3/12/2019), Bureau members suggested that the administration should propose an initiative to ensure that former CoR members could continue to be involved in the CoR's work. In particular, former or existing Regional Presidents and Mayors who have or not been CoR members, former CoR members who are Members of the European Parliament, Members of the European Commission or National or Regional Ministers representing their country in the Council could be a valuable help in bringing forward the CoR's political priorities in the broader EU legislative process as well as in the specific context of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

It is proposed to launch the CoR initiative under a more flexible format of an informal network, with a goal-oriented approach. The initiative would be open to all 2116 ex-CoR members since 1994 (781 members and 1335 alternates), who would be invited by an open call to manifest their interest to be part of the network, i.e. on a strictly voluntary basis. A particular focus could be given to the ex-CoR members who were active during the 5th and 6th mandate (2010-2020) or are now members of the European Parliament, the European Commission, one of the Council formations or still have a political role at regional and local level.

Ex-members interested in joining this Network of Former Members of the CoR could be provided with online workshops to refresh their knowledge of the CoR functioning and current political activities and files, with a particular focus on CoR Barometer and activities linked to the Conference on the Future of Europe.

With an estimated interest of about 10% of ex-CoR members, one could foresee to carry out this activity with an annual budget of EUR 30 000 in the first year (2021). The CoR's protocol unit will be the lead service to set up the network and link it with other services and CoR activities. The CoR could consider offering the following service to former members/alternates who would manifest their interest:

* **Policy-related**
* Activation of informal contacts when needed to influence the EU agenda setting and/or concrete EU legislative proposals in the Member States or in other EU institutions;
* Targeted invitation (without reimbursement) to EWRC, EuroPCom and selected events;
* A possible annual workshop;
* Involvement in events linked to the Conference on the Future of Europe, Green Deal, etc.
* **Communication**
* Members would be provided with a communication toolkit and offered voluntary involvement in local events, via EDICs, by submitting the list of CoR alumni to DG COMM
* Synergies with CoR visitor's service and Young European Politicians Programme
* CoR newsletters and information material
* Participation in surveys and polls
* Information/invitations (without reimbursement) to events organised by the CoR
* **Logistics**
* Special Badge to access CoR buildings/meeting rooms
* Possible logistic support for hosted events organised by ex-CoR members according to the rules in force (conferences, visitor's groups, etc.)
* Basic administrative support of the network by the CoR protocol service.
* **Financial**
* Possible reimbursement of the invitation of some ex-CoR members to certain well targeted events in the interest of/on behalf of the CoR
* Possible invitation as speakers to local dialogues.

# **A renewed programme of Local Dialogues**

The "Reflecting on Europe" series of local events supported Members' dialogues with citizens was launched in 2016 providing a platform for citizen engagement in the ongoing debate on the future of Europe. Through a dedicated [online survey](https://cor.europa.eu/ReflectingEU/Pages/survey/survey-langaugeselector.html?utm_source=ShortURL&utm_medium=Other&utm_campaign=Debate-EN) and over 210 local debates across the EU, organised in cooperation with local and regional partners, the CoR provided citizens with opportunities to share their views and proposals on how the EU should evolve in the next decade.

The overall success of "Reflecting on Europe" was recognised in the report of the European Council in December 2018 and formed the basis of the call for a permanent dialogue mechanism. The McDonnell Opinion adopted in October 2020 takes this idea forward through a proposed CitizEN network of practitioners of deliberative democracy.

Anticipating the launch of the Conference, the CoR has launched a further call to Members and will support them in digital local dialogues. The CoR will interact with the European Parliament and the Commission to maximise synergies. The package of support measures includes:

* Help with conception and preparation (timing, theme, speakers, briefing);
* Organisation of the digital local dialogue through an appropriate digital platform with moderation and interpretation (for example where needed for cross-border dialogues);
* Communication support for the digital local dialogue before the event to encourage participation;
* Preparing the readout from the event (with translation where necessary), identifying the key issues linked to the thematic priorities of the CoFoE;
* Ensuring the outcomes of all Members' digital local dialogues are published in the inter-institutional digital platform being developed by the European Commission specifically for the CoFoE;
* Transmission of the feedback into the CoR's work in the institutional strand of CoFoE as well as ongoing legislative work through the CoR Commissions;
* Collating the overall input of regions and cities' input to the CoFoE;
* Inclusion of the dialogue in the evidence base for the 2021 EU Regional and Local Barometer;
* Inclusion in a final report to be prepared for the 2022 European Summit of Regions and Cities.

**A first set of Digital Local Dialogues was submitted for approval to the CFAA on 17 November 2020. To use existing synergies, the initiative will be interlinked with the EU Councillors initiative and the CoR Alumni network.**

**PROPOSAL:**

**Bureau members are invited to endorse the initiatives outlined in this document.**

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1. COR-2018-03994-00-01-AC-TRA (EN) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Austria: Burgenland, Niederösterreich, Wien; France: Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes; Hungary: Transdanubia; Italy: Piemonte; Poland: Dolnośląskie, Opolskie, Śląskie; Portugal: Centro, Norte; Spain: Castilla y León; Sweden: Skåne, Halland. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)