

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — The CoR's role in boosting subnational climate diplomacy ahead of COP27 and COP28**

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**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR),

1. stresses the importance of subnational governments in achieving climate ambition with a focus on the future implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in fulfilling the provisions of the Paris Agreement in order to achieve the goal of limiting global warming to 1,5 °C;
2. regrets the lack of recognition of the role of subnational authorities in the Council Conclusions of 21 February 2022 on 'EU Climate Diplomacy: accelerating the implementation of Glasgow outcomes', stressing the key importance of climate diplomacy and of EU outreach to third countries in order to speed up the implementation of the COP26 Glasgow Climate Pact.
3. urges the national governments when negotiating the terms of global climate goals and define National Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) to truly involve their local and regional governments, as they are the actors concretely delivering on their international pledges and commitments; considers therefore that NDCs not endorsed by LRAs are not likely to be successfully implemented and that UNFCCC should systematically check this step before accepting them; in this context, calls on national governments to include both regional and local delegates in their national negotiating delegations to the UNFCCC climate summit;
4. emphasises the fact that cities and regions are at the forefront in dealing with the consequences of climate change, such as climate-related disasters, social impacts such as energy poverty and increasing weather-related health problems, environmental problems such as the dramatic loss of biodiversity, ecosystems and their services, and existing inequalities that climate change deepens; highlights that subnational climate diplomacy is necessary to meet national climate targets, as local and regional authorities (LRAs) prepare and implement detailed adaptation and mitigation plans that accurately take into account local environmental conditions, socioeconomic requirements, energy and climate justice;
5. stresses that successful climate actions carried out by cities and regions can be more ambitious than national targets without impairing growth and territorial cohesion. This shows a strong 'demonstration effect' and provides leverage to national and sub-national political groups that aim at adopting more progressive climate policies;
6. believes it essential to support cities and regions' climate networks and strengthen their subnational climate diplomacy activities in order to build up critical political resilience against national level backsliding and therefore safeguard the achievement of global climate goals;

7. recognises that, by engaging with relevant local and regional stakeholders, including businesses, universities and research centres, civil society organisations and citizens, cities and regions contribute to increasing awareness and public acceptance of climate actions at local, regional, national and global level, as well as enable and promote a good life for all within planetary boundaries;
8. recalls that climate agenda was one of the main topics raised by the citizens' panels and Plenary of the Conference of the Future of Europe, resulting in 49 proposals complemented by detailed measures. EU citizens call for an accelerated green transition, the need to focus on education, better communication and addressing social justice <sup>(1)</sup>;
9. reminds that climate change has a distinct gendered dimension, as globally women are more affected by the consequences of climate change; therefore, women leaders' participation in climate negotiations is paramount for effective climate action, and subnational climate diplomacy can help bridge this gap, as proportionately more women are active in local politics;
10. emphasises that cities host numbers of young people who are at the forefront of climate action, forming new movements and initiatives, such as the Youth Climate Strike, creating a new type of pressure on local, regional and central governments. Through collaboration with the youth organisations, cities provide young people with right tools, platforms, and shelters to express their own opinions via street gatherings or participation in the local council meetings. Ultimately cities and regions actively create leaders of tomorrow, ready to address local problems and represent their own community;
11. points out, that the involvement of LRAs is particularly important in identifying the opportunities and risks that planned climate activities present for employment, income and economic activity of different genders, age groups, occupational groups and business areas;
12. believes that, given the proximity with citizens, cities and regions are instruments for achieving community empowerment, self-determination, and good governance: subnational diplomacy creates a direct connection between citizens and global affairs, overcoming the democratic deficits of traditional multilateral policy-making where citizens lack participation in the decisions taken;
13. believes that subnational climate diplomacy can contribute to overcoming specific challenges faced in state-to-state diplomacy, such as frequent deadlock situations and North/South divides;
14. draws attention to international alliances of regions and municipalities for climate action, such as the Under2 Coalition, which make an important contribution to international climate policy at subnational level and should therefore be more closely involved in the UN negotiations; calls on the Commission to include these alliances in its climate diplomacy;
15. points out several levels at which subnational actors move the international and EU climate agenda forward:
  - (a) adopting progressive climate policies within their jurisdictions while engaging local stakeholders and representatives of various groups in order to boost implementation;
  - (b) engaging other subnational actors in horizontal diplomacy to commit to ambitious climate goals, thus creating broader and stronger communities of climate ambitious territories;
  - (c) through vertical diplomacy, influencing national environmental and climate policy, and providing a strong voice in the climate debate and state negotiations; limiting the potential damage in the case of adverse national policies;

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<sup>(1)</sup> Proposal 3 / Measure 11 calls for increasing the EU's leadership and taking stronger role and responsibility to promote ambitious climate action, a just transition and support to address loss and damages in the international framework.

- (d) promoting UNFCCC work for climate protection at the local level; contributing a distinct perspective to the UNFCCC negotiation process;
- (e) enabling citizen participation and dialogue of large number and variety of citizens, to increase climate action, commitment acceptability of further climate policies;
- (f) collaborating with the states to improve national Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV), as local and regional governments can provide more detailed and accurate information;
- (g) providing capacity-building, institutional support or technical assistance to third countries;

16. identifies the main cooperation challenges for the future development of subnational climate diplomacy between regional and local authorities in the EU and in third countries:

- (a) the dependence on the level of decentralisation, political autonomy, and local democracy;
- (b) the limited legal framework outlining the rules on cooperation between cities and regions, as well as the uneven and insufficient cooperation between cities/regions and national governments;
- (c) insufficient funding and cooperation between cities/regions and financing institutions;
- (d) lack of technical staff and support, capacity building and encouragement in particular of smaller and less developed cities and regions;
- (e) missing data on collaboration initiatives, preventing the proper tracking of subnational climate diplomacy and the assessment of its full impact and importance;
- (f) lack of a structured regular dialogue with the subnational level in climate negotiations and during the COP meetings.
- (g) lack of involvement of local and regional governments in the preparation of Nationally Determined Contributions;

17. calls, therefore, on the European Commission to address the gaps and limitations and to boost subnational climate diplomacy between EU cities, regions and the EU's neighbouring and partnering countries ahead of the next Conferences of the Parties in Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and beyond;

18. recognises the importance of focusing on big cities given their economic power and significant role in both causing and potentially being key solutions to the climate crisis; however, the nature of climate change requires a response that is thoroughly integrated across the whole territory and calls therefore for emphasis to be placed also on small and intermediary cities, which suffer from more limited participation to networks, city diplomacy and have lower international recognition; moreover, existing international and local rural networks should be used to facilitate knowledge exchange;

19. stresses that the world's archipelagos and islands are particularly vulnerable to climate change, and calls for better exchanges of climate knowledge between EU islands and between these and islands in the rest of the world;

20. stands ready to serve as the main coordinating institution for subnational climate diplomacy in the EU and its neighbouring countries. The CoR is ready to assume greater responsibility at COP meetings, to play a coordinating role, and to represent the positions of regional and local authorities from the EU, in partnership with the Western Balkans and Turkey as well as EU's Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood;

21. commits, to present the proposals of ARLEM and CORLEAP on climate issues to the UNFCCC, via its participation in the official EU delegation to the CoP; calls for the inclusion of LRAs in all stages of the preparation and the negotiations of the CoP;

22. calls on the European institutions, international financial institutions and all international partners, including LRAs in the EU who will contribute to the rebuilding and reconstruction of Ukrainian cities and towns as well as industrial and energy sites destroyed by the Russian war, to gear reconstruction investment towards the key aspects of the Paris Agreement as well as towards the objectives of the EU's Green Deal, with a view to achieving the target of net zero emissions by 2050, renewables-based energy autonomy, a carbon-free economy, sustainable agriculture, conservation and restoration of ecosystems and biodiversity;

23. welcomes the establishment of a dedicated agenda within the UNFCCC process — the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) and the Gender Action Plan (GAP) — for addressing the lack of gender-responsive and gender-sensitive implementation of climate policies and ensuring that women's voices are included in the global discussion and international negotiations on climate change, and specifically welcomes the appointment of national gender and climate change focal points (NGCCFP) for every party; stands ready to cooperate with UNFCCC and other relevant partners in this field;

24. understands the role of cities in the phenomenon of global climate migration, providing jobs and shelters for those who run away from the adverse and hostile environmental conditions. LRAs are currently facing unprecedented economic and humanitarian challenges due to climate change impacts, as a recipient of climate refugees who pressure already limited resources that cities can provide. At the same time LRAs, together with local organisations and other stakeholders, can provide timely response to the issues such as social distress and ecological disaster caused by human influx into urban areas;

#### **CoR external relations bodies' commitment to the global climate agenda**

25. recognises that cooperation between European LRAs and their peers in third countries plays an important role in promoting subnational climate diplomacy, i.e. through alliance building and actions to promote, expand and finance existing and new initiatives that support exchanges of knowledge and best practices by European, national, regional and local networks as well as city-to-city cooperation, such as peer-reviews and mutual learning activities, site visits, green twinning, partner-to-partner mentoring and coaching;

26. points out that all CoR external relations bodies and platforms (ARLEM, CORLEAP, working groups/joint consultative committees, peer-to-peer cooperation and the 'Cities and regions for international partnerships' forum) are actively engaged in delivering on global climate goals, to which they have committed in their respective action plans and work programmes;

27. values the significant and underexplored potential of subnational climate diplomacy to boost the recognition of the role of the cities and regions in the UNFCCC framework; notes, in that respect, that the involvement of ARLEM members and partners in the Global South led to the reintroduction of 'multilevel collaboration' in the text of the Glasgow Climate Pact at COP26;

#### **ARLEM**

28. recognises that climate action is central to ARLEM's work on the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, which has triggered further cooperation among Mediterranean local and regional authorities, i.e. subnational diplomacy, to fight against the common challenges that climate change poses to all territories;

29. praises ARLEM's active participation at the related Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) ministerial conferences, such as the UfM ministerial meetings on blue economy, on energy, and on the environment and climate change, where ARLEM representatives regularly highlight the role of LRAs in mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change;

30. while praising the longstanding climate action cooperation among Mediterranean cities, the coastal cities in particular, notes that a larger geographical engagement should be encouraged with non-coastal local and regional authorities;

**CORLEAP**

31. notes that the priorities of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in relation to the climate agenda have put a visible focus on accelerating the green transition, while adopting the directions promoted by the Paris Agreement, the UN SDG agenda, and the EU Green Deal. There is a true interest in the Green Deal, which is often considered part of the wider national efforts towards adopting the national green agendas aligned with international commitments, especially through the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and the SDGs;
32. underlines that all of the Green Deal areas of intervention can be found in the national-level strategies of the EaP countries, with energy being the dominant focus;
33. underlines the need to support, with funding and technical assistance, those EaP countries that strive to diversify away from Russian sources of energy supply and to prioritise clean energy;
34. draws attention to the advanced commitment to the EU green agenda by the EaP cities and regions from the trio countries (Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia) via their partnership agreements, and strongly welcomes the European Council decision to grant the status of candidate countries to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova;
35. notes that the 'East' arm of the Covenant of Mayors (CoM) is a prominent climate action network in the Eastern partnership countries. CoM East has collected 361 new signatories from local governments willing to commit to reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 30 % by 2030 and to enhancing resilience through climate change adaptation;

**Enlargement peers**

36. underlines the central role of the green agenda and sustainable connectivity in the 2021 Enlargement package and supports the implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans that can be a major contribution to the green transition in the region <sup>(2)</sup>;
37. recognises, within the Balkan area, the potential of the B40 Balkan Cities Network as an important milestone regarding city climate diplomacy in the region, with sustainable development and climate action among their top priority areas. It now includes 24 cities and aims to expand further in the region;

**Multilevel governance**

38. calls for the establishment of a well-designed and multi-level governance framework outlining the rules of European, national and subnational cooperation on climate diplomacy within the EU and with potential implementation in the partnering countries. Considering the lack of support for and inclusion of municipalities and smaller and less developed regions, the framework should give such underrepresented local and regional governments special consideration, ensuring just and equal participation in the process;
39. proposes to consider identifying LRA climate ambassadors within the CoR external relations bodies, taking into account the already existing CoR Covenant of Mayors ambassadors and Climate Pact ambassadors and creating synergies between them, thereby enabling them to internally coordinate their input to the CoR official delegation to the COPs;
40. calls for a stronger coordination among cities and regions to issue joint statements ahead of UNFCCC COP events and 2023 Global Stocktake, in close cooperation with the global partners, including the LGMA, the ICLEI, the Regions4, the Under2 Coalition and the Global Covenant of Mayors; encourages local and regional authorities from the Member States and the partnering countries, especially from ARLEM, CORLEAP and Western Balkans to organise multilateral meetings between the LRA climate ambassadors and the representatives of the Member States;
41. highlights the potential link between subnational climate diplomacy and EU energy policy, notably the importance of energy security within the global clean and just energy transition via external energy policy and diplomacy, in facing both the energy crisis exacerbated by Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and the existential threat of climate change;

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<sup>(2)</sup> CDR 109/2022, Enlargement Package 2021.

42. calls for the EU to step up its engagement around the world through dedicated partnerships involving local and regional authorities, in the field of energy security, energy transition towards an efficient and renewable model and strategic sufficiency;

43. outlines the role of cities and regions as global climate innovation hubs, developing new policies and setting more ambitious emission reduction and climate adaptation and mitigation goals than the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs); reiterates its call for the establishment of a system of Regionally and Locally Determined Contributions as complementary to the NDCs to recognise, monitor and encourage the efforts of sub-national authorities in cutting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions;

#### **Innovation hub**

44. advocates for cooperation between the private sector, LRAs and the UN agenda on innovative climate ideas in order to provide unique and cross-border solutions that are able to move the global climate agenda forward; moreover, individual cities and regions can implement innovative policies which when successful, can be scaled up or replicated elsewhere; in this sense, suggests to build upon initiatives such as the Innovate4Cities within the Innovation pillar of Global Covenant of Mayors;

45. represents the Member States' LRAs and their partnering international initiatives during the European and global discussions on climate innovation; promotes examples of successful collaboration between the EU and its partners on innovative climate solutions;

#### **Finance**

46. stresses that climate diplomacy and climate ambition at the local and regional level require appropriate funding and investment; highlights in this regard the importance of making direct funding available for subnational governments to deliver climate action and climate adaptation;

47. highlights the need for synergy between public and private funding sources at the global, EU, national, regional and local levels, and calls for greater financial support, including direct funds, for the EU LRAs and their external peers, accelerating climate diplomacy and implementing the goals of the Paris Agreement;

48. calls for the EU Climate financing provided to climate mitigation and adaptation to be specific and directed to the regional and local level. The EU mission's focus on adaptation, and emphasis on supporting 150 regions towards adaptation pathways, is particularly welcomed, but could be extended and replicated within the EU external climate financing and aid to other regions in Africa, Latin America and Asia;

49. notes that cities and regions globally have a varying degree of functioning 'green' markets or investments; supports engagement in projects and networks between peers, which allow LRAs to learn from more experienced peers about the approaches practiced elsewhere, and to inspire their own local or regional agendas. In this respect it is needed to help the Local and Regional Authorities to prepare their own climate adaptation strategies to increase protection and resilience of local communities and natural habitats;

#### **Research**

50. recognises the need for a more structured approach to the assessment of ongoing international subnational climate diplomacy and the need for reinforced data collection in order to fully understand its scope, particularly in the Global South; calls on the coordination efforts to provide a full overview of current multilateral climate action at the local and regional level, especially from the EU LRAs and their partnering initiatives;

51. calls for the provision of a toolkit and a platform for self-assessment and self-reporting by LRAs on climate action and international diplomacy.

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*The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions*

Vasco ALVES CORDEIRO

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