Green Deal Going Local: cities and regions put forward economic and social measures to support citizens and businesses to overcome the energy crisis

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Dedicated funding to deliver energy efficiency in buildings, green investments to be exempted from public deficit and permanent climate consultations with citizens amongst the proposed measures

Following up on the Council adoption of its general approaches on key 'Fit for 55' files, the European Committee of the Regions adopted four opinions directly related to the role of cities and regions in delivering the European Green Deal – the EU's growth strategy to reach climate neutrality by 2050. From economic and financial measures to increase local green budgets, to the implementation of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) and the need to develop social measures to protect the most vulnerable and reinforce the role of citizens in the green transition.

The war in Ukraine provides a historic opportunity to leave Russian fossil fuels behind and achieve energy sovereignty in the EU. Skyrocketing energy prices have drastically increased the number of citizens facing energy and mobility poverty. The opinions adopted during the June plenary of the EU's Assembly of cities and regions propose ways to tackle both these key challenges.

On the opinion on the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, the rapporteur André Viola (FR/PES), Member of the Departmental Council of Aude, said: "We need to fight energy poverty and rethink our energy system in order to be more resilient and reach our climate goals by 2050. We must be ambitious in decarbonising the EU's building stock because a renovation will happen only once until mid-century! We need a future-proof renovation plan that is affordable for all citizens and local and regional authorities. The revised Energy

Performance of Buildings Directive must focus on the entire life-cycle of buildings and integrate a circular use of materials and sufficiency at all stages." More information.

Concerning the opinion on the environmental imperatives and social acceptability of the ecological transition, rapporteur Hanna Zdanowska (PL/EPP), Mayor of Lodz and Polish Ambassador of the Covenant of Mayors, said: "The success of the ecological transformation depends on a quick creation to deploy the right conditions at the European and national level for the implementation of green actions by local and regional authorities. We call for direct EU funds to cities and regions to deliver the Green Deal locally as well as to move forward the diversification of energy sources and achieve independence from Russian fossil fuels. In that context, we need to boost energy efficiency within the Renovation Wave and speed up the deployment of renewable energies in our cities and regions. The EU's ecological transformation must be based on a strong social acceptability and leave no citizen, territory nor business behind. Therefore, we propose organising permanent local dialogues and local climate summits to succeed in the ecological transition." More information.

On the opinion on the implementation of green budgets at the local and regional levels, rapporteur Vincent Chauvet (FR/Renew Europe), Mayor of Autun, said: "Climate change has a big economic impact, with ever higher environmental costs. Cities and regions have a pivotal role to play in delivering the inclusive green transition. The Member States and the EU are all responsible for supporting local and regional authorities by means of direct financing and tangible measures. We urgently need to agree on a common definition of green budgeting and a structured but flexible European framework, which will help align budget items with climate and environment objectives. The green transition will either take place at local level - or it will not take place at all." More information here. Rapporteur Chauvet will be a member of the European Committee of the Regions' delegation to the next global climate conference organised by the United Nations in November in Egypt (COP27).

In addition, the Committee adopted an opinion on the new EU Arctic strategy by rapporteur Mirja Vehkapera (FI/Renew Europe), member of the Oulu city council: "EU funding must be targeted to support and ensure sustainable investments in the Arctic. We need to think about

how to implement the Green Deal and the 'Fit for 55 package', while taking into account the specific features of the EU's Arctic area. For example, the specific conditions of winter shipping in the Arctic must be considered in the context of emissions trading. At the same time, it is important to strike a balance between responsible development of natural resources and environmental protection, in order to make full use of the Arctic's potential as a driver of green growth and the digital transition in the EU. The Arctic can provide Europe with knowledge, products, resources and energy which are crucial for achieving the EU's climate goals." More information here.

Buildings account for 40% of final energy consumption in the EU and 36% of its energy-related greenhouse gas emissions. The ultimate objective of the new directive is to decarbonise Europe's building stock by 2050. The Committee calls for the new directive on the performance of buildings to be applied not only to new buildings but also to renovations. The opinion adopted by the Committee supported Mr Viola's proposal to bring forward the elimination of fossil fuels for heating and cooling to 2025, instead of 2027 as proposed by the European Commission. More information.

The Committee calls on the European Commission to review the rules for financing municipal services, to reduce cost burden of energy efficiency and renewable energy measures and to reduce and simplify regulatory barriers for new technologies and business models. To boost social acceptance, the Committee suggests several measures, including greater use of participatory governance – for example through participatory budgets and local dialogues – and financial support for permanent consultation mechanisms such as local climate summits. More information.

The European Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission and the Member States to exempt green investments from the regional public deficit calculation and from the debt limit "golden rules" and advocates efficient, participatory and transparent green budgeting. The Committee encourages a participatory approach to green budgeting so as to enable citizens, and in particular young people, to manage part of the annual budget for the implementation of green projects. The EU's assembly of regional and local representatives calls for the creation of a cross-authority cooperation platform to build the capacity of local and regional authorities for greening their budget and aggregating small-scale projects with a

view to creating economies of scale and exchanging good practices. More information.

In the new EU Arctic Strategy, the European Commission highlights the growing strategic and geopolitical importance of the Arctic. According to an estimate published in early 2022, the EU Arctic region has an investment potential of around EUR 150 billion by 2030, a large part of which is linked to delivering on the green transition. The focus is on investments in carbon-neutral steel, battery manufacturing, mineral extraction and processing, as well as the circular economy and bio- and wind energy. More information.

Green Deal Going Local is a CoR initiative that aims at placing cities and regions at the heart of the EU's transition towards climate neutrality.

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