Local leaders urge fast-tracking of EU investment into clean public transport

PUBLISHED JUL 11, 2022
BY EUROPA

How to better finance the decarbonisation of public transport through cohesion policy and other EU instruments, remove administrative bottlenecks and give cities direct access to EU funds: these were the main issues discussed during a two-day meeting that gathered to Prague local and regional leaders from all over the European Union at the start of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU.

European cities are investing massively into sustainable mobility to mitigate the climate impact of transport, improve the quality of citizens' life, reduce fossil-fuel consumption and increase energy resilience. Thanks to EU cohesion policy, European countries committed to spend more than 18 billion euros in the past decade to promote clean urban transport, financing hundreds of projects on the ground. This amount is expected to increase by 2030 and to be complemented by resources from the EU's pandemic recovery plan, Next Generation EU .

The Czech Republic is one of the top bus producers in the Union and is one of the EU countries that is financing the largest number of urban transport projects (nearly 700 in the last decade). The capital Prague is a champion of the green transition: one year ago it adopted its 2030 Climate Plan , which seeks to reduce CO2 emissions by 45% compared to 2010 levels while transforming the city into an eco-friendly metropolis and an even more attractive place to live.

"Prague is sending a clear message towards the EU. Cities are absolutely vital for the implementation of the European Green Deal and need direct EU funding. The Climate Plan for Prague is a detailed and ambitious roadmap for reducing CO2 emissions in the city by 2030. Sustainable mobility is one of the essential pillars of the plan ," stated the Mayor of Prague, Zdeněk Hřib (CZ/Greens), who hosted the two-day event organised in the framework of the external meeting of the European Committee of the Regions' (CoR) commission for

territorial cohesion policy and EU budget (COTER).

"Carbon-free mobility in our cities is absolutely paramount if we want to reach our objective to be a carbon-neutral continent by 2050. The 8th Cohesion Report shows that transport is responsible for almost a quarter of EU greenhouse emissions and is the main cause of air pollution in cities. Therefore, all the political, juridical and technical obstacles preventing cohesion policy from financing green mobility in our cities and rural areas should be removed. Enhancing public transport and active mobility, while reducing the use of individual cars, is the only way to succeed in implementing a fair ecological transition for all," said Emil Boc (RO/EPP), Mayor of Cluj-Napoca, who chaired the external meeting of the COTER Commission.

The Deputy Minister of Regional Development Radim Sršeň participated in the debate on behalf of the Czech Presidency. Local and regional leaders had also the chance to exchange best practices on urban mobility and visit projects implemented by the Municipality, such as the new Sídliště Barrandov – Holyně tramline.

During the meeting, COTER members also discussed the FAST-CARE instrument, recently put forward by the European Commission to help cities and regions in assisting refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. The proposed flexibility measures respond to key CoR demands but, as several members pointed out, addressing the continuing emergency requires the mobilisation of fresh financial resources.

The role of cohesion policy as long-term investment into regions' future, whose impact should not be undermined by the need to cover unforeseen budgetary shortcomings, was highlighted by local leaders in the draft opinion on the EU Commission's 8th Cohesion Report (rapporteur: Nathalie Sarrabezolles – FR/PES), adopted during the meeting on Tuesday, 12 July. The text was voted while the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development was adopting its draft resolution on the same topic, putting forward the same priority as the CoR.

All six opinions are scheduled to be adopted in the CoR plenary session in October, which will take place during the 20th European Week of Regions and Cities .

The recently published 8th Cohesion Report shows that "after a sharp drop between 2008 and 2014 as a consequence of the 2008 economic

crisis, greenhouse emissions from transport in the EU increased between 2014 and 2019 at rates similar to those in the period 1990–2008, at just under 2% a year."

In the draft opinions adopted during the COTER meeting, local and regional leaders point out that cohesion policy represents a major contribution to European green investments and to the EU's energy independence. They call on the European Commission to draw up a new long-term European strategy for 2030 linking green and digital transitions while strengthening the EU's economic, social and territorial cohesion, in line with the "do no harm to cohesion" principle introduced in the Cohesion Report.

COTER members also recalled that the economic growth of urban centres is directly linked to the fluidity of mobility, which is dependent on a strong public transport backbone. According to the European Court of Auditors , congestion costs 270 billion euros per year at the EU level.

On 29 April, the European Commission announced the names of the 100 cities that will participate in the pilot "mission" to become climate-neutral by 2030. One month ago, the first 118 regions and local authorities that will participate in the EU Mission for Adaptation to Climate Change were also unveiled.

The 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.

Pictures of the meeting can be downloaded here .

Press release distributed by Wire Association on behalf of Europa, on Jul 11, 2022. For more information subscribe and follow us.

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