

Main topics and media events 26 March – 8 April 2018

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EU trade policy needs to consider regional and local impact of trade liberalisation

How to mitigate the negative effects of globalisation on Europe's economy is at the heart of the [opinion](#) on the EU trade package drawn up by Micaela Fanelli (IT/PES), mayor of Riccia in the province of Campobasso. Local and regional representatives adopted the opinion during the plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) on 23 March in Brussels.

International trade has fostered growth and promoted competitiveness both within and outside the EU. However, not everyone benefits to the same extent, putting some severe strain on some local economies and communities. To have local and regional authorities on board they must be included from the beginning. Territorial impact assessments can be a powerful tool in identifying and quantifying the possible impact of a given trade deal on European regions before the start of negotiations.

" The problems encountered with the CETA negotiations, where the Wallonian parliament raised severe concerns about the agreement, shows that more has to be done to ensure an adequate and timely involvement of regional and local

authorities in the assessment of EU international trade deals, so that critical situations can be prevented and responsibilities shared better “, said CoR president **Karl-Heinz Lambertz**.

“ EU Trade policy has to ensure that globalisation has positive economic, social, territorial and environmental effects for people and businesses in Europe and beyond. To reach this goal any further step in trade liberation should imply territorial impact assessments, which will facilitate more sound, informed, transparent and evidence-based decisions regarding the content of the deal. It will also enable a more tailor-made support for the concerned regions to anticipate and manage the impact “, said **Micaela Fanelli** (IT/PES), mayor of Riccia in the province of Campobasso.

The rapporteur underlines the key role of the [European Globalisation Adjustment Fund](#) (EGF) to support those bearing negative consequences of the opening to a global market but also reiterates the CoR’s call to improve the way it operates. “ We need complement the EGF with a preventive arm, increase its budget to at least EUR 500 million per year, integrate it into the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and allow more flexibility in order to respond to the specific needs of regions and territories. We also need to improve synergies with the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) “, said **Ms Fanelli**.

The rapporteur further welcomes the principle of EU-wide [screening for Foreign Direct Investment](#) (FDI) for reasons of security and public order, but calls for clearer criteria and more legal certainty when such screening is necessary at EU level. She also stresses that the planned [multilateral investment court](#) (MIC) – to overcome the problems encountered with the current investor-to-state dispute settlement – should not bypass domestic legal systems or local government decisions defending the rights of private investors.

Related opinions:

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[Boosting regions as centres of innovation for a competitive](#)

industrial sector in Europe

Local and regional politicians adopted recommendations for European industry adapting to a new age at the plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) on 23 March in Brussels. The [opinion](#) drawn up by Heinz Lehmann (DE/EPP) highlights the potential of cities and regions to serve as hubs for innovation and so support Europe's global industrial competitiveness.

In a rapidly changing world, the aim of an EU industrial policy strategy at European level is to respond to current and future challenges and opportunities in order to enhance the competitiveness of European industry. Cities and regions have an important part to play in supporting industry's capacity for change and innovation to make it fit for the digital age.

" The EU provides ways of maintaining and expanding a globally competitive industry. Innovation, investment in key enabling technologies, digitalisation, leadership in a low-carbon and circular economy, and a focus on important projects of common European interest are important pillars in making Europe's industry future-proof . Local and regional authorities need to be on board, as they have important powers and competences in critical areas such as research and innovation, education and skills, export support, infrastructure, SMEs and regulation ", notes Heinz Lehmann (DE/EPP), member of Saxony regional parliament.

Given the centrality of regions and regional ecosystems to industrial modernisation and innovation, the rapporteur calls for the EU's strategy to have a strong regional dimension. He also recommends more investment in the infrastructure necessary for advancing digitalisation, and urges better support for start-ups, scale-ups and cluster initiatives.

" Regional clusters like the Silicon Saxony Cluster are good examples of regional ecosystems: they offer jobs and vocational training at local level, they are unique in and for Europe, and they are anchored in global value chains . Together with other regional and interregional networks such as the MERGE lightweight construction cluster, the European Network of Chemical Regions ECRN or the Vanguard Initiative they can boost a region's image as a centre for innovation and prevent emigration, shortages of skilled labour, and a small-scale economy ", Mr Lehmann adds.

The rapporteur also points out that a well-functioning single market that provides free and fair access to the European market will help to better integrate local and regional companies in global value chains. All regions – including rural areas – should be able to participate in value creation and should have the opportunity to create and retain skilled local jobs. He stresses that competitive business services are increasingly important for the productivity and cost competitiveness of industry and essential to its success.

More information:

CoR opinion: [A European strategy for industry: the role and perspective of regional and local authorities](#)

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Reform of the European Citizens' Initiative: further improvement needed to deliver ECI's full potential for participatory democracy

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) welcomes the European Commission's reform proposal to improve the European Citizens Initiative (ECI), which it sees as "a step in the right direction" to make it more accessible and user-friendly. The EU's Assembly of local and regional representatives however regrets that the proposal falls short of achieving the ECI potential as a transnational tool of participative democracy at European level. In an [opinion](#) led by Luc Van den Brande (BE/EPP), Member of the Management Board of the Flanders-Europe Liaison Agency and Special Adviser to the European Commission on outreach towards citizens, the CoR is concerned that the proposal fails to solve the current conflict of interest whereby the European Commission is both judge and party in the procedure. The Assembly also calls for the European Parliament to play a greater role in political scrutiny and follow up. Since 2012, the ECI empowers one million EU citizens from at least seven EU member states to participate directly in the development of EU policies, by calling on the European Commission to propose new legislation. However, during its six years of existence, only four ECIs managed to successfully secure the required number of signatures, with two of them ([Stop Glyphosate](#) " and " [Right2Water](#)) finally leading to formal EU legislative proposals. Following mounting criticism against the instrument for being too restrictive and burdensome, the Commission came out with a proposal last September to remove excessive legal and technical requirements whilst taking advantage of new identification and collection technology.

The CoR reiterates its strong support for the ECI as a tool that can help respond to the perceived democratic deficit of the EU and bridge the gap with the citizens. The need to restore citizens' trust in Europe is what triggered the CoR's EU-wide consultation process called " [Reflecting on Europe](#) ",

mainly in the form of citizens' dialogues at local level, to collect their ideas, ambitions and concerns about Europe's future.

In an [opinion](#) adopted on 23 March, the CoR welcomes major revisions proposed to improve the usability of the ECI, including a central online collection system, a collaborative platform to better advise organisers, the possibility of partial registration of an initiative, and lowering the minimum age for supporting an ECI to 16 years. According to the CoR there is however much more to be done to enable the ECI to truly give a voice to citizens in EU-policy making.

"The Commission has undoubtedly introduced administrative, technical, logistical and communicative improvements to the ECI in its reform proposal. But the EU executive missed a great opportunity to transform it into an effective participatory tool that would truly allow citizens to influence the EU policy agenda. There is still an impression of an over-cautious stance on the part of the Commission, which is especially evident in the more political aspects of the citizens' initiative "; said rapporteur Van den Brande.

Commission's conflict of interest

The CoR points out that the proposed revision does nothing to resolve the Commission's conflict of interest, namely that it is at the same time the support structure and primary "addressee" for ECIs, and the authority that decides over registration and admissibility. The CoR is therefore repeating its call made in its [2015 opinion](#) for the creation of a "wise-persons council" or "European Citizens Advocacy".

" One of the key sticking points with the new regulation is the Commission's conflict of interest and monopoly over all stages of the procedure. Failure to resolve this situation is damaging the effectiveness and legitimacy of the ECI. We therefore suggest that the registration decision is entrusted to an independent committee of lawyers, academics and representatives of civil society ", explained Van den Brande.

Role of European Parliament

The CoR expresses concern regarding the lack of political scrutiny and follow up to successful ECIs, calling for a greater role for the European Parliament. In particular, the Parliament should take full responsibility for organising public hearings where ECI organisers are invited to present their initiative – as opposed to the Commission's proposal whereby both Commission and Parliament should organise these hearings.

Signatures' collection period

The CoR stresses that collecting 1 million signatures represents quite an undertaking and requires a great deal of publicising and awareness-raising. In order to allow more time to achieve the final target for signatures, the CoR calls for an extension in the collecting period from 12 to 18 months, which would be less of a deterrent for potential initiative organisers.

Follow-up to unsuccessful initiatives

The CoR calls on the Commission to develop appropriate forms of response to those ECIs which receive significant support but do not meet all the formal criteria or do not reach the full 1 million signatures. This would ensure that the political message of such ECI and the mobilisation they have created are not completely ignored.

Note to the editors:

Luc Van den Brande is a former President of the European Committee of Regions and former Minister-President of Flanders (1992-1999). As Special Adviser to the President of the European Commission for “the outreach towards the citizens”, he published a [report](#) last October which sets out a framework for a more citizen-focused Europe.

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[Statement ahead of World Tuberculosis Day by Commissioners Andriukaitis, Moedas, Thyssen and Mimica](#)

On the eve of World Tuberculosis Day, we underline our commitment to ending the tuberculosis epidemic by 2030. We call on governments all over the world to redouble their efforts and make this happen.

Globally, tuberculosis remains the single most deadly infectious disease. In 2016, there were over 10 million new tuberculosis cases and 1.7 million deaths worldwide. The European Union fully supports the international effort to address this, including the commitment made in Riga in March 2015 to fully eradicate tuberculosis by 2050; the 2017 “Berlin declaration”; and the 2017 “Moscow declaration to end Tuberculosis”. Building on the work of the United Nations and the World Health Organisation, in summer through a policy paper the Commission will address ways to eliminate tuberculosis, as well as HIV/AIDS, and significantly reduce viral hepatitis, in line with the objectives set out in the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). In September this year, the EU will be represented at the United Nations General Assembly which will convene for the first time, specifically to discuss tuberculosis. This is a crucial opportunity for health ministers to stand together and reaffirm our commitment to eradicating tuberculosis forever. The EU is also financially supporting the international effort. For the period 2017-2019, we

provided €475 million to the [Global Fund against Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#), to support the most vulnerable people, including those living with tuberculosis and HIV, and those who do not have sufficient access to quality services. Thanks to our support, more than 53 million lives were saved between 2000 and 2016.

We are also working to address antimicrobial resistance, which is inextricably linked to tuberculosis. In 2016, 600 000 of new cases of tuberculosis were also multi drug-resistant (MDR-TB), underlining the extent of the global antimicrobial resistance (AMR) [\[1\]](#) crisis. Unless we take decisive action now, by 2050, antimicrobial resistance could cause 10 million deaths per year, up to a quarter of which could be caused multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis [\[2\]](#). It is precisely to eliminate the possibility of this unthinkable future, that the Commission adopted an [EU Action Plan against antimicrobial resistance](#) last June, which includes infection prevention and control measures within vulnerable groups, to tackle resistant tuberculosis strains. To make matters worse, there is also still no effective vaccine for tuberculosis. Treatment is complicated, and where available, it can be very toxic. This is why we are investing in research to find better diagnostic tools, more effective treatments and safe and effective vaccines. The EU is currently investing over €100 million in the development of new vaccines and new drug regimens.

But this is far from enough. Tuberculosis is also frequently associated with poverty and poor living conditions. This is why we must pay particular attention to addressing the social conditions that encourage the disease to spread. This is not just a question of financing. We strongly urge leaders in Europe to ensure access to preventative and good quality curative healthcare for everyone, in line with the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) and the values Europe stands for.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel. The number of cases is actually decreasing in most parts of the world. The overall number of new cases within the EU continues to decline by 5-6% each year and globally by 1.5% per year. While small, these figures bode well for the future. They show that with political will, determination and sufficient funding, we can save lives. Together we can #EndTB.

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For more information

<https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/tuberculosis>

[\[1\] Global Tuberculosis Report 2017, World Health Organization](#)

[\[2\] "Tackling a crisis for the health and wealth of nations", Review on AMR, December 2014](#)