

# The European Committee of the Regions and the Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion call for a strong and ambitious cohesion policy after 2020

On 20 March 2018 the member regions of the Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Piedmont, Liguria and the Aosta Valley) and the Lyon metropolitan region welcomed Karl-Heinz Lambertz, president of the European Committee of the Regions, at the premises they share in Brussels.

Elected representatives of the six local authority members of the Euroregion called for a strong and ambitious cohesion policy for the post-2020 period, which would cover all European regions and rely on the potential of the most developed regions. They also called for simplified and decentralised implementation of funding and drew attention to their specific sub-regional features (upland and urban areas) and to the importance of European territorial cooperation.

**Karl-Heinz Lambertz**, president of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), the EU's assembly of local and regional elected representatives, drew attention to the CoR's support for a cohesion policy covering all Europe's regions. He also mentioned his wish to see closer cooperation between the CoR and the representative offices of the regions and cities in Brussels: *"The Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion proves that cohesion policy has added value even in the most advanced regions, whether it be to finance territorial, and especially cross-border, cooperation or to improve the lives of the most vulnerable Europeans in disadvantaged urban and upland areas"*, he stressed.

**Renaud Muselier**, president of the Sud-Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, added his support, saying that *"the Alpine and Mediterranean regions have for some months been lobbying very intensively for the post-2020 cohesion policy. Today we are more united than ever in this essential task."*

**David Kimelfeld**, president of the Lyon metropolitan region, stressed the impact of the European regional funds at local level: *"Cohesion policy is an essential lever for local public policies. In the Lyon conurbation, the ESF is crucial to helping more than 8 000 people annually to find jobs. It also makes it possible to support a hundred or so projects each year. It is therefore a fundamental contribution to urban development that benefits everyone."*

**Yannick Neuder**, vice-president of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, responsible for higher education, research, innovation and European funds, said that *"the European regions are facing real competitiveness challenges and are relying on innovation and training to reduce digital, energy and medical divides: cohesion policy is essential to achieving these objectives."*

The six local authorities represented then signed the Cohesion Alliance in the presence of Mr Lambertz, to formalise their support for the initiative.

Note for editors:

The [#CohesionAlliance](#) is a grassroots campaign open to all who believe that EU cohesion policy must continue to be a pillar of the European Union's future under the post-2020 EU budget. The Alliance was launched by the European Committee of the Regions in partnership with the leading European associations of local and regional authorities to defend a cohesion policy that is stronger, more effective, visible and available to all cities and regions after 2020.

Since its launch in October last year, the Alliance has gained almost 4 000 signatories, including local and regional authorities, MEPs, EU ministers, and business, university and trade union associations.

More information at <https://cohesionalliance.eu>.

**The Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion** brings together five French and Italian regions in a single, integrated geographical framework straddling the frontier: Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Liguria, Piedmont, the Aosta Valley and Auvergne Rhône-Alpes. It has a population of 17 million inhabitants and covers an area of 110 460 km<sup>2</sup> in France and Italy.

The Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion is an interregional cross-border association whose first institutional meetings were launched in 2006; its member regions signed a memorandum of understanding in 2007 at a meeting at Bard in the Aosta Valley. The objective of this association is to consolidate its role in Europe, influence the European institutions and develop joint projects in the framework of integrated cross-border cooperation. The member regions have shared offices in Brussels and cooperate to make their voices heard more clearly in the European institutions.

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## **Letter of congratulations from President Donald Tusk to Peter Pellegrini on his appointment as Prime Minister of Slovakia**

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## **Speech by Vice-President Katainen at the High-Level Conference on Financing Sustainable Growth – ‘Sustainable finance within the Commission’s Agenda promoting sustainability’**

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am sure you have already been well informed by now on what sustainable finance means to the European Commission. I once more want to thank Mr. Thimann on the excellent job that you have done with the High-Level Expert Group on Sustainable Finance and on creating an basis for what sustainable finance could mean and what kind of actions the European Commission could take in order to pursue the goals for sustainable finance.

Actually, I hope that when we have a similar type of event in say five years' time, we could drop the first word, sustainable. Because sustainable finance is supposed to be mainstream. Sustainable finance is not just a side effect of the financial market. It is like ten or fifteen years ago when you went to the supermarket and tried to find organic carrots. Today they are mainstream.

Sustainable finance is not "second-best" finance, it's not something that is just a good dead. That is the reason why I wanted to say that hopefully in five years' time we can drop the "sustainable" because it will have become already a normal way of looking at things and our financing will be going towards sustainable, long term, sustainable products much more than it is doing at the moment.

Today's theme is about raising the financial resources for a more sustainable, resource-efficient, circular economy, for sustainable growth, for new and innovative green technologies to achieve our climate and environmental targets.

It is about taking into account environmental, social and governance aspects when making investment and finance decisions in all areas of our economy.

Sustainable finance plays a key role in turning the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to which the European Union is fully committed, into reality. The European Commission, among other initiatives, set up a dedicated multi-stakeholder platform on the implementation of the sustainable development goals last year.

Sustainable finance is the crucial element to reach our ambitious European energy, climate and environmental policy goals as enshrined, for instance, in the EU's 2030 climate and energy framework or the Circular Economy Action Plan.

Making Europe's economy more sustainable and contributing to sustainable development globally means undertaking a huge investment programme, both in the public and private sector, to improve, innovate, and become more efficient and competitive. This is an immense opportunity for us.

The European Union is already in a transition process to a low-carbon, more resource-efficient, circular economy. As mentioned earlier, estimates on investments needs to make our current economy in Europe greener and more sustainable, bringing it in line with a 2° or even 1.5° pathway agreed in the Paris Agreement in December 2015, amount to additional investments of around EUR 180 billion per year over the next 2 or 3 decades.

Most of these investments – in sustainable infrastructure, more energy-efficient buildings and equipment or new environmental technologies – will have to be made by companies and, more generally, the private sector. Finance will, to a large extent, have to come from private investors and capital markets.

This means that we need to create the right framework conditions for private investments and finance, provide guidance to investors and accelerate

sustainable investment opportunities. And we need to connect capital willing to invest with sustainable investment projects seeking finance.

The Commission's Action Plan on sustainable finance includes dedicated actions to mobilise sustainable finance. There is also a strong link to the Investment Plan for Europe, with its finance and advisory capacity, to step up investments.

Let me mention two important actions which will help us increase sustainable investments and better connect finance to investments:

#### 1. An EU classification of green and sustainable activities:

One of the key actions in the Commission's Action Plan on sustainable finance is to determine what 'green' and 'sustainable' activities, across the EU, are. Investors need clarity and certainty when investing in green or sustainable projects.

By building up, step-by-step, a harmonised EU classification system of green and sustainable activities, we can increase transparency in the market and guide investors.

Clear understanding on what the EU regards as green or sustainable will also allow, in conjunction with standards, labelling green investment funds or other green or sustainable financial products. This would facilitate raising capital for sustainable investments from institutional and retail investors alike.

#### 2. Making projects investor-ready and leverage private finance through EFSI and EIAH:

Another major challenge to increase low-carbon and green investments is to make economically viable projects investment-ready. This requires capacity to prepare and develop investment projects. We are aware of the investment and project preparation needs in different parts of the European Union and across different sectors.

The European Investment Advisory Hub is already supporting, through project development and support services, green and sustainable investment projects. There will be even stronger focus on sustainability and better local access to advisory under the extended European Fund for Strategic Investments ("EFSI 2.0") until the end of 2020.

Among concrete, and more targeted examples – we have set up the advisory initiative for urban authorities (URBIS) or established the platform to support circular economy financing. Both with strong stakeholders' engagement. And in both cases the ultimate goal is the same – promote innovative approaches in financing sustainable investments.

Furthermore, to accelerate investments in low-carbon, green and sustainable projects, pooling of private and public resources, including ways to share risks, will be necessary to accelerate their implementation.

There is an important role for public finance to play, coming from EU and national budgets, to mobilise private capital. This is complementary to setting the right regulatory framework conditions. Smart regulation and effective use of public budgets are complementary tools and must go hand-in-hand.

We already have the European Fund for Strategic Investments which is a highly effective financial instrument to encourage more sustainable investments while attracting private investment. The EFSI now has a target of at least 40% for investments that contribute to climate action, in line with the Paris Climate Agreement goals.

Under EFSI, we can also support the bundling of smaller green or sustainable projects into larger portfolios through Investment Platforms, making them more attractive for private investors.

There are similar good practice examples at national level, for instance promotional banks which support environmental and sustainable investments through targeted equity and loan finance.

We need to learn lessons from our current EU financial instruments and best practice examples at national level for the next generation of public support instruments under the next, post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework. In this context we are preparing the InvestEU Fund, a single, multi-policy investment support instrument.

This could be an important avenue – in addition to reformed regulatory frameworks – to mobilise the necessary financing for green and sustainable investments.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Moving to a more sustainable European economy, with its various dimensions, and contributing to the political agenda of a sustainable, resource efficient and circular economy requires making huge investments, mobilising finance and changing the way of decision-making.

We have set clear policy frameworks, at European level and internationally, to make this transition happen. We know what needs to be changed and we have the tools to bring about this change. Now, it is time to accelerate their application.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for participating to this conference. We are eagerly waiting for your views on our sustainable finance approach. This must be a joint venture between public authorities and private sector. The private sector knows how the market is evolving, what is possible and where regulatory help is needed. And the public sector's role is to set the target from the societal point.

Thank you very much.

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## Global Report on Food Crises finds that in 2017 major famines were partly averted but food security remains critical

Neven **Mimica**, Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, who presented the report today in Rome, said: *"In 2017, the Global Report on Food Crises alerted us about the risk of famines in a number of partner countries. Thanks to local and international efforts, including in the most critical hotspots, we were able to avert major famines. But let us be clear: we still have huge challenges ahead of us, and the EU will continue to work relentlessly for food security around the world. When future generations look back on this time in history, I want to say that we were not only able to diagnose the problem, but we were also able to prescribe the right solutions."*

Tibor **Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, responsible for the Joint Research Centre, added: *"Food crises remain one of the most pressing catastrophes worldwide. In Africa alone, over a hundred million people are facing food insecurity with some on the brink of famine. Unfortunately, there is no simple solution. The scientific rigour applied by the Joint Research Centre in compiling the annual report on food crises will help us diagnose the problems correctly and propose the best policies."*

Christos **Stylianides**, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, said: *"World hunger is on the rise again. The EU is one of the world's leading donors in humanitarian food assistance. We are now strengthening a coordinated response, covering humanitarian and development aspects, to face the increasing complexity of crises. It is only by working together that we can become the architects of a future without hunger"*.

The report shows that, in 2017, almost 124 million people faced levels of acute food insecurity or worse. The report finds that in the future, food crises are likely to become more acute, persistent and complex. Among the main root causes for severe food insecurity, it cites conflict, extreme climatic events and excessive prices of staple foods – these factors are often acting together.

To tackle the root causes of these pressing challenges, the EU is working to implement a long term strategy, taking into account humanitarian aid, development assistance and peace building support in an integrated way – and thereby increasing the [resilience of people and communities in partner countries](#).

To implement this long term strategy, the European Union supports measures to

improve food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture in over 60 partner countries, providing approximately €8,5 billion of funding between 2014 and 2020. For the four major food crises in 2017 in particular, the European Union contributed over €750 million to joint humanitarian and development support, and EU Member States additionally provided over €1 billion.

## **Background**

The Global Report on Food Crises provides a comprehensive picture of the severity and magnitude of acute food insecurity and malnutrition in 51 countries and territories, with in-depth analysis of 26 hotspots. The knowledge it provides will steer our work to prevent food crises, as well as to develop appropriate, sustainable and joint responses to food insecurity.

Commissioner **Mimica** presented the report today in Rome, together with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), to an audience of over 50 Country-Representatives.

The new report, led by the Food Security Information Network and compiled in cooperation with EU-Joint Research Centre scientists, the FAO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the WFP, identifies crucial countries and regions where assistance should be prioritized to bridge the gap between emergency and development operations. Moreover, it allows joint planning for the short-medium-long term with the aim to strengthen resilience.

## **For More Information**

[Global Report on Food Crises 2018](#)

[Press release – EU presents its strategy for more resilient states and societies around the world \(07/06/2017\)](#)

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# **[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU to commemorate the World Water Day, 22 March 2018](#)**

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Access to safe drinking water is a fundamental right but is still a challenge in many parts of the world. On World Water Day, the European Union reaffirms that all States are expected to fulfil their obligations regarding access to safe drinking water, which must be available, accessible, safe, acceptable, and affordable for all without discrimination, and recalls that the right to safe drinking water is a human right essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.

The EU also stresses the importance of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, and calls on all states to collaborate with the current rapporteur.

Across the world, human rights defenders protecting and promoting the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation are often subjected to prosecution, threats and violence. Today, the European Union pay special tribute to those brave individuals who stand up every day for fundamental rights and the protection of the environment.

Climate change is taking a toll on the drier areas of the planet. Already, one of Africa's largest lakes, Lake Chad, has decreased by 90 per cent as a result of climate change, over use of water and extended drought. The reduction has destroyed livelihoods and led to the loss of invaluable biodiversity. The UN Security Council has also recognized the adverse effects of climate change and ecological changes among other factors on the stability of the Lake Chad region.

As the 2017 Report of the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace has acknowledged, water is not only a driver of social and economic development but also of peace and security. The availability of water is one of the key factors that can lead to conflicts and mass displacements. As cooperation increases resilience and stability by preventing conflicts and consolidating peace, the EU will continue to promote global accession to the UNECE Water Convention, and share with its partners its long experience in the sustainable management of shared water resources. The EU also reiterates its commitment to the Paris Agreement and the Marrakech Action Proclamation which reaffirmed the world's determination to fight climate change and to help address the impacts of climate change on the environment, including on water.

The EU will continue to support sustainable water management through its cooperation with key partner countries in policy dialogues, development cooperation, multi-stakeholder partnerships and through a strategic approach to regional development. Promoting and protecting access to fundamental resources means promoting and protecting the rights and the security not only of the present, but also of the future generations.

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