European Committee
of the Regions

SEDEC-VII/026

11th commission meeting, 15 February 2022

DRAFT OPINION

Commission for Social Policy, Education,
Employment, Research and Culture

European Missions

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This document will be discussed at the meeting of the **SEDEC Commission** to be held **on 15 February 2022**

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Draft opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – European Missions

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. welcomes the EU Missions, as a coordinated effort by the Commission to pool the necessary resources in terms of funding programmes, policies and regulations, as well as other activities to mobilise and activate public and private actors, such as EU Member States, regional and local authorities, research institutes, farmers and land managers, industry, entrepreneurs and investors, and citizens to co-create real and lasting impact to boost societal uptake of new solutions and approaches;

2. emphasizes that, in the light of the Conference on the Future of Europe, the EU Missions are a real test of the EU's impact and credibility, and they need to have widespread legitimacy and acceptance;

3. reiterates the CoR statement[1] of supporting the implementation of the EU Missions as bold steps towards addressing societal challenges and underlines the need for an effective system of multilevel governance that combines the EU Missions with local and regional development strategies, the COVID recovery measures and the innovation funding through the structural funds;

The EU Missions as ambitious new instrument to tackle grand societal challenges

4. acknowledges that the EU Missions are a "NEW" and "VITAL" instrument as stated by the European Commission: "EU Missions are a new way to bring concrete solutions to some of our greatest challenges by delivering concrete results and impact by 2030 by putting research and innovation into a new role, combined with new forms of governance and collaboration, as well as by engaging citizens"[2];

5. reminds that each EU Mission should define a clear roadmap and create a systemic new multi-governance approach and methodologies on experimenting, prototyping, monitoring, and scaling-up the activities on all governance levels. Special attention is needed creating portfolios of actions both at the EU and regional/local levels and disseminating these effectively in all phases of the planning and implementation;

6. stresses that the EU Missions need to co-create new ways to operate, integrating technology and research with a human-centric approach building the competencies, committing to joint green and digital transformation processes, and accessing the right resources. The requirements are especially creating well-functioning local RDI ecosystems, building new innovative knowledge bridges connecting top-level European knowledge creators with regional and local

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[1] CoR Plenary 1-2 December 2021, Resolution on the 2022 Work Programme of the European Commission

[2] European Research Area Policy Agenda – Overview of actions for the period 2022-2024, European Commission 2021

living labs and other experimentation centres, bench-learning using the concepts and solution practices of forerunner smart sustainable cities and regions;

7. reminds its instrumental role, with its six commissions and campaigns such as the Green Deal Going Local and the EER European Entrepreneurial Regions, in the EU Missions implementation – noting that the CoR provides a natural access point to the collaboration with industry and citizens;

The role of cities and regions in the EU Missions

8. underlines, according to the Joint Action Plan signed 2020 by Commissioner Mariya Gabriel and the CoR, that the CoR with European regions and cities is ready to have an active role in co-creating an effective multi-level governance system based on regional place-based innovation ecosystems, and Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3/S4) to reach the EU Mission targets;

9. agrees to assist in engaging as many cities and regions as possible to ensure that regional and local levels support the EU Missions by:
   a) implementing joint open and interactive engaging processes,
   b) getting the forerunner communities signing in for experimenting the innovative solutions in their real-life practices,
   c) getting the demonstrator communities to contribute to large-scale deployment processes of innovative solutions and scaling-up the best solutions for European-wide use;

10. urges the importance of well-organized learning processes for cities and regions to operate as platforms for multi-actor service providers supporting others, including all actor groups. The local/regional value-creation processes need to be orchestrated at the level of efficient collaborative value-chains and value-streams developing further the ecosystems;

11. emphasizes that the ambitious targets require, as a crucial precondition, decision-makers, civil servants, and innovation professionals to gain competencies to operate as change agents in acquiring new knowledge and capabilities. The three critical processes are a) the operational learning processes of cities and regions, with a focus to integrate mission-related activities into other local activities to be part of the normal strategic and operational decision-making, b) motivating and supporting companies and research institutes to contribute in co-creating new innovative frontrunning solutions and c) using new inclusive methods in innovation by rapid prototyping and experimenting of new solutions;

Guidelines for more influential EU Mission implementation

12. helps to create the partnership contracts between the EU and the demonstrating cities and regions to get the larger scale and/or distributed demonstrators to focus on European-wide impact and testing the forerunner activities aimed at broad-scale results;

13. proposes creating the concept of the EU Mission Label for those cities and regions which will take the responsibility as demonstrating forerunners and supporters of the European green and

digital transition in reaching the EU Mission targets and scaling-up the results of their innovative solutions;

14. proposes different ways to use the EU Mission Label to add synergy with other relevant EU and other related initiatives and the use of financing instruments, such as InvestEU Fund, Recovery and Resilience Facility, Interregional Innovation Investments I3, Interreg Europe, Connecting Europe Facility, Digital Europe, EU4Health, EIB and EIT;

15. reminds to create and use effective knowledge management procedures to enforce the EU Missions by using the best global knowledge. To take-up and scale-up the results, Horizon Europe and other instruments need to be more dynamic for experimenting and prototyping in real-world settings;

16. stresses that the EU Missions should be implemented through an open and participatory process, involving all relevant stakeholders at local, regional, European, and global levels. Especially citizens' engagement will be crucial for the successful implementation of the EU Missions. The CoR is ready to be strong ally with the EU Missions;

17. points that the EU Mission experiments and demonstrations should focus on orchestrating activities to push further the frontiers of science, mastering deep technologies, and combine digital, physical, environmental, and biological innovations – and regularly review and share the outcomes at the forefront level. The Smart Specialisation Strategies as concepts for regional collaboration with industry and research should have a high profile in the EU Missions;

Foresight and societal innovations crucial for and by the EU Missions

18. reaffirms that the challenges are complex, and only part of the necessary scientific and technological knowledge exists. Reaching the targets is possible with extensive foresight activities, increasing R&D investments, real-world prototyping, experimenting, and scaling-up of the results;

19. has recognized the significant potential of research for all kinds of innovations and tackling grand societal challenges. However, political decision-making, in general, is not sufficiently evidence-based, research-supportive, and not targeted enough on creating favourable conditions for societal innovations and implementing those fast enough in real-life practice and processes;

20. highlights the importance of moving to action, based on the main statements in European R&D and technology policy as defined in the EU Strategic Foresight 2021 report[3], especially:
    a) The coming decades will be marked by an increasing redistribution of global power, with its geo-economic center of gravity shifting eastwards.
    b) The EU is in global competition for 'first mover' advantage in standard-setting.
    c) The EU needs to position itself more firmly in the development and production of next-generation inclusive technologies.

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[3] EU 2021 Strategic Foresight Report, COM(2021) 750 final

d) Beyond specific technologies, hyperconnectivity is driving the transformation.

e) Critical raw materials are essential for the EU's twin transitions.

f) The EU's digital sovereignty will depend on capacity to store, extract and process data, while satisfying the requirements of trust, security and fundamental rights.

g) A smart mix of industrial, research and trade policies with international partnerships could ensure sustainable and diverse supply;

21. points out that in moving to action, technology development should, more than so far, be aligned with the socio-economic developments and happen in a real-world context, thus ensuring rapid take-up and scale-up of the results;

22. proposes increasing the EU interinstitutional collaboration on foresight with special roles of the JRC, European Parliament Research Services and the CoR. The CoR proposes considering on national, regional and municipality levels special participatory citizen science activities for youth, especially university and secondary school students, and for political decision-making by establishing committees for the future focusing on foresight and technology assessment;

New approach to technology and R&D policy by the EU Missions

23. ensures that the societal and behavioral transformation supporting the EU Missions goals needs to be inclusive and positive by applying prototyping widely and experimenting as methodological approach;

24. reminds all that the core of the EU Missions is research and innovation. The complex societal challenges can only be tackled through increasing RDI investments. Both ERA and industrial studies give clear evidence[4] that the EU is lagging-behind its main global competitors in business R&D intensity, particularly in high-tech sectors, and in scaling-up innovative SMEs, which yields negative effects on productivity and competitiveness;

25. agrees with the ERA targets[5] to boost Europe's recovery and to support its green and digital transitions by supporting innovation-based competitiveness and fostering technological sovereignty in key strategic areas (e.g. artificial intelligence, robotics, data ecologies, microelectronics, quantum computing, 5G, next generation batteries, renewable energy, hydrogen technologies, zero-emission built environments, smart mobility, etc.) in line with the model of open strategic autonomy;

26. endorses industrial RDI carbon handprint measures in creating new extended products, systems, and other innovative solutions playing an essential part in reaching the climate targets and points out that without a significant acceleration in clean energy innovation, net-zero emissions targets will not be achievable. The IEA report[6] shows analytical evidence that 25% of the reduction in carbon emissions needed to put the Earth's climate on a sustainable path will come from mature technologies. In comparison, 41% of the necessary tech will come from new

[4] COM(2020) 628 final – A new ERA for Research and Innovation

[5] Ibid

[6] IEA Energy Technology Perspectives 2020

technologies in the early adoption phase, and 34% will come from technology at the demonstration stage, the prototype stage, or those not even conceived yet;

27. emphasizes the role of the EU Missions at the heart of the EU's priorities in making the green and digital transition a reality. The European Commission has launched the piloting phase of the ERA Hubs initiative to facilitate regional RDI collaboration and exchange of best practices, with the incentive of maximizing the value of knowledge production, circulation, and use. The CoR encourages the EU Missions to actively partner with local and regional decision-makers in piloting the ERA Hubs;

28. supports enabling active local contributions for integrated implementation of the ERA Hubs, other experimentation of regional ecosystems, and the EU Missions in experimenting, rapid prototyping, testing, demonstrating, and scaling-up the research and innovation effectiveness in cities and regions;

The CoR's experiences: Synergy between the EU Missions and other main policy instruments

29. urges that the EU Missions can and should integrate the existing enormous number of EU initiatives and programmes to operate in synergy;

30. proposes special attention to the steps in the EU Missions' implementation by the cities and regions with the supporting role of the CoR, including multi-level governance, funding, and successful execution on how the ambitious targets can be achieved by integrating them effectively to EU research and innovation policies, especially Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3/S4), ERA Hubs, New European Bauhaus, and other most relevant initiatives, programmes and instruments provided by the EU multilevel policies;

31. is committed to organize learning activities in collaboration with the JRC to support the EU Mission activities under the headings "City Science and Science Meets Regions" by boosting broad-scale impact activities and sharing the results of the EU Missions. Short-term interventions are not an adequate response for addressing what is really needed. A useful activity is to support creating the network of regional Future Centers to stimulate creativity and entrepreneurial mindset and link these to the New Bauhaus, the UN SDG work and the UNESCO's Futures Literacy Labs to ensure both short- and long-term sustainability of the initiatives undertaken;

32. encourages deepening the collaboration with European networks that are active in enhancing RDI in tackling societal challenges, such as EUA, EARTO and ERRIN. In addition, each EU Mission should collaborate effectively with its theme-specific networks, such as Eurocities and CPMR. The CoR collaborates extensively with all these stakeholder networks to ensure that the EU Missions as a new, bottom-up policy instrument creates the desired impact;

33. urges the importance of enhancing regional capabilities to apply for the EU Mission funding and using the experiences of EU-financed initiatives such as European Network of Living Labs, Vanguard Initiative, Digitalising Cities, Open & Agile Smart Cities, City Science Initiative, and Living-in.EU (the European way of digital transformation in cities and communities). This

will enhance the absorption capacity of cities and regions and inclusion of the citizens all over the EU, acting as a multiplier of the impact of EU initiatives and ensuring a broader and fairer distribution of resources to reach the forefront of development;

The CoR's role to support a European and worldwide transformation

34. emphasizes that the people live and work in the cities and regions and all EU Mission activities should focus on people: from business, academic and governmental stakeholders to individual citizens of all ages and backgrounds. The CoR, the JRC, and other relevant players know diverse effective and proven technologies for citizen-participation, from entrepreneurial discovery to societal innovations camps to be employed to ensure citizens' engagement;

35. underlines that the EU Missions will be successful only if closing the knowledge and innovation divide in Europe and the innovation gap between Europe and the US are highlighted. The focus needs to be on ambitious concrete and inclusive real-life measures using the RDI outcomes;

36. points out that implementing the EU Missions will foster local and regional leadership within the EU, but also worldwide. The CoR in enhancing the role of cities and regions within the Covenant of Mayors and other global networks, should create synergy between the EU Missions and the UN SDG activities and campaigns Race to Zero and Race to Resilience. Reinforcing the global leadership of EU cities and regions can also support the effort of the CoR towards formal recognition of subnational governments in the UNFCCC framework and in preparing for the COP27;

Sum-up of the critical success factors

37. recalls that Europe needs to strengthen its global competitiveness based on knowledge, European-wide partnerships, capacities, and talents to work for the future – an inclusive approach to take everybody on board. Europe has an opportunity to take the role of a global leader implementing collaborative policies to achieve SDGs, and tackling climate change;

38. underlines that real-life action is the key for the EU Missions. Research is essential for creating new solutions and determining the best ways forward – the appropriate applications are vital to achieving results;

39. urges the need to co-finance and support the daily work of cities and regions in their value-creation and bench-learning to scale up the best processes and actions for the everyday well-being of citizens. The role of the demonstrator communities is to act as pioneers, developers, and frontline testers of systemic change for all the others;

40. highlights that the key questions are how the cities and regions learn to orchestrate necessary activities and how the activities attract private industrial and other investments. The ERA Hubs network ideally ensures that local and regional RDI ecosystems become an integrated part of the European-wide RDI ecosystem;

41. calls for better societal and technological predictability and increased collaboration as the critical success factors to accelerate industrial and other investments for reaching carbon neutrality and other EU Mission targets. The mission-oriented policy suits well in strengthening the bottom-up dimension in the EU's unique multilevel governance system: the lessons learnt can and will be actively shared across the Member States. More substantial consideration and integration of the EU Missions' objectives within developing future legislation is necessary, carbon pricing and Fit-for-55 package as examples of this;

42. highlights that the latest EU-level industrial and innovation policy guidelines, plans, and necessary new scientific and technologic knowledge and innovations need to be integrated into the EU Missions and developed and transferred to real-life solutions and practices by effective bottom-up knowledge management and other actions.

II. PROCEDURE

Title	European Missions
Reference(s)	
Legal basis	Article 307 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Procedural basis	Article 41(b) (i) of the CoR Rules of Procedure
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	
Date of Bureau/President's decision	
Commission responsible	Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC)
Rapporteur	Markku Markkula
Analysis	
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Adopted at plenary	Scheduled for 27 April 2022
Previous Committee opinions	
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	