



Fylkeshuset,
3706 Skien, Norway
Tel.: +47 35 58 42 00
Fax: +47 35 52 90 44
nsc@northsea.org
www.northsea.org

SUMMARY BRUSSELS ACTIVITIES for the NSC

- Plenary session Committee of the Regions (CoR) 21-22 **April** 2009

Find below the most important themes discussed at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels.

The social impact of the crisis and the EU's Eastern partnership project were the most important issues in will the CoR's April Plenary Session.

Looking ahead to the European Council on the EU's Eastern partnership initiative and the Ministerial meeting on employment organised by the Czech Presidency - both took place in Prague on 7 May - members of the Committee of the Regions adopted their position on how regional and local authorities should be integrated in these European strategies. CoR President Luc Van den Brande presented the position taken by the Committee before the European Council.

Moreover, the CoR celebrated its 15th birthday during the Plenary Session on 21 April, with the launch of its new Mission Statement, a declaration of intent for the next 15 years and beyond. The Committee of the Regions first met in March 1994, after its creation by the Treaty of Maastricht. The celebrations included a video presentation of the history of the CoR, including interviews with the CoR's former presidents, showing how it has grown through three different treaties and three successive waves of enlargement. President Van den Brande presented the CoR's new Mission Statement which defines the work of the Committee, how it operates and what it achieves, as well as setting out its priorities and aspirations for the next 15 years and beyond.

Regarding the European election campaign the CoR hosted its 4th [Communication Forum](#), bringing together representatives of the European institutions, journalists and editors from across Europe to discuss how citizens can be made aware of the upcoming European elections. The centre-piece of the Forum was a political debate. Also the CoR launched its own [European election website](#) containing useful information about how local and regional representatives can get involved in the election campaign. The site features 27 national pages with information tailored to each Member State, including video messages from 50 regional and local politicians across the EU calling on citizens to cast their vote for Europe in June 2009.

The social impact of the financial crisis: protecting citizens, boosting the economy

As the financial crisis begins to hit the real economy and to weaken the job market, the CoR's April Plenary Session focused on how local and regional authorities can play their part in tackling the social effects of the current crisis. The **various draft opinions (4)** formed part of the Committee of the Regions' message to the meeting of current and future EU presidency holders with the social partners, on May 7 in Prague.

I

The link between economic prosperity and social policy – specifically how social policy can suffer in times of economic recession and what must be done to minimise these negative social consequences – is highlighted in the draft opinion of Veikko Kumpumaki, member of Lapland Regional Council (FI/PES), on ["The Renewed Social Agenda: Opportunities, Access and Solidarity in the 21st Century."](#)

II

The direct impact of the crisis on regions is particularly visible in one specific sector of the economy – tourism. The knock-on effects for the many regions whose economies rely heavily on visitors, and the necessary measures to counteract them, is debated in the draft outlook opinion on ["The correlation between the labour market and regional needs in the area of tourism"](#) by



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Konstantinos Tatsis, President of the Enlarged Prefectural Authority of Dramas-Kavalas-Xanthis (EL/EPP).

III and IV

In two major lead opinions looking at the main European tools to fight the crisis, the CoR has set out its positions and proposals on how to promote recovery as swiftly as possible. The draft opinion on the "[European economic recovery plan and the role of local and regional authorities](#)" by Dietmar Brockes, member of the North Rhine Westphalia Landtag (DE/ALDE), underlines the vital importance of making sure that European money destined for the regional and local level is not delayed by excessive red tape. It also calls on the European Commission to be more flexible in interpreting the rule-book on regional state aid in order to allow support for regions at high risk of job losses. Uno Silberg, chairman of Kose Municipal Council (EE/EA-UEN), in his draft opinion on the "[European Globalisation Adjustment Fund](#)" agrees that measures to help workers who have lost their jobs as a result of globalisation need to be implemented more rapidly at the local level, and that the fund itself needs to be made more flexible in order to respond to the current crisis. Eastern partnership and the Baltic Sea: the CoR took up a position before the Council of Ministers. The adoption of two opinions, one on the Eastern partnership and the other on the strategy for the Baltic Sea, European local and regional authorities encouraged their institutional partners to adopt a mutually supportive, practical approach to their relations with the countries on the EU's eastern flank.

And on the agenda were the relations with third countries at the eastern border of the EU – two relevant draft opinions

In his draft opinion on [Local authorities: actors for development](#), Christophe Rouillon, Mayor of Coulaines (FR/PES), reiterates that cooperation by local and regional authorities is the local dimension of a global strategy of solidarity between the rich and the poor regions of our planet. Noting the Commission's support for the CoR's proposal that a mechanism be established to promote the exchange of information, the CoR proposes to establish and organise this "stock exchange" in the form of an Internet portal, which would in a way be an extension of the annual decentralised cooperation conferences by virtual means.

In preparation for the Swedish presidency of the EU in the second half of the year, Uno Aldegren, president of Skåne regional council (SE/PES) and of the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC), stresses in his opinion on [The role of local and regional authorities within the new Baltic Sea strategy](#) that the Baltic Sea Strategy must involve Russia and Norway in all stages from preparation to implementation and be integrated with the Northern Dimension. Furthermore, additional impetus should be given to the objective to develop the Baltic Sea region into Europe's maritime best practice region as claimed by several Baltic Sea organisations.

And the CoR, in anticipation of the Swedish presidency of the EU and a European Commission communication on this subject, has also presented its priorities in connection with the [New strategy for the Baltic Sea](#). Uno Aldegren welcomed the measures to achieve further synergies between internal policies in this region, but hopes that the CoR's involvement will help ensure that infra-national cooperation, praised on several occasions by the Commission, is accorded a more important role. Although the Baltic Sea strategy is aimed at Member States in the region and is focused on territorial development, Russia is an important factor in the successful implementation of this new macro-regional approach. Dialogue must therefore be initiated with Russia so that tangible projects in the fields of transport, the environment, etc. may be set up to the benefit of both parties, providing real added value for citizens.