



**European Committee
of the Regions**

The President

Brussels, 25/03/2020

CabPres/GM/rc (2020) D 426

Mr David Maria Sassoli

President

European Parliament

Rue Wiertz 60/ Wiertzstraat 60

1047 Brussels

Dear President,

I would like to thank you for your consultation request dated 20 March 2020 to the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) regarding the following dossier:

*Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 and Regulation (EU) No 508/2014 as regards specific measures to mobilise investments in the health care systems of the Member States and in other sectors of their economies in response to the COVID-19 outbreak - **COM(2020) 113 final***

In order to contribute to a swift vote by the European Parliament on March 26, and in an effort to help assisting and supporting, at all levels, our regional and local authorities, the CoR's Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget decided on 25 March 2020 by written procedure not to issue an opinion on this dossier, but to reply in form of the present letter, putting forward the CoR's position on the matter.

The CoR underlines that local and regional authorities are at the forefront of tackling the coronavirus crisis and in fact often acted ahead of the national governments, thus crucially assisting in containing the spread of the virus, in particular by maintaining public order and implementing an array of very practical measures of social distancing, providing healthcare services and reinforcing local capacities, preparedness and robustness of the health infrastructure, as well as adopting the first measures aimed at alleviating the impact on the local and regional economy, while also guaranteeing the provision of all indispensable public services. The CoR therefore welcomes the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative, which provides Member States with liquidity to use the ESI Funds for investments related to the COVID-19 outbreak as a first and necessary step to support our cities and regions in their fight against the crisis.

In particular, the CoR fully supports the proposed measures aiming at accelerating the use of cohesion policy funding to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic, in particular the mobilisation of unspent pre-financing to speed up investments under the ESI Funds related to the COVID-19 outbreak, the extension of eligibility criteria in order to include all Coronavirus crisis related expenditure, as well as the possibility of a more flexible reallocation of financial resources between the Funds. The CoR recalls the need to ensure that all possible reallocations of resources and modifications of cohesion policy programmes are carried out in line with the

principles of partnership and multilevel governance, in order to ensure that the money is spent in the areas of greatest need.

However, given the profound impact that the coronavirus pandemic has on all aspects of public life, stretching the provision of public services to the limit, the CoR considers that further measures are indispensable. In this respect, the CoR invites the Commission and the co-legislators to consider setting up an EU Health Emergency Mechanism, that should help cities and regions across Europe to urgently hire additional medical staff, buy more medical devices, support intensive care services, and provide sanitation tools and material to hospitals and schools. It should streamline and make financial resources more readily available from regional, national and EU budgets for public health services.

The road ahead is uncertain, and communities urgently need help today to not only protect lives, but also to rebuild in the aftermath. In order to assist and support the efforts of our local communities, the CoR is creating a platform to exchange, cooperate and facilitate mutual support between cities and regions across Europe; it is also introducing ways to provide regular and practical information to local and regional authorities about EU measures to address the crisis. Cooperation between the CoR and European Parliament should be envisaged on these projects, in order to maximise their impact and offer the best possible level of communication, information and support to our local and regional authorities.

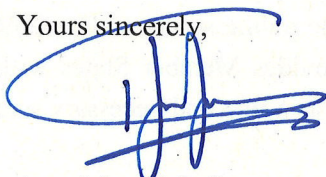
Looking ahead, I also propose to issue a joint call for an urgent adoption of the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework. This would be an important signal for taking the right measures by providing cities and regions with the perspectives for their health, economic and social investment needs. Moreover, the call would emphasize that cohesion policy is an indispensable tool for the European Union to react to crises situations, as it was the case in 2015 and as it is the case now.

As you can see, the Committee stands ready to identify all possible ways to cooperate with the European Parliament in the interest of our citizens and communities in these difficult times. Our first duty as political leaders is to stay united and join forces at local, regional, national and European level to protect our citizens.

I am confident that democracy is stronger than a virus and that, thanks to our joint efforts, over time we will emerge stronger from the COVID-19 crisis.

The CoR's COTER Secretariat remains at your disposal should you require additional information (Mr Gordon Modro, gordon.modro@cor.europa.eu).

Yours sincerely,



Apostolos Tzitzikostas

copy to:

EP Vice President Klara DOBREV

EP Committee Chairs: BUDGET, REGI, ENVI, IMCO

Mr Klaus Welle, Secretary-General of the European Parliament

Mr Petr Blížkovský, Secretary-General of the European Committee of the Regions