



**European Committee
of the Regions**



“Bringing Europe closer to people, building sustainable, resilient, innovative regional and local communities, and striving for our values, education and culture: these are our main priorities.”

Apostolos Tzitzikostas
First Vice-President of the European
Committee of the Regions

“The best investment for our future is in our people. We must engage with all Europeans, not just those who live in the capitals or are knowledgeable about the European Union.”

Ursula von der Leyen
President of the
European Commission

Joint Action Plan

between the European Committee of the Regions
and the European Commission
Directorate General for Education and Culture,
Directorate General for Research and Innovation,
and the Joint Research Centre

Yearly monitoring of the Joint Action Plan, 2023

Foreword

This is the third yearly monitoring report of the Joint Action Plan. Its 27 actions in innovation, research, culture and education aim to increase the administrative and implementation capacity of the regions and cities in order to leave no one behind, to reduce the innovation divide and to build an interconnected innovation ecosystem in Europe.

The monitoring report takes stock of the common actions and achievements in 2023 under the four priority areas.

The Joint Action Plan enables the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) to be an active and recognised partner in the strategic debates and gives new impetus to the collaboration between the CoR and the European Commission.



Iliana Ivanova

Commissioner for Innovation, Research,
Culture, Education and Youth

The collaboration between the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions exemplifies a powerful synergy in research, innovation and education. This monitoring report shows how we leverage diverse expertise to bring tangible benefits to Europeans. This cooperative spirit is crucial as we tackle complex challenges and strive for sustainable impact.



Tanya Hristova

Chair of the Social Policy, Employment, Research,
Education and Culture (SEDEC) Commission

Since its inauguration in November 2020, the Joint Action Plan has turned into an invaluable tool for both the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission in implementing key European EU policies on the ground. The Third Monitoring Report clearly demonstrates that we have achieved a lot and I sincerely hope that this cooperation will be further strengthened during the new political mandate.

Priority A. No one left behind, evidence-based policy-making in regions and cities

The debate with regions and cities on strategic issues continued in 2023. Under the aegis of the **Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP)**, the longstanding **cooperation** forum between DG R&I and the CoR, two **KEP seminars** were organised in 2023.

The first one, **‘Open Science for higher quality, more efficient and more impactful research - Opportunities for Regions and Cities’** was held on 15 June, on CoR premises. The seminar aimed at raising awareness about the benefits of Open Science as a transformative force that is changing the way we conduct research, innovate, and address societal challenges.

The second KEP seminar **‘Implementation of the New European Innovation Agenda – what is in it for regions and cities?’** took place on 28 September in Brussels, back-to-back with the final event of ‘Science meets Regions’. It had a special focus on the Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs) and their relevance to local and regional stakeholders. During the event, the Commission highlighted the key features of the RIVs and gave useful information about the ongoing Call, while regions presented also concrete examples that can be replicated elsewhere.

Both seminars were very well attended, with around 80 people in the audience, composed of CoR members and stakeholders, who engaged in very rich discussions with the high-level speakers (such as Deputy Director-General of the Commission, MEPs, CoR Vice-President and SEDEC Chair besides other regional representatives.)

As foreseen in the KEP process, in order to reach out to the local level, these seminars were followed by a **KEP peer-to-peer event/Innovation Camp** in Joensuu (FI) organised by the European Committee of the Regions to present the New European Innovation Agenda, featuring representatives of DG R&I, who shared their expertise on the subject.

In order to give regions and cities the possibility to interact directly on R&I matters relevant to them, provide feedback on KEP events and make suggestions for future ones, the **KEP website** has been rendered **more interactive**, by way of a functional mailbox and an **EU survey**. Through the interactive website, regional and local stakeholders have the possibility to exchange directly with the Commission services on R&I matters relevant to their territories.

In addition to the events organised in the context of the Joint Action Plan, DG R&I has also organised a number of events more thematically focussed and aimed at facilitating the deployment and commercialisation of R&I actions and maximise its impact. More specifically, online pitching events on different topics were organised to establish contacts between potential investors and beneficiaries of EU-funded R&I projects. On 23 May 2023, an in-person pitching event was organised in the areas of Cluster 5 of Horizon Europe.

One of the flagship initiatives in the effort to **promote a culture of evidence-informed policymaking** in recent years has been the **Science meets Regions** programme, which in 2023 had its final year of implementation. Deriving from the annual *Science meets Parliaments* event, which brought together high-level policy-makers and scientists in the European Parliament, *Science meets Regions* has evolved into a fully-fledged tool for regions and cities to boost their knowledge potential and innovation capacity, in order to improve the quality of public policy-making.

The Preparatory Action "**Advancing evidence for policy at local and regional level**", adopted by the European Parliament in 2021, and developed under the banner of the 'Science meets Regions' programme, came to completion in 2023. The regions and cities selected through calls for expression of interest, organised their events and a series of innovation camps during 2022 and 2023. The remaining activities and inter-regional collaborations notably the pairing schemes and the skills training on working with evidence for policymakers, unfolded in 2023. A major closing event on 27-28 September 2023 brought together the participants in the programme as well as other local and regional stakeholders, including the Spanish presidency of the Council of the European Union, to take stock and discuss the way forward for the initiative.

An innovative component is the organisation of **pairing schemes** between local and regional policymakers and scientists. The pairing schemes, which have now mostly been concluded, were carried out in a decentralised mode, in which the JRC provided financial and methodological support to **9 pairing schemes** implemented locally in 6 different Member States. As a promising early outcome of this initiative, a number of participants jointly received Erasmus+ funding to pursue their initiatives in the field of science for policy. This project is due to start in 2024.

Finally, **a training offer** on working with evidence was developed specifically for (local and regional) policymakers. The course content was developed by an external contractor in close consultation with the JRC and has been delivered repeatedly to groups of policymakers across Europe. The training materials will ultimately be available in at least 11 EU languages, so as to ensure even better inclusion of and outreach to local and regional authorities. The final version of the course material will be available through the JRC's EU Academy Platform.

The **Start-up Village Forum**, launched in 2021, continued its activities in 2023. The 2023 Forum took place in Brussels on 28th February featuring a strong political impulse demonstrated by the participation by various high-level politicians including CoR's Vice-President Tzitzikostas. At the 2023 Forum, the JRC presented a Science for Policy report on the conceptualisation of Startup Villages and announced the launch of the Startup Village Mapping Tool. Additionally, throughout the year, the JRC participated in various relevant events, including the Rural Pact Conference in Uppsala (Sweden) in May 2023.

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

The main focus of the CoR-EC joint activities during 2023 was the implementation of the New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA), with a particular stress on place-based innovation. The already established cooperation with DG R&I and JRC in this field managed to greatly facilitate this process, not least via established transversal instruments such as the renewed Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP 2.0) and Science meets Regions (SmR).

Several key EC initiatives and funding streams, such as the Horizon Europe Missions and New European Bauhaus (NEB), aimed at promoting sustainable and green transition in EU territories, received much greater attention and widespread participation from CoR member regions and various regional associations. Parallel to this, the ERA Hubs pilot project and the Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRIs) gave rise to the first Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs) across Europe. Both DG R&I and DG REGIO launched a dedicated call for new RIVs on 17 May 2023. Other bottom-up and networking initiatives such as the Seal of Excellence and widening measures also accelerated during the reference period and equally hold considerable promise for local impact.

The presence of local and regional representatives, as well as the inclusion of regional (innovation)

associations such as ERRIN and EURADA, in the debates of the ERA Forum allowed for maintaining a specific priority on place-based innovation in the different strands and priority areas of this important policy forum.

Finally, the mid-year change of commissioners (Mariya Gabriel being replaced by co-national Iliana Ivanova) did certainly have some impact on the very active inter-institutional relations within the Joint Action Plan. However, the regular participation in events and contacts between the CoR administration and political members, on the one hand, and EC high-managers and administrators, on the other, allowed for the continuation of this mutually beneficial partnership.

Support to **territorial development and smart specialisation** remains high on the list of priority actions in the Joint Action Plan.

The **Partnerships for Regional Innovation** continued as a joint EC/CoR Pilot Action throughout 2023.

There were regular meetings of working groups reflecting on the strategic framework, the open discovery process and the policy/action mix.

Lessons were shared in two major events:

- 28/03/2023: High Level Event on Partnerships for Regional Innovation “From Playbook to Implementation” hosted at the heart of the European Commission
- 31/05/2023: Conclusion of the joint EC/CoR Pilot Action on the Partnerships for Regional Innovation with an international event hosted in Dalarna Region (Sweden)

The activities lead to a number of publications¹.

JRC scientists are available to **deliver relevant data and factual material to the CoR and to local and regional authorities** directly. A recent example is the Pilot project on regional SDG indicators, which is being led and implemented by the JRC. The project was concluded in 2023, with the presentation of the final report during a high-level event in the Committee of the Regions in December 2023. It is expected to continue under the form of a Preparatory Action tabled in the European Parliament. The JRC also continues to make expertise available to the CoR’s commissions and rapporteurs in the preparation of CoR opinions. An important example was the preparation of the opinion on “Preparing for and dealing with crises: strengthening the resilience of the Union, its regions and cities” (rapporteur C. Clergeau) which relied on input from the JRC team that developed the Vulnerability Dashboard. The contacts were maintained through a later presentation of the Dashboard to the NAT commission in November 2023.

The JRC made a significant contribution to the **CoR's annual Regional and Local Barometer** in several fields: the Green Deal, migration and demography, as well as participatory and deliberative democracy.

The CoR has also been cooperating with the JRC regarding a number of **horizontal studies** (especially as regards the implementation of the Green Deal, foresight, demography and resilience). Collaboration in the area of participatory and deliberative democracy continued in 2023. The “BiodiverCITIES” project was presented at various CoR commission meetings as well as during the final event of ‘*Science meets Regions*’ in September 2023. Moreover, the JRC competence centre on participatory and deliberative democracy (CC-DEMOS) organised several citizen engagement training sessions targeted specifically to

¹ These can be accessed at <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/relevant-publications> and <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/the-square>

local and regional policymakers, including the participants in the 'Science meets Regions' programme.

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

After an important pilot year, the PRI project gained in both policy legitimacy, enriched by local experiences and regional diversity. 2023 laid also the ground for a preparation of a substantial JRC-led couple of publications, "The Square" and ACTIONbook, on place-based innovation and strengthening regional innovation ecosystems. The interested members of the European Parliament also launched a preparatory action on the PRI in order to see this important project further developed during the coming years.

The developments in the New European Bauhaus (NEB), such as the technical expert support for regions and the NEB Facility which will be implemented in 2024-2027, have generated significant interest among many European regions and cities. The "NEB voucher scheme," proposed by the Committee of the Regions' NEB rapporteur, will be implemented via a European Parliament Pilot Project.

The JRC services have regularly been sharing research analyses and studies with the CoR commissions, while the CoR's annual Regional and Local Barometer clearly benefited from JRC policy briefs and data. At the same time, CoR members were invited as speakers to different key EC events, while inter-institutional visit by CoR members to different JRC sites have been in the planning.

Priority B. Close consultation on the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA), the European Education Area (EEA) and the Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP), Horizon Europe Missions and other initiatives

Substantial progress has been made in supporting the active involvement of the CoR in strategic fora, such as the **ERA Forum**. As of the end of 2023, more than 20 meetings of the ERA Forum have taken place. Representatives of the CoR participate in the ERA Forum meetings as observers and are actively involved in the discussions.

At the ERA Forum, the new ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 is currently being implemented. The Policy Agenda consists of a list of 20 actions to be jointly implemented by the European Commission, the Member States, associated countries and stakeholder organisation. The CoR committed to seven ERA actions and engages in the respective implementation activities. **In particular, the CoR is observer in the sub-group of Action 16 – Increase EU-wide access to excellence, co-chaired by DG RTD and DG REGIO that gathers together representatives of the research field and Managing authorities implementing the Cohesion programmes funds, two for each Member State.**

The ERA Forum also started the process towards defining the actions for the next ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027. In the second half of 2023, proposals for new and to be updated actions are discussed in the Forum. The European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) will draft an opinion on a proposed list of actions in the first half of 2024.

In order to test different **ERA Hubs concepts**, two pilot projects, COOPERATE and ERA FABRIC, started in January 2023 and will deliver key results by the end of 2024. ERA Forum members will be informed of the results, which could lead to the launch of follow-up ERA policy initiatives and/or actions.

As of 2023, the ERA Forum monitors the implementation of the actions and provide strategic advice. On 17 January 2024, the ERA policy platform was launched.

ERA4You and inter-sectoral mobility are supported by the European framework for research careers

which was to be adopted by the Council on 18 December 2023, based on the Commission proposal of 13 July 2023 (Council Recommendation on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe). The Council Recommendation also includes the new Charter for Researchers.

On 13 July 2023 the Commission launched the **European Competence Framework for Researchers** (ResearchComp) website. ResearchComp includes the transversal skills that researchers should have for easier inter-sectoral mobility. The CoR was invited to the ERA Forum meetings and received relevant documents including a technical document of the European framework for research careers.

The Commission adopted a **Communication on EU Missions on 19 July 2023**. It is addressed to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. It presents key messages regarding the main achievements of and challenges faced by EU Missions. The Communication proposes recommendations on the way forward for the EU missions beyond 2024.

All five mission secretariats are in constant contact with the CoR. To name just a few examples of collaboration in 2023:

- The **'Adaptation to Climate Change Mission'** has signed an Administrative Arrangement with the JRC, to make scale between the Partnerships for Regional Innovation pilot conducted by the CoR and JRC/DG REGIO and climate resilience planning by regions supported under the Adaptation Mission. This work was also discussed during the final event of the Science meets Regions initiative.

The Mission is preparing the next Mission Forum 2024 in cooperation with the CoR and the EU Belgian Presidency. Furthermore, it has strongly collaborated with the CoR in outreach, communication and stakeholders' events addressing the urgency to improve local preparedness to changing climate: this included the opening of the second Mission Forum by the CoR President on 13 June 2023. The Mission co-created a session on climate adaptation action at the local level at COP28 (with SEDEC Chair Hristova) and at the Week of European Regions. There were some synergic participations to events such as the European Climate Stocktaking on 27 October 2023.

- On 24 January 2023, the Mission **'Restore our Ocean & Waters'** has co-organised a meeting together with the Italian Presidency of Council of Ministers, in Rome, where all Italian regions' representatives have attended. The aim of the meeting was to exchange views among the Commission representatives implementing the Horizon Europe programme and the Italian national authorities involved in the cohesion policy programmes on how more efficiently promote and implement synergies between the Horizon Europe and regional funds.

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

The JAP catalysed a series of key cooperation activities between DG R&I and the members of the CoR in the field of EU Missions, but also the New ERA, Bauhaus and the emerging Regional Innovation Valleys.

In mid-2023, the SEDEC commission of the CoR appointed two key rapporteurs on the Green and Digital Transition for Place-based Innovation (Andrea Putzu (IT/ECR)) and on the Next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (Anne Besnier (FR/PES)). This strategic approach on behalf of local and regional authorities was confirmed also by the EC counterparts, including the DG R&I Director-General Marc Lemaître, who held a discussion with the SEDEC members on 2 October.

The CoR continued its support for the Commission's efforts to achieve the **European Education Area (EEA) by 2025** with local and regional authorities as key partners in its implementation. The CoR adopted at its July 2023 plenary an opinion on how the local and regional authorities could counter disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference. DG EAC contributed to the follow up to this opinion.

DG EAC increased its engagement actions under the European Education Area (EEA) by inviting SEDEC Chair Tanya Hristova to the 6th European Education Summit on 30 November 2023.

CoR representatives also participated in the **EEA midterm review** event in Brussels on 10 October 2023 organised jointly by the European Commission and the European Parliament. With the Commission's launching of an interim EEA policy evaluation, a call for evidence was opened between 15 June and 16 September 2023. The outcomes of the 2023 EEA midterm review process, including the October 2023 midterm review event, will feed the evaluation. Targeted and public consultation will continue in 2024.

DG EAC and DG R&I appreciate the increased engagement of the CoR in the field of higher education and the European Universities initiative and welcome the CoR's opinion on the Higher Education Package. The implementation of the proposal to the Bologna Follow-Up Group will enhance synergies between EHEA (Bologna) and EEA & ERA.

In the field of **digital education**, the Commission adopted the proposal for two Council Recommendations on digital education and skills in April 2023, followed by the adoption by the Council in November 2023. These Council Recommendations emphasize the importance of local and regional actors in different areas. For example, the Commission called for enhancing the links between existing funding instruments and regional strategies for digital education and the digitalisation of schools. It also calls on Member States to involve key stakeholders, such as regional authorities, in developing strategies or strategic approaches for digital education and skills and competences. The Commission also calls for relevant and methodologically sound monitoring, evaluation and assessment of educational initiatives and training programmes on digital skills at local and regional levels.

In the field of **sport**, efforts between DG EAC and the CoR are ongoing to exchange evidence through studies and data to improve sport policies. Both collaborate closely through the **SportHub Alliance for Regional Development in Europe (SHARE)** initiative, as well as through other flagship initiatives, such as the European Week of Sport, the #BeInclusive EU Sport Award and notably the HealthyLifeStyle4All.

The **SHARE initiative** (SportHub: Alliance for Regional Development in Europe) will continue to promote the role of sport and physical activity as an instrument for economic, social and cultural development towards more healthy and active communities, while enabling spaces for healthy lifestyles, for instance in the context of the New European Bauhaus.

Continuity will be ensured in the support of the **European Week of Sport**. Since 2015, the European Week of Sport and its #BeActive message has helped tackle the inactivity crisis, reaching out to citizens at the grassroots level, regardless of age, social background, or fitness level.

The CoR SEDEC commission held a Stakeholder consultation in July 2023 with representatives from DG EAC to talk about the European Sports model, in light of the adoption of their opinion on the European Sports model in its November plenary session.

In the field of **culture**, the collaboration between the CoR and the implementation teams of the **European Capitals of Culture** initiative is set to continue with regular participation in the selection of

the Capitals through the related expert group and ongoing monitoring activities. The CoR communication team helped with the *ad hoc* promotion of iCapital 2023.

The **Commission's Expert Group on Cultural Heritage** is systematically followed by the CoR as an observer. Fostering the mutual exchange of expertise, the expert group has proven to be an important forum for exchange. DG EAC is looking forward to fostering the cooperation in regard to the European Heritage Label Award, which celebrates remarkable projects, initiatives and personalities in the field of cultural heritage and aspires to give stakeholders the opportunity to reflect on recent developments, novelties and strategies. The presentation of the European Heritage Label (EHL) state of play which took place at the SEDEC Committee meeting of 21 June 2023 is another good example. The CoR services have also been informed on the recently published calls for the EHL. Several working meetings have taken place between the EHL EAC team and the CoR to advance the synergies around the EHL Action. EHL EAC Team convenes regular meeting the European Heritage Days department of the CoR to fine tune their actions and favour synergies. The Commission also presentation its OMC report on “Strengthening cultural heritage resilience for climate change” at the SEDEC Commission meeting of 17 February 2023.

On 7 November 2022, the European Alliance Group from the CoR organised the seminar “Protecting and promoting regional Cultural Heritage” during which DG EAC presented “EU policy and actions to support Culture and Cultural Heritage”. In the SEDEC meeting of 8 December 2023 the CoR organized a debate on the ECOC initiative.

The CoR SEDEC Commission prepared an Opinion on “Promoting cultural policies in rural areas within the framework of development and territorial cohesion strategies and the 2030 Agenda”. DG EAC worked together with DG REGIO and DG AGRI on this follow-up.

In this context, DG EAC participated in the Stakeholders’ consultation meeting held by CoR SEDEC on 17 July 2023, where it presented the results from the recently published report “Culture and Democracy: the evidence”. DG EAC also participated at the SEDEC Commission meeting on 2 October where the Opinion was adopted. The Opinion was finally adopted in Plenary on 29 November 2023.

Priority C. Raising awareness and dissemination of funding opportunities. Exchange of best practices in the fields of research and innovation, education, culture, youth and sport

The cooperation between the JAP partners has proven to be important in a joint effort to promote the **EU Youth Portal** as a focal point of information for youngsters on the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+, including the DiscoverEU initiative. Cities and regions are regularly addressed via news items highlighting Commission / CoR initiatives and via articles tackling topics with cities in the spotlight. Some examples include the "Youth4Regions" competition, the "Europe in My Region" stories competition, the presence of the European Solidarity Corps beneficiaries at the European Week of Cities and Regions, traineeships opportunities at the CoR, European Youth Capitals (with CoR represented in its Jury and hosting its final Jury meeting in 2023) and Cultural Gems in European Cities. The European Youth Portal also highlights cities and regions via European Solidarity Corps opportunities, the DiscoverEU competition and its Green Route, the EU Youth Dialogue and its local / regional consultations, and events taking place in EU cities. In the framework of DiscoverEU, the Portal has been providing since spring 2022 a map for meet-ups in EU cities.

The CoR SEDEC Chair or its Rapporteur on Youth participated in each of the nine stakeholders’ meetings during the 2022 European Year of Youth, which were extended until the first half of 2023. EYY stakeholder organisations contributed to the co-creation and implementation of the European Year of

Youth, with activities linked to the EYY objectives and promoting youth participation. They acted as multipliers and represented their organisation and the interests of their members in the EYY stakeholder, national coordinators/national contact points group. The CoR contributed to the implementation report of the EYY (with inputs included in the SWD, which accompany the Commission Communication on the European Year of Youth and the way forward published in January 2024).

Throughout 2023, the CoR continued to promote the **Charter on Youth and Democracy** (co-created in cooperation with the European Youth Forum in a bottom-up participatory process) at several events, including a workshop on youth participation during the European Week of Cities and Regions 2023. A thematic debate on youth participation took place at June 2023 SEDEC meeting as well as in November 2023 at the CoR CIVEX committee meeting, as follow up to the "Conference on the Future of Europe and the Charter on Youth and Democracy". It also strengthened its collaboration with the European Youth Forum and actively promoted the local and regional youth councils for meaningful youth participation.

The Commission welcomes the existing exchanges of experiences and networking opportunities on current calls within EU programmes such as the Erasmus Days and invites the CoR members to maintain the contact with their respective Erasmus+ national agency to enhance participation and dissemination at national level.

The CoR adopted an opinion on mentoring during their October 2023 Plenary. DG EAC had been consulted on it and will produce a follow up to the opinion.

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

Youth policy is in its essence implemented at the local and regional level, which is best placed to cater for the needs and aspirations of the young persons of their communities. The CoR continues to promote initiatives such as local and regional youth councils as structures for meaningful youth participation and encourages its members to continue strengthening and investing in such initiatives.

Priority D. Co-funding of programmes: top-up with European Structural and Investment Funds (Cohesion Policy Funds)

In the context of enhancing synergies between Horizon Europe and the cohesion funds, the CoR is invited to participate in the meetings of the **Seal of Excellence Community of Practice** and to disseminate information on the Seal of Excellence to its members. This should lead to an **increase in the implementation of the Seal of Excellence in the regions** and ultimately to more regions investing in research and innovation. Related to the Seal of excellence, the CoR was invited to participate in the different meetings of the Community of Practice, in a dedicated group on synergies between Cohesion and R&I Policy/programmes and the R&I Days workshops.

The **Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRI) pilot** constitutes an important element of Flagship 3 of the New European Innovation Agenda. Under the EIE WP 23-24 call for implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys, complementarity and synergies with regional participation in pilot PRIs will be sought.

DG R&I is currently exploring the role of regions in innovation ecosystems in the context of the **New European Innovation Agenda**. One action is aimed specifically at accelerating and strengthening innovation ecosystems across Europe and at better connecting them in support of EU priorities.

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

The newly introduced measures to strengthen regional innovation ecosystems and the use of various EU innovation funding sources in synergy was the focus of multiple debates within the EC and CoR, and resulted in a dedicated study within the SEDEC commission in early 2023. The key opinions on Green and Digital Transition for Place-based Innovation (A. Putzu) and on the next FP10 for Research and Innovation (A. Besnier) also took stock of this new reality.

It is noteworthy that the Commissioners for regional policy and for research and innovation have been working together on many aspects of this new policy agenda. The PRI initiative and especially the Regional Innovation Valleys 2023 call were the result of such concerted effort. It is also encouraging to mention that the CoR as an institution and regional associations in Brussels had been involved and regularly consulted from the onset of this process – hence, a much wider outreach and stable basis on which future calls could be based upon.

Conclusions:

Overall, the Joint Action Plan (JAP) has better structured and further strengthened cooperation in a number of key areas between the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions.

The Joint Action Plan is a key tool for maximising the positive impact of EU action in Europe's regions and local communities. It is a hallmark of strengthened outreach, not just to the CoR as a political body, but also directly to the local and regional authorities and the citizens that the CoR represents.

The priority areas identified in the JAP constitute an important compass for decision-makers and policy officers in both the Commission and the CoR. The inbuilt flexibility of this list of actions enables new and interesting projects and initiatives to be included, such as the New European Bauhaus and the cooperation in the framework of the 2022 European Year of Youth and its legacy, while the 2023 European Year of Skills had also benefited from such multilevel governance type of cooperation.