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Subject: Developing the 2030 Agenda to reach the goals: Accelerating the localization of the SDGs
- Council conclusions (27 November 2023)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on developing the 2030 Agenda to reach the goals: Accelerating the localization of the SDGs, as approved by the Council at its 3987th meeting held on 27 November 2023.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON “DEVELOPING THE 2030 AGENDA TO REACH THE GOALS: ACCELERATING THE LOCALIZATION OF THE SDGs”

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- (1) *REAFFIRMS* that the European Union (EU) and its Member States remain firmly committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a comprehensive, integrated, coherent and effective manner, as the collective plan of action to put sustainability, human rights and gender equality at the centre of policy actions at EU level, leaving no one behind. *RECALLS* its previous conclusions on this topic¹, the European Council conclusions of October 2018², as well as the key political messages for the 2023 UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and the 2023 SDG Summit³, and *REAFFIRMS* the commitments therein.

¹ Council conclusions: ‘A sustainable European future: The EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ (ST 10370/17), ‘Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030’ (ST 8286/19), ‘Building a sustainable Europe by 2030 – Progress thus far and next steps’ (ST 14835/19), ‘A comprehensive approach to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development – Building back better from the COVID-19 crisis’ (ST 9850/21) and ‘The EU at the half-time of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda: Steering transformative change and expediting progress at all levels’ (ST 11084/23)

² ST 13/18

³ ST 9435/23

- (2) *ACKNOWLEDGES* that, at the halfway point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the world is far off track to achieving the SDGs. Particularly, *UNDERScores* its concern about the cumulative negative effects of the triple planetary crisis, including climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, the slowing pace of climate action, the global food crisis, the commodity price shocks, and the increasing risk of poverty and inequality across the world affecting the most vulnerable, especially in countries with fragile social protection systems and those affected by emergent and recurrent conflicts. Moreover, *REITERATES* that sustainable development cannot be realised without peace, security and respect for international law, particularly international human rights law, as enshrined in SDG 16. Hence, *SUPPORTS* the UN Secretary-General’s call for a renewed impetus and accelerated actions for reaching the SDGs and the collective commitment reflected in the 2023 SDG Summit Political Declaration, as well as the key messages of the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023, particularly concerning the need for transformative actions rooted in science.
- (3) *RECOGNISES* that sustainable development will only be achieved through an integrated, systemic whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach capable of triggering collective and coherent actions across European, national, regional and local levels, taking into account positive as well as negative spillover-effects. *NOTES* that, according to the OECD, 65% of the 169 targets underlying the 17 SDGs will not be reached without proper engagement of and coordination with local and regional governments. *RECALLS*, therefore, that key actions supporting the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs implementation largely rely on regional and local capabilities, bottom-up actions and local development policies.
- (4) *WELCOMES* the launching of the United Nations Local2030 Coalition in September 2021 and its recognition among the 12 High Impact Initiatives at the SDG Summit in 2023 as a multi-stakeholder platform designed to facilitate cooperation across the UN, and to internationally accelerate the localization of the SDGs and support transformative local-level efforts and progress to deliver the 2030 Agenda. *RECOGNISES* the relevance of the establishment of a Secretariat for the UN Local2030 Coalition, located in Bilbao, contributing to enhance and amplify the scope and impact of this multi-stakeholder and multilevel UN platform for SDG Localization.

- (5) *RECALLS* the resolution adopted by the United Nations Habitat Assembly on 9 June 2023 regarding "Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals", which encourages Member States and members of the specialised agencies of the United Nations to promote the localization of the SDGs in order to accelerate action towards the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda, and strives to advance efforts to develop normative guidance and practical tools relating to all the dimensions of the localization of the SDGs, as well as to build the capacity of local and regional authorities to report on progress through voluntary local and subnational reviews.
- (6) *ACKNOWLEDGES* the Resolution ‘SDGs in EU regions and cities following the EU Voluntary Review and 2023 UN discussions’ adopted by the European Committee of the Regions in its 157th plenary session⁴, as well as the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee ‘EU and Agenda 2030: strengthening the implementation of the SDGs’⁵ adopted in October the 25th.

Boosting localization of the 2030 Agenda at the international level

- (7) *STRESSES* that while the SDGs are global, their achievement depends on making them a reality in towns, cities, rural areas and regions worldwide, by breaking silos among levels of governance and scaling innovative practices. *NOTES* that, according to UN estimations, over half of the global population currently resides in urban areas, and this rate is projected to rise up to 70 percent by 2050. *ACKNOWLEDGES* that, while cities provide opportunities for strengthening sustainable development and provision of public services, rapid urbanisation poses social, economic and environmental risks exacerbating already existing inequalities and urban poverty and, therefore, requires innovative and increased efforts to ensure equal access to housing and basic services for all, while enhancing synergies between rural and urban areas, and capitalizing on the opportunities and specificities of rural areas to ensure territorial cohesion and harmonised development.

⁴ [RESOL-VII/030 SDGs in EU regions and cities following the EU Voluntary Review and 2023 UN discussions.](#)

⁵ [EESC – NAT/903 Opinion EU and Agenda 2030: strengthening the implementation of the SDGs.](#)

- (8) *RECOGNISES* that SDG Localization processes require democratic ownership and citizens' empowerment for participation, and concrete steps towards gender equality, as well as capacity building and innovation among local and regional actors in order to adapt SDGs to local conditions and realities and co-create long-term robust local policies towards ensuring more inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities and regions. *WELCOMES* the UN Local2030 Coalition's focus on mobilising multi-stakeholder partnerships, including with civil society representatives, catalysing inclusive and innovative approaches along with fostering knowledge sharing and tailored capacity-building activities among and for regional and local authorities. Also *WELCOMES* the G20 Platform on SDGs Localization and Intermediary Cities (G20-PLIC) as an open, voluntary and collaborative space for peer dialogue and knowledge sharing. *INVITES* the Commission and the Member States to continue to support these initiatives.
- (9) *RECALLS* that the new European Consensus on Development of 2017 establishes that the EU and its Member States will support transparency, accountability and decentralisation reforms, where appropriate, to empower regional and local authorities and to improve governance and development impact, thus to better address inequalities within and across countries⁶. *REAFFIRMS* the commitment to support processes to help regional and local governments to efficiently interact and engage people and civil society at all stages of policy chain, notably planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as to strengthen their cooperation with local and other regional authorities, including through decentralised cooperation.
- (10) *WELCOMES* the progress made on Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs) to further implement the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Also *STRESSES* the need to continue supporting INFFs as a comprehensive and integrated approach to mobilise financing from all available sources including private funding to reach the SDGs and to contribute to strengthen coordination between all relevant actors engaged in partner countries.

⁶ European Consensus on Development, paragraph 86 (ST 10108/17).

- (11) *WELCOMES* the EU Global Gateway strategy to mobilise investments of up to €300 billion between 2021 and 2027, aimed at also supporting partner countries to progress towards the SDGs, thereby generating genuine and sustainable development outcomes that benefit local communities. In line with the principles of good governance and transparency on which Global Gateway is based, those most affected by potential projects – local communities, businesses and other local stakeholders must have their full say through meaningful civil society engagement at all the stages of the investment cycle. Regions and local governments, as the closest level of government to citizens, can play crucial roles such as voicing the priorities of their local communities, especially for those often marginalised or underrepresented, fostering the local anchoring of projects, contributing to transparency and accountability and facilitating the strategic assets needed to promote investment opportunities for sustainable development. Therefore, *CALLS FOR* the full involvement of and dialogue with the regional and local governments, together with civil society representatives in partner countries to ensure ownership and alignment in the roll out and follow up of the Global Gateway through a Team Europe approach for accelerating the localization of the SDGs.
- (12) *EMPHASISES* the relevance of reinforcing the capacities of the UN System as a whole to better deliver on the SDGs in close synergy with “Our Common Agenda” and particularly through the United Nations Development System reform. *RECOGNISES* the contribution made to this end by the UN Joint SDG Fund, allowing scaled-up response to the SDGs at the country level through a whole of government approach and collaboration among different development stakeholders, in particular local civil society. *WELCOMES* that the EU-UN High-Level Dialogue aims to strengthen EU-UN cooperation for the achievement of the SDGs, which includes defining opportunities for joint and coordinated policy engagement with national and local governments as appropriate, as part of their shared objectives for joint advocacy and multistakeholder partnerships. *WELCOMES* the continued work of the Joint SDG Fund on SDG localization that will enable the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda through integrated policy and financing solutions at regional and local levels. *INVITES* the Commission and the Member States to contribute and to cooperate with this initiative in order to scale up the collaboration between local and regional authorities in Europe and in partner countries, thus increasing the effectiveness of actions and efforts.

Enhancing the contribution of local governments and regions to EU efforts to attain sustainable development

- (13) *REAFFIRMS* that the implementation of EU policies can only be successful if carried out within the framework of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. *RECALLS*, at the halfway point in its timeline, the urgent need to make progress on an integrated, strategic, ambitious and comprehensive EU approach to implementing the SDGs by 2030 as stated in previous Council conclusions. Further *REITERATES* its call to move urgently forward in addressing the implementation of SDGs at all levels by focusing on gaps and addressing interlinkages, synergies, trade-offs and spill-overs in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda, as a means of further localizing the SDGs, and reinforcing vertical and horizontal consistency, inviting the upcoming Commission to consider the adoption of a comprehensive 2030 Agenda implementation strategy, as part of its priorities for the 2024-2029 political cycle, to move forward in addressing the implementation of SDGs at all levels.
- (14) *UNDERLINES* the continued commitment of regions and local governments to the SDGs, and their importance for ensuring long-term sustainable development in Europe, in spite of the multiple and overlapping international crises, including impacts of the pandemic and the consequences of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as the challenges posed by the demographic trends, social, green and digital transitions. *RECALLS* that, because of their unique position as the closest bodies to grassroots and citizens, regional and local governments are at the forefront of pursuing the SDGs and mobilising and engaging citizen participation in sustainable solutions, particularly of women from all segments of society, as well as to actively contribute to foster partnerships, convey information and scale up best and tailor-made practices. *INVITES* regions and local governments to continue and to increase the efforts on implementing the 2030 Agenda by putting in place adequate governance structures, strategic frameworks and integrated action plans, as well as mechanisms for structured dialogue with a wide range of regional and local stakeholders, including the encouragement of cross-border synergies that have an important role in promoting transnational partnerships, cooperation and spillover effects analysis, so as to ensure horizontal and vertical coordination.

(15) *STRESSES* the importance of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) carrying the voice of regions and local governments inside the European Union, representing local and regional authorities and advising the EU on new legislation that has an impact on regions and cities. Equally, *VALUES* its contribution to the global sustainable development dialogue, as well as to the preparation of the EU Voluntary Review on progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁷ and its presentation at the 2023 HLPF. Likewise, *HIGHLIGHTS* the work of the associations and networks of local and regional governments at global, EU and national levels in supporting regions and cities in localizing the SDGs, through capacity-building, peer learning and exchange of best practices including on indicators' development and monitoring at the local level for an evidence-based tracking of progress toward the SDGs. *INVITES* the Commission to continue to enable cities and regions to learn from each other and to benefit from capacity building and peer learning activities in the EU and beyond, including within the Committee of the Regions and through the promotion of decentralised cooperation initiatives. *INVITES* Member States to support local and regional initiatives as well as to seek ways to maximise their scope and impact and integrate their recommendation and experiences in national and EU level policymaking.

⁷ [COM/2023/700 final \(ST 9391/23\)](#)

- (16) *RECOGNISES* that a transformative SDG localization process needs a territorial approach, understanding the territory as a social, economic, environmental, cultural and institutional ecosystem with people at the centre, so as to leave no place and no one behind, and to ensure that the furthest behind are reached first. *RECALLS* that in order to harness the full potential of policy coherence and to maximise impact, it is essential to tailor solutions to the local context and to ensure their support through effective vertical and horizontal coordination. Likewise, local solutions should ideally be anchored in national sustainable development processes and related coordination mechanisms to ensure that feedback is taken into consideration and that best practices applied at the upper levels are also integrated. Capturing the different dimensions would call for synergies to be detected and fostered, to cross-validate impacts and interactions across multiple scales. To this end, *STRESSES* the need for effective vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms across all levels of government, from local to national to European, ensuring coherence and delivery, since addressing multi-dimensional and global challenges such as inequalities –particularly gender and income inequality-, climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, urbanisation, and demographic pressures, requires partnerships that align policy objectives and investments at all levels and that also ensure both costs and benefits of the transition towards a greener, fairer and prosperous future are proportionately distributed.
- (17) *EMPHASISES* the support at EU level to the implementation of the SDGs at regional and local levels through relevant EU policies, such as the European Cohesion Policy, and through knowledge production along with support to local and regional authorities in connection with the European Pillar of Social Rights. *REASSERTS* the importance of initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus as being a key integrator of localising the Sustainable Development Goals through local and democratic participation and through activation of its programmes, thereby harnessing the transformative power of culture, heritage and creativity for the common good and a sustainable future. Likewise, *HIGHLIGHTS* the importance of the European Green Deal to live up to the 2030 Agenda’s ambition and to address the current environmental emergency and the just transition mechanism to leave no region behind, and *RECOGNISES* that its implementation requires greater involvement of regions and cities to ensure transformations reach to and mobilise citizens.

(18) *RECALLS* that Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) constitutes a fundamental approach to ensure an integrated, strategic, ambitious and comprehensive implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and a SDG target in itself. *HIGHLIGHTS* that progress on PCSD demands, in addition to the previous actions, setting up a wide range of tools and mechanisms to better inform decision-making processes, among which regulatory and budgetary alignment with the SDGs feature prominently, measuring the contribution of policies to the SDGs, while taking into account trade-offs, synergies and spillover effects. *RECOGNISES* the steps taken by the Commission to mainstream the SDGs, consistent with the 2021 revision of the Better Regulation policy framework, to help ensure that every legislative proposal contributes to the 2030 Agenda, as well as to assess the contribution to the implementation of the SDGs of each individual programme under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. *ACKNOWLEDGES* that complementary initiatives are also being implemented at national and international level, allowing greater outcome-oriented and evidence-based decision-making. *INVITES* the Commission to explore options for strengthening its budgetary reporting, such as the SDG related expenditure tracking, taking further the commitment to inform on the implementation of the SDGs in all relevant EU programmes, also bearing in mind trade-offs, synergies and spillover effects. *INVITES* Member States to continue developing and improving regulatory and budgetary alignment with SDG methodologies while supporting and enhancing regional and local governments' involvement in these exercises and *INVITES* the Commission to facilitate peer learning exercises using Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX), also involving local public administrations.

- (19) *EMPHASISES* that PCSD requires a more inclusive multi-level governance in decision-making processes and requires synergies among European, national, regional and local policies to better align with and contribute to relevant economic, social and environmental goals. Hence, *WELCOMES* the Commission's efforts to work with regions and cities, as well as civil society, the private sector, academic institutions and other stakeholders, on the EU Voluntary Review, and the inclusion of the multi-level governance with concrete local and regional examples. Nonetheless, in view of a more consistent EU approach to SDG implementation further *REAFFIRMS* the call to the Commission to establish and ensure a regular consultation platform on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, taking into account the roles of the EESC and the CoR, and with the long-term political involvement and commitment of the Commission, to engage with a wide range of stakeholders in EU work on the SDGs, with inclusive and representative membership, to facilitate the whole of society approach and to enhance action and delivery on the SDGs.
- (20) *WELCOMES* the Commission's initiative to embed monitoring and evaluation of relevant SDGs in the European Semester framework, contributing to an appropriately enhanced alignment of EU and Member States' policies contribution to the 2030 Agenda, and *REITERATES* its invitation to the Commission to consider an interim assessment of this process as a contribution to the integrated, strategic, ambitious and comprehensive EU approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and *RECALLS* the importance of anticipatory tools, such as foresight methods, which should be enhanced gradually to address challenges and bottlenecks in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. *NOTES* the increased focus of the European Semester on regional dynamics as an integral part of Europe's strategy for growth in alignment with the 2030 Agenda, and the Commission's intention to place sufficient focus on regional contexts and realities, while noting that the Semester remains the EU Framework for the coordination and surveillance of fiscal, economic and employment policies.

(21) *VALUES* Eurostat’s continued efforts to translate the 2030 Agenda objectives and ambition into meaningful indicators and data to monitor EU and member states’ progress towards the SDGs, also taking into account their policy relevance from an EU perspective. Likewise, *TAKES NOTE* of the CoR’s Resolution VII/030, which expresses the importance for EU level SDG monitoring mechanisms to contain NUTS-2-level data in order to better reflect the reality on the ground and the existing territorial disparities and inequalities within countries. Therefore, *INVITES* Eurostat and Member States to study ways to expand the availability of territorial indicators and data, including through the development and integration of innovative data sources, such as geospatial information and earth observation data, capturing local particularities and conditions in order to better track SDG progress within countries and address the existing gaps, as well as to increase their efforts to develop multidimensional indicators to better measure PCSD at all territorial levels. Furthermore, *INVITES* Eurostat to play an active role in the UN-led reform of the System of National Accounts (SNA) by 2025, where one of the objectives is to enhance the capacity of the SNA to monitor, on a regular basis, progress on wellbeing and sustainability in a more integrated manner, in line with the thrust of the Council conclusions on Economy of Wellbeing 2019 and *CALLS ON* Eurostat to consistently disaggregate data and indicators by sex.

- (22) *WELCOMES* the increasing number of regional and local authorities carrying out Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSR) and their contribution to strengthening overall SDG progress and accountability, bridging the gap between global agendas and local realities, and fostering citizens' ownership of SDG delivery, as an important tool for providing a more detailed and nuanced assessment for complementing the VNRs and for knowledge sharing among local and regional governments. Likewise *ACKNOWLEDGES* the work done by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), in the framework of the Regions2030 project, supporting cities on SDG reporting through their own VLR and *INVITES* the Commission to extend the mandate of the JRC to work with other Regions. *CALLS ON* the Commission and Member States to support these exercises and to find ways to better include and reflect them in their own voluntary review exercises in an integrated way. *RECALLS* the invitation to the Commission to present a new voluntary review of the EU's implementation of the SDGs at least once every four years and ahead of the next SDG Summit at the latest. In relation to this endeavor, *REAFFIRMS* the invitation to the Commission to establish a timely, open, transparent and multilevel participatory process for the preparation of the next EU Voluntary Review, with the active involvement of the Council and in close consultation with key stakeholders and the European Parliament, in line with the UN Guidelines.
- (23) *RECOGNISES* that education and training is a key enabler for the achievement of the SDGs and that the sector plays a critical role in supporting citizens of all ages to learn about the SDGs and to develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required to promote and advance sustainable development. *NOTES* that culture is increasingly integrated into education systems, practices and pedagogies⁸, thus promoting SDG 4. *INVITES* regions and local governments to continue to provide learning opportunities in Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship in both formal, non-formal and informal settings including through culture.

⁸ [Report on the implementation of the resolution on Culture and Sustainable Development A/78/217](#)