

Cities and regions have a key role to play in tackling the global climate emergency

Written by Gilles Pargneaux on 10 May 2018 in Opinion
Opinion

European regions and cities have already demonstrated their commitment to fighting climate change, writes Gilles Pargneaux.



Gilles Pargneaux | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

These last three years have been the hottest on record, in line with long-term global warming. We have witnessed exceptional weather conditions: a 46 per cent increase in extreme weather events since 2000, including temperatures of 50°C in Asia, deadly hurricanes in the Caribbean and in the Atlantic that reached Ireland, devastating floods resulting from monsoon season and continuous droughts in east Africa.

The increase in concentrations of carbon dioxide, rising sea levels and the acidification of our oceans

are carrying on relentlessly. This is a climate emergency. The international community must react quickly and - more importantly - effectively in taking on this challenge.

Since 12 December 2015, when 195 countries signed the Paris agreement, the geopolitical context has changed considerably. The announcement, on 1 June 2017, of the US withdrawal from the agreement ushered in a new dynamic in the face of this climate crisis. It has galvanised, rather than weakened, the other 194 COP21 signatories.

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The Paris agreement is alive, irreversible and non-negotiable. This is the message we sent to US President Donald Trump on the occasion of COP23, which took place in Bonn from 6-17 November 2017, presided by the Fiji Islands.

Clearly, US isolationism will lead to the formation of new alliances on the climate stage and the emergence of new leadership. Accounting for 10 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, the EU is the new leader the world needs to effectively combat climate change.

As Parliament's opinion rapporteur on the role of EU regions and cities in implementing the COP 21 Paris agreement on climate change, I can assure you that EU member states will have to rely on regional and local authorities for a rapid response to this climate challenge.

I believe regional and local organisations hold much more weight and have much more competence than national governments when it comes to fighting air pollution and implementing new environmental regulations.

This is why Article 7 of the Paris Accord calls on regions and cities to support actions aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote regional and international cooperation.

Through my opinion report, which I drafted on behalf of Parliament's environment committee, I assessed the role of EU regions and cities in implementing the Paris agreement.

In the opinion text, I wrote that European regions and cities have already demonstrated their commitment to fighting climate change; they are the main contributors to the Lima-Paris action agenda and to the non-state actor zone for climate action (NAZCA).

My report also praises the launch of initiatives such as the EU covenant of mayors for climate and energy and the commitment to limit global warming to 2°C.

Cities and regions have shown they have the necessary motivation. They now need to be properly integrated into the UN framework convention on climate change. The US' withdrawal from the Paris agreement should encourage the UN to establish a permanent, direct dialogue between regional and local authorities.

The COP21 deal will be implemented without Donald Trump, but not without the US. Since it announced its withdrawal from the accord, the US administration has been confronted with an anti-Trump front on climate. This 'other America' brings together states, cities and companies and insists it will carry on with policies to fight greenhouse gas emissions.

On 8 November 2017, the Governor of California, Jerry Brown, met with members of Parliament's environment committee and the Conference of Presidents to discuss EU-US cooperation on combating climate change. He said California would adhere to the Paris commitments.

In its pursuit of a dialogue with the American people, the EU must quickly set up cooperation at three levels; with US states, cities and business.

My report suggests creating a system of contributions at local level, complementing the contributions determined at national level.

Improvements are also needed on the ground. Cities and regions must speed up their energy transition. They must foster investment at local level and promote measures to mitigate climate change, by reducing bureaucracy, promoting innovative solutions and encouraging partnerships between local communities and civil society.

My report shows how much regions and cities are already actively contributing to the fight against climate change. I will be closely following the elaboration of a report on cities and climate by the intergovernmental panel on climate change, the first-ever report on this crucial topic.

About the author

Gilles Pargneaux (S&D, FR) is Parliament's environment, public health and food safety committee opinion rapporteur on the role of EU regions and cities in implementing the COP 21 deal

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[Environment](#) [5]

[European Commission](#) [6]

[Regions](#) [7]

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[Clean energy package](#) [9]

[Clean mobility](#) [10]

[Energy](#) [11]

[Environment](#) [12]



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