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An aerial photograph of a city, likely Vilnius, showing a dense forest in the foreground, a large park area, and modern buildings in the background under a sunset sky.

Revising the EU Governance Regulation for enhanced local and national climate action: recommendations from EUCityCalc

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Executive Summary

Cities and local governments play a key role in implementing the policies and measures that will be required to achieve national climate goals. Cities often demonstrate a high level of ambition to cut their greenhouse gas emissions that can even go beyond national-level targets, but they also face a range of challenges in implementing measures, which can slow their transition.

While the European Union's Governance Regulation requires EU Member States to closely coordinate with regional and local authorities, the public, and other stakeholders, when formulating National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs), this is not always observed consistently, rigorously, or even at all in certain cases.

Building on exchanges and inputs from partners in the EUCityCalc project and on a range of literature, this report identifies recommendations for the upcoming revision of the EU's

Governance Regulation to ground the role of cities, local authorities, and the public in order to make this regulation truly fit-for-purpose as a multi-level climate governance framework.

In this context, when revising the Governance Regulation, it is essential for the European Commission and related EU institutions and committees in the policymaking process to significantly strengthen:

- i) **enforcement frameworks** that grant the European Commission the mandate to: reject incomplete or unambitious NECPs; oblige Member States to address gaps, clarify information, or increase the ambition of their NECPs; and apply penalties and/or other corrective measures (e.g. if Member States don't submit NECPs and progress reports on time, or fail to uphold Articles 10 and 11 of the Governance), and more (see below);
- ii) **integration and reporting by Member States** in their NECPs and related progress reports **of the commitments, data, and measures of cities and local authorities** (e.g. SECAPs, Climate City Contract, Local Green Deals) as well as the support and resources provided by national and EU governments to support local implementation, and more (see below);
- iii) **multi-level climate and energy dialogues** for enhanced policy coordination, including by making these dialogues permanent and framing clear minimum requirements around the frequency of meetings, diverse representation, mandate of work, and more (see below);
- iv) **public participation requirements** for enhanced environmental democracy by requiring Member States to elaborate engagement strategies and uphold clear minimum timeframes for engagement and taking into account the public's inputs, and more (see below).

Introduction

Cities and local authorities are essential to incorporate into national and EU climate policymaking processes. They often have high climate ambition and ultimately implement many of the policies that are decided at higher levels of government. This means they are essential in actually reaching national and EU climate targets.

At the same time, cities and local authorities also rely on support from their regional and national governments in terms of finance and capacity as well as in overall policy coordination in order to unlock their full climate mitigation potential.

However, in many cases, cities and local authorities are not adequately consulted nor involved in climate policymaking processes at the national and EU levels, as has been well documented, including in two previous EUCityCalc reports entitled, “National and EU factors affecting EUCityCalc pilot cities’ climate transitions” and “Tracking EU climate policy and engaging with policymakers: a toolkit for cities to unlock climate action”.ⁱ

Although the European Union’s Governance Regulation requires Member States to set long-term climate plans in consultation with key stakeholders such as local and regional authorities, civil society organisations, and the wider public, this is not well observed in practice. The disconnect between what is inscribed in law and what is implemented on the ground is widely documented, including by partners in EUCityCalc and in other EU projects such as NECPlatform and Together for 1.5°C.ⁱⁱ

In this context, this report explores the existing shortcomings of the Governance Regulation and formulates a set of recommendations regarding the upcoming revision to the EU’s multi-level climate governance framework in order to place effective public participation and true coordination across levels of government front and centre.

For specific recommendations that EUCityCalc pilot cities have made to their national governments in the context of the ongoing update cycle of NECPs concluding at the end of June 2024, please consult our website [here](#).ⁱⁱⁱ For general recommendations and a corresponding toolkit for how cities can engage in EU climate policymaking, including how they can use the EUCityCalculator tool to convey their strengths, ambition, and needs to

their ministries and EU institutions, please consult our report “[Tracking EU climate policy and engaging with policymakers: a toolkit for cities to unlock climate action](#)”.^{iv}

EU Governance Regulation obligations for local and public participation are rarely upheld

The EU Governance Regulation's provisions for public participation (Article 10) and multi-level climate and energy dialogues involving local authorities (Article 11), have been inadequately implemented by Member States, both in the first phase of developing NECPs in 2018-2019 as well as in the second ongoing phase of updating NECPs in 2023-2024. This has been illustrated in the European Commission's own assessments of NECPs, in a previous EUCityCalc publication, as well as in many other reports, including by the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change.^v

During the first NECP cycle, from 2018-2019, Member States generally set up public consultations (Article 10), but it would be difficult to categorise these as being truly compliant with the intent of the Governance Regulation. Consultation periods were often very short and poorly publicised (sometimes they were even non-existent), rendering it even less likely for stakeholders to be able to give meaningful comments on documents reaching hundreds of pages in length. Similarly, when it came to multi-level climate and energy dialogues (Article 11), experiences were quite mixed, with many some member states failing to establish dialogues, or performing largely box-ticking exercises (e.g. one short workshop).

During the ongoing NECP update cycle, from June 2023 to June 2024, the same concerns have largely been replicated. Climate Action Network Europe and WWF undertook a survey, collecting experiences and data from 35 civil society organisations across 23 EU member states to assess whether national governments have been implementing the provisions for public participation and multi-level dialogues. The study, published in late April 2023, found large deficiencies, with 14 out of 23 EU member states having failed to even start any form of public consultation on their NECPs, despite the deadline for the draft NECPs being due by end of June 2023.^{vi}

Moreover, Climate Action Network Europe and WWF's study also found that even in Member States where public consultations were initiated by late April -- Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain -- that the quality of these consultations varied considerably: e.g. France organised online panels about the NECP process, but no draft revised NECP was provided to stakeholders, and the panels only tackled the theme of energy.

Problematically, these issues have not led to real consequences for Member States, despite the fact that several of the European Commission's assessments of NECPs noted that Member States had not adequately upheld Article 10 and 11.

Similarly, even though Member States must "report on progress in establishing this [multi-level energy and climate] dialogue"^{vii} in their NECP Progress Reports that were due on 15 March 2023, many Member States submitted their progress reports either late or not at all, which is illustrative of wider issues regarding implementation and enforcement.^{viii} This risks further entrenching the status quo, whereby Member States do not adequately involve diverse stakeholders like cities that would actually play a key role in further unlocking the national government's climate ambition.

Part of the problem leading to inconsistent and inadequate implementation of the Governance Regulation's requirements for public participation and dialogues is due to vague provisions in the Governance Regulation. For example, the provisions under Article 10 do not define a minimum duration on what constitutes a sufficient time for the public to be informed, to participate and to express its views, which can lead to Member States holding public consultations that only last a few weeks, which is an extremely short period for such complex and comprehensive planning documents. There is also no provision requiring Member States to consult the public "well before the adoption" of the draft NECP – this is only required for the final version of the NECP. In the first NECP drafting cycle, this led to many Member States only consulting on their final NECP, but not on the draft. This is inadequate for several reasons, including because NECPs are much less likely to significantly change after the first draft has already been prepared and submitted.

Finally, the Governance Regulation's provisions on enforcing transparency in the overall public participation process lack stringency with regard to guidelines and enforcement since Member States are not obliged to provide an easily accessible and clear timeline of their

draft and final NECP processes. Enforcing transparency would be indispensable to providing early and effective opportunities for the public and stakeholders to participate in the NECP drafting process. The public and other stakeholders must be aware of the timing and format well in advance of the public participation process, to be able to fully participate and express their views on the NECPs.^{ix}

The current state of affairs regarding the lack of enforcement of Articles 10 and 11 of the Governance Regulation has pushed the European Committee of the Regions to call for an urgent revision of the regulation:

“The European Committee of the Regions [CoR] considers the poor quality of MCEDs [multi-level climate and energy dialogues] and consultations in some member states, to pose a serious threat to the successful implementation of the Governance Regulation, which can only succeed with the genuine involvement of cities and regions.

[CoR] calls therefore for a reinforcement of Article 11 of the Governance Regulation and suggests that the revised Article 11 require Member States, in line with their own administrative circumstances, to establish a permanent multilevel energy and climate dialogue (PMECD) [...]

[CoR] considers that, in compliance with the Aarhus Convention, the public participation provision in the Governance Regulation (Article 10) should be strengthened and better monitored to ensure that citizens take part to a greater extent in climate, energy and environmental policy design and implementation, which is essential to ensure structural changes in behaviour.”^x

The European Committee of the Regions’ urgent call for a revision of the Governance Regulation chimes with the perspective and experience of partners in the EUCityCalc project, which has formulated a set of recommendations in the next section.

Revising the Governance Regulation

There is a strong need to revise the European Union's Governance Regulation in order to make it fit-for-purpose for multi-level governance: not only due to the vastly different policy landscape that has emerged over the last years but also to correct for longstanding issues in the regulation and notably to greatly strengthen the role of key stakeholders such as cities and local authorities.

The Governance Regulation was adopted in 2018, at a time when the policy and global context was vastly different from today. The European Union had not yet increased the ambition of its 2030 target, nor set its 2050 climate-neutrality target, nor initiated the Fit for 55 climate package. A number of health, energy security and inflation challenges have also been exacerbated by crises and wars in the last years, representing both opportunities and challenges for climate action. These factors, coupled with shortcomings in the Governance Regulation present since its original design, have all exposed how the regulation has become ill-adapted and unfit for the current context.

Partly in recognition of this, a review and potential revision of the Governance Regulation is currently underway. In the summer of 2023, the European Commission opened a call for evidence on the Governance Regulation, to which a number of organisations responded^{xi}, underscoring many of the multi-level governance challenges that have been stressed in previous EUCityCalc publications.^{xii} , The Governance Regulation is being evaluated over the course of 2024.^{xiii}

It is expected for the regulation to be revised, likely starting in 2025, for better overall EU policy alignment due to the large change in context since the original adoption of the Governance Regulation (e.g. Fit for 55), but this may not be 100% guaranteed since future priorities will depend on the direction set by the European Commission which will have a new 5-year term starting in 2025.

There are several fundamental structural revisions to the Governance Regulation (beyond the need for stronger involvement of cities and local authorities), which will not be addressed in this current report, but which can be consulted in the works of organisations such as WWF Europe, Climate Action Network Europe, and Ecologic Institute.^{xiv}

This current report will focus on recommendations to revamp core multi-level policymaking aspects of the Governance Regulation, specifically the NECP process, and namely around Articles 10 and 11 of the regulation. Policymakers at the European Commission must take advantage of the upcoming revision of the Governance Regulation to operationalise much stronger participatory climate policy-making processes, which can also serve to enhance the climate ambition of Member States and the EU. The recommendations below result from the inputs of partners of the EUCityCalc project and also build on a range of literature on the subject cited throughout this report.

Recommendations for an enforcement framework and cross-cutting integration of local action in NECPs

In the upcoming revision of the Governance Regulation, the European Commission and related EU institutions and committees in the policymaking process must significantly reinforce an enforcement framework and cross-cutting incorporation of local action in NECPs through several amendments:

- Introduce a **robust enforcement framework**, with **commensurate deterrents and/or penalties for non-compliance with the Governance Regulation**, including in the event of **unambitious NECPs** (i.e. not ambitious enough relative to the Member States' required contribution to the EU climate target).
- The European Commission should be given the **mandate to i) reject NECPs that are incomplete or unambitious, ii) oblige Member States to address gaps, provide more information, and/or increase the level of ambition in their plans, and iii) apply penalties and/or other corrective measures**, where necessary, to Member States that are late in submitting their NECPs and progress reports, or fail to uphold other obligations under the Governance Regulation such as with regard to Articles 10 and 11.
 - o As noted by Climate Action Network Europe, Articles 29 to 34 of the Governance Regulation have not been effective in ensuring enforcement of the regulation.^{xv} For example, while Article 31 stipulates that in the event of insufficient NECPs, the European Commission “shall propose measures and exercise its powers at Union level in order to ensure the collective achievement of those objectives and targets” (Article 31, paragraph 3), this appears to be a provision that is not enforced and would benefit from more clarity to grant it ‘regulatory teeth’.

- While the upcoming revision of the Governance Regulation must ensure that more regulatory and enforcement discretion is given to the European Commission, it is worth noting that quality assurance and quality control processes regarding the submission and review of NECPs, including the rejection by the Commission of inadequate plans, could already be implemented immediately without a change to the regulation.^{xvi} This should already be done, especially since the timeline for the revision of the Governance Regulation is not clearly defined.
- **Member States should integrate and report on commitments made by cities and local authorities in their NECPs and progress reports.**
 - This includes, but is not limited to, reflecting in NECPs: **Sustainable Energy Action Plans (SEAPs) and Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs)** for signatories of the Covenant of Mayors as well as the **Climate City Contracts and Action Plans** developed by Mission Cities, **Local Green Deals** under the Intelligent Cities Challenge.^{xvii} (Going beyond the scope of the revision of the Governance Regulation, aligning the timeline of these urban climate action commitments would also be beneficial.)
 - The **NECP template should thus be broadened to allow for mandatory incorporation of reporting on such initiatives, including the data and measures undertaken and envisaged.**
 - Requiring NECPs to incorporate city-level climate commitments, data, and measures and to regularly report on these would ensure better coordination between local and national levels of government as well as boost awareness of city-driven initiatives that have the potential to accelerate the achievement of national climate targets.
- The **NECP template could also be expanded to include a new chapter or subsection regarding “Support and resources provided to Local and Regional Authorities for implementation”**, as recommended by the European Committee of the Regions.^{xviii} Herein, Member States would describe the technical and financial support available for implementation at all tiers of governance. Member States could describe how different EU and national funds are made available to local and regional authorities to support the implementation of EU and national climate policies, which could also feature as a regular item in discussions of the permanent multi-level climate and energy dialogues (PMECDs – more on these below). As part of this reporting, Member States should also quantify and report on the estimated level of investment needed at the local level to achieve these targets and policies.

Incorporating these recommendations into a revised Governance Regulation would already go a long way in addressing numerous enforcement gaps in the current framework, which has led to non-optimal outcomes, an inadequate level of ambition, and insufficient engagement with local authorities or consideration of their real contributions to national plans. Beyond these cross-cutting issues, it is also vital for the revision of the regulation to

rethink the structure and requirements around multi-level climate and energy dialogues, as expanded upon in the next section.

Recommendations for permanent and robust multi-level climate and energy dialogues

In the upcoming revision of the Governance Regulation, the European Commission and related EU institutions and committees in the policymaking process must significantly reinforce multi-level climate and energy dialogues for enhanced policy coordination through several amendments:

- **Require Member States to establish a permanent multi-level climate and energy dialogue (PMCED)**, as recommended by the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change, the European Committee of the Regions, cities, NGOs, think tanks, and more.^{xix} **Among other things, PMCEDs can serve to define the “how” regarding how to reach Member States’ and cities’ climate objectives (technically, financially) as well as to keep stock of NECP implementation to ensure whether Member States are on track and what opportunity areas exist.**
 - o Whereas the preamble to the Governance Regulation calls for Member States to establish “a permanent multi-level energy dialogue”, Article 11 of the same regulation does not include the word “permanent”. **This should be corrected by prefacing “MCED” with “permanent” in Article 11**, which would be an easy and necessary fix. Other detailed requirements should be added, as covered in the below points.
 - o The **last sentence of Article 11 should also be amended, by changing “may” to “shall”** regarding the discussion of NECPs in MCEDs: “Integrated national energy and climate plans ~~may~~ **shall** be discussed within the framework of such a dialogue.”
 - o **Article 17(2)(b) should also be amended by deleting “where applicable”** (referring to the obligation for Member States to report on progress in establishing MCEDs).^{xx}
 - o In general, the European Commission and related EU institutions **should develop much clearer guidance on PMCEDs** in the upcoming revision of the Governance Regulation, including by drafting **legally binding minimum requirements on scope, permanence, frequency, composition and institutional make-up of the PMCEDs and related reporting**. Below we propose recommendations along these lines, which should be further elaborated on by the European Commission building on best practices, including experiences from the NECPPlatform project.^{xxi}

- **PMCEDs should convene regularly, at least 3 times a year outside of NECP draft/update cycles and at least 3 times a year during NECP draft/update cycles** (it is recommended to increase the frequency of meetings to at least 6 times a year during NECP draft/update cycles, while recognising this may depend on Member States 'context'). PMCED meetings occurring during the NECP draft/update cycle must happen at the inception stage, to ensure dialogue and exchanges occur before a first full draft has already been prepared. Past experience shows that it is difficult to alter the contents of a draft NECP or draft updated NECP that's already been submitted, despite the fact that in principle another year is reserved to finalise it.^{xxii}
- **PMCEDs should be required to represent diverse stakeholders in a Member State**, with an obligation to have representation from **Non-governmental organisations/civil society organisations or institutions representing local authorities** such as a national association for cities/municipalities, a regional/local energy association, or representatives of specific cities. While the exact number of stakeholders may vary in Member States, PMCEDs should convene at least 3 NGOs/CSOs and 6 organisations or institutions representing local authorities (in the event the minimum number of stakeholders is not convened, Member States will need to justify this in relevant reporting to the European Commission – the European Commission will assess this and make relevant recommendations, including potential remedial actions if it deems the justification to be inadequate).
- **PMECDs could be linked to, or embedded within the responsibilities of, a National Climate Advisory Body or other existing national frameworks.**
 - o The European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change calls on Member States to establish a National Climate Advisory Body, which they specifically indicate should be linked to permanent MCEDs.^{xxiii} Member States may also have existing national structures and frameworks in place which may be better suited to host MCEDs.^{xxiv} Therefore, some degree of flexibility can be granted to Member States determining where and how such permanent MCEDs should be hosted, so long as clear minimum requirements are determined, as indicated above and below.
 - o PMCEDs could also be used as a forum to discuss additional facets of the European Green Deal and related climate legislation extending beyond just the scope of the Governance Regulation.^{xxv} However, care is needed to ensure adequate time and resources are dedicated first and foremost to the Governance Regulation and related processes.
- **Clearer binding reporting requirements are needed on PMECDs:**
 - o Further provisions in Article 17(2) and/or in reporting templates should be added **requiring Member States to report in detail on PMCEDs, including: who participated in the PMCEDs, how many meetings took place and which topics were discussed, and how the perspectives from**

stakeholders in the MCEDs informed the development/update of the NECP and LTS.^{xxvi} These changes could be operationalised via a revised reporting template, e.g. as proposed by the European Environmental Bureau,^{xxvii} which could be further expanded upon.

- **The European Commission must also assess the quality of multi-level climate and energy dialogues** in its evaluation of Member States' draft and final NECP and progress reports, **and make recommendations to Member States** including **possibly imposing penalties and other corrective measures** where relevant (e.g. in the event that MCEDs have not been adequately set up or engaged).^{xxviii}
- **Member States should also be required to publish an annual report on PMCEDs** (beyond the formal reporting to the European Commission in NECP drafts and progress reports) which should **summarise views expressed and address cases where those views were not taken into account.**^{xxix}

Implementing the above recommendations in a revision of the Governance Regulation are absolutely essential to setting a concrete basis for ministries, local authorities and cities, and other stakeholders to genuinely engage with one another with a view to strengthening NECPs and supporting local climate ambition. Many have pointed to the significant weaknesses observed in the implementation of multi-level climate and energy dialogues currently,^{xxx} but the good news is that many of these issues can be addressed through a revised regulation that embeds the above principles and amendments. In addition to substantially strengthening MCEDs, many improvements are also needed with regard to public participation processes, as expanded upon in the next section.

Recommendations for reinforced and legitimate public participation

In the upcoming revision of the Governance Regulation, the European Commission and related EU institutions and committees in the policymaking process must significantly reinforce public participation requirements for enhanced environmental democracy through several amendments.

Namely, there must be requirements for Member States to **establish a stakeholder engagement strategy**, to **respect a minimum timeframe for the public to make inputs** and to **ensure these inputs are considered in the development of the NECP** (while all

options are still open), and to **report on these elements** in the NECP and progress reports to **the European Commission which will assess these for conformity**:

- Regarding the engagement strategy: Member States should be obliged to set out a strategy **identifying different stakeholder groups** among the public and **how these groups will be engaged** depending on the stakeholder group (e.g. social media promotion and online articles may be an effective way to engage some groups, while holding a public meeting or putting up physical flyers in municipal buildings may be more effective for other groups). The strategy should also **differentiate how efforts will be made to ensure communities that are affected and/or particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change will be reached**.^{xxxix}
 - o In terms of practical implementation, as others have flagged, **Recital 29 of the Governance Regulation mentions the need for accessible information and public notices** and states that “when carrying out public consultations, Member States should aim to ensure equal participation”, but **the contents of this recital must be made binding via an operational article** in order to actually work (this was one ground upon which the European Union was found in noncompliance with the Aarhus Convention requirements by the Meeting of the Parties both in [2014](#) and again in [2021](#)).^{xxxix}
- Regarding the minimum timeframe for the public to make inputs: **Member States should be obliged to respect a mandatory minimum timeframe of at least 4 weeks for public consultation on NECPs**. The **public should be informed of the upcoming consultation well ahead of time (at least 2 weeks)**. These factors will help ensure the public has the opportunity to plan ahead for the consultation and has enough time to get acquainted with the information to formulate inputs.^{xxxix}
- Regarding the need for public inputs to be considered in the development of the NECP: the **public consultation should conclude at least 2 months before the NECP submission deadline**, to allow for sufficient time for the Member State to process and incorporate any views before submitting the draft NECP or finalising the NECP. Respecting these timelines is crucial to ensure the public is providing inputs on a document that is not static (i.e. with options still on the table, in accordance with Articles 4 and 6 of the Aarhus Convention). Otherwise, the public consultation risks becoming a tick-the-box exercise where it is not possible to truly consider any inputs submitted. Article 9(4) of the Governance Regulation should thus be amended to clarify that it is referring to a draft for the purpose of informing the public, rather than the draft that must be submitted to the European Commission detailed in Articles 9(1) and 14(1).^{xxxix}

- Regarding the need for regular reporting on these elements: **Member States should be required to report on the above elements in detail, both in their NECP submissions and in the progress reports to the European Commission.**
 - o Due to the low level of detail currently provided in NECPs, based on the existing provision in the Governance Regulation to include a “description of the public consultation and involvement of stakeholders and their results”, it is clear that the **templates on drafting and reporting of NECPs need adjustment to better detail how the public’s views were reflected**, as the EEB and others have suggested.^{xxxv}
 - o At a minimum, Member States’ reporting on public participation should include **detailed descriptions of how different stakeholder groups were engaged** to notify them of the opportunity to make public comments, **when and for how long the public comment period took place, whether the consultation concluded at least 2 months before the submission of the draft/final NECP, how the inputs were integrated into the draft/final NECP or why they were not with compelling justifications.**
 - o The **European Commission must then assess the quality of this reporting and make recommendations to Member States** including **possibly imposing penalties and other corrective measures** where relevant (e.g. in the event public participation requirements have not been upheld or were weakly implemented).

It is crucial for the upcoming revision of the Governance Regulation to re-centre public participation by ensuring democratic climate policymaking principles are upheld and fostered. Member States’ large shortcomings with regard to enforcing public participation are not minor issues. In fact, as the ESABCC notes, this implementation gap actually means that EU is in breach of the Aarhus Convention in relation to public engagement in the NECP process.^{xxxvi}

Conclusion

The shortcomings of the EU's Governance Regulation to truly deliver on multi-level climate policy making and public participation are illustrated in a large body of literature as well as in first-hand experiences of local authorities in EUCityCalc and other projects focused on similar topics such as NECPlatform and Together for 1.5°C.

The first cycle of developing National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) from 2018-2019 demonstrated a huge gap between obligations for EU Member States to establish multi-level climate and energy dialogues with local authorities (Article 11) and to foster public participation (Article 10) and the actual implementation of these legal requirements. Unfortunately, these same issues have largely repeated themselves during the current NECP cycle which is wrapping up at the end of June 2024. In both cases, there have been either unclear or no consequences for Member States failing to properly uphold and implement key provisions of the Governance Regulation, despite the fact that these large shortcomings are even in breach of the Aarhus Convention (see above).

Clearly, there needs to be a fundamental revision of the Governance Regulation that ensures public participation and engagement with local authorities is not only upheld but also greatly strengthened and even fostered, as detailed in this report.

While the exact timeline for the upcoming revision of the regulation is not clearly specified – it may depend on the priorities of a new European Parliament and new European Commission – it is expected to get underway in 2025. It is crucial that the Governance Regulation be revised in the near future, given the vastly different policy and geopolitical landscape since its initial adoption as well as its major shortcomings and loopholes (see above). Revising the regulation soon is also important since there are a number of milestones in the next years that must be grounded in a better regulation: e.g. the submission of NECPs progress reports in March 2027, the preparation of the draft NECPs for the period 2030-2040 (to be submitted by 1 January 2028), and the preparation of the LTSs for the period 2030-2060 (to be submitted by 1 January 2029).^{xxxvii}

Since the revision of the Governance Regulation is not planned during the ongoing 2023-2024 NECP cycle, the recommendations enclosed in this report will not influence current

NECPs. Rather, they are intended to make a key pillar of EU multi-level climate policy truly fit for purpose by embedding urgent changes.

In this context, it is essential for the European Commission and related EU institutions and committees in the policymaking process to significantly strengthen:

- i) **enforcement frameworks** that grant the European Commission the mandate to: reject incomplete or unambitious NECPs; oblige Member States to address gaps, clarify information, or increase the ambition of their NECPs; and apply penalties and/or other corrective measures (e.g. if Member States don't submit NECPs and progress reports on time, or fail to uphold Articles 10 and 11 of the Governance), and more (see above);
- ii) **integration and reporting by Member States** in their NECPs and related progress reports **of the commitments, data, and measures of cities and local authorities** (e.g. SECAPs, Climate City Contract, Local Green Deals) as well as the support and resources provided by national and EU governments to support local implementation, and more (see above);
- iii) **multi-level climate and energy dialogues** for enhanced policy coordination, including by making these dialogues permanent and framing clear minimum requirements around the frequency of meetings, diverse representation, mandate of work, and more (see above);
- iv) **public participation requirements** for enhanced environmental democracy by requiring Member States to elaborate engagement strategies and uphold clear minimum timeframes for engagement and taking into account the public's inputs, and more (see above).

For the Governance Regulation to truly deliver on its ambition for multi-level governance, the urgent recommendations and amendments detailed in this report to revise the regulation need to be designed with intention and robustness to avoid leading to non-compliance or simple box-ticking, which is the current status quo. While it may currently be a sad state of affairs for this flagship EU multi-level climate policy, the substantial improvements recommended in this report indicate a bright future where EU climate policymaking can become truly iterative, inclusive, and ambitious.

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- ⁱⁱ For more information about the NECPlatform project and Together for 1.5°C project, please consult the following webpages respectively: <https://energy-cities.eu/project/life-necplatform/> & <https://1point5.caneurope.org/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://europeancitycalculator.eu/publications/>
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^{xx} See the below text from the current Governance Regulation with "where applicable" struck from the text:

"2. The integrated national energy and climate progress report shall cover the following elements:

(a) information on the progress accomplished towards reaching the objectives, targets and contributions set out in the integrated national energy and climate plan, and towards financing and implementing the policies and measures necessary to meet them, including a review of actual investment against initial investment assumptions;

(b) ~~where applicable,~~ information on the progress in establishing the dialogue referred to in Article 11" (Article 17, paragraph 2, Governance Regulation).

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^{xxx} See for example, the following, among others: 4i-TRACTION (6 February 2024), “Fostering transformative climate governance? The potential of multilevel climate and energy dialogues: A criteria-based assessment of Member States reports under Article 11 of the Governance Regulation”

^{xxxi} Informed by: CAN Europe submission to the Call for Evidence on the Governance Regulation Review Report (July 2023), https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13799-Energy-Union-and-climate-action-Review-report-on-the-Governance-Regulation/F3433698_en

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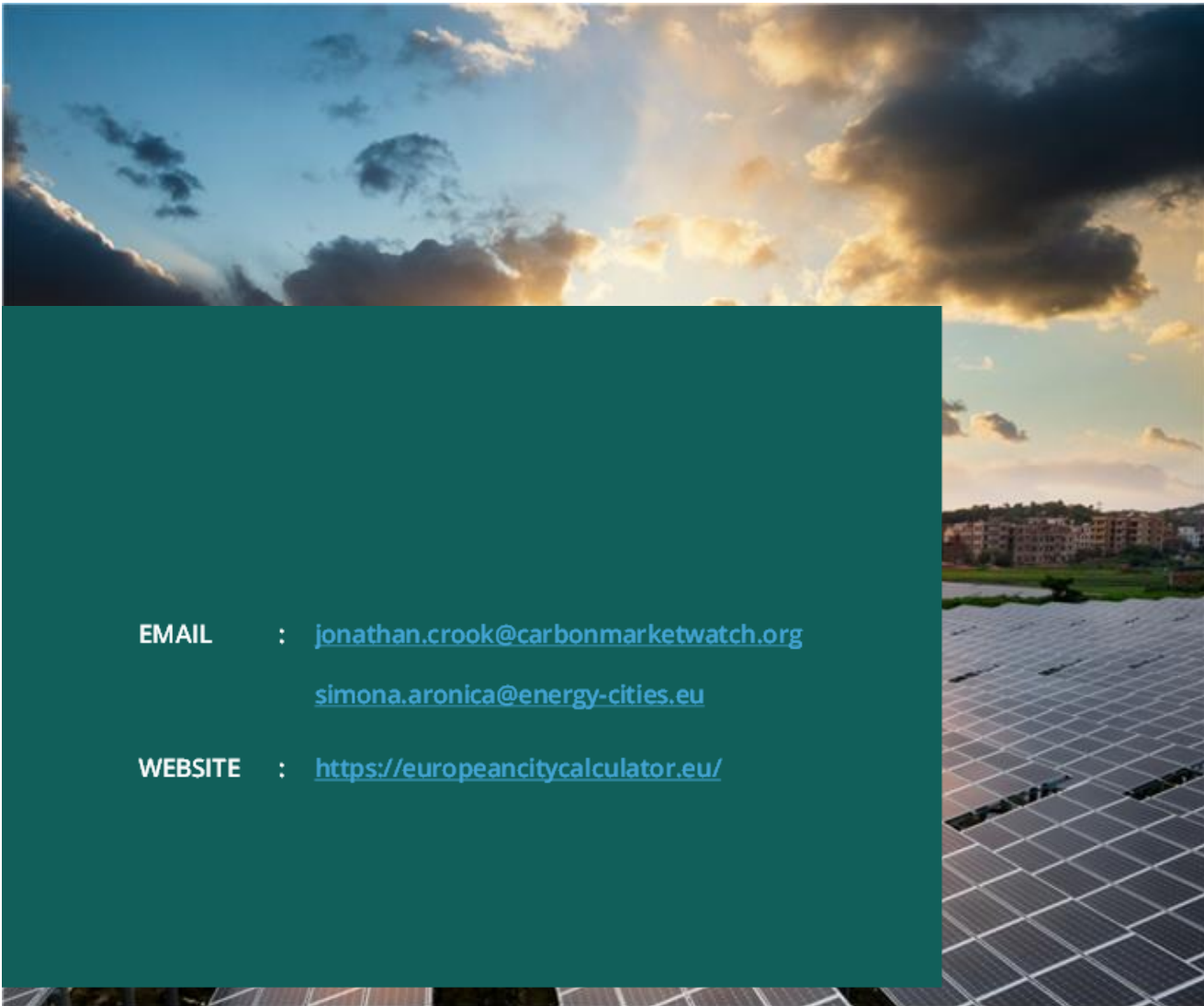
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The background of the page is a photograph showing a vast field of solar panels in the foreground, with a residential building visible in the distance under a dramatic sky with large, golden-lit clouds at sunset or sunrise.

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