

Recommendations to Heads of State or Government of the EU and the Eastern Partner countries

The Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) is committed to pursuing the objectives of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) at local level, to promoting the universal values upon which the EU is founded – the rule of law, respect for human rights and democracy –, and fostering territorial cooperation between the EU and partner countries.

CORLEAP aims to support local democracy and good governance both in the EaP countries and in the EU. It provides an institutional framework for cooperation and exchanging good practices on territorial development and decentralisation between members of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and representatives of the local and regional authorities of the partner countries.

The Joint Declaration adopted at the 5th Eastern Partnership Summit on 24 November 2017 presented CORLEAP as an effective instrument for local and regional authorities to advance the objectives of the EaP at the level of governance closest to citizens. This becomes even more important in the aftermath of an unprecedented crisis, such as COVID-19, when strengthening resilience is the overriding priority for the policy framework.

Furthermore, subnational authorities have an essential role in promoting the Eastern Partnership beyond the capitals. They continue to develop as players and policy shapers within the EaP architecture, and further support is needed to enable them to grow into their role. Many of the key EaP deliverables are based on achievements and sustained efforts at sub-national level, which should continue to be acknowledged in summit conclusions.

CORLEAP contributed to the structured consultation process on the future of the Eastern Partnership with suggestions on how to further develop and increase the visibility of the involvement of local and regional authorities (LRAs) across the Partnership priorities, drawing on CORLEAP reports and position papers adopted during 2018-2019.

Among these suggestions, CORLEAP advocates for the creation of a platform for online training and/or the establishment of an **EaP Academy for the Public Administration serving the local/regional governments, with headquarters to be located in one of the partner countries and tailored to the specific needs of public administration at sub-national level**. This proposal is a tool for capacity building devoted to LRAs and is hereby submitted to Heads of State and Government, together with a set of other recommendations that address the local and regional dimension of the future Eastern Partnership.

CORLEAP is further committed to delivering on and measuring up to the regard it is held in, by consolidating the basis on which resilience can take root and grow at community level, by showcasing the success and potential of territorial cooperation, and by increasing the understanding and visibility of the benefits of EaP policy for citizens.

Therefore we, the representatives of local and regional authorities of the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries,

HAVING REGARD TO:

- the role of local and regional authorities in strengthening resilience, defined as a broad concept encompassing the whole of society, featuring democracy, trust in institutions and sustainable development, and the capacity to reform¹;
- the need to support reforms that promote decentralisation and consolidation of local self-government in the partner countries as a means to foster democracy, achieve sustainable, inclusive and smart development and as a way to increase territorial and cross-border cooperation where relevant;
- our commitment to deepening good cooperation among local and regional authorities, their associations and civil society organisations for the benefit of all citizens;
- the CORLEAP reports on fiscal decentralisation policies and financial autonomy; capacity building in relation to local and regional government; promoting people-to-people contact through cross-border cooperation programmes; economic cooperation and economic development at local level and sustainable municipal development in the EaP, as adopted at the eighth, ninth and tenth CORLEAP annual meetings and their recommendations;
- the CORLEAP non paper on capacity building for local and regional public administrations in Eastern Partnership countries from February 2019;
- the CORLEAP position paper on the proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI);
- the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on Local and regional authorities shaping the future Eastern Partnership, adopted in December 2019²;
- our further strengthened cooperation with our institutional partners, notably the European Commission and the European External Action Service and the permanent observers of CORLEAP, namely the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum;

Local and regional authorities shaping the future of the Eastern Partnership

1. **WELCOME** local and regional authorities' reinforced role in the implementation of Eastern Partnership policies, strategies and flagship initiatives, including their increased involvement in the work of the multilateral platforms and their panels.
2. **WELCOME** the EU Joint Communication on Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 entitled *Reinforcing resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all* and in particular the uptake therein of the proposal regarding the establishment of an EaP School of Public Administration, as well as the fact that local authorities are recognised as key multipliers and opinion leaders in strategic communication on EU actions, political priorities and values.
3. **WELCOME** the EU Council Conclusions on Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020, which reaffirms shared commitments and fundamental values of the Partnership and underlines the crucial importance of professional, depoliticised, people-centred and accountable public administrations.
4. **INSIST ON** the participation of EaP LRAs in drafting policy recommendations and legislation, as well as their active involvement in negotiations with the central authorities on projects and decisions of interest for the local and regional levels.
5. **CALL FOR** a strategic approach to strengthen regional and local initiatives, which would have a positive effect on the implementation of democratisation and reform processes. It would also strengthen the economic power of the regions and municipalities in the EaP countries, creating new development perspectives for the citizens living there.

¹ Joint Communication on *A Strategic approach to resilience in the EU's external action*.

² CDR 3731/2019

6. **STATE** that the Eastern Partnership should increasingly benefit local stakeholders and EU financial resources should be adapted to target their needs.
7. **ENCOURAGE** the EaP countries' participation in Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Creative Europe, COSME and other programmes that offer additional exchange opportunities for universities, administrations, businesses and researchers, and call for more efforts to raise awareness of these programmes at local and regional level.
8. **EXPECT** that EU assistance to and cooperation with LRAs from EaP countries would not suffer in financial or organisational terms as a result of increased flexibility in the allocation of financial and other resources between the various geographic and thematic programmes within the proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument.
9. **REQUEST** that LRAs and their associations be involved in the design, programming and management of bilateral assistance programmes for the period 2021-2027, and that they be ready to reinforce their capacity for engagement.
10. **UNDERLINE** that LRAs and their associations have an essential role to play in communicating on the Eastern Partnership's achievements.
11. **CALL** for a review of the EaP 20 deliverables based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in order to facilitate the achievement of SDGs in the EaP.

Strengthening local democracy, good governance and inclusiveness

12. **REAFFIRM** that good governance cannot be built by overlooking the local level. LRAs are well-placed to support the development of a strong and inclusive civil society and to help ensure the democratisation and modernisation of local communities.
13. **HIGHLIGHT** the need for open dialogue in inclusive public administration and local government reforms, including as part of territorial reforms, and in promoting a partnership culture between local and central authorities.
14. **EMPHASISE** the important role that LRAs play in defending key rights at local and regional level, including in the protection of minorities and the prevention of gender discrimination;
15. **CONSIDER** that the absence of real fiscal decentralisation, which should be a priority for all Eastern Partnership countries, is the main obstacle to introducing other elements of local government sustainability. Local politicians, service providers and administrators can develop their capacity in practice only by implementing their own policies and administering their own revenues.
16. **CALL FOR** a greater role and appropriate resources for the associations of local and regional authorities to assist LRAs in participating in the drafting and implementation of national/sectoral/regional strategies and policies affecting them, and in providing services.
17. **REMINDE** that capacity building for local and regional authorities depends on the provision of the proper conditions in terms of the legal, information, economic and intellectual-creative environment. Institutional capacity relates to the whole gamut of relations between public authorities, businesses and citizens, which can be captured by the concept of good governance.
18. **REGARD** the introduction of new programmes for capacity building for local and regional authorities in the partner countries as a catalytic tool to attract further cooperation with EU's cities and regions.
19. **TRUST** that public administration reform and policies designed to enhance transparency and integrity are vital for sound governance and public administration. Enhancing the institutional capacity of public authorities and efficient public administration at local and regional level is a stated priority.
20. **RECOMMEND** therefore that further reflection be given to tailoring initiatives and programmes aimed at strengthening administrative capacity to the specific public administration needs at sub-national level in EaP countries.
21. **REQUEST** capacity-building strategies, programmes and training curricula both for local elected representatives and for local administrations, in order to enable local and regional authorities to take full responsibility for the management of the services they provide.

22. **CALL FOR** the creation of a platform under the Eastern Partnership for online training and/or the establishment of an EaP Academy for Public Administration serving the local/regional governments, with headquarters to be located in one of the partner countries.
23. **CALL ON** EU institutions to further support decentralised cooperation as a means to achieve SDGs in EaP countries, build capacities and share expertise on particular topics related to good governance and local democracy.

Fostering territorial and cross-border cooperation in support of local economic and human capital development

24. **CONSIDER** that territorial and cross-border cooperation programmes present an opportunity for the Eastern Partnership countries to identify and jointly address common challenges.
25. **RECOMMEND** increasing the budget for the next generation of EaP Territorial Cooperation programmes (EaPTC) and keeping the budget of cross-border cooperation (CBC) programmes at least on the same level as in the previous cycle, in order to expand the support of people-to-people projects, effectively promote and strengthen cross-border cooperation between local authorities, communities and civil society organisations. Where appropriate, cross-border cooperation among the Eastern Partnership countries, and between EaP countries and bordering EU countries, is one of the tools that can be used to overcome economic inequalities between the regions and to improve quality of life on the basis of sustainable development.
26. **RECONFIRM** that the most efficient aid delivery modality, conducive to economic and social development and reaching out to the population, is represented by investments in local and national infrastructure of different scale for key community projects (water, solid waste, energy efficiency, education facilities, social and economic infrastructure), and such projects should be given particular attention in the next CBC and EaPTC programmes.
27. **DRAW ATTENTION** to the issue of co-financing projects and programs, which represents a significant burden, particularly for small and vulnerable communities, alienating them from the inclusion and participation in the EU development programs. Such communities form 90-95% of all local governments in the EaP countries and represent the majority of population. Even for bigger communities, co-financing is a significant challenge as the financial resources at the discretion of local governments in the region are extremely small, majority of local budgets being composed from recurrent expenditures. The problem of co-financing and unequal conditions generated by it not only for small local governments but also for local governments versus central governments (which never do encounter a co-financing), need an urgent solution in view of its amelioration and finding proper, equitable, and non-discriminatory forms of addressing the co-financing issues at the local, national and international levels.
28. **STRESS** that, in the post-pandemic crisis period, local economic development via promotion of foreign investments will become particularly important, including via investments guarantees and facilitation through intermediary of the European External Investment Plan for EaP countries. The EU and its Member States are called upon to make the most of the available resources and mechanisms to encourage private and institutional investments into projects of bilateral interest in the Partner States that would contribute to their local and regional economic development.
29. **DEMAND** that LRAs be involved in more decentralised implementation of EU programmes and therefore that the participation of the LRAs of all EaP countries, in particular Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine (countries which are signatories to Association Agreements) be extended to the European Union's programmes to support sustainable planning, encourage local economic growth and investments in local infrastructure, and facilitate experience exchanges and experimentation, such as URBACT, the "Europe for Citizens" programme or programmes for the environment and climate action such as LIFE.
30. **DEMAND** that access to TAIEX and twinning programmes be extended to local and regional governments in order to support Eastern Partnership local administrations and local elected representatives in their reform processes, in the framework of their competences.
31. **CALL FOR** gender equality, youth, climate action and digitalisation to be mainstreamed into cooperation development programmes.

32. **CALL ON** national governments to facilitate project registration and, where relevant, the involvement of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) and their respective regions or cities in cross-border cooperation programmes, with the aim of implementing projects based on territorial needs.
 33. **CALL ON** national governments to unlock the potential for local authorities to make a significant contribution to job creation and local economic development, especially in the innovative sectors. A more decentralised system would offer more freedom for innovation and therefore competitiveness.
 34. **WELCOME** a renewed focus on sustainable municipal development and developing a green agenda for cities. Financial support, expertise and capacity-building should be given to LRAs in the region to enable them to contribute to the ambitions of the European Green Deal. Environment, energy and climate partnerships should be set up with EaP LRAs.
 35. **SUPPORT** the "Covenant of Mayors East" initiative as a bottom-up governance model capable of stimulating local authorities' engagement with citizens and local and international institutions;
 36. **PLEDGE** their support for the "Mayors for Economic Growth" initiative and the "Partnerships for sustainable cities", aimed at improving prosperity and innovation.
 37. **LOOK** forward to receiving the findings of the evaluation of EU Support to Local Authorities in Enlargement and Neighbourhood Regions (2010-2018) and information on the envisaged follow-up action.
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