

ACTION PLAN

2021-2024



CONFERENCE OF THE REGIONAL AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES FOR THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

ACTION PLAN 2021-2024

INTRODUCTION

Established in 2011, the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) is a **political forum of LRAs from the EU and EaP countries** founded on mutual interest and commitment as well as on the principles of differentiation, shared ownership and responsibility.

As the EaP celebrated its ten-year anniversary in 2019, the European Council invited the European Commission and the High Representative to present **new long-term policy objectives** for the years after 2020. After a broad and inclusive consultation launched by the European Commission, to which CORLEAP contributed, five long-term policy objectives beyond 2020 were identified:

- together for resilient, sustainable and integrated economies;
- together for accountable institutions, the rule of law and security;
- together towards environmental and climate resilience;
- together for resilient digital transformation;
- together for resilient, fair and inclusive societies.

These objectives, with resilience at their core, were published by the European Commission on 18 March 2020 under the joint communication *Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all*. The Council welcomed the joint communication in its conclusions of 11 May 2020. The EaP Leaders' welcomed on 18 June 2020 these long-term objectives on the basis of the joint communication, the Council conclusions and input from Member States and the Eastern partners. This led to the shaping of concrete **priorities beyond 2020** which were captured in the **Joint Staff Working Document** *Recovery, resilience and reform: post 2020 EaP priorities* published on 2 July 2021. The new agenda will be structured around two main pillars:

- **investment** - supported by an *Economic and Investment Plan* and flagship initiatives;
- **governance**.

The Joint Declaration adopted by the last EaP Summit (November 2017) presented CORLEAP as an effective instrument for LRAs 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 and the **devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic** on economies, societies and people. Subnational authorities are playing an essential role in dealing with the challenges of the pandemic and CORLEAP stands ready to support and showcase the success, potential and efficiency of territorial cooperation.

CORLEAP contributions and actions aiming at further developing and increasing the visibility of the involvement of LRAs across the EaP priorities are brought forward via dedicated events (online conferences or webinars), thematic CORLEAP reports, position papers, political recommendations etc. Among these, CORLEAP advocated for the creation of a platform for online training and/or the establishment of an **EaP Academy for Public Administration** serving local/regional governments and tailored to the specific needs of public administration at sub-national level.

In accordance with the tradition, the current Action Plan covers the period between the EaP summits: more specifically, the EaP Summit of 15 December 2021 and the 2024 EaP Summit.

1. KEY TOPICS

CORLEAP will continue contributing to shaping the local and regional dimension of the Eastern Partnership in line with the proposed **five policy objectives** and its **two main pillars** (investment and governance).

For 2021-2024 the core topics of CORLEAP activity are the following:

1.1 Post-pandemic recovery, resilience and reform

CORLEAP will devote an important part of its activities to the implementation of the guiding three Rs (**R**ecovery, **R**esilience and **R**eform) of the new EaP agenda and of the **Economic and Investment Plan**. EaP Leaders stressed the importance of solidarity at the time of the COVID-19 crisis, including the EU's substantial support to address the impact of the outbreak in the EaP region, and the Economic and Investment Plan is an important step in that regard.

LRAs have been called upon to provide emergency services, coordinate efforts and mitigate as far as possible the impact on economies. In an effort to contain the impacts of the virus, LRAs have taken various measures in addition to national measures, to reduce the existing risk and prevent future risk associated with biological hazards. The role of local initiatives and processes, such as volunteering networks, has been critical in responding to immediate needs and recovery efforts. CORLEAP will engage discussions and exchanges of good practices in relation to **post-COVID recovery and health resilience** at EaP local and regional level. Above all CORLEAP will continue experience exchange and advocacy activities on promotion of the concrete tools and instruments for resilience and recovery, such as: (i) protection of local autonomy, which is under different pressures during the pandemic crisis; (ii) fiscal decentralization and adequate financial resources for local governments to meet new competencies and challenges emerged during the crisis; (iii) safeguarding of local democracy; (iv) raising funds for local and regional projects towards resilience and recovery; (v) consolidation of development policies targeting the needs for resilience and recovery; (vi) cooperation and dialogue with the central governments, which gain particular importance and multi-dimensionality during the crisis.

1.2 Contribution to the creation of the EaP Academy for Public Administration

CORLEAP recalls the suggestion put forward in its *Recommendations to the Heads of State or Government of the EU and the EaP countries* at the 5th EaP Summit on the "creation of a platform under the EaP for online training and/or the establishment of an EaP Academy for Public Administration serving the local/regional governments" and warmly welcomes its launching as stated in the EC's proposal. CORLEAP intends to contribute to the setting-up of the **virtual EaP Academy for Public Administration** by promoting and mobilising local and regional expertise.

1.3 Support to the green agenda and the launching of the EaP "green city" award

CORLEAP strongly welcomes the creation of the **EaP "green city" award**. With EaP mayors being similarly committed to making cities cleaner and healthier, the award will further promote and encourage local action on the way to resilience and sustainability in EaP urban areas. CORLEAP will carry on its work on climate resilience and progress on the green agenda for LRAs in line with the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, CORLEAP will be instrumental in aligning the global policies to the realities and opportunities on the ground in the Eastern Partnership countries, will advocate for substantial international support and investments in local infrastructure in the fields of climate, green economy, infrastructure and energy efficiency, essential for sustainable results in these fields, especially under the conditions of limited resources in national and local budgets in the EaP countries.

1.4 Progress on decentralisation and good governance

The lack of fiscal decentralisation and autonomy has been identified by CORLEAP members as one of the main pressing issues obstructing the smooth development of the EaP local and regional authorities. CORLEAP will therefore persist in promoting the **ongoing decentralisation processes and upcoming reforms** by organising debates on how decentralisation, including fiscal decentralization, helps to consolidate democracy, improve local governance, local economic development and justice, and accelerate local and regional development.

1.5 Revision of the EaP multilateral architecture

In line with the discussions on the adjustments needed to reinvigorate cooperation and increase partners' ownership in relation to the EaP architecture, CORLEAP welcomes the call to reinforce targeted cooperation and reiterates its commitment to play a crucial role together with the EaP key stakeholders.

2. **POLITICAL DIMENSION**

The EU must assist its neighbours in strengthening their resilience by laying the foundations of better governance which should also benefit socio-economic recovery and long-term resilience. CORLEAP considers that the territorial dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy should be expanded.

The key challenges in working with neighbouring countries are linked to the lack of political stability, to pervasive corruption, poor justice mechanisms as well as the generally slow advance of reforms. Furthermore, the pandemic has exacerbated the risks to security, democracy, including local democracy, and media freedom (e.g. disinformation). The rule of law and good governance remains an overarching joint objective of the EU and the EaP partners.

CORLEAP offers a framework for EU and EaP local and regional authorities to shape policies and advocate for their interests through preparation and adoption of reports on one hand, and through active participation in EaP meetings, including EaP summits, on the other.

The CORLEAP focus in 2021-2024 will be:

- a) Assessing opportunities and challenges within the renewed EaP agenda, based on commitments to be endorsed by the EaP summit in 2021.
- b) Pursuing a reinforced acknowledgement of the role of CORLEAP and of LRAs in the EaP summit declaration.
- c) Contributing to the conceptualisation of the EaP Academy for Public Administration.
- d) Continuing to support the decentralisation reforms in EaP countries.
- e) Continuous support and advocacy of the local democracy and local autonomy, as a pan-European value based on the European Charter of Local Self-Government
- f) Enhancing cooperation on the economic recovery and climate resilience agenda.
- g) Drawing lessons from the implementation of the new policy framework in view of the 7th EaP summit to be held in 2024.

CORLEAP remains committed to promoting **visibility of the benefits of EaP policy for citizens**. Its events will further seek to reach out to wide, young and gender-balanced audiences in view of promoting an increased and inclusive participation.

3. OPERATIONAL DIMENSION

CORLEAP reports are prepared on topics chosen according to their comparative advantage in terms of profiling a political message, notably related to the role of local and regional authorities and the visibility of their engagement and commendable efforts in those fields. Those reports will eventually feed into Summit recommendations. The topics of the thematic reports will be linked to one of the priorities outlined in the current Action Plan.

The impact of local and regional authorities on EU, national and local policies and strategic communication are significantly enhanced through **cooperation with partners**. Therefore, CORLEAP will continue to strengthen its active cooperation with its permanent observers: the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly and the EaP Civil Society Forum, as well as with other institutional partners. Cooperation with the European Commission will be further strengthened in the areas of the EaP renewed agenda and also within the continuance of successful experiences, such as the Mayors for Economic Growth. CORLEAP will aim to consolidate cooperation and to reinforce advocacy messages together with European associations of local authorities active in promotion of local governance local democracy and local autonomy (CEMR, UCLG and NALAS).

CORLEAP will also continue to play its role as a **platform for promoting territorial cooperation** between EU and EaP local and regional authorities in areas of common interest and provide visibility to specific projects.

Additional targeted actions will be taken to boost exchange of experience through **peer-to-peer cooperation** between local and regional authorities of the EaP partner countries and CoR members. These efforts can be channelled both through multilateral structures available for this purpose, such as EaP Academy of Public Administration, and through bilateral arrangements, taking into account existing EU programmes that can financially support this form of capacity building for local and regional administrations of the EaP partners.

TIMETABLE OF CORLEAP RELATED ACTIVITIES AND PROPOSALS FOR ACTION 2021-2024

This timetable, subject to eventual adjustments based on latest developments, lists regular events and proposals by CORLEAP members, CORLEAP observers and stakeholders, as approved by CORLEAP co-chairs. Additional suggestions and proposals by CORLEAP members, CORLEAP observers and stakeholders are welcome and will be incorporated based on the approval of CORLEAP co-chairs. The timetable will be updated in the course of the reference period.

In accordance with its mandate, the CORLEAP plenary session will meet once a year. The CORLEAP Bureau will meet either once or twice a year, on the occasion of the annual meeting, and/or in the period between two annual meetings. The meetings can be held (upon invitation) in the partner countries. In urgent and duly motivated circumstances the co-chairs can convene an extraordinary meeting of the CORLEAP Plenary or Bureau, subject to budget availability and political necessity.

2021

14 October 2021

- CORLEAP – Euronest workshop within the 19th European Week of Regions and Cities on "Green regions and cities in resilient and sustainable Eastern Partnership economies", Brussels/online

15 November 2021

- Annual EaP foreign affairs ministerial meeting

14 December 2021

- 10th CORLEAP Annual meeting, Brussels/online

15 December 2021

- 6th Eastern Partnership Summit, Brussels

2022

Spring 2022

- CORLEAP Bureau meeting, (tbc with the CORLEAP co-chairmanship)
- EaP multilateral architecture meetings

October 2022

- Corleap-Euronest workshop within EURegionsWeek (tbc)

Autumn 2022

- CORLEAP Annual meeting in conjunction with the CZ Presidency of the EU (tbc)
- Annual EaP foreign affairs ministerial meetings
- EaP multilateral architecture meetings

2023

Spring 2023

- CORLEAP Bureau meeting (tbc)
- EaP multilateral architecture meetings

Autumn 2023

- CORLEAP Annual meeting (tbc)
- CORLEAP event within the EURegionsWeek (tbc)
- Annual EaP foreign affairs ministerial meetings
- EaP multilateral architecture meetings

2024

- CORLEAP Bureau meeting (tbc)
 - CORLEAP Annual meeting (tbc)
 - CORLEAP event within the EURegionsWeek (tbc)
 - 7th Eastern Partnership Summit, Brussels/online
 - EaP multilateral architecture meetings
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