



Remarks for discussion for the conference:

“How to improve the European Neighbourhood Policy? Concepts, perceptions and policy recommendations for its Eastern dimension”

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Discussion Note on the Role of Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR) in the European Neighbourhood Policy's Eastern Dimension¹

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I. General Background

The Committee of the Region (CoR) and its members, who are elected local and regional representatives in the member states, have been actively involved in monitoring and shaping the ENP and the recently adopted Eastern Partnership (EaP). To this end, two official opinions have been adopted by the CoR Plenary: on ***"A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy"*** (Rapporteur: Sharon Taylor (UK/PES), 8.10.2008) and on ***"The Role of Local and Regional Authorities within the Eastern Partnership"*** (Rapporteur: Istvan Serto-Radics (HU/ALDE), 22.04.2009). Both Opinions have been followed by a series of internal and external conferences and events, promoting the CoR's view. Moreover, the RELEX commission at CoR and the Studies Unit commissioned several externally produced studies in order to broaden the existing scope of analysis and to particularly highlight the **role of local and regional authorities**.

The current discussion note does not have the ambition of being comprehensive and reflect all points of view. Instead, it aims at presenting, in a succinct fashion, the CoR's political priorities and proposals made in front of the other EU institutions and outside partners within this process.

¹ The views expressed in this note are unofficial and do not bind the Committee of the Regions in any implicit or explicit way. They are strictly personal and reflect the opinion of the individual authors.

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1) *The CoR's political message on the ENP:*

The CoR is convinced that **the involvement of local and regional authorities**, in particular those of **the new member states**, in the implementation of the ENP should be strengthened, since they are **key players in the achievement of a stable and secure neighbourhood**.

The CoR is **committed to contribute to the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy's thematic and geographic instruments** and programmes, particularly in the field of **cross-border and interregional cooperation** as well as **institution-building programmes**, which are of particular importance for local and regional authorities.

2) *The CoR's political priorities regarding the ENP:*

The CoR recalls its conviction that a prosperous and secure neighbourhood can only be achieved through an efficient co-operation at the local and regional level. Local and regional authorities are **best placed to identify and address citizens' needs** and provide adequate services.

The CoR stresses the need to set up **regional fora of sub-national authorities**, in line with the regional approach of the ENP (***Mediterranean dimension, Northern Dimension and Black Sea dimension***) and to **promote regional and decentralised cooperation**, boosting partnership and development programmes by means of integrated measures in the relevant regions.

The CoR calls on the European Commission to put greater **emphasis on local economic development** in countries' individual Action Plans and allocate appropriate funds **through ENPI**.

The CoR believes strongly that local and regional authorities can play a **crucial role in conflict transformation and post-conflict reconstruction**.

3) *Some additional views from both CoR opinions:*

- calls on the European Commission to **include representatives of local and regional authorities of members states** in the process of monitoring the preparation and implementation of **individual countries' Action plans**;

- welcomes the new **European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)**, which began operating in 2007, and especially its ***cross-border dimension***, which allows cooperation with regions bordering the EU (financed by the European Regional Development Fund and the ENPI);
- reiterates its support for the emerging ***Black Sea Euro-Region*** intended to promote cooperation at the local and regional level between the countries of Black Sea basin thus promoting local democracy, stability, good governance and sustainable development;
- welcomes the existing **thematic EU funding streams**, in which ENP countries can already be involved, like **FP7 and DAPHNE**;
- recalls the support given in the Political Declaration on "**Cross-border co-operation in the Northern Regions of Europe**" (CoR 313/2006) for the initiative of the **European Parliament** to organise a ***Northern dimension parliamentary forum*** and reiterates the proposal that a suitable permanent body be established to **discuss issues of local and regional importance in the Northern dimension policy**;
- supports a supervisory role for the CoR and the ***EaP Local and Regional Assembly***, especially when it comes to monitoring the work of the EU-EaP country joint subcommittees dealing with issues **related to the thematic platforms on *Democracy, good governance and stability, and Contacts between people***, including issues of social and economic development, regional development, cross-border cooperation, administrative reforms and decentralisation in EaP countries;
- calls upon the EaP countries' governments to set up mechanisms for **structured national dialogue and consultation with sub-state (regional and local) agents**, the social partners and ***civil society***, by bringing in networks and associations of local and regional authorities;
- especially suggests that both the ***New Partnership Instrument and sectoral tools*** should be an integral part of an EaP package which the EU would negotiate individually with each partner country. This EaP tools package would provide the basis for harmonisation as well as **transparent evaluation of various EaP tools**. The EaP countries should be **given transparent and clear benchmarks** so that they know where they are moving in relation to the EU within the EaP.

II. CoR's concrete proposals:

- initiates a dialogue with the EC in order to find ways of engaging local and regional authorities from EaP countries into a ***Comprehensive Institution-Building Programme (CIB)***. It is aimed at improving the administrative capacity of the Eastern

partners, and thus should cover all relevant sectors of cooperation including those sectors, in which the role of local and regional authorities is irreplaceable. In addition, the CoR should **prepare its own plan** on how to contribute to the **implementation of the CIB programme in cooperation with its partners from the EaP countries**;

- the CoR should support the proposal of the Commission on signing **Memoranda of Understanding on regional policy** with the Eastern partners aimed at building their administrative capacity at national and local level;
- resolves to assist and/or to consult - in cooperation with local and regional authorities from the EaP countries - the European Commission and national governments in the process of identifying **pilot regional development programmes** addressing the needs of regional and local development in the EaP countries **modelled on EU cohesion policy**;
- initiates a discussion with the European Commission in order to specify its own participation in the **thematic platforms on Democracy, good governance and stability and on Contacts between people**. The CoR should initiate the creation of some **specific panels** (fourth operational level of the EaP) dealing with issues close to the core agenda of local and regional authorities with a view to supporting the work of the EaP **thematic platforms** (third operational level);
- resolves to assist the European Commission in drawing up **the programme for training and networking of local authorities** with a view to **strengthening administrative capacities and promoting local governance** reform under the thematic platform on *Democracy, good governance and stability*. The CoR will elaborate and come up with its proposals on a specific **EaP Cultural Programme** that is going to be launched under the thematic platform on **Contacts between people**;
- especially considers its contribution to a flagship initiative on **Prevention of, preparedness for, and response to natural and man-made disasters** to strengthen disaster management capacities at local, regional and national level;
- resolves to promote the establishment of the **Eastern Europe and South Caucasus Local and Regional Assembly (EaP LRA)** to serve as an institutional platform for regular political dialogue and cooperation between local and regional authorities from the EU and the EaP countries;
- recognises an open initiative for the participation of third countries - particularly **Russian Federation and Turkey** - that could be involved in the work of a thematic platform, panel or an initiative, on a case-by-case basis (...) the CoR and its EaP partners could invite as observers the representatives of local and regional authorities

from the Russian Federation and Turkey to the *EaP Local and Regional Assembly's* meetings.

On Financial Instruments, Country Action Plans and Cross-Border Cooperation:

- the CoR supports the European Commission proposal to increase the allocations from **€ 450 million in 2008 to € 785 million in 2013** This would mean an additional envelope of €350 million and a redeployment of € 250 million from the allocations to ENP regional programmes 2007-13.
- notes that the **European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI)**, which also covers Russia, is designed to be more flexible and policy-driven and to target sustainable development and approximation to EU policies and standards. For the budgetary period of 2007-13 approximately € 12 billion have been allocated. This represents an increase in funding of 32%, however 62% of this funding is earmarked for the neighbours to the South and only 38% for the neighbours in the East. The difference is less pronounced in per capita terms, but it does not represent the efforts to strengthen the Eastern Dimension;
- also notes that the national programmes under the ENPI are developed in **Country Strategy Papers (CSPs)** and funds are allocated according to the **National Indicative Programmes (NIPs)**. Country Strategy Papers list three to four priorities for each partner country; however, all include reference to the strengthening of administrative capacities and good governance. *For all partner countries local government should be listed as a sub-category to the rule of law priority in the National Indicative Programmes.* Another aspect minimising the effects of the ENP on local and regional authorities is that the CSPs and NIPs list people-to-people contacts *but are almost exclusively* on the education and research level. Local government can play a role in this field as demonstrated under the **Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC)** programmes and should be recognised for that;
- similarly notes that in the **ENPI Cross-Border Cooperation Strategy Paper 2007-2013**, the EC identifies four fields for cooperation: economic and social development; common challenges in the areas of the environment, public health and the fight against organised crime; border management; and people-to-people contacts. A strong involvement of local and regional authorities should be required, which also calls for more small-scale cooperation, improved support for capacity building measures for local and regional authorities and for a priority on actions to improve the living standards in border areas;

- regarding the **EC ENPI Eastern Regional Strategy Paper 2007-13**, the cooperation between partner countries as well as between the EC and the partner countries should provide assistance towards the common ENP space objectives where there is a clear advantage in regional level assistance. This translates into priority support for the next **strategic categories**: *transport and energy networks, the environment and forestry; border and migration management; people-to-people activities; anti-personnel landmines, explosive remnants of war and small arms and light weapons;*

Certain proposals having already been taken on board by the European Commission:

- the CoR also proposed its direct participation in identifying and developing common areas in issues which fall within its remit. The European Commission took up this idea in ***the New Enhanced Agreement with Ukraine***, which will ensure an enhanced cooperation between local and regional authorities of EU and Ukraine. Following the request of the CoR, the New Enhanced Agreement would also cover cross-border and regional cooperation issues;
- The European Commission took note of the CoR's request of **allocating at least 10% of the ENPI to cross-border cooperation programmes** and remarked that **the CBC budget, which is composed of ENPI and ERDF, already amounts to 10%**;
- The CoR also called for the launch of **new instruments** such as the ***Neighbourhood Investment Fund*** to stimulate investment. The European Commission informed the CoR that the Neighbourhood Investment Fund is already operational.

III. Conclusion

- the CoR is an **active and constructive player** in monitoring and influencing the ENP and EaP. Its members undertook, in a timely fashion, the task to contribute to this process through a series of official opinions and specialised events;
- the CoR works **in partnership with other EU institutions and bodies**. It also effectively uses its network of contacts with **LRAs** and local **civil society**;
- the CoR has **made innovative proposals**, some of which were taken on board by the European Commission, as well as individual member states and ENP countries;
- the CoR proposes the setting up of a ***EaP Local and Regional Assembly***, with Russia and Turkey acting as observers;
- the CoR has been trying to take a **leading role** in discussing the overall amounts and specific sub-programme goals under **the ENPI and CBC budget**. Likewise, a

Neighbourhood Investment Fund was recently created, while **cross-border cooperation programmes** were also encouraged in a variety of ways;

- the CoR has also promoted EU institutional relations with **individual countries**, such as Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and Russia, for instance.