

**Conclusions of the Annual meeting of the
Conference of the regional and local authorities for Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP)
Chişinău (Moldova) | 17 September 2012**

Introduction

1. The Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) was established in 2011 as a political body of multilateral cooperation between regional and local authorities from the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries which aims to further engage these authorities in the delivery of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).
2. Heads of State and Government meeting at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw, on 29-30 September 2011 called on the Committee of the Regions to work with local and regional authorities from Eastern partners to establish a permanent institutional framework for cooperation.
3. The new ENP Package presented by the European Commission in 2012 address this need to involve LRAs in the promotion of reforms in the EU neighbourhood, recalling that “Local and regional authorities have a key role to play in narrowing the gap between the population and institutions, promoting a culture of political participation at local level and ensuring that policy decisions take local needs into account.”¹.
4. The European Parliament too recognises this particular role of regional and local authorities in delivering the ENP and has called on the European External Action Service and the Commission to support amongst others, local and regional authorities in their efforts to play their proper role in defining ENP strategies, holding governments to account, monitoring and assessing past performance and achieved results².
5. Despite this, LRAs still play only a minor role in the deliberation and the decision-making process in many policy areas in the neighbouring countries. This has to be rectified and their role as major stakeholders properly recognised.

CORLEAP members meeting in Chisinau are committed to the success of the development of the Eastern Partnership and have therefore agreed the following:

The role and the needs of local and regional authorities

1 Joint Communication "Delivering on a new European Neighbourhood Policy " JOINT (2012), 14 final, page 7

2 European Parliament resolution of 14 December 2011 on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (T7-0576/2011)

6. LRAs have wide experience of policy development and implementation in the delivery of essential public services such as public health, education, waste and water management, local entrepreneurship, transport and infrastructure, the environment and natural resources, and agriculture. They have also a broader responsibility for the protection of true democracy, transparency and respect for human rights. Thus, the exchange between EU' s and partner countries local and regional authorities should be supported under all its forms – town twinning, technical co-operation and capacity building. The EaP countries should have access to the EU instruments aiming at building sustainable partnerships between local and regional authorities.
7. The inclusion of local and regional authorities in the implementation of Eastern Partnership is of fundamental importance to the success of the policy. Local and regional authorities both in EU and in the partner countries can – and should – play a decisive role in shaping policy and strategies at their respective levels. Similarly, they can and should be given the opportunity to contribute to work at national and international level.
8. Nevertheless, local and regional authorities have certain needs and requests to bring to the attention of national governments and European and international institutions. The following facts - to different degree in different countries - hinder LRAs in many cases to fully exercise their potential, and reforms are therefore needed, where such hindrances exist:
 - A lack of financial autonomy and limited fiscal capacity;
 - Need of a boost in public administration reform which includes also local and regional authorities;
 - The need to speed up the development of local democracy, transparency and citizen participation, benefitting of the activities carried out by the Congress of the Council of Europe in these fields;
 - Need of sharing experiences and increasing cooperation with EU counterparts in specific area of relevance to LRAs such as energy security, environment and climate change (including the development of alternative energy source, economical use of energy), housing modernization, social well-being, territorial development, immigration and promotion of contacts between people;
 - The need to further strengthen citizens' participation at the local level for policy making and partnership;
 - Limited awareness of the financial assistance mechanisms available to local and regional authorities in the Eastern Partner countries from EU programmes;
 - Need for capacity building to engage in EU programmes and projects.

Contribution of local and regional authorities to the development of the Eastern Partnership

9. CORLEAP is ready to play a greater role in achieving the Partnership goals and monitor the roadmap implementation as is expected of it, and will deliver on the

ambitions of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council by taking forward its role;

CORLEAP can fulfil four key functions:

(1) A strategic thinker: drawing up and proposing long-term plans about where local and regional governments should be heading, with a road-map for implementation;

(2) A timely intervener: both at the EU and Member States level to ensure that development assistance goes towards meaningful and socially important projects at local and regional level ;

(3) A skilful advocate:

 Making a convincing case for a role for local and regional government in drafting territorial reforms;

 Developing an inside track both to the European institutions (particularly the Commission and EEAS) and the national governments of the Eastern Partnership;

 Making the case for decentralization of competences; both policy-making and fiscal competences;

(4) A high performance promoter: showing how to build a high performance culture at the local and regional level with a focus on improving the training and skills set of local and regional government officials.

10. Greater political and fiscal autonomy for regional and local authorities is an important factor enabling multi-level governance to function effectively. Therefore CORLEAP will follow closely the European and international debate on devolution, paying particular attention to the on-going decentralisation and devolution efforts in the EU Member States, and recalling the need to strengthen local democracy notably through the European Charter of Local Self-Government and to the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy endorsed by the governments of the member states of the Council of Europe as a means of achieving that objective.
11. At the same time EU shall permanently promote the role and place of local government associations in EaP countries as the main advocates of local autonomy, of local democracy and collective representatives of the voice of local authorities. The strengthened institutionalisation and capacity building of representative national associations of local and regional authorities in EaP countries will contribute to strengthening of the role of local and regional authorities in the multi-level governance arrangement. National associations constitute an indispensable national platform for debate and for exchange of information and best practice among LRAs. They also serve as a mechanism for national advocacy and international co-operation of local and regional authorities.
12. CORLEAP intends to support a training of LRA from EaP countries to improve local capacity building. If the politicians and managers from local authorities develop further their skills and knowledge it will contribute to the effective, open and transparent government. CORLEAP will start a dialogue with the European Training

Foundation and other interested stakeholder in this respect. Moreover, CORLEAP intends to explore whether the programmes similar to the Local Administration Facility programme³, could be extended to EaP countries.

13. Local and regional authorities and their public services should have access to support within the framework of all EU instruments financing the EaP policy. The proposed Eastern Partnership Pilot Regional Development Programmes could play a role in addressing the problems the LRA are dealing with and could serve to demonstrate the impact of cohesion-type policies on territorial development, growth and jobs. Support for, and the involvement of, local and regional authorities in community development must be a horizontal issue and should not be restricted to a single instrument. Therefore CORLEAP calls for the creation of direct access to adequate financial instruments (European and national) for local and regional authorities from EaP countries. At the same time CORLEAP ask for limiting, or even removing, the co-financing requirements for local authorities within the EU aid programmes since those requirements are further inhibiting local governance very limited financial capacities.
14. CORLEAP acts as a communication channel between local and regional authorities in EU and the Eastern Partnership countries, with the aim of engaging more local and regional authorities and their associations in the EaP policy. In this context CORLEAP wishes to establish in the future a permanent dialogue with the European External Action Service and the European Commission and be informed about the preparation of association agreements, strategic documents and actions plans with partner countries.
15. In the spirit of multi-level governance, CORLEAP will also continue to build bridges with the parliamentary dimension of the Eastern partnership, notably through cooperation with the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly, and with its other permanent observers: the Civil Society Forum for Eastern Partnership and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

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Local Administration Facility is a TAIEX programme currently available to candidate and pre-candidate countries to promote knowledge about the EU and its procedure,