

ACTION PLAN

2018-2020



CONFERENCE OF THE REGIONAL AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES FOR THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

The Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) aims at ensuring that the Eastern Partnership has an **active and vigorous local dimension**, building support and true ownership of policies and reforms in partner countries at the local and regional level and close to the citizens, as acknowledged by the EaP summit in Brussels on 24 November 2017. A policy focus on delivering tangible benefits presupposes a specific role for regional and local authorities and their associations.

The **strategic environment** framed by the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, which postulates that the EU will support different paths to resilience in its neighbourhood, and a reviewed European Neighbourhood Policy, set out for building more effective partnerships to support stabilisation, generate a new impetus for the Eastern Partnership with increased opportunities from a local and regional perspective. The **differentiation** approach within the ENP reflects the variety of aspirations of different partner countries. In this respect, CORLEAP's flexible operational methods allow to accommodate various requests for cooperation in specific thematic as well as geographic areas. The **streamlined EaP architecture** endorsed at the EaP summit brings a more cross-sectoral approach, while involving a wider array of actors and stakeholders. The effectiveness of the EU's involvement with the Eastern Partnership countries requires the highest degree of participation of local and regional authorities, which are becoming increasingly active. Their involvement is essential for a more efficient and effective multilateral architecture and would facilitate a close alignment with policy priorities from a local perspective. **A structured engagement with local and regional authorities and their associations should thus be pursued across all four Eastern Partnership priority areas.** CORLEAP defined the present Action plan on the basis of the Joint staff working document *Eastern Partnership - 20 Deliverables for 2020* and in close consultation with its institutional partners.

CORLEAP **activities** consist in promoting cooperation in areas of common interest between the EU and EaP countries, as well as effective capacity building through exchange of good practice and peer to peer learning. Decentralisation and strengthening of the EaP local and regional authorities is seen as fundamental for reinforcing local democracy and building civic society, thus providing an additional leverage for reforms.

1. KEY TOPICS

For 2018-2020 the core topics of CORLEAP activity are the following:

1.1 Economic cooperation and Local economic development

CORLEAP will focus an important part of its activities on exchange of good practice in the area of Local economic development. The development of competitive, green, digitalised local economies is crucial for economic and social development overall and the pre-condition for increased stability and resilience of the partner countries. LRAs play an important role in attracting investment, creating jobs and promoting inclusive sustainable growth. The support for small and medium-sized enterprises among others through easier access to finance or high speed broadband is of particular importance.

1.2 Good governance and local democracy

Decentralisation, public administration reform and anti-corruption measures are key pillars of improved governance.

A lack of fiscal decentralisation and autonomy has been identified by the members of CORLEAP as one of the main pressing issues hampering the development of local and regional authorities.

In the area of the Public Administration reform, CORLEAP will further develop its activities with a particular focus on service delivery.

Corruption in particular poses a major threat to governance and democracy and undermines the confidence of citizens in democratic institutions. In addition, it costs governments billions of euros each year; its prevalence affects citizens, governments and business alike, increasing unpredictability and impeding new investment. Therefore the fight against corruption needs to remain a long-term priority for national as well as local and regional governments, and CORLEAP will continue to focus some of its activities on exchange of best practice in this field.

CORLEAP will therefore promote the concept of decentralisation and will organise debates on how decentralisation can help to consolidate democracy, reduce corruption, improve justice and implement regional development strategies and territorial development. CORLEAP will further strive to emphasize the role played by local and regional authorities in promoting human rights.

1.3 Youth

CORLEAP will devote a particular focus on supporting and empowering the young generation. Youth related topics such as fostering employability of young people and their entrepreneurial spirit will be covered. People-to-people contacts, cross-border programmes, and mobility in general, bring societies closer together. The young generation in particular significantly benefits from educational, cultural or scientific exchanges. Heavy user and consumer of social media outputs, the young generation is vulnerable to disinformation campaigns and some of CORLEAP activities will thus address the aspects of youth communication with emphasis on strengthening critical thinking skills and responding to disinformation activities.

1.4 Other topics

Specific thematic areas covered by the CORLEAP activities could include financial assistance, e-governance, cyber-security, cross-border cooperation, strategic communication and countering disinformation. The year 2018 is the European year of cultural heritage, therefore CORLEAP will also consider this topic in its activities.

2. **POLITICAL DIMENSION**

2.1 Role of the LRAs as policy shapers

Local and regional authorities have the opportunity 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.

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 mentioned in points 1.1-1.4.

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.

2.2 Role of the LRAs within the new EaP architecture

The revised EaP architecture organises EaP work in four platforms providing basis for structured debate with partners.

- Platform 1 "Strengthening institutions and good governance"
- Platform 2 "Economic development and market opportunities"
- Platform 3 "Connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change"
- Platform 4 "Mobility and people-to-people contacts"

CORLEAP will contribute to the work of the platforms and to cross-sectoral activities through active participation in the relevant thematic areas. In this context, CORLEAP will continue to further strengthen cooperation with the EEAS and support the Panel on Governance and Public Administration Reform, which has selected the topic of local/regional government and decentralisation as one of its working areas.

2.3 Cooperation among LRAs

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

3. **OPERATIONAL DIMENSION**

Cooperation with the European Commission will be further strengthened in the areas of sustainable municipal development and other regional programmes. Capitalising on the successful experience of the Mayors for Economic Growth, CORLEAP can act as prime channel of dissemination of information on call for proposals addressed to local authorities.

CORLEAP will concretely support territorial cooperation through activities ranging from effective matchmaking to providing visibility to concrete projects.

Information about financial assistance available to local and regional authorities will be facilitated and updated during 2018 now that the mid-term review of the European Neighbourhood Instrument has taken place.

CORLEAP is further committed to delivering on and measuring up to the regard it is held in by showcasing the success and potential of territorial cooperation and by increasing the understanding and visibility of the benefits of EaP policy for citizens. Corleap events will further seek to reach out to young audience in view of promoting increased youth participation, subject to availability of adequate funding.

TIMETABLE OF CORLEAP RELATED ACTIVITIES AND PROPOSALS FOR ACTION 2018-2020

This timetable is a living document. It 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 shall meet once a year. The CORLEAP Bureau shall meet at least once a year, on the occasion of the annual meeting. One additional meeting may be held in the period between two annual meetings. The meetings could be held (upon invitation) in the partner countries. In urgent and duly motivated circumstances the co-chairs could convene an extraordinary meeting of the CORLEAP Plenary or Bureau, subject to budget availability and political necessity.

2018

29 May 2018

- CORLEAP Bureau meeting, Brussels

24 September 2018

- 8th Annual CORLEAP meeting, Kyiv (Ukraine)

11 October 2018

- CORLEAP-EURONEST workshop thematic seminar on "Freedom, independence and plurality of media in EaP countries" at the European Week of Regions and Cities, Brussels

November 2018

- 12 November 2018: Forum on Local Democracy - "Economic Cooperation and Economic Development at Local Level", co-organised with the Union of Communities of Armenia, with the support of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development of the Republic of Armenia and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Yerevan

EaP Platform meetings

2019

28 March 2019

- CORLEAP Bureau meeting, Yerevan (Armenia), followed by conference

12 September 2019

- 9th Annual CORLEAP meeting, Turku (Finland)

8/9/10 October 2019 (tbc)

- Thematic seminar at the European Week of Regions and Cities in cooperation with EURONEST, Brussels

EaP Platform meetings