

**Annual Meeting of the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), Vilnius 3 September 2013**

**Recommendations to the Heads of State and Government gathering in Vilnius on 28-29 November 2013 for the EaP Summit**

The Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) involving members from both the EU and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries was established as a response to the request of the Heads of State and Government (HSG) meeting at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw on 29-30 September 2011. The HSGs called on the Committee of the Regions to work with local and regional authorities from the EaP countries to establish a permanent institutional framework for cooperation.

Since the launch of the EaP initiative in 2009 significant progress has been made, but we firmly believe that the moment for rethinking the initiative has come. A smarter "more for more" approach is needed, whereby the initiative should be considered more as an instrument to deploy the transformative power of the European Union's contribution through cooperation with its partners to achieve modernisation and reform. Local and regional authorities – the level of governance operating closest to the citizens – can contribute substantially to this initiative and are ready to do so.

Cooperation and closer partnership between actors across geographical and political boundaries in the EaP space offers enormous potential for meeting the wider objectives of the partnership, notably helping the partner countries to move closer to the EU and to work in collaboration in support of common goals – implementation of the rule of law, respect for human rights and international law, fundamental values including transparency and democracy, sustainable development and good governance.

The Communication on "*Eastern Partnership: A Roadmap to the Summit 2013*" called on CORLEAP to strengthen the capacities of partner countries at local and regional level and improve links between national authorities and citizens. Based on an assessment of the needs and challenges of local and regional authorities in the partner countries, the work of CORLEAP in 2013 has focused on three priority areas: fiscal decentralisation, public administration reform and territorial cooperation. This work is supported by a number of activities at local and regional level and by partners such as the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, EURONEST and the Civil Society Forum.

**Therefore we, the representatives of local and regional authorities of the EU and Eastern Partnership countries gathered together for the third Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP),**

HAVING REGARD TO:

- The fundamental principles of local autonomy, which represent a steadfast European value wholeheartedly endorsed by the Council of Europe and by the European Charter of local self-government;
  - the limited decentralisation and insufficient consolidation of local autonomy in the partner countries, as required in the European Charter of Local Self-Government;
  - the insufficient financial autonomy and limited fiscal capacity of the partner countries;
  - the need to speed up public administration reform at all levels, including the promotion of e-governance and training on capacity-building at local and regional level;
  - the need to speed up the development of local democracy, transparency and citizen participation, in close collaboration with civil society as experts and stakeholders in this area;
  - the need for the EaP countries to share their experiences and increase cooperation with their EU counterparts in areas of particular relevance to LRAs, such as energy security, sustainable development, the environment and climate change (including the development of alternative energy sources, the efficient use of energy and disaster risk reduction and resilience), housing modernisation, social well-being, territorial development, immigration and the promotion of contacts between people;
  - the limited awareness of and accessibility at local and regional level to the EU financial assistance programmes available to the Eastern Partnership countries;
  - the need for capacity-building to engage in EU programmes and projects,
1. CALL FOR the inclusion in the final texts of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius of explicit statements about the key importance and role of local democracy and of local autonomy
  2. CALL FOR the inclusion of local and regional authorities in the definition and implementation of Eastern Partnership policies and strategies. Local and regional authorities both in the EU and in the partner countries can and should play a decisive role in shaping policy and strategies at their respective levels.
  3. CALL FOR support to be provided to the Eastern Partnership countries willing to sign Association Agreements with the European Union, as this is the most direct way to bring about comprehensive changes in local governance, consolidation of local autonomy and local and national democracy, local and national economic development, and a radical improvement in people's lives as regards bringing services and infrastructure to the people and making public services much more accessible to vulnerable groups.
  4. CALL FOR a re-examination of the budget-related procedures enabling central governments to provide adequate support to all levels of governance.
  5. CALL FOR the provision of direct access to adequate financial instruments (European and national) for local and regional authorities from the EaP countries and for the removal of existing barriers to spending from such funds, such as the application of incompatible public procurement rules. At the same time, CORLEAP calls for the limitation, or even removal, of the co-financing requirements for local authorities within the EU aid programmes, since those requirements are further inhibiting the very limited financial capacities of local governments.

6. REQUEST the provision of support, through training and seminars at European and national level, to facilitate the exchange of best practice regarding the implementation of strategic management, e-governance and e-government, a business-friendly administration, the reform of public services, the partnership principle for better regulation and local development, and funding programmes aimed at addressing, as a priority, specific needs at local and regional level in the EaP countries.
7. REITERATE that CORLEAP intends to continue supporting the training of Local and Regional Authorities from EaP countries within the format of the Local Administration Facility in order to improve local capacity-building, and recall that CORLEAP has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Training Foundation. We call on other stakeholders, such as the European Commission and national governments, to support this goal, so that politicians and managers from local authorities can further develop their skills and knowledge and exchange their experiences in order to contribute to effective, open and transparent governance.
8. UNDERLINE that there is no single model to be applied to fiscal relations within the different governance levels of each country, but emphasise that a decentralisation of expenditure may improve the governance balance so that public finances can be better tailored to subnational needs, thus leading to greater efficiency in expenditure and, at the same time, supporting the role of local government as a service provider to a local community and as an instrument of democratic self-government. Appropriate administrative tools and processes - such as participatory and transparent local budget process, sound tax administration and control over local staff - are required to respond to local needs.
9. REQUEST that the annual reports on the EaP countries contain overviews on developments concerning the division of powers as well as on fiscal decentralisation, public administration reform and local self-government.
10. ASK the European Commission to prepare a strategy document that recognises territorial cooperation as a priority in the Eastern Partnership initiative and supports the further mapping of efforts in this respect.
11. CALL ON national governments to facilitate the implementation of EGTCs and cross-border macro-regions, notably by adjusting their legislation to allow for the creation of these entities, which help promote decentralisation and multi-level governance.
12. UNDERLINE the role of local government in the EaP countries as the main advocates of local autonomy and stress that strengthening the institutions and capacities of local and regional authorities and their representative associations in the EaP countries will help to strengthen the role of local and regional authorities in a multi-level governance system.
13. Call for the invitation of Presidents of local government associations and Mayors of national capitals of the EaP countries to the EU summit in Vilnius in November this year and call for their participation in the signature ceremonies of the Association Agreements as part of the EaP national delegations.