

## Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy

### PLATFORMA contribution

PLATFORMA is the network of European local and regional governments, and their associations, active in the field of development cooperation. PLATFORMA represents 34 members: national, European and international associations as well as individual local and regional governments. Since its launch in 2009, PLATFORMA has actively engaged with the European institutions to inform and constructively participate in shaping the EU development policy (more information on [www.platforma-dev.eu](http://www.platforma-dev.eu)).

## Key messages

A new European Neighbourhood Policy

### Differentiation

- ▶ should be based on **unified fundamental principles** and maintain a **political dimension**;
- ▶ should apply a strategic **territorial approach** favouring macro-regional and multi-lateral **territorial cooperation** instead of division into East and South axes;

### Focus

- ▶ should include a focused objective on **territorial governance and development** and **not become a security policy** on behalf of the EU;
- ▶ should be conceived in view of a **closer association** of partner countries;

### Flexibility

- ▶ should provide a **flexible toolbox** whilst striving for **coherence** with existing of instruments and policies;

### Ownership and visibility

- ▶ should emphasise a **localised approach** with institutional, economic and social dimensions and seek **engagement with citizens**, civil society and local and regional governments;

# Narrative

## Differentiation

- ▶ **Unified principles.** One of the political challenges of the European Neighbourhood Policy remains the striking of a good balance between political conditionality and sovereignty of the neighbourhood countries. Whilst recognising the sovereignty and independence of EU's partner countries in the neighbourhood and beyond, the future European Neighbourhood Policy should be firmly based on, as well as further promote fundamental democratic principles and freedoms, common values, and standards which are at the base of a modern democratic society and which must apply to all aspects of the policy. These principles must be irreplaceable and may not be waived by any bilateral agreements or instruments. The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, and the prohibition of any discrimination based on any ground, as enshrined in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*<sup>1</sup>.
- ▶ **Political dimension.** The European Neighbourhood Policy has always maintained a strong political dimension in view of the objective of closer association of the neighbourhood countries. This political dimension should notably be maintained and strengthened in the principles of good governance – openness, participation, accountability, and coherence – as defined in the European Commission's white paper on European governance<sup>2</sup>, and further developed in the Committee of the Regions' white paper on multi-level governance<sup>3</sup>. The policy should notably be strengthened in its efforts to support local and regional governance and sustained decentralisation in the neighbourhood countries, reasserting the European Union's commitment to the principle of subsidiarity and the shared European conviction that "local authorities are one of the main foundations of any democratic regime" expressed in the European Charter of Local Self-Government<sup>4</sup>, ratified by all 47 Member States of the Council of Europe.
- ▶ **Territorial approach.** The European Neighbourhood Policy should assume a strengthened territorial approach, undergoing a paradigm shift from the division into Eastern and Southern axes, as there are equally significant differences within these two groups of countries as between the two groupings. Differentiation may be made in terms of an agreed set of short- or mid-term objectives and priorities for each country, reflecting the 'more-for-more' principle and a tailored approach with stronger partnerships with countries that make more progress towards democratic reforms or countries aspiring for EU accession. However, these objectives and priorities must always have a territorial dimension in support of multi-lateral macro-regional territorial development, as demonstrated by the strategic approach in the Baltic Sea Region, the Black Sea Region, the Adriatic and Ionian Region, the Danube Region or the Alpine Region. The Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) already proposed a differentiated macro-regional approach covering the Western Mediterranean and the Eastern Mediterranean macro-region, arguing that "in the medium term, each of these macro-regions could be more cohesive and more dynamic than a single uniform region for the whole of the Mediterranean"<sup>5</sup>. Analogous co-operation and development strategies should be formulated for applicable macro-regions concerning not only the European Neighbourhood Policy countries, but involving also EU Member States, neighbours of neighbours, as well as relevant candidate and potential candidate countries.

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<sup>1</sup> *Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union*, OJ C 83 (30/3/2010)

<sup>2</sup> *European governance – A white paper*, COM(2001) 428 final, OJ C 287 (12/10/2001)

<sup>3</sup> *The White Paper on multi-level governance*, Committee of the Regions (16/06/2009)

<sup>4</sup> *European Charter of Local Self-Government*, Council of Europe, CETS 122 (15/10/1985)

<sup>5</sup> *Report on a Cohesion Policy for the Mediterranean*, ARLEM Fifth Plenary session (24/02/2014)

- ▶ **Territorial cooperation.** The formulation and implementation of territorialised development policies should be accompanied by enhanced support to territorial co-operation at all levels of governance, fully respecting the principle of partnership. The local and regional dimension of all components of the policy should be recognised through methodologies, concepts and concrete instruments in support of decentralised co-operation between local and regional governments, who are often the implementing bodies of various public policies. The importance of local authorities and their comparative advantage in development cooperation has been recognised by the European Commission in the Communication *Empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes*, which equally recognised that associations of local authorities can be instrumental in achieving good governance and development outcomes at local level<sup>6</sup>. Examples of such instruments for cooperation are already well-enshrined in other EU policies, and analogy as well as procedural coherence should be sought with instruments such as town-twinning, thematic networks of towns, cross-border local and regional cooperation, European groupings for territorial cooperation (EGTC) or instruments of decentralised development cooperation.

## Focus

- ▶ **Territorial governance and development.** Most public policies have a significant territorial impact and the territorialisation of the European Neighbourhood Policy should reflect this angle. About 60% of the EU *acquis* have a strong territorial dimension and are implemented at the local level, e.g. provision of services of general interest, education and vocational training, social and health care, local and regional economic development, climate and energy efficiency, migration and integration, inclusion of vulnerable groups, gender and minority policies, transport, youth policies, etc. Successful and effective implementation of these policies requires strong territorial governance with local and regional governments empowered to participate in the agenda setting, formulation of objectives, identification of instruments, implementation and monitoring of these policies. Priorities of a new European Neighbourhood Policy should be based on thematic discussions with local and regional governments responsible for the implementation of relevant policies.
- ▶ **Not a security policy.** While the European Neighbourhood Policy needs to be closely aligned with the overall foreign policy of the EU it must not be transformed into a tool for the security policy of the Union and its Member States. Whilst many neighbourhood countries face fragility, crisis, conflict- or post-conflict scenarios, with resulting phenomena such as radicalisation, terrorism and organised crime, focus of the policy should be maintained on objectives fostering development, prosperity and better life of citizens, based on sustainable and sustained reform processes, rather than on geopolitical security challenges.
- ▶ **Closer association.** Closer association of partner countries should remain the principal and ultimate objective of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The values and principles upon which the policy should be based remain universal, regardless of the geopolitical strategic orientation of Europe's neighbours. The EU remains a strong geopolitical actor and closer association, co-operation and deeper relationships with neighbours, or neighbours of neighbours, can only result in mutual benefits and improved stability and security both outside and within the EU. Concrete tools and instruments should be accessible to actors and stakeholders in these countries (local and regional governments, civil society organisation, citizens) promoting the values and freedoms upon which the European Union was conceived and developed, improving citizens' daily lives. Closely-associated countries should be able to use efficient integration instruments, akin to the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), and benefit from the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) instrument.

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<sup>6</sup> *Empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes*, COM(2012) 280 final (15/05/2015)

## Flexibility

- ▶ **Flexible toolbox.** Flexibility and differentiation may be based on short- or mid-term objectives and priorities for each country, but these must imperatively be defined through a multi-level and partnership-based mechanism, involving representative local and regional government associations, civil society organisations and other stakeholders in a truly inclusive and participative process. The neighbourhood policy should be transformed into a flexible toolbox providing all actors in the neighbourhood countries with access to applicable instruments from all relevant EU policies which can support achieving its objectives: closer association, good public governance, decentralisation as well as territorial, social and economic development.
- ▶ **Coherence.** The European Neighbourhood Policy should seek closer coherence and synergies with existing policies and programmes of the European Union not only at the level of principles and objectives, but also at the level of applicable methodologies and instruments. Synergies should be sought notably with the European enlargement policy, regional policy, development policy, migration policy or individual instruments with significant local impact and visibility, such as the *Europe for Citizens* programme. Relevant EU policies, such as *Creative Europe*, *Horizon 2020*, *COSME* or *European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg)*, should be extended to include a neighbourhood component, creating a coherent approach in favour of synergies and closer association of the neighbourhood countries, as is already the case for the *Erasmus+* programme. Coherent, unified, simplified and accessible methodologies should be developed for access by all stakeholders, notably local and regional governments, to different instruments applicable for the achievement of the policy's objectives.

## Ownership and visibility

- ▶ **Localised approach.** The ownership and visibility of the European Neighbourhood Policy should be created and developed at the local level, where local governments, local actors and citizens should be able to contribute to the formulation of territorialised objectives, to have access to the policy's instruments and to be implied in the implementation and evaluation of the policy and its components. Local governments are public institutions closest to citizens and have opportunities to mobilise local communities and engage them in policy-making and implementation. Notably in countries without tradition of civic participation in public policies or in countries with underdeveloped civil society, local governments have the necessary proximity to engage citizens and local actors. Programmes and instruments should not merge local and regional governments with civil society organisations into one beneficiary group, as this puts them into disproportionate disadvantage in comparison with international civil society organisations in terms of capacity for project development and implementation. The European Neighbourhood Policy should thus seek to empower local governments and their representative associations and contribute to building their capacity to perform these roles and to exchange know-how and experience with their peer municipalities, cities and regions in the European Union.
- ▶ **Engagement with citizens.** Stronger engagement with citizens is a prerequisite for strengthened co-ownership of the neighbourhood policy in the partner countries. The EU has developed several programmes and instruments with high visibility and ownership by citizens, such as *Erasmus+*, *Creative Europe* or *Europe for Citizens*, or different forms of direct support to organised civil society, which should be extended to the European neighbourhood to provide visibility and ownership and facilitate contacts between people. Citizen-oriented approach also calls for a substantial liberalisation of the visa regime, addressing notably its prohibitive cost for citizens of the neighbourhood countries e.g. by waiving the visa fee for short-term travel for tourism, business or education and training. Local engagement with citizens through a number of small-scale projects and activities has the potential to provide far more ownership and visibility than large-scale cooperation with the central governments, who enjoy much less confidence and trust of the citizens than the local and regional governments.

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