The EU Global Strategy and the 2030 Agenda:
Global challenges, local solutions

PLATFORMA declaration

PLATFORMA – the network of local and regional governments for development cooperation between Europe and partner countries call on the institutions of the European Union and its Member States to adopt the following recommendations in view of the upcoming presentation of the Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy and the future revision of the Agenda for Change.

➢ We call on the European Union to **work with local and regional governments** in the design and implementation of EU external assistance programmes. We believe that the governance structures supervising the implementation of the Association Agreements between the EU and third countries, the Association Council and Committee, must be open to towns and regions;

➢ We stress the importance of **adopting a multi-stakeholder consultation mechanism** for the definition and implementation of joint programmes in partner countries. Before the launch of a programme, local and regional authorities and other key stakeholders must be able to input the country-specific strategy papers or the bilateral action plans through transparent multi-stakeholder consultation mechanisms;

➢ We highlight that, as reflected in the "comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises", peace and security require sustainable development and the eradication of poverty, two of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's main goals. **The Global Strategy cannot become merely a security strategy**. We support the design of a Global Strategy which truly embodies the "comprehensive approach" and has Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development at its core.

➢ The EU's external action must **adopt a local approach** when addressing some of the most pressing challenges such as migration, conflict, humanitarian crises, and climate change. Only by localising its programmes will these issues be effectively addressed:

  o In responding to the root causes of migration, we call on the European Commission to clarify and formalise the consultation procedures with local and regional governments on the projects funded under the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. We recall that the EU's support to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is essential given the weight SMEs have in a number of third countries as important contributors to economic activity and employment.

  o In responding to humanitarian crises in the neighbourhood, we demand from the the EU an increase in specific resources to address the challenges at the

local level and a more balanced distribution of resources between the different levels of government. We recall that local authorities are on the frontline when responding to humanitarian crises around the world, whether they are caused by conflict or natural disasters;

- o In fighting the effects of climate change, the EU must focus its international climate action at the local level to help local and regional governments build the resilient territories of tomorrow. In partner countries, and especially in Least Developed Countries, local and regional governments are crucial to fight and adapt to climate change and its effects.

➢ We recommend that the EU includes **decentralised cooperation as a means for implementation of development programmes**. The EU should especially build on the expertise and convening power of national, regional and global networks of local and regional governments. Local government's capacity-building, twinning, peer-to-peer partnerships, are all appropriate forms of partnership between EU and partner countries, enabling for real sharing of expertise and know-how between peers.

➢ We believe that the Global Strategy must have a **strong focus on good governance and democratic institutions** and that it must support an efficient decentralisation framework in partner countries, with clear core powers and responsibilities and transfer of corresponding financial resources to ensures that local and regional governments can carry out their responsibilities effectively and efficiently.

PLATFROMA position paper

Background

The need to rethink the EU's external action is timely, given the recent adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which mark the beginning of a new chapter for the international community in its efforts to build prosperous societies around the globe. Moreover, a number of crises that are taking place in Europe's immediate and wider neighbourhood, including the spill-overs of the Syrian civil war and the tensions in Ukraine, are questioning the EU's ability to act cohesively.

The status of the EU as a global actor is increasingly challenged by both internal and external factors. Internally, the economic crisis and Schengen's structural problems, together with the decreasing faith of citizens in the European project, could weaken its international projection. At the same time, the rise of a number of emerging powers and the shift of power away from traditional nation states constrain the EU's capacity to act at the global level.

Against this background, it is important to recall that local and regional authorities (LRGs) are key actors for development, democratic governance as well as peace and security. They have been increasingly recognized by both the European Union[1] [2] and the United Nations[3] as major development actors -thousands of European towns and regions already implement projects in partner countries. Yet local and regional governments in partner countries are seldom provided with the legal, financial or technical means to implement development programmes at the territorial level.

The Strategic Review makes the case for joined up external action. LRGs must be part of it. The EU would benefit from further involving LRGs in the design and implementation of its external assistance in third countries. Until now, the local dimension has not been properly addressed. The EU Global Strategy is an excellent opportunity to redress this gap.

Narrative

➢ Engage LRGs to improve the response to global challenges

The EU must allow LRGs to actively participate in the design, monitoring and supervision of its assistance to third countries. Before the launch of a programme, local and regional authorities and other key stakeholders must be able to input the country-specific strategy papers or the bilateral action plans through transparent multi-stakeholder consultation mechanisms. Bottom up processes to define development needs and challenges will ensure more impact of the partnerships with third countries on the ground. Given the EU experience on subsidiarity and multi-level governance, local governments and their associations from Europe can play an important role in supporting the local governments and their associations in partner countries.

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[1] European Parliament. Report on "the role of local authorities in developing countries in development cooperation" (2015/2004(INI)). July 2015.
[2] European Commission Communication "Empowering Local Authorities in Partner Countries for enhance governance and more effective development outcomes". May 2013.
[3] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Global Taskforce for local and regional governments, and UN Habitat. Report 'Dialogue on localizing the Post-2015 Development Agenda'. October 2014.

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Moreover, the governance structures supervising the implementation of the Association Agreements between the EU and third countries, the Association Council and Committee, must be open to towns and regions. So far, these governance structures have been reserved to the parties to the agreements, that is, the EU institutions and its Member States, on the one hand, and the third country concerned, on the other hand, while excluding other key stakeholders such as LRGs.

As pointed out in the Strategic Review, today's world is increasingly complex, with a shift of power away from nation states to markets, civil society, and media. Many of the global challenges the EU faces must be tackled at the local level. This is particularly true in the field of migration and climate change, two of the main challenges identified in the Strategic Review.

➢ Place Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development at the heart of EU external action

The new EU Global Strategy must be consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As reflected in the "comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises", peace and security require sustainable development and the eradication of poverty, two of the Agenda's main goals. Hence, the Global Strategy cannot become merely a security strategy. Despite its global nature, the 17 goals of the Agenda provide good guidance as to how the EU should adjust its external assistance. Promoting the sustainable development of partner countries will benefit Europe's standing in the world, by opening new opportunities for commercial exchanges and building more inclusive and peaceful societies in partner countries.

Furthermore, Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development must be at the heart of EU external action (especially in its trade, climate and migration dimensions). If all the efforts and money put into development cooperation is not to go to waste, it is crucial for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development to be mainstreamed at the EU, the national and the local level.

The international agreements of 2015 - the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change- were a turning point for the development paradigm, and will shape the future of international development cooperation. The 17 goals of the new 2030 Agenda cover a wide range of policy areas, from climate action to urban policy and the fight against inequalities. The wide scope of these goals is sensitive to the multifaceted nature of development challenges and the need to build synergies between the different policy areas.

➢ Localise development and external policies for increased effectiveness

The EU's external action must adopt a local approach when addressing some of the most pressing challenges it faces today, including migration, conflict, humanitarian crises, and climate change. Only by localising its programmes will these issues be effectively addressed.

o Localise the efforts to tackle the root causes of migration

Local governments can facilitate peaceful dialogues between communities, thus reducing in-country or cross-border conflicts. They also play an important role in state-building from the grassroots level, contributing to greater stability. In some cases a local approach to peace-building - through mediation between different communities, enhancement of the role of local governments in peacebuilding, community policing, etc. - can prove to be an effective solution.

In addition to conflict, unemployment and poverty are two other main driving forces behind migration. In consequence, it is essential to go beyond peace-building actions in order to tackle the root causes.

In this regard, the establishment of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa constitutes a positive initiative, as its objectives and priorities will be agreed in consultation with local authorities in the target countries in order to ensure local ownership.

Economic development has a strong local dimension because of the weight SMEs have in a number of third countries as important contributors to economic activity and employment. Local authorities' policies towards local businesses can play a significant leverage role for a more favourable investment environment, especially if the following preconditions are in place: security of property and predictability, coherent territorial and land planning, transparency and accountability of administrations, fiscal and administrative decentralisation, local procurement policies, and access to local markets. Therefore, the EU must reinforce its support to SMEs in partner countries.

- o **Localise the response to humanitarian crises to ensure self-reliance of affected populations**

The current migration crisis demands from the EU an increase in specific resources to address the challenges at the local level and a more balanced distribution of resources between the different levels of government. This is because local authorities are on the frontline when responding to humanitarian crises around the world, whether they are caused by conflict or natural disasters. As shown by the refugee crisis that is currently affecting the Middle East and Europe, LRGs have been confronted with increasing pressures on public service delivery, the need to offer newcomers a decent life and facilitate their social integration into the host communities, and the importance of raising awareness among their constituents in order to fight discrimination. Until now, the EU's response to the crisis has been undermined by the prevalence of domestic concerns and by the focus on national governments.

The EU Global Strategy also needs to be fed by the reflection surrounding the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit and its objective to rethink the goal of humanitarian assistance, from meeting short-term needs to empowering affected population and reducing their vulnerability. Local authorities can be key in reducing the vulnerability of crisis-affected populations and promoting their self-reliance, by improving the delivery of services such as education and health, upgrading slums and deprived urban areas, and designing participatory and integrated urban strategies.

- o **Localise the fight against climate change and its consequences**

The EU must focus its international climate action at the local level to help local and regional governments to build the resilient territories of tomorrow. In partner countries, and especially in Least Developed Countries, local and regional governments are crucial to fight and adapt to climate change and its effects.

Furthermore, non-party actors must be supported and consulted through their representative platforms for all climate-related EU policies. Non-party actors to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and especially territorial stakeholders such as local and regional governments, local civil society organisations and local small and medium businesses have demonstrated during the run towards the COP21 that they are playing a significant role to help States comply with the objectives adopted in the Paris Agreement.

- o **Use decentralised cooperation to implement development programmes**

In the frame of this greater emphasis on the localisation of external action, the EU must include decentralised cooperation as a means for implementation of development programmes. The EU should especially build on the expertise and convening power of national, regional and global networks of local and regional governments.

Local government's capacity-building, twinning, peer-to-peer partnerships, are all appropriate forms of partnership between EU and partner countries, enabling for real sharing of expertise and know-how between peers. These partnerships have a positive impact on democratic governance, and social

cohesion at local level, which, as previously said, contributes to creating the appropriate conditions for peace and security. It is an efficient way to bring closer communities and foster cultural but also youth and professional exchanges. In addition to this, city-to-city / region-to-region cooperation ensure ownership of local governments and local populations of the programmes implemented in their territories.

> **Promote good governance and decentralised and accountable institutions as pillars of the Global Strategy**

As shown by the so-called school of institutional economics[4], while other factors such as geography and cultural norms also play a role, economic and political institutions best explain the differences in welfare between countries.

In consequence, the Global Strategy must focus on good governance and democratic institutions. An efficient decentralisation framework, with clear core powers and responsibilities and transfer of corresponding financial resources ensures that local and regional governments can carry out their responsibilities effectively and efficiently. This is particularly important, given that the local level is the closest to the citizens and local governments' policies are immediately perceived by the population.

Furthermore, decentralisation can also help political leaders in the fight against corruption, by improving the government's capacity to deliver services while increasing the transparency and the accountability to local constituents.

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[4] Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson. "Institutions as Fundamental Cause of Long-run Growth". 2005

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