

Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020

PLATFORMA Comments

PLATFORMA – a coalition of local and regional governments and representative associations active in development cooperation - seeks to provide policy input to the June EaP Summit following the publication of the [Joint Communication](#) of the European Commission and the European External Affairs Services on the Future of the Eastern partnership (EaP).

The Eastern Partnership celebrated its 10th anniversary last year. After having interacted over the past decade, the EU is now better placed to engage with EaP states in a more effective manner and to prepare the post-2020 partnership framework.

The EU plays a very important role in the area of Eastern Partnership promoting democracy, rule of law and economic development in the eastern neighbors. The EaP policy is seen as a key instrument to close governance systems in target countries to the EU standards. The EU association instruments have positive impact on development process in the EU associated countries such as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The key role of local and regional governments is insufficiently recognised though

PLATFORMA fully supports the importance given to the Eastern Partnership by the EU. We are convinced that more “*engagement with people at local level*” as stated in the Joint Communication, as well as the multilevel approach that it promotes will be crucial.

However, the paper does not sufficiently and clearly refer to the role of local and regional governments and their associations in promoting good governance, local democracy and the rule of law through decentralisation processes. Local and regional governments have a key role to play in public administration reforms, sustainable local policies, local economic development, environmental and climate resilience, gender equality and diverse societies, state reform, and delivery of public services, including through digital means, in all priority areas of the European Union.

To ensure full and successful implementation of the association agreements and deep and comprehensive free trade areas (DCFTAs), local and regional governments (LRGs) should take a lead and act independently in their area of competences. Therefore, the role of LRGs within the public administration reform process and decentralisation strategy should be recognised. Adhering to the principle of subsidiarity, the EU should aim at promoting the role of Local governments as policy and decision-makers and in order to have a greater understanding of the challenges and needs at the local and regional level.

Localising EU support modalities

The EU provides tangible financial support to the EaP governments in a form of the Direct Budget Support. For Georgia it is implementation of Integrated regional development program, successful completion of the Public Administration Reform and efficient implementation of rural development measures. The new EaP strategy should involve LRGs and its Associations in monitoring of realisation Direct Budget support conditions in each EaP country.

PLATFORMA regrets that the Communication does not also draw more attention to the importance of capacity-building at local and regional level. The new EU policy needs to be more concentrated on capacity-building for better governance on local level and on reinforcing Associations of Local Authorities. Also, on their role in the dissemination of relevant knowledge and sharing of experience between the municipalities not only on domestic scene but in the entire area of the Eastern Partnership.

For instance, since 2006, the Council of European municipalities and Regions (CEMR) has developed a [European charter](#) (with 38 signatories in EaP) for gender equality in local life. For two years now, PLATFORMA supports the roll out of this initiative in the EaP Region, with workshops and deep exchanges among peers to ensure the development of action plans by municipalities, in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine especially. Also, the Covenant of Mayors is one of the flagship initiatives that demonstrates the commitment of local and regional governments for local climate and energy actions.

Decentralised cooperation is an asset for EU policy in the EaP

European local and regional governments are also ready to accompany the European Union and their peers in partner countries (check for example at [NALAG advocacy policy](#)). Local and regional governments insist on the important role of decentralised cooperation to accompany the reforms in the EaP countries, notably in the promotion of a balanced territorial development, with access to finance in capital cities as well as in rural areas, in shaping inclusive and fair economy, including using the European Commission's methodology for smart specialisation. Delivering the Green Deal beyond European borders implies a collaboration on the management of waste, water and land, but also on energy efficiency of building and green transport solutions, for instance.

Decentralised cooperation is a key tool for EaP municipalities and regions to benefit from the experience and expertise in all these sectors of EU peers, which belong to the mandate of local and regional governments, and it should be highlighted as such in the Communication. Likewise, cross-border cooperation should be further supported as essential element for further development.

COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and its impact on local level – a new priority

When it comes to resilience, the local governments are the ones who are often the first to feel the strongest impact of conflicts, disasters and crises. They are under pressure to provide first response before a strategy can even be formulated at central level. The ongoing COVID-19 virus global pandemic has had immediate impact on municipalities and regions, affecting people in their daily life, distressing healthcare infrastructures, schools and universities, transport and mobility, housing, companies and businesses. Without any doubt, as the level of government closest to the citizens, local and regional governments are at the forefront of this crisis management on the ground.

Therefore, the EU would have a key role in assisting local governments in EaP countries to overcome post COVID economic difficulties, in the emergency and recovery phases.

PLATFORMA, the pan-European coalition of local and regional governments and their associations active in development cooperation, is working with Eastern Partnership Associations of local and regional governments since 2002 through the Council of European Municipalities and Regions. Since 2015, PLATFORMA has developed an Eastern partnership programme aiming at strengthening local and regional governance, and developing capacity building of national associations of local authorities, in particular in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The diversity of PLATFORMA's partners is what makes the network unique. PLATFORMA reflects the diversity of local and regional governments' realities in Europe and across the world.

The aim of PLATFORMA is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and mutual learning, but also to strengthen the specific role of local and regional governments in development policies.

In 2015, PLATFORMA signed a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with the European Commission. Its signatories commit to take actions based on common values and objectives to tackle global poverty and inequalities, while promoting local democracy and sustainable development.

The Secretariat of PLATFORMA is hosted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions ([CEMR](#)).

PLATFORMA website: platforma-dev.eu
 Follow PLATFORMA on Twitter [@Platforma4Dev](#)
 Subscribe to [PLATFORMA newsletter](#)

OUR PARTNERS

European and global networks



Associations



Local and regional governments



Contact

Bella Tskhelishvili
 Project Officer – Eastern Partnership
 Phone: +32 2 842 67 77
bella.tskhelishvili@ccre-cemr.org