



Co-funded by
the European Union

EU-EaP Local Leaders Seminar:

Strengthening Local Government Capacities for EU Engagement in the Eastern Trio – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine

Programme

When: 28 November 2024

Where: CEMR/PLATFORMA – 1 square de Meeûs, 1000 Brussels, 1st Floor

What time: 09.00 – 16.30

09.00 – 09.20 Registration and welcome coffee

09.20 – 09.30 Welcome words by Marcus Holmberg, Director of international affairs and Head of Brussels office, SALAR and Boris Tonhauser Director of PLATFORMA

09.30 – 11.00 Session 1: Significance of empowered local governments for EU engagement

Moderated by David Young, Senior expert, SALAR International

09.30 – 09.45 How and why to involve local representatives in European integration presentation by Alexandra Schantl, KDZ Centre for Public Administration Research

09.45 – 10.05 Three Break-out groups (10 minutes, 1 question each, Rapporteurs tbc on the day) will discuss:

Concrete examples demonstrating how local involvement contributes to improvement in:

- 1) National legislative alignment and negotiating positions
- 2) Local preparations for delivering EU standards
- 3) Engagement with citizens on EU integration

10.05 – 10.20 Local Europe – Why the EU needs multi-level governance. Presentation by Ms Jasna Gabrič, Co-Chair of the Joint Consultative Committee between the Committee of the Regions and North Macedonia.

10.20 – 10.40 Three Break-out groups (10 minutes, 1 question each, Rapporteurs tbc on the day) will discuss:

- 1) 70% of EU legislation is implemented at the local or regional level – what does this mean for the typical council agenda?
- 2) 'It is up to each Member State to decide how to organise local self-government, so the EU has no business engaging with municipalities.' Discuss.
- 3) 'Local government – the missing link between the EU and its citizens?' Discuss.

10.40 – 10.55 Case study: Montenegro - presentation by Vanja Starovlah, Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) and formerly Union of Municipalities of Montenegro



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

10.55 – 11.10 Questions & Answers, closing the session by the moderator

11.10 – 11.30 Coffee break

11.30 – 13.00 Session 2: The role of Local Government Associations (LGAs) in implementing and adapting reforms to local contexts. Moderated by Ryan Knox, Managing Director, SALAR International

11.30 – 11.40 Introduction by the moderator: what can LGAs do to get more involved in the EU accession process?

11.40 – 12.40 Panel discussion: Challenges and opportunities for LGAs in the EU accession process: lessons learned, success stories, mistakes made, challenges faced

- Ieva Andriulaitytė, Head of Brussels Office, Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania
- Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, Serbia, tbc.
- Denisa Sarajlic, Team Leader for the project 'Strengthening Associations of Cities and Municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina'
- David Melua, SALAR International Senior National Advisor, formerly Executive Director, National Association of Local Authorities, Georgia
- Marta Suprun, Advocacy Expert, Cities4Cities Academy.

12.40 – 13.00 Storytelling – invited LGAs will exhibit posters illustrating their experience and initiatives.

13.00 – 14.30 Networking lunch (with further opportunity for participants to chat with exhibitors)

14.30 – 16.00 Session 3: Implications for Growth, Investment and Reform Moderated by Fabrizio Rossi, Secretary General of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions

14.30 – 14.40 Brief intro from the moderator: Scope for engagement of local authorities in EU-funded projects

14.40 – 15.40 Panel discussion: Future of EU enlargement and scope for local engagement in the reform agenda (implications of the recent evaluation of external assistance, EU-funded activities on decentralisation, the new Growth Plans for the Western Balkans and Moldova, the notion of staged enlargement, and more)

- Elena Višnar Malinovská, Head of Unit, Inter-institutional, coordination of relief and reconstruction Ukraine facility, DG NEAR, EU Commission
- European External Action Service (tbc)
- Michael Emerson, Associate Senior Research Fellow, Centre for European Policy Studies

15.40 – 16.00 Questions & Answers

16.00 – 16.30 Session 4: Closing session Moderated by Ryan Knox, Managing Director, SALAR International

16.00 – 16.20 Reflections invited from representatives of the Missions to the EU of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine

- Vakhtang Makharoblishvili (Georgia) tbc



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

- Chentsov Vsevolod (Ukraine) tbc
- Daniela Morari (Moldova)

16.20 – 16.30 Final reflections from the moderator and next steps



Co-funded by
the European Union

Aims of the seminar

In EU development policy, the idea that the EU should seek to engage strategically with local governments in pursuit of development goals is familiar (at least since the Commission's 2013 Communication on empowering local authorities). Likewise, within the EU, it is often noted (after the Committee of the Regions' 2006 opinion on subsidiarity) that 'the local and regional level is responsible for implementing more than 70 % of EU legislative acts'.

One aim of this seminar is to **ask what the EU's vision should be for engaging with the local level in the Eastern Trio** as they move (with Georgia's candidate status and the opening of accession negotiations in Moldova and Ukraine) from 'Neighbourhood' to 'Enlargement'. Sometimes local government is seen as just another stakeholder or as a complement to central government. But if local authorities are strategic partners in the development sphere, should they not be all the more so once they take on responsibility for implementing significant parts of the EU acquis?

Another aim is to **share experiences among candidate countries on how the local level can become better involved in EU integration**. Accession has a profound impact on local authorities as service providers, employers, regulators, procurers of goods and services, investors, and upholders of standards. In the past, mayors have sometimes 'woken up too late' to commitments made on their behalf, and best use has not always been made of EU funding intended to help smooth preparations.

More recently, some candidate countries have sought to include local representatives, for example in consultation mechanisms, in working groups underlying the accession negotiations or in capacity-building. Local government associations (LGAs) have a special role in promoting dialogue with central government and in preparing their members, for whom the EU may not (yet) figure highly among day-to-day priorities. The seminar will showcase LGAs' efforts, for example in assessing the impact of EU membership at the local level, or in creating networks of EU focal points in municipalities.

A third main aim is to **explore the scope for local involvement in EU-financed projects**, both under current instruments, and – as discussions on the post-2027 package begin – under the successors to the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance.

The recent (March 2024) evaluation of the EU's external financing instruments found that support to local authorities 'has been de facto deprioritised' after the discontinuation of a thematic budget line for local authorities. Although the NDICI regulation called for at least € 500m within geographical programmes to support local authorities, they do not appear in most of these programmes. What could be done to remedy this in the final years of the 2021–27 framework?

The new Growth Plans for the Western Balkans and Moldova and the Ukraine Facility are seen by many as reflecting a shift towards staged enlargement, with increased financial assistance conditional on progress with reforms. But if more funding goes to national budget support and to blended grants and loans through the development banks, how will local access be assured? Or to look at it another way, how will the role of local authorities in the reform agenda be recognised?



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

The seminar will seek to answer these questions and more and, following the day's discussions, to compile concrete recommendations addressed to stakeholders and decision-makers at the EU, national and of course local levels.