

EUROPEAN UNION



## Committee of the Regions

**CIVEX-VI/004**

**113th plenary session, 8-9 July 2015**

### **DRAFT OPINION**

### **New European Neighbourhood policy**

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**Deadline for tabling amendments:**

**3 p.m.** (Brussels time) **on Tuesday 23 June**. Amendments must be submitted using the online tool for tabling amendments (available through the Members' Portal at <http://cor.europa.eu/members>).

Number of signatures required: 6

Reference document

Joint Consultation Paper "Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy"  
JOIN(2015) 6 final

## I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

#### Preliminary remarks

1. recalls that European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was developed in 2003<sup>1</sup> to strengthen relations between the EU and its neighbouring countries. A cornerstone of this policy is progressive integration through the implementation of political, economic and institutional reforms, bearing in mind the commitment to shared values, foremost among those being democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law;
2. notes that, to date, ENP has revolved around three main pillars: a) building democracy, b) promoting economic development, and c) strengthening the neighbourhood's two regional dimensions (the Union for the Mediterranean<sup>2</sup> and the Eastern Partnership<sup>3</sup>). The multiannual implementation of ENP has made a positive contribution to promoting the objectives set. The EU's relations with the ENP partners have developed significantly. It is nevertheless essential to continue adapting to the constantly changing international environment, so as to respond to the new needs that are continually arising. Rapid developments in both the East and the South have generated conditions of uncertainty making it more necessary than ever to review the ENP framework in order to rise to these challenges<sup>4</sup>;

#### General comments

3. takes as a starting point the observation that although at first glance ENP may seem to fall almost exclusively within the competence of national governments, local and regional authorities (LRAs) do play an important role in this area. Consequently, ENP cannot simply be a process between governments and EU institutions, but should also provide for the participation of other players from the partner countries, and LRAs in particular;
4. would stress that LRAs need to be involved in all phases of ENP: in setting priorities, evaluating outcomes, and auditing the content of government policies. There are a number of reasons for which ENP cannot be based solely on cooperation with ENP partner governments:
  - partner countries in the East and the South do not necessarily have governments committed to EU values and standards;
  - governments from these countries are not always sufficiently stable, and continuity could be jeopardised by frequent changes in the composition of those in power.
  - in order for the process of helping these countries assimilate EU values to succeed (including real progress in deepening democracy and developing effective regional partnerships within ENP), a significant part of society must have ownership of it;

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2003) 104 final, 11.03.2003.

<sup>2</sup> Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia.

<sup>3</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine.

<sup>4</sup> JOIN(2015) 6 final, 4.3.2015.

5. argues that it is very important to include local and regional levels of government in the EU's actions with regard to the ENP region, since democracy building and democratic transition begin first and foremost at grassroots level and cannot be imposed from above. For democracy to be stable and deeply rooted, is vital that it be embraced by the local community as a whole. This task should involve all layers of governance, in a transparent manner, starting with municipalities and local authorities;
6. welcomes the EU's efforts to support the establishment of lasting political and administrative structures and considers that these efforts should include supporting local institution-building by providing for effective technical assistance and training for local and regional administrations, with a view to making efficient use of humanitarian aid and existing and future financial instruments for fostering social, economic and territorial development;
7. points out that the CoR is investing a lot of effort and resources in the development of the local and regional dimension of ENP. In 2010 it established the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), and in 2011 it set up the Conference of regional and local authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP). The purpose of these institutions is first to disseminate the concepts that will bring the ENP partner countries closer to the EU and second to foster internal reform and capacity building at local and regional level. Their creation has established the CoR as the political coordinator and partner for other stakeholders in the area of ENP (including the European Commission);

### **Priorities**

8. deems it essential that the EU continue to be the primary strategic partner for the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean. The EU must be capable of helping its neighbouring countries to set a clear path towards a prosperous future and to lay the foundations for better governance, whilst respecting their national sovereignty;
9. considers the European Commission's intention to promote sub-regional cooperation as a means of developing economic links to be very welcome and important, as this in itself would help significantly to increase prosperity in these regions. Both ARLEM and CORLEAP are initiatives that bring the EU into contact with the Southern and Eastern partners respectively, and thus help to improve regional cooperation;

### **Flexibility and adaptability**

10. notes that it is widely agreed that the most successful neighbourhood policy has been enlargement policy. By offering "everything including institutions" to countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the EU acted as a catalyst for change and a setter of standards. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the prospect of EU membership is not open to the Mediterranean partner countries of ENP;
11. would stress that with regard to the Eastern partner countries, it is clear that the prospect of membership cannot be offered to all the countries currently in the network of neighbours. EU enlargement and ENP are two distinct policies with different objectives and should not be

confused. Nevertheless, European countries that are ENP partners can seek membership providing they fulfil the conditions laid down in Article 49 of the EU Treaty. For policy towards any neighbouring country to be effective, it should lead to a clear institutional attachment on the part of the particular country to the EU, provided it fulfils conditions in certain areas;

12. considers that the principle of conditionality and, in particular, the "more for more" principle, although emphasising the EU's commitment to its core values, have not always made a positive contribution to creating the conditions for evenly balanced relations between the EU and its ENP partners. Furthermore, in many cases they have not helped to provide incentives for reform in the EU's neighbourhood. As a result, a more flexible approach would facilitate not only the more effective implementation of ENP, but ultimately the promotion of the EU's fundamental principles among ENP partners;
13. considers that, in order for ENP to be more effective, the approach taken should be tailored to the specific nature of each partner country. Each ENP partner is distinct and should be treated as such, i.e. applying the principle of differentiation. The new ENP, without violating the general principles of the EU, should have the necessary flexibility to maximise the benefits of its implementation. Every partner country should be given the possibility to develop its relations with the EU in its own way, in accordance with its own needs and capacities. This does not imply the adoption of double standards, nor does it negate the unified nature of ENP, by which means the EU has succeeded in taking a coherent approach to all its ENP partners;

#### **Objectives and areas of cooperation**

14. considers that the new ENP should set specific objectives and offer its partners a clear timeframe for implementation of its policies. The new ENP will have little or no impact if there are no concrete benefits for particular stakeholders or if those benefits are only likely to emerge in the distant future;
15. considers close cooperation on energy issues to be a significant part of the EU's relations with its neighbours. Many ENP partners are significant suppliers of energy sources in the EU Member States. This cooperation should be established and encouraged still further to serve the mutual interests of all parties;
16. considers an important area of ENP to be close coordination of the measures taken by the EU and its neighbours on migration issues. When it takes place in an organised manner, mobility from non-EU States to EU Member States has a positive impact in areas such as education and cultural exchanges. On the other hand, irregular migratory flows, which have increased sharply in recent times, create problems and pose new challenges, relating not least to security issues;
17. notes that the EU's engagement with its neighbours on security is of paramount importance. Joining forces to counter terrorism and other asymmetric threats is essential in order to consolidate mutual trust and create an environment of peace and stability;

## **The regional dimension of European Neighbourhood Policy**

18. considers that the process of constitutional reform under way in countries in North Africa and the Middle East could pave the way for the gradual development of democracy, based on a legislative framework that recognises democratic principles, standards and values. This process should lead to decentralisation with a view to guaranteeing effective and appropriate governance to respond to local challenges and specific circumstances in the light of the principle of subsidiarity;
19. therefore believes it to be of particular importance that the ENP support decentralisation processes actively and act as a useful tool to promote reform processes. To this end, it would be worthwhile providing for a detailed assessment to be made of the feasibility of incorporating the methodologies, concepts and instruments of European cohesion policy into the new ENP, and of including Mediterranean partner countries in European structural policies and programmes on a progressive basis. Further strengthening of the AMICI initiative (the Southern Mediterranean Investment Coordination initiative) will certainly contribute positively towards development and investment cooperation and for that reason it is crucial that it be made a priority;
20. notes that as a complement to cohesion policy, it would be equally worthwhile applying to the Mediterranean basin the macro-regional approach that the EU has successfully implemented in other regions that share a common geography, such as the Baltic and Danube macro-regions, or that it is implementing in the Adriatic-Ionian region. This approach could be introduced gradually, through three separate macro-regions for the Mediterranean, including the Adriatic-Ionian strategy, a Western Mediterranean strategy and an Eastern Mediterranean strategy. An alternative approach would be to encourage the gradual involvement of the countries and territories of the whole area within one growing macro-region. This approach would avoid fragmentation of the region into sub-regions;
21. considers that it could and should play a decisive role in the context of certain regional initiatives involving Russia and Turkey. The challenge for the Committee would be to push for tangible results that citizens could see. Practical and project-based involvement of Russia and Turkey in cross-border cooperation would make a major contribution to the ENP;
22. would underline that many of the challenges that need to be tackled by the EU and its neighbours together cannot be addressed without taking into account, or in some cases cooperating with, the neighbours of the neighbours. However, the EU's relations with its ENP partners must not be adversely affected those countries' relations with their neighbours;

## **The role of local and regional authorities**

23. stresses that LRAs are crucial to the success of the ENP. Consequently, the inclusion of the concepts of decentralisation and the territorial dimension within the new ENP will make it more attractive and increase its effectiveness;
24. points out that the role of LRAs in the action plans developed in the framework of the bilateral component of the southern ENP should be strengthened, in order to promote, within those

national action plans, the distribution of assistance on the basis not only of a sectorial approach, but also a territorial approach;

25. considers that regional ENP programmes and territorial cooperation should be reinforced and that LRAs should be given genuine opportunities to implement the programmes and priorities defined jointly with ARLEM;
26. is of the opinion that, as a rule, in the EU neighbourhood countries, LRAs do not play key roles in local decision making or service delivery and do not have significant autonomy from central government powers. Nonetheless, they contribute additional knowledge, resources and expertise to central governments' activities. LRAs can act as catalysts for change, conflict prevention, decentralisation and confidence-building in external relations. In this light, efforts should focus on a specific number of topics that are of real practical interest to cities and regions across the whole neighbourhood and then on ways to develop practical initiatives with authorities to take them forward;

### **The role of the Committee of the Regions**

27. would stress that as a political institution, the CoR should facilitate and promote confidence-building and low-profile cooperation at grassroots level with politicians who share European values and respect freedom of speech and the rule of law. This is equally true in the East and the South;
28. considers that against this backdrop, efforts should be made to link up and twin with cities and regions whose representatives are involved in ARLEM and, in future, in CORLEAP. It would also be worthwhile for the European Commission to cooperate jointly with ARLEM and CORLEAP and support their work, not least in terms of financing. To this end, the CoR would recommend extending twinning and TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Programme) projects between LRAs in the EU and ENP states. This is of profound importance not only for improving governance across the ENP states, but also as a good way of inculcating a sense of the importance of EU multilevel governance structures in the ENP countries. Underlines the importance of the institutional reinforcement of local authorities, reiterating the call to the European Commission to extend the scope of the Local Administration Facility (LAF) to the neighbourhood;
29. would stress that special attention must be given to improving the administrative capacity of government within ENP countries, placing a special emphasis on the local and regional dimensions. The CoR, its members and its associated authorities, along with national associations, are prepared to play a role in the Comprehensive Institution Building programme which is proposed by the European Commission and Member States to help build up local and regional administrative capacity within ENP countries;
30. considers that the EU's efforts to support the establishment of lasting political and administrative structures should include supporting local institution-building by providing for effective technical assistance and training for local and regional administrations, with a view to

making efficient use of existing and future financial instruments to foster social, economic and territorial development;

31. as a practical measure, calls on the European External Action Service to appoint a "contact point" within each of the 16 EU delegations in the ENP countries. These communication officers would serve as the main information gateway for territorial organisations and local and regional authorities in the ENP country concerned, and would have an overview of the sub-national level projects being financed by the EU. They could also help to transmit important CoR messages to the relevant counterparts in the ENP countries;
32. highlights the fact, lastly, that the CoR also has an important political mission as an observer of local and regional elections in the partner countries. The CoR is the only EU body that observes local and regional elections on a regular basis. Consequently, an enhanced role for the CoR in the new ENP is needed in order to promote the principles of democracy, that are the cornerstone of our shared European values.

Brussels,



## II. PROCEDURE

<b>Title</b>	New European Neighbourhood Policy
<b>Reference</b>	Joint Consultation Paper Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy JOIN(2015) 6 final
<b>Legal basis</b>	TFEU Article 307
<b>Procedural basis</b>	Rule 39(a) of the Rules of Procedure
<b>Date of the referral</b>	5 March 2015
<b>Competent Commission</b>	Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX)
<b>Rapporteur</b>	
<b>Background memo</b>	27 March 2015
<b>Debate by the Commission</b>	22 June 2015 (tbc)
<b>Date of adoption by the Commission</b>	N/A (rapporteur-general)
<b>Vote outcome</b>	N/A (rapporteur-general)
<b>Date of adoption by the plenary session</b>	8-9 July 2015 (tbc)
<b>Previous CoR opinions on this subject</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Opinion of 27 January 2011 on Local and regional government in Azerbaijan and the development of cooperation between Azerbaijan and the EU (<a href="#">CdR 235/2010</a>)</li> <li>– Opinion of 2 December 2010 on Local and regional government in Ukraine and the development of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU (<a href="#">CdR 173/2010</a>)</li> <li>– Opinion of 2 December 2010 on The implementation of the Eastern Partnership initiative and the development of cooperation between local and regional authorities in the EU and Belarus (<a href="#">CdR 169/2010</a>)</li> <li>– Opinion of 2 December 2010 on The implementation of the Eastern Partnership initiative in Armenia and the development of cooperation between local and regional authorities in Armenia and the EU (<a href="#">CdR 168/2010</a>)</li> <li>– Opinion of 6 October 2010 on The implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy and in particular the Eastern Partnership initiative: modernisation, reforms and administrative capacity of the local and regional authorities of the Republic of Moldova (<a href="#">CdR 106/2010</a>)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Opinion of 6 October 2010 on Local and regional government in Georgia and the development of cooperation between Georgia and the EU (<a href="#">CdR 107/2010</a>)</li><li>– Opinion of 9 October 2008 on A strong European Neighbourhood Policy, rapporteur Councillor Sharon Taylor (UK/PES) <a href="#">CdR 134/2008</a></li><li>– Opinion of 22 April 2009 on the Role of Local and Regional Authorities within the Eastern Partnership rapporteur Istvan Sertő-Radics, (HU/ALDE) <a href="#">CdR 78/2009</a></li><li>– Opinion of 14 December 2011 on European Neighbourhood Policy Review, rapporteur Mr Jacek Protas (PL/EPP) <a href="#">CdR 198/2011</a></li><li>– Opinion of 3 December 2014 on Neighbourhood at the Crossroads: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2013, rapporteur Mr Olgierd Geblewicz (PL/EPP) <a href="#">CdR 04459/2014</a></li></ul>
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