



**European Committee
of the Regions**

CIVEX-VI/030

130th plenary session, 4-5 July 2018

OPINION

Eastern Partnership deliverables for 2020: The contribution of local and regional authorities

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- points out that local and regional authorities have a decisive role to play in the successful implementation of the 20 deliverables for 2020;
- considers it particularly important to promote exchanges between EU local and regional authorities and those in the EaP countries in the form of urban and regional partnerships, as well as between individual authorities within the EaP countries themselves;
- calls for a job-shadowing programme for administrative staff to be set up at local and regional authority level, in order to improve the dissemination of European standards in administrative practice;
- reiterates that social entrepreneurship should be promoted, as it improves economic development at local and regional level and creates new jobs;
- considers it important for the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) not to be restricted to providing an exchange platform, but to concretely support territorial cooperation through activities ranging from effective matchmaking to providing visibility to concrete projects;
- is committed to delivering on and measuring up to the regard CORLEAP is held in by its partners by showcasing the success and potential of territorial cooperation and by increasing the understanding and visibility of the benefits of EaP policy for citizens.

Rapporteur

Sören Herbst (DE/EPP), Member of Magdeburg City Council

Reference document

Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit of 24 November 2017, Annex 1 – 20 Deliverables for 2020

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Eastern Partnership deliverables for 2020: The contribution of local and regional authorities

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

General comments

1. welcomes the adoption of the 20 deliverables for 2020 in the joint declaration of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit held in Brussels on 24 November 2017, and also welcomes the fact that the declaration highlights local and regional authorities as active promoters of the Partnership's objectives, through their participation in the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP);
2. welcomes the new institutional structure for the implementation of these "20 deliverables for 2020" launched on 12 March 2018 and structured to deliver a stronger economy, a stronger governance, a stronger connectivity and a stronger society to these countries, in addition to some cross cutting issues;
3. stresses that differentiated cooperation between the EU and the six individual EaP countries plays a decisive role in the democratic, economic and civil society development of these countries, which are similar in many ways, as well as being sometimes drastically different in all areas of politics, the economy and society;
4. points out that, thanks to their closeness to the grassroots and the reform of local self-government in the EaP countries, local and regional authorities have a decisive role to play in the successful implementation of the 20 deliverables for 2020;
5. notes that the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the Russian-backed conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine have had serious social consequences for the Ukrainian population and for the state as a whole that can only be overcome with the support of the EU and the Western partners;
6. recalls that unfortunately Ukraine is not the only country of the EaP with conflicts either with other countries of the EaP, or with a third country; therefore, reiterates the EU's support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all Partner Countries, and its full adherence to all principles, purposes and commitments enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1990 Charter of Paris and the UN Charter;
7. calls for renewed efforts to promote the peaceful settlement of unresolved conflicts in the region on the basis of the principles and norms of international law; the resolution of conflicts, building trust and good neighbourly relations are essential to economic and social development and cooperation;

Strengthening institutions and good governance

8. points out that local self-government reform, which will strengthen state institutions and good governance, is one of the priorities in the EaP countries. The European Charter of Local Self-Government was signed by Moldova and Ukraine in 1997, Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2002, and Georgia in 2004. Belarus is not a member of the Council of Europe and has not signed the Charter;
9. calls for efficient decentralisation reforms to be accompanied by effective anti-corruption measures on all levels of government, in order to ensure that stronger and trustworthy governance impacts positively on citizens' daily lives;
10. welcomes the explicit reference to the implementation of public administration reforms in the 20 deliverables for 2020, and believes that official statistics that are compiled at local and regional level and provide high-quality statistical information should be provided as open data at local and regional level in the EaP countries;
11. stresses that high-quality official statistics help to provide a better understanding of social, economic and environmental contexts and allow for evidence-based political and economic decision-making, as well as promoting civic participation in political processes; calls in this context for practical support in the form of sustainable projects relating to overcoming current difficulties in the acquisition of official statistics, in particular referring to the sub-national level, and draws attention to the Division of Powers website, hosted and developed by the European Committee of the Regions, which provides an overview of levels of institutional and fiscal decentralisation in EU and neighbouring countries;
12. points out in this connection that the collection, processing and publication of official statistical information by public authorities in the context of local self-government reform presents significant economic potential, as it not only enables local and regional authorities to accurately assess the economic potential of their territories, but also allows small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to find their niche in the market and generate sustainable economic growth at local and regional level. By providing reliable, high-quality data, it also helps to prevent corruption and to develop effective mechanisms to combat it. Moreover, the data collected provide material for numerous analyses by academic institutions, which in turn will strengthen research in the EaP countries;
13. calls for the issue of effective and efficient management of local public budgets to be put on the agenda, and for internal and external audits of local budgets to be required, in order to ensure that public funds are being used correctly and efficiently. Civic participation in the independent audit would bolster local authorities in their capacity to assess their own performance, programmes and quality of service and to adapt them to public demand;
14. recommends supporting the promotion of civic participation in the public budgets of local and regional authorities, in the form of participatory budgeting, in order to enable citizens to get involved and participate in the management of public resources, and to express their preferences with regard to public spending;

Mobility and people-to-people contacts

15. welcomes the fact that EaP countries can take part in programmes such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe, COSME and Horizon 2020 that offer additional exchange opportunities for universities, administrations, businesses and researchers, and calls for more projects to be undertaken to raise awareness of these programmes at local and regional level, particularly in light of the fact that in some EaP countries international funding programmes are the only platforms for exchange and that some of them have a relatively low success rate for applications;
16. calls for efforts to promote (exchange) projects not only in basic science, but also in the humanities, which will contribute to a better understanding of political, social and cultural developments in the EaP countries, allow for exchanges of experience on research methods, and help to integrate researchers into European research structures;
17. has concerns regarding the statement in the 20 deliverables for 2020 that networks of universities in EaP countries should focus only on teaching;
18. in this regard, strongly recommends not only working to improve teaching in EaP countries' universities, but also promoting research by means of concrete projects passing on examples of best practice in research methods and academic writing;
19. points out in this connection that exchanges between key players such as universities, research institutions, civil society organisations (e.g. think tanks) and SMEs could help develop positive synergies that, in turn, would be of benefit to the entire field of research and innovation;
20. agrees that the reform of local government and of decentralisation is having a positive impact on local and regional budgets and has great potential to promote research and innovation at local and regional level;
21. suggests that entrepreneurship-related projects should cover not only young people, but also adults, particularly women;
22. calls in this connection for concrete measures to develop social entrepreneurship as a form of non-formal education among young people and adults at local and regional level that solves local problems, generates income, creates jobs and promotes social innovation on the ground;
23. points out that exchanges should be promoted not only between the EaP countries and with the EU, but also within the individual EaP countries themselves, as these countries are hallmarked by relatively low mobility, which leads to prejudice and stereotypes taking root within a country and paves the way for disinformation;
24. considers it particularly necessary to support such internally focused interregional exchange projects in Ukraine, which is affected by ongoing military aggression and constant disinformation from the Russian Federation;

Economic development and market opportunities

25. welcomes the fact that the EaP countries can participate in the COSME programme for SMEs;
26. stresses, in this connection, that Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are not yet participating in the programme, and that projects in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus are relatively low in number (between one and eight projects) and are largely restricted to the capital cities;
27. strongly believes that this programme should be further expanded and should focus on local and regional SMEs – including those far away from the capital – in the EaP countries. Such programmes will promote SMEs and contribute to sustainable growth at local and regional level;
28. highlights how important it is for EU local and regional authorities to promote business associations and professional bodies, along with local and regional chambers (e.g. chambers of industry and commerce, chambers of engineers, etc.), as these institutions facilitate integration into European structures and contribute to a culture of fair competition, which would also help to combat corruption;
29. reiterates that social entrepreneurship should be promoted, as it improves economic development at local and regional level and creates new jobs;
30. considers it important to support SMEs in the field of innovation and to promote synergies between entrepreneurship and research;
31. stresses that it is not enough just to support local and regional authorities in the implementation of economic development strategies, as specified in the 20 deliverables for 2020; rather, there is a need to provide technical support right from the development stage of strategies;

Cross-cutting deliverables

32. as stated in the deliverables, expects the countries concerned to step up their efforts to strengthen the rule of law and justice, to guarantee fundamental rights, freedoms and security and to enshrine the protection of minorities and gender equality, including tackling domestic violence;
33. underlines its view that civil society in the EaP countries plays a decisive role in the democratic development of society and should be regarded by governments as an important and credible partner;
34. points out that, against the background of local government and decentralisation reform, new democratic forces and leaders play an important role in democratic processes and should be supported through targeted measures;
35. stresses the need to improve the quality of administrative operations and calls, in this context, for a job-shadowing programme for administrative staff to be set up at local and regional

authority level, in order to improve the dissemination of European standards in administrative practice;

36. calls, in this context, the Commission to bringing back a modified Local Administration Facility (LAF) as specified in the CoR opinion on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy of October 2016¹;
37. strongly recommends supporting research activities within civil society institutions, such as think tanks and research institutions, that enrich policy dialogue through their analyses and facilitate decision-making by key political and economic players in the EaP countries by making practical proposals;
38. stresses the particular importance of protecting minorities in all EaP countries, as a key element in enabling individuals to identify with their region and all of its own cultural, social and societal characteristics;
39. considers it necessary to support both the development of new and the preservation of existing non-commercial local and regional media and public service broadcasting, in order to promote pluralist discourse, ensure that the populations of EaP countries have access to independent information, support quality journalism, and thus effectively counter disinformation;
40. draws attention to the particular situation of the population of Donbas, where the only available analogue broadcasts are channels controlled by the Russian Federation that broadcast mainly propaganda, and therefore calls for the establishment of an EU technical support fund for Ukrainian non-commercial local radio to provide the population of Donbas with independent information, broadcasting from the non-occupied areas;

Concluding remarks

41. highlights the special role played by local and regional authorities, which can operate in all areas, and considers it particularly important to promote exchanges between EU local and regional authorities and those in the EaP countries in the form of urban and regional partnerships, as well as between individual authorities within the EaP countries themselves;
42. calls in this context for a non-bureaucratic programme to be set up to initiate such partnerships between local and regional authorities in the EU and in the EaP countries; This will provide more opportunities for practical implementation of the objectives of the programme by providing financial support to strengthen the partnerships
43. is concerned that the proposed Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 does not provide the stronger allocation of financial resources to the new External Instrument -that would replace, among others, the European Neighbourhood Instrument- needed to respond to the objectives established for the Eastern Partnership countries, although it increases the overall budget for the actions of the EU in the world;

¹ COR-2016-00982-00-00-AC-TRA.

44. considers it important for the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) not to be restricted to providing an exchange platform, but to concretely support territorial cooperation through activities ranging from effective matchmaking to providing visibility to concrete projects; furthermore, is committed to delivering on and measuring up to the regard CORLEAP is held in by its partners by showcasing the success and potential of territorial cooperation and by increasing the understanding and visibility of the benefits of EaP policy for citizens.

Brussels, 4 July 2018

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Karl-Heinz Lambertz

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

Jiří Buriánek

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Eastern Partnership deliverables for 2020: The contribution of local and regional authorities
Reference(s)	
Legal basis	
Procedural basis	Rule 41(b)(ii) of the Rules of Procedure
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	N/A
Date of Bureau decision	29 November 2017
Commission responsible	Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX)
Rapporteur	Sören Herbst (DE/EPP)
Analysis	
Discussed in commission	6 February 2018; 11 April 2018
Date adopted by commission	11 April 2018
Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	Adopted by majority vote
Date of adoption in plenary	4 July 2018
Previous Committee opinions	
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	