



Committee of the Regions

**RELEX-IV-012**

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**OPINION  
of the  
Committee of the Regions  
on the  
Commission Communication on  
"A strong European Neighbourhood Policy"**

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- Recalls its conviction that a prosperous and secure neighbourhood can only be achieved through an efficient co-operation at the local and regional level. Local and regional authorities are best placed to identify and address citizens' needs and provide adequate services;
- Stresses the need to set up regional fora of sub-national authorities, in line with the regional approach of the ENP (Mediterranean dimension, Northern Dimension, Atlantic dimension and Black Sea dimension) and to promote regional and decentralised cooperation;
- Welcomes the proposal presented at a meeting of EU foreign ministers on 26 May 2008 to build closer ties with the EU's neighbours to the east; namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine;
- Welcomes the relaunch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and stresses the importance to give it a territorial dimension and to support dialogue between local and regional authorities of EU member states and ENP partners in the Southern Mediterranean;
- Welcomes the new European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), which began operating in 2007, and especially its cross-border dimension, which allows cooperation with regions bordering the EU (financed by the European Regional Development Fund and the ENPI);
- Urges the European Commission to create a new thematic fund in the EU Budget (in addition to the European Integration Funds) to help local authorities in the EU member states with particularly high migrant influx from third countries to deal effectively with current challenges that migrant population places on local services;

Rapporteur

Councillor Sharon Taylor (UK/PES), member of Stevenage Borough Council

Reference document

Communication from the Commission "A strong European Neighbourhood policy"  
(COM(2007) 774 final)

## **I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

#### **A Political dialogue and decentralisation reforms**

1. Recalls its conviction that a prosperous and secure neighbourhood can only be achieved through an efficient co-operation at the local and regional level. Local and regional authorities are best placed to identify and address citizens' needs and provide adequate services;
2. Calls on ENP countries to adhere to and propagate good election practices and to welcome international monitors to observe their elections in order to increase transparency of election process and consequently improve level of confidence of citizens in democratic processes;
3. Calls on wider promotion of public awareness of the ENP amongst the citizens of both the EU and the ENP countries, with the greatest possible involvement of local and regional authorities through specific programmes or actions;
4. in line with the regional approach of the ENP (Mediterranean dimension, Northern Dimension, Atlantic dimension and Black Sea dimension) and to promote regional and decentralised cooperation, boosting partnership and development programmes by means of integrated measures in the relevant regions. Representatives of the CoR should be included in the work of each Forum;
5. Welcomes Swedish-Polish joint proposal for the "Eastern Partnership" to the European Council;
6. Wishes to be associated with the EC in the process of elaboration and evaluation of the ENPI programmes in order to promote a better integration of those issues concerning the territorial dimension within the operation framework of the ENPI;
7. Calls on the European Commission to support further programmes that work on development and support of free and professional media in the ENP countries;
8. Calls on the European Commission to put greater emphasis on local economic development in countries' individual Action Plans and allocate appropriate funds through ENPI;
9. Underlines that Monitoring Committees of the cross-border cooperation programmes are an important consultation mechanism to resolve any difficulties that may arise in relation to the operational modalities including management of funds;
10. Calls on governments of the partner countries to work towards increasing transparency and accountability, as well as towards creating sufficient administrative capacity, and calls on the Commission to monitor closely the overall level of corruption and corruption prevention

measures in those partner countries where corruption is still an impediment to the progress of democracy, transparency and accountability and to take into account the degree of progress made in these areas when giving support and aid;

11. Calls on governments of Israel, Georgia, Tunisia and Ukraine to ratify UN Convention against Corruption and join the rest of the ENP countries that have already done so;
12. Welcomes the opening of a European Commission office in Minsk, Belarus and hopes that office will be able to work towards strengthening civil society and local and regional democracy and improving general public awareness about European Union, its institutions and shared values;
13. Calls on the European Commission to urgently provide more effective support for civil society in Belarus, independent and professional media, as well as political parties committed to democracy and reforms;
14. Recalls that one of the key principles of the ENP is that it remains distinct from the process and policy of EU enlargement as well as from the issue of EU membership. However, it should not prejudge any possible future developments of partner countries and the EU;
15. Calls on the EU Member States and the European Commission to offer the possibility of European perspective to Ukraine and Moldova in upcoming new agreements following conclusions of 10 years long Partnership and Cooperation Agreements;
16. Welcomes the proposal presented at a meeting of EU foreign ministers on 26 May 2008 to build closer ties with the EU's neighbours to the east; namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine;
17. Recognises the French presidency's efforts to renew dialogue and multilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries from the south and east of the Mediterranean, thus helping to strengthen the Barcelona Process;
18. Welcomes continuing work on implementation of the agreed action plans as they represent excellent tools to foster countries' domestic reforms and urges the EU to work on drafting action plans for all other remaining countries;
19. Welcomes review of action plans entered into force in early 2005 and call for development of Enhanced Agreements with Moldova and Israel;
20. Calls on the European Commission to include members of civil society in the ENP countries, where possible, in the process of monitoring the progress of ENP Action Plans in order to acquire direct and impartial assessment of certain implementation aspects of individual Action Plans;

21. Calls on the European Commission to include representatives of local and regional authorities of member states in the process of monitoring the preparation and implementation of individual countries' Action plans;
22. Recommends to carefully define priorities for cross-border cooperation in the North and East as well in the South in order to maximise synergies and work more effectively towards objectives set up in Action Plans where agreed;
23. Reaffirms that more technical and political support is needed to ensure continuous cross-border and international cooperation between the EU member states and neighbourhood countries over the shared border;
24. Welcomes the new European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), which began operating in 2007, and especially its cross-border dimension, which allows cooperation with regions bordering the EU (financed by the European Regional Development Fund and the ENPI);
25. Welcomes the start of the implementation process of the cross-border cooperation (CBC) programmes under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument and stands ready to cooperate in overseeing the programmes. Calls on Commission and Participating Parties to ensure the finalisation and the timely adoption of all CBC programmes. Stresses the need to ensure that all of the resources earmarked for cross-border cooperation under the ENP are harnessed, redistributing them, if necessary, among programmes that are already up and running in the neighbouring region;
26. Welcomes the increased funding of cross-border cooperation at the EU's external borders for the 2007-2013 period. However calls on the European Commission to further increase, in the framework of the new EU cohesion policy, INTERREG funding after 2013 for trans-border cooperation between local and regional authorities of the EU member states and ENP countries to tackle joint problems specific for the regions to which these countries belong;
27. Calls on member states and participating countries to make full use of TAIEX and twinning instruments in order to provide targeted policy and/or legal advice to local and regional authorities of ENP countries in the context of legislative approximation to "*acquis communautaire*";
28. Reiterates its support for the emerging Black Sea Euro-Region intended to promote cooperation at the local and regional level between the countries of Black Sea basin thus promoting local democracy, stability, good governance and sustainable development;
29. Welcomes the existing thematic EU funding streams, in which ENP countries can already be involved, like FP7 and DAPHNE;

30. Calls on local and regional authorities of European Economic Area countries (Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein) to use their significant experience in building democratic institutions in enlargement countries and help local and regional authorities in ENP countries to increase their democratic capacities and develop their economies;
31. Calls on the European Commission and member states to set up a mechanism for exchange of information on individual and collective efforts in supporting civil society in ENP countries in order to avoid duplication and increase synergies between future programmes;
32. Welcomes the continuation of *Tempus*, *Erasmus Mundus* and other programmes for academic cooperation in 2007-2010 period as they offer students from ENP countries an opportunity to study;
33. Calls on European Commission to support further cooperation between research institutions and think-tanks in ENP countries and EU member states as they provide a forum for debate on issues that could be sensitive for their governments;
34. Notices that with increased mobility and use of transport, production of CO<sub>2</sub> and green-house effect gasses will increase and calls on ENP countries to consider environmental policies as fundamental to sustainable economic development. Local and regional authorities in ENP countries have an important role to play in developing communication and planning that takes account of climate change issues. Local and regional authorities in EU member states should welcome a two way dialogue on these issues;
35. Welcomes the relaunch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and stresses the importance to give it a territorial dimension and to support dialogue between local and regional authorities of EU member states and ENP partners in the Southern Mediterranean. Considers that, as a tool for supporting this process, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument should be adapted to take account of the renewed Barcelona process;
36. Calls for the development of fora of local and regional authorities of EU member states and ENP partners for the Eastern dimension;
37. Recalls the support given in the Political Declaration on "Cross-border co-operation in the Northern Regions of Europe" (CoR 313/2006) for the initiative of the European Parliament to organise a Northern dimension parliamentary forum and reiterates the proposal that a suitable permanent body be established to discuss issues of local and regional importance in the Northern dimension policy;
38. Welcomes the European Commission attaching appropriate significance to extending important transport corridors into the EU's neighbouring countries as part of the ENP; an integrated and sustainable transport network is crucially important for taking forward the economic component of the ENP;

*Mobility & Migration*

39. Reiterates that mobility and contacts between people are reinforcing the capacity of ENP countries to benefit from economic integration, while progress on mutual understanding would be exceptionally difficult without increasing opportunities for ENP citizens to travel to the EU;
40. Welcomes the possibility for further exchanges between EU member states, enlargement countries and ENP countries of local and regional government trainees and seconded officials;
41. Urges EU member states to improve the process of issuing visas in order to increase the mobility of citizens. Particular attention should be paid to students, cultural and academic exchange and representatives of civil society. Promotion of people to people contacts will be improved if costs of visas and the amount of red tape are reduced;
42. Calls on EU member states to improve the effectiveness of consular services in ENP countries and encourages the establishment of common Schengen visa application centres in the countries;
43. Welcomes the conclusion of visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Ukraine and with Moldova; urges the European Commission to draw on its experience with countries that have recently acceded the EU and start negotiating similar agreements with other ENP countries;
44. Stresses that mobility is only possible in a secure environment; this requires that the new Mobility Partnership system will make it the joint responsibility of all countries to tackle challenges posed by migration. For this reason, the ENP countries must also be reminded of their obligation to do more for security and justice. The new system should cover steps to combat illegal migration and provide with more opportunities for legal migration from ENP countries to the EU;
45. Reiterates its belief that local and regional authorities are on the front line of managing issues caused by migration. This applies to illegal migration when local and regional authorities have to manage reception and deal with the outcomes of illegal employment. It also applies to legal migration when local and regional authorities are responsible for provision of local services;
46. Acknowledges cooperation between FRONTEX<sup>1</sup> and local authorities in preventing illegal migration and calls for further closer cooperation with local and regional authorities in bordering member states;

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<sup>1</sup> FRONTEX (European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union) is the European Union agency for external border security.

47. Calls on the European Commission to encourage and contribute to the development of practical solutions to reinforce management of the southern maritime external borders and improve the capacity of the Community, its members and its local and regional authorities to deal with critical situations such as the mass influx of illegal immigrants<sup>2</sup>, with the cooperation of the countries of origin;
48. Urges the European Commission to create a new thematic fund in the EU Budget (in addition to the European Integration Funds) to help local authorities in the EU member states with particularly high migrant influx from third countries to deal effectively with current challenges that migrant population places on local services;
49. Calls on the European Commission to envisage the necessary means that will enable local authorities in the countries of migrants' origin, that particularly suffer from the out-migration of the skilled workforce, to develop opportunities which attract skilled and educated people and ensure local economic and cultural development;
50. Calls on the European Commission to increase, in the framework of the new EU cohesion policy, INTERREG funding after 2013 for trans-border cooperation between local and regional authorities of the EU member states and ENP countries to tackle joint problems specific for the regions that countries belong;
51. Calls on EU member states to use "Local Border Traffic Regulations" which allows EU member states to conclude bilateral agreements with neighbouring third countries and improve cross-border contacts; EU member states should fast track and simplify visa processing for applicants who have previously complied with visa requirements;

*Human rights and trafficking*

52. Notes considerable progress in the improvement of human rights and democracy since the beginning of the ENP and Euro-Mediterranean Partnership programme and urges governments of ENP countries to continue embracing universal human rights and the principles of democracy as they constitute the core values of the EU;
53. Urges the European Commission to continue working with local and regional authorities and civil society of the ENP countries in order to improve human rights, minority rights, women and children rights. Calls on Governments of ENP countries to display greater openness for the contributions from civil society;
54. Welcomes measures undertaken by all ENP countries to enhance women's participation in political, social and economic life and to promote equal rights for women and men, but

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<sup>2</sup> CdR 64/2007 fin EN/o.

notices, that discrimination against women and domestic violence are still very present; therefore calls on participating countries to increase efforts in promotion of women's rights;

55. Recognises that trafficking of human beings between some ENP countries and the EU member states is still a particularly serious problem;
56. Calls on the Government of Belarus to ratify the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and relevant protocols and start constructive dialogue with the EU and full participation in the ENP;
57. Reiterates the importance of the social dialogue and calls on Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco to ratify ILO fundamental conventions on the freedom of association and collective bargaining;
58. Urges the European Commission to prioritise the protection of the victims of trafficking in its Neighbourhood Policy, in line with the respect for human rights, the core principle of the EU;
59. Points out that, regional and local authorities play an important role in combating trafficking of human beings. Recommends therefore, in accordance with the respective national legal frameworks, that local and regional authorities in the ENP countries draw up and implement local and regional anti-trafficking action plans and strategies in close co-operation with central governments and the other Member States to prevent trafficking and protect victims;
60. Calls on local and regional authorities of EU members states to help local and regional authorities in ENP countries to develop action plans which could include the setting up a specialised department resource centre or support unit at regional and/or local level dedicated to action against human trafficking, awareness raising campaigns, specialised training for police and professionals coming in contact with trafficked persons, greater educational opportunities for women and children, etc.;
61. Welcomes the fact that all ENP countries have signed the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and calls on governments of Israel, Morocco and Jordan to sign and ratify the first and second protocols that concern human trafficking and smuggling of migrants;
62. Endorses the presidency conclusions of the European Council meeting of 1 September on the conflict in Georgia and at the same time notes that local and regional authorities can play crucial role in conflict transformation and post-conflict reconstruction; Calls on governments of Georgia, Russia and authorities in South Ossetia to urgently make necessary steps that will enable safe and sustainable return of all refugees and internally displaced persons following the war in South Ossetia;

*Regional conflicts*

63. Reiterates that the EU has a direct interest in working with ENP countries in order to contribute to the resolution of so called "frozen conflicts"<sup>3</sup> as they can undermine European's own security through regional escalation, unmanageable migratory flows, disruption of energy supply, etc.;
64. Reiterates that ENP will have difficulties reaching its full potential unless the conflicts that make regional cooperation extremely difficult or impossible are resolved. People and local communities on both sides of the borders suffer the most from inabilities of their central governments to engage in dialogue and constructive conflict resolution;
65. Calls on the EU to get more actively involved in resolution of so called "frozen conflicts" through support for various confidence building programmes, conflict management, people to people contacts, "city diplomacy", as well as building capacities of civil society organisations in breakaway territories. The EU should keep the issue of conflicts on the agenda when meeting with relevant international institutions and countries;
66. Calls on the European Commission to support border management programmes and confidence building measures between local communities on the both sides of the border of the "breakaway" regions. Fostering convergence between political, economic and legal systems will enable better social inclusion and infrastructure rehabilitation. Particularly important are local income generation projects;
67. Calls on the European Commission to draw experience from the recent EU enlargement process and make good neighbourly relations a precondition for full exploitation of benefits and potential of the ENP. The Commission should encourage countries concerned with "frozen conflicts" to make fresh and genuine efforts to find mutually acceptable and sustainable solutions.

Brussels, 9 October 2008

The President  
of the Committee of the Regions

Luc Van den Brande

The Secretary-General  
of the Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl

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<sup>3</sup> Conflicts in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Middle East and Western Africa are referred to as "frozen conflicts".

### III. PROCEDURE

<b>References</b>	"A strong European Neighbourhood policy" (COM(2007) 774 final)
<b>Legal basis</b>	Article 265, al. 1, ECT
<b>Regulatory basis</b>	Optional consultation
<b>Date of the referral</b>	Letter of EC Secretary General Catherine Day of 20 March 2007
<b>Date of the referral by the Bureau</b>	22 May 2007
<b>Competent Commission</b>	Commission for External Relations and Decentralised Cooperation (RELEX)
<b>Rapporteur</b>	Ms Sharon TAYLOR (UK/PES)
<b>Background memo</b>	10 January 2008
<b>First reading by the Commission</b>	24 June 2008
<b>Date of adoption by the Commission</b>	24 June 2008
<b>Vote outcome</b>	<b>Majority Vote</b>
<b>Date of adoption by the plenary session</b>	9 October 2008
<b>Previous CoR opinions on this subject</b>	Opinion on the Black Sea synergy initiative – CdR 155/2007 fin <sup>4</sup> ; Own-initiative opinion of 10 October 2007 on Local and regional government in Ukraine - CdR 34/2007 fin <sup>5</sup> ; Opinion of 13 October 2005 on the Communication from the Commission on the "Tenth Anniversary of the Euro- Mediterranean Partnership: a working programme to meet the challenges of the next five years" – CdR 142/2005 fin <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> OJ C 105/10 of 25 April 2008, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 305/05 of 15 December 2007, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> OJ C 81 of 4 April 2006, p. 46.