

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

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DRAFT OPINION

**Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External
Affairs**

Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy

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This document will be discussed at the meeting of the **Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs to be held from 11 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. on 23 June 2016**. To allow time for translation, any amendments must be submitted using the online tool for tabling amendments (available on the Members' Portal: <http://cor.europa.eu/members>) **by no later than 3 p.m. (Brussels time) on 10 June 2016**. A user guide is available at <http://toad.cor.europa.eu/CORHelp.aspx>.

Reference document
JOIN(2015) 50 final

Draft opinion of the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs – Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

General comments

1. takes the view that promoting stability and prosperity in the EU neighbourhood should be a top priority for the EU's foreign and security policy, and calls for the potential of local and regional authorities (LRAs) to be drawn on in the design and implementation of EU external policy. The Committee of the Regions should play a significant role in building trust and in international cooperation at local and regional level;
2. notes that European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) can only have an enduring impact if it brings practical benefits to the people of Europe, and urges that this consideration be central when it comes implementing the new strategy;
3. is sorry that the ENP is still above all a project of the institutions in Brussels and of national governments, and calls above all for cooperation at local and regional level and for interaction between countries' civil societies to be strengthened under the ENP and for adequate resources to be made available to enable this. LRAs and their associations must be involved in every phase of implementing the ENP – from programming to democratic control – and they should take part in the work of the Association Committees and Association Councils and be given permanent observer status;
4. calls for more specific projects to promote interpersonal contacts; believes it is essential to make more resources available for cross-border cooperation, partnerships between cities, and scientific, cultural and youth exchanges; reiterates its request that partners be included in Union programmes such as Erasmus; welcomes the Commission's prioritising of visa facilitation and its presentation of specific proposals for Ukraine and Georgia, and reaffirms its support for the process of visa facilitation for citizens of the ENP countries;
5. reiterates the proposals contained in its opinion of 9 July 2015 on a *New European Neighbourhood Policy* and calls on the European Commission and the EEAS to take these into consideration when implementing the strategy;
6. notes that the serious destabilisation in many countries and regions in the EU neighbourhood is hindering the development of lasting partnerships and stresses the importance of abandoning geopolitical approaches and wishful thinking in favour of realistic objectives based on a realistic analysis and of organising cooperation between those partners who are genuinely interested in cooperating and who also have the capacity to achieve long-term objectives; insists that although it is necessary to make a distinction, a balance must be maintained between the eastern and the southern neighbourhood;

7. points out that a durable partnership can only developed on the basis of equal rights and mutual benefit, and welcomes the Commission's particular focus on this consideration when reviewing the ENP; calls for the concept of an equal partnership with reciprocal responsibility to be put into practice for ENP partnership;
8. notes that the new ENP is presented as a pragmatic, interest-driven policy and is concerned that the values and ideals of the EU might be neglected under such an approach; emphasises in particular the importance of not questioning the principle of consistently upholding human rights and the standards of the humanitarian provisions established by international law when addressing the complexities of the refugee issue and development of relations with the ENP countries, and urges that this issue be given high priority in all bilateral agreements with non-EU countries;

Stability of the EU and its neighbourhood

9. notes that the biggest source of Europe's influence on stability and prosperity in its neighbourhood is not military strength, but the attractiveness of the EU's socio-economic model, the unity and solidarity between the EU Member States, sustainable development, democracy, and respect for human rights and democratic freedoms; the stability of the EU and adherence to its values and principles constitute the most important contribution to stabilisation of the neighbourhood;
10. calls for security threats to be analysed in all their complexity, starting with the causes of instability; underlines the need to tackle the socio-economic root causes of the current security and migration challenges as a matter of priority, and welcomes the EU's commitment to engage with the ENP partners in implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals; calls for increased focus on promoting social rights, since sustainable economic and social development are crucial for a stable neighbourhood; stresses that job creation is the decisive issue for the future of most neighbourhood countries, and welcomes the specific focus on youth employability and on promoting small and medium-sized enterprises; emphasises that this requires a multilevel approach, from national to regional and local level as well as regional, subregional and cross-border cooperation; urges that sectoral cooperation programmes be designed in such a way that they can be implemented by LRAs;
11. calls for LRAs in both the EU and the ENP countries to be given support as a matter of priority in providing refugees with adequate basic services, and in the longer term in efforts involving those people to achieving sustainable social and economic development for their municipalities and regions of origin; points out that refugees coming from the neighbourhood countries to Europe could in future be a bridge between the EU and its neighbours and contribute to the success of the ENP;
12. in view of religious radicalisation, nationalism, extremism and terrorism, advocates developing strategies and providing adequate instruments to foster intercultural dialogue within the EU and with the societies of its neighbours, stressing the responsibility and potential of LRAs in this area;

13. notes that good-neighbourly relations with Russia are essential for stability in Europe, and notes that at the subnational and business levels cooperation and dialogue between the EU and Russia have continued and that this potential should be better harnessed to overcome differences;

Differentiation and regional cooperation

14. notes that cooperation with the EU should not lead to competition between the neighbourhood countries for the best relations with the EU but to regional and territorial cooperation, and stresses that the multilateral dimension of the ENP is indispensable. The complex challenges in relation to stabilisation in the neighbourhood can only be met if all partners in a given region cooperate systematically; greater commitment is required from the EU to stimulate the multilateral approach of neighbourhood policy and to give LRAs a central role in this process;
15. draws attention to the engagement and the potential of the Committee of the Regions in relation to regional cooperation – especially through the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), and the Ukraine Task Force – and calls on the Commission and the EU delegations to make better use of the expertise provided by ARLEM and CORLEAP;
16. notes that in the expectation of long-term benefits for their democratic and economic development, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have decided in favour of very close relations with the EU by signing association agreements; is concerned about the high social costs of reform processes, which jeopardise public acceptance of approximation, and calls on the EU to work together with the countries concerned to find ways of managing this challenge; underlines the importance of these countries' decentralisation reforms when it comes to implementing the agreements and urges that priority be given to promoting the democratisation processes at local and regional level;
17. calls for strategies to avoid a situation in which countries have to decide between closer cooperation with the EU or with other partners, and welcomes the new avenues explored in the latest agreements between the EU and Armenia to allow close cooperation with the EU without undermining other international obligations; this experience should also be drawn on in the development of relations with Belarus and Azerbaijan;
18. calls for subregional strategies that meet the very different challenges and situations in the southern neighbourhood, notably in the form of strategies respectively for the Adriatic-Ionian region, the western Mediterranean and the eastern Mediterranean;
19. urges the High Representative and the Commission to present a specific strategy for involving the neighbours of the neighbours in the ENP countries, in order to dynamise this approach;
20. notes that partnership begins in border regions, and calls on the Commission to support the growing cross-border cooperation between LRAs in the neighbourhood countries and thus set an example for other ENP countries; calls for a longer-term, comprehensive plan to be drawn up going beyond the current financial framework for developing all the EU regions bordering on ENP countries;

Responsibility and focus on citizens

21. notes that local and regional responsibility is essential for a successful ENP and that EU policies and measures, as well as financing, must be determined in the light of regional needs. A comprehensive approach must be adopted which benefits all sections of society and supports regional development. The role of LRAs in bilateral action plans should be strengthened, which means strengthening the rights and responsibilities of LRAs, as well as making adequate financial resources available that the LRAs can draw on;
22. observes that understanding of the EU and the agreements between it and the ENP countries is still limited at local level and among the general public, and calls on the Commission to work together with the EU delegations to substantially increase the visibility of the cooperation programmes at local level, to ensure that local players are better informed and better trained, and to strengthen capacity-building at subnational level for using the ENP programmes;
23. believes it is essential to strengthen young people's interest and participation among women as key factors in the neighbourhood countries' development;
24. calls for more specific projects at local level that produce tangible results and have positive effects on the daily lives of ordinary people;

Good governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights and civic freedoms

25. notes that good governance, the rule of law, democracy, and respect for human rights and democratic freedoms are fundamental for stability; points out that the societies of the EU neighbourhood have different historical experiences and conditions, and that democratic and human rights standards can neither be imposed from outside nor imposed from above, but have to develop from the ground up; emphasises the role of LRAs in entrenching democracy and the rule of law in society;
26. points out that administrative capacity is weak in most of the neighbourhood countries, and affirms the readiness of the CoR and its members and the local authorities concerned, as well as their national associations, to be involved in the programmes to build administrative capacity in the neighbourhood countries, calling on the Commission to provide the necessary administrative and financial resources; urges that more support be provided for decentralising reforms in the neighbourhood countries, and recommends agreeing on sectoral pilot projects whose implementation would be the responsibility of local and regional authorities so that experience can be gained with decentralisation processes;
27. calls on the Commission to develop projects for local and regional elected representatives and local administrations under which exchanges of experience can be organised with LRAs in the EU; urges that more support be given to national associations of LRAs so as to promote exchanges of experience between LRAs within the ENP countries; is in favour of significantly expanding town twinning programmes and the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) instrument, as well as the Twinning programme; and asks the Commission to provide

not just adequate political, but also adequate financial, support for projects developed through ARLEM and CORLEAP;

28. reaffirms its request that the European External Action Service as a practical measure appoint a contact partner for LRAs in each of the sixteen Commission delegations in the ENP countries;

Energy cooperation

29. notes that close cooperation on energy issues is a significant component of the EU's relations with its neighbours, many of them being significant suppliers of energy to the EU Member States; believes that the EU can reduce its dependency on external suppliers and fuels by maximising its use of renewable sources of energy and giving preference to fuels and technologies that are environmentally sustainable; stresses that energy cooperation between the EU and its neighbours should include above all projects to develop renewable energy and energy efficiency;
30. points out that there has been huge resistance in many EU localities against gas and oil extraction by hydraulic fracturing, and calls for energy cooperation with the ENP countries to include adherence to the highest EU environmental standards in gas and oil drilling and processing;
31. calls for energy interconnectivity to be improved not only within the EU, but also between the EU and its neighbours and those neighbours' neighbours;
32. is concerned at the massive increases in energy prices seen in some ENP countries in the context of reform processes supported by the EU, and calls for the Commission to translate its commitment to promoting affordable energy into practical strategies to support populations affected by energy poverty in the ENP countries;

Building synergies

33. recommends improving the sharing of experiences of cooperation with both the eastern and the southern neighbourhood, and welcomes the activities of the ARLEM and CORLEAP secretariats in this regard;
34. calls for closer coordination between the ENP and the programmes developed by the EU in order to ease the refugee situation in the neighbourhood countries;
35. calls for an integrated approach to the EU global strategy for foreign and security policy that has been announced, which mentions both the achievements of EU neighbourhood policy as an effective means of preventive diplomacy and the particular role played by LRAs;

Financial resources

36. emphasises that the funding provided through the European Neighbourhood Instrument is not commensurate with the political ambitions and the challenges in the EU neighbourhood, and

regrets that the ENP review did not result in a recommendation to increase the financial resources;

37. observes that the EU is currently facing more crises than ever before, in particular the refugee crisis, natural disasters and armed conflicts, which have created a risk to key values. These crises were not yet anticipated at the time the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) was finalised, and the Commission is asked to present a proposal for a revision of the MFF with a view to raising the ceilings both for payment appropriations and for commitment appropriations under this heading, so as to substantially increase ENP resources;
38. calls for the practice of concentrating ENP financial resources on cooperation with the national level to be eliminated, and for percentages appropriate to each country's situation to be laid down for financing projects at subnational level. EU financial resources must be adapted to target the needs of local and regional stakeholders, including by supporting small-scale projects and organising co-financing in a flexible way. The Commission should consider the possibility of bringing back the Local Administration Facility (LAF) with stricter reimbursement rules requiring more specific and more sustainable projects. The way in which financial resources are used must be carefully monitored, including by civil society.

Brussels, ...

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Review of the European neighbourhood policy
Reference(s)	JOIN(2015) 50 final
Legal basis	Article 307 TFEU
Procedural basis	Rules 41(b) and 41(c) of the Rules of Procedure
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	N/A
Date of Bureau/President's decision	27 November 2015
Commission responsible	Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs
Rapporteur	Anne Quart (DE/PES) State Secretary for Europe and Consumer Protection, Ministry of Justice, European Affairs and Consumer Protection of the Land of Brandenburg
Analysis	1 March 2016
Discussed in commission	23 June 2016
Adoption by commission	23 June 2016
Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	
Date adopted in plenary	11 and 12 October 2016
Previous Committee opinions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Opinion of 27 January 2011 on <i>Local and regional government in Azerbaijan and the development of cooperation between Azerbaijan and the EU</i> (CdR 235/2010) – Opinion of 2 December 2010 on <i>Local and regional government in Ukraine and the development of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU</i> (CdR 173/2010) – Opinion of 2 December 2010 on <i>The implementation of the Eastern Partnership initiative and the development of cooperation between local and regional authorities in the EU and Belarus</i> (CdR 169/2010) – Opinion of 2 December 2010 on <i>The implementation of the Eastern Partnership initiative in Armenia and the development of cooperation between local and regional authorities in Armenia and the EU</i> (CdR 168/2010) – Opinion of 6 October 2010 on <i>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</i> (CdR 106/2010)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Opinion of 6 October 2010 on <i>Local and regional government in Georgia and the development of cooperation between Georgia and the EU</i> (CdR 107/2010) – Opinion of 9 October 2008 on <i>A strong European Neighbourhood Policy</i>. Rapporteur: Sharon Taylor (UK/PES) CdR 134/2008 – Opinion of 22 April 2009 on the <i>Role of Local and Regional Authorities within the Eastern Partnership</i>. Rapporteur: István Sértő-Radics, (HU/ALDE) CdR 78/2009 – Opinion of 14 December 2011 on <i>European Neighbourhood Policy Review</i>. Rapporteur: Jacek Protas (PL/EPP) CdR 198/2011 – Opinion of 3 December 2014 on <i>Neighbourhood at the Crossroads: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2013</i>. Rapporteur: Olgierd Geblewicz (PL/EPP) CdR 04459/2014 – Opinion of 9 July 2015 on the <i>New European Neighbourhood Policy</i>. Rapporteur: Nikolaos Chiotakis (EL/EPP) CdR 02671/2015
Date of Subsidiarity Monitoring consultation	N/A