

CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIRST CORLEAP MEETING

POZNAN, 8th of September 2011

Dear President Bresso,

Dear Commissioner Füle,

Distinguished participants from Eastern Partnership Countries and from the EU

I would like to thank you on behalf of all my colleagues to have invited the Civil Society Forum for Eastern Partnership to be permanent observer of the just born CORLEAP. I will today take the floor as Co- chair of the Steering Committee of the Forum and Director of the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies. Together with me is. Mr. George Toklikishvili, from The Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia, who is leading the Sub Group on Administrative Reform of the WG 1 of the CSF for Eastern Partnership. The Sub group produced the document, which is included in your folders today. I seize opportunity to wish to this initiative all possible success, because that would mean that also for us, CSF, we would achieve part of our objectives.

The Civil Society Forum for Eastern Partnership – gathering 250 NGOs - was established in 2009 with the aim to involve civil society from Partnership Countries and from the EU in the Eastern Partnership. Our role is to make the Civil Society voice heard but and to produce a change for democracy and good governance in Partnership countries. Despite some – expected - difficulties, the very high commitments and the strength of the NGOs involved, through Working Groups and National Platforms, are now bringing results and we prove to BE PRESENT, with a coordinated action in participation, definition of policies, monitoring and implementation.

Let me report now the main elements of the Paper presented to you today.

The CSF welcomes the inclusion of local and regional authorities in the implementation of Eastern Partnership. This initiative will enhance dialogue between all stakeholders participating in the reforms in the countries ensuring that more consistent and consensus-based steps are taken.

Development of the local democracy is both fundamental and difficult for the EaP Countries. The legacy from the past and elements of centralized governance remain dominant. Certainly, traditions of self-government exacerbate the problem, and the lack of public discussions hinders better understanding of the principles of self-governance in wider society.

Which are some of the Challenges and Needs

1. The administrative reforms at regional level are not on the policy agenda in most of the EaP countries and they do not have a strategy for the development of local self government
2. despite the ratification of the European Charter on Local Self Government, the provisions are – even more the practice – often inconsistent with the Charter
3. in several countries, local executive authorities are not accountable to the elected councils
4. there is an evident issue as for the discrepancy between the competences and the resources of the local governments and a low independence of the local budget from the national level.
5. Underdeveloped property basis of self government is also a matter of concern
6. Citizens' participation at the local level, even if mentioned in the legal provisions, is rarely "effective" and "real".
7. Qualification and continuity in civil servants service remain problematic
8. Often transborder cooperation has only a declarative character

9. in many countries, the actual power is concentrated in the hands of the executive branch which is mainly accountable to national countries
10. The lack of democratic participation and centralized decision making hinder efficient and transparent allocation of resources
11. The regional and local self governments present overlapping competencies, with a consequent overspending of resources

Taking into consideration the recent study findings on the needs of public administration reform in EaP countries, conducted by the PAR subgroup the CSF considers it necessary to evoke recommendations delivered to the various stakeholders in 2009-2010 and present the following points

a) To the Committee of Regions:

Basically, to keep high the topics of the real existence and functioning of local and regional authorities in the agenda of the Eastern Partnership and to make sure they are included among the criteria of conditionality to progress on the Partnership

To call for clear delineation of functions among various government levels and their provision with adequate resources as required by the principle of subsidiarity;

To ensure monitoring of the implementation of the relevant legislation of member countries through close cooperation with the Council of Europe and in particular the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in accordance with principles and in the spirit of the European Charter; To encourage the self-governing units to join Innovations and Good Governance Strategy of the Council of Europe .

As for the CoR versus Civil Society

- To ensure strong political support in the issues of decentralization and the involvement of civil society in the process;
- To encourage launching of common projects for good local administration and active local citizens in support of CSF and its participant organizations;
- To consider civil society as one of its main partner in consultations while developing policy and opinions;
- To ensure the involvement of civil society organizations as constant CSF observers (and financial support of their participation) at CIVEX commission meetings;

AND :

- To call on Belarus to join the European Charter of Local Self-Government;
- To call on Azerbaijan to grant the status of municipality to the capital city of Baku

B) To Local Governments:

- To be actively engaged in the implementation of Eastern Partnership;
- To take active part in the implementation of public administration reforms going on in their respective countries at local and regional levels;
- To strengthen cooperation with civil organizations in order to ensure implementation of citizen-oriented policies and enhance their independence from national government;
- To join Innovations and Good Governance Strategy of the Council of Europe and the introduction of its principles;

Mrs Bresso, we are certainly - already from now - accepting the active cooperation that you earlier proposed to establish with the Civil Society Forum . We are also working hard to bring an added value in the objectives of the Eastern Partnership rather NOW

than in a too long term perspective . Our experience says that it possible to have an immediate impact on the life of citizens through a joint action with local governments, which could be less entangled in national political dynamics and closer to the day to day needs of people.

Let me add another hint after hearing your contribution this morning. You correctly quote the important role of the CoR and the Congress of the Council of Europe as observers of the Local and Regional elections. Would it be possible to think that our role of observers in the Corleap could be extended to participate as well in these observatory missions, as CSF representatives ? Our view certainly would add to the understanding of the situation.

You also referred to the contribution of President Barroso in the White Book on multilevel governance. Let's remind us all as well that the multilevel governance – which is certainly a modern answer to many of the political, social, economic and environmental issues of these years – can only exist with a vivid, complex and strong civil society.

Thank you for your attention

Anotnella Valmorbida

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Director of the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies