

The new European Neighbourhood Policy needs greater recognition of local and regional governments

Joint declaration

We, PLATFORMA¹ and the LADDER consortium², believe that the new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)³ presents mixed results: While the new policy does incorporate some of the suggestions made during the open consultation^{4 5}, a number of important issues remain unaddressed, notably in relation to the role of local and regional governments. This might endanger the ENP's effectiveness in partner countries and its capacity to achieve its objectives.

- **A recognition of the role played by LRGs in the priority areas is lacking**

We believe that the new ENP should seek to further engage local and regional governments (LRGs) in the identification of priorities, as well as in the implementation and the evaluation phase, in order to ensure a greater "localisation" of the policies and programmes launched under the bilateral action plans. This lack of recognition comes despite the fact that LRGs' engagement is essential when putting into practice policies in many of the identified priority areas. For instance, in the area of migration, hosting LRGs, whose services have been put under considerable strain since the start of the refugee crisis, play particularly important functions when it comes to raising awareness, providing information and facilitating social integration. Moreover, available funds should allow for sub-granting schemes, as this could enable the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders, including LRGs and civil society organisations (CSOs), while simultaneously increasing their capacities through the implementation of projects.

- **Support to decentralisation in the neighbourhood needs to be strengthened**

Although the joint communication briefly refers to the need to provide capacity-building to LRGs, this falls short of our requests. Capacity-building can prove to be a hollow term if it does not go hand in hand with increased competences resulting from a process of decentralisation, bringing services closer to the citizens and allowing for a more efficient matching of public expenditure with local needs. Moreover, decentralisation and accountability are means to improve the quality of democracy and the justice system, as well as to effectively tackle corruption. The ENP should therefore adopt a multi-stakeholder approach and reinforce the decentralisation processes already taking place across the Southern Mediterranean region, notably in countries such as Tunisia and Morocco, and the Eastern Partnership, including Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

- **The potential of decentralised cooperation remains unexploited**

The new ENP must recognise the role that cooperation between cities and regions can play in view of achieving the policy's objectives, by boosting LRGs' capacities in such areas as migration, local economic and territorial integrated development, climate adaptation & mitigation, and service delivery. European LRGs have over the years built an extensive network of partners in neighbouring countries, through twinnings and different types of cooperation actions (bilateral agreements, territorial and decentralized cooperation projects, etc.) and their participation in associations and assemblies such as the Euro-Mediterranean Local and Regional Assembly or the Conference of Regional and Local

¹ PLATFORMA is the European network of local and regional authorities active in the field of development cooperation

² LADDER is an EU-funded project on the role of Local Authorities as drivers for development education and raising awareness

³ As outlined in the recently published [joint communication](#) by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

⁴ PLATFORMA's contribution to the open consultation to the ENP

⁵ LADDER contribution to the open consultation to the ENP

Authorities for the Eastern Partnership. We hence believe it is time for European Union institutions to tap into this insufficiently exploited resource.

- **Democratic governance must be part of the joint priorities**

We believe that democratic governance should have a higher profile in the new ENP. The joint communication does state that the democratic principles the EU embodies must remain the backbone of any future ENP and that the principle of differentiation should not entail a compromise on such fundamental values. However, the joint priorities the document points out relate mostly to economic development, security and migration, and do not emphasise democratic reforms. Finally yet importantly, all the initiatives concerning young people, and particularly those on employment and employability, and education, help lay the foundations for strengthened democratic governance in the neighbourhood and should be developed in close cooperation with LRGs and CSOs.

- **The focus on fewer priorities and more tailor-made partnerships is welcome**

We support the new ENP's focus on fewer strategic priorities and more tailor-made partnerships on the basis of the "more for more" principle. The replacement of the uniform reporting framework with a more partner-specific mechanism is also a step towards more effective actions. A joint identification of priorities and common interests on the basis of country-specific dialogues involving all relevant stakeholders – at all governance levels - will help increase partners' sense of ownership, which will, in turn, have a positive impact on the implementation of the programmes connected to the European Neighbourhood Instrument.

- **The reinforcement of regional and sub-regional cooperation is stated**

We welcome the importance given to promoting sub-regional cooperation within the Southern and Eastern neighbourhoods. This is in line with our suggestion to strengthen ENP's territorial dimension and to divide the Southern and Eastern neighbourhoods into macro-regions to better reflect both blocks' internal diversity. This will allow for greater differentiation and reinforced cross-border exchanges. In addition, the EU macro-regional and sea basin strategies should be used as useful and operational instruments for improving multilevel governance schemes, and maximising the effectiveness of EU policies in connection with the ENP.

- **The promotion of public administration reform is key to the ENP's success**

We support the ENP's ambition to promote public administration reform as part of the good governance agenda. Building a more accountable public administration, through the strengthening of the capacities of LRGs in policy implementation and financial management, the development of eGovernment, and the design of effective anti-corruption measures, will enhance LRGs' ability to deliver to its citizens and to engage with other levels of government.

- **The ENP need to ensure better coordination with other EU policies**

We recall the importance of ensuring the coordination of the ENP with other EU policies in the areas of development cooperation, trade, and migration, but also in research & development, transport, maritime affairs, environment, energy and cohesion. This will ensure the optimisation of EU resources as well as a more effective implementation of the ENP, while boosting the sustainable socioeconomic development of partner countries and improving their assimilation of the EU acquis.

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