

Consultation: "Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy" (ENP)

LADDER community recommendations to the EC – DG NEAR

30 June 2015

On behalf of LADDER, the EU project on DEAR, coordinated by ALDA and implemented by 46 Organisations (LAs & their Associations, and CSOs & network of CSOs) from 35 EU & non-EU countries,

We agree on:

- The **importance & added-value of the European Neighborhood Policy** for the development of a democratic, secure and mutual developed Neighborhood. The relevance of promoting cooperation for a peaceful & prosperous neighborhood is clear and non-challengeable in order to face common global challenges.
- The need to ensure that **the EU institutions, EU Member States & partner countries share ownership** of the process which is developed jointly. To that end, we reiterate our belief on the importance of establishing a clear process of consultation with the partner countries to develop the cooperation under the ENP:
- The added value of **the regional cooperation** as a driver of the European Neighborhood Policy is that it ensures the necessary **coherence** and **ownership** to the process of cooperation;
- The importance to recognize that each partner country shall be **treated individually**, by adapting the approach to the needs and situation of each country

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We assess that :

- On the ENPI area, the **funds and programs available for local governments are limited except** from Cross-border cooperation (CBC). Local governments benefited in a limited way of the direct support of the EU. CBC is quite insufficient, with many implementation problems, and with very complicated, for local governments, administrative procedures.
- LAs & CSOs, Human Rights and Democracy instruments – calls are **sporadic, rare, with very limited funding and often inaccessible** to local governments because of high competition
- **Budget support** is an inefficient and obsolete tool since the funds go to the state budget and are often manipulated for electoral reasons.

- **Co-financing** of the projects by beneficiaries creates distortions both for efficiency and for fairness. Few local governments can afford co-financing. Moreover in combination with a rather complicated EU project implementation and administrative procedures.
- **ENP supporting central governments** with additional financial resources could downgrade the power balance in society in favour of central governments and state bureaucracy. ENP should rather focus on increasing power of local governments and civil society so to consolidate democracy, diminish corruption and support justice

We welcome :

- the recently adopted EU approach with higher attention by European Commission towards the **decentralized cooperation, local democracy, local autonomy and decentralization** and particularly in this sense such changes on the ground can be mentioned as :
 - the 2013 EC Communicate “Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes” – an important step for consolidation of decentralized cooperation and promotion of local governance
 - More and more diversified consultations at the EU level in which the local governments on the new programs and policies
 - Changes in the institutional context at the EU level and emergence of new institutional structures including first of all of DG NEAR
 - More attention, focused and positive reforms oriented messages on behalf of EU Delegations
 - Changing approaches and focus of the programs
 - Accessibility of European programs for local governments in partner countries – for example ENPARD and programs for public administration

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We recommend:

- To strengthen the **regional approach** of the ENP to offer the space and ground for the sense of ownership by all partner countries involved, notwithstanding the level of engagement and ensuring an overall **coherence** of the European policies. To that end, we believe that the 2 regional dimensions (EaP & MED) shall be further strengthened, supported by available means and funding programmes for the promotion of cooperation for establishing an area of prosperity & good relations with neighbors.

- to recognise the need to treat each partner country **individually**, by adapting the approach to the needs and situation accordingly, providing the opportunities of cooperation for the countries willing to deepen the cooperation through the available tools (Association Agreements, Action Plans etc) also for the ones not opting for this approach but having expressed a clear political will to develop bonds of cooperation with the EU. We believe that **differentiation** should be promoted and developed avoiding an in or out approach. At the same time, countries willing to have a closer association with the European Union shall be provided with the possibilities of access to better targeted EU programmes such as those of Pre-Accession or an extended version of the programme Europe for Citizens, which is working on strengthening the European Identity and the cooperation between Local authorities and CSOs.
- To foster the **role of Local Authorities** (and their **Associations and networks**) in the process of consultation & development of the ENP at all levels of governance in partner countries. Considering that sustainable development & cooperation starts from grassroots, the new ENP should promote active cooperation and partnership between LAs from the ENP countries & the EU, establishing the appropriate funding programmes to further develop the involvement of those actors and enhance their recognition as drivers for change.
- To recognize, promote and enhance the **involvement of Civil Society (& networks of CSOs) in the ENP**, widening the scope of actors involved and having access to funding tools as stakeholders acting at grass-root level in their field of expertise and having a key role to play in enhancing the sense of ownership of the ENP in both the EU (& Member States) and the partner countries
- To promote the **cooperation between Local Authorities** (and their Associations) **& Civil Society Organisations** (and networks), developing the multi-stakeholder approach in the process of the ENP, and involving those actors in its implementation
- To pursue the inclusion of **governance** in the ENP, emphasizing on the local level and its development: the promotion of the ENP activities at grass-root level will enhance the support of citizens to the ENP process and have a spill-over effect on all levels of governance (local, regional, national etc) in terms of sense of ownership
- **Migration** was & remains a major issue for both the EU & its partner countries from the ENP region. Nevertheless, migration pressure must not addressed from its security point

of view but rather tackled as a global humanitarian issue that needs coherent and sustainable action for change

And we recommend also:

- A focus on the work of the **EU Delegations** that should pay much more attention to local governments as closest to the people layer of public administration, bottom-up approach is welcomed as well as EU funds available and directly accessible (not through central government) to local governments close to the people and people needs
- **More targeted and efficient tools than budget support** for central governments shall be applied. One of the potential project implementation modalities might use local governments associations as programs implementers along with the programs' Steering committees including all national and international stakeholders
- **Co-financing** for projects shall be eliminated or at least essentially reduced
- Local autonomy and decentralization shall be promoted as one of the key commitments coming from the **European Charter of local self-government** (and its additional **protocol on citizens participation**) and from Association Agreements with the EU as well as a major precondition for democracy, justice and anti-corruption

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LADDER & ALDA

Local Authorities as Drivers for Development Education & Raising awareness - www.ladder-project.eu

European Association for Local Democracy - www.alda-europe.eu