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ΔΙΑΣΚΕΨΗ ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑΚΩΝ &
ΠΑΡΑΚΤΙΩΝ ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΕΥΡΩΠΗΣ



ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗ ΒΑΛΚΑΝΙΩΝ &
ΜΑΥΡΗΣ ΘΑΛΑΣΣΑΣ

**CPMR's Balkan & Black Sea Regional Commission (BBSRC) reaction to the
"Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit" signed on 7th May 2009**

11th June 2009, Odessa

1. Eastern Partnership in brief

In Prague on 7th May, the 27 EU member states have put their relations with six Eastern neighbours and Caucasian states (Belarus, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia) on a new perspective.

What happens in the countries in the Eastern Europe and in the Southern Caucasus affects the European Union. Successive EU enlargements have brought these countries closer to the EU and their security, stability and prosperity increasingly impact on the EU's. All these countries, to varying degrees, are carrying out political, social and economic reforms, and have stated their wish to come closer to the EU. The European Commission puts forward concrete ideas for enhancing relationship with: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus (the latter depending on the development of its relations with the EU). This implies new association agreements including deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with those countries willing and able to enter into a deeper engagement, gradual integration in the EU economy and allow for easier travel to the EU through gradual visa liberalisation, accompanied by measures to tackle illegal immigration.

The Partnership will also promote "democracy and good governance; strengthen energy security; promote sector reform and environment protection; encourage people to people contacts; support economic and social development". It offers additional funding for projects to reduce socio-economic imbalances and increase stability.

Main focuses:

- Gradual integration into the EU as an economic area and harmonisation of legal regulations;
- Support for the partners in the development of a free trade area among one another which, in the long term, could lead to the formation of an economic community comprising these neighbouring countries;
- Simplification of immigration to the EU provided certain security requirements are met (taking action to stamp out corruption, organised crime and illegal migration);
- Improvements in the field of energy security for all partners;
- Support for social and economic development, in particular to overcome serious economic and social inequalities in the partner countries;
- Intensive and ongoing support for reform efforts;
- Assistance to develop administrative capacity in the field of institution building (for instance for courts and authorities);
- Creation of a multilateral dimension so that the partners can join forces to tackle common challenges

2. CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission (BBSRC) welcomes:

- This new ambitious policy from the EU member states and their Eastern Partnership partners in this sensitive geographic area and recalls that CPMR has already plead for ambitious policies at the borders of the European Union considering their strategic geographical importance for the long-term security and stability of the Union.
- The principles and fundamental values mentioned in the Eastern Partnership adopted in May including democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as, market economy, sustainable development and good governance and appeals to its members do recognize these priorities as central for the development of this area thus ensuring economic and political stability in a democratic framework.
- The objective to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partners countries.
- The mentioned complementarity with regional initiatives between the European Union and relevant partner countries in particular the Black Sea Synergy already supported by the CRPM Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission.
- The participation of the Committee of the Regions in the Prague Summit where the Partnership has been launched.

3. CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission regrets:

- That, besides the participation of the Committee of the Region, no mention of Regions, their representative associations and the potential role of regional authorities in development of this specific geographic area is made in the document. It recalls that Regions and their associations are essential actors for growth and development of territories, for building new governance practices and promoting democratic and close-to-citizen approaches and practices.
- That the proposals made by the European Commission in its communication in December 2008 on "Eastern Partnership" concerning participation of Regional and Local authorities, have completely disappeared in the document adopted by the Council.

4. CRPM Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission (BBSRC) strongly recommends:

- That the following two proposals from the European Commission, which were not mentioned in the Declaration are taken into account and put into practice in the successive calendar of activities of the Eastern Partnership: direct co-operation between the regions of the EU and of the partner countries, including participation of relevant partners in existing transnational programmes in South-Eastern, Central and Northern Europe; extending ENPI-funded cross-border co-operation, currently implemented at the external borders of the EU, to the borders between partners. CPMR BBSRC is conscious of the possible difficulties to overcome but considers these actions essential to be promoted and supported by the EU and partner countries.
- Regions to be involved in the different thematic platforms proposed in the Eastern Partnership: democracy, good governance and stability, economic integration and convergence with EU sectoral policies, Energy security; and Contacts between people. For each of these themes, it recalls the importance of the role of regional authorities. The Eastern Partnership should become a project for dialogue between citizens and a platform for co-operation, bringing together local and regional authorities through an approach based on solidarity and on citizens' needs. Regions and their associations **must be part** of the multilateral platforms mentioned in the article 15 of the Declaration. This was mentioned in the EC Communication but does not appear anymore in the Declaration.
- *That European regional policy principles and practices are used in the area as important elements to the development of the partner countries and their regional and local authorities.*
- CPMR BBSRC strongly supports the creation, as mentioned in the EC communication, of an Assembly of local and regional authorities from Eastern Europe and Southern Caucasus.

CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission wishes to state its support and strong interest for all initiatives resulting from this Eastern Partnership and places its expertise at the disposal of the EU institutions to build upon this ambitious initiative, which can only become successful by fully integrating citizens and their representatives at the closest territorial level, i.e.: regional and local authorities.