



AER Rize Final Resolution **Adopted in Rize, on 4th October 2013**

The context

The EU, as a global actor, has a crucial role to play in ensuring conditions for peace, stability and sustainable democracies throughout the whole European continent. The launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 was a decisive step in that direction. The new response towards a changing EU neighbourhood adopted in May 2011 took stock on the changes taking place in Southern Europe and provided new ground for closer association and deeper economic integration with EU Eastern Neighbours. In their joint communication of 20 March 2013, the European Commission and the High representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy call for a 'stronger partnership' in the frame of European Neighbourhood Policy. Careful assessment of the progress reports show, however, that the results of ENP can be considered as limited so far.

In that context, and with regards to the upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, regional representatives from EU member states, and from EU neighbouring countries, gathered in Rize, on 4th October, adopted the following resolution:

We, regional representatives from the wider Europe,

1. Underline the need for a strong European Neighbourhood Policy which provides the ground for a sound and fruitful cooperation with the European Neighbourhood and show Eastern and Mediterranean partners sufficiently motivating European perspective
2. Consider therefore that appropriate funding for the EU's global activities should be ensured, to enable it to live up to its ambitions outlined in the Lisbon treaty and ad hoc recommendations
3. Share in that context the concern of the European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee regarding the severe reductions to the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) planned in the provisions of the 2014 Draft Budget, which could endanger relations with the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood, one of the main priorities of the EU's external action.
4. Express our concerns that still no agreement could be found on the EU 2014-2020 multiannual budget regulation¹, which could put at risk the timing for the start of the new ENP programmes

¹ Parliament's budget committee decided on 11 September to postpone the consent vote to the EU's 2014-2020 budget regulation.

5. Call for more synergies with other programmes and policies of the European Union to cope with current budgetary constraints whilst improving the effectiveness of EU external relations
6. Welcome in that respect the mechanisms for the pooling of funds from internal and external instruments of the EU budget, which are entailed in the ENI and will be possible from 2014 onwards
7. Globally welcome the provisions from the new ENI which take account of some of the recommendations made in the AER Batumi Declaration (April 2011) and AER Position on ENP, regarding the simplification of the programming process, and the mainstreaming of the implementation rules within a new Implementing Regulation common to all EU external assistance instruments
8. Consider though that there is still room for improvement to allow for more efficiency of the EU future ENP and put forward the following recommendations:

More efficiency for ENP through true ownership: multilevel governance and partnership as core principles

Increasing prosperity, stability and security is a process which calls for the involvement of all layers of governance and of the civil society. Regional authorities, in particular, are the key drivers for regional and local development and regional democracy is a cornerstone of territorial stability.

9. We therefore:
 - a. reiterate the message adopted by AER at its General Assembly in November 2011, that “principles of multilevel governance and partnership must govern (...) the development and implementation of the future ENP (and that) the future European Neighbourhood Policy must foster the process of decentralisation in concerned countries”.
 - b. adhere to the AER Batumi Resolution (April 2011), to the AER Resolution on the Eastern Partnership (April 2013) and call on to the EEAS² and DG DEVCO³ for enhanced inclusion of the regions in the programming and implementation of the future Eastern Partnership and ENP territorial cooperation programmes
 - c. repeat as well our call to the national authorities for more political and fiscal autonomy for regions in the Eastern Partnership and neighbouring countries at large.
 - d. underline the key role which AER has played since the early 1990ies in promoting decentralisation and interregional cooperation towards EU Eastern Neighbourhood and its leading role since 2010 in promoting dialogue among Regions from the Black Sea
 - e. consider therefore that AER should become a privileged partner of the Eastern Partnership and, as for the Black Sea, develop into the main coordination platform to ensure that regional authorities from Black Sea countries are heard and visible in the future ENP, and benefit from a one-stop-shop for exchange of best practice and know-how.

² European External Action Service

³ Development and Cooperation-EuropeAid Directorate General

Operational aspects are also crucial to ensure a successful ENP

The new ENI will bring a number of improvements on the management of future ENP programmes which can only be welcome. However, a number of challenges remain, which need to be addressed.

10. With regards to the Black Sea Basin CBC Joint Operational Programme, in particular, we therefore:

- a. welcome very much the fact that IPA⁴ funds will be pooled together with the ENI funds, as this will allow Turkish beneficiaries to act as applicants and not only as partners as it is the case for the moment
- b. draw the attention though on the fact that IPA is based on annual financing agreements with Turkey, which creates issues related to timings and the expiry of the agreement.
- c. call on the European institutions and Member States to ensure that the conditions be met for a multi-annual programming of IPA funds, to truly facilitate the participation of Turkish applicants in the future Black Sea CBC JOP.
- d. welcome the flexibility introduced by the ENI CBC⁵ Implementation Rules (IRs) regarding the programme areas and geographical eligibility which we consider as a possible answer to the AER Declaration which called for the extension of the Black Sea CBC programme "to the riparian regions of the Danube whose waters flow into the Black Sea and have a direct impact on the quality of its water".
- e. call therefore upon the Joint Programming Committee for the Black Sea Basin to consider the possibility to extend the eligible area of the future programme to the riparian Danube regions as a way to solve the common environmental challenges of the two areas and to foster cooperation between them.
- f. underline that, as there is no certainty about the financial resources for the Black Sea and the Danube programmes for now, other appropriate solutions to enhance closer cooperation between the riparian Danube regions and the Black Sea regions should be considered as well, and demand that the stakeholders consultations on the future Black Sea Basin programme be as inclusive as possible.
- g. ask, in the same spirit, for more details about the plans for the future EU Danube transnational programme, how this programme will take into account the Black Sea Synergy, the BSB programme and include regional authorities.

Conclusions

The global environment of the EU is moving very fast. To keep up with its role as a global player, the EU must be able to react rapidly, whilst adopting a longer term strategy which

⁴ Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

⁵ Cross-Border Cooperation

could be attractive enough to reinforce its partnership with Southern and Eastern Neighbours.

With this in mind, the participants in the 4th AER Black Sea Summit, gathered in Rize, on 4th October 2013, urge the EU institutions for soon achieving agreement on the EU multiannual framework and on the ENP regulatory framework, to allow for the rapid start of the programmes.