

PLATFORMA Forum, Florence, 2-3 April 2012

FINAL DECLARATION

The importance of local and regional governments in multi-actor development partnerships

We, local and regional elected officials, representatives of local and regional authorities in Europe, assembled together in Florence on the 2nd and 3rd of April 2012 for the forum of PLATFORMA, the European platform of local and regional authorities for development, with the participation of local authorities representatives from other regions of the world:

Considering the role and commitment of European local and regional authorities (LRAs) to poverty reduction and development, underlining the importance of public support for international cooperation in a time of economic crisis in Europe and the necessary partnership between the various stakeholders to contribute more effectively to the development of territories;

Considering that partnerships between LRAs, national governments and civil society organisations (CSOs) provide an important added value in developing territories, building peace and reconciliation;

Considering that, as acknowledged in various European Union's documents, and in particular the Joint Declaration on the European Consensus for Development, the parliamentary report "Local authorities and development cooperation" and the Commission's Communication "Local Authorities: Actors for Development", LRAs and CSOs are actors in their own right in development cooperation;

Recognising that these roles contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and carry with them a responsibility to cooperate and a division of labour established according to the distinctive characteristics of these actors, and in the case of LRAs:

- *Democratic accountability which lends legitimacy to their actions,*
- *Their key competences in local and regional public services delivery, among others: water, sanitation, land planning, education, health, civil registry, land registry, territorial climate plans and vocational training,*
- *Their crucial role in the articulation of local and regional stakeholders in order to promote local and regional development and participatory governance;*

Considering that in the partner countries, where decentralisation is often a much more recent development, supporting these roles which fall to LRAs takes on added importance as it can determine their capacity to carry out their democratic mission and public service mission;

- Welcome the fact that the communication "**An Agenda for Change**" of October 2011 confirms the recognition of LRAs in development, stresses an actor-based approach, and thus represents a very positive step forward which was supported by PLATFORMA at the preparatory consultation. We invite the European Commission to strongly interlink the role of LRAs with **governance and democracy**, two of the priorities of the Agenda for Change: there can be no democracy without local democracy, nor governance without local governance. In order to contribute to social inclusion which is to constitute at least 20% of

EU aid, the Commission should equally acknowledge the increasing responsibilities of local and regional governments in implementing basic social services in the context of progressing decentralisation reforms in various regions of the world;

- Point out that the Agenda for Change's approach must now be reflected in the **new architecture of the development cooperation instrument (DCI)**, the policy basis of which can be found in the Communication, and advocate that it also serve as the model for the EU's other instruments for external action, particularly the Democracy and Human Rights Instrument and the Neighbourhood Instrument;
- Call for greater **strengthening of the complementary elements between geographic and thematic programmes**, and warmly welcome the debates which have been initiated to this effect in the European Parliament. We emphasise the importance of having the geographic programmes reflect the priorities of the "Agenda for Change", those of governance and democracy, including at the local level, and call for **support for decentralisation and local governance** being made a cross-cutting priority in all programmes, on the basis of the global evaluation of the European Commission's support to decentralisation processes which has just been published;
- Welcome the proposal to continue the **Non-State Actors and Local Authorities programme** as one of the DCI's two thematic programmes in 2014-2020 as well as the budget increase for this programme, and call for an adaptation in its implementing modalities;
- Call on the European Commission to take into account the lessons learnt from regional programmes like URB-AL III for example, and propose their continuation and replication. These programmes have been for many local and regional governments a mechanism facilitating their involvement in decentralized cooperation, particularly in local and regional economic development initiatives, territorial and multilevel governance approaches.
- Are pleased with the innovative exercise carried out in 2010 and 2011, namely the **European structured dialogue**, which associated LRAs for the first time, and call on the EU to strengthen this political dialogue with LRAs and CSOs, in particular by ensuring that there is a regular exchange between the EU Delegations and LRAs along with their representative associations at the level of each partner country. We take note of the proposal for a **policy forum for development** with the institutions in Brussels on a permanent basis and propose that PLATFORMA as the coordination of representative LRA associations represent there LRAs;
- Regret however and express our concern at the fact that the **preparatory consultation for the Communication of October 2012** exclusively concerns civil society organisations whereas this text is intended to be the European Commission's political response to the structured dialogue, an exercise inherently meant to be multi-actor, and call on the European Commission to rapidly clarify both its **overall approach to multi-actor partnerships** and its **engagement strategy with LRAs** through an exchange with PLATFORMA;
- Request that, in the EU partner countries, **all the levels of governance be consulted**, particularly LRAs and their representative associations, during the stage of drafting and implementing country support strategies, and that the partnership of PLATFORMA with the European Commission's DG DEVCO and the European Parliament's Development Committee in particular be consolidated at European level, and that a dialogue be opened with the **European External Action Service (EEAS)**.