

More cooperation with local authorities needed in EU enlargement process



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An estimated 70% of the EU legislation requires action by sub-national governments.

Recent years have seen the extension to the regional and local level of technical support traditionally provided to national administrations, as well as the development of a network of contact points in municipalities on issues linked to EU integration. However, the opinion says "cooperation must be stepped up between the central and local level in the integration process", calls for the earlier involvement of local and regional authorities, and presses for additional support for reform of local and regional administrations coupled with more detailed performance indicators on the involvement of local and regional authorities in the overall reform process.

Priority areas identified in the CoR's opinion, which was drafted by Anna Magyar (HU/ECR), member of the County Council of Csongrád Megye, are: economic and investment development, public administration reform including local public service development, agriculture and food security, climate policy and green transition, public procurement, and social policy.

The CoR called for some years for the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument (TAIEX) to be extended to the local and regional level before the Commission decided to do so. The CoR believes there would also be value in extending the Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (SIGMA) initiative to subnational levels of administration in enlargement countries.

The opinion also assessed the progress made by individual countries that are seeking to join the EU, voicing support for opening accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania and for easing visa requirements for Kosovo. In keeping with the emphasis placed in the EU accession process, the country-specific reviews of the

Commission's reports underscore the need for more progress on issues related to the rule of law. The opinion argues that local and regional authorities, "due to their specific role as local policy-makers and public service providers, can play a greater role in addressing some shortcomings in the area of the rule of law and fundamental rights, but also in strengthening transparent and accountable governance of local policies and better protecting the rights of vulnerable groups".

The opinion was drawn up to provide a local and regional perspective on the European Commission's 2021 progress reports for enlargement countries. It does not consider Ukraine and Moldova, which were accepted as candidates for membership of the EU in June 2022, nor Georgia, whose status as a candidate was conditioned on further reforms.

The CoR works with local and regional authorities in the Western Balkans and Turkey through structured dialogues, in the form either of joint consultative committees (JCC) with a fixed membership and work programmes, or of working groups, with regional representatives from the partner countries varying according to the topics discussed and the location of the meeting. The CoR has JCCs with Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, and two working groups, one for other countries in the Western Balkans and one for Turkey. The opinion calls for the creation of a JCC with Albania.

The central moment of the CoR's work on enlargement each year are the Enlargement Days, with sessions for individual countries and a plenary session bringing together local and regional politicians from each country. This year's Enlargement Days will be held on 6-7 July. The situation of young people will be a central theme. The event will this year be extended to politicians from Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

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