

# Sustainability in focus as Ukraine reconstruction agenda takes shape



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Long-term support and energy transition are emerging as central elements in the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine.

Local and regional politicians from across the political spectrum have voiced preliminary support for a fast-tracked set of recommendations intended to ensure that the regions and cities of the European Union can become deeply and effectively involved in the reconstruction of Ukraine. The rapporteur, Mayor of Florence Daria Nardella, said that "rebuilding is a re-birth" for Ukraine and that the EU's local and regional authorities "should be proud" to help this re-birth, a process that would include a sharp focus on helping Ukraine's transition to a greener and more sustainable economy.

The opinion on the role of EU cities and regions in rebuilding Ukraine will help shape the work of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine, created in June by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and European associations representing local and regional administrations. The Alliance itself was a response to a request by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The opinion is scheduled for adoption on 11 October, ensuring that the recommendations of cities and regions are crystallised in time for an international conference devoted to Ukraine's reconstruction on 25 October and ahead of final decisions on the form of the European Commission's emerging platform to coordinate support for Ukraine's reconstruction.

Mayor Nardella (IT/PES), who is also president of Eurocities, said at meeting of the CoR's Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX) on 28 September that reconstruction of Ukraine's destroyed infrastructure "can serve as the basis for the accession process of Ukraine" to the European Union and should be underpinned by a focus on democratic principles,

sustainability and stable institutions as well as by sustained economic support to enable reconstruction. The need for long-term support with Ukraine was a key message that Mayor Nardella brought back to the EU from a meeting in August with President Zelenskyy, who, he said, had expressed concern about the "weariness factor".

Recommendations included in the draft opinion stress a preference for grants – rather than loans – for Ukraine and a need for support to be phased, with a first stage focused on emergency response, a second dedicated to the restoration of critical infrastructure and services, and a third phase to pave the way for long-term sustainable growth.

Longer-term support should particularly focus on reaching the objective set by the Ukrainian government to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions by 65% by 2030 and rebuilding social infrastructure – such as housing stock, schools, and hospitals – in order to attract Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons back to their pre-war homes.

Ukraine's government has suggested that the EU's regions and cities could contribute on the basis of twinning partnerships with peers in Ukraine, a proposal backed by the CoR. The CoR's draft opinion also highlights the potential value of broader investment schemes to involve a larger group of cities and regions.

The recommendations drew in part on a study commissioned by the CoR in which researchers canvassed the views of local and regional politicians from areas of Ukraine that have suffered varying levels of damage. Its conclusions note substantially improved administrative capacities at the local and regional level thanks to a decentralisation process that began in the mid-2010s, and also highlighted the potential for EU cities and regions to help capacity-building reforms, particularly in smaller communities.

Support for reconstruction was also the central point of debate at a meeting of the CoR's bureau on 16 September, which has attended by Vitaliy Klitschko, mayor of Kyiv, president of the Association of Ukrainian Cities and the first honorary member of the CoR. At the meeting, the mayors of Warsaw and Gdańsk and the vice-president of Bremen State Parliament invoked their cities' experience of wholesale destruction during the Second World War to highlight the knowledge that could be used to help Ukraine.

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