

EU and Ukrainian local governments establish partnerships to support decentralisation reform

The European Union increased its support for local and regional authorities in Ukraine on 8 March, with the launch of five partnerships between Ukrainian and EU regions and cities. The relationships will see Estonian, German, Hungarian, Lithuanian and Polish communities share their experience in areas identified as priorities by their Ukrainian partners – drawing up economic-development plans, supporting rural areas, helping small and medium-sized enterprises, boosting tourism, and increasing transparency.

The initiative is part of a broader effort by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) to support the decentralisation of power in Ukraine, a process that began in April 2014 and that has seen a consolidation of local governments, an increase in their funding and the transfer of greater powers to them.

The partnerships will see local officials and experts visit each other's communities to identify objectives, analyse challenges, and implement plans over the course of the next three years or more. Four of the five EU communities involved have representatives in the European Committee of the Regions. Financial support comes from the European Commission, with GIZ, the German development agency, providing day-to-day technical support.

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, the President of the CoR, said: "Local and regional governments are working together to encourage decentralisation and increase capacity-building by providing practical support to communities in Ukraine. These partnerships will help Ukrainian communities emulate the progress of EU towns and regions that have prospered from greater control over local services. Strengthening relations and sharing good policy is in the interests of local communities and will ensure a securer, more prosperous European neighbourhood."

Sergey Chernov, Chairman of Kharkiv Regional Council and President of the Ukrainian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, said: "These partnerships are a very welcome initiative that will help the decentralisation process. Ukrainian communities are gaining more power and funding, but local politicians need very specific support as they learn how to use that power to the best effect for their communities. This is also a show of solidarity by communities – in eastern Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, and Poland – **that have made a similar journey away from very centralised state management.**"

The city of Rakvere in Estonia will work with Vesele in southern Ukraine on energy efficiency and sustainable local development, while the Wielkopolska region has teamed up with Kharkiv region in north-eastern Ukraine to assist rural development. Shyroky in the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in eastern Ukraine

will be teamed with Barleben from Saxony-Anhalt in Germany, while the western Ukrainian region of Khmelnytskyi has asked Szabolcs Szatmár Bereg County in Hungary to help develop green rural tourism. Zarasai municipality in Lithuania will share its experience of improving transparency and involving local citizens in decision-making processes with Chemerivtsi, a town in the foothills of the Carpathian mountains.

On the same day, representatives from the Ukrainian regions also attended a meeting in Brussels of the Ukraine task-force created by the CoR, at which the keynote speech was given by **Vyacheslav Nehoda**, Ukraine's First Deputy Minister for Regional Development, Building and Housing. Other speakers included **Marc Cools**, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, **Tibor Szanyi** MEP, deputy chair of the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee, and senior EU officials – including **Peter Wagner**, Head of the European Commission's Support Group for Ukraine, and **Dirk Schuebel**, head of the Eastern Partnership division in the European External Action Service.

Notes to the editor:

- The European Commission is providing funding through its [U-LEAD programme](#). GIZ, the German development agency, is running the programme on behalf of the EU. **Bastian Veigel**, GIZ Programme Director of U-LEAD, spoke at the launch of the initiative in Brussels on 8 March.
- The European Committee of the Regions created a Ukraine task-force in 2015. Ukrainian local and regional authorities are also represented in [CORLEAP](#), the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership, which was established by the CoR in 2011 to foster contact and collaboration between EU cities and regions and peers in the six members of the EU's Eastern Partnership: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.
- In 2016, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) launched peer-to-peer [partnerships with Libyan cities](#), including Tripoli, Benghazi, Ghariyan, Tobruk, Sabha, Sirte, Zintan and Zliten. Federica Mogherini, the EU's foreign-policy chief, has described the CoR's cooperation with Libyan cities as an example of "city diplomacy at its best", arguing that "municipalities can play a central role in the reconstruction of Libya, and we need [the CoR] to keep engaging with them".
- The [Mayors for Economic Growth](#) initiative was launched by the European Union in 2017. It offers technical support to local governments in the Eastern Partnership countries – Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – that wish to develop economic-development plans. The objective is to help municipalities catalyse economic growth at the local level. The CoR has urged local governments in the [Eastern](#)

Partnership to take the opportunity to access EU expertise and to develop peer-to-peer relationships.

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