

CONTRIBUTION TO THE CONSULTATION:
"TOWARDS A NEW EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY"

SUBMITTING ORGANISATION	MedCities
TYPE OF RESPONDENT	Association of cities
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About MEDCITIES

MedCities is a network of Mediterranean cities created in Barcelona in November 1991 at the initiative of the Mediterranean Environmental Technical Assistance Programme (METAP). Being a network of Mediterranean towns and cities belonging to different countries, its purpose is urban sustainable development as a way to improve living conditions in the Mediterranean region. The main aims and purposes of the network are:

- To develop the awareness of interdependence and common responsibility in the policy areas of sustainable development, environmental conservation and social cohesion of the Mediterranean basin.
- To reinforce the role, competences and resources (institutional, financial and technical) of local administrations in the adoption and implementation of sustainable local development policies.
- To develop citizens' awareness and involvement in the sustainable development of their towns and cities.
- To get under way and develop policies for direct cooperation and partnership between partners and with other associations.

This contribution has been developed thanks to the work that MedCities carries out on a daily basis with Mayors, councillors and technical staff of Mediterranean municipalities.

Lessons Learned and Questions on the Future Direction of ENP

MedCities and its members welcome the review of the ENP and, from a Mediterranean perspective, we consider it necessary to continue building deeper relationships with our neighbours, and contributing to the development and stability of the Mediterranean basin.

Regarding the **promotion of regional cooperation**, we welcome the efforts undertaken thus far by different stakeholders. Yet more synergies have to be developed and we call for higher coordination and better policy integration between international actors. Spaces of coordination such as the Union for the Mediterranean should develop and reinforce the articulation between all stakeholders, looking for specificities and complementarities in order to achieve better results.

We consider that the ENP provides for a broad framework for sector cooperation, but then again these partnerships should incorporate an integrated approach and focus more in the main challenges of the region. In particular the revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy should integrate the **urban dimension** among its priorities. This idea is in line with the international debates taking place in the framework of the post-Millennium Development Goals and the Habitat III process. At the same time, the EU is promoting the definition of an EU Urban Agenda.

Last, but not least, a **greater involvement of local authorities** is essential for a successful European Neighbourhood Policy. Civil society has been acknowledged as a key actor, and the EU has committed to supporting and involving civil society organisations in the implementation of the ENP. However, it is important to recognise the specific role of local authorities and to strengthen their involvement in the reviewed ENP as a way to underpinning its democratic legitimacy and bringing it closer to citizens' needs and demands. This, together with the reinforcing of civil society, can become a driving force for greater democracy and social cohesion, developing further participatory instruments and increasing turnout in local elections.

Towards a Partnership with a Clearer Focus and More Tailored Cooperation

1. The Challenges of Differentiation

Some partner countries in the Southern Mediterranean have undergone drastic changes in recent years. Some have developed political changes towards democracy whereas others face conflicts and more complex transitions.

Hence, with regard to **differentiation**, MedCities is in favour of exploring new relationship formats to satisfy the diverse priorities and aspirations of partner countries. Synergies with other European policies and financial instruments may generate a leverage effect of investments in the region, improving its socio-economic development.

The **participation of partner countries in European Programmes** should be developed further; the new ENP could incorporate an approach and implementation instruments similar to those used in Cohesion Policy. The European Commission and partner countries should find effective ways to allow municipalities from both shores of the Mediterranean to work together. In this sense, the projects that MedCities promotes in the South could be perfectly in line with other European programmes such as LIFE, URBACT, Erasmus +, Creative Europe, etc.

Therefore, we call for greater involvement of Mediterranean partners beyond regional programmes, and for promoting their participation in sectoral programmes as a means to reinforcing Europe's relationship with the region. Furthermore, if the EU were to design a Macroregional Strategy for the Mediterranean, this process should be developed in partnership with our southern neighbours.

2. Focus

The ENP review needs to clarify the interests of the EU and each partner, as well as the issues in which they have stronger common interests. Several priority areas have been identified in the initial assessment of the ENP review: trade and inclusive and sustainable economic development, improving connectivity, addressing security threats, governance challenges, migration and mobility, young people, women, etc. MedCities considers that all these are matters of utmost importance, but **special priority should be given to governance challenges** and an urban and **sustainable territorial development**.

Firstly, when addressing **governance challenges**, the ENP must be more committed to **decentralisation** processes that have already started in most countries (in particular Morocco and Tunisia). Administrative decentralisation enhances governance systems that were often drowned by state bureaucracy, leading to project stagnation. Therefore, the ENP should help articulating multilevel governance systems and enable the implementation of policies at different levels, in order to ensure efficiency and respect to the principle of subsidiarity.

MedCities calls for a central role for **local authorities** in the definition the ENP priorities, Action Plans and Indicative Plans. It is necessary to adopt a territorial approach, based in the principle of subsidiarity and decentralisation, where local authorities and their associations become key partners and catalysers of the programmes. Only this approach can guarantee the success of ENP and a greater sense of ownership of the policy.

Secondly, regarding urban and **sustainable territorial development**, the Mediterranean region is not an exception to the global trend of urbanisation that started in the mid-20th century. According to UN figures, in 2014 54% of world population lived in cities and it is estimated that by the year 2050 2.5 billion people will be added to this figure. In particular, in the Mediterranean it is expected that 80% of the population will live in cities by 2020. Therefore, **urban development** should become a priority in Neighbourhood programmes. In this field, we must aim at the establishment of major structural projects that have a direct positive impact on citizens.

Moreover, the EU should promote the elaboration of **City Development Strategies** (CDS) as a first step to a bottom-up approach for urban development. CDS allow cities to identify their needs and build a consensus among stakeholders for the identification and further implementation of their projects. Successful examples have taken place in recent years (Chefchaouen, Tetouan, Sousse, Saida, etc.) that should become a reference to promote participatory development in Mediterranean cities.

Strengthening local institutions and consolidating the competences of public administrations should be one of the strategic priorities of this policy: thematic initiatives will not succeed without strong administrations able to manage and articulate the different policies taking place in cities, and doing so with their own local financial resources. Therefore, MedCities calls for the **promotion of administrative and financial capacity building instruments** in the ENP Action Plans and Indicative Plans (i.e. developing skills and competences of staff and decision-makers, their capacity to collect local taxes, increasing transfers from national governments, local indebtedness capacity, etc.).

At the same time, **further conditionality linked to tax collection** must be sought. The development of the Mediterranean region does not depend on external aid, but on the capacity to generate solid public institutions that guarantee the necessary equality and stability to attract foreign (and national) investments. Conditionality should also be extended to other relevant instruments for an efficient decentralisation in favour of local authorities that should be responsible for issues such as approving urban plans in their territory,

Finally, urban sprawl and demographic pressure have also raised enormous **social challenges** for Mediterranean cities, where informal neighbourhoods and high demographic density are a general trend. Social cohesion and equity are far from being achieved: high unemployment (especially youth unemployment) rates and the incapacity to generate jobs are pressing challenges that ENP needs to help address urgently if we want to avoid further marginalisation of vulnerable population.

3. Flexibility – Towards a More Flexible Toolbox

Currently, municipalities in several southern partner countries have difficulties in participating in European Programmes, due to administrative constraints and, in some cases, incompatibilities between EU and national regulations in the management of such funds. We believe that **more funds should be allocated to local authorities** in order to reinforce democracy and the processes of decentralisation

that most Mediterranean countries are undertaking. This should be accompanied by the necessary measures to **ensure that municipalities are able to effectively use this funding**; in particular, capacity-building and measures to avoid central governments blocking the operationalisation of funds related to EU projects.

The ENP should not only focus in studying the situation in neighbour countries, but there needs to be **an implementation and monitoring mechanism for projects**. This should include funding short term actions that will trigger a reform process, and supporting projects through a monitoring and implementation unit that should identify potential constraints that may hinder this process.

We would like to point out the specific case of the ENPI-CBC Mediterranean 2007-2013 and future ENI-CBC Mediterranean 2014-2020 where Morocco is not participating for political reasons. There are important links and a strong relationship between Moroccan and European municipalities (in particular French, Italian and Spanish) is, and this exclusion has been a real limitation for the good use of these funds in the region.

4. Ownership & Visibility

With regard to the general public's weak awareness of the policy's aims and impact, we would like to insist on the fact that **local authorities are essential to strengthen the ownership of the policy**. At the same time, we must not forget the role that initiatives such as ARLEM can play in stressing the benefits of this policy and disseminating its results, increasing its visibility both across the EU and in partner countries.

The **lack of resources of local authorities** is another handicap for the improvement of local governance and its perception by citizens. Without adequate resources for public authorities to manage what happens in the cities, a balanced and sustainable development doesn't seem possible. Specific programmes addressed to local authorities, in coordination with national states, should be established, as well as the right communication tools for the cities to network with each other and disseminate the information to their citizens.

Here again, we must not underestimate the role of local government associations: **national unions of local governments** must become key partners, as far as they support decentralization processes and do not become state-centred institutions. They can be strategic interlocutors for the EU and help increase the ownership and visibility of the ENP.

Finally, the ENP should be able to **showcase benefits within a shorter timeframe**. For instance, the elaboration of City Development Strategies should be accompanied by short-term and specific "quick-win" projects in order to engage population in the transformation of the region. No planning can be undertaken in the region without offering solutions in the short-term.

CONCLUSION

MedCities welcomes this reform of the European Neighbourhood Policy, especially in the context of recent developments in the southern neighbourhood, where the most pressing challenges are related to **governance** (democracy and decentralisation) and **sustainable territorial development** (urban development and administrative and financial capacity). Therefore we call for a strategic prioritisation of these issues in the review policy.

We believe that these issues should be addressed with the **clear involvement of local authorities** in the design and implementation of the ENP. In this sense, we also call for the possibility of allowing **greater participation of partner countries in European sectoral and structural programmes**.

Finally, we believe that the ENP must be accompanied by **“quick-win” projects that allow greater immediate visibility of its benefits** through a decentralised communication policy.

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