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ITEM 7D

COR WORKING GROUP ON UKRAINE WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2025

Submitted by the secretary-general

FOR DECISION

SUMMARY

Bureau meeting: 217

Date: 14/3/2023

Item 7d

CoR Working Group on Ukraine Work Programme 2023-2025

Type:

- Document for information / debate
- Document for decision
- Recommendation to the Assembly

Short description:

This work programme is an update of the previous work programme of the CoR's Working Group on Ukraine for 2021-2025.

Against the background of the military aggression by Russia against Ukraine, the objectives of the WG needed to be modified in order to correspond to the new realities on the ground. These now include: (i) support for Ukrainian local and regional authorities in tackling the consequences of the Russian invasion, including providing humanitarian support, especially for internally displaced persons and refugees in Europe; (ii) emergency support in the energy sector; as well as (iii) planning and strengthening local and regional capacities around Ukraine's accession to the EU, and the future reconstruction under the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine.

The Bureau is invited to approve the updated work programme of the Working Group on Ukraine for 2023-2025.

Remarks:

The updated work programme also incorporates the provisions of the CoR Bureau decision on the mid-term renewal, setting-up and composition of the working groups, joint consultative committees and other political bodies from 28 June 2022, whereby the composition of the Working Group was extended from six to 13 members.

**Subject: Work programme of the European Committee of the Regions'
Working Group on Ukraine for 2023-2025¹**

This work programme is an update of the previous work programme of the CoR's Working Group on Ukraine for 2021-2025. It has been drawn up in accordance with the remit of the working group (WG) as defined by CoR Bureau Decision 2020/01 of 6 April 2020, setting out the priorities for the WG's activities corresponding to the CoR's seventh term of office, and its subsequent decision on the mid-term renewal, setting-up and composition of the working groups, joint consultative committees and other political bodies from 28 June 2022. It equally follows the political guidelines on the "support package for Ukraine" provided in the "Agenda for Change / reinforcing partnerships: CoR and enlargement countries", agreed by the CoR Conference of Presidents on 7 February 2023. It also takes into account as far as applicable (i) the Joint Communication on *Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all*²; (ii) the priorities laid out in the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement; (iii) the key priorities of the CORLEAP Action Plan 2021-2023; (v) the Declaration of the European Union's Regions and Cities on Solidarity with Ukraine 2022³; (vi) the European Commission's opinion on Ukraine's application for membership of the European Union⁴; and (vii) the European Council conclusions on the membership applications of Ukraine 2022⁵.

The work programme may be further updated to take into account developments in Ukraine.

1. Main focus of activities

Against the background of the military aggression by Russia against Ukraine, the priority objective of the WG is to facilitate support for Ukrainian local and regional authorities in tackling the consequences of the Russian invasion, including providing humanitarian support, especially for internally displaced persons and refugees in Europe; emergency support in the energy sector; as well as planning and strengthening local and regional capacities around Ukraine's accession to the EU, and the future reconstruction under the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine. The "Support package for Ukraine" agreed upon by the Conference of Presidents on 7 February 2023 provides further political guidance for the WG activities.

¹ Final version adopted at the Bureau of the European Committee of the Regions on 14 March 2023.

² https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/1_en_act_part1_v6.pdf.

³ <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/brochures/Documents/Declaration%20of%20the%20European%20Union%27s%20Regions%20and%20Cities%20on%20solidarity%20with%20Ukraine/4560%20Ukraine%20Declaration%20CovA4%20EN.pdf>.

⁴ <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/Ukraine%20Opinion%20and%20Annex.pdf>.

⁵ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/23/european-council-conclusions-on-ukraine-the-membership-applications-of-ukraine-the-republic-of-moldova-and-georgia-western-balkans-and-external-relations-23-june-2022/>.

The activities of the WG shall also:

- offer political support to safeguard successful achievements of the decentralisation reform process in Ukraine;
- provide space for debate on the challenges faced by Ukrainian LRAs in the process of the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), as well as in Ukraine's future accession process;
- provide expertise and support to Ukrainian LRAs in matters related to the regional and local dimension of implementing the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and the European Commission's criteria for membership of the EU;
- prepare the CoR's input to the Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform to support Ukraine's repair, recovery and reconstruction process;
- prepare the CoR's position on the review of Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons;
- facilitate the contribution of local and regional authorities (LRAs) to the Eastern Partnership initiative and other EU policies with a strong local impact;
- complement multilateral activities within the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) by providing a framework for sustainable bilateral cooperation with Ukrainian local and regional authorities;
- sustain interinstitutional cooperation on Ukraine with other EU institutions, particularly the European Commission, European External Action Service and European Parliament;
- exchange best practices with local and regional authorities in third countries involved in the hosting of Ukrainian refugees, and in particular with the UK through the CoR-UK contact group.

2. **Key topics**

The core topics to be addressed in 2023-2025 are:

1. Emergency support to Ukrainian cities and regions.
2. Support for Ukrainian refugees.
3. Reconstruction and recovery of Ukrainian cities and regions.
4. Safeguarding the ongoing reforms (decentralisation, good governance, fight against corruption, local economic development).
5. Coordinating the peer-to-peer cooperation and capacity building between cities and regions in the EU and Ukraine.

In addition, upon the decision of the members, the activities and deliberations within the WG can touch upon other topics of interest, including – but not limited to – cross-border cooperation, sustainable regional development, green reconstruction, preservation of cultural heritage, and integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level. Ukrainian counterparts can also suggest priority themes for discussion, based on the evolving political situation and societal

changes in Ukraine. Furthermore, the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the recovery from it can be addressed at the meetings of the WG.

All of the above cooperation strands are aimed at building the resilience of Ukrainian local and regional authorities, as these are facing unprecedented challenges with regard to military, security, humanitarian, economic, political, social and public health aspects.

2.1 Fostering emergency support to Ukrainian cities and regions

Ukrainian cities and regions are suffering from the Russian invasion in multiple ways: civilians are being killed, wounded and displaced; local authority leaders abducted⁶, and critical infrastructure (including power generation plants and transmission facilities, gas distribution networks, water utilities, telecommunications systems, and roads), public infrastructure (including schools, kindergartens, and hospitals) as well as residential and private buildings destroyed. That is why, from the very first days of the war, European cities and regions launched an unprecedented campaign of emergency aid for partner cities in Ukraine. The WG will continue to facilitate calls to urgently provide necessary energy⁷ and other equipment needed to maintain Ukraine's resilience.

2.2 Ensuring support for Ukrainian refugees

Since 24 February 2022, Russia's military invasion of Ukraine has created a situation of mass arrivals of displaced people from Ukraine unable to return to their homes. Due to the scale of estimated arrivals, the European Council activated the provisions of the Temporary Protection Directive⁸ for Ukrainian citizens and residents to offer quick and effective assistance to people fleeing the war. European cities and regions continue to host, protect and assist the millions of Ukrainians. Moreover, children and young people fleeing the war in Ukraine are being welcomed to stay with their peers, receive the experience of communicating in a foreign language, obtain targeted psychological help to stabilise their emotional state and distract them from traumatising experiences. The WG will continue to explore ways on further assistance for internally displaced persons in Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees in the EU and prepare the CoR's contribution to the review of the directive as its validity to cover the situation of Ukrainian refugees is limited in time.

2.3 Facilitating the reconstruction and recovery of Ukrainian cities and regions

The European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine⁹ was launched by the CoR and its partners to coordinate their joint efforts directed towards helping Ukraine's local and regional authorities rebuild homes, schools, infrastructure and services destroyed by Russia. The Alliance provides information and feedback, fostering the political dialogue with the local and regional level, delivering expertise in capacity-building, good governance, and technical assistance to

⁶ <https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/release-Ukraine-mayors-and-local-leaders.aspx>.

⁷ <https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/Call-give-energy-equipment-Ukraine.aspx>.

⁸ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en.

⁹ <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/pages/european-alliance-of-cities-and-regions-for-the-reconstruction-of-ukraine.aspx>.

cities and regions in Ukraine. The Alliance shall also contribute to giving the Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform to support Ukraine's repair, recovery and reconstruction process a local and regional perspective and advocate the application of the partnership principle as well as best practices of the EU's regional policy.

In this context, ensuring sustainable local economic reconstruction remains one of the main priorities for Ukraine. The efforts of both the Ukrainian authorities and the international donor community are directed towards enhancing economic opportunities for Ukrainians, creating better conditions for international and local businesses, and fostering economic growth at local and regional level. In this context, the WG will support activities of the Alliance, including those aimed at promoting investment opportunities in Ukraine, improving territorial planning and infrastructure development, and improving the system of regional development management, with an emphasis on the development of rural regions.

The WG shall also be mindful of the Alliance's principles, which include unwavering support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and unity; a bottom-up approach and of empowerment of local self-government to take on a meaningful role in the recovery and reconstruction; support to Ukraine's EU accession path; of "build back better" with a sustainable, green, smart and inclusive approach; of good local and regional governance; and on the facilitation of local and regional business development and innovation and the development and modernisation of the Ukrainian countryside, respectful of its decentralisation reform.

2.4 Safeguarding the ongoing reforms, in particular those in the field of the decentralisation, good governance, fight against corruption, and local economic development

The inclusion of local authorities in the decision-making processes and measuring policies by the benefit they bring to citizens are important aspects of the overall EU integration process. Particularly, decentralisation and public administration reform have been the key pillars of change and improved governance in the past several years. In order to consolidate the achievements of the decentralisation reform, the WG will offer continuous support through policy advice and the sharing of good practices on decentralisation, the division of powers and devolution.

The fight against corruption will remain a long-term priority for securing good governance and democracy principles for both national and local governments, as well as preserving citizens' trust in democratic institutions. The EU Anti-Corruption Initiative (EUACI), and its "Integrity Cities" concept provides support to selected Ukrainian city administrations to minimise the risk of corruption and establish sound and transparent procedures. The WG will contribute to this initiative throughout 2023-2025.

Ukraine's economic recovery after the war is, without any doubt, the top priority for all international donors. The efforts of both the Ukrainian authorities and the international donor community will be directed towards fostering economic growth at local and regional level. In this context, the WG will support activities aimed at ensuring direct support to Ukrainian LRAs during the recovery phase, promoting investment opportunities in Ukraine, improving territorial planning and infrastructure development, and improving the system of regional development management, with an emphasis on the development of rural regions.

2.5 Coordinating the peer-to-peer cooperation and capacity building between cities and regions in the EU and Ukraine

The importance of capacity-building for Ukrainian local and regional authorities has been underlined repeatedly during meetings of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine, by the Ukrainian partners themselves and in the CoR dialogue with the EU institutions and other stakeholders. After the successful implementation of the peer-to-peer initiative between the EU and Ukrainian local and regional administrations, with the financial and technical support of European Commission's "U-LEAD with Europe" programme, the CoR was invited to contribute in a similar way to another programme it implements in Ukraine – the EU Anti-Corruption Initiative (EUACI), specifically within the "Integrity Cities" concept. This, and other peer-to-peer projects will constitute one of the focuses of the WG in 2023-2025.

Another strand of the efforts to build the capacities of Ukrainian local and regional administrations will be connected with CORLEAP multilateral efforts in this field, particularly related to the launch of the Eastern Partnership Academy for Public Administration.

Within its "Support Package for Ukraine" the CoR will look for avenues to provide direct capacity building support to local and regional administrations, in cooperation with the European Commission.

It will also focus on involving the young people in building direct connections between Ukrainian and EU cities and regions, including through the CoR's Young Elected Politicians (YEPs) network.

3. Synergies

The work of the WG will complement the activities of CORLEAP and the CIVEX commission to provide coherent and efficient support for the policy debate and ensure that the CoR builds firmly upon the existing inter-institutional network, both inside and outside the CoR.

To achieve the objectives laid down in this work programme, cooperation will be sought and continued with the European Commission's Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR); the European Commission's Support Group for Ukraine; the European External Action Service, including the EU Delegation in Kyiv; the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee; other EU institutions and bodies; the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other UN agencies and projects; the European Investment Bank; the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; central government bodies; governments of EU Member States and their bilateral programmes and projects; representatives of academia, civil society and the private business sector.

4. Structure and timing of meetings

As a rule, the agenda of meetings will include:

- a review of the current state of the decentralisation reform implementation in Ukraine;
- one or two thematic debates on specific areas of one of the listed key topics;

- practical issues related to peer-to-peer exchanges; and
- any other business, to allow members sufficient time to raise questions or submit proposals.

Ensuring gender-balanced representation among speakers will remain a priority.

The WG will meet at least twice per year. Use of videoconferencing for certain non-statutory activities in the field of external relations will be considered, particularly in view of ensuring the participation of Ukrainian counterparts. Ad-hoc online and live meetings related to the peer-to-peer exchanges may take place separately, under the auspices of the WG.

5. **Membership**

The working group consists of 13 CoR members, who can be replaced by 13 other members/alternates¹⁰.

¹⁰ CoR Bureau decision on mid-term renewal, setting-up and composition of the working groups, joint consultative committees and other political bodies from 28 June 2022.