



Tbilisi Agenda 2015

Leaving Chisinau a year ago, the participants of the Conference agreed to continue the debate on Overcoming Regional Disparities with a **focus on practice and policy delivery**. The mission for CORD 2015 in Tbilisi was to explore how we can deliver regional development in the field, how we can reach the people, and make a difference for their lives.

The starting point was that **regional development** should **not** be seen as a **sector** but as the **spatial expression of all national policies for economic and social development**. Regional development policy has the task to integrate sector policies – for economic growth, employment, transport, the environment and social inclusion, etc. – and deliver them as a coherent whole to the people in the regions, cities and rural areas of our countries.

Since our meeting in Moldova, the **European co-operation frameworks** in which our countries take part – Cohesion Policy, IPA and the Eastern Partnership – have been **renewed**. Smart, inclusive and sustainable growth is the goal all participants are working for, in the context of national development agendas. It is important to realise that the renewed frameworks provide development policy makers with **increased freedom, a more diverse toolbox, and the possibility of adapting best practices** from each other.

The **precondition** for any effective national development policy and overcoming regional disparities is to have clear policies. National development objectives are guided and shaped by EU instruments such as IPA, Eastern Partnership or Cohesion Policy. But it is the responsibility of national governments to translate common shared goals into national action, and **develop national strategies, plans, and measures**, making the most of available national and EU resources.

The concept of regional policy is often confused with the politically sensitive issue of decentralisation. The Conference has shown: Whatever the constitutional arrangements, whatever the structure of the administration, **there are functioning tools to involve partners, people**, communities, villages, cities and regions into the formulation, implementation and evaluation of regional policy. Participants agreed: **Giving the opportunity to people** to develop their own communities can only **enhance the quality** of development programmes. It will help to get out the most of whatever one can invest. **Co-operation and dialogue lead to win-win scenarios**. There is a need for establishing a **climate of mutual trust** among stakeholders of regional policy. Trust comes from co-operation and mutual investment into policy design and delivery.

Partnership and multi-level governance do not necessarily involve the creation of large bureaucracies. Good European practices for the delivery of place-based development offer various options for light **institutional arrangements**. These



options allow for a strong bottom-up dimension, an efficient use of existing capacities, and the voluntary co-operation of partners at regional and local level. They can also offer models for sustainable and cost-efficient institution building in all types of territorial contexts: cities, rural areas, as well as regions with specific geographical or demographic handicaps.

Overall, it is clear that the task to overcome regional disparities in the interest of a balanced and sustainable development continues to be relevant – within the EU as well as on the Western Balkans and in the Eastern Partnership region. A number of participating countries have recently initiated **comprehensive reforms** of their regional policies. The establishment of long-term development plans and multiannual programmes combining national and EU resources is on-going. Following up these reform efforts could be at the heart of the next edition of CORD.