

**CORD 2015**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Conference on Overcoming Regional Disparities**  
**Tbilisi, Georgia**  
**October 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015**

The 5<sup>th</sup> Conference on Overcoming Regional Disparities (CORD) brings together high-level decision-makers and professionals working on regional development, from the European Union, the Balkans, and the countries taking part in the Union’s Eastern Partnership.

CORD is an event with a rich tradition. Following earlier meetings in Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Moldova, in 2015, participants will, for the first time, meet in the South Caucasus, hosted by the Georgian Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure.

The 2015 conference continues where CORD 2014 in Chisinau left off. Its focus will be “*Making regional development real*” – achieving a tangible impact where it matters most and where development needs to happen: in the regions, at local level.

The first agenda point will be an overview of new developments in EU assistance programmes across the region. In IPA<sup>1</sup> II, ENI<sup>2</sup> and cohesion policy alike, a new seven years budgetary period has started. Legal and programming frameworks have been renewed. Change is organic and gradual – but it is also fast. In IPA II, there is a renewed emphasis on a strategic, multi-annual approach to sector reforms. Strategy and flexibility, strengthening ownership and impact, are also the keywords for ENI. Cohesion policy is not applicable outside the EU. Still, it is very much relevant as a governance model, and a source of best practices for IPA and ENI countries. For the new financial period, cohesion policy is also undergoing change. Strengthened links to the Union’s Strategy for Smart Sustainable and Inclusive Growth – Europe 2020 – is bringing about major changes in programming and delivery methods. There is a lot of new development, and there is a lot to learn from each other. At the start of the new programmes for 2014-2020, the conference will provide an important opportunity for orientation. In addition, participants will get a special opportunity to hear about Georgia’s comprehensive reforms in regional policy, supported by an EU sector support programme.

Continuing the debate from Chisinau, the focus will then shift to the regional and local levels. Participants will explore how territorial and sectoral strategies can be used to generate real change in the field. For this, the conference invites stakeholders from both the national level and high-ranking representatives of local governments. Their dialogue on the podium will explore win-win scenarios of

<sup>1</sup> Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

<sup>2</sup> European Neighbourhood Instrument





supporting regional and local initiatives that contribute meaningfully to reaching national development goals, and vice versa.

Moving on, in parallel sessions, participants will have a chance to learn about real life examples of local development that worked. Participants will explore the role of cities for regional development, urban-rural linkages, and the potential metropolitan areas as growth poles for boosting the development of their surrounding areas. In addition, successful examples for bottom-up, community led local development initiatives in rural areas will be reviewed, looking at recent best practice from the European Union. Last but not least, the conference will review the development of regions with a difficult geography: remote areas with underdeveloped transport links, and mountainous areas.

On the last day of the conference, another plenary session will be held to offer a comprehensive overview of recent experience with place-based development programmes. Finding and exploiting the endogenous development potential of various territories (regions, cities, rural areas) is at the heart of the recent changes of EU cohesion policy – and a guiding example for policies and programmes on regional development outside the EU. The history of the last seven years since the publication of the EU's Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, and subsequently, the Barca Report, carries important lessons for all participants.

Summing up, as on previous occasions, the Conference on Overcoming Regional Disparities 2015 again offers an unrivalled opportunity to exchange experience, learn from each other and discuss new opportunities and ways to work for regional development.

In addition, CORD 2015 will allow participants to take a closer look at the South Caucasus region, opening up a whole new perspective for experts from IPA, EU and ENI countries alike to debate and develop new ideas for regional development.

Come, be part of the debate, join the community, and enjoy the experience!



*This event is co-funded by the European Union.*