

*Doc.: GA26/LC26/REP/05*

THE TWENTY SIXTH PLENARY SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
LEGAL AND POLITICAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

# REPORT<sup>\*</sup>

ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN STRENGTHENING  
COOPERATION IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

Rapporteur: Mr. Zurab DAVITASHVILI, Member of the Committee, Georgia

---

<sup>\*</sup> *Text considered by the Twenty Sixth Meeting of the Legal and Political Affairs Committee in Tbilisi on 18 October 2005 and approved by the Twenty sixth General Assembly in Tirana on 23 November 2005.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Legal and Political Affairs Committee at its Twenty Fifth Meeting in Sofia on 20 April 2005 following the proposal by the Georgian delegation was of the opinion to examine the role of the local governments in strengthening cooperation in the Black Sea region.
2. In this respect, the Twenty sixth Meeting of the Committee in Tbilisi on 18-19 October 2005 is dedicated to “The Role of Local Governments in Strengthening Cooperation in the Black Sea Region” with a view to elaborate the Report and the Recommendation for further submission to the consideration of the Twenty Sixth Plenary Session of the General Assembly in Tirana in November 2005.
3. The present report is designed to take a broader look at the role of the local and regional authorities as level of government closest to the citizens and how they can promote and contribute to the consolidation of the cooperation between and among the states of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.
4. The Report benefited from the contribution by the national delegations of Georgia and Romania. In addition, the reference material has been obtained by the PABSEC International Secretariat through other related sources.

## II. THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN STRENGTHENING COOPERATION IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

5. In today’s complex and fast-moving world new visions for governance are required in order to meet the challenges facing citizens and societies. Nowadays none of the major issues can be successfully tackled by any level of government alone. Many topical contemporary problems like unemployment, social inclusion, urban policy, rural development, migration, environment, etc. are primarily felt locally and need to be dealt with at the local level, thus, increasing the role of local government in securing social, economic and political justice for all citizens. Within this context, local government has essential place in underpinning sustainable societies based on the principles of democracy, solidarity and human rights.
6. The political support at local level is one of the major elements for successful development of regional cooperation. Each city, region or territory, different in area, population, geography, wealth, cultural heritage and environment develops its own sustainable vision and builds on its own identity with immense capacity to enhance regional cooperation. Implementation of shared policies for economic growth, environmental protection and social improvement at regional level increasingly involve local initiatives and consequently, local governments who enjoy the most privileged position to apply adequate solutions to the pressing problems concerning citizens.
7. Local governments have wide responsibilities and the ability to develop integrated approaches in working with their communities promoting dialogue and peace through peoples’ diplomacy and cooperation. The exchange of experience and knowledge

between local governments, with the involvement of the communities provide significant added value to the cooperative interaction stimulating tolerance, friendship and mutual understanding.

8. In a truly democratic society the local governments can initiate creation of a legal framework for strengthening the role of local authorities. Increasing the fundamental rights of all citizens, including the right to education, health care, housing, the right to work and respect for gender equality, the rights of minorities, and protection of cultural diversity are also main pillars of local government actions.
9. The strengthening of democratic local government is a prerequisite for more vigorous development and requires a balanced approach towards building its operational capacity conscious of the fact that local government is an integral part of the national structure and national context of each country. Increased role of the regions and administrative units along with political decentralization and apportionment of powers between the state and the regions are necessary prerequisites for successful democratic development. Decentralisation develops a democratic system of governance and an adequate basic service provision for, by and with the community. This process is based on general principles such as accountability, transparency, equity, predictability and the rule of law.
10. The flow of democratic changes is rather complex and controversial due to many different factors and, first of all, still prevailing old stereotype that a state is more powerful if the authority is concentrated in the centre and little autonomy is left to the regions. A «strong centre – weak region» model is rather common in most of the BSEC member states and, respectively, the role of administrative units is rather modest and their voice is much insignificant at the level of international cooperation. It should be noted that strengthening of the status and powers of the administrative units and local authorities has to proceed in due regard to the national specificity (especially in case of big states).
11. The lower capacity of the local authorities can much be attributed to the administrative division of most states or, in other words, constitutional status of administrative units. In most of the BSEC member states (except Russia and partially Serbia and Montenegro) the rights of the regions are rather limited within unitary state. Constituent entities of federation have rather broad powers compared to the administrative units within unitary states. That is why some countries rather actively advocate a shift to a federal structure. For example, Georgia elaborates a project for transition to a federal state with entities of federation with broad autonomy. Similar projects are considered in Azerbaijan and Moldova. It is noteworthy to mention that federalization is viewed as a modality for resolving existing problems with regions.
12. There is no doubt that prevailing unstable political climate, unresolved and protracted conflicts, continuous border disputes and acute security concerns undermine normal flow of economic activities and deprive the region from fully benefiting from the economic cooperation process. Even the countries, which are not directly involved in conflicts, suffer economic, social and political consequences of the regional

instability. It is true that the resolution of political problems cannot be attributed solely in the context of local authorities. It is natural that microclimate prevailing at the local level influences in an essential way the life of the whole country and has negative impact upon the collective undertakings in the broader region. Solution of spectrum of regional problems is closely linked to the efforts for the establishment of a lasting peace and stability in the region by political means counteracting the logic of force leading to the political impasse.

13. Strengthening of cooperation between and among local governments in the Black Sea region becomes important factor since it bears the opportunity for communities to interact and participate. There is an enormous range of activity and depth of commitment for maintaining links with the counterparts - between individual cities and regions - for the purpose of promoting international understanding. The local level governance, with its close contacts to its citizens is the best channel to promote regional and national policies through wide range of activities raising public awareness on the processes in the region and mobilising public support for concrete undertakings.
14. The countries of the Black Sea Region sharing common values which are centrepiece of the sense of togetherness have been promoting setting up of different frameworks to facilitate, carry out and disseminate activities to support the regional cooperation. The basic strategic document of the BSEC - the Economic Agenda for the Future implies that in order to become more effective regional economic organization the BSEC needs more contribution and support on the part of the member states with greater involvement of the local authorities in the BSEC process dealing jointly with the issues encouraging regional cooperation at the local level.
15. From the very first meetings of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the interaction between the local authorities was placed higher on the agenda. In order to underpin the activities carried out by the BSEC countries towards integration, the PABSEC initiated cooperation among the governors and mayors of capital cities of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation member countries in 1994. The initiative generated from the conviction that local authorities, pooling their experience and expressing their views on everyday problems encountered by citizens, may render to the regional integration process new dimension and make valuable contribution to attaining the BSEC goals and objectives.
16. Three Round-Table Meetings of the Governors and Mayors of the Black Sea Capitals were held under the auspices of the PABSEC. The first meeting in Istanbul in 1994 focused on the topical issues of infrastructural development, urbanisation, social, immigration, law and public order issues, environmental problems and city twinning. The second meeting in Kyiv in 1995 tackled the topical issues of cities infrastructure and considered the prospects for future cooperation. The third meeting in Bucharest in 1998 opened a new chapter in the collaboration between the capital cities by establishing a new organisation uniting the capitals of the Black Sea countries and adopted its statute. These preparatory meetings gave to its participants the opportunity

to consider a number of important issues concerning the urban development and evolution of democratic municipal authorities in the BSEC states. It forged closer ties among the local authorities of the capital cities having significant role in their capacity as the economic, political and cultural centres of their countries. These meetings provided a framework for the exchange of experience towards innovative approaches and solutions for their development necessitated by the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century meeting the objectives of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

17. The initiative of the Assembly to bring closer the capital cities of the BSEC member states subsequently grew into the permanent structure of the Black Sea Capitals' Association (BSCA) as a constructive tool for providing a new dimension to the BSEC process and opening up pragmatic opportunities for intensifying support at a local level. The First BSCA Assembly was held in Ankara in 2000 dedicated to the issue of social projects for a better living demanding comprehensive response for overcome a wide range of challenges concerning city transportation, housing, communal services, developing the scientific and cultural potentials, protecting the environment, safeguarding the historical and cultural heritage, social protection, health care, schools, etc. The Second BSCA Assembly in Athens in 2001 marked an important step forward towards implementation of the goals of the Black Sea Capitals' Association and an important contribution aimed at consolidating and expanding multilateral cooperation in the Black Sea region as a whole. The debates focused on the topical subjects of international terrorism, organized crime and environmental protection stressing the determination to enhance continuously the cooperation among the capital cities of our countries in the interest of prosperity, stability and peace in the Black Sea region with a view to attaining the overall BSEC goals. The Third BSCA Assembly in Baku in 2002 fostered close cooperation among and between the capital cities of the Black Sea member states, as a constructive contribution to strengthening neighboring relations, economic integration, prosperity and stability in the region, to addressing vital issues of local governance, involvement of the citizens in to overall management of the local administration, elaboration and implementation of comprehensive economic and social programs with a direct and positive impact on the overall sustainable development. The Fourth Assembly of the BSCA in Chisinau in 2003 offered an excellent possibility for a fruitful exchange of views concerning the strengthening of the local public authorities' role in increasing the level of services providing in the child and family domain, remarking the contribution of the participants to the related economic, social and administrative strategies. The Fifth General Assembly of the BSCA in Moscow in 2004 was devoted to the transport issues with the commitment of the participating cities to enhance their contribution to good neighborly relations, peace, prosperity and economic cooperation in the Black Sea region. The participants also expressed their will to pool efforts designed to solve economic, social and cultural problems in the region's capitals. (*The Sixth General Assembly of the BSCA is planned to be taking place in Sofia in October 2005*).
18. With the aim to share experiences with other cities in the region, the International Black Sea Club (IBSC) was established in 1992, in order to act together to reach common goals of strengthening business cooperation between city-ports of the Black

Sea countries and contribute to higher degree of integration in the BSEC region. The IBSC unites 24 cities from nine Black Sea basin countries. Among the priorities of the IBSC are: participation in development, coordination, organization and performance of joint investment projects in the field of economy, ecology, tourism and culture; creation of conditions for free business, expansion of trade; problems solution of rational natural-resource potential usage and the Black and Azov Seas protection against pollution; and Organizational and economic, scientific and technical, commercial and cultural connections system strengthening between cities and regions of the Black Sea basin. The General Assembly of the IBSC is held once a year in the member cities. The IBSC provides the platform for the cities to carry out activities together and to be a tool to express the views and problems in order to reach common goals and aims for the benefit of the citizens.

19. The IBSC has also created the Business Council which consists of the business circles and Chambers of Commerce and Industry representatives of the IBSC member cities, which are the real instrument of more professional approach and effective economic cooperation. The relations with the European Union are enhanced through establishment of the IBSC Information centre in Brussels.
20. The role of cities in the international arena is increasingly important, not only because the vast majority of the population living in urban environment, but also because the main challenges of globalisation are concentrated there. Each city is the fruit of a culture and a history living and changing with its personality and its size. The municipalities build core capacities for sustainable development and underpin democratic processes and enhance cooperation through town twinning and project oriented arrangements.
21. Twinning of cities and regions by means of establishing direct contacts between the counterparts in the region contributes to the development of unity through building awareness among populations concerning concrete forms of cooperation. Twinning can enable a town and its citizens to exchange experiences, to confront problems, and to help each other in looking for solutions. Transport, protection of the environment, education, the fight against crime, equal opportunities, initiatives for employment, etc. are the topics that twin towns work on together. Twinning is a best way of exchanging, learning, building knowledge and bringing people closer together discovering different cultures and societies.
22. According the statistics provided by the Romanian Ministry of Administration and Interior, Romania has institutionalised relations with eight BSEC member countries: Romania has 4 relations of twinning (ex.: Cluj – Korce) with *Albania*; 6 relations of twinning (ex.: Giurgiu – Russe), 8 relations of collaboration (ex. Slobozia – Silistra), 1 relation of association and 4 relations (ex. Braila – Plevna) of cooperation with *Bulgaria*; 14 relations of twinning (ex.: Constanta – Thessaloniki), 4 relations of collaboration (ex. Bucharest – Athens) with *Greece*; 32 relations of twinning (ex. Bucharest – Chisinau), 1 relation of partnership, 4 relations of cooperation, 2 relations of collaboration, 1 relation of association with *the Republic of Moldova*; 5 relations of twinning (ex. Ploiesti – Pancevo), 1 relation of cooperation (ex. Bucharest – Belgrad)

with *Serbia and Montenegro*; 2 relations of twinning (ex. Constanta – Novgorod), 3 relations of collaboration (ex. Bucharest – Moscow) with *Russian Federation*; 10 relations of twinning (ex. Bucharest – Ankara; Constanta – Istanbul), 1 relation of cooperation (ex. Bucharest – Izmir) with *Turkey*; 11 relations of twinning (ex. Constanta – Odessa), 5 relations of collaboration, 3 relations of cooperation (ex. Region of Maramures– Region Ivano Frankivsk), 1 relation of association and 2 relations of partnership with *Ukraine*.

23. At the same time, there are some examples of joint initiatives/activities such as: (a) established activities of the city of Bucharest with other cities from the BSEC countries in the following fields: with Athens: environment, urban development, culture, economy; with Chisinau: economy, culture, education, social affairs; with Moscow: investment, environment, culture, education, youth, sports, tourism; with Belgrade: social affairs, economy, culture, commerce, urban development, environment, monuments, sports, tourism, business; with Izmir: territorial planning, energy, health, environment, mass media, culture, youth, social services; with Ankara: sustainable development, energy, mass media, culture, economy; and (b) establishment of Rouse-Giurgiu Euro region in April 2001 marked by demographic peculiarity, social trends, economic development and cultural model of both cities. It should be noted that the Rouse-Giurgiu Euroregion is a recognized member of the Association of European Border Region (AEBR) and has an important activity at national and international level. Among the euro regional expectations there are the removing of the obstacles of adhesion to the EU for Romania and Bulgaria; obtaining the financial support for important projects; collaborations with other European cities and Euro regions.
24. It should be noted that strengthening of the capacity of the local authorities and increase of status and powers of administrative units will bring more contribution to boosting cooperation between the BSEC states. Consequently, the BSEC has to concentrate more attention to providing overall support for strengthening the capacity of the local authorities and increase of the role of the regions based upon the European and global experience.
25. The BSEC member states, who all are the members of the Council of Europe, are well familiar with the European approach that the regions are a pillar for democracy. All 12 BSEC states are party to the European Charter of Local Self-Government (entered into force in 1988) which has been used as a major guideline for establishing basic local government legislation and serves together with the European Convention on Human Rights as a prerequisite for the accession of Council of Europe member states.
26. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe established in 1994 serves a consultative body comprising two chambers (*the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions*) consisting of elected representatives from local and regional authorities in the Council's member states (*including all 12 BSEC member states*). This organisation provides a forum where local and regional elected representatives discuss common problems, pool their experience and express their

views to governments; cooperates closely with national and international organisations representing local and regional government; organises hearings and conferences at local and regional levels to reach a wider public whose involvement is essential to a working democracy; prepares regular country-by-country reports on the state of local and regional democracy in all the Council's member and applicant states and monitors, in particular, how the principles of the European Charter of Local Self Government are being implemented. The Congress develops initiatives to enable citizens to participate effectively in local and regional democracy; represents the interests of local and regional government in the shaping of European policy; encourages regional and cross-border cooperation for peace, tolerance and sustainable development; encourages the setting up of Euro-regions; observes local and regional elections.

27. Among the main projects of the Congress are: The European Network of Training Organisations for Local and Regional Authorities (ENTO) providing expert help and training for central and east European nations; *Prix Europa* competition in the cultural field, which promotes the best of European television and radio across national boundaries, illustrating Europe's cultural diversity and encouraging programme exchanges; and *the projects* for strengthening local democracy and cross-border cooperation in south-eastern Europe following up Stability Pact activities.
28. The European Union forms a dense network of institutional, social and political relationships which has become even richer in the context of an enlarged Europe and will continue to do so in the context of future enlargements implying the BSEC member states\*. The European Union lately put forth measures to bring European Union and its institutions closer to the citizens of the member states and encouraged the EU institutions to promote citizens' participation in public life and in decision-making process. The European Commission has adopted the proposal for a new programme "Citizens for Europe 2007-2013". This programme is aimed at activities that involve and promote direct exchanges between European citizens through their participation in town twinning activities. It implies that there is a need for better information of citizens about European institutions and that the citizens should be aware of their duties and become actively involved in the process of European integration. The challenge of bridging the gap between citizens and the European institutions is closely linked to another challenge, that of strengthening cohesion among Europeans.
29. The Sustainable European Regions Network is funded under the Innovative Actions programme, run by the Regional Policy Directorate of the European Commission, and through contributions from the regions themselves. The Innovative Actions programme focuses on regional identity and sustainable development; knowledge based regional economies and technological innovation; and e-europe, the information society and regional development. Designed to enable regions to

---

\* for more information on the EU enlargement see the Report of the Legal and Political Affairs Committee on "The Black Sea region within the context of the enlargement of the European Union" adopted in 2003.

undertake experimental programmes, the majority of the Innovative Actions programme funds individual projects within the regions of the EU, but in addition and in order to complement these programmes, networks were established for each of the three themes. The Network's work programme centred around two key questions: how regions can become more sustainable and what makes a sustainable region; and, how the European Commission and structural funds can help to promote sustainable regions.

30. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions is the largest organisation of local and regional government in Europe uniting national associations of towns, municipalities and regions from over 30 countries (*also including Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Montenegro and Ukraine*). The CEMR works to promote a united Europe that is based on local and regional self government and democracy. It endeavours to shape the future of Europe by enhancing the local and regional contribution, to influence European law and policy, to exchange experience at local and regional level and to cooperate with partners in other parts of the world. CEMR has developed its unique town twinning network. Today, there are over 26,000 twinning projects linking towns from all over Europe. CEMR is the European section of the new worldwide organisation of United Cities and Local Governments.
31. The Assembly of European Regions (AER) was created in 1985 as a political organisation of the regions of Europe and the speaker for their interests at European and international level (*among the members are the regions from Albania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, Ukraine*). This organisation aims to bring together the regions of Europe and allow them to act together in the construction of Europe and European integration. The AER member regions vary in size, economic wealth and competences according to their respective countries. The AER transforms this diversity into a strength and an element of cohesion for the regions, a reflection of the political reality of Europe. Right from the beginning, the AER has been committed to promoting regionalism and to institutionalising the regions' participation in European politics. The creation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe by the Council of Europe in 1994 followed by the creation of the Committee of the Regions by the European Union in 1995, may serve as proof of these principles in action. The AER promotes the increase of the political role of the regions in Europe, contributes to the development of interregional and cross-border cooperation, encourages the integration of regional elected representatives and civil servants, and develops regional initiatives in favour of cultural diversity.
32. Cooperation between the local governments acquires more support at global arena. There is a growing trend throughout the world that local authorities play a major role in international cooperation and bring substantial contribution to the development processes. The partnership between the local levels of government has been established through the World Charter of Local Self-Government, setting out the guidance of all national governments and international agencies and the basic principles which should underlie any democratic local government system – a joint initiative of the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities (WACLAC) and the

United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (UNCHS). Local self-government is seen in the global context as a vital component of the development process.

33. Local governments have developed great experience and interest in relations with counterparts from around the world. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) was launched in 2004 as a global coordinating mechanism for activities of local authorities uniting the Fédération Mondiale des Cités Unies – United Towns Organisation (FMCU-UTO) and the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA). It aims to strengthen the role of local authorities both at the national and international levels, to intensify collaboration towards concerted action addressing the needs and concerns on the international stage achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It believes that decentralised cooperation, municipal international cooperation and city to city relations contribute to transforming the international relations into relations between communities, between and for the citizens of the world. It supports the development of local governments across the world working for a sustainable future.

### ***Role of the National Parliaments***

34. The present stage of development of cooperation in the Black Sea region reveals the need for greater involvement of national parliaments in promoting the integral role of local governments in mobilising support and contribution at a local level for the smooth flow of ongoing cooperation process.
35. The national parliaments as the legitimate representatives of the people, have to pay particular attention to upgrading existing legal and regulatory framework with a view to introduce more systematic and effective methods of citizen participation and development of strong and effective democratic local government.
36. Parliamentarians have to put every effort to make maximum use of the available legal mechanisms to ensure respect for universal human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law which ultimately underpins bilateral and multilateral relations between the states and is a prerequisite for sustainable economic and social development.
37. While recognizing the need to preserve the independence of national legislation, PABSEC should assist the states and their national parliaments to develop stage-by-stage legislative acts facilitating multilateral economic cooperation, speeding up economic, political and social reforms and whenever possible to approximate and harmonize them with European legislation and standards.
38. National Parliaments have to mobilise public support for implementation of BSEC projects, and to monitor the ratification process of the multilateral documents adopted by the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, encourage and support actions speeding up economic integration in the region.
39. Parliaments have to speed up ratification of international instruments pertinent to sustainable development and integration and to incorporate their provisions in national legislation.

40. Parliaments have to take an active role in supporting establishment of the direct contacts between the local authorities in the Black Sea region, facilitating and sustaining undertakings within the framework of the BSCA and IBSC, as a significant component of the consolidating regional cooperation process.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

41. There is a growing consensus in the world that local government, with the privilege of proximity with their elected representatives, is best positioned to safeguard and disseminate the values of democracy, friendship and mutual understanding. Local governments possess possibilities to improve a dialogue between the state, citizens and communities, thus bringing immense contribution to promoting peoples' diplomacy and good neighbourly relations.

42. Aspiration of the Black Sea countries towards establishing peace, prosperity and stability in the region has to be tied in with a coherent strategy of partnership and coordination with due regard to the strengthening of the role of local government as an important link for bridging friendship and cooperation among the Black Sea peoples.

43. The capacity of the local governments varies from country to country. The role of the local governments is more important in federal states. As for the unitary states, the local governments do not have any particular role at the level of international cooperation.

44. Strengthening of the role of the local authorities in the framework of cooperation in the BSEC region is rather impossible without increasing the status of local authorities in administrative-territorial units and cities, which directly links with the development of a strong and effective self-government. The present decentralization process in the BSEC states does not have desired effect and, hence, the role of local government in domestic and external affairs remains rather weak.

45. It is important that the status and powers of the administrative units and local authorities are enhanced and strengthened with due regard to the national context. It is equally important to develop and deepen direct contacts between cities and regions of individual states, like twinning of cities and regions, laying basis for consolidation of friendship and mutual trust between states and nations.

46. Twinning and partnership concept gives opportunity to find out more about the citizens in other countries, to exchange experiences, and to develop joint projects on issues of common interest, such as local integration, the environment, economic development, and cultural differences. Twinning and cooperation at local government level underpin democratisation processes and promote understanding for different viewpoints. It is in this respect that the Black Sea region states have to draw more attention to fully explore twinning potential in the region in order to facilitate strengthening of cultural and economic ties at local level providing a solid foundation for strengthening cooperation at regional level.

47. Local governments, taking action in solidarity for meeting the aspirations of peoples in towns and villages, as well as in central and peripheral regions, can add their voice in maintaining peace and political stability in the region. Despite the diversity of regions, shared initiatives and projects can allow particularities to be bypassed and shared values to become a source of mobilisation.
48. For the Black Sea region to fully benefit from its diversity, collective effort at all levels is needed to provide a common frame of cooperation which supports economic growth and prosperity.