



## Meeting with Mr. Andris Piebalgs, Commissioner for Development European Union Commission

### Report

A delegation of UCLG-Africa (UCLG-A) headed by Mrs. Moustache Belle, Mayor of Victoria, Seychelles, member of the UCLG Africa executive committee, was received by Commissioner Piebalgs at his office in the European Union Building in Brussels on 26 June 2013. This meeting was organized following a request for appointment sent to Commissioner Piebalgs by the UCLG-A president, Mr. Khalifa Sall, Mayor of Dakar, Senegal.

The UCLG-A delegation included also:

- Mr. Abdelkader Berkhia, Member of Parliament, President of the Rabat-Sale-Zemmours-Zaers Regional Council, Morocco;
- Mr. Boubacar Bah, President, Association of the Municipalities of Mali, member of the Pan African Council of local governments;
- Mr. Daniel Chisenga, Mayor of Lusaka, President of the Local Governments Association of Zambia, member of the Pan African Council of local governments
- Mr. Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary General, UCLG-A
- Mrs. Claire Mandouze, Special Adviser, UCLG-A

Commissioner Piebalgs was accompanied by

- Mr. Angelo Baglio, Chief of Unit, CSO/LAs, DEVCO
- Mrs. Elina Melngaile, Member of Commissioner Piebalgs cabinet

The meeting started at 18:15.

In his welcoming address Commissioner Piebalgs acknowledged to have received the request for this appointment from the UCLG-A President a while ago, and said that the meeting is taking place at the right time, after the adoption of the communication on Local Authorities in the EU cooperation.

In response, Mrs. Moustache Belle extended first the apologies of President Khalifa Sall who had to stay in Dakar to welcome the USA President, His Excellency Barack Obama who is paying a three day official visit to Senegal starting from 26 June 2013. She went on presenting the members of the delegation as well as the UCLG-A mission, objectives and structures.

After her presentation, Mr. Berkhia informed Commissioner Piebalgs about the dynamic of decentralization on going in Africa and the importance of the communication on local authorities just adopted by the European Union. The UCLG-A welcomes this communication and its provisions and commends Commissioner Piebalgs and his team for what should be considered as an accomplishment paving the way to deepening democracy, enhancing inclusive growth, and giving opportunity for sustainable local development. Time has come when there is need to translate the provisions of this communication into concrete action, and to start treating local authorities as full-fledged political partners of the

European Commission and its delegations, so that they take full part in the programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes of the EU cooperation agenda in Africa, including the European Development Fund (EDF), and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) for neighbouring countries of North Africa. He insisted on the fact that Africa should be treated as one, and that the current EU cooperation financial instruments should evolve accordingly.

Mr. Daniel Chisenga presented the results of a snapshot survey conducted after the publication of the EU communication on Local Authorities and before the second phase of the programming process of the 11th EDF. Most of national associations were not aware of the communication and its content; most of them say that there is no staff dedicated to the relations with local governments in the EU delegations. The latter hardly invite them in dialogue meetings concerning the definition of priority areas for EU cooperation. All of them asked for capacity building for them to be able to become full and efficient partners in the definition and implementation of the EU cooperation agenda.

Mr. Boubacar Bah went on pleading the importance of local authorities not only for their delivery capacity because they are closest to the people, but also as proven during the crisis in North Mali, for the great deal of resilience they showed when the Malian State collapsed in that region. The only public authorities who remained in the localities and to which the population were looking at when they encountered problems were local authorities. They are also the first authorities to have started a wave of solidarity between Northern and Southern local governments within Mali, and with their counterparts in the neighbouring countries. They were also vocal internationally, and mobilized attention on people that were suffering, beyond the concern of that period that was mainly military. And this paid off, since the national association of municipalities of Mali is now part and parcel of all initiatives in support of the recovery of Mali. Also the central government understood better the complementarity of the work it is doing with that of local governments. The old strains between central and local governments are being eased. The momentum is therefore very favorable for the European Union to come and back this move towards more empowerment of local governments in order that the European cooperation yields more results and impact on the ground.

In summing up the conversation, Mr. Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi explained once more what was expected from Commissioner Pielbags as follows:

1. Agreement that the UCLG-A plays the role of coordination platform and interface between the EU Commission, the EU delegations and the African local governments associations in view of the animation of the political dialogue on programming and implementation of the priorities defined at the country, regional and continental levels;
2. Agreement on the mandate and activities that the UCLG-A should have in its role as a coordination platform for Local Authorities involvement in the 11th EDF (Sub Saharan Africa) and the DCI for neighbouring countries (North Africa);
3. Agreement in principle to fund this platform by EU Commission on the remaining sums of the 10th EDF or other resources that can be mobilized quickly;
4. Agreement that national associations of local governments are granted a monopoly situation in their respective countries and that the EU commission provide financial support to their priority program through institutional support and not anymore through competitive calls for proposals;

5. Agreement that guidelines will be sent soon to the EU delegations in order that they know how to implement the provisions of the communication pertaining to the new role of local authorities in the EU cooperation.
6. Agreement to set up a task force regrouping the services in charge with the 11th EDF and those managing the implementation of the provisions of the communication in order to improve synergies and positive impact on the ground. UCLG-A to participate in the task force;
7. Agreement to hold such consultative political meetings at the level of the Commissioner two times a year in order to assess progress made in the implementation of the provisions of the communication;
8. Agreement of the Commissioner to attend the UCLG world congress on 1-4 October 2013 in Rabat, Morocco; and the 7th Africities Summit in December 2015 either in Lusaka, Zambia, or in Johannesburg, South Africa.

In response to the demands of the UCLG-A delegation, Commissioner Piebalgs said first that he was impressed by the UCLG-A organization and preparedness to the meeting. He thanked the UCLG-A delegation for the insights it brought on the way local authorities are so far involved in the dialogue with the EU commission and delegations and expressed the hope that the situation will improve drastically thanks to the implementation of the provisions of the EU new communication on local authorities. He however thought that the expectations of the UCLG-A sounded too ambitious for the time being. The EU commission is aware of difficulties that can exist between some national governments and local governments in Africa. It is not the role of the EU commission or of the EU delegations to impose to any given national government to work with its local governments. Different countries have different relations between national and local governments. On the issue of the monopoly situation of national associations of local governments and that of the UCLG-A becoming a coordination platform financially supported by the EU commission, Commissioner Piebalgs acknowledge the interest to have such an arrangements; the provisions of the communication provides some space thereof; but he raised some doubt on where to find the money. He promised to conduct consultations in-house to that effect and to give a response on this issue when attending the UCLG congress in Rabat in October 2013, thus confirming his participation. For the Africities Summit, he said he cannot yet give an answer since there are many political events that are going to take place in Europe between now and 2015.

The meeting ended at 19:00 after closing remarks by Mrs. Moustache Belle and Commissioner Pielbags.

Brussels, 26 June 2013  
The UCLG-A secretary general

Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi