



■ In Profile – Paolo Ciccarelli, Head of Unit, DEVCO C5 - Cities, Local Authorities, Digitalisation, Infrastructures



Paolo Ciccarelli is an Architect who has specialised in development cooperation in both the private and public sector. He has more than 35 years of experience in managing a broad range of infrastructure projects in Europe and Africa. His experience of living and working in Somalia, and in EU Delegations in Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia enable him to work in a multicultural and multidisciplinary environment. He has spent more than 25 years with The European Commission where he has gained experience in policy and strategy negotiation in international forums as well as knowledge of project appraisal and implementation in many sectors, particularly in the urban development, water and transport sectors. He now works at DG DEVCO as Head of the Unit "Cities, Local Authorities, Digitalisation, Infrastructure", where he manages a team of about 20 people.

Dear Paolo, before we dive into our interview questions, thank you for taking the time to discuss your work as Head of the C5 Unit for “Cities, Local Authorities, Digitalisation and Infrastructure” at DG DEVCO with us. Can you tell our readers what a typical day at the office looks like for you and what in your work inspires you?

Actually, this is a very difficult question because as you might imagine, there is not such a thing as a typical day in the Unit I manage. Indeed, I have under my supervision a diversity of sectors, ranging from digital to infrastructures, cities to local authorities. Every day is a journey and the enriching context that is development cooperation and the variety of issues we deal with is quite exciting. This dynamic environment is one of the aspects that keeps me inspired and motivated. What also feeds into my inspiration are the multiple countries, such as Somalia, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia, in which I worked for almost 20 years. Both the experience on the ground and the technical knowledge that I gained there feed into my daily work at DG DEVCO and motivate me to guide my team in the best possible way.



DG DEVCO works together with partner countries across the world to achieve sustainable development and designs the EU's international partnership and development policy with the aim to reduce poverty, ensure sustainable development, promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law across the world. What role does your unit have for the overall strategy of the European Commission and how does your work profit from your DeLoG membership? Where do you see potential to increase your cooperation with DeLoG?

The new European Commission under the Presidency of Ursula Van der Leyen just ended its first 100 days. My unit, under the leadership of our Commissioner, Jutta Urpilainen, has made a valuable contribution to this work, as we are an important part of making the EU a stronger and even more reliable partner in the world. These first 100 days have been marked by the launch of several initiatives among which in particular, the Digital strategy, the European Green Deal as well as an EU strategy for Africa should be mentioned. The EU strategy for Africa sets the basis for a comprehensive EU-Africa Strategy and reflects the importance the Commission places on forging a solid, rounded relationship with our African partners in the coming years. We will now follow with attention the implementation of the different strategies and ensure their translation into action and the projects financed by DG DEVCO.

Against this background, our collaboration with DeLoG has been very precious, thanks to the knowledge-sharing activities and the expertise that DeLoG has been providing for more than a decade now. DeLoG has been a key partner in the elaboration of the 2013 Communication on Local Authorities "Empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes" that remains our landmark document and our policy guidelines for Commission's relations with the local and regional governments. Moreover, we welcome very much the new thematic priorities DeLoG is engaging in such as localising the 2030 Agenda and Urban and Territorial governance for which I see promising synergies that could be further enhanced in the coming months and years.

Recently, the European Commission launched the Second Call for Proposals for Sustainable Cities. The programme aims to create strong relationships among Local Authorities to strengthen good urban governance, the social inclusiveness in cities and the requirements for prosperity and innovation. We would like to know: How successful was the first call, what challenges were the funded projects confronted with and what are your aspirations for the second call?

The Partnerships for Sustainable cities programme, which was launched in November 2018, aiming at promoting integrated urban development through partnerships built among Local Authorities from EU Member States and partner countries, was very successful. Over 250 concept notes were received, out of which 43 were preselected to submit a full proposal. Despite the novelty of the programme and the limited time for the submission of the proposals, the Commission signed 16 grant contracts with local and regional governments or their associations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and



Caribbean as well as in the neighbourhood south for a total budget of 53M euro. These projects are targeting social resilience, greening, prosperity and innovation.

In February 2020, a second call for proposals was launched with a total budget of 111M euro. Two additional dimensions were added to the dimensions covered by the first call: a) addressing municipalities in fragile countries and b) facilitating the participation of smaller cities (towns) by creating a specific lot and reducing the funds to be attributed (too high in the other lots for the absorption of small cities). This evolution is the fruit of a participative process where associations of local authorities (including the 5 who signed a Framework Partnership Agreement with the EC) as well as several local authorities who have applied to the 1st call, provided constructive feedback.

We expect to sign further 50 grant contracts at the end of the current selection procedure. With this ambitious cooperation programme of decentralized cooperation, the Commission is actively contributing to the challenge of sustainable management of cities in our partners countries where the urban population will double in the next 2 decades.

A few weeks ago, you took part in the World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi. DG DEVCO and DeLoG hosted a joint session titled “If you want to go far, go with many: Strengthening the local voice at the international level”. You had the opportunity to discuss the role of networks and associations of local authorities for urban development with Greg Munro, Secretary General of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary General of UCLG-Africa, Edgardo Bilsky, Director of Research and Intelligence at United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Sarah Bentz, Policy Officer for Sustainable Development Goals (PLATFORMA/CEMR). What were your main takeaways from the session in particular and the World Urban Forum in general?

I consider the World Urban Forum and our joint session very successful. Generally, the discussions confirmed the relevance of an increased focus on cities and urban development and our shared understanding. It was well highlighted just how much urbanisation is a core element in the transformation of economies around the world, and in particular of the EU's partner countries. It is a phenomenon of key importance to the achievement of our green objectives, job creation and the wider implementation of SDGs. With the participation of our Deputy DG Marjeta JAGER, DG DEVCO sent a clear message to our partner countries, EU actors and other stakeholders that we are and will be an active and reliable counterpart in this area.

The exchange with the multitude of stakeholders present was very inspiring and the networking with them has been the real benefit of my participation to WUF. This concerns the promotion of our own City-to-City Partnerships Programme but also the development agenda in the wider sense, its challenges and opportunities.



Contemporary discussions in the field of local development have focussed on how to render cities and municipalities more autonomous from the state in terms of financing urban projects and enhancing the responsibility of local authorities. It has proven particularly difficult for local authorities in developing countries to access funding. They are often dependent on international aid distributed by the state and according to nation-centric needs. Where do you see potential for donor countries to re-organise their financial aid flows and how can local authorities encourage and benefit from this process?

Indeed, we see that financial autonomy on the local level is becoming an increasingly prominent issue. This is why we support our partner countries in the many different issues that come into play when we speak about the financial empowerment of subnational governments. Be it fiscal decentralisation and the provisions on transfers and local revenue generation itself, capacity for tax collection and budgeting, or access to financial markets - all these issues are pieces of the puzzle in which financial recourses need to be coupled with the necessary capacity-building measures.

For donors like the Commission, this means that we have to look at how we can channel funds to the local level with the different modalities we have at our disposal, and what they need to be accompanied with. For instance, we are increasingly looking at how to use budget support operations to increase the funding for Local Authorities through the existing national setup, while using our policy dialogue to engage on the essential questions around decentralisation with the central government.

This then can be accompanied with technical support, more traditional project interventions, or their inclusion in our blending facilities that are a more recent approach to supporting urbanisation in particular. Another important element is engagement with the National Associations of Local Authorities. On the one hand, they can act as interlocutor between the local and the central level and on the other hand they can accompany subnational governments in the implementation of policy reforms and projects. At the Headquarters and Delegation level, we therefore try to engage as much as we can with the different Associations, including on the issue of financial autonomy.

Before we close, is there anything that you would like to add?

As said already, I will be very happy to work together more closely and exchange knowledge and experiences. My team will keep following even more your useful trainings and events. From our side, we will organise in 2021 the second edition of the Forum Cities and Regions for Development cooperation (the first one was organized in 2019), with the Committee of the Regions. It will bring together representatives of local authorities from across the world to discuss the current Commission priorities linked to sustainable development and the implementation of the SDGs at the local level. This will be a new relevant opportunity to work together in its preparation.