

## **P6\_TA(2008)0492**

### **Governance and partnership at a national, regional and project basis in the field of regional policy**

#### **European Parliament resolution of 21 October 2008 on governance and partnership at national and regional levels and a basis for projects in the sphere of regional policy (2008/2064(INI))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community and in particular Articles 158 and 159 thereof,
- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and in particular Article 15 thereof,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund<sup>1</sup> (hereinafter the General Regulation on the Structural Funds) and in particular Article 11, entitled Partnership, thereof,
- having regard to the Territorial Agenda of the European Union, the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities, and the First Action Programme for the Implementation of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union,
- having regard to the study drawn up by Parliament's Policy Department on Structural and Cohesion Policies entitled 'Governance and partnership in regional policy',
- having regard to the opinions of the Committee of the Regions (COTER-IV-17) and of the European Economic and Social Committee on governance and partnership (EESC 1177/2008),
- having regard to the exploratory opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee entitled Towards balanced development of the urban environment: challenges and opportunities (EESC 737/2008),
- having regard to the Commission's Practical guide to EU funding for research, development and innovation,
- having regard to the second cycle of the URBACT programme (2007-2013), a European programme whose aim is to foster exchanges of experience between European towns and cities, and in particular the seven new thematic networks dealing with governance,
- having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development and the opinion of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A6-0356/2008),

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 25.

- A. whereas the interest and well-being of citizens lie at the centre of European, national and regional policies, and whereas an improved level of governance and partnership, aimed at establishing an improved level of coordination and cooperation between the various authorities, is to the benefit of all citizens of the Union,
- B. whereas the practical solutions which our fellow citizens expect to see as regards public services (such as public transport, drinking water, social housing and public education) can be achieved only by means of good governance, involving two complementary systems: firstly, the institutional system, which provides for the allocation of powers and budgets between the State and regional and local authorities and, secondly, the partnership system, which brings together all the public and private bodies concerned by a given topic in a given territory,
- C. whereas attention should be drawn to the definition of ‘partnership’ as contained in the General Regulation on the Structural Funds, pursuant to which each Member State shall organise "a partnership with authorities and bodies such as:
  - (a) the competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities,
  - (b) the economic and social partners,
  - (c) any other appropriate body representing civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organisations and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women",
- D. whereas partnership should take account of all relevant communities and groups, can bring benefit and added value to the implementation of cohesion policy through enhanced legitimacy, guaranteed transparency and better absorption of funds, and should also be assessed in terms of the social and civic value it represents,
- E. whereas the closest possible involvement of the various partners in the drafting of operational programmes will ensure the production of a document that takes full account of the specific features of a given territory and provides the best possible response to the requirements and challenges in that area,
- F. whereas an enhanced partnership with universities and institutes of tertiary or technological education, as well as private sector involvement, can be beneficial to strategies within the framework of the Lisbon Agenda and EU policies dealing with research and innovation,
- G. whereas social capital in the form of active volunteering is positively linked to regional economic growth and is an important factor in reducing regional disparities,
- H. whereas the extensive participation of the partners mentioned in the General Regulation on the Structural Funds and closer cooperation among the bodies involved in implementing programmes and projects financed from the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Funds would serve to make cohesion policy more effective and to increase the leverage effect,
- I. whereas an integrated approach must not only take account of the economic, social and environmental aspects of territorial development, but must also serve to reconcile the interests of the various actors involved, in the light of a territory’s specific characteristics, with a view to meeting local and regional challenges,

- J. whereas both better coordination of the relevant public policies, at all the administrative levels concerned, and effective governance are essential if the sustainable development of territories is to be moved forward,
- K. whereas the concept of an integrated approach is now regarded as a necessity, and whereas it is now time to put that concept into practice,
- L. whereas structural policies accounted for the second largest share of the European Union budget in the programming period 2000-2006 and are the major policies of the European Union in the 2007-2013 period,
- M. whereas arrangements should be made for more efficient cooperation and transparency for all among the various authorities and public and private bodies involved, without necessarily transferring legal powers and without creating new authorities, enabling each body to work more effectively as a result of that cooperation,
- N. whereas the involvement of regional and local authorities must be envisaged at the earliest possible stage of negotiations on Community legislation and, in particular, in the negotiations on the next package of cohesion policy rules,
- O. whereas applying the concept of 'population and labour catchment areas' involves taking account of the relevant basic territorial units when addressing issues of fundamental importance to people's daily lives, (transport, public services, quality of life, jobs and local economic activity, security, etc.),
- P. whereas effective governance can be facilitated through the use of proper spatial planning,
- Q. whereas the fact that the individuals involved in implementing cohesion policy have project management skills is a key factor in improving and facilitating governance,
- R. whereas the results of successful experiments involving new methods of governance and partnership should be drawn on in the future, including those which have already been successfully tested in European Fund programmes, such as the LEADER method and the global grant (pursuant to Articles 42 and 43 of the General Regulation on the Structural Funds),
- S. whereas adequate communication structures and strategies at all policy, implementation and evaluation stages, designed in close cooperation with regional and local authorities, by promoting the spread of information to all sections of society, foster transparency, inclusive participation and full ownership,

### ***Governance and Community funds***

1. Calls on the Member States and regional and local authorities to fully exploit the potential of the various Community funds (Structural Funds, Community framework programme for research and development, and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development,) whose purpose is to promote regional and urban development with the aim of facilitating integrated funding;
2. Calls on national, regional and local authorities to intensify their use of the integrated approach during the current programming period;

3. Proposes, in the context of future cohesion policy, that the integrated approach should be made compulsory; considers that the application of this principle must be undertaken within a specific timeframe;
4. Proposes, for reasons of simplification and effectiveness, that a study should be carried out into the feasibility of merging the various Community funds, in particular the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, under the future cohesion policy for the period after 2013;
5. Notes that transparent and clear procedures are factors of good governance and therefore calls on the Commission and the Member States, working together with regional and local authorities and taking due account of the suggestions of potential beneficiaries, to examine without delay – subject to a fixed timescale to be set by the Commission – how to simplify and rationalise procedures and how to divide more clearly responsibilities for implementing cohesion policy with a view to reducing the bureaucratic burden on the individuals and bodies involved;
6. Calls on the Commission to promote the use of Article 56 of the General Regulation on the Structural Funds, which allows for contributions in kind to European Union co-financed projects;

#### ***Governance and partnership***

7. Calls on the Commission to draw up and submit to it an assessment of the implementation of the partnership principle by the Member States in the context of the drafting of the National Strategic Reference Frameworks and the operational programmes, identifying the factors behind successful and unsuccessful governance, and also to examine in particular what account has been taken of opinions and proposals put forward by the partners in drawing up the operational programmes;
8. Calls on the Commission to draw up a guide containing a clear definition and assessment criteria as well as setting out instruments, tools and good practices (among others for the selection of partners) designed to facilitate the implementation of effective partnerships in accordance with Article 11 of the General Regulation on the Structural Funds, in keeping with the institutional framework specific to each Member State;
9. Notes that the partnership process can work only with partners which have the necessary capabilities and resources, and calls on the managing authorities to contribute to the strengthening of those capabilities by providing the partners, at an early stage and in accordance with Article 11 of the General Regulation on Structural Funds with the same information as is available to the authorities and by allocating appropriate financial resources to technical assistance for implementing the partnership principle, for example training, building up social capital, and making their partnership activities more 'professional';
10. Regrets that for the current programming period no quantifiable minimum amount of funding from the Structural Funds has been earmarked for implementation of the partnership principle; calls on the Council and the Commission to earmark in future legislation a quantifiable minimum amount of funding from the Structural Funds for implementation of the partnership principle;

11. Notes the important role that volunteering plays in the partnership process and calls on the Member States and the Commission to support and facilitate the valuable work done by volunteers in contributing to this process and the stronger engagement of people and grassroots organisations in local democracy in a multi-level partnership;
12. Draws attention to the requirement to consult the general public and organisations representing civil society on the issue of programming with the aim of reflecting their proposals, and stresses that the participation of civil society helps to legitimise the decision-making process; notes that the efforts to involve the public in the preparations for the operational programmes for the period 2007-2013 were not as successful as hoped for; calls on the Commission, therefore, to identify good practices and to facilitate their application with a view to improving public involvement ahead of the next programming period;
13. Calls on the managing authorities to inform partners of how and at what level suggestions made by them at the various stages in the Structural Fund programming process are taken into account;
14. Recalls that partnership can contribute to effectiveness, efficiency, legitimacy and transparency in all the phases of Structural Fund programming and implementation and can increase commitment to and ownership of programme outputs; calls, therefore, on the Member States and managing authorities to involve the partners more closely at an early stage in all the phases of Structural Fund programming and implementation, with a view to making better use of their experience and knowledge;
15. Urges the Member States to ensure closer cooperation between public and private sectors through the establishment of public-private partnerships to implement structural funding, given that the potential benefits deriving from public-private partnerships are still largely underexploited;
16. Notes that new Member States have not fully complied with the partnership principle and that its introduction could therefore gradually be reinforced;
17. Requests that the next Structural Funds regulations contain specific provisions to make the application of the partnership principle legally binding, with clearly verifiable criteria;

### ***Multi-level governance***

18. Calls on the Member States to develop as quickly as possible the practical measures set out in the First Action Programme for the implementation of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union, in particular under heading 3.1, with a view to strengthening multi-level governance;
19. Proposes that governance should be included as a criterion under heading 4.1 of the First Action Programme for the implementation of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union, which calls on the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) to develop new territorial cohesion indicators;
20. Takes the view that successful multi-level governance needs to be based on a 'bottom-up'

approach; calls in this context upon local and regional authorities to investigate means to intensify their cooperation and contact with national governments as well as with the Commission, and recommends that regular meetings take place between officials from national, regional and local authorities;

21. Urges the Member States to decentralise the implementation of cohesion policy, so that the system of multi-level governance can work effectively and in keeping with the principles of partnership and subsidiarity, and calls on them to take the decentralisation measures required, at both legislative and budgetary levels;
22. Emphasises that regional and local administrative capacity as well as its stability and continuity constitute a precondition for the efficient absorption of funds and their impact maximisation; calls on Member States to ensure adequate administrative structures and human capital in terms of recruitment, remuneration, training, resources, procedures, transparency and accessibility;
23. Calls for the national courts of auditors to play a stronger role in the control mechanisms, to ensure that funds are appropriately spent, thus acquitting themselves of their responsibilities and playing a more active part;
24. Urges the Member States to delegate responsibility for managing the Structural Funds to regional and local authorities on the basis of agreed terms and criteria which must be met by the authorities in question, with a view to involving them more closely and by means of formal coordination structures in the work of drafting and implementing the operational programmes, or, at the very least, to award them global grants; recommends that full use be made of the possibilities offered by these grants to enable regional and local authorities to play a full role in the multi-level governance arrangements;

#### ***Governance and the territorial dimension***

25. Calls on those Member States which have not yet amended their national law to make provision for the establishment of the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) to do so as soon as possible;
26. Calls on the Commission, while examining which NUTS level is most pertinent, to identify the area in which, on the basis of experience gained, an integrated policy for the development of territories might best be implemented, forming the basis of the following projects in particular:
  - population and labour catchment areas, i.e. towns, suburban areas and the adjacent rural areas;
  - territories which justify specific thematic approaches, such as mountain ranges, large wooded areas, national parks, river basins, coastal areas, island regions and environmentally degraded areas, to develop place-based approaches;

#### ***Governance and the European Union institutions***

27. Welcomes the greater recognition of the role of regional and local authorities and the strengthening of the subsidiarity principle in the Lisbon Treaty; calls on the European institutions to start considering as of now the practical implications of such developments;

28. Notes that within the Council there is no department which has specific responsibility for the strategic monitoring of cohesion policy, which accounts for the largest volume of appropriations in the European Union budget, and calls on the Member States to schedule specific Council sessions involving the ministers responsible for cohesion policy;
29. Welcomes the establishment within the Commission of interdepartmental groups such as that on 'urban policy' and that on 'the integrated approach'; calls on the Commission to develop this cross-departmental approach further and to keep Parliament and the Committee of the Regions regularly informed of the outcome of the work of the groups in question;
30. Undertakes to consider changes to its Rules of Procedure to make provision, by means of temporary working groups or other bodies, for cross-departmental work on topics involving several parliamentary committees, in particular in the context of the proceedings of the Working Party on Parliamentary Reform;
31. Calls on the Committee of the Regions to step up its efforts to develop the practice of governance, in both quantitative and qualitative terms;

***Tools for promoting successful governance and partnership***

32. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to support the development of governance and partnership training measures, involving all public and private education and training organisations, with a view to addressing the major challenges facing the Community;
33. Calls on the Member States to make proper use of spatial planning in order to assist in the facilitation of balanced regional development;
34. Calls on elected representatives and national, regional and local civil servants and partners involved in managing operational programmes in the context of cohesion policy in accordance with Article 11 of the General Regulation on Structural Funds, to use the financial resources available under these programmes for technical assistance to acquire training in the forms of governance associated with these programmes, in particular project management; also calls on the Commission to request Member States to give detailed accounts of the manner in which their specific financial programmes are used;
35. Takes the view that the European networks for exchanges of good practice should broaden their work in the area of governance and partnership, put more emphasis on political and strategic lessons learnt from previous programme cycles and should ensure public access to exchanges of experiences in all European Union languages and thus help to ensure that good practices are in fact implemented;
36. Welcomes the launching by the French Presidency of the European Union of a project to draw up a set of benchmarks for urban sustainability and solidarity and calls for the governance and partnership dimension to be included in those benchmarks;
37. Proposes the creation of a programme, similar to the ERASMUS programme, for regional and local elected officials;

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38. Instructs is President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.