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Committee of the Regions

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Draft opinion
of the
Committee of the Regions

**PARTNERSHIP WITH RESPECT TO GOVERNANCE AND PROJECT
PLANNING IN THE FIELD OF REGIONAL POLICY**

Rapporteur: **Mr Vladimir Kissiov (BG/EPP)**
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Deadline for tabling amendments:

Monday 29 September 2008 at 3 p.m. (Brussels time) email: coter@cor.europa.eu *[no later than the seventh working day before the opening of the plenary session]*

Number of signatures required: 6

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Reference document

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS:

General remarks on partnership with respect to governance at national, regional and local level and project planning in the field of regional policy

1. wholly supports the initiative to examine partnership with respect to governance at national, regional and local level and project planning in the field of regional policy, in the preparation and implementation of programme and planning documents for territorial development;
2. welcomes the efforts being made by the Member States towards the establishment and systematic introduction of partnerships between state institutions and representatives of civil society, the social partners and business in the preparation of planning documents for developing and implementing regional planning and development policies;
3. especially welcomes the fact that, in the Member States, governments are making efforts to promote a dialogue with regional and local authorities in determining not only goals, priorities and resources for territorial development, but also how it is implemented, in the context of European and national policies;
4. stresses the leading role of towns and regions in the preparation of strategy documents, programme implementation and monitoring and the implementation of EU policies;
5. calls for local and regional authorities not to be put into the same category as civil society and economic and social partners when it comes to partnerships, since they are elected bodies directly accountable to the EU's citizens. For this reason, any partnership between national Member State institutions, EU bodies and local and regional authorities must be on a qualitatively higher level than other forms of partnership and must be clearly enshrined in general rules and documents. Partnerships between Member States and local and regional authorities in their current form under Article 11 of Council Regulation (EC) 1083/2006 – which states that "Each Member State shall organise, where appropriate and in accordance with current national rules and practices, a partnership..." – can on no account be considered adequate;
6. is convinced that the principles of good governance can be put into practice in the field of local and regional policy through greater involvement of representatives of civil society and economic and social partners.

Main concerns regarding governance in the field of structural policy

7. supports a comprehensive approach to structural policy governance within the European Union's multilevel system;

8. believes it is crucial for good governance in the field of regional policy that policy instruments are applied in an integrated manner, all stakeholders are actively involved, and there is a clear focus on efficient and effective policy implementation which is based on horizontal and vertical integration of the various instruments so that clear and measurable results are achieved;
9. acknowledges the role that European structural policy plays in the development of regional planning and indicator-based management processes which have greatly contributed to improving public initiatives at local and regional level;
10. believes that the current governance model in the field of structural policy provides a solid basis for the future direction of that policy;
11. points out that the absence of an EU-wide methodology for employing partnerships in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of territorial development programming and planning documents makes it impossible to judge whether the process involved a partnership in reality or in name only and what its real effect was.

Political dimensions of partnership in the management of regional policy

12. regards as a success the moves to strengthen partnership with a view to developing a more sustainable policy for closer and stronger vertical and horizontal integration of governance and partnership at national, regional and local level;
13. sees the efforts made by governments in the new Member States to introduce the principles of good governance into the process of drawing up and implementing programme documents as a democratic achievement;
14. calls on the Commission to draft a binding methodology for the use of partnerships in regional policy in relation to programme and planning documents. The methodology should clearly define the operation and minimum extent of partnership in all stages: preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It must cover two levels of partnership:
 - elected bodies directly accountable to the EU's citizens – i.e., local and regional authorities; economic and social partners and civil society.

Categories of partner should also be defined based on their sphere of operation, specialisation, skills and potential contribution. This methodology must take account of the fact there are various levels of decentralisation in the individual Member States and ascertain whether their local and regional bodies are the managing authority for some operational programmes. The European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the European

Economic and Social Committee should be the European Commission's key partners in putting this methodology together;

15. considers that, through their good practices, older EU Member States, particularly those which are highly decentralised, have made a substantial contribution to the improvement of the system of partnership in relation to good governance at national, regional and local level and project planning in the field of regional policy and could share best practices with other countries;
16. argues that the inclusion of networks of partners in the elaboration and implementation of regional development policies provides considerable opportunities for the various actors and participants to express their interests and increases people's trust in government. It must be ensured, however, that the partners concerned have the right mandate to act, as well as the necessary expertise and capacity, and that their participation will make a real contribution. They must also have the necessary funding to play a proper role in the discussions. This funding should be a mandatory part of the technical assistance and should also cover the drafting of truly warranted studies and research at EU, national and local level;
17. calls on the European Commission, since this is something not included in a number of operational programmes, to authorise and encourage regional and local authorities, their associations and other relevant partners to use technical assistance resources in the present programming period; this will enable them to carry out studies and analyses at local, regional, national and EU level to identify the needs and priorities for a new cohesion policy;
18. is convinced of the increasing importance of strengthening partnership in relation to governance and project planning at all stages of EU policy making in the field of local and regional development – preparation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation;
19. considers that governance and partnership in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of EU territorial development policy should be given an increasingly significant place in the EU's communication strategy;
20. calls on the European Parliament and the European Commission to make broader use of partnership and governance and the open method of coordination in developing EU policies, so as to include a maximum number of stakeholders, especially local and regional authorities, as the level of government where a significant proportion of Community policies are usually conducted. In order to facilitate the development of partnership at local and regional level, it is essential that the responsibilities of local and regional authorities be more precisely defined and delimited;
21. insists that a connection be made between the issues of governance and partnership at national and regional level in preparing national, regional and local strategy and planning documents and the consideration and launch of initiatives to overcome challenges such as climate

change, urban transport, the development of life sciences and biotechnology, scientific and research activities and innovation in EU and other regions.

Encouraging partnership in relation to governance

22. considers that, in the context of preparing the new cohesion policy, it will be of crucial importance to ensure that local and regional authorities, above all, but also economic and social partners and civil society have an input at the earliest possible stages in formulating national positions and priorities and preparing documents and that their views be given appropriate weight;
23. considers it appropriate to continue the thorough examination of the Member States' practices and experience of using partnerships to set priorities for local, regional, national and supra-national development, as a basis for developing guidelines for a simplified communication procedure between partners at local and regional level, with a view to optimising the process of planning and elaborating programming documents;
24. considers that, given the varying degrees of decentralisation in the Member States, there are also differences in the process of consultation and in the way governance is conducted in relation to project planning. For this reason, the Committee:
25. recognises the need for the participants in governance and partnership at national and regional level in the Member States over the next planning EU period to be prepared for doing so through tried and tested and effective methods for consultation with partners and civil society players, such as the handbooks on good practice, public-private partnerships and cooperation with civil society partners in consultations on future local and regional development planning;
26. in accordance with the Lisbon Strategy's objective of developing a knowledge-based economy, recommends targeted measures to involve universities and technology centres in the preparation of national positions and documents for the new programming period, not only at the national, but also at regional and local levels;
27. considers it imperative that, as part of overall efforts to strengthen administrative capacity, the priority be to introduce targeted measures to include young people at the earliest stages in the preparation, discussion and programming of territorial development policies. This would have a profound and long-lasting impact on the implementation of EU policies as well as encouraging young people to take an active role in civic life;
28. recognises the need to continue to enhance active partnership (at the initiative of local and regional authorities, and of non-governmental organisations) in the process of governance. To this end, considers that the Member States need to take action, adapted to their specific national circumstances, to encourage their communities of partners to organise themselves, so as to increase the involvement, responsibility and interest of civil society stakeholders;

29. recommends the implementation of a targeted policy of introducing programme budgeting at all levels of government – local, regional and national – as a prerequisite for the efficient use of EU funds and their own funds and human resources in the field of governance;
30. recommends that the EP and the European Commission assess the possibilities of using the capacity of national and/or regional authorities in monitoring the implementation of operational programmes and spending under the Structural and Cohesion Funds, in order to verify the costs incurred and the results achieved. This would help both to simplify procedures and to reduce their cost;
31. considers that there is a need to develop institutional instruments to facilitate the implementation of horizontal and vertical approaches. These might include platforms, regional-level policy management and round tables, which facilitate communication within sector-based networks at political and administrative levels;
32. considers that, in evaluations of partnership in governance and project planning, the focus should increasingly be placed on qualitative rather than quantitative indicators. It is therefore essential that central, regional and local authorities' partners in the process of governance not be assessed in the same way, but categorised according to their capabilities and potential contribution;
33. given the difficulty of ensuring that regional policies have a public impact, it is of the utmost importance that the requisite interfaces be developed at the different levels where policies connect with the various sectors involved;
34. one of the major tasks of local, regional and central authorities must be to strengthen and bring about continuous improvements in administrative capacity. Annual evaluations of administrative capacity must be changed from a formality into an analysis of what has been achieved, which should then be made public and serve as the basis for future capacity-building.

The role of the Committee of the Regions

35. is convinced that the Committee of the Regions should be given a greater role in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of EU policies, through the active involvement of Committee members – in their capacity as representatives of the interests of local and regional authorities – in local and regional level dialogue with the public and civil society organisations. This is a prerequisite for the successful planning of territorial development as well as for building and extending administrative and communication capacity at local and regional level, with a view to overcoming the administrative deficit often cited in EU documents as an obstacle to development;

36. will draw up annual recommendations for improving regional and local-level partnership, which will be incorporated as a matter of course into the annual high-level discussions;
37. will support initiatives conducted by Member States, the European Parliament and the European Commission with a view to developing partnership with local and regional authorities, not only during the phase of monitoring the implementation of policies but also, and most importantly, during their drafting;
38. considers that partnerships with NGOs and employers at lower levels of government should be supported, promoted and developed through diverse initiatives, particularly at the planning stage and during the implementation of specific measures;
39. is committed to planning and implementing initiatives to disseminate best practices in using partnership in setting local, regional, national and supra-national policy priorities in the Member States. Local authorities must be involved in communication, since they are best placed to explain what the European Union means for people's everyday lives;
40. will take all the necessary steps to make best use of the mechanisms for coordinating and implementing European, national and regional policies available through the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), as a means of decentralised international cooperation which can also be used for involving different partner groups more effectively in governance.

Brussels,

The President
of the
Committee of the Regions

Luc Van den Brande

The Secretary-General
of the
Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Governance and Partnership at national, regional and project basis in the field of regional policy
References	
Legal basis	Art. 265(4)
Procedural basis	
Date of European Parliament letter	22/04/2008
Date of President's decision	16/05/2008
Commission responsible	Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy (COTER)
Rapporteur	Mr Vladimir Kissiov (BG/EPP), Member of Sofia Municipal Council
Analysis	08/05/2008
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Result of the vote in commission	Majority
Date adopted in plenary	
Previous Committee opinions	