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

2008/2064(INI) - 09/09/2008

The Committee on Regional Development adopted an own initiative report by Jean Marie **BEAUPUY** (ALDE, FR) on governance and partnership at national and regional levels and a basis for projects in the sphere of regional policy.

MEPs stress that partnership, which 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. The main points raised in the report are as follows:

Governance and Community funds: the report calls on national, regional and local authorities to intensify the use of the integrated approach during the current programming period and proposes, in the context of future cohesion policy, that the integrated approach should be made compulsory.

MEPs propose, 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.

The Commission and the Member States, together with regional and local authorities and taking due account of the suggestions of potential beneficiaries, are called upon to examine without delay 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.

Governance and Partnership: the report calls on the Commission to draw up and submit to the European Parliament 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.

The Commission is called upon 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 keeping with the institutional framework specific to each Member State.

Stressing that the partnership process can work only with partners which have the necessary capabilities and resources, the report calls on the managing authorities to contribute to the strengthening of those capabilities by allocating appropriate financial resources earmarked for technical assistance for implementing the partnership principle, for example for training, for building up social capital, and for professionalising their partnership activities. The Commission is also called upon to identify good practices and to facilitate their application with a view to improving public involvement ahead of the next programming period.

Lastly, MEPs call 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.

Multi-level governance: the report 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, with a view to strengthening multi-level governance. It proposes that governance should be included in the First Action Programme, which calls on the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) to develop new territorial cohesion indicators.

Stressing that successful multi-level governance needs to be based on a 'bottom-up' approach, MEPs call on local and regional authorities to investigate means to intensify their cooperation and contact with national governments as well as with the Commission, and recommend that regular meetings take place between officials from national, regional and local authorities.

Lastly, the report urges the Member States to decentralise the implementation of cohesion policy and 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 in the work of drafting and implementing the operational programmes.

Governance and the territorial dimension: MEPs call 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. The Commission is called upon, while examining which NUTS level is most pertinent, to identify the area in which an integrated policy for the development of territories might best be implemented, including: (i) population and labour catchment areas, i.e. towns, suburban areas and the adjacent rural areas; (ii) territories which justify specific thematic approaches (such as mountain ranges, river basins and coastal areas).

Governance and the European Union institutions: the report calls on the Member States to schedule specific Council sessions involving the ministers responsible for cohesion policy. MEPs welcome the establishment within the Commission of interdepartmental groups such as that on 'urban policy' and that on 'the integrated approach' and call on the Commission to develop this cross-departmental approach further and to keep Parliament regularly informed.

Tools for promoting successful governance: the Member States and the Commission are called upon to support the development of governance training measures, involving all public and private education and training organisations, with a view to addressing the major challenges facing the Community. MEPs take the view that the European networks for exchanges of good practice should broaden their work in the area of governance and partnership and propose the creation of a programme, similar to the ERASMUS programme, for regional and local elected officials.