

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

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The European Parliament adopted by 593 votes to 36, with 32 abstentions a resolution on governance and partnership at national and regional levels and a basis for projects in the sphere of regional policy.

The own-initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Jean Marie **BEAUPUY** (ALDE, FR) on behalf of the Committee on Regional Development.

The resolution stresses 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. According to MEPs, 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.

The main points raised in the resolution are as follows:

Governance and Community funds: Parliament 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.

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.

The Commission is called upon 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: 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 invited 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 resolution 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. They urge 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.

Multi-level governance: 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.

The resolution also 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: Parliament 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. 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: MEPs invite the Member States to schedule specific Council sessions involving the ministers responsible for cohesion policy. They 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 invited 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.