

Seminar on “European Social Fund for capacity building of social partner organisations”, 30th March 2015, Riga

Involvement of social partners in the ESF: the partnership principle and identifying thematic priorities

The European Code of Conduct on Partnership

The partnership principle has for a long time been one of the key principles for managing the European Funds. Partner involvement can be beneficial in enhancing collective ownership and engagement of the Europe 2020 Strategy for growth and jobs, as well as for EU policies more generally. The partnership principle helps to share knowledge, expertise and different standpoints in the programming phase and also ensures a more transparent process. It can also contribute to a better coordination between different levels of government during the implementation phase.

In the legislative framework for the ESI Funds 2014-2020, the legal basis for partnership and multi-level governance has been strengthened (article 5 CPR). A European code of conduct on Partnership has also been developed (Delegated Regulation). The code of conduct aims at supporting Member States in their realisation of the partnership principle in order to ensure the involvement of partners at all stages in the implementation process of Partnership Agreements and programmes.

The key principles of the European code of conduct include the following:

- partners selected should be representative of relevant stakeholders
- selection procedures should be transparent and take into account the different institutional and legal frameworks of the Member States
- partners should be involved in the preparation and implementation of the Partnership Agreement and programmes
- partners should be represented within the monitoring committees of programmes, throughout the whole cycle (i.e. preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation)
- effective implementation of a partnership should be ensured by strengthening the institutional capacity of relevant partners through capacity building activities targeting social partners and organisations representing civil society who are involved in the programmes
- exchange of experience and mutual learning should be facilitated
- the role of the partners in the implementation of the Partnership Agreement, as well as the performance and effectiveness of the partnership during the programming period should be subject to assessment.

Implementation of partnership principle in PAs/OPs

- The 28 Partnership Agreements, and all 292 OPs (including 92 multi-fund programmes and 76 ETC programmes). As regards ESF, 150 ESF OPs out of 187 are now adopted (37 OPs are expected to be adopted after the MFF revision and DAB 2015: 22 ES, 8 IT, 3 CZ, 2 UK, 1 HU and 1 SE).
- This is the opportunity for the Commission to look at how the partnership principle was taken on board on the basis of a checklist provided to all geographical desks which specifies what is important to assess in the programming documents as regards the respect of the Partnership principle.
- These elements include, in particular the following:
 - the list of partners who have been involved, their responsibilities and the extent of their participation;
 - how the partners were identified and how the principles of transparency and accessibility have been applied;
 - the action taken to facilitate wide involvement and active participation by the partners;
 - how technical assistance resources are used to promote partnership (nature of support services envisaged, level of resources made available and management arrangements planned).
- With those elements, the Commission was able to assess the level and quality of partnership when negotiating with the MS the partnership agreement and the programmes.
- In general it seems that no fundamental problems exist with the respect of the MLG and partnership principles during the drafting of PA. However, it should be underlined that Member States implement the partnership principle in different ways, pursuant their institutional background, their administrative capacity, their know-how as well as their experience with the implementation of the principles in the past.
- In several Member States (SE, ES, MT, IE, LV, CZ, CY, and BG) the drafting process is (heavily) centralised. Whereas this can be explained in some countries given their internal constitutional/institutional organisation, it is rather surprising that

centralisation seems also to be applied in some of the more federalised/devolved Member States.

- It is positive that a number of Member States (AT, BG, CY, EE, FI, LT, LV, NL, and PT) have used Article 5 of the CPR and the DA on the ECCP as a springboard for streamlining (electronic) administrative procedures resulting in greater, more systematic and more meaningful involvement of partners for the 2014-2020 programming period.
- Whereas the involvement of stakeholders in the (initial) drafting stages of PA/OP is generally considered as open, transparent and participative, the feedback as regards whether or not comments/suggestions were taken on board could in many Member States be improved.
- The degree of involvement of partners under ESF OP differs from ERDF OP in many Member States. Under ESF OP social partners are (historically) better involved.
- In some Member States (such as BE, DK, RO) the drafting/delivery process of PA/OP seems not to differ (much) from the consultation practices that were in place under the previous programming period(s). Some Member States (RO, BG) have established coordination platforms/working groups in charge of drafting the PA that appear to be too large, making it more a useful format for exchange of information than for genuine strategic coordination.
- The timetable of consultations and deadlines for sending feedback needs in many Member States to be less tight. This is an essential point in order for partnership to be meaningful, relevant and genuine.
- The participation of European Commission desk officers in informal consultation meetings is generally perceived as positive and useful by all stakeholders.

Training seminars on ECCP for MAs

- A session on ECCP was included in the seminars organised by REGIO in cooperation with EMPL and EIPA (European Institute on Public Administration) for MAs of ESF and ERDF
- Two sessions took place ,one in EN and one in FR
- Feedback from participants confirmed the findings of Commission's assessment

Publication of the Report Van den Brande on "Multilevel Governance and Partnership"

- Prepared by ex-President of Committee of Regions Luc Van den Brande upon request from Commissioner Hahn and is based on information provided mainly by DG REGIO
- Content:
 - importance of multilevel governance and reinforced partnership for policy making in the European Union, in particular in the context of cohesion policy
 - main findings and recommendations following a first assessment of the Partnership Agreements of all Member States
 - recommendations are made as to how the review of the Europe 2020 Strategy can be used as an opportunity to ensure better coherence between the Strategy and the Partnership Agreements, whilst providing Europe 2020 with a genuine territorial dimension.