



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND INCLUSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY

The Directors-General

ARES 23. 04. 2014

N° 1263323

Brussels,

Mr Mark Fodor
Director
CEE Bankwatch Network
Rue d'Edinbourg 26
1050 Brussels

Dear Sir,

Subject: Your letter of 19/3 regarding Deficiencies in the implementation of the partnership principle in Cohesion Policy

We refer to your letter of 19 March regarding the implementation of the partnership principle in Cohesion Policy for the new programming period 2014-2020.

First, we would like to thank CEE Bankwatch Network and the other signatory organisations for their support during the negotiations of the Regulations governing the new programming period, which allowed enlarging the scope for implementation of the partnership principle in the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds ("ESIF").

As stressed in your letter, the European Commission has always strongly supported the active and meaningful involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of the programmes funded by the ESIF. Partnership is indeed a powerful driver for enhancing collective commitment and ownership of EU policies, increasing the knowledge, expertise and viewpoints available when strategies are being designed and implemented, for managing the relevant funds, and ensuring greater transparency in decision-making processes. It is therefore an effective tool for improving the results-orientation of the ESIF.

The entry into force on 15 March 2014 of the Delegated Regulation on the European code of conduct on partnership clearly reflects this longstanding commitment. This Code was adopted on the basis of Article 5 of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 (the Common Provisions Regulation for the ESIF, entered into force on 21 December 2013) pursuant to which Member States are required i.a. to organise a partnership throughout the

preparation and implementation of the Partnership Agreements and Programmes. For the very first time, a Delegated Regulation sets out a number of detailed provisions on partnership that are common to 28 Member States, covering issues such as

- identification of partners;
- involvement of partners in the preparation of the Partnership Agreements and programmes;
- involvement of partners in the progress reports, monitoring, evaluation, and in the monitoring committees and calls for proposals;
- strengthening the institutional capacity of relevant partners; and
- the role of the Commission in the dissemination of good practices.

We would like to stress that the Commission is thoroughly assessing the respect of the partnership principle. When Member States submit their draft Partnership Agreements and Programmes to the Commission, they are required to provide at least the following information:

- the list of partners involved in the preparation phase;
- measures taken to ensure the active participation of the partners, including measures to improve accessibility, in particular for people with disabilities;
- the role of the partners in the preparation phase; and
- the results of the consultation with partners and a description of its added value in the preparation phase.

Whenever the Commission identifies deficiencies in respecting this principle, it will mention them explicitly in the observations to the respective document of the Member States, which will be expected to adequately address them. In particular, the Commission is paying special attention to the extent to which Member States exploit the possibilities offered by the Regulations to support actions for strengthening the institutional capacity of partners, especially under the form of dedicated workshops, training sessions, coordination and networking structures.

At this stage of the negotiations, the situation varies among Member States and Funds concerned. In general, and on the basis of a first assessment, it appears that the partnership principle is well acknowledged in the different Member States, but that in some cases more could be done to better demonstrate how the consultation of the partners is actually shaping the preparation of the Partnership Agreements and Programmes.

The country reports which you have sent to us provided us with useful input and will feed into our discussions with Member States.

In this respect, the Commission will take stock on a regular basis of the involvement of stakeholders through discussions in the ESIF Expert Group on Structured Dialogue, as provided for in Article 5 (6) of the Common Provisions Regulation.

We should also add that, as regards the European Social Fund ("ESF"), a number of social partners at European level (i.e. ETUC, Businesseurope, UEAPME and CEEP) are currently consulting their members for feedback on how they have been involved in the preparation of Partnership Agreements and Programmes. The ESF Committee will discuss in June the state of play in the respect of the partnership principle in the context of the negotiations of the Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes.

In addition, the Commission will set up a European Community of Practice on Partnership, which shall be common to the ESIF and open to interested Member States, Managing Authorities and organisations representing the partners at EU level, with a view to facilitate exchange of experience, capacity building, as well as dissemination of relevant outcomes.

Finally, we would like to assure you that the Commission will continue to support Member States in implementing the partnership principle, and that we also count on your support to ensure that steady progress will be made in this new programming period.

Yours sincerely,



Michel Servoz



Walter Deffaa