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**PARTNERSHIP IN THE 2007-2013 PROGRAMMING PERIOD**

**ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE**

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**Partnership in the 2007-2013 programming period**

**Analysis of the implementation of the Partnership principle**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Partnership is one of the core principles of the implementation of EU Structural Funds. The idea was already present in the Treaty of Rome in 1957 as regards the European Social Fund. It was later established as a common key principle for the Structural Funds by the 1988 reform.

As a principle of involvement and consultation on the objectives and priorities of the Structural Funds, the partnership principle aims at:

- Increasing the efficiency of the policy-making – better identification and knowledge of local problems;
- Increasing the effectiveness in pursuing the final goals – rationalisation of the efforts;
- Promoting the territorial development factors – multi-level governance;
- The democratisation of the EU – subsidiarity.

For the current programming period (2007-2013), and in accordance with article 11 of the Structural Funds General Regulation<sup>1</sup>, an obligation of partnership is established on the Commission (partnership at European level) and on the Member State (partnership at Member State level).

At European level, the annual consultation meeting with the European economic and social partners on assistance from the Funds (article 11.3) is organised by the Directorate-General for Regional Policy jointly with the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. In order to benefit from the input and expertise of organisations working on the implementation of Funds other than socio-economic partners, the scope of this annual consultation has been enlarged to other organisations working on Cohesion Policy at EU level.

The **structured dialogue** with civil society organisations currently involves the traditional economic and social partners, but also associations or networks representing local, regional, urban authorities, as well as other representatives of civil society. This enlarged scope is to be understood as an alignment of the same type of partners required at both Member State<sup>2</sup> and EU levels.

At Member State level the modification of the "partnership clause" in 2006 included a more precise list of partners than in the previous programming period. Civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organisations and bodies responsible for promoting equality between

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<sup>1</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999, OJ L 210, 31.7.2006.

<sup>2</sup> Article 11.1 of Regulation 1086/2006 mentions the following partners at Member State level: "a) the competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities; b) the economic and social partners; c) any other appropriate body representing civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women.

men and women are mentioned for the first time in the current General Regulation. At present, the partnership principle shall be implemented "in accordance with national rules and practices". Practically, the current EU Regulation makes partnership an important part of the governance of the Cohesion Policy, whilst leaving considerable margin of manoeuvre to national and regional authorities as to how it should be applied.

Progress on partnership has taken place across the programming periods. In this context, article 5 of the recent Commission proposals for a Common Provisions Regulation on CSF funds goes in the direction of strengthening this principle<sup>3</sup>.

Partnership must be seen in **close liaison with the multi-level governance approach and the respect of the subsidiarity and proportionality principles**. As highlighted by the Committee of the Regions in its White Paper issued in 2009<sup>4</sup>, multi-level governance means coordinated action by the European Union, the Member States and local and regional authorities, based on partnership and aimed at implementing EU policies. The multi-level governance approach reinforces the implementation of the partnership principle both vertically – between regional and local authorities (RLAs), national government and the European Union – and horizontally – between these different levels, economic and social partners and civil society organisations.

Other bodies and institutions also call for the strengthening of this principle in cohesion policy. The European Parliament endorsed the Beaupuy report on governance and partnership in 2008<sup>5</sup>. More recently, the Manescu Report on good governance (2010)<sup>6</sup> considered that satisfactory multi-level governance should be based on a bottom-up approach and called on the Member States to identify the most efficient means of implementing governance at various levels and to improve their cooperation with the regional and local authorities as well as with the Community's administration. The report also recommended the enhancement of the partnership practice and urged the Commission to come up with an agreed definition of the concept of partnership as a condition for building up real partnerships with regional and local authorities and civil society actors. As mentioned above, the Committee of the Regions issued a White Paper on multi-level governance in 2009. The follow-up report to this White Paper has been adopted on February 2012<sup>7</sup>. The European Economic and Social Committee adopted an exploratory opinion on the

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<sup>3</sup> COM (2011) 615 final, "Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund covered by the Common Strategic Framework and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) N° 1083/2006

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://web.cor.europa.eu/epp/Ourviews/Documents/White%20Paper%20on%20MLG.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A6-2008-0356&language=EN>

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2010-0280&language=EN>

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:113:0062:0072:EN:PDF>

involvement of civil society organisations (CSO) in the current programming period in 2010 – the so called "Olsson report"<sup>8</sup>, carried out at the request of the Commission.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The present analysis is based on two questionnaires for both National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRFs) and Operational Programmes (OPs) filled in by the geographical units of DG Regional Policy. The questionnaires were aimed at gathering information on the involvement of partners in the programming process established by the Member States or the Managing Authorities (MAs): preparation of strategic documents and also other stages of the implementation process, including their participation in the Monitoring Committees.

This analysis concerns the replies on the partnership arrangements for programmes supported by both the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund.

As a starting point, the Commission prepared an internal evaluation of the involvement of partners during the preparation of strategic documents and implementation of the Structural Funds. The geographical desks in DG Regional Policy examined the situation in each of the Member States analysing the partnership arrangements involving stakeholders in the different stages of the programming process. The analysis was supported by two questionnaires prepared DG Regional Policy, focusing on the participation of partners in the programming process and differentiating the NSRFs and the OPs. Each geographic unit chose the most representative OP from a partnership point of view. Altogether, 35 questionnaires for both NSRFs and OPs were completed.

## **3. PARTNERSHIP IN 2007 – 2013 PROGRAMMING PERIOD**

### **3.1. Role of partners during 2007 – 2013 Structural and Cohesion Funds – results of the survey**

This section describes the perceptions of DG Regional Policy's desk officers regarding the role and involvement of partners in the different stages of the programming cycle during the current programming period. Some best practices are presented in Annex 1.

Partners can perform a variety of functions in the programming cycle, from conception to monitoring. This is summarised in the following table<sup>9</sup>:

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<sup>8</sup>See:[http://eescopinions.eesc.europa.eu/EESCopinionDocument.aspx?identifier=ces\eco\eco258\ces967-2010\\_ac.doc&language=EN](http://eescopinions.eesc.europa.eu/EESCopinionDocument.aspx?identifier=ces\eco\eco258\ces967-2010_ac.doc&language=EN)

<sup>9</sup> Source: previous analysis of the implementation of the partnership principle "Partnership in the 2000-2006 programming period", Discussion paper of DG Regional Policy, November 2005.

**Table 1 - Actors and their participation in the programming cycle 2007-2013**

<b>Phase</b>		<b>Actors</b>	<b>Role of partners</b>
<b>1. Programming</b>	National Development Plan	MS (MAs), EC + national, regional and local authorities, economic and social partners, civil society	Consultative role
	National Strategic Reference Framework	MS+ national, regional and local authorities, economic and social partners, civil society + EC	Consultative role
	Operational Programmes	MS (MAs) + national, regional and local authorities, economic and social partners, civil society + EC	Consultative role
<b>2. Implementation</b>		MS (MAs) + national, regional and local authorities, economic and social partners, civil society	Consultative role
<b>3. Monitoring</b>		MS (MAs) + national, regional and local authorities, economic and social partners, civil society + EC	Participation in the Monitoring Committees with voting rights or as observers Possibility to comment on the AIRs (according to the Rules of organisation and functioning and statutes of the Monitoring Committees) when they are discussed during the MC meetings.
<b>4. Evaluation</b>	Ex-ante evaluation	Independent evaluators selected by open tender, under the coordination of MAs/national coordinator of Structural Funds	Consultative role – some of the partners are interviewed by the evaluators. Partners are also consulted in the evaluation process as members of the Monitoring Committees
	Mid-term/ongoing evaluation	Independent evaluators selected by open tender, under the coordination of the MAs	Consultative role – some of the partners are interviewed by the evaluators. Partners are also consulted in the evaluation process as members of the Monitoring Committees

### **3.2. Selection of partners**

The identification and inclusion of partners is an important step in the preparation of planning and programming. Their involvement at a stage as early as possible is crucial for the Partnership principle and their ownership at a later stage. The result of the survey indicates that each country applies its specific approach to determining the social and economic partners, NGOs and business structures. In general, the following categories have been stressed:

a) Government/Public Administration partners:

- Government institutions, ministries, and agencies
- Regional and local authorities, representatives of municipalities

b) Social and economic partners

- Social and economic partners for the country - i.e. trade unions, employer and industrial organisations, professional associations and organisations, and so on
- Business and trade associations and members, leading companies operating in the country

c) Civil society

- Non-governmental organisations representing important interest groups: equal opportunities, environmental protection and so on
- Research and education entities

#### ***3.2.1. Identification***

The participants in the process were identified using certain criteria, namely:

- Representativeness, like in the Czech Republic, Romania or Greece
- Transparency and visibility of the process as in Latvia
- Scope of interests and relevance for the respective OP: in Greece, Ireland, Slovakia, Austria, UK, Estonia, Luxembourg
- Balanced distribution of interest groups: Greece, UK, Hungary, Malta, Estonia
- Institutional basis, like in France with the Midi-Pyrénées OP

#### ***3.2.2. Selection***

Pre-determined procedures or a legislative basis for the selection of partners as in Finland are rare. Some of the countries, especially those already experienced in accessing Structural Funds – the

Netherlands, France, Austria, Slovenia, and Germany for instance – rather took into account the traditional partners of the previous programming periods.

Some countries did not apply any selection criteria for setting up the partnership. The authorities used "inclusive" criteria, being interested in involving as many entities as possible in the process, like in Poland.

Representatives of regional and local authorities were usually selected in order to represent different territorial levels – e.g. Portugal – and in accordance with their specific responsibilities, as in Estonia. Some other partners were selected mainly on the basis of their specific expertise, as they may have a substantial contribution to the topics discussed and, implicitly, to the elaboration of the strategic documents (NSRF, OP, Programme Complements).

In some cases selection is based on an open application made by any interested partner, to be sent to the Managing Authority.

For the civil society category, usually representatives of NGOs specialised in one or more of the following sectors were selected: environmental protection, disabled people, Roma people, equality between men and women. Their representatives were invited to participate in the working groups organised for the elaboration of NSRF and OPs. In some of the respondent countries – like Latvia, Belgium or Italy – cooperation memoranda were signed between NGOs or economic and social partners and the government.

### **3.3. Participation of partners in the programming process**

In most Member States, partnership is an accepted part of the programming of the Structural and Cohesion Funds and the drafting of national/regional programmes is based on a wide-ranging partnership. Similarly, a wide range of regional and local authorities, socio-economic partners and civil society representatives are involved from the development stage of the strategic documents – NSRFs and OPs, under various forms:

- questionnaires
- workshops
- conferences
- consultative and technical committees
- working groups
- public dialogues, seminars
- intergovernmental consultations
- specific websites
- press conferences

In some Member States, the involvement of civil society has a long and valued tradition – e.g. Malta, Ireland, the Netherlands, or Sweden – as it provides independent views on politics, culture, social and environmental issues and other important society aspects. On



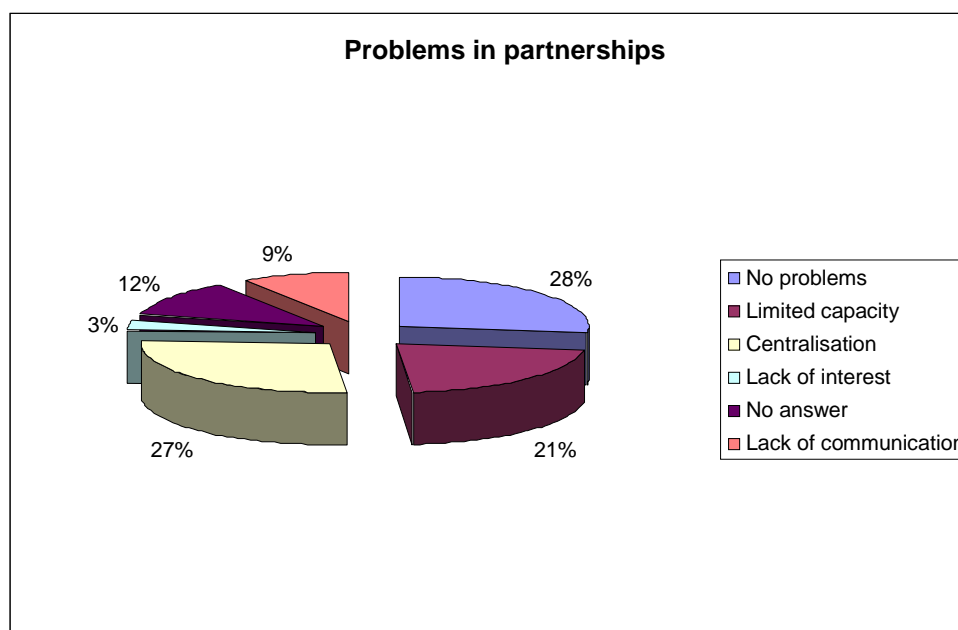
a macro-level, civil society plays an active role in the political reforms and in educational, environmental, cultural and social development.

Involvement of partners in the programming process was even encouraged by creating various types of *cooperation platforms* which aim at raising awareness for participation: Romania, Greece, Portugal, Hungary, Ireland, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Finland, Latvia, Belgium, France, Austria, Italy, and Poland.

Notwithstanding these facilitation tools, the survey revealed the general perception that participation and involvement of partners could be improved at strategic level, thus in various phases of the programming cycle of the Structural Funds.

Regardless the extent of partners' involvement in the programming stage (preparation of NSRF/OPs), all the Member States appreciated as important and substantial the contribution of partners. The relevant comments received from the partners were taken into account by the Managing Authorities.

As regards the **obstacles** faced during the programming process from partners' involvement perspective, the results of the survey conducted at DG Regional policy level is shown in the graphic below:



In several Member States – Romania, Hungary, Estonia and Latvia– as well as in more experienced countries – as in Germany, France or Italy – authorities pointed out the *lack of capacity* of civil society organisations to engage with national and regional economic policy and their lack of resources to become active participants.

*Centralisation of the decision-making process* was mentioned among the most relevant obstacles to a sound functioning of the partnership in Portugal, Hungary, Malta, Ireland, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Spain for instance.

### **3.4. Technical Assistance to partners**

Some Member States have encouraged the increase of administrative and financial capacity of the partners by including specific Technical Assistance budget lines in their OP for the involvement of the partners. The technical assistance measures for enhancing the participation of partners have taken different forms:

- United Kingdom: the members of the Monitoring Committee, who are selected following an open competition, are remunerated in accordance with the rules specified by the Welsh Assembly Government
- Portugal: the partners' involvement in meetings and events organised by the Managing Authorities is financed by technical assistance measures
- Slovakia: the Managing Authority decided to make changes in eligibility rules for technical assistance projects in OP Health so as to finance some of the members of the Monitoring Committee
- Latvia: technical assistance is available for strengthening the professional capacity of the partners (training sessions) and in order to increase their participation possibilities
- Poland: under the Technical Assistance programme, partnership is financed without limit; beneficiaries are economic and social partners and NGOs; besides, the Human Capital programme finances measures for strengthening the partners' capacity.

### **3.5. Implementation**

#### *3.5.1. Involvement in project selection process*

The conducted survey revealed that in all Member States examined, partners also participate in elaborating the project selection criteria, the latter being discussed and approved during the Monitoring Committee meetings.

In some of the Member States, the partners were directly involved in the process of project selection. For instance, in Portugal, partners have been involved in the project evaluation process, on individual basis, as consultants. As well, there are situations where some partners are members of the Project Selection Committees organised at the Managing Authority level, like in Slovakia or Hungary; or in the technical working groups or thematic committees set up for the project selection process, as in Belgium, the Netherlands and France. The question of conflict of interests has not been specifically raised by the questionnaires but the general lack of functioning rules for the organisation of the partnership is to be highlighted.

### *3.5.2. Participation in the Monitoring Committees*

The participation of partners in Monitoring Committees is one of the more visible aspects of the application of the partnership principle in the management and implementation of Structural and Cohesion Funds.

The questionnaires filled in by the desk officers show that all Member States established clear rules and procedures for the organisation and functioning of the Monitoring Committees, approved by means of legal acts.

Members of the Monitoring Committee are either nominated or elected by governmental or regional authorities – like in the Czech Republic or the United Kingdom – or selected following an open competition, as in Latvia, where the application of a potential member is discussed and approved during the MC meetings. There can also be delegated representatives. In the Hungarian example, half of the MC members are delegated by RLAs and NGOs.

In most of the cases, the partners have the same voting rights, while the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, and the European Investment Fund have only an advisory role, as observers. However, there are countries where other partners play the same advisory role. In Portugal, all the other Managing Authorities are observers. In Germany, there are only 8 votes in the Monitoring Committee, five belonging to the Managing Authorities, 2 to the Monitoring Authority and one to the Audit Authority; all the other members have no voting rights. The French case puts an accent on representatives of universities. They are present but have only the quality of observers. In Spain the Intermediate Bodies and the economic and social partners are present in the Monitoring Committees with an advisory capacity; and in Italy, only public authorities have voting rights.

Representation of the social partners varies across countries. The questionnaires filled in by the desk officers in DG Regional Policy demonstrated that in a minority of cases, partners are only consulted without having direct participatory rights in the implementation of Structural and Cohesion Funds or the right to vote. In some cases their main role is to serve as an information channel towards the public. Thus, in France and Austria, decisions within the Monitoring Committees are taken by consensus; while in Slovenia, the voting system is so formalistic that the members of the Monitoring Committees are, in practice, merely following the Managing Authority decisions.

In certain Member States – e.g. Spain –, in spite of a quite centralised approach in relation with the Structural and Cohesion Funds programming and implementation, a working group composed of representatives of RLAs, social and economic partners and civil society was created in order to smoothen the functioning of the Monitoring

Committee. The aim of the working group was to analyse the socio-economic situation of the specific regions and bring added-value during the Monitoring Committee meetings.

As regards the *Annual Implementation Reports*, in all the Member States, the Managing Authorities are involved in their preparation. However, an important contribution from different partners has to be mentioned, as reports are discussed during the Monitoring Committee's meetings, where the members have the real possibility to express their opinions and formulate comments and recommendations for the improvement of the documents.

### **3.6. Involvement in the Evaluation process**

The partnership principle is expressed in terms of encouraging the participation of the relevant stakeholders during the evaluation planning and implementing processes, as well as in the analysis of their results. In particular, the partnership between the Commission and the Member State deserves highlighting, bearing in mind the regulatory provision determining that the funds' objectives be realised through their close cooperation, covering "the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programmes" (Article 11 of Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006).

Participation adds value — the more participatory the process is, the more value can potentially be added to the program, as learning is extended to the programme, the implementing stakeholders, and its beneficiaries during the evaluation process. Ultimately, participation in evaluation facilitates consensus-building and ownership of evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Accordingly to the questionnaires, the partnership in evaluation within DG Regional Policy was implemented differently, depending on national and regional practice.

External consultants were selected for the NSRF/OPs evaluations, according to the national public procurement rules. However, in some Member States – e.g. Portugal or Estonia – the relevant partners were also involved in the evaluation process conducted at NSRF level, through interviews and consultations. Thus, the independent experts consulted the partners during the preparation of the evaluation studies.

The presentation of the evaluation reports to the Monitoring Committee broadened the involvement of partnership in the process. The partners members of the Monitoring Committees have then the opportunity to express their opinion on the evaluation reports. A substantial contribution from different partners was also recorded in relation to the Action Plan, which had to be drafted for implementation of the recommendations, included in the evaluation reports.

Partners are sometimes members in the evaluation working groups organised at the Managing Authorities' level. It is the case in the United Kingdom (Evaluation Advisory Groups), Latvia (Advisory Working Group on thematic evaluations), France (Regional

Evaluation Committee), Italy (Evaluation Steering Committee), Poland (Evaluation Steering Group), and Sweden (Evaluation sub-groups of the Monitoring Committee) for instance. The issue of conflict of interest is also to be addressed and deepened in this regard.

On the other hand, certain countries complained about the lack of the partners' involvement in the evaluation process, stating that there was only a theoretical possibility for the latter to have a real contribution to the evaluation report, since only its summary was made available for all interested stakeholders (like in Romania, Malta, or Slovakia); while, for example, in Germany, no information on the evaluation at all was made available for the public.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The analysis shows that efforts have been done in order to improve the functioning of partnership. Where it is well implemented, genuine partnerships have generated further benefits such as a better inter-institutional coordination and communication at the national level, and a better involvement of civil society. The broad participation at various levels and the participation – at national and regional level - of the same partners, as well as transparency in the flows of information did prevent incoherencies between the NSRF and the programmes in Greece for instance. In Poland, assistance for partners and non-governmental organisations is connected with the role of those entities in the process of supporting the modernisation of state structures and is conducive to increasing their participation in the implementation process of necessary reforms, optimisation of the law constituting process and implementation of the good governance principle.

The successful application of the partnership principle ensures the achievement of the objectives set in the programming documents. The main conclusions could be summarised as follows:

- Partnership is an integral part of all stages in the programming of the Structural Funds and the extending of partnership through the inclusion of civil society and Regional and Local Associations boosts programme effectiveness;
- Involvement of partners at the different stages: their role is greater at the stage of planning and project selection; their role in the specific operational tasks is varied; their role with regard to the monitoring and evaluation is more limited;
- The extending and consolidation of partnership results in: greater effectiveness of programme development, monitoring and project selection; transparency of the decision-making processes; greater engagement in and fostering of the programme results;

For the next period, the partnership principle will be implemented in accordance with the provisions of the new Council Regulation for 2014 – 2020. The Commission's proposal seeks to notably reinforce the partnership principle. Therefore, the cooperation between

regional and local authorities, on one hand, and the national governments and the Commission, on the other hand, should be intensified, thus encouraging a "bottom-up approach". As recommended by the Beaupuy Report, regular meetings should take place between officials from different tiers of government. The role of regional and local authorities should be therefore strengthened in programme preparation, management and implementation<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> "Report on good governance with regards to the EU regional policy: procedures of assistance and control by the European Commission", European parliament, Committee on Regional Development, Rapporteur Ramona Manescu (07/10/2010).

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

### ○ *Selection of partners*

More than sixty bodies (social partners, regions, and ministries) were involved in the consultation procedures for drafting *Greece's* NSRF. Their selection was based on criteria related to the representation of all policy areas and social groups at national and regional level, ensuring full coverage of thematic and horizontal themes addressed in the NSRF, according to the provisions of the General Regulation.

The broad participation at various levels and the participation – at national and regional level - of the same partners, as well as transparency in the flows of information did prevent incoherencies between the NSRF and the OPs.

In *Latvia*, the Cooperation Memorandum between non-governmental organisations and the cabinet of ministers has been developed with the aim of facilitating operation of an efficient public administration system that meets the interests of the society by ensuring involvement of civil society in the decision-making process. Currently the Cooperation Memorandum involves 237 NGOs. Most active NGOs create the “civil society”.

“Civil society” also involves National Tripartite Cooperation Council which is an institution working at national level of tripartite social dialogue, where the appointed representatives of Government, LDDK and Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia collaborate as social partners.

The aim of National Tripartite Cooperation Council is to foster the cooperation of social partners at national level and to ensure an integrated way of dealing issues on socioeconomic development in compliance with the interests of the whole society and state, that would guarantee social stability, increase of the level of well-being and economic growth in the country.

○ *Involvement of partners*

In **Romania**, for the preparation of the Regional Programme, the following entities were created:

- **Inter-institutional committee** made up of decisions makers from ministries, other public institutions, regional development agencies, research and higher education institutions, representatives of economic and social partners;

- At regional level, the **regional coordination committees** and the **thematic working groups** which included representatives of the regional development agencies, county councils, prefects' offices, de-concentrated services of the central public institutions, higher education and research institutions and regional economic and social partners.

As well, **consultations and conferences** in specific fields of activity were organised with partners such as professional associations, employers' associations and trade unions, local and central authorities, decentralised services, regional development agencies, NGOs, representatives of the academic and scientific research environment, business environment. The consultations ended in concrete proposals for the improvement of the programming documents.

The work on the preparation of the NSRF has relied substantially on the main conclusions from the consultation process for the OP. The process involved consultation at MAs level with the following partners: political leaders, ministries with a direct interest in Structural and Cohesion Funds, other line ministries and government institutions, local authorities, NGOs (including environmental NGOs), universities and education establishments, social and economic partners.



○ *Cooperation platforms*

For example, in Austria, within the context of European regional and spatial development policies, ÖROK (Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning), is a platform where all responsible authorities on federal and regional level including economic and social partners and associations for cities and municipalities are involved. It plays an important role as the coordinating body between the internal and the European level:

– EU Regional Policy - Platform for Co-ordination and Information:

Definition of the Regional Aid Map according to article 87 of the EC Treaty and co-ordination of the national break-down of EU-Structural Funds; drafting and strategic monitoring of the “National Strategic Reference Framework” STRAT.AT 2007–2013; secretariat for the Monitoring Committees for the regional programmes for the objectives “Convergence“ and “Regional Competitiveness and Employment”; support and accompany the programme cycle (programming, negotiations, evaluation, closure,);

– European Territorial Cooperation - National Contact Point:

In the period 2007–2013 the ÖROK office continues to act as “National Contact Point” for transnational and network programmes with Austrian participation under the “European Territorial Cooperation” objective. The focus of the activities is on the three programmes covering Central Europe, South East Europe and Alpine Space; Interreg IV C, Urbact II and Espon are served as well.

○ *Technical Assistance for the partners*

In Poland, among Technical Assistance programme, partnership is financed without any limit. Recently the list of beneficiaries and target groups directly benefiting from aid has been expanded to NGOs and economic and social partners in some measures but without setting limits in the budget.

It is worth mentioning that there is also a specific objective in Human Capital programme which is aimed at strengthening the potential of social partners and non-governmental organisations (specific objective 4 in priority V: Good governance). Assistance for partners and non-governmental organisations is connected with the role of those entities in the process of supporting the modernisation of state structures and is conducive to increasing their participation in the implementation process of necessary reforms, optimisation of the law constituting process and implementation of the good governance principle.

○ *Involvement of partners in NSRF/OP Evaluation*

In Poland, in case of Human Capital programme (HC OP), in order to support effectiveness of evaluation both at national and regional level, Polish ESF Managing Authority had established an Evaluation Steering Group for HC OP.

The Evaluation Steering Group is composed of institutions and entities interested in participating in the evaluation process, such as representatives of the Managing Authority, Intermediate Bodies (both central and regional), social partners (all representatives from the HC OP Monitoring Committee), National Evaluation Unit, independent evaluation experts.

Additionally, every evaluation study and conclusions or recommendations resulting from it, is consulted with social partners, represented in the Evaluation Steering Group.