The event brought together some 350 delegates representing regions, NGOs, civil social economy organizations to discuss the partnership principle in EU Cohesion policy. It was organized in the context of the “Open Days - European Week of Regions and Cities” which took place in Brussels on 8-11 October 2007 and attracted some 5,000 participants.

This forum was organised under the COOPERATE project which is now in its third phase. During its first two years the project concentrated on training of actors of the public and third sector in the area of socio-economic and territorial development in the context of EU Structural Funds. By favouring the exchange of experience and best practices, the project provides a framework to study bottom-up approaches to local economic development. For its third phase, the COOPERATE project intends to actively promote the identification and transfer of best practices concerning partnership implementation at various levels. Hence the project includes research into partnership practices and at the same time, an attempt to bring the various threads together into a model or compact of partnership. Cooperate is funded by the Compagnia di san Paolo Foundation based in Turin (Italy).

This report attempts a brief summary and analysis of the main points discussed during the event. All Power Points presentations, abstracts and articles sent by the speakers are available on the official Open Days website under the heading “Checking delivery: How the new programmes are implemented”

Context
The event represented a first opportunity to examine how the new partnership principle (i.e. art. 11 of the general regulation on the structural funds) has been implemented in the run up to the 2007-2013 programming period. The new article puts a duty on EU member states to establish a more extensive partnership for all the phases of Structural Funds operations (i.e. from programming to implementation to monitoring and evaluation) by including “any other appropriate body representing civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organizations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women”. At the same time, the event provided the opportunity for looking at the new partnership principle as well as the EU Cohesion policy as a whole, from the point of view of the elements necessary to their successful implementation such as effective synergies among different actors.

The Civil Society Forum attracted high-level speakers from the EU Institutions (Graham Meadows former Director General DG Regional Policy, Elisabeth Schroedter Member of the European Parliament and Commissioner Danuta Hübner who sent her message for the event on a video).

The event was structured in three consecutive workshops which, by following the main stages of structural funds operations (i.e. strategy setting, implementation and evaluation), assessed the functioning of partnership at each stage. The interventions from the representatives of the EU institutions were followed by a series of panels with representatives from civil society organisations and academic institutions and lively debates with the audience.

Workshop I
Partnerships - Their Role in Framing Strategies
The session was chaired by Mario Monti (ECAS’ Chairman) whose intervention set the scene on the partnership principle and civil society’s role in the future implementation of the Structural Funds (see Annex).

This session was divided in two main parts. In the first part, the session saw the intervention from Danuta Hübner (Commissioner for Regional Policy) who, even though she could not be present at the event, sent a taped speech and then from Graham Meadows (former Director General for Regional Policy). During the second part, a panel of experts from different sectors (i.e. the academic world, civil society and the European Parliament) reacted to the interventions from the European Commission and added insights and important comments and remarks.

This session explored the reasons for and the contribution from civil society organisation's participation in policy-making processes (i.e. from policy-setting through to implementation and evaluation).

The panel was made up of the following experts:

Elisabeth Schroedter, Member of the European Parliament
Simona Piattoni, Professor of the University of Trento, Italy
Ray Phillips, Director London Voluntary Sector Training Consortium (LVSTC), UK
Martin Konecny, Project Coordinator, CEE Bankwatch Network and Friends of the Earth Europe

The main concerns and remarks made by the chairman, the Commissions’ representatives the panel and the audience can be summed up as follows:

1 Council Regulation 1083/2006
Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy

In her message, Mrs. Hübner pointed out that the role of extensive partnerships is crucial if we want to succeed in our policies and in communicating on their impact. Success and efficiency of programmes and projects very much depend on local and regional knowledge. This has become even more important in the new programming period, as programme management is decentralised still further.

Moreover, broad partnership also contributes to greater efficiency and effectiveness of programme management, greater transparency of decision-making processes and encourages stronger commitment and ownership of programme outputs: all contributing to success.

For these reasons, all partners are involved in all stages of programming and implementation under the new general regulation. In the negotiating process, DG Regio pays attention to selection criteria for involving partners, and gives recommendations where there are doubts as to the quality of the partnership process or where the partnership principle does not seem to have been followed properly.

Experience so far shows that in many Member States, involvement of partners in programming has improved considerably, but much work still needs to be done to benefit from the full potential of such involvement. For example, some countries have even included in their operational programmes specific actions oriented towards civil society capacity building, but there is still a need to build the capacity of civil society to become a fully-fledged partner.

Mrs. Hübner closed her message by encouraging civil society and all participants to the seminar to contribute to the on-line public consultation about the future of cohesion policy.

Graham Meadows, former Director General for Regional Policy

Mr. Meadows concentrated his speech on three core Regional Policy topics.

1. The nature of regional policy

What is regional policy? Regional policy is an instrument of economic growth, a tool for economic policy. By increasing the rate of economic growth, regional policy creates jobs and raises living standards. Economic growth policies are largely determined by small, closed partnerships working in the main capital cities which do not tend to involve wider partnerships. Governments are not used to share competences and influence over economic growth policies. This is where the partnership principle in the structural funds finds resistance.

2. A response to globalization

Even though globalisation has so far had a strong impact on increasing economic growth it is increasingly being contested. Such contestations started with environmental concerns but now they also target the wider impact of globalisation as it exacerbates social disparities.

In June 2007 a Commission Communication on “Flexicurity” was issued. With this Communication, the Commission wants to lay down the basis for a stable balance between flexibility and security at work. Mr. Meadows stressed that as far as these kind of initiatives are concerned, civil society has to be alerted and involved closely since it is often through civil society that the echoes of change are first felt.
3. How can partnership deliver something good

The key issue in partnership is consensus. Partnership has to be much more than just talking and it should concentrate on building strong consensus about what can and should be done to speed up economic growth in a way that will benefit all individuals in each European region. Mr. Meadows stressed the fact that currently, public consultations need to concentrate on the future of regional policy (i.e. how European regional policy should look like until 2020) and hence should also examine what further action should be taken to drive partnership in the heart of European regional policy. To conclude, Mr. Meadows noted that the answer to the question if we need partnership is, no doubt, “yes”. However, while the value of partnership is undeniable in both policy setting and implementation, the latter is in practice much easier to realise. Partnership in objectives setting is more difficult since governments are not used to share responsibilities and influence on economic growth policy; yet, that should be the final aim.

Elisabeth Schroedter, Member of the European Parliament

Ms. Schroedter presented the main objectives, challenges and shortcomings of the partnership principle as it currently functions.

The partnership principle is a cornerstone of Cohesion policy since its goals focus on the visibility of EU politics, sharing management and responsibility, strengthening of democratic structures and of civil society as well as on developing control mechanisms to ensure quality and good delivery.

There have been some recent positive developments regarding the partnership principle in the new Structural Funds Regulation (1083/2006) which now includes “any other appropriate body representing civil society etc.”. As to the content of partnership, the new Regulation states that it should cover the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programs, which should translate into a full involvement of partners. However, the actual functioning of partnership shows a less positive picture. There is a lack of information; a significant disregard for contributions (which is the consequence of a strong resistance on the part of the Member States to consult partners); a lack of involvement in the planning process, a lack of training and capacity building activities; lack of professional structures and financial resources (e.g. technical assistance); a lack of refund of direct costs. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a general lack of fair partnership. As a consequence, the main goal of ensuring quality and good delivery cannot be met, partners cannot act on an equal level and there is no real partnership.

Ms. Schroedter presented a number of important suggestions for the strengthening of the partnership principle which would significantly improve the current situation. These points include:

- A clear demand from the Commission to the Member States for a full involvement of partners
- The inclusion of the opinions of the partners in the proposed operational programmes.
- Making the approval of final operational programmes subject to a verification of the fulfilment of the partnership principle.
- The introduction of sanctions where necessary
- The elaboration of guidelines on good partnership.
Ms. Schroedter also made a number of interesting suggestions concerning the contents of such guidelines on partnership which included:

- Transparency of all minutes and decision procedures
- Providing partners with information in a reasonable time and manner
- Access to all supporting background documents
- Highlighting the contributions from the partners in final texts
- Declaring which parts of the opinions of the partners were rejected
- The introduction of voting rights in the plenary and monitoring committees
- Provision of training and capacity building

Finally, Ms. Schroedter proposed a number of other actions to improve the quality of partnerships in the Structural funds. Such actions included:

- A report from the Commission to the European Parliament on the partnership principle within each Member State
- An evaluation of the principle between partners and the European Commission
- Meetings of the Commissioner with partners during official visits in Member States
- Obligatory reporting by the Member States to the Commission on the implementation of the partnership principle.

**Simona Piattoni, Professor at the University of Trento, Italy**

Prof. Piattoni introduced the results of a number of interesting research projects carried out by a consortium of universities on the nature and role of civil society organisations in Structural Funds operations and partnership arrangements.

Already in the 80s, there was a growing consensus concerning the fact that, development policies cannot be parachuted from the top but that they need to be agreed through consensus with the local “intelligence” (i.e. local stakeholders, civil society organisations etc.).

Empirical evidence shows that awareness concerning Structural Funds and EU cohesion policy depends on a number of issues such as:

- Presence and level of Structural Funds investments (where they are more, significant awareness is higher)
- Institutional structure of the State (higher awareness in regional and federal rather than centralised states)
- Presence of significant structural divisions in the country (higher awareness in countries with large structural gaps).

Research also shows that structural policy is very often entangled with other issues such as:

- The degree of regional autonomy (so much so as to become a testing ground for the redefinition of centre-periphery relations)
- The protection of the environment, the preservation of traditional products, etc. (i.e. issues with significant public visibility)
- The creation/absorption of areas of social exclusion (marginalized workers, ‘ethnic’ division of labour, etc.)
- Cross-regional cooperation and the challenge of the distribution of competencies between central and peripheral governments
Prof. Piattoni made very interesting remarks concerning public identification with civil society organizations:

- In general terms, and as far as regional policy is concerned, public institutions, particularly if elected, are more genuinely representative of the general interest of the local citizens than civil society organisations. Also, political parties are indeed close to the citizens hence they feel legitimated to represent them.

- Civil society organisations themselves tend to admit that they represent only very specific, although important, issues and to be special-purpose organizations. Neither do they claim to represent large sections of the population (but rather ideas and values which are spread in the population to an unknown degree) nor do they really attempt to explain, educate and “raise the consciousness” of the population on structural issues (some exceptions can be noted in Hungary and France). At most they keep their membership informed and they try to represent their functional, sectoral or issue-specific values/ideas/interests.

- As people are not very interested in structural policy and SCOs are not very interested in mobilizing them on this issue, there is the real danger that partnership schemes will simply reproduce existing concentration arrangements which may not be particularly suited for regional development policy and which may thus represent an instance of (perhaps involuntary) capture of consultation mechanisms rather than of opening up to wider societal interests.

Therefore, in general terms, regional authorities feel that they already speak for civil society and that they have a double role of public policy enforcers and civil society representatives. As such, they tend to see civil society organisation as “competitors”. Undoubtedly, there’s a tension there which can create competition. However, in practice, civil society organisations need to collaborate with regional authorities rather than compete with them.

A number of interesting conclusions on civil society involvement in Structural funds can be drawn from empirical research:

- There is a mismatch between the level at which civil society actors are best structured and developed (i.e. either national or local or both) and the level at which they are requested to act (i.e. regional);
- Civil society is generally scarcely interested in regional development issues and, therefore, has problems with gathering and processing the relevant information, difficulties with developing real expertise, and frustration with the incapacity of making a real contribution;
- The above problems, which can be found also in governance systems where sub-national institutional and non-institutional actors are actively included into the decision-making process, are bigger when the governance system is only formally implemented while civil society marginalization is actively pursued in a number of more or less subtle ways;
- This may happen because neither governmental institutions nor, perhaps, the civil society organizations themselves feel completely legitimated to take part in a decision-making process of which they know so little and about which they care, in the end, so little;
- Nevertheless, virtually all civil society organisations feel that the best way to have an impact on structural developmental issues is to “play according to the rules of the game”, which means preferring provision of expert knowledge, submission of petitions, lobbying activities, media campaigns and participation in decision-making forums over direct action.
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Ray Phillips, Director of London Voluntary Sector Training Consortium (LVSTC), UK

Mr. Phillips’ presentation concentrated on the importance of technical assistance in the promotion of partnership.

He noted that the 4th cohesion report puts emphasis on partnership as bringing added value to service delivery connected to the Structural Funds. However, the reality is that there are still barriers of participation such as lack of information.

Another very important aspect is the low utilisation of Technical Assistance (TA). TA has been around for a long time now, and in Member States, it consists of around 4% of the funds. Also the European Commission has its own TA to allocate. However, TA is not yet recognised as a real tool for partnership development.

On the one hand, TA (in the form of funds) should be allocated to civil society organisations so that they are able to develop quality partnerships. On the other hand, they should be put in a position to compete for it so as to maximise its impact and utilisation.

However, in practice there are only very few good practices in this field. A typical example is the UK where TA has been used and allocated to civil society organisations for a long time. Another good example is Slovenia where there is a specific Ministry responsible for civil society which is currently allocating TA to organisations in Slovenia.

Mr. Phillips mentioned that more can be found out about the situation if we ask the following question to partners:

- Do you know who decides on TA in your country?
- Do you know where TA has been spent and on what?
- If all TA is spent by government agencies, why not wider?
- Have NGOs promoting social inclusion applied for TA?
- Is your government aware of such practice as in the UK?
- Are you aware of the wide scope of the new Regulations?
- How about starting a dialogue with your government on TA?
- Where can TA help in promoting social inclusion?
- If government says no, what's your strategy to get a rethink?

Moreover, these questions should be directed not only to governments but also to the European Commission who has TA to distribute but seems to have the same attitude as national governments.

Martin Konecny, Project Coordinator, CEE Bankwatch Network and Friends of the Earth Europe

Mr. Konecny’s presentation concerned the role of partnership in the programming of EU funds and presented some interesting findings and conclusions from the previous period. The global picture shows that even if there are a few improvements, there are still grounds for development since in many cases the hope of civil society organisations to be involved has just not materialized. Nevertheless, there are some positive, even though isolated, cases. For example, in Estonia real working groups for consultation and participation of civil society were formed; in Latvia the procedure was quite orderly and transparent and in Hungary public hearings were properly organised and enough time was given to partners for submitting comments. Moreover,
in several countries comments from NGOs at least received replies (even if negative in most cases).

Yet, these examples do not mean that the whole process in those countries was organised and managed correctly but only that aspects of those processes were done well. Hence they show good will on the part of the governments concerned.

However, there are also negative cases. For example, in Slovakia, around 25 civil society representatives tried to participate in the programming process of EU funds. However, the Slovak government gave very short periods of time (generally 5 days) for comments and then disregarded them completely. Moreover, there was no feedback on how NGO comments and contributions were dealt with. As a protest about this type of attitude from the government, civil society organisations withdrew from all monitoring forums and informed the media. The reaction from the government was to open up again towards civil society and organised new meetings with the aim of including some of their recommendations and contributions. However, because of upcoming elections in Slovakia, the government decided to speed up the process and even if civil society organisations tried to participate until the very end, finally they were not able, in practice, to influence the programming process.

The conclusions that can be drawn from these examples show that NGOs tend to be included in negotiations and consultations pro forma. They are rarely taken seriously which means that they cannot influence the contents of the programming documents. Usually decisions are taken behind closed doors which creates frustration among NGOs who invest money and resources in preparing and implementing their participation and do not even get reimbursed.

Mr. Konecny stressed that it is time for the Commission to act. On the one hand the Commission holds that the practical implementation of partnership is a matter that concerns the Member States and it cannot really dictate to them how to enable participation. On the other hand, clear guidelines on partnership could go a long way in improving the process in all Member States. For example, for the new Member States, the pre-accession fund was intended to be (according to the Commission) a learning process also on partnership and that by the time the real funds would come, the public authorities would have learned. However, this was not the case and after nearly 7 years, the situation on partnership is still the same. Hence, it is time for the Commission to step in and make sure the standards of the partnership principle are improved.

**Workshop II**

**Partnership - Making it Happen - How The Structural Funds Are Implemented**

Under Article 11, civil society is mentioned as a partner. However, in practice, there is still a long way to go before the partnership principles is fully implemented. Models currently do exist, but they are found mostly at a micro level. It is true that national strategies, evaluations and programmes are in place but how can we apply this on a wider level? This workshop consisted in the presentation of a number of examples exploring the range of instruments to make partnership operational. It can be noted already here that during the discussion that followed the end of the interventions, an interesting point was made which was discussed by both participants and the panel. It seems that NGOs are invited to participate in setting strategies plus monitoring and evaluation but then, if they choose to engage, they are excluded from being beneficiaries of the funds. This is a contradiction since other sectors (private, industry etc.) have the possibility of, for example, sitting in Managing Authorities and Monitoring Committees but they are also beneficiaries of the funds. Hence, for the NGOs there is a trade off between accessing the funds.
or being insiders and trying to bring change to the system. Discussions also revealed that the administrative nature of the structural funds does not seem to fit with the level of operation of NGOs and that access is an important issue because the nature of it determines how really democratic the process is.

The session was chaired by Tony Venables (ECAS' Director).

The panel was made up of the following experts:
Oto Potluka, Director, IREAS - Institute for Structural Policy, Czech Republic
Lorraine de Bouchony, Associate Director, Welcome Europe, France
Paolo Bonesso, Consultant, Piedmont. Region, Italy
Petra Francová, Head of the EU section, NROS - Civil Society Development Foundation, Czech Republic
Tina Micheli, Project Manager, CNVOS - Centre of non-governmental organisations of Slovenia
Thomas Andreén, Project Manager, Social Ekonomi, Sweden

**Oto Potluka, Director, IREAS - Institute for Structural Policy, Czech Republic**

Mr. Potluka stressed the fact that in the short-term, partnership is costly and time consuming. Hence, politicians do not want to use it to define policies. However, the results of partnership implementation are sustainable in the long term.

He concentrated on informing the audience about the Czech Republic’s experience with partnership in EU Policies, which can be divided into three phases:
- Pre-accession period
- The first Structural Funds assistance (2004 – 2006)
- The second Structural Funds assistance (2007 – 2013)

The first phase (i.e. pre-accession period) concerned tools such as Phare, ISPA, and Saphard. Those programmes were used as training tools for the Czech Republic and Czech NGOs who gained valuable knowledge on how to tackle EU funding. However, partnership was applied mainly at project level. The programming level helped to prepare the Czech Republic for meeting the Copenhagen criteria and meet the requirements of full EU membership.

The first Structural Funds assistance (i.e. 2004 – 2006) was the second phase of partnership application. EU legislation required active involvement of the public in the preparation of the programmes and afterwards in their implementation. Partnership was quite a new method not only for the Czech public administration and managing authorities, but also for the wider public. There was no (and there is not yet) a legal framework enabling cooperation in this field. Thus the programmes were prepared by officials within the ministries and partnership application was more formal than real concept.

On the NGO side, the situation in 2004-2006 was that they were characterized by the following three traits: (i) low capacities, (ii) weak position in negotiation with ministries and (iii) weak NGO associations. This meant that they could not push forward their visions and comments.

For the 2007-2013 period the situation seems to be slightly improved from both the managing authorities and wider public point of view. Public, private companies, municipalities and NGOs were in fact able to participate more actively during the 2007 – 2013 programming process in the Czech Republic.
However, civil society organisations do not feel they are sufficiently involved not even in important and highly relevant fields such as for example environment where a high degree of participation is desirable but not obligatory in the Czech Republic (for example in consultations concerning the Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy).

In conclusion, Mr. Potluka made two points:
- Firstly, partnership is primarily a political question because politicians are responsible for decisions and not NGOs. When NGOs try to participate, what response is there? It seems more a “pre-elections” type of response i.e. politicians listen to get votes, but this enthusiasm is not maintained after the elections.
- Secondly, policies should be compared and experiences embraced for any real partnerships to evolve and be maintained.

Lorraine de Bouchony, Associate Director, Welcome Europe, France
Ms. de Bouchony concentrated on how the Structural Funds are implemented in France and particularly the European Social Fund.

Historically, the procedure for managing the programmes under the Structural Funds in France included the development of partnerships essentially between the state and the local authorities (regional and municipal level). Currently, however, there seems to be a new tendency and its developments should be followed very closely. In fact, after having experienced partnerships with private organisations (only non-profit) in the period 2000 - 2006 for small measures and which saw NGOs take charge of ESF programmes, new formal procedures are being developed for the period 2007–2013. In addition to small ESF budgets being delegated to not-for-profit organisations in some regions, a new initiative is coming into play. A call for proposals has been published in the French Official Journal for the ESF for a global grant in favour of innovative transnational actions in the field of regional competitiveness and employment.

This initiative has been introduced as a consequence of two main factors:
- On the one hand, articles 3 to 8 of the ESF state that “innovation, partnership and transnationality will have to be an integral part of the operational programmes; the management authorities will need to determine the most appropriate activities and themes to be implemented”.
- The State recognizes its internal lack of competencies and takes into account the results from experiences such as the EQUAL initiative (rules on project management and expertise required for transnational cooperation etc.).

Hence, under this new call, the French authorities are selecting an external body to manage an important section of the ESF and which will act as an intermediary in the absorption of ESF funding. The selected body will be responsible for a number of activities such as: (i) the initiation of transnational projects (i.e. the core of the programme), (ii) leadership of the all processes / mechanism and (iii) technical assistance (project building and reporting procedures).

The selected public or private body will need to be an organisation acting at national level. The organisation will also need to be able to mobilise different potential operators and qualitative ones and so must have good communication tools. The organisation will have to encourage networking of the operators and assist them in the design and implementation of transnational
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projects and will need to have the added benefits of internal competent human resources who are used to leading innovative initiatives and forging partnerships.

Finally, Ms. de Bouchony summarised her overall opinion, and asked a few questions. Firstly, to ponder whether the new trends in place are a result of a recognition by the state of its own incapability; secondly to question the preference of an independent intermediate body within the process as opposed to a technical secretariat; thirdly to question whether such methods are a way to select public bodies while respecting competition law. In reality, although very few private non-profit organisations are able to answer such eligibility criteria, it would make sense to promote non-profit organisations to be recognised as such potential bodies as a progressive way of thinking regarding partnerships.

Paolo Bonesso, Consultant, Piedmont Region, Italy

Mr. Bonesso focused his intervention on the application of project cycle management in the Piedmont Region.

The starting point was the first round of Equal initiatives projects in July 2001 in Piedmont. Mr Bonesso came to the conclusion that many of the projects did not work out, the reasons for this being: (i) the poor involvement of the beneficiaries in the process, (ii) the poor diagnosis of the problems the beneficiaries were affected by, (iii) the confusion between objectives and activities (iv) the lack of measurable indicators for objectives and (v) the poor identification of assumptions.

As a result, two important questions arise: first, how do project promoters think they can help people if they do not know people? Second, how do we struggle against problems if we do not know what they are? The basic conclusion was that too often, “love” for money overrides much of what is going on and so many mistakes have been made which however can only be attributed to bad practice, not bad luck.

On the basis of the experience from the EQUAL initiative, the relevant authorities initiated a process of strengthening of the regional department responsible (i.e. the Piedmont Region’s Department for Vocational Training and Labour). To do so, three matrixes were adopted for the different institutional levels. First, the “WHAT” matrix for service delivery to the final beneficiaries (i.e. the project matrix). Such matrix consists in a logical framework describing what should happen to support beneficiaries in alleviating their concerns. Second, the “HOW” matrix for implementing organisations as service deliverers (i.e. the matrix of the Equal Development Partnerships “DPs”). Third, the “SUPPORT” matrix for the Project Management Unit, responsible for the co-ordination of the DPs (the matrix of the Equal Unit in Piedmont Region). In actual fact, the “WHAT” matrix should be considered as the final result of the “HOW” and “SUPPORT” matrixes: any support organisation (the Equal Unit in Piedmont Region) has to identify elements that need to be strengthened in order to provide adequate support to strengthen the implementing organisation (Equal DPs). Furthermore, each implementing organisation (Equal DPs,) has to identify elements needed to create a professional organisation with competence and capability to implement the project. To be most effective, all such activities must be well organised, and interdependent to be a success.

The question the regional Department responsible for Equal has to ask itself is: “Why does the Equal Unit Staff need the support?” The answer is: “Because the staff needs to have the necessary capacities, competences and capabilities” For example, advisory capacity: project
evaluation, consultancy on PCM, support of the running projects; quality control: mission, priority setting, deadline setting, reflection on effectiveness and impact; finance: capability in supporting DPs for any financial matter: expense certifications, statements, accounts, financial reports; co-ordination: communication lines and mechanisms for internal and external co-ordination evaluation of the quality of the projects; public relations, promotion and monitoring and finally mechanism, system, organisation.

The two main results have been the following:
- Directly linked to Equal: the DPs that have adopted PCM have been more effective in managing projects and are able to create new and better jobs for those who have difficulties in being integrated or re-integrated into the labour market and to enforce stable employment for those suffering from unequal treatment at work.
- Indirectly linked to the Equal experience: the development of innovative instruments, tools, products, methodologies, skills of professionals operating in the labour and social field that have demonstrated to be effective in Equal have been driven or will be driven into the regional catalogue of services and tools and into the matrix of the skills of the professionals operating in the employment and social fields.

Petra Francová, Head of the EU section, NROS - Civil Society Development Foundation, Czech Republic
Ms. Francová mainly spoke about the issue of partnership versus lobbying whilst using Czech case studies as examples. Firstly, she gave some background information on the organisation she represents so as better understand the context of the proposed ideas. NROS is the biggest Czech foundation which has had so far an intermediary function in re-granting EU funds. Such grants are seen as a tool to help and achieve change. As such, 45 m€ was re-granted to NGOs to develop 7,200 projects so far. The continuation of global grants contributes an important amount to the social economy. NROS partakes in the following activities (i) implements transition facility programmes (ii) is an intermediary body for block grant for NGOs from EEA/Norwegian Financial Mechanisms (iii) organises most recognised charity projects in the country (iv) is a member of the International Youth Foundation (v) is an intermediary body for two Global Grants (ESF) and (vi) is involved in the capacity building of small NGOs who provide social services to socially excluded people or to those at risk of social exclusion. Their latest call for proposal was focused on financial management (which is a typical NGO weakness) and they are currently making an effort to have a similar small grants funding in the new programming period.

Secondly, Ms. Francova described the how the negotiations on operational programmes functioned taking the case study of the social economy. When negotiating Operational Programmes, the following steps were taken:

1. Finding a key organisation able to negotiate
2. Gathering a group with the same interest
3. Agreeing a common procedure for negotiating
4. Settling key words and identifying common interest with officers
5. Deciding whom to approach and how
6. Being positive, giving examples, offering help.
7. Gaining the approval of managers and contacting officers working on the OPs
8. Controlling every new draft to check whether the specific subject was not left out.
9. Being persistent and trying to understand officers’ needs. Finding common interests with them.
Ms Francová pointed out examples of how the above steps have been taken also through the creation of working groups on social work which were very pro-active. Those who have been successful in getting approval managed to push through social agendas. Such groups have even arranged meetings with deputies and success has been evident with two programmes: the Operational Programme Human Resources and Employment (ESF) and the Integrated Operational Programme (ERDF). However, the downside is that despite such successes, the grant scheme may freeze the social economy in the Czech Republic because it is currently not working well. So yes, there is money but there are also limitations and protocol to follow. As such the best thing to do now is keep an eye on complements, but also to try and change the grant scheme on social economy.

On the argument of partnership vs. lobbying Ms. Francová made the point that actually both are necessary. Systematic lobbying is essential in order to keep NGO issues on the agenda and also because lobbying makes things happen. Partnership is important because it provides an official framework.

Tina Micheli, Project Manager, CNVOS - Centre of non-governmental organisations of Slovenia
Ms. Micheli spoke about Structural Funds 2007-2013 for NGOs in Slovenia and how the partnership principle has been implemented in Slovenia.

Substantial financial resources for NGOs come from the funds because there has been recognition of the developmental potential of NGOs at national level. The Government’s intention is to ‘positively influence development of the non-governmental sector’.

Currently, the Operational Programme for the development of human resources is such that overall: 7% of resources (53 million EUR) are put aside for NGO activities. Of that, 13 million EUR is reserved exclusively for NGOs as a result of the promotion of the development of NGOs, Civil and Social dialogue for 2007-2013. The idea is to ensure improvement of the staff structure and capacity of those employed in the NGO sector; development and functioning of the NGO networks according to priority areas; provide support for programmes for the strengthening of civil and social dialogue and support for projects concerning the promotion of the NGO sector and good practices. The NGO sector in Slovenia is currently weak as shown by the following statistics on employment:

• 0.53% of all active population in Slovenia (average: 4.9%; comparison: Czech Republic 2.8%, France 4.9%, Sweden 2.5%);
• 0.74% if other forms of paid work such as student or honorary work are included
• 80% of NGOs have no employees (only volunteers)

Secondly, Ms. Micheli described the involvement of Slovenian civil society organisations and hence the implementation of the partnership principle in the preparation phase of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme.

The consultations with NGOs were conducted both before and after the presentation of the draft Operational Programmes in the form of public consultations, special meetings with NGOs as well as through the Council on Sustainable Development which is the central advisory body of the Government devoted to dialogue with civil society and social partners on key questions regarding sustainable development (e.g. social, economic and environmental).
During the consultations, NGOs proposed some concrete suggestions for more systematic inclusion of the non-governmental sector in the implementation of the development projects and co-financing of activities of NGOs. During the consultations, the NGO sector underlined the several problems it faces in terms, for example the need for a larger share of resources exclusively for NGO sector (especially for the purpose of employment and strengthening its administrative efficiency and capacity) and the financial difficulties linked to the lack of pre-financing.

Although NGOs were actively involved in the consultation on the Operational Programmes and the government was very responsive to their suggestions, the content of the process itself was not as clear as it should have been – especially when the most crucial priority in OP HRD was changed during the process and ‘social dialogue’ was added to what became “Promotion of the development of NGOs, Civil and Social dialogue”.

Nevertheless, NGOs were involved in elaborating suggestions for more concrete sub-programmes of the priority orientation of Promotion of the development of NGOs, Civil and Social dialogue through the identification of Target Projects for Co-funding the NGO sector from the EU Structural Funds in the 2007-2013 period. These suggestions were intended to provide guidelines for the Ministry of Public Administration that will issue the calls for tender within the priority orientation. A consequence was that the Ministry included in the 2007 call the identification of target projects supporting programme activities relating to the dialogue between the Government and NGOs.

As the first calls for proposals for co-financing NGO projects from Structural Funds are expected in the fall 2007 - and there are still some open questions such as who will provide technical assistance or how the pre-financing is going to be arranged - it is still too early to assess implementation aspects. What has already been established, however, is that NGOs will have their representatives in the Monitoring Committees for the three Operational Programmes. This was also the case in the previous programming period 2004-2006, where NGOs had their representative in the Monitoring committee of the EQUAL initiative.

Based on the volume of structural funds for NGOs and their active involvement in identification of concrete target projects - and if allocation provisions will take into consideration specific capacities of NGOs – it can be concluded that structural funds may indeed represent a great opportunity for the sector's development in Slovenia in the 2007-2013 period.

Thomas Andreén, Project Manager, Social Ekonomi, Sweden
Thomas Andreén gave a brief overview of the situation in Sweden, citing relevant examples and noting developments and ideas for the future.

He believes that, most importantly, money is needed from all sectors, especially the private sector. In Sweden, the social economy is mostly made up of NGOs, cooperatives, foundations etc. in particular, 80% of social economy organisations are NGOs and almost 80% of those are active in the sport sector. Volunteering is big in Sweden.

Social economy involvement in the Structural Funds was characterised by a slow start particularly in the previous programming period. Yet, social economy organisations did get involved in the Leader+ programme and then got very much involved in EQUAL. In fact, before 2000, the third sector was not active and most of the time it was not invited to activities for growth and jobs. Such responsibilities seemed to belong to the public and private sector only.
However, in 2001 there were 12 different regions managing Leader+ projects and other big Structural funds projects started as well. The biggest opportunity was offered by Object 3, with one small part specialised for Social economy and the third sector. Then, the Equal programme started in 2003. For all this it was necessary to bring people from NGO’s and the Social economy into different partnership. And they did start taking part very successfully.

What is needed is more trust within the NGO sector, more important projects (NGOs tend to get only small projects) and more networking activities. Before the year 2000, the sector was rather small and inactive. After joining the European Union, it began to take part in partnerships but this has proven to be time consuming and time management is essential to NGOs. Sweden is changing and regions are growing. Maybe, the NGOs in Sweden are not so great at team work, which is where Social Ekonomi comes in. We have seen the development of new organisations, and also umbrella organisations have mushroomed. Social Ekonomi hopes to find a way to cooperate together and learn about the European Union and other countries.

The future vision is 15 billion (Swedish currency) in grants being allocated to social economy organisations; NGOs working together or else focus on corporate organisations in the biggest arenas, for example, countryside projects; more transnational cooperation and more networking type of activities also.

Workshop III
The Added Value of Partnership – Looking at Evaluation Results

This session focused on methods to evaluate partnerships and their potential added value and multiplier effects. Examples from outside the structural funds were also taken into consideration to be able to assess what the EU can learn from other international organisations, particularly OECD.

The session was chaired by Floriana Nappini (Project Manager at ECAS).

The panel was made up of the following experts:
Sue Webb, Manager, Community development foundation, UK
Gabriela Miranda, Policy Analyst, OECD Local Economic and Employment Development Programme
Denis Stokkink, President, European think tank “Pour la Solidarité”
Stephanie Lang, European Regional Policy Officer, WWF European Policy Office
Elodie Fazi, Policy Officer, EAPN

Sue Webb, Manager, Community development foundation, UK
Sue Webb presented partnership as a European issue and focused on three main points:
• Partnership – Participation
• Evaluation - Models
• The role of Community Development

The year 2007 is the year of delivery for EU cohesion policy. More than 450 national, regional and cross-border programmes for the period 2007-2013 with a total investment of about EUR 500 billion of public and private funding will be put in place. In May the Commission issued the 4th Report on Economic and Social Cohesion to provide a thorough insight into the current situation and the progress made towards achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU region. Since the third Cohesion Report the role of partnership has received a greater
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recognition. Policy makers should understand what the potential of partnership is, and despite it being complex, time consuming and difficult it can identify the main problems and help ameliorate or solve them.

What is participation within the concept of partnership? Participation is a fundamental political element of democracy consisting in the process of directly involving people. Participation can be seen from different perspectives: as a more efficient and effective way of developing and implementing projects and programmes or as fundamentally political, which affects the way people share power in relation to decisions that affect them. Its role can be also regarded as challenging and changing relationships, so those affected by policy are no longer targets but joint designers.

Evaluation of partnership is connected with issues of:

- Action focus: how partnership establishes its aims, priorities and outcomes and agrees actions leading to demonstrable improvements against measurable targets. Questions are focused on vision, values, the added value being contributed, identification of local needs, encouraging innovation and having a positive impact on service delivery.

- Efficiency: how resources are matched to plans, how the partnership manages its performance in relation to its aims and objectives and how it ensures regular financial reports, shares information and makes sure partners deliver what they have signed up for.

- Inclusiveness: how the partnership actively involves the public, private, community and voluntary sectors, civil society in open and transparent decision making, how the partnership learns together and encourages learning and development across all sectors and makes use of the relationships, skills and knowledge of all its members.

Community development is an important aspect connected with partnership which concerns enabling and empowering others and should exist across all programs and projects. There is a need for greater empowerment since the role of governments is changing and this change has to be driven bottom-up. Society relies on Community development but it is still not well known. It contributes to equity building, inclusiveness, participation and cohesion amongst people and their organisations. What is more, Community development helps people find common causes on issues that affect them and work together, build the strength and independence of groups or organisations, empower people to influence public policies and services and advice public authorities on community needs.

If there was no Community development there would be problems of participation, inclusion and poor social capital as well as lack of information and little involvement of public services. What is more, sections of the local population would not be able to participate in community activities because of prejudices, assumptions and cultural differences would not be tackled. Community representatives would not be properly selected and held accountable and public agencies or departments that need to engage with local communities would be unaware of each other's efforts, lack insight into how communities work and would have few channels for dialogue with them.
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Gabriela Miranda, Policy Analyst, OECD - Local Economic and Employment Development Programme (LEED)

LEED works within the OECD on all the components of successful integrated strategies for sustainable economic, employment and social development at local level. It focuses on employment and skills, entrepreneurship, innovation, and small business development, economic inclusion and social cohesion and governance. It supported by the Austrian Government. Innovation, skills, entrepreneurship and social cohesion are the main drivers of growth. But governments cannot adequately support drivers of growth on their own and that is why they need partnerships.

The OECD has released an Action Statement on Partnerships which aims to enhance governance by improving the dialogue and cooperation between policy makers and other stakeholders, at local, regional and national levels and to enhance economic development, social cohesion, environmental sustainability and the quality of life.

The OECD has helped implement a number of partnerships throughout the world. From the evaluation of such partnerships a number of important conclusions have been drawn:

Partnerships bring together diverse local partners and policy areas and they improve vertical communication between policy makers from different governance levels.
→ The Territorial Employment Pact Berlin-Neukölln (Germany) recognises that acting locally has to be supported by all levels of governance.

Partnerships facilitate the development of cross-cutting perspectives and integrated approaches to multi-dimensional problems and support the better adaptation of policies to local circumstances, needs and opportunities.
→ The Ballyhoura Partnership (Ireland) operating in a rural area, needs to influence policy to ensure that national policies have rural issues on the agenda and that such policies are ‘rural proofed’ at the development stage.

Moreover, partnerships provide leadership, build trust and consensus on priorities and identify the potential conflicts and synergies between different policies.
→ The Dublin Inner City Partnership (Ireland) takes the view that influencing the content of policy to better meet the needs of local residents is also likely to influence the process of policy making; and recognises that this may mean conflict with government over certain issues.

They also integrate the concerns of civil society and the private sector into strategic planning exercises and share good practice and offer know-how from practical experience on what works and what does not.
→ Vibrant Communities Calgary Partnership (Canada) is concerned with poverty alleviation and sees influencing policy as major objective because existing policies of government agencies are neither systematic or systemic.

In order to enhance their influence on public policy, partnerships must be based on a strong multi-level collaboration (i.e. involvement and consultation of stakeholders from various government levels) and must promote cross-sector collaboration (i.e. involvement of stakeholders from various economic sectors/branches).
Denis Stokkink, President, European think tank “Pour la Solidarité”

Based on the idea that social cohesion, participatory democracy and sustainable development are fundamental issues connected with structural funds, Mr. Stokkink made 3 introductory remarks about evaluation:

→ Evaluation must be carried out from the very beginning of the project, because it is pointless once the partnership and the project are finished. It should automatically start when a project is being conceived. Also, evaluation of the partnership itself (and not only of the project) should be carried out at the beginning of every project.
→ When planning a project and a partnership, or when evaluating them, it is essential to bear in mind the objectives of the EU and in particular the Lisbon strategy.
→ At the level of evaluation is should be clear that a partnership is not a series of people but it is more than the sum of its parts.

He concluded with the following recommendations:

A partnership should always show its internal diversity. This aspect always needs to be evaluated. Hence, for example, evaluations should always include gender indicators.
Social innovation should always be a key.
Reproducibility is also a very important aspect. Every partnership and project experience should be reproducible and usable by others.
Projects need full involvement of EU citizens. Project promoters need to open up completely to participative democracy.

Stephanie Lang, European Regional Policy Officer, WWF European Policy Office

Ms. Lang begun her intervention by introducing the audience to WWF objectives and interests concerning the Structural Funds.
WWF works to ensure that EU funding delivers on sustainable development goals and to guarantee that sufficient funds are channelled to the implementation of key EU environmental and conservation targets, especially regarding the implementation of the Habitats and the Water Framework directives and the Kyoto goals. At the same time, WWF works to stop damaging projects and to fight against the misuse of EU funds.

Ms. Lang then made a few remarks concerning aspects of evaluation of the programming process for 2007-2013 period based on WWF's researches, studies and direct experience:

- In a majority of member states analysed, it appears to be standard procedure to involve environmental authorities in the programming for Regional Funding. The procedures to involve this particular type of authorities may be different, but environmental authorities are not neglected in the programming. It was sometimes difficult to assess to what extent the contributions of environmental authorities are ultimately influential, but they seem to play a well-established role in most of the analysed member states.

- Environmental NGOs across the member states analysed face various degrees of participation: at one end is Portugal, where NGOs were not involved, while at the other end of the spectrum is Latvia, where environmental NGO representatives were even present in the bilateral Commission/Member State negotiation of programming documents. All other stages between these extremes are represented by the member states analysed. In general, some form of
pressure from the Commission side appears to be very helpful in securing the inclusion of environmental NGOs.

- It seems to be the case that the environmental NGO comments are taken seriously only regarding the environmental OPs. So, if environmental NGOs still work mostly on the Environment OP, that means that participation and consultation occur within the context of vertical integration, not horizontal. It also means that consultation is taking place only when the same “communities” talk to each other, environmental stakeholders to environmental stakeholders, and not throughout the whole programming process.

- When environmental NGOs are indeed actively involved in the development of the National Strategic Reference Frameworks, the results are quite difficult to assess. In the majority of analysed member states, they have the opportunity to comment on various drafting stages of the strategic document. With some exceptions, NGOs had a chance to participate and engage in commenting upon the document drafts. The problem then emerged that there were either very tight deadlines or no deadlines at all as the documents were only presented during consultation conferences. Yet participation and consultation can only have an effect and result if the process is well organised and information is well managed.

- While environmental NGOs are still relatively happy with their opportunities to make comments, there is quite a strong concern about what actually happens to those comments. Transparent mechanisms to process comments are rare and, even then, comments are not necessarily taken into consideration. Even if the authorities are appreciative of the NGO comments, there is usually no feedback on how they are handled or included in the final documents. Hence the stakeholders suspect that the authorities do not take them into account. A well co-ordinated consultation would generate and build trust among stakeholders and offer the basis for better co-operation in the future.

Ms. Lang concluded by highlighting the current main challenges of partnership:

- No binding quality standards
- Not systematically applied Europe-wide and along the whole policy programming, implementation and evaluation
- Quality and design of partnership depend a lot on good-will and political situation
- Need an intensive knowledge management
- Cost-intensive (training, time to prepare)
- No refund of direct costs (travel, copy, overnight stay for meetings)

**Elodie Fazi, Policy Officer, EAPN**

Structural funds have a great potential for and can have a significant impact on social inclusion. Partnership at all level (planning - consultation on programming, monitoring - participation in monitoring committees and - evaluation) is an essential tool to ensure this potential is fully exploited and the positive impact is maximized.

Partnership in structural funds (at both programming and project level), is crucial as it means acknowledging the added value of involving all stakeholders, including NGOs. Partnership is also needed to support democracy and legitimacy, more transparency and better information about structural funds as well as their better absorption.
As far as delivery of structural funds is concerned, NGOs should be considered as partners. They can adapt to the needs of excluded groups, and they contribute with a multi-dimensional and integrated approach to inclusion (which is strongly needed in Structural Funds funded projects), they are used to working on innovative and targeted projects and they contribute to better absorption of funds.

However, there are a number of obstacles to the correct implementation of partnership and this is true particularly for NGOs. For example, implementation of Article 11 might not be as straightforward as it should be; there is increasingly a greater focus on the Lisbon strategy and it is not all clear what place is left for issues more related to inclusion; the end of the EQUAL programme is indeed problematic for NGOs. Another obstacle is that NGOs are not always able to monitor all the programmes (monitoring by NGOs in the 2000-2006 period took place only in around half of the Member States). Moreover, a number of issues still need to be addressed such the widespread lack of information, the lack of resources in application rounds and follow-ups and the difficulties in using the funds for “micro-projects”.

Possible solutions might to train civil society organizations to enable them to access the funds (as it has successfully happened in the UK, Malta and Poland), or provide global grants and “micro-projects” funding (as for example in UK, Hungary, Spain and Portugal).

The added value of partnership in Structural Funds has been acknowledged and has been showed by several evaluation activities such as the EQUAL evaluation carried out by a group of Managing Authorities (June 2006), partnership in the 2000-2006 programming period and the evaluation of the Objective 3 Global Grants Programme in UK. However, to maximize the impact of the results of such evaluation activities, dissemination of information, of lessons learned and good practice needs to be improved.

To conclude, Ms. Fazi noted that partnership needs time, commitment and resources. It is a long learning process, but it is possible to learn the lesson from 2000-2006, especially from EQUAL, and improve the experience gained at EU, national, regional and local level.

This forum was the second organised by ECAS in the context of the “Open Days”. By comparison with the first forum in 2006, it attracted far more participants from the third sector and much more debate at all sessions with the audience. It succeeded in bringing together evidence of how the partnership principle is being applied with a number of practical examples and national reports. But, the evidence remains scattered, so that the forum is being followed up by gathering more evidence and filling the gaps on the basis of a questionnaire.

Do not hesitate to give us your comments, ideas or suggestions for the next forum in 2008.
OPEN DAYS FOR REGIONS AND CITIES

SPEECH BY MARIO MONTI, ECAS CHAIRMAN

3 Questions about partnership in EU Cohesion policy

Civil society forum, Brussels 9 October

The main focus of this civil society forum, which is becoming a regular feature of the ‘Open days’ is on the partnership principle. Two years ago, I opened a similar forum in Turin, and at that time it seemed likely that the partnership principle would be seriously undermined with the Council of ministers resisting the idea that civil society or NGOs should be included. Fortunately, under pressure from NGOs themselves, the Commission and the European Parliament, the Council eventually gave way. The general regulation on the funds states in article 11 that member states have a duty to put in place an extensive partnership including “any other appropriate body representing civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women”. For ECAS and other European associations, the change is important: from being on the outside two years ago, we are now in the inside with NGOs mentioned for the first time in the basic regulation.

I also think judging from the message from Danuta Hubner that we can count on the political support of the European Commission. The Commissioner sees partnership as making cohesion policy more credible in the eyes of the public and a means to encourage better coordination, clarity and full use of the funds. She also makes the point that the partnership approach has become more important in a policy which sets out both to be more local and better able to adapt the economy to global change. Here, I would like to point out the valuable role NGOs play in easing change and helping communities to adapt. They are not the obstacle: they are part of the solution, because they are often the first to detect new social challenges caused by economic change.
I would like to ask three questions:

**Do we need partnership?**

“Yes”. An example of this would be migration. As a result of enlargement, there are across some border regions and towards countries like the UK or Ireland, which have opened up their labour markets, significant and above all rapid movements of workers from new to old member states. Economists point out that enlargement has not changed the overall picture of the movement of people in the Union, which remains low. This general message will not be believed by the public, because it is often contradicted by real or perceived local problems. Here, partnership is not just added value, but the only way to make an impact. At ECAS, we provide legal advice to EU migrants, and have links to national citizens’ advice services, but are conscious this is not enough. A partnership or even a one-stop shop is needed, so that migrants find access to a full range of services which can help them integrate from the small things which can be very difficult in a new country to contracts, working conditions, language learning, housing etc. Furthermore, such clusters should not be isolated. Public and private stakeholders working in partnership should be linked across countries of origin and countries of destination. One of the lessons from the 2006 year of workers mobility was that 80% of problems can be more easily solved before departure and need not be exported.

**Do we know how to implement partnership?**

“Yes again”. It is not necessary to reinvent the wheel, because there is long experience in the structural fund operations, and in particular programmes such as Leader and Equal, even though they have disappeared as separate programmes. Let us hope that as they are absorbed in the core structural funds activities, their lessons of best practice on partnership will survive and also influence the mainstream programmes. I think it is significant that the last testament of a group of managing authorities about partnership guidelines arising from Equal that is to say a governmental initiative, is not so different from the approach and recommendations of NGOs. Work has also been done by ECAS, particularly in new member states, the European anti-poverty network and environmental NGOs. The forum here in October 2006 helped us pool such information. The next step might be for the Commission to consolidate these lessons and produce guidelines on partnership. Here, it is a question of applying findings from specific
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projects to a much wider context of putting in place the strategy, then the programmes and evaluating their results.

**How well has the partnership principle been applied in practice in setting in place the 2007-2013 funds?**

I wish I could reply positively to this third question, and then we would probably not need this forum and your active presence to help us find answers. As a former Commissioner, I can well imagine it is difficult enough to assess for example how well consultation works across the EU Institutions, let alone how it functions nationally and regionally under more decentralised policies. Such an exercise involves taking into account very real differences of national and regional governance. We are beginning to collect information, and will receive more today, and there is also a questionnaire you can fill in and take home for others. But how to aggregate and then evaluate feedback across 27 member states and their regions remains an open question.

The three questions correspond to main themes in the two sessions this morning and the third in the late afternoon. I should also mention that tomorrow ECAS is organising an event to examine the partnership principle in the wider context of EU accession and neighbourhood policy. The link between the two is that article 11 in the structural funds, also applies to cross-border operations with the European Union’s neighbours. In other words, a small change has occurred, but it has the potential to produce much larger ones within the EU and beyond.