

RECOMMENDATIONS ON NGO INVOLVEMENT IN STRUCTURAL FUNDS OPERATION

position paper of conference on „Promoting effective involvement of environmental citizens organisations in the implementation and monitoring of Structural Fund assistance in new Member States”, Budapest, April 27, 2003

The European Union promotes a wide and effective partnership in Structural Funds assistance with social and other relevant partners (including organisations working on environment) on the national and regional level. Partnership should cover the area of preparation, financing, monitoring and evaluation of Structural Funds assistance. Aarhus Convention also requires effective public participation in development of plans, programs and policies related to environment.

The public participation is a key component of increasing the quality of programming documents and ensuring their acceptance by the citizens. Environmental NGOs can contribute to the process by providing support such as additional expertise, on the ground knowledge, networking and other.

The time of accession is getting closer and the experiences of first programming could be gathered and evaluated. As environmental NGOs from accession countries and current member states, we recommend national authorities and the European institutions the following actions to implement the partnership principle of EU regional policy:

1. Involvement of NGOs in the planning process

For ensuring the partnership-based planning process the national authorities should

- inform the public about process of programming, its steps, calendar and time-scale properly in advance;
- publish all programming documents, including environmental ex-ante evaluations, of NDP and OPs for the wider public and NGOs;
- provide information about European Commission comments on NDP and OPs for the public and NGOs, and consult NGOs on the modification of programming documents;
- invite NGOs, especially environmental citizen organisations, to planning teams preparing the Programme Complements, and ensure sufficient time and proper process.

2. Participation of citizens organisations in decision on financing, monitoring and evaluation of Structural Funds assistance

For a transparent and democratic financing and for the sustainable use of EU funds the national authorities should

- provide timely and full info regarding Structural Fund operation for public and especially NGO communities,
- involve representatives of environmental NGOs selected by NGO community itself for each Monitoring Committee of the Community Support Framework and the Operational Programmes;
- all the members of the Monitoring Committee should have equal rights, the decisions should be based on consensus;
- invite NGOs to Management and Project Selection Committees of Operational Programmes with clear and transparent rules of decisions;
- establish a separate committee for assisting environmental impact assessment of project proposals.

3. Building NGO capacities for partnership

Using domestic resources and technical assistance measures of Structural Funds the national authorities should

- support the role of the national and regional networks of NGOs, which took the task to disseminate information on regional policy and to promote public participation in programming, management, monitoring and evaluation of Structural Funds assistance;
- build capacity of NGOs by training, consultancy and financial assistance in project preparation for Structural Funds,

4. Partnership in project development and implementation

The national authorities should

- design financial and administrative tools enabling NGOs (as significantly financially weak beneficiaries) to operate EU funded projects;
- include partnership with several stakeholders, especially with NGOs, into the Programme Complements as a one of the scoring criteria within the project selection process.

5. Strengthen the legal framework of the public participation

National authorities should issue clear, binding, enforceable regulations on public participation for the programming and implementation of regional policy.

6. Role of European Institution in enforcing public participation in regional policy

The European Commission and Council should issue detailed and binding regulations on public participation in regional policy decisions based on Aarhus Convention for all member states and all EU funds, including the Cohesion Fund.