



# Elements for a European Code of Conduct on Partnership

## Response to the Commission's staff working document

The next programming period presents an opportunity to strengthen multi-level governance in cohesion policy. The success of the programmes will depend on the strength of the partnerships. To promote an integrated approach and ensure the delivery of Europe 2020 it is essential that Europe's major cities are directly involved in those partnerships throughout the programming cycle, together with member states and regions. To this end, we need a strong and clear code of conduct that can support a legally-binding requirement in the Common Provisions Regulation to involve cities in the partnership contracts.

### **A direct involvement of cities in the partnership contracts**

We support the Commission's explicit mention of urban authorities in article 5 of the draft Common Provisions Regulation. If backed by a strong code of conduct on partnership, this can help the direct involvement of cities in the partnership contracts.

The staff working document recognises that closer cooperation between all national, regional and local authorities is essential to ensure a coherent and integrated approach to implementation of funds. Promoting an integrated approach linking Europe 2020 with regional and local actors will also require improved coordination across different territorial levels. The crucial role of regional and local authorities as the public authorities closest to the ground is also underlined, together with their role in delivering the Europe 2020 strategy.

The partnership contracts will clearly be key to developing this integrated approach. Due to the central role cities play in delivering territorial cohesion and development they must be equal partners to regions in the partnerships. Their knowledge of their own metropolitan economy, its needs and opportunities, will make limited funding stretch as far as possible, with the greatest potential impact.

We welcome the Liverpool City Region example in the working document. The approach of the city region has helped ensure cross-sector support to identify priorities for ERDF investments and that structural funds investments target local challenges. The example demonstrates that cities are well experienced in the partnership approach locally and will be key partners to promote an integrated approach.

However, the Commission also suggests that regions should play a leading role in developing the partnership contracts nationally, and only subsequently should they (regions/managing authorities) involve local authorities, including cities. Furthermore member states would only be requested to ensure the direct involvement of those cities where integrated territorial investments (ITIs) will be implemented.

This will not be sufficient. If the aims are effective multi-level governance, coherent strategies and more value for money, the leaders and mayors of Europe's major cities must be involved directly in the process nationally to define and develop the partnership contracts. Involving cities via the national associations of regional and local authorities alone will not provide an adequate solution.

Often the umbrella organisations do not adequately reflect the needs of larger cities. This approach to partnership would undermine article 5 of the draft regulation and only lead to strategically significant city authorities continuing to find themselves excluded from far-reaching investment decisions.

## **Meaningful involvement of cities throughout the programming cycle**

The working document details the specific role of public authorities, including cities with a public mandate and democratic legitimacy, in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programmes. It will be important that the processes in relation to operational programmes and partnership contracts nationally provide sufficient time at each of these stages for a meaningful involvement of the partners.

To this end, we welcome the proposed minimum requirements for procedures for the partnership and for reporting on the actual involvement of partners, including the partners' views and satisfaction. However they should not reduce the code of conduct to a simple guide on good consultations.

City authorities must also be directly involved in the discussions on the criteria for selecting cities that will implement ITIs, and on how the ITIs will be delegated. A top-down process that only involves the cities once those decisions have been taken will not ensure adequate ownership and effective results in the implementation phase.

## **A code of conduct that makes a difference**

It is clear that the impact of the code of conduct will depend on both the formal status of the final code and on the Commission's ability to push for better partnerships where they are not adequately implemented.

The Commission proposes that the code of conduct could 'supplement' the Common Provisions Regulation. It remains essential that the partnership provisions in the regulation are clear, strong and detailed to encourage the use of rather than undermine the code of conduct. EURO CITIES has consequently argued in favour of the direct involvement of cities in developing the partnership contracts. A legally binding requirement to do so in the Common Provisions Regulation, supported by a code of conduct actively promoted by the Commission to guide member states through the programming phases, could help ensure a real change in terms of sub-regional involvement and multi-level governance in the next programming period.

If the European institutions and member states do not take the opportunity now to engage meaningfully with Europe's major cities we run the very real risk that Europe's 2020 ambitions will remain a vision only. Europe's global competitiveness depends on ambitious investment in our metropolitan economies and territories. With a fairer share of support, metropolitan Europe is capable of delivering the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth that will benefit all Europeans.