



Local & Regional  
Europe

# Partnership Agreements

**CEMR Survey Report on “Involvement of national associations of LRAs in the Partnership Agreement preparations”**

| April 2013

## Purpose

The purpose of this report is to identify the state of play of local and regional authority associations involvement in the preparation of the Partnership Agreement. The last December agreement on the Partnership Agreement provisions for the European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF) and the publication of the draft European Code of Conduct, which will have a statutory nature, have been a success for the campaigning of CEMR to ensure that the new funds will have strong partnership provisions for Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs).

The officers of national associations of local and regional authorities<sup>1</sup> that are members of the Future of EU Cohesion Focus Group of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) are also often part of the negotiation teams that are currently preparing the Partnership Agreement in their respective Member States (MS).

Therefore, and following an earlier request by the Commission, the Focus Group (FG) issued a survey to officers enquiring on the participation of national associations in the preparation of the Partnership Agreement. The main questions asked have been:

- \*Who has the responsibility of drafting /coordinating PA in your MS?
- \* What is the development stage reached as of late February?
- \* What is the involvement of local government to date?
- \* What is the engagement format for the national association?
- \* Best practices/ suggestions/ concerns on how partnership is working in your MS
- \* What are the key priorities? Will your MS Partnership Agreement (PA) have a special priority on (Integrated) Territorial/Local Development? If so, in what form?

*This reports also benefits from a number of discussions at the CEMR Cohesion Focus Group meetings and bilateral exchanges. Survey answers have been collected by the Group´s chair Serafin Pazos-Vidal. Any omission or misreporting is under his responsibility.*

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<sup>1</sup> Member States surveyed/reported: Sweden, Germany, Czech Republic, UK (Scotland, England, Wales), Finland, Romania, Spain (Catalonia), Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium (Flanders), Estonia, Latvia.

## Main Findings:

1. Partnership has markedly improved in the majority of cases.
2. Such improvements are unrelated to the length of experience of using ESIF or the constitutional structure of the country.
3. National Associations of local and regional authorities are involved in all reported cases.
4. However, the degree of involvement ranges from full involvement in decision making in full respect of the Code of Conduct (4), partial partnership (6) to mainly a stakeholder role (2) or a basic public consultation (1).
5. In all but two cases (UK, BE) the process is led by central government ministries.
6. In all reported cases there is a board at central level gathering officials of the key ministries.
7. However, beyond the purely strategic decisions and the legally binding common provisions of the ESIF that need to be reflected in the PA the majority of decisions continue to be managed among ministerial vertical lines.
8. All reported cases are considering introducing integrated delivery instruments for Territorial Development (ITI, CLLD), however the sentiment is moving towards a tentative use of them at this stage.

## Detailed report

The below report provides a summary of the responses received. Where applicable, a number of recommendations are based on the existing [CEMR official position on the Partnership Principle](#).

## Partnership Involvement

Using the draft Code of Conduct as the basis, a small typology of partnership levels in preparing the PA could be described as below:

**Level 1:** Full exchange of information, National Associations represented in small drafting groups with civil servants (4 MS: FI, DK, NL, BG).

**Level 2:** Partial exchange of information, National Associations invited to submit input to civil servants & attend some of the preparatory discussions (6 MS: SE, UK, DE, LV, RO, EE).

**Level 3:** National Associations receive some information and are invited to attend large meetings of stakeholder evidence gathering.(2 MS: BE, CZ).

**Level 4:** National Associations invited to respond to public consultation (1 MS).

These are ideal types and no reported case fits exactly the above typology, however in broad terms we can report that out of the **27 Member States there is evidence that in only 9 of them the Code of Conduct provisions are fully or at least satisfactorily applied.**

Indeed even in those cases partial application of the partnership provisions and the Code of Conduct is far more common than full partnership.

We have partial references from the situation in some other MS that indicate that, with some exception, in the vast majority of other cases the degree of involvement is either as stakeholders (Level 3) or as general consultees (Level 4).

**CEMR FG Recommendation:** *make full use of the already agreed partnership provisions of the Common Provision Regulation and the draft Code of Conduct that develops them.*

It is interesting to note that the reason for this does not only respond to stronger background of partnership working that can be found, for instance, in Scandinavia which is also translating into the PA discussions.

Nor the existence of a federal/devolved constitutional setting or longer experience in using ESIF automatically means a higher level of partnership being observed: two paradigmatic cases are Romania and Spain, where the first is a new MS with a centralised structure but has to date more developed reported levels of partnership than the latter MS, who has been implementing ESIF for long existing and highly regionalised structure.

However, the situation may change in some of such cases as there is the (incorrect) understanding that Partnership applies for Operational Programmes at regional level and not to the Member State Partnership Agreement. This may well be due to insufficient understanding and awareness of Article 5 CPR and of the Code of Conduct provisions.

**CEMR FG Recommendation:** *The Partnership provisions foresee that the Code of Conduct should be applied both to the Partnership Agreement and the Operational Programmes and Local and Regional Authorities, or their representatives, shall be included in the process.*

The reason for those counter-intuitive differences in partnership levels respond to ad hoc situations particular to each MS at this point in time than overall EU-wide trends. However, an EU-wide unifying trend that is consistently reported as key reasons for improved partnership is:

- The more integrated nature of the ESIF and its strategic documents (CPR, CSF, PA) act as a stimulus for multi-sectorial approaches that require more evidence of local and regional impacts and priorities.
- The tight timescales to put the new programmes in place require gathering as much specialised information as soon as possible.
- The reduced number of central government staff acts as a strong incentive to use the experience and know-how of national associations or LRA experts.

### **Practical and organisational issues**

Even in the cases with the highest level of partnership, there are practical constraints, unintentional or otherwise that weaken in practice the contribution from partners. In most reported cases, the papers from government arrive only with one or two days before the meeting.

When this happens with a large array of them the possibility of earlier consultations even within the national association secretariat is very challenging (let alone to experts in municipalities) which weakens the quality of the input provided by LRA representatives.

**CEMR FG Recommendation:** *fix a minimum one week deadline to send the meeting papers.*

Another common feature, even in the reported cases of higher levels of partnership, is the organisations of large working groups that effectively prevent meaningful discussions to take place.

**CEMR FG Recommendation:** *organise working groups or breakout sessions small enough that all partners can speak.*

Equally, partnership meetings tend to be announced in fairly short notice and the agenda items are equally unknown until the agenda is circulated. While it is understandable that the Government is keen not to lead but to shape the process, more ownership on shaping the agenda would be beneficial for the quality of the input and the outcome of the meetings.

**CEMR FG Recommendation:** *provide a medium term calendar of meetings and indicative agenda items and give partners the opportunity to provide suggestions.*

In a small number of reported cases (notably Netherlands, Denmark, Scotland(UK)), experts from the national associations and on occasion from individual local or regional authorities are part of the small drafting teams preparing both the broad Partnership Agreement.

**CEMR FG Recommendation:** *organise small drafting groups with Local and Regional representative as permanent members. Enable them to chair, or co-organise some of the sessions.*

Given the scale and time pressures of the Partnership Agreement, many decisions are taken among government officials in between the partnership meetings. To ensure that local government input is always available, a case of best practice is reported in England (UK) where there are several local authority secondees as part of the drafting teams in their respective central governments.

**CEMR FG Recommendation:** *place secondees from Local Government in the government Partnership Agreement drafting teams.*

As the Partnership Agreements are being drafted when the rules and additional implementation provisions or guidance (such as ITI, CLLD) are also in preparation, exchange of information is essential. National Governments are the first to receive such information (fiches, draft guidance, national position paper, drafting guidelines for PA/and Operational Programmes ,OP). However, the sharing of this information is reportedly patchy even if having prior knowledge of such documents is necessary for Local and Regional partners to provide meaningful input: in fact there are reported cases where such documents are sparingly made available even when the Local and Regional partners are part of the drafting groups. Paradoxically, in some other cases where direct input of local and regional partners is much more limited such documents are more widely available.

**CEMR FG Recommendation:** *share with national associations the key documents provided by the Commission to Member States to implement the new programmes.*

### **MS vis-à-vis regional arrangements**

The position papers for each MS have had the effect of making reassessing the notional priorities that each MS (or region) originally had in mind prior the Commission recommendations provided in such papers. This has also resulted in a slowing down of the drafting process with even in those cases with the highest levels of partnership (and who typically had started drafting the earliest) the PA draft not being available at the time of writing (mid-March).

Particularly in Member States with essentially Competitiveness status there is a rethink towards trying to work under the ringfences and thematic concentration (innovation, low carbon, SME support) that the new regulations advocate and the position paper spell out for each Member State. However, there is continuing tension between the narrow set of priorities of each position paper (although previous FG discussions show that they are broadly similar) and specific priorities (broadband infrastructure, accessibility in sparsely populated areas, for instance).

Equally, there is an inherent tension between the position paper narrow priorities and the Member State wide priorities it advocates versus the possibility of regional specific priorities. Indeed the format of the Partnership agreement (2 Drafts have been circulated) does not allow for significant departures from the MS-wide priorities advocated position paper.

Linked to this, in federal or highly decentralised MS (DE, BE, UK, ES) the reported use of the partnership principle shows different degrees. The involvement of Association of Local and Regional Authorities is reportedly very diverse and of significantly different intensity from one federal/devolved/autonomous unit to the other. The UK, with only four territorial units, is a 'case in point' in that diversity of engagement. Equally, in many of these cases partnership provisions are applied at MS-level but not at regional level, or vice versa.

**CEMR FG Recommendation:** *The Code of Conduct and the Partnership provisions in the Regulations can and should be used even in the current draft form. To be really effective its use should be uniformly applied at Member State and regional level, not just at Partnership Agreement stage but also in the drafting of the Operational Programmes.*

### **Integration and coordination**

Coordination tends to fall in either the finance/economy ministry or the line Ministry dealing with a majority of the funds. Romania is a peculiar case as there is even a specialised ministry for European Affairs with overall responsibility over the PA, even if the OP will be managed by traditional line ministries. This responds to specific arrangements or traditions in each Member State. Most reported cases indicate that the priority is not having one among the ministries exercising the lead but that whoever ministry is the lead that it works thoroughly and in close coordination with the other concerned ministries.

Clearly the more integrated approach requested upon line ministries by the CPR and the Partnership Agreement is reported to be not without difficulty. Like with the integrated delivery instruments for Territorial Development (see below) there is a reported perception (both by national but also increasingly by local and regional partners) that while the new regulatory multi-fund framework is encouraged, a very significant number of fund-specific provisions remain. Therefore, in most reported cases the integration is limited to the very strategic level foreseen in the Partnership Agreement, whereas for the OP delivery will tend to follow more traditional lines. Scotland (UK) is one of the few countries where integration agenda was reported to be more thoroughly examined . However even in this case the fund-specific rules are likely to limit a real integration particularly between ERDF/ESF on the one hand and EARDF, EMFF on the other.

At delivery level, while the multi-fund approach has been considered as an option at the beginning of the drafting process, this is increasingly seen as unlikely in most cases (though in Finland consideration continues to be given to multi-fund operational programmes) given the concern on unforeseen audit and reporting liabilities (and the fact that multi-fund programmes would need to be reported to several DGs, thus increasing the risk of conflicting interpretation).

As reported in previous contributions from CEMR, the issue of Funds being managed at different governance levels makes it difficult to pursue a genuine integrated approach at local and regional level: typically a fund might be managed Member State wide by a line ministry (EMFF, ESF), or by a Regional authority (typically ERDF) and in some cases by both (typically ERDF and, less frequently, EAFRD). This situation has not been reportedly changed in that the situation has not been alleviated by the new regulatory framework 2014-2020. For instance, the requirement by the Commission that EMFF is to be Member State wide only clearly has an impact in achieving integrated local development (particularly as per using CLLD, such as in Scotland) using the four funds simultaneously.



**CEMR FG Recommendation:** *it is imperative to identify more sophisticated ways that integrated delivery of funds can work without the same levels of reporting and audit requirements that they would have if they are deployed separately.*

## **Integrated Territorial Development**

For the CEMR and its national associations the development of new integrated territorial development instruments such as ***ITI, CLLD are together with the strong provisions on partnerships, the issues that we have (successfully) more actively campaigned for.*** Indeed we contributed to the development of these instruments right from its very beginning<sup>2</sup> to providing suggestions to their recently published guidance papers.

However when it comes to the actual take up in the Partnership Agreement of such instruments as key parts of delivery of the funds (as the PA template requires to spell that out) the approach both by Managing Authorities and by local and regional partners is so far more nuanced: while in some cases ITI for instance looks that it is likely to have a significant role (Netherlands where the Rotterdam Model was first tested, or in Finland where consideration of a Growth Pact through a single ITI across several cities is being given) in other cases it is too early to say even if they have been strongly advocated by local partners - [e.g. -England (UK)- some cities are keen to explore ITI model, but government appears to be reticent].

Very commonly the scoping of the use of ITI is being done alongside the potential use of CLLD as an alternative or a complement such as in Finland, Sweden, Belgium among others.

Most national associations judge the recent draft guidance as useful in solving some key questions (notably scope, remit, scale of these instruments) however there are significant issues concerning fund-specific requirements that require a number of risk assessments within each national or regional context before making strategic decisions about their use.

Clearly the extension of ITI to EAFRD is welcomed as it enables local and regional partners a wider range of options to use either CLLD or ITI. By contrast while CLLD was initially conceived as the main link to deliver at local level four funds -most particularly in Scotland (UK) - after further discussions with the Commission that led to the recently published Guidance consensus seems to be growing to use CLLD as a continuation of the EAFRD LEADER with some ad hoc contribution from ERDF/ESF whenever they provide distinctive added value over and above what the EAFRD Regulation already allows.

However, the general trends in the Partnership Agreement preparations is to use the new instruments as insofar they add significant value compared to existing delivery tools. Otherwise, the tendency is to utilise existing delivery instruments and adapt them to the new integrated delivery and performance arrangements 2014-2020. This is, for instance, the case

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<sup>2</sup> Local Development Labs 2010, CEMR paper on Local Development 2010, Contribution by CEMR members to the Local Development and ERDF Study 2011, Seminar on Local Development 2011, several workshops on the CLLD Opinion and ITI 2012.

with the Community Planning Partnerships in Scotland (where they are already used for ESF), the Local Economic Partnerships in England (where they exist for domestic policy but might also now be used for EU funds) or the Danish Regional Growth Forums, which as in the current programme will be the key partnership in each region to take strategic decisions on the use of the ESIF in each of the 5 regions.

**CEMR FG Recommendation:** *engage with National Associations of LRAs in preparing guidance and the implementation of Territorial Development, building on existing good and bad experiences where appropriate, and benefit from the know-how and capacity that LRAs can provide to address local needs and opportunities.*

## **Conclusion**

The CEMR FG will continue to exchange best practices among its members and provide suggestions to the Commission so that the final version of the Code of Conduct can learn from the actual experiences from the associations of Local and Regional Authorities to date in preparing the Partnership Agreements 2014-2020.

## **Annex - Highlights and best practices**

### **Denmark Regional Growth Forums**

Regional Growth Forums are established in all five Danish regions (Northern Jutland, Central Jutland, Southern Denmark, Zealand, Capital Region) and additionally one Growth Forum in the regional community of Bornholm.

Representatives from the private business sector, knowledge and higher education institutions, labour market policy organisations, social partners and the municipalities and Regional Councils constitute the Regional Growth Forum.

Partnership Agreements on growth and business development are signed between each Regional Growth Forum and the central government.

Even though each Forum gives recommendations on the use of European Structural Funds and Regional Development Funds; the Forum itself has no funds at its disposal. The secretaries' salaries are covered by the Regional Councils.

### **UK Partnership Agreement**

The UK is quite unique as the UK Partnership Agreement is going to be a collection of four national chapters (coordinated by the 'UK Business, Innovation and Skills' and involving the Business, Communities, Environment and Work and Pensions ministries), including the Scottish Partnership Agreement which is drafted by the Scottish Government. The UK and the 3 Devolved administrations have agreed in early December how to organise the drafting of the UK Partnership Agreement (of which the Scottish Partnership Agreement is a part) on the basis of the templates received by MS in January. Work on the preliminary evaluations and other technical work is being undertaken. Associations of Local Authorities will contribute or be consulted upon their respective national chapter and, less commonly, to UK-wide provisions as well.

### **Local Enterprise Partnerships (England)**

As English regions have no legislative or administrative power, the focus in terms of delivery will be on local areas. Newly-created Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) will be the fundamental building blocks of the programme and will receive a seven year notional financial allocation.

LEPs are current developing 'EU investment prospectuses' which is their local investment plan for the local area. This is challenging as LEPs don't yet know how much money will be available to them (elements of the funds may be top sliced for national programmes or allocated to Wales, Scotland or NI etc. The exact ERDF/ESF split is also not yet known).

It is not yet clear if local projects will normally pass through the local management board of the LEPs for approval in line with the local 'investment prospectus', or if the Managing Authorities (government ministries) will retain the ultimate ability to reject or approve a bid (on compliance/eligibility grounds for example). All final funding decisions will be dependent upon due diligence by the Managing Authorities. LEPs will identify their preferred EU investment prospectus as part of their wider (domestic) 'local growth strategy', for agreement by the (national) Growth Programme Board. LEPs will not take on project delivery accountabilities, however but retain a strategic oversight role in cooperation with local partners.

Government departmental teams will work as 'CSF Area Growth Teams' to support LEPs in their strategic role, with at least one point of contact per fund and per region.

## **Finland**

In Finland, the Ministry of Employment and the Economy as MA has the responsibility to coordinate the preparations and draft the text. In ministry level they work in close cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. AFLRA is a member of the national working group, whose responsibility is to coordinate and give inputs on national level on the programming process.

Working along 7 thematic objectives, the content of the programme is based on preparatory work made in two regions, namely North-East and South-West. In regions the Regional Councils have been responsible on coordinating the work and municipalities have been strongly involved in content discussions. Consideration is being given that in selected urban areas Growth Pacts so that a small network of urban areas would be working under the same them by working closely together.

## **Scottish Partnership Agreement (Scotland, UK)**

The Scottish Government and COSLA have agreed end 2011 that the Scottish Partnership Agreement, aiming at delivery in genuine integration across ERDF, ESF, EAFRD, EMFF would be co-produced with Local Government. In the first instance a number of thematic workstreams based on the CSF eleven objectives were set up to which COSLA or Local Government officials worked hand in hand with civil servants to identify synergies across funds. Some of these workstreams have been facilitated by COSLA. What is the engagement format for the national association? Officer involvement is currently undertaken through the High Level Group of which COSLA is the representative of local government, the CAP Stakeholder Group and Maritime Funds Group as well as for the Structural Funds the Evaluation Group. COSLA coordinates and ensures that when appropriate individual Council expert practitioners participate. There are as well bilateral exchange of views and intelligence and a range of ad hoc seminars. Work is mostly at officer level, even if COSLA political leadership and relevant ministers have overseen progress on a

number of occasions. There are also a number of more public discussions and both the Partnership Agreement and the subsequent Operational Programmes would be subject to statutory consultation in the Spring. As a result of these negotiations we expect that a key pillar of the Scottish PA would be devoted to Local Development. Equally we are discussing in detail with officials the extent that Local Government or the Community Planning Partnerships is one of the key lead partners in the formulation and delivery of the three broad themes that the four ESIF are expected to jointly deliver in Scotland.

### **Netherlands**

The Ministry for Economic Affairs is as coordinating ministry for Structural Funds and Rural Development responsible for coordinating the PA in the Netherlands. At the beginning of 2012 the Ministry has appointed a programme manager for the drafting process and coordination of the PA. Regions, cities and municipalities are closely involved in the drafting process. A special working group of the involved ministries, local and regional government has been established for developing synergies between the different EU funding programmes (ERDF, ESF, EGFRD and EMFF). Local and regional government are also involved in the drafting processes of the different EU funding programmes, Between the national government and local and regional governments has been agreed that the thematic objectives and investment priorities in het PA will be decided bottom-up, which means that local and regional government are closely involved in the principal part of the drafting process of the PA.

### **Belgium**

The Partnership Agreement is highly regionalized in Belgium. Regions have set up several thematic working groups of civil servants which are then replicated at federal level. Most negotiations in relation to the cohesion policy occur at an inter-institutional level between the regions and the federal state.

The negotiations in relation to cohesion policy occur in several thematic working groups involving civil servants of the relevant departments at regional level. When there is a political agreement at regional level, the inter-institutional dialogue takes place at federal level and a final decision (or compromise) is taken.

Local government as a whole is to date reported to be involved more as stakeholders than partners. They are invited to general information sessions for all stakeholders. Only the group of 13 core cities were invited (end of March 2013) by the Flemish department to discuss the investment priorities for urban development in the framework of ERDF for Flanders.

There is on-going discussion on the ITIs, there may be two to three ITI's in Flanders, but local government is not involved in those discussions. Decision has been taken to apply the CLLD only in the framework of rural development.

### **Wales (UK)**

The Managing Authority in Wales, the Welsh European Funding Office and other officials in the Welsh Government, are leading on drafting the Welsh Chapter of the PA. Engagement with the Welsh Local Government Association is, however, reported to be limited to date. Preparatory work is being developed internally by civil servants in the Welsh Government who then present drafts for comment rather than involve key partners such as local government in the early drafting of key documents. The first draft of the Welsh Partnership Agreement (a chapter of the UK PA) would only be shared for the first time with local government and other partners and stakeholders at the next meeting of the European Programmes Partnership Forum for 2014-2020 to be held mid-April. The Welsh Local Government Association is also calling for Integrated Territorial Investments and CLLD being used across the four European Structural Funds for Investment and indeed it is submitting proposals to deliver packages of activities and interventions to be funded by ERDF and ESF on a regional basis across Wales complemented by Integrated Multi Fund Local Programmes, utilising both the LEADER and CLLD approaches, complementing the regional activities and utilising the four funds to deliver activities and interventions more suited to a sub-regional and/or local approaches.

### **Czech Republic**

Working groups have been established at fund-specific OP level and the horizontal approach advocated in the Partnership Agreement builds over work at OP level. The rationale for integration is to bring if forward in those issues where it makes sense, and existing structure for individual line Ministries responsible for national level programmes is likely to continue.

Local and Regional partners are involved in some of these discussions at both Partnership and fund specific levels. Territorial and Urban issues will be examined as a horizontal issue. The issue of using ITI, CLLD or delegation of task is subject to further assessment in terms of their audit burden and added value vis-a-vis current delivery arrangements.

### **Latvia**

As the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG) is member of the EU Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund Monitoring Committee it is involved in the preparation of the Partnership Agreement through provision of comments to discussion

documents for the thematic consultations between the line ministries and the European Commission. Until mid-March five discussion meetings between the ministries and the EC have taken place. However, there are several reported concerns in the organisation of the consultation process, namely, the late notice on the meetings and the submission of documents for comments just several days before the meeting. This is reported to hinder the possibility of the LALRG to consult with the municipalities, as well providing insufficient time for LARG advisers to provide detailed comments.

### **Germany**

In Germany, the Partnership Agreement and the operational programs are discussed at the same time at different governmental levels. Due to Germany's federal system, the situation differs slightly from state to state. According to representatives of several local governments, the possibility to participate in the process has improved to the last period. However the levels of partnership with local government are diverse with North Rhineland-Westphalia reported having the better performance levels of partnership. At national level, the participation of local government associations in the drafting procedure on a national level mainly takes place through a number of information sessions organized by the Federal Ministry of Economics.

### **Sweden**

There are several parallel discussions and processes going on within designing the implementation of the next cohesion policy 2014-2020, that will be described and finalized with the Partnership Agreement between Sweden and the EU commission. Within the government discussions are taking place between the departments that are concerned by the ESIF. Information sharing with local and regional partners is considered positive and fluid. National civil servants have held several meetings with different groups of stakeholders to gather information, knowledge and opinions. A number of regular large meetings of more than a hundred participants are also held to seek views on draft PAs.

### **Romania**

The Ministry of European Funds is the authority responsible with the preparation of PA and the negotiation of the above with the European Commission services. According to the Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) approving the necessary actions towards the preparation of programming documents for 2014-2020, an Inter-institutional Committee for preparation of the PA (CIAP) was set-up since June 2012. CIAP is the institutional fora insuring programming coordination at the national level. Several consultative committees and working groups on both territorial and sectorial issues were created in order to involve

stakeholders and provide input for the CIAP works. The committees and working groups provide input on the social economic analysis and investments proposals.

National associations of local authorities were asked to appoint representatives in CIAP, committees and working groups. Members are well informed about the agenda and receive the minutes in due time from CIAP secretariat. However, CIAP members are reported to finding it difficult to engage as the CIAP has 62 members, thus making it more a useful format for exchange of information than for decision making purposes. Therefore, from local authorities point of views, CIAP format could evolve further to facilitate further collective working and decision making. There is also a reported need to have a better understanding of the new CPR and the CSF requirements in order to improve the quality of the partnership discussions.

## **Bulgaria**

In Bulgaria, the Working Group (WG) on drafting the Partnership Agreement with the European Commission was set up in the spring of 2012, pursuant to the Order of the Minister in Charge for EU Funds Management. Its major objective is to ensure the compliance of the contract with the principles of partnership, multilevel management, promoting equality of men and women and sustainable development, to guarantee the avoidance of overlapping of the measures under the different programmes and to monitor the fulfilment of the general preliminary terms and conditions. The WG consists of 53 members, representatives of the state authorities, regional authorities, National Association of Municipalities (NAMRB), socio-economic partners and NGOs.

The Minister in Charge for EU funds management Responsibilities coordinates the WG's activities and all major issues are discussed in advance with NAMRB before being submitted to the WG. From this prospective NAMRB acts as partner to the state. So far there is consensus reached on the national priority areas and the number of the Operational Programs (OP).

Separate local governments are not involved in the planning process; all is done through the NAMRB or the regional associations. The NAMRB participates in each of the thematic working groups (TWG), set by the Managing Authority of each of the OPs, whose aim is to develop in full details the OPs for the next period. The TWG consists of 80-100 members, too large for meaningful and fruitful discussions.

Bulgaria currently envisages to apply ITI investment only through the Leader approach (CLLD) under the Program for Rural Development. But has introduced an essentially similar investment approach for sustainable urban development through the development, coordination and implementation of launch Integrated plans for urban regeneration and development (IPGVR). IPGVR include projects, actions and investments that will be implemented within cities.



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## About CEMR

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the broadest organisation of local and regional authorities in Europe. Its members are over 50 national associations of municipalities and regions from 40 European countries. Together these associations represent some 100 000 local and regional authorities.

CEMR's objectives are twofold: to influence European legislation on behalf of local and regional authorities and to provide a platform for exchange between its members associations and their elected officials and experts.

Moreover, CEMR is the European section of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the worldwide organisation of local government.

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