Mr. Walter Deffaa  
Director General for Regional and Urban Policy  
European Commission  
Avenue de Beaulieu 1,  
B-1160 Brussels, Belgium

Cc: Mr. Michel Servoz  
Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

Brussels, 19th March 2014

Subject: Deficiencies in the implementation of the partnership principle in Cohesion Policy

Dear Mr. Deffaa,

The European Commission has been a strong advocate for the involvement of partners into planning and implementation of Cohesion Policy for the 2014 – 2020 EU budget period, acknowledging partners’ crucial role in delivering on the Europe 2020 Strategy and headline targets, and the multiple benefits that the involvement of partners can bring in:

- enhancing collective commitment and ownership of EU policies,
- increasing the knowledge, expertise and viewpoints available when strategies are being designed and implemented,
- managing the relevant funds, and
- ensuring greater transparency in decision-making processes.

The involvement of partners helps to reduce coordination and capacity gaps in policy making between different levels of government, in terms of information, resources, funding, administrative and policy fragmentation.

Indeed, our past experiences as partners actively involved in Cohesion Policy proved that the broad involvement of stakeholders leads to clear goals which make programmes more sustainable and effective. Getting the expertise from stakeholders on what works on the ground and reaching out to potential beneficiaries and including stakeholder results in better calls for proposals, better-informed applicants which mean better project applications, high quality projects and finally a better absorption. The multi-level governance approach is at the heart of subsidiarity in the EU and, if managed properly, partnership improves the democratic decision-making process. And last but not least, a partnership aiming at transparency, openness and prevention of misuse and corruption supports the smooth implementation of the programmes.

Even more we are concerned that during the ongoing programming a number of the basic partnership principles are not met by member states: timely access to information and sufficient time for reaction is far from being guaranteed; the involvement of partners was not happening at early stages when major strategic decision have been taken, and a number of member states are failing to establish a reciprocal dialogue where partners receive feedback on their contributions.

And whereas – following recommendations of the European Commission – member states plan to allocate Technical Assistance to increase the administrative capacity of their managing bodies, support from Technical Assistance for partners remains marginal.
We are calling on the European Commission to hold member states accountable for their commitment to implement a good partnership and to follow the principles laid down in the European Code of Conduct on Partnership while negotiating with Member States on the Partnership Agreements and with National and Regional Managing Authorities on the Operational Programmes.

Furthermore, we would like to emphasise that socio-economic and civil society partners must have access to Technical Assistance as well as global grants and capacity-building in order to ensure sufficient capacities to fulfil their role in contributing to an efficient and transparent implementation of ESI funding, in their coordination efforts and their representation in committees and decision making procedures.

On behalf of the signatories,

Yours sincerely

Mark Fodor
Director - CEE Bankwatch Network
Rue d’Edimbourg 26
1050 Brussels, Belgium