



socialplatform

Annual Conference 2008

Report for Workshop 3:

*What is the role of European NGO
networks in bridging the gap
between European and national levels?*





Objectives of the workshop

- To discuss the role of European Networks as a capacity-builder, mediator and facilitator of information flow between the national level and the European arena
- To exchange experiences and jointly develop recommendations on capacities and structures that are needed
- To address the related issue of civil dialogue at national level with a particular focus on Central and Eastern Europe



Challenges

- **Permanent tension between approach focusing on pre-defined European agenda and involvement in policy formulation and approach starting from interests + needs of members (their priority is to make a difference on the national level); how to channel back European information to the members and vice versa (re-translation of national interests to the European level)?**
- **To create an interest of what is happening at EU level**
- **Capacity-building of national members in terms of European issues and related communication strategies – giving ownership to the national level**
- **Transfer of the relevant knowledge (to understand the issues at stake in nat. context, too) and avoidance of information overload**
- **Language**
- **“Translation» of concepts and EU jargon**
- **Continuity of financing from public sources (for infrastructure, too)**
- **In some countries: Lack of support for civil dialogue (focus rather on decision making)**



What works – But not well enough

- **NFP an appropriate model to promote and structure information exchange on sector-specific issues/defined topics, supported by already existing nat. umbrella org. (problem: political cleavages)**
- **European networks are aware of their responsibility and their role in influencing the political agenda of Europe**
- **European networks are representing the interests of their members and filter out the priorities according to the respective targets their network is engaged in (role as facilitator and mediator)**
- **Training and empowerment of members in terms of European topics and policies**
- **Trans-national cooperation and transfer of best practice (also as incentive to get involved), also based on seminars, etc. and trans-national work on specific topics in regional clusters**
- **European networks as “door openers” for national members (and vice versa) allowing them to participate in consultation processes, civil dialogue**
- **European networks can provide for arguments on policy change at national level (and vice versa), building on European legislation or successful models**



Recommendations

- **Support the building up of national networks for more effective advocacy in the national policy arena and feeding back of consolidated positions to the European level**
- **Capacity-building for NGOs at all relevant levels (national, regional, local); providing the right skills to the respective level (European issues, policies – contents – and other process-based skills – procedures and methodology) by support of European NGOs and transnational and best practice transfer**
- **Training of trainers (multiplier effect); one element of MHE model**
- **Develop efficient communication strategies, make more use of the media; reach the grass-root level/citizens**
- **Inform on representativeness of European and national umbrellas (justify why the networks should get involved in civil dialogue, who they represent, how they arrive at common positions, etc.)**
- **Promote and strengthen NGOs' representation of Eastern and Central Europe in committees/ working groups/ boards of ENGOS**
- **Exchange within Social Platform must be enhanced**



Recommendations (cont.)

- **Make use of institutional frameworks, cultural links and regional bonds (in a first step; afterwards easier: extension to EU 27)**
- **Promote exchange of best practices, peer learning and cooperation between organisations on the national level and cross borders/ trans-national level**
- **Empower national NGOs to push their national governments towards implementing European policy and to make effective use of governance tools (e.g. OMC) at national level**
- **Empower national members to influence the European level by using their European NGO networks (bottom-up approach) based on structured forms of feeding back information on own positions, expectations, concerns of national NGOs**
- **Force national and regional governments to co-finance work of national organisations on European issues**
- **Use national NGOs as “trampolin” to states outside of EU Member States**
- **Encourage the establishment of umbrella organisations at national level**



Outstanding issues

- Finding ways to stimulate civil dialogue all over Europe (media), transporting good news/encouraging examples of active citizenship (show how to make an impact)
- Influence and encourage media to positive reporting about NGOs' work and their role to promote social inclusion and cohesion
- Statutes for European NGOs are missing - providing a legal framework for trans-national associations/civil society organisations



Thank you!

Our contact information

socialplatform

Square de Meeûs 18
B-1050 Brussels
Belgium

T +32.2.511.37.14

F +32.2.511.19.09

platform@socialplatform.org

www.socialplatform.org