

Summary of the second workshop of the network of regional hubs

27-28 June 2019 at the CoR in Brussels

Day 1, 27 June 2019

Start of the workshop

The workshop was opened by Olgierd Geblewicz (CoR Member and Marshall of the Westpomeranian region, Poland).

He emphasised the important role regions and cities play in implementing EU policies, giving them distinctive and valuable experience.

The network of regional hubs can be a tool to give them a stronger voice in the EU's better regulation agenda, gathering timely and systematic technical feedback on EU policies that matter to them.

According to Olgierd Geblewicz, the first consultation, on public procurement, was a useful exercise in that respect. He acknowledged the efforts of the network's contact points, who were able to reach out to more than 250 stakeholders.

Thus, they have created a well of information that can be used for the implementation report that will come out of the network's first consultation.

The implementation report is an important first step towards a better application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, which are cornerstones of EU law and it is also a good example of how “active subsidiarity” can promote greater ownership and understanding of what the EU does, by those who are involved.

Presentation of examples of good practices: how to set up a successful hub – discussion on the first consultation procedure

The first presentation on how to set up a well-functioning hub was one by Martina Büchel-Germann (Vorarlberg) and Florian Hytrek (Baden-Württemberg) from the International Lake Constance Conference hub. Ana Enguïdanos Weyler from the Community of Valencia hub gave a second presentation and Sara Michalska from the Mazovia hub a third one, both also on how their respective hubs were set-up.

[Work document]

These presentations were followed by a Q&A session and a discussion between the hubs on how they go about to structure their hub and how they handled the first consultation of the network. These were moderated by Rainer Steffens (CoR, RegHub coordinator) and Rafael Mondelaers (CoR, RegHub policy officer).

Several topics were covered during this discussion: the internal approval procedures of a hub, the use of electronic survey tools, the timeline of the consultation procedures, the use of open box answers in the questionnaire, the involvement of the stakeholders and their selection, the compiling of the results into the implementation report and the follow-up of the consultations at the European inter-institutional level.

Results of the public procurement consultation

The workshop was also an opportunity for the contact points of the hubs to discuss the draft implementation report that was the result of the first consultation, on public procurement.

Effrosyni Kossyvakaki (CoR, ECON unit) presented the results of the consultation and the key findings of the draft implementation report.

This presentation was followed by a panel discussion between David Blanchard (European Commission, DG GROW) and Michael Schmitz (German County Association), moderated by Bert Kuby (CoR, ECON unit) on the results of the consultation.

David Blanchard welcomed the existence of the network and the choice of public procurement as the topic for its first consultation. He confirmed the strong interest of the European Commission in the data collected from relevant stakeholders through the consultation. Also, he particularly valued the fact that the contributions from the involved stakeholders were not anonymous.

This was echoed by Michael Schmitz, who pointed out the importance of the qualitative analysis of the results, related to the types of stakeholders.

After the panel discussion, the floor was opened to the hubs for a Q&A session.

One of the main conclusions from the discussion was that the hubs and their stakeholders in general had a rather positive view on the reforms brought about by the 2014 Directives on public procurement.

The high number of issues raised by the stakeholders as mentioned in the implementation report should therefore not be seen as contradictory to this overall positive judgement. Rather, it is an effort to put on the radar of the EU institutions often technical obstacles encountered on the ground, by those who implement a policy, even if they its aims and objectives as positive. The aim is for this to lead to finding efficient solutions.

Day 2, 28 June 2019

Introduction the Air Quality topic

The second day of the workshop was kicked off with an introduction by CoR Member Roby Biwer (Vice Chair of the CoR's ENVE commission; Member of Bettembourg Municipal Council, Luxembourg).

Amongst others, Roby Biwer mentioned important aspects of air quality linked to biodiversity and he cited the relevance of this policy area for the opinion work of the CoR. Also, he mentioned some relevant initiatives such as the covenant of mayors and the EEA air quality index.

Second consultation, on air quality

As part of the launch of the second consultation of the network, Stefano Panozzo (CoR, ENVE unit) moderated the workshop's second panel, which was composed of Michael Klinkenberg (European Commission, DG ENV) and Roby Biwer.

The importance of the air quality topic was confirmed and the panel members also agreed that the relevance of the network's consultation lies in the fact it is not just a duplication by local and regional authorities of the European Commission's fitness check.

The Q&A session that followed the panel debate gave rise to a number of suggestions from the hub's contact point to improve the draft questionnaire they had received before the workshop.

Presentation by Antonina Cipollone

In order to establish a general picture of how the results of the network's consultation can fit into the European Commission's better regulation activities, Antonina Cipollone (European Commission, Evaluation & Impact Assessment, Regulatory Scrutiny Board Secretariat) covered this theme in a comprehensive presentation.

She gave an overview of the recent stock taking exercise of the European Commission on better regulation and also mentioned other relevant topics such as impact assessments, evaluation of existing legislation and regulatory fitness.

[Work document]

The presentation then gave way to an extensive Q&A session during which a variety of points were raised.

The importance of involving the local and regional levels of government was repeated, as they are often the levels where policies are implemented. In that sense the relevance of the network also stems from the strong input given by public authorities, not just private stakeholders.

The contact points of the hubs called upon the European Commission to improve its communication efforts regarding better regulation and mainly regarding the follow-up of consultation exercises.

Concerns were voiced about the dangers of consultation fatigue and about timing issues when it comes to the alignment of evaluation of policies and policy making.

It was acknowledged that CoR initiatives such as the network, are necessary instruments for the European Commission to directly reach the local and regional authorities in the EU.

Outlook

Rainer Steffens closed the workshop with a presentation of the outlook for the network's activities over the months to come. He then gave the floor to Rafael Mondelaers for a short overview of the indicative timeline of the next two consultations (air quality and cross border health care).

The outlook presentation also included a video projection on the cross border health care topic, prepared by the CoR's NAT unit.

Rounding up the workshop, the hubs and the CoR representatives exchanged views on how the hubs could help the CoR's inter-institutional efforts to expand the network's impact. The European Commission, and in some cases the Council, were identified as institutions where regional levels of government can focus on in this regard. In that respect, the option of designing a "political roadmap" for the network was well received by the participants.