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**EFFECTIVENESS OF**

**REGIONAL, PROVINCIAL AND**

**LOCAL REPRESENTATIONS IN**

**BRUSSELS**

**Policy Paper**  
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## Motivation

With about **250 TO 300 OFFICES** of regional, provincial and local authorities in Brussels with a **TOTAL STAFF OF 2000 PEOPLE**, more and more regional actors have appeared on the EU stage during the last decade. The growing importance of these authorities in implementing and evaluating EU policies justify their presence in Brussels.

The **INTEGRATION** of the interior market as well as the Lisbon strategy, the increasing **EUROPEAN AGENDA** and the coverage of a wide range of issues of the enlarged Commission made a close dialogue between the EU-Institution and the regions and municipalities **AN ESSENTIAL TOOL** for defining European policies.

The input of regions and municipalities is enormous. In some areas where they are directly concerned they deliver direct input into final documents of the Commission (for instance in evaluation of the operational program of the EU cohesion funds). For the reform of the institution as well as the **ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL COHESION**, the regions and municipalities are indispensable.

## Aim

This policy paper aims to:

- Identify **EFFECTIVE LOBBYING STRATEGIES** of the regional and local administrative level in Brussels,
- Establish **CRITERIA FOR GOOD LOBBYING PRACTICES** by regional representations<sup>1</sup>.

The policy paper is the basis for the next step of my research:

- Assess the **CHANGES OF AND CHALLENGES FOR REGIONAL LOBBYISM** following the EU enlargement in 2004.
- Provide a first outline of a possible catalogue of **BEST PRACTICES OF REGIONAL LOBBYISM**.

## Background

Karsten Wenzlaff has studied **PHILOSOPHY, ECONOMICS AND SOCIOLOGY** at the University of Bayreuth. He will continue his studies at the University of Cambridge (UK) with a Master in **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**.

The policy paper draws from the author's experience of **WORKING** at the Bavarian representation, from information of the **WEBSITES** by regional offices, from a **SURVEY** sent via email to the regional offices in 2006 and personal **INTERVIEWS** with directors of regional offices in 2007. This dialogue with about 100 regional offices has influenced this paper – however the presented opinion is my own **PERSONAL ASSESSMENT** and does not necessarily represent the views of regions participating in the survey or the interviews.

## Diversity of Regions

The **DIVERSITY** of the regional offices is great: Not only their budget, staff size, task and their constitutional justification differ greatly, but also their day-to-day work and their integration into interregional networks. This is not surprising given the different constitutional balances of **COMPETENCES** between national, regional, provincial and local authorities in the Member-States and the large **ECONOMIC DISPARITIES** of regions in the European Union. Despite these differences some **KEY STRATEGIES** for effective lobbyism can be seen in all successful regional offices in all member states, of which a few I will highlight subsequently.

In general, small member states are better off by strengthening the **LOCAL EXPERTISE** in Brussels since the weight of small regions in these member states is not big enough for effective lobbyism. For medium-sized and large member states, it is preferable to strengthen the level of administration that has the **MOST LEGISLATIVE COMPETENCE** as well as the **MOST IMPACT ON IMPLEMENTATION** of EU policies.

## Finances

The costs for a representative office in Brussels are high. Premises in Brussels should be chosen not primarily for criteria of representation, but for criteria of synergy. For small and medium-sized member-states **JOINT PREMISES WITH OTHER REGIONS BASED ON EQUAL PARTNERSHIP** are a good solution – especially if the partnership with the other regions is based on common interest or geographic proximity. For large regions a representation which hosts other actors from regions is a successful model.

Salaries of the Brussels staff sometimes exceed the salary of elected legislators at home. Therefore the majority of regional offices only employ a small team of experts. Small and medium-sized member-states have considerable

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<sup>1</sup> In the following text I will use the term regional representations/regional offices as a synonym for offices of regional, provincial and local authorities in Brussels.

difficulties in providing appropriate budgets. However they should consider the value of an office with a long-term perspective. Budgets should allow more than just leaflets and a Christmas party. Networking in Brussels costs time and money – financial resources are especially needed if the regional representation is also working as a platform for other civil and corporate actors from the regions.

For some services, such as the help with applying for project funding, it is a good strategy to create **PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS TO GENERATE ADDITIONAL INCOME** – however this can only be done if the regional office is already established as part of a public-private-partnership at home.

## Long-term perspective and expertise

Despite the large costs of regional offices, it makes no sense to establish the offices for a short period only – offices should have a **LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE** otherwise all invested resources are in vain.

Given the personal character of networks in Brussels, it is essential (especially for small offices) to hire staff **INDEPENDENT FROM POLITICAL CHANGES AT HOME** and maintain representatives for a longer period of time (at least more than 5 years).

Despite their political independence, representatives need a strong **KNOWLEDGE OF THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL MECHANISM** of policy-making at home. Especially in federal member-states, lobbying by regions in Brussels can only complement the lobbying within the member state. A strong and close **COOPERATION WITH THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATION** of the Member State helps to make regional lobbying more coherent - especially if the Head of the Permanent Representation of the Member State sees the benefits of cooperating with the regions.

The staff in Brussels needs good **CONTACTS TO EXPERTS** in the regional administration. A **TWO-PILLAR SYSTEM** of European Liaison Officers in all branches of the regional administration and Experts in the policy fields is essential for organizing effective communication flows from Brussels to the region and back. Requests for EU information can be handled both by the Brussels Office and the Europe Office at home fast and efficiently.

An increased **VISIBILITY** of the Brussels office at home can be reached if regional decision makers are well-informed about EU-procedures (for instance through a parliamentary visitors program). If local politicians see the Brussels office as a possibility to appeal to the audience at home, even better results can be achieved - however given the regional focus of media, this only works if the regional media is financially and structurally supported when reporting about events in Brussels.

For the seminars, conferences and workshops held by the office or attended by office staff, an **EFFECTIVE MECHANISM OF FOLLOW-UP** needs to be established that does not restrict the office's ability to react to political changes. Activity reports should not list activities only, but refer also to their place in the long-term strategy of the office.

## Specialization

For regional offices from large and medium-sized member states, **SPECIALIZATION ON SPECIFIC EU POLICIES** is a well-established practice, but for the small member-states specialization across member-states becomes increasingly important. Successful regional lobbying requires identifying relevant issues in the Working Program of the Commission, focusing resources on monitoring these issues and sharing the information in networks of region with similar backgrounds or interest.

The lobbying strategy of the regional office should match the policy cycle of the European Union (in particular the Budget periods and the elections of the Commissions), which can be helped if a **COHERENT POLITICAL AGENDA OF PRIORITIES** exists at home.

## Communication adapted to target groups

Communication of information gathered in Brussels is a large part of the work of the regional offices. The **TARGET GROUPS** can be divided into two groups: firstly, the **DELEGATING ADMINISTRATION** and partially also other levels of administration, secondly, **OTHER ACTORS FROM THE REGION**, such as corporate or civil organizations or the media. Both groups differ in their demand and access to information about European activities and their capabilities to understand and follow the complex mechanism at the European level.

It is wise to invest time into careful **PLANNING OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS** and cooperating strongly with other regional actors with similar target groups. The joint websites and regular newsletters of regions in some member-state are good examples of such a strategy aimed at reaching the second target group and explaining the impact of the regional offices on EU politics. The first target group needs additional means of communication, for instance through regular working groups on specific issues in order to prepare them for upcoming European topics.

## Networking and interregional cooperation

Between six and twelve months is an appropriate time for **ESTABLISHING PERSONAL NETWORKS** in Brussels by attending receptions and workshops. It is especially crucial to establish networks to country fellows in the EU-Institutions and to experts in the region's relevant thematic fields from other regions and member states. Afterwards personal time resources should be focused on thematic works in project.

**INTERREGIONAL NETWORKS** can help regions to concentrate their resources, specialize on specific issues, receive information and raise awareness of upcoming European issues at home. EU-Institutions increasingly rely more on the input from interregional networks than from directly from the regions. Regions lend support to each other on a wide range of issues, even if they are not directly concerned and not negatively affected by a certain issue.

Networks of regions, both informal and formal, can be **VERTICALLY** (local-regional-national), **HORIZONTALLY** (between regions, between associations) and **CROSS-SECTORAL** (public-corporate-private) integrated. The crucial point is not the size of networks, but the **FOLLOW-UP-MECHANISMS** within the network. Clearly defined tasks of the chairing regions, agreed paths of disseminating the information and arrangements for the policy input towards the EU-institutions are especially important. The problem of work-overload for the chair can sometimes be solved by a rotating leadership. However, rotating leaderships increase the possible loss of information and sustainability. Networks that are meant to be permanent need to create **INDEPENDENT COORDINATING STRUCTURES** and assign resources to these structures. It is not always necessary to create new associations or committees; sometimes it suffices to establish a permanent secretariat in one of the regions.

For regional offices from countries outside of the EU, representation is difficult but not impossible. There is a great willingness by established regional offices (premises, working permits, networks) to support regions from outside EU, especially if partnerships already exist. Given the tendency of interregional networks to focus resources on those networks that are either geographically or thematically meaningful, regions should search for **THEMATIC AND GEOGRAPHIC SYNERGIES** when establishing offices in Brussels.

## EU Institutions as partner for the regions

The new strength of regional actors on the European level is surely welcomed by the **EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT** and the **EUROPEAN COMMISSION** since it gives them additional leverage in conflict of interests with member-states. Especially the **DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR REGIONAL POLICIES** is an important partner of the regions. The regions indicated that the cooperation with Mrs. Danuta Huebner is excellent because she takes the role of regions very seriously and gives institutional and personal support to the regional networks.

In the interviews it became clear that other Directorate-Generals are becoming increasingly important, especially the **DGS ENVIRONMENT, RESEARCH, AND TRANSPORT AND ENERGY (TREN)**. All DGs need to develop strategies for interacting with the regions and using their expertise in a more institutional framework. The DG Environment is already co-operating closely with the **EPRO-NETWORK** (Environmental Platform of Regional Offices), other similar platforms that allow the distribution of information towards the regions and organize the inputs by experts according to thematic areas should follow.

The **COMMITTEE OF REGIONS (CoR)** has the most democratic legitimacy for making regional perspectives visible in the framework the EU-Institutions. The CoR is acknowledged by the regions to maintain the "regional voice" in Brussels. It is a good source to establish interregional cooperation and often the seed for interregional projects.

However, the mandate of the CoR does not allow an active role as regional lobbyist. Regions do not use the CoR as a tool for direct lobbying and coordination of lobbying activities.

To make the CoR more effective as an actor in Brussels, the **POTENTIAL EXPERTISE OF THE CoR** and the network of regions needs to be untapped. There should be more incentives for CoR-members to become involved in the CoR discussion – even if it consists of simply featuring a "CoR-Member of the Month" on the CoR-Websites. The CoR needs to be more service-oriented towards the regions, help them in arranging meetings, providing first-hand information for CoR-members or regularly provide a directory of experts in the regions and the regional offices.

The Open Days 2007 are an **IMPORTANT FORUM** for the regions. The organization of the Open Days has considerably improved, but many regions still mention the **HEAVY WORKLOAD** associated with the Open Days. Also the sometimes **INEFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES** are criticized. If the organisational entrepreneurship inside the administration of the CoR is strengthened, giving more space to experiment with interregional cooperation, than the CoR could become a more effective lobbying tool. A key to this process is that the member states need to take the CoR seriously – otherwise it will remain one of many regional actors in Brussels.