

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the following Communications from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament:

**Implementing the Hague Programme: the way forward
Evaluation of EU policies on freedom, security and justice
Report on the implementation of the Hague Programme for 2005**

(2007/C 57/05)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament of 28 June 2006 entitled *Implementing the Hague Programme: the way forward* (COM(2006) 331 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament of 28 June 2006 entitled *Evaluation of EU policies on freedom, security and justice* (COM(2006) 332 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament of 28 June 2006 entitled *Report on the implementation of the Hague Programme for 2005* (COM(2006) 333 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the decision taken by the European Commission on 28 June 2006 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

HAVING REGARD TO the decision taken by its Bureau on 25 April to instruct its Commission for Constitutional Affairs, European Governance and the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice to draw up an opinion on these subjects;

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament entitled *The Hague programme: Ten priorities for the next five years. The partnership for European renewal in the field of freedom, security and justice* (COM(2005) 184);

HAVING REGARD TO its opinion of 16 February 2006 on a related package of proposals and measures in the field of freedom, security and justice (CdR 122/2005 ⁽¹⁾);

HAVING REGARD TO its draft opinion (CdR 234/2006) adopted on 17 October 2006 by its Commission for Constitutional Affairs, European Governance and the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (rapporteur: Mr Opstelten, Mayor of Rotterdam);

WHEREAS

1. the extent to which European policy on freedom, security and justice proves to be successful over the next few years will be of decisive importance to the judgement of European citizens as to the added value provided by the European Union;
2. regional and local authorities have responsibilities in the field of public order and security and the *effectiveness and efficiency* of EU policy is thus *also* determined to a considerable extent by the involvement of these bodies;
3. the policy on freedom, security and justice has made a 'step forward towards achieving greater maturity', thereby providing the ideal opportunity to make it tie in more effectively with the role of regional and local authorities;

adopted the following opinion at its 67th plenary session, held on 6 and 7 December 2006 (meeting of 6 December):

1. Views of the Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions,

1.1 **believes** that regional and local authorities have a key role to play in the policy area of freedom, security and justice; draws attention to the fact that, in its earlier opinion (CdR 122/2005), it set out concrete recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of EU policy in this field by paying more attention to the experience of regional and local authorities in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the policy;

1.2 **greatly appreciates** the efforts made by the Commission in the field of freedom, security and justice; the Communications under review reveal an ambition and bold determination to achieve these objectives; **does**, however, **express** its concern over the considerable discrepancies with regard to the implementation of the Hague Programme measures in the EU Member States;

1.3 **has understanding**, in view of the complex nature of this policy area and the time constraints to which the drawing-up of these Communications was subject, for the fact that it is no easy task to achieve more direct involvement of regional and local authorities; **does**, however, **deplore** the fact that the Commission's intention in the short term, *to develop a way of working which takes account of the recommendations put forward by the CoR* is not mentioned in the Communications under review;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 192, 16.8.2006.

1.4 **believes** that such a way of working *still* can and will be developed *inter alia*, on the basis of the discussion announced by the Commission in the conclusions to Communication COM (2006) 331;

1.5 **endorses** the choice of policy areas requiring closer attention during the period of operation of the Hague Programme; and **appreciates** the efforts made by the Commission to streamline and speed up the decision-making process as much as possible by making use of legal mechanisms provided for under existing European treaties;

1.6 **regrets** the absence as yet of sufficient support for actually adopting a better approach in the short term;

1.7 **endorses** the need to improve monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and **notes** that the proposals put forward by the Commission are in line with its recommendations. This represents a step in the right direction towards the adoption of a more systematic, structured and integrated approach. This will make it possible to render the policy more readily comprehensible, more identifiable and more feasible. By building on the knowledge and experience of national, regional and local authorities, a coherent and targeted set of indicators can be developed which provides valuable information and prevents unnecessary duplication;

1.8 **wishes** to do its utmost to bring about close involvement of regional and local authorities in the organisation and implementation of the evaluations, **and supports** the proposal to designate contact points in the EU Institutions, too, for the dialogue with the Commission with a view, also, to improving the quality and effectiveness of the evaluation reports;

1.9 **underlines** the importance of carrying out thorough strategic policy evaluations in respect of a number of parts of the policy and **expects** that this will make it possible to pay more attention to the consequences in respect of implementation practice at regional and local level.

2. Recommendations of the Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions,

2.1 **calls for** clearer agreements with regard to cooperation between the European Institutions and regional and local authorities in the field of freedom, security and justice;

2.2 **urges** that steps be taken in the short term to demonstrate how its earlier proposals have been taken into account in the elaboration of the Communications under review;

2.3 **urgently recommends** that the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament seek practical, feasible and workable solutions in the short term to the shortcomings which have been highlighted in the implementation at national level of the mechanisms defined in Title VI of the Treaty on European Union;

2.4 **urges**, in line with the view set out in its earlier opinion, that regional and local authorities be more directly involved in the establishment of the annual scoreboard, for example by holding hearings with teams of experts. There is bound to be interest not only in what has been achieved on paper but also, and above all, in the practical consequences, which are closely linked to the development of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms;

2.5 **notes** that this evaluation process clearly reveals the scant progress made on combating illegal immigration. It therefore urges the EU to engage fully in developing a common immigration policy that addresses the various complex aspects relating to irregular immigrants;

2.6 **calls for** the common underlying principles for the establishment of a coherent European framework for integration in the short term to be further developed into a practical 'toolbox' for regional and local authorities, with a view to stimulating the integration process at regional and local level and rendering it more professional;

2.7 **proposes**, in line with the views set out in its earlier opinion, that steps be taken to promote the development of a situation whereby, at local level too, the integration process clearly forms an integral part of the various strands of government policy;

2.8 **urges** that regional and local authorities be involved in the drawing up of draft legislation in respect of the establishment of an early warning and information network covering infrastructure of critical importance;

2.9 **advises** the Commission, in the context of the debate on how to do (more) justice to the expectations of Community citizens in respect of EU policy in the fields of freedom, security and justice and how to make this policy more effective, to make provision also for direct discussions with regional and local authorities, NGOs, the business community, etc.;

2.10 **recommends** the Commission to pay considerable attention to preventing the proposed monitoring and evaluation mechanisms from being organised in a bureaucratic way and ensuring that they are geared to implementation procedures;

2.11 **urges** that, when the proposed measures for providing information for all 'stakeholders' are being implemented, steps be taken to ensure that the knowledge and experience of regional and local authorities play an important role in this context;

2.12 **requests** the Commission also to take account of the CoR's earlier recommendations when it implements the proposals with regard to the national reporting mechanisms. National reports should also, as a rule, explicitly indicate how regional and local authorities are involved in the implementation of the policy. A simple statement to the effect that consultations are carried out with some degree of regularity is unsatisfactory.

Brussels, 6 December 2006.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Michel DELEBARRE