



EUROPEAN CHARTER OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP*

July 2006

PREAMBLE

We, active citizens organized in movements and associations operating in different European Union countries have drawn up this European Charter of Active Citizenship.

We submit it to the public debate at the Community and national level and request that it be included in the European constitutional process, as well as in the Member States' legal frameworks.

The Charter concerns citizens' organizations and not individuals. Moreover, it refers to public institutions, understood both as governmental and administrative bodies / agencies, irrespective of their legal status.

The Charter draws on the actual experiences of Autonomous Citizens' Organizations (ACOs)¹, which are directly or indirectly involved in European and national public policies.

The Charter is also based on the analysis of a number of good practices in Public institutions-citizens' organizations relationships, as well as on documents produced by the European institutions, the scientific community, active citizenship organizations and previous Charters and Conventions addressing the issue of citizens' participation in policy-making.

There are two fundamental reasons why this Charter has been drawn up: the existence of a paradox concerning citizens' participation in the democratic life of the European Union and the presence of a normative gap in European legal framework.

The paradox is that while citizens and their autonomous organizations are usually asked to contribute with material and immaterial resources to filling the "democratic deficit" of the European Union, they are, at the same time, hardly considered and often mistrusted by Public institutions.

* This draft is the result of the joint work of the team FONDACA (Active Citizenship Foundation) - Active Citizenship Network (the European program of the Italian civic movement Cittadinanzattiva), composed of Cinzia Carnevale, Giuseppe Cotturri, Cecília Fonseca, Giovanni Moro, Charlotte Roffiaen and Ilaria Vannini. The text is the outcome of a project managed by Active Citizenship Network with the participation of World of NGOs (Austria); Consumers Defense Association (Czech Republic); Sozialbüro Main-Taunus (Germany); Ghaqda-tal-Konsumatori (Malta); Association of Polish Consumers (Poland); Animar (Portugal); Romanian Association for Consumer Protection (Romania); Legal Information Center for NGOs (Slovenia); Helsinki Citizens Assembly (Turkey). The project was supported by a grant from the DG Education and Culture of the European Commission and Unicredito.

The project team took also into consideration the contributions from 22 organizations, institutions and individual experts during the consultation period (March - April 2006) and the comments done during the project' Final Conference held in Vienna the 22nd and the 23rd May 2006.

¹ We prefer the expression Autonomous Citizens' Organizations rather than the other existing ones (Civil Society Organizations, Third Sector Organizations, Non-profit Organizations, etc.) that refer to economic, philosophical and ethical aspects, which are currently under discussion.

This paradox is linked to a normative gap: while EU documents contain several references to the activity of citizens' organizations in the public arena, they completely lack legally binding texts defining the roles, rights and responsibilities of Autonomous Citizens' Organizations, as well as the related obligations of Public institutions. The European Union has yet to define, in fact, citizens' organizations activity in the public arena in terms of rights, thus confining this matter to the field of policy making.

The European Charter of Active Citizenship aims at addressing this paradox and at filling the normative gap, by finally acknowledging the role of Autonomous Citizens' Organizations as legitimate and fundamental actors in the construction of Europe.

The Charter contributes to the building and development of the European democratic space through the collective exercise of citizens' rights, already guaranteed as recognised fundamental rights, by ACOs.

Its strength lays on its process of implementation, specifically when serving as a basis for the enhancement and improvement of the relationship between ACOs and public institutions. The Charter must be understood as an ongoing process of deliberation and discussion between both actors.

It must be pointed out that this role does neither conflict with the responsibility of Public institutions, nor challenge the mechanisms of democratic representation in the European Union. The activity of Autonomous Citizens' Organizations is rather meant to integrate European institutions' actions and to enrich democratic life with new energy.

The European Charter of Active Citizenship draws its inspiration, among others, from the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and particularly from article 11 on the freedom of expression and information, article 12 on the freedom of assembly and association, article 21 on non-discrimination and article 41 on the right to good administration².

The 20 articles of the Charter are thus an embodiment of fundamental rights and, as such, they exist and must be respected even when European and national laws do not explicitly provide for their protection.

The Charter contains 20 articles and is divided into the following sections:

- General Principles
- Rights of Civic Participation
- Public institutions' Obligations
- Enforcement
- Implementation

The articles of the Charter shall be considered together. Specifically, articles 10, 11, 12, 13 and 19 shall be interpreted based on the provisions of articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8,9 and 18.

Annexed to the Charter is a summary of national examples of good practices gathered in 10 European countries during the project, which were used to identify the rights of the Charter; they testify to the fact that these rights are attainable. These examples shall, therefore, be considered as an integral part of the Charter.

² These rights, already guaranteed by that Charter, will therefore not be directly quoted in the body of the text. Moreover, the Charter does not make reference to the European Treaties that have yet to be ratified.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. Definition of Autonomous Citizens Organisations

The Autonomous Citizens Organisations (ACOs) are created and managed by citizens. They achieve civic participation contributing to the protection of the fundamental rights and to the enhancement of the democratic life.

They work for the protection of citizens' rights and / or the preservation of common goods through advocacy activities, delivery of services and the empowerment of citizens.

They operate in the general interest through democratic structures, without seeking for profit.

2. Right to Participation

Each individual has the right to actively participate, through Autonomous Citizens' Organizations (ACOs), in public life.

Public life refers to situations and places where issues of general interest are dealt with, including the fields of action addressed by Public institutions.

ACOs shall have the opportunity to directly participate in the entire policy-making process; meaning that they shall be considered as one of the key players when setting the public agenda, when implementing the policy and when evaluating it. Furthermore, they shall contribute to the decisions right from the beginning of the decision-making process, and not when the decisions have already been taken.

3. Role of Public institutions

Public institutions value and encourage ACOs' activities aimed at protecting rights, preserving and / or enhancing the common good and/or general interest.

Public institutions in the European Union – that is local, national and EU institutions - shall remove the obstacles to the development of ACOs' activities and support them, particularly by putting in place adequate instruments, systems and processes to promote greater participation; formulating policies in a transparent and clear manner; supporting and collaborating in ACOs' autonomous initiatives and working in partnership with them on common projects.

Public institutions shall call for the views of ACOs, encouraging their participation in decision-making processes.

Finally, Public institutions shall integrate the lessons learned from the best practices in their work standards.

4. Responsibilities of Autonomous Citizens Organizations

ACOs have the responsibility to contribute to the promotion of a greater European awareness among citizens and to increasing people's participation in the Union's democratic life.

In doing so, they shall comply with the following requirements:

- a. Accountability towards their members and their constituency at large.
- b. Transparency, especially on financial matters and when beneficiary of public funds and/or citizens' contributions.
- c. Independence from other actors (such as trade unions, political parties and the institutions themselves) whose role they shall not take on.
- d. Democracy in their structure and procedures.

ACOs shall promote the interests and aspirations of citizens, conveying them to local, national and EU policy-makers, with special attention to marginalized groups of people.

ACOs shall provide citizens with concrete opportunities to work together and participate in the construction of the EU through European, national and local projects and initiatives.

When ACOs bring to the political agenda new issues or problems they shall propose the appropriate measures to address them and shall also motivate their opinions and demands.

ACOs shall comply with minimum standards of transparency such as adopting a Code of Conduct and publishing the organisation's objectives, mission, legal status, membership, governing bodies, accountability and consultation modalities, financial sources, budgets and accounts, work programme and monitoring procedures.

Public institutions shall support ACOs in taking on their civic responsibilities and shall encourage their compliance with the four basic requirements.

RIGHTS OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION

5. Right to Intervention

Whenever citizens' rights and general interests are at stake, ACOs have the right to intervene with opinions and actions, as well as publicly disclosing the actions and/or omissions which may have an effect on such rights and general interests.

They have the right to ask for injunctions and file compensation actions for damages before the competent courts of the European Union and its Member States in order to protect citizens' rights, the common good or general interests, as already established for consumer organizations.

When ACOs report a violation of citizens' rights or a damage to the common good, Public institutions shall respond with concrete and participatory actions.

Moreover, private sector actors shall facilitate the exercise of this right.

When a European Union law or decision infringes the European fundamental rights, ACOs may present an appeal to the European Court of Justice and ask for the suspension of the legal acts' application.

When a national law or decision infringes the European fundamental rights, and especially the high levels of protection established in articles 35, 37 and 38 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, ACOs may present an appeal to the competent national courts and ask for the suspension of the legal acts' application.

6. Right to carry out Prevention Activities

ACOs have the right to carry out activities aimed at preventing injuries and damages to persons and common goods, as well as the lowering of the high levels of protection of human health, the environment and consumer rights established by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

When ACOs report a risk of any kind to Public institutions, these in turn shall intervene to prevent the risk from taking place. Public institutions shall also integrate ACOs' experience in prevention in their public planning.

Finally, Public institutions shall encourage those prevention activities directly carried out by ACOs.

7. Right to Consultation

ACOs have the right to participate in all public consultations.

The appropriateness and design of consultations shall be decided in a participatory manner. Their objective shall be clearly defined before the consultation process is launched.

When consultations are to be held, Public institutions shall guarantee that the final decisions will not have been taken yet and that ACOs views will be taken into account.

Consultation procedures shall be open and be conducted according to transparent rules, which will not however be overly bureaucratized.
In defining and managing the consultation processes, Public institutions shall also have to take into account ACOs' limited human, time and financial resources.

8. Right to Access

ACOs have the right to access to all the sources of information and documentation.
ACOs are entitled to access to the spaces where citizens' rights, common goods and/or general interests are at stake, in order to verify their respect and actual fulfilment.
They have the same right to access to public and private media as all other actors involved in policy-making do.

Public institutions shall facilitate ACOs' access to information and documentation.
They shall provide effective, complete, clear and quality information on laws, programs and other policy measures in a language understandable to all the interested stakeholders.
Information shall be made accessible through different communication channels and made available as soon as possible.
Public institutions shall facilitate ACOs' access to and free circulation in public places.

9. Right to Evaluate

ACOs have the right to publicly communicate their evaluation of public and private actors' activities concerning the fulfilment of the common good and/or general interest, as well as to the respect of citizens' rights.
To this end, ACOs have the right to take part in evaluation procedures and bodies.

Public institutions shall involve ACOs in the evaluation process, creating and using participatory monitoring and evaluation instruments.
To this end, evaluation procedures shall be transparent and formalized and the evaluation method clearly defined.

10. Right to a Qualified Interlocution

In their relations with Public institutions, ACOs have the right to dialogue and collaborate with properly qualified public officials or institutions' representatives.

Public institutions shall make sure that their representatives and civil servants dealing with citizens' matters be clearly identifiable and accessible to ACOs and that their number be sufficient to deal with ACOs' requests.
In order to meet this requirement, Public institutions shall promote training and periodic updating activities.
They shall also guarantee continuity of relations, even when their representatives and civil servants change posts.

PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS' OBLIGATIONS

11. Respect of Time and Obligation to give Feed back

Public institutions shall:

- a. respect ACOs' time, by adopting swift and simple procedures;
- b. provide timely replies to ACOs' inputs and properly motivate their answers.

Public institutions shall define an appropriate timetable for ACOs' participation in the different phases of policy-making and disclose them in advance. They shall involve ACOs in this process. These participative procedures are intended to avoid an excessive bureaucratization, which may prevent ACOs' participation.

ACOs are entitled to receive a clear and prompt feedback from Public institutions on whether and how their recommendations will be taken into account in the drafting of policies. Public institutions shall motivate their response in a clear and exhaustive manner, especially when they reject an ACOs' proposal.

12. Trust and Equal Dignity

Public institutions shall carry out their relations with ACOs on the basis of trust, equal dignity and the principle of non-discrimination.

Public institutions shall formally recognize the autonomy and equal dignity of ACOs, as well as the importance of their role. This means that Public institutions shall treat ACOs on an equal footing and not consider them as quasi-administrative bodies.

When establishing a relationship of dialogue, collaboration or partnership with ACOs, Public institutions shall follow the principle of non-discrimination. This means that Public institutions shall identify their interlocutors / partners through a public and participated process, using transparent criteria adapted to each policy-making phase and specific situation as defined in article 19.

Moreover, Public institutions cannot expect to have just one ACO representative as their only interlocutor.

13. Facilitation and Support Measures

In order to promote and support the development of civic activities, Public institutions shall provide tax relief to ACOs, contribute to their expenses and facilitate their access to logistical resources.

Public institutions shall develop funding policies that take into account the objectives and needs of ACOs. They shall define, together with ACOs, a list of clear criteria and procedural rules regarding funding.

They shall guarantee timely payment, promptly inform ACOs on future funding and ensure that funding decisions be taken according to principles of fairness and transparency.

In order to facilitate ACOs' activities and their participation in public decisions and debates, Public institutions shall provide them with specific training and with logistical resources.

ENFORCEMENT

14. Applicability of the European Charter of Active Citizenship

The articles contained in this Charter are to be applied immediately and directly to all the Public institutions and ACOs in the European Union at the local, national or EU level.

15. Administrative Claims

ACOs have the right to submit claims requesting the respect of the Charter's rights and the fulfilment of the concerned Public institutions' obligations, directly to the competent public administration or independent authorities.

16. Appeal to the national courts

When national a law or decision infringes the provisions of the present Charter, the ACOs affected by this law or decision may present an appeal to the competent courts and ask for the suspension of the legal act's application.

17. Appeal to the European Court of Justice

When a European law or decision infringes the provisions of the present Charter, the ACOs affected by this law or decision may present an appeal to the European Court of Justice and ask for the suspension of the legal act's application.

IMPLEMENTATION

18. Institution of Horizontal Bodies

In order to effectively implement the principles of this Charter, Public institutions shall set up horizontal departments or agencies and *ad hoc* structures, and/or liaison officers, devoted to coordinating and supporting the interaction between ACOs and Public institutions.

Public institutions shall not deal with ACOs in a fragmented manner, so that different approaches and policy styles towards ACOs are avoided within the same institution.

19. Criteria for involving ACOs

Public institutions shall define and apply a set of criteria to identify the ACOs with which to establish relationships of collaboration and partnership.

These criteria shall vary according to the type of relationship being considered and shall be adapted to the concrete situations. Dialogue shall remain a completely open process.

For the use of this Charter, dialogue is understood as those situations in which public institutions listen to ACOs' inputs, give them a feedback and take it into account.

Collaboration refers to the situations in which public institutions and ACOs have convergent objectives. Partnership refers to the situations in which ACOs and public institutions share objectives, resources, responsibilities and risks.

The criteria for involving ACOs in collaboration and partnership shall both be objective (field of activity, size, territory scope, degree or operational level, stability, resources, etc.) and evaluative (experience, expertise, reputation, trust, networking, internal organization, ability to express general or focused interests, past results, quality of project, etc.).

The selection of the appropriate criteria will be conducted through an open and public consultation process. ACOs shall be invited to participate in the definition of the criteria.

The selected criteria shall be communicated and applied in a transparent manner. The application of such criteria shall involve ACOs as much as possible, for example through the use of joint bodies. The results of the identification process shall be motivated and publicly disclosed.

20. Insertion of the Charter's provisions in the national and EU legal orders

In order to reinforce the protection of the ACO's rights, the general principles of the Charter shall be recognized by the national and EU constitutions. Its specific provisions shall be included in the national and EU laws.

The European Union shall encourage Member States to adopt national laws guaranteeing the exercise of active citizenship' rights *vis-à-vis* public and private bodies involved in public interest activities. The future European Constitution and every future European Treaty shall include the principles of this Charter. On the occasion of National Constitutions' revisions, these principles shall be taken due consideration.

ANNEX

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

2. Right to Participation

ACO participating in the entire policy-making cycle

Portugal – Ministry of Health (Directorate-General of Health) (Public institution); APDP - Association for the Protection of the Diabetics in Portugal (Autonomous Citizens' Organization)

The ACO participated from the beginning in the public policy making process concerning the control of diabetes and continues to collaborate with the PI through a formal partnership that includes, for instance, the training of health professionals.

ACO participating in the entire policy-making cycle

Portugal – Regional Services of the Ministry of the Education (PI); RADIAL/ IN LOCO (ACO)

The Best Practice was triggered by the ACO research on the lack of pre-school services in rural areas. The entire project was monitored in a participative manner, involving the ACO, other citizens and the regional services of the PI. The involvement of citizens led to the public decision to extend the project to other rural areas.

3. Role of Public institutions

Public institution collaborating in ACO autonomous initiatives

Austria - The Women's Department of the Provincial State Government of Lower Austria (PI); Suedwind (ACO)

The ACO asked the PI to become a partner in organizing the celebrations for the history of women in Austria. The PI was responsible of preparing and organizing a conference and an exhibition, as well as providing information to many interested citizens.

Public institutions publicizing ACO activities

Austria – The Austrian Federal Ministry for Health and Women (PI); Autonomous Women Organizations in Austria (ACO)

The PI signed an agreement with the ACOs, aimed at disseminating information on domestic violence to citizens, through their public support facilities.

Public institutions publicizing ACO activities

Czech Republic – Municipalities (PI); Consumer Defense Association of the Czech Republic (ACO)

The ACO identified a general lack of citizens' awareness concerning the existence of consumer advice centers. The ACO contacted the PI in order to create joint electronic centers and raise, this way, consumer awareness. The PI published this new service on its web-site.

Public institutions removing obstacles to ACO activities

Germany – Police (PI); Women help Women (ACO)

The PI overcame its administrative procedure to allow the ACO to provide prompt and efficient assistance to women victims of domestic violence.

The new procedure proposed by the ACO was then definitively integrated into the PI's standards.

Public institution promoting ACO activities aimed at preserving the common good

Italy – “Terza Età Sicura” – Department of the City of Genoa (PI); Association “Tutti in Ciassa” (ACO)

The PI promoted and coordinated an urban renewal project through an experimental and innovative method of participatory management of public spaces by organized citizens. The ACO participated in the improvement works and, afterwards, continued to be in charge of the management of the public spaces.

Public institution continuing an ACO autonomous initiative

Malta – Ministry of Education (PI); Eden Foundation (ACO)

The PI decided to take over the course for trainers of children with special needs that the ACO had initiated. This Best Practice shows that Public institutions can learn from ACO initiatives.

Public institution integrating an ACO best practices in its work standards

Portugal – Central and Municipal Governments (PI); DECO Proteste (ACO)

The ACO and the PIs set up, in partnership, a pilot project of Arbitrage Centers on Consumer Disputes. In light of the project's good results, it was replicated at the national and European level. This experience became the basis for the work of the European Commission in developing the present European network for the cooperation among these organizations: Network for the extra-judicial settlement of consumer disputes (EEJ-Net).

Public institution calling for ACO participation in policy-making

Romania – Ministry of Education (PI); Romanian Association for Consumer Protection (ACO)

In the framework of the collaboration with the PI, the ACO was involved in training teachers and contributed to introducing a number of consumer protection issues in the school curriculum.

4. Responsibilities of Autonomous Citizens Organizations

ACO requesting the Public institution to preserve a common good

Czech Republic – Ombudsman Office (PI); Czech Eco-Counseling Network (ACO)

The ACO proposed to the newly established ombudsman office to meet the criteria on green procurement, advising the PI on the changes to be implemented and the procedures to be adapted.

ACO contributing to promote social welfare

Czech Republic – Municipalities (PI); Czech Blind United (ACO)

The ACO implemented a project aimed at creating websites accessible to blind people. The ACO also ran a competition on the best accessible websites.

ACO promoting the interests and aspirations of citizens

Germany - Town-Mayor and Parliament (PI); Caritas (ACO)

In the framework of a program for social-towns, the PI signed an agreement with the ACO for its definition and implementation. The ACO facilitated the expression of citizens' needs, ideas and requests, which were afterwards presented to the PI.

ACO contributing to promote social welfare

Malta - Employment and Training Corporation (PI); Eden Foundation (ACO)

The ACO set up a small unit for the training of people with special needs to help them find work. The ACO put up its own funds to start the project and worked in sensitizing the families, while the PI searched for possible employers.

ACO contributing to the construction of European and local identities

Portugal – Jacques Delors European Information Center, municipalities, public schools (PI); Association "Inscrire", Animar, local cultural associations (ACO)

The partnership between two ACOs and a PI involving local governments and schools consisted in an active/participative educational project: the writing of the fundamental rights of the European Union (Charter of the Fundamental Rights) in the public spaces (in glazed tiles panels) in several Portuguese cities. Besides its educational value, it will remain as a symbol for the strengthening of the European and local identities.

ACO contributing to promote social welfare

Turkey – Social Services and Child Care Institution (PI); Civic Involvement Projects (ACO)

The program, implemented in collaboration with several PI, aimed at giving University students awareness that individuals not only can, but also have the responsibility to contribute positively to society. Through the Civic Involvement Projects, young people learned that they can make a difference individually, as well as collectively as a team.

ACO contributing to promote social welfare

Turkey - The Ministry of National Education (PI); Human Resource Development Foundation (HRDF) and Departments of Education of universities in the three major cities of Istanbul, Izmir and Bursa (ACO)

The ACOs implemented an information and training program on sexual and reproductive health for adolescents. The PI provided the needed resources.

5. Right to Intervention

ACO intervening when citizens' rights are at stake

Austria - Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumers (PI); VKI Verein für Konsumenteninformation (ACO)

An Internet Ombudsman structure was set up, through a partnership between the ACO and the PI, to assist consumers on online shopping problems and frauds perpetrated by firms and individuals on the Internet.

ACO intervening when citizens' rights are at stake

Italy – Parliament (PI); Cittadinanzattiva, Forum del 3° Settore, FUCI, Legambiente (ACO)

The ACOs presented a proposal for the introduction of a new citizen's right on horizontal subsidiarity into the Constitution. Thanks to the many advocacy activities, petitions and the constitution of alliances and committees the right was adopted following the recent reform process of the Italian Constitution.

ACO intervening when general interests are at stake

Malta – Ministry for Social Policy, Ministry of the Interior (PI); Jesuit's Refugee Service (ACO)

The ACO started talks with the PI to obtain the release of young unaccompanied immigrants who shouldn't be detained. Afterwards, the PI, following the ACO's request, provided a house that was converted into a youth shelter. The ACO contributed with human and financial resources and is now in charge of running the shelter.

ACO requiring the intervention of the Public institution on the violation of citizens' rights

Portugal – National Government; National Institute for Consumers Protection; State Office for Consumers Protection; Presidency of the Cabinet (PI); DECO Proteste (ACO)

Following a fatal incident in an Aqua-Park, the ACO persuaded the PI to draw up the necessary Law changes that would guarantee the safety of these recreational facilities, based on the lawsuits brought against the State by one of the victims' families and on the evaluation studies conducted years before by the ACO itself.

ACO intervening when general interests are at stake

Slovenia – Slovenian Office for Youth, National Assembly, Ministry for Education and Sports (PI); Slovenian Youth Council (ACO)

The ACO promoted a process to revise a law on Youth by drafting its own law proposal, conducting public debates and consultations with other ACOs, as well as advocating it in different circles (Ministry, Parliament, etc.), until the new law was approved by the National Parliament.

ACO requiring the intervention of the Public institution on the violation of citizens' rights

Slovenia – Ministry of Health, Agency for Insurance Supervision (PI); Association of Consumers Slovenia (ACO)

Following the violation of Consumers Protection rights by an insurance company, the ACO promoted an awareness campaign and subsequently petitioned the PI to include a new amendment in the Law on health care and health insurance which would nullify all prior contracts.

6. Right to Carry out Prevention Activities

ACO preventing damages to persons

Austria – The Women's Department of the Provincial State of Carinthia (PI); ASPIS Research, consultation and support for traumatized persons (ACO)

The PI asked the ACO to collaborate in creating a help-line for potential victims of trafficking in human beings. The ACO provided the facilities and psychologists. A new social support structure was implemented on a regional level, which also took on a series of problems that could not be dealt with by other institutions and organizations.

ACO preventing damages to persons

Germany – Social Services Department (PI); Ecumenical housing association (ACO)

The ACO operated in preventing people from becoming homeless, by searching for low-cost housing for poor people and asylum seekers.

ACO preventing damages to the environment

Poland – Ministry of Environment, local authorities (PI); Institute of Civil Affairs, "The Citizen" Association, Green Federation – Krakow Group (ACO)

The ACOs promoted, in cooperation with the Public institutions, a massive campaign to encourage pro-ecological behaviour and promote environmental friendly city transport. The initiative included the production of information materials, seminars, concerts, the organization of traffic blocks, etc. As a result, a number of local authorities created, for instance, bicycle lanes.

7. Right to Consultation

Taking ACO views into account

Malta – Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity (PI); National Council of Women (ACO)
When the PI submitted for consultation the White Paper on the new national law on Family, the ACO not only provided its views, but also collected case law and released a short report on the issue. Its proposals were accepted and the ACO provided advice on how to draft the changes.

Transparent consultation procedures

Poland – Ministry of Environment (PI); Non-Governmental Environmental Organizations (ACO)
ACOs are represented in the Steering Committees (consultative and advisory bodies) that participate in each stage of the legislative process. The innovation of this best practice is that ACOs are entitled to elect their representatives to the Committees instead of having them appointed by the Public institution.

Taking ACO views into account

Romania – National Authority for Consumer Protection (PI); Romanian Association for Consumer Protection (ACO)
The PI, with a view to implementing a EU Directive on Consumer Credit, consulted the ACO in the definition and drafting of the new Consumer Credit Law. The PI was open to dialogue and accepted most of the ACO's proposals.

Taking ACO views into account

Romania - National Authority for Natural Gas Regulation (PI); Romanian Association for Consumer Protection (ACO)
When the PI launched a consultation process on new gas distribution contracts, which would have also included the setting of a monthly fee, the ACO, along with other citizens' organizations, presented a request to put into place the necessary tools for the evaluation of the use of the money collected through this monthly fee. As a result, the PI adopted a new regulation prohibiting the introduction of such a fee.

8. Right to Access

Free access and circulation in public spaces

Italy – Local Health Agencies (PI); Cittadinanzattiva (ACO)
The ACO created a partnership with PI and private companies to evaluate health services through instruments designed by the ACO. The PI guaranteed the free access and circulation of the ACO in the health facilities.

9. Right to Evaluate

ACO involvement in evaluation procedures

Germany – The Chancellor, Secretaries of State for social and economic affairs (PI); Charitable organizations (ACO)
The PI asked the ACO for a report highlighting the possible gaps of a new social law and the recommendations to address them. The ACO monitored the situation and gave the PI its evaluation on the impact of this new law.

ACO involvement in evaluation procedures

Italy – City of Rome, Simplification and Citizens' Rights Office, "Cantieri" – Department of the Public Administration (PI); Cittadinanzattiva (ACO)
The PI asked the ACO to evaluate the experimental phase of a project on a Citizens' Info line. The collaboration was extended to the implementation phase, with the ACO in charge of monitoring the quality of the service.

ACO involvement in evaluation procedures

Italy – National Post Office (PI); Cittadinanzattiva (ACO)

A prototype of the new post offices was tested by the ACO and subsequently adjusted on the basis of the test's indications. The new model was then introduced, leading to significant improvements in the efficiency and quality of the service and in the satisfaction of its users.

10. Right to a Qualified Interlocution

Participated training of civil servants

Poland - Office for Competition and Consumer Protection (PI); Association of Polish Consumers (ACO)

The ACO provided information on consumer issues and, together with the Public institution, gave legal advice to local consumer advocates (who answer to local authorities). This activity involved the cooperation between PIs operating at the national and local level and the ACO.

Training of civil servants

Romania – Local Governments (PI); CREST Resource Center (ACO)

The PIs carried out the training of its civil servants in order to provide them with the necessary tools to promote citizens' participation in public decision-making. Training focused, for instance, on sharing information honestly, completely and clearly with citizens and on encouraging them to use these resources.

11. Respect of Time and Obligation to give Feed back

Defining an appropriate timetable and prompt feedback

Austria – Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (PI); The World of NGOs (ACO)

The PI set the schedule of the consultation meetings in advance, allowing all stakeholders to plan ahead and guarantee their participation. During the meetings, the PI provided immediate feedback to the ACO's inputs. All recommendations were taken into account, recorded in the reports and followed adopted when considered appropriate.

12. Trust and Equal Dignity

No single ACO interlocutor

Germany: Common Committee of representatives from the doctors, hospitals and public health insurance (PI); German Disability Council and German Group of Consumer Protection (ACO)

The ACOs taking part in the Committee maintained their own autonomy and, as a rule, represented their interests individually, even though they also cooperated together. No single ACO was designated with a general mandate of representation.

Relationship based on trust and equality

Malta – Malta Communications Authority (PI); Għaqda tal-Konsumaturi (ACO)

The ACO met the PI to share views on the current state in telecommunications and on the sector's future prospects. The relationship of trust developed between the two organizations allowed for a frank exchange of information on the issue. Moreover, this partnership is an example of how PI can benefit from opening up to other stakeholders.

Relationship based on trust and equality

Poland – Local Government of Czaplunek (PI); Regional Historic Society, "Szczecin EXPO" – Society for Supporting the Development of Western Pomerania (ACO)

The initiative, aimed at promoting tourism in the region, was based on mutual trust and partnership between the PI and the ACOs at each stage of the project, from joint brainstorming, fundraising, and evaluation of the drafting of the follow-up activities. The project involved the participation of various stakeholders: local officials (that participated as volunteers), ACO representatives, teachers and students.

13. Facilitation and Support Measures

Facilitating ACO fundraising

Czech Republic – Czech Post (PI); Consumer Defense Association of the Czech Republic (ACO)

The PI provided a letter of intent to help the ACO to look for funds to print the material needed to implement its campaign.

Accessing to training and logistical resources

Poland – The Office of the President of Gdynia (PI); Local NGOs (ACO)

The PI set up and financed a center for ACO activities. In this center, ACOs can organize meetings, conferences, campaigns and access to legal assistance and advice on fundraising and on how to fill application forms and implement projects. The center has also a database of local ACOs.

Facilitating ACO participation

Slovenia – Agency for RadWaste Management (PI); Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (ACO)

The ACO accepted the invitation of the PI to implement a project aimed at informing local communities and other environmental ACOs on how to participate in the decision-making process concerning the location of a radioactive waste disposal site.

Facilitating ACO fundraising

Turkey - Istanbul Kadikoy Municipality (PI); Foundation for the Support of Women's Work and Istanbul Branch of the Federation of the Handicapped (ACO)

ACOs often encounter difficulties when searching for funds for their projects or applying to EU Calls for proposals. In this case, the PI applied to the EU for the project and was able to obtain the funding for the beneficiaries of the project.