

## **'Mission impossible? Getting politicians more involved in EUROCITIES'**

### **Why do we want to get politicians involved?**

- EUROCITIES is, by its nature, a political network – in theory and in the statutes, EUROCITIES is an association of politicians. But in practice, city experts make the most of the network through their work within working groups etc. Political leadership is necessary.
- Some skepticism that politicians may push just for short-term results. Nevertheless they are figureheads in our lobbying work.
- Nevertheless, there is no alternative, we need politicians: they vote at the AGM, they have the final say on policy papers, etc
- City officers need the back up of their politicians at home. Politicians, in their cities, take the budgetary decisions: one of them being to allocate money to the EUROCITIES fees.
- Participating to EUROCITIES' network also brings politicians more visibility, credibility, power and influence at EU level. It gives them the possibility to take part in high level events with MEPs and commissioners. For EUROCITIES, politicians are the best lobbyists for our cities.
- The network gives politicians a unique opportunity to exchange new ideas and common issues with fellow Mayors. Mayors of smaller cities like Bialystok get a chance to promote their cities among the network. Smaller cities very often share the same issues as bigger cities.
- Involvement in forum work depends on the politician's interests. Most would prefer visibility in the political context of high-level events or the annual conference rather than the more detailed technical forum work.
- Involving politicians makes officers' work easier as they understand what the officers want to achieve.

### **What is the best way to transfer ideas gained from EUROCITIES' work to your politicians?**

- In smaller cities, EUROCITIES contact officers can brief the Mayors directly about their work. In bigger cities, this is generally not possible, and the information is passed on to the relevant city field expert who may or may not inform the Mayor. The best way to transfer ideas gained from EUROCITIES work to politicians is to invite them for city visits with a focus on a specific topic of interest, such as transport solutions or water cleaning for instance.
- It is important that politicians participate in important meetings themselves because of the possible loss of information when they are replaced by city officers.

- Exchanging on European affairs should be made obligatory in city administration meetings (common rules of business). It is a long-term effort to raise the value of European work in local administrations.
- High benefits to be gained for the city through engagement in EU via EUROCIITIES, but make clear that the EU is not a bank, but that EU policies influence national policies and that EUROCIITIES lobbying brings long-term returns to the cities.
- Peer reviews are a good way of transferring ideas from other cities.

**What happens when there is a change in political leadership? How do you introduce EUROCIITIES?**

- City councils can influence mayors (lobbying for the cause of EUROCIITIES when new Mayor wanted to withdraw e.g. Chemnitz)
- It is crucial that contact officers brief the new Mayor about the benefits EUROCIITIES can bring to the city. If possible, take the new politician to the annual conference. Show the advantages of the city participation in an EU-funded project through EUROCIITIES, for example.
- It is not so much about the political party but rather the politician, of personal involvement and interest.
- Role of officers is to ensure continuity in EUROCIITIES network and European affairs for the city.
- This is not an issue for some cities because they are very stable politically (eg Helsinki).
- Very difficult because the new politicians always want to make changes (even if it is the same party).
- Ensure good visibility for politicians e.g. signing Integrating Cities Charter was very important for Genoa to get involved after the political change.
- Annual reports about activities, incl. European activities.
- City manager/director is often in place for a very long-time as it is not a political position, so he/she also ensures continuity.
- Work on changing the mentality/set of mind of politicians.

**What would you recommend to others?**

- **Find the right politician**, a 'champion' – EUROCIITIES brings opportunities to politicians who are willing to travel on behalf of their city. Generally, a contact officer would try and find a politician (with good English) who likes travelling and values giving presentations and speeches about his city to an international

audience, and work with him/her and the network to ensure **visibility** for politicians within the network.

- **Use the personal interests of politicians** to get support for our work within the network (eg a politician wanting to be an MEP). Contact officers are most successful when they study their politicians' interest/political agenda and look for equivalent topics at EU level and/or within Eurocities: e.g. a politician interested in local energy issues will be more interested in EU energy policy than in other policies.
- **Profiling the city** – more than bigger well-known cities, some lesser seen cities value profiling opportunities. For example, Malmo is the third largest city in Sweden and there is no objective reason why it should be known as far as Japan. But the Mayor enjoys going out and talking about their achievements, as a result and through the years, Malmo has built a wide network across the world and participate to many projects. A lot of this started through EUROCITIES and is still sustained thanks to EUROCITIES.
- **Make it easy** – it would be easier to have politicians travel if the place where the event takes place is easily reached. Politicians must be able to go back to their city easily – for a council meeting or any emergency that always arise in their day-to-day work.
- **Would need a one or two-page briefing about EUROCITIES:** organisational structure, what is it about for politicians? What does it achieve for politicians? What are the main political issues/priority of the work programmes? 'Added value' is the key word. The European added value/the added value brought by EUROCITIES must be more visible.
- Try to involve politicians in **meetings in Brussels**, including in advocacy of city interests at EU level. Make your politicians understand that some issues are easier to deal with at EU level.
- **Organise a political study tour to Brussels to raise awareness** of politicians about EU institutions to make them understand the importance of lobbying the EU institutions (eg Copenhagen, G4).
- **Be selective** in choosing the right opportunity for your politician.
- Easier to involve Mayors than councillors who are more focused on local issues.
- Have the **secretary general visit** the politicians in your city to get them more committed.
- Organise a **EUROCITIES in the cities** in your city to get politicians on board.
- Make sure that the content of any activity/discussion is **relevant** for the politician.
- Money is a good argument to get politicians interested, either funding opportunities or financial threats through planned EU regulation.

- Involving politicians often requires a long term strategy that goes beyond the international relations/Europe's departments. It is really about horizontal work. In Nantes the politician in charge of international and European affairs hosts regular meetings on EU affairs with peers in charge of various sectors (culture, social affairs, environment...).
- The level of English is key. Nantes has developed a system of coaching. It works!

#### **Other comments**

##### Obstacles:

- Too many networks, on EU and national level.
- Work is duplicated (different networks may ask for update on same things), priorities need to be established.
- Busy agendas of politicians
  - o It is sometimes difficult for contact officers to get appointments with their politicians to explain EUROCIITIES and European work. These appointments are crucial though, as written reports do not have much impact or are simply not read.
  - o It is difficult to find time in politicians' agendas for e.g. visits and meetings in Brussels; such visits can however be very helpful to raise awareness and understanding of local politicians for European issues.
- Language /level of English.
- Lack of interest in European issues and/or EUROCIITIES
- Impossible to do anything if politicians are not convinced about the importance of being involved in EU affairs.

##### Request:

That EUROCIITIES produces short briefing summaries and short press releases that EUROCIITIES contacts can easily translate and use 'ad-hoc' for preparing political debates.