



Six new programmes

The Commission recently approved funding for six new programmes: four global grants to stimulate economic activity in the Mezzogiorno (Italy), a technical assistance programme to improve the implementation of Objective 1 aid in Italy and a multiregional single programming document (SPD) to further the conversion of Objective 2 areas in France threatened by restructuring in the defence sector.

One of the four global grants, "Business Innovation Cooperative Industries", aims to help innovative small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Italy make more use of non-financial services. The award should help pay for a total of more than 600 company audits. This grant, which includes ECU 12.5 million from the ERDF, will be managed by SFC (Sistemi formativi confindustria scpa).

Another of the grants, managed by "Cartesio - Società Consortile per Azioni", will also facilitate access by small businesses to non-financial services, primarily to promote the rationalisation of purchase and distribution operations and the modernisation of their information and management control systems. This grant includes an ERDF contribution of ECU 16.9 million.

The "BIC (Business and Innovation Centre) Sicilia SpA" will manage a third global grant, including ECU 12.9 million from the ERDF, to encourage business start-ups in Sicily.

The fourth global grant, to be managed by the "Mediterranea Sviluppo Scrl", consists of ECU 20 million of ERDF money to support SME start-ups in the economic crisis area of

Gioia Tauro in Calabria. In concrete terms, this grant is intended to help set up shared infrastructures and to finance an aid scheme and permanent company support services. A total of more than 450 jobs should be saved or created in the area.

The technical assistance programme for the implementation of the Italian Objective 1 Community Support Framework (CSF) aims to improve CSF management, monitoring, evaluation and publicity for the current period (1994-99). It will also prepare the ground for Community assistance post-1999, in particular by helping regional and local authorities identify their programming priorities. The ERDF contribution to this programme, which is financed entirely by the public sector, will be ECU 21.5 million.

The French authorities proposed an Objective 2 SPD areas dependent on the defence sector having decided, in 1997, on a large-scale restructuring of their defence industries. The SPD aims to encourage economic conversion in 22 employment areas eligible under Objective 2 that are particularly threatened by the restructuring. This new programme will be coordinated with current Objective 2 SPDs and Konver programmes. Of an estimated total cost of ECU 136.3 million, ECU 38.4 million will come from the ERDF and ECU 35.4 million from the French authorities, with the private sector making up the balance. The ERDF contribution is to be spread as follows between the four types of assistance that are planned:

- 37% for the reclamation and conversion of land used by the armed forces or industry for defence-related purposes (mainly in the form

of support to local authorities lacking the necessary local technical and financial resources;

- 24% for support measures for major investment projects (the "PAT" scheme of regional planning grants);
- 20% to help diversification within small businesses that are subcontractors for large groups (SME groupings, closer contacts between SMEs and large firms, manpower loans from large firms to SMEs);

- 19% to strengthen the financial structure of small businesses (via France's SME Development Bank).

A summary of each of these programmes is available on the Inforegio website <<http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/erdf>>.

Summaries can also be requested by fax: +32 2 230 49 15.

Regions and the information society

There is currently a plethora of initiatives and meetings aimed at improving the access of regions to the information society. Below are three important meetings due to take place before the end of the year:

- From 21 to 24 September, the Valencia region of Spain and the Commission are organising a second summer school in Alicante to look at the impact on economic and social cohesion of regional development strategies for the information society and telecommunications.

Working languages: Spanish and English.

Information and registration:

Summer School in regional policy of IS&T

Fundación OVSI

Fax: +34 965 13 22 18

E-mail: <school@ovsi.com>

Internet site: <<http://www.ovsi.com/school>>

- On 22 and 23 October, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), with support from the Commission, is organising a conference on applying the information society at regional and local levels.

Working languages: French, English and German.

Information and registration: STG, Sara Riso

Fax: +32 2 732 93 73

E-mail: <stg@infoboard.be>

Internet site: <<http://www.elanet.org/eisco>>

- Finally, in November, there will be a meeting in Austria of the regions taking part or interested in the Regional Information Society Initiatives (RISI).

Working languages: German and English

Information and registration: Otto Petrovic

Fax: +43 3 163 809 545

E-mail: <otto.petrovic@kfunigraz.ac.at>

Internet site: <<http://eris.epri.org>>

In brief

European Regional Planning Awards

On 4 August 1998, Monika Wulf-Mathies, the Commissioner responsible for regional policy, announced the results of the third competition for the European Urban and Regional Planning Awards. In the local planning category, the winner was Santiago de Compostela (Spain) for its project to rehabilitate the historic town centre. The plan for the Po Delta (Veneto region, Italy) won first prize in the regional planning category. In the cross-border planning category, the award went to the German-Dutch project for the Aachen-Heerlen industrial park. Finally in the category for planning between the EU and other countries, the winner

was a project submitted by the City of Toledo (Spain), in conjunction with Harvard University (USA) - "Revitalising Toledo's Historic Core". The independent jury given which had to choose winners from among 170 entries also gave special merit awards to four other projects: "Rapid participatory planning" (County Kilkenny, Ireland), "St Nicholas Park" (Naoussa, Greece), "Urban plan for Horta and renovation of the Faial theatre" (Portugal), and "Metropolitan infrastructures" (Barcelona, Spain). The awards will all be officially presented at a ceremony in Brussels on 18 November.

Contact: Charles White (DGXVI/F.2), fax: +32 2 296 60 03.



European Commission
Directorate-General for Regional Policy and Cohesion

CX-AB-98-008-EN-C