

# inforegio news

## "A Regional Policy which is both effective and meaningful to Europe's citizens"



Michel Barnier, the new Commissioner for regional policy, also responsible *ad personam* for the Inter-Governmental Conference

Nationality: French

CV:

- 1973-89 Member of the Savoy departmental council
- 1978-93 MP for Savoy
- 1982-99 President of the Savoy departmental council
- 1993-95 Minister for the Environment
- 1995-97 Minister in charge of European Affairs
- 1997-99 Senator for Savoy
- 1997-99 President of the French national section of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
- 1998-99 President of the French Senate's Delegation to the European Union

As I take over my new position within the College of Commissioners, I would like to set out my view of Community regional policy and the priorities which will be guiding what I do over the next five years.

I am truly happy that President Prodi has entrusted me with responsibility for regional policy within the new Commission. The European Union's regional policy is contributing to building a united Europe, to economic and social cohesion and to cohesion among its peoples and regions. It is also one of the most visible and down-to-earth of the Community's policies, helping to improve the quality of life of a large number of the Union's citizens in a direct way. For these reasons, I believe that regional policy is a valuable tool for ensuring that everyone shares in Europe's progress.

The primary aim of the Community's regional policy is to reduce the wide disparities still existing between the Union's regions and sections of its society. Regional policy is helping the regions and their populations to partake fully in the benefits of the Single Market and economic and monetary union. But although significant progress has been achieved over the last ten years, I believe that regional policy must persevere in our efforts to support restructuring in those regions which are in difficulty. This calls for, and justifies, longer term assistance.

In my previous position as president of a French regional authority - the Department of Savoy, which borders the Valle d'Aosta and Italian Piedmont - and as Minister for the Environment, I have had personal experience of overseeing a large number of local and regional development projects supported by the European Community. This experience has taught me that the Community Funds do more than encourage investment. Often the very existence of the Community's regional policy has led local actors to innovate, to work together and to channel their energies into long-term schemes, making projects of common interest possible, sometimes across national borders.

I am committed to ensuring that the partnerships among regional and local actors (the political authorities, business circles, the social partners, etc.) are reinforced when regional programmes are being prepared and implemented. This is, after all, a powerful means of increasing the effectiveness, visibility and democratic acceptance of the Structural Funds, and therefore an excellent way of making Europe better known to Europeans.

### A new look for Inforegio News

Readers will have noticed that the layout of this 68th issue of the Inforegio newsletter has changed. Our "face lift" coincides with two important events for Community regional policy: the arrival in office of the new Members of the Commission, and the transition from the 1994-99 programming period under the Structural Funds to the 2000-06 period. All the publications of the Directorate-General for Regional Policy will gradually be switching to a new design identity.

Member States should be doing all they can to set up strong local partnerships.

## Implementing the decisions taken at the Berlin summit

As you will know, the main outlines of Community regional policy in 2000-06, together with the relevant budget, were approved by the heads of state and government last March at the European Council held in Berlin. In total, almost EUR 260 billion will be devoted to structural activities in the Member States and in applicant countries between now and 2006.

On this basis, and within this general framework, my role will be to make sure that the new generation of regional programmes and Cohesion Fund projects are a great success. Starting next year, the Structural Funds will be granting almost EUR 25 billion a year to the regions lagging behind in their development (Objective 1) or in the process of restructuring (Objective 2). A further EUR 2.5 billion will be going to the Cohesion Fund for new projects in the fields of the environment and trans-European transport networks in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Ireland.

Our team will also be ensuring that the extension of structural policy to cover central and eastern European countries, in particular assistance in their pre-accession phase, is carried through under satisfactory conditions. This enlargement is a challenge of a special kind and we must prepare for it well. We will be using the new pre-accession instrument (ISPA) for this, but I shall also be involved in it as an aide to the Commission President in the context of reforming the institutions, one of my other official duties.

## Information and dialogue

Finally, and more generally, I would like to redouble the efforts being made in Brussels and in every Member State to inform all the potential beneficiaries, direct and indirect, about the operation, results and value-added of the Union's regional policy. This is a central plank in building a Europe of the people and the people's representatives. I will be going regularly on tour "on the spot", not only to explain our regional policy but also to discuss the future of the Union and its institutions with the citizen in the street.

*Michel Barnier*

# Structural policy and the Prodi Commission

**The European Parliament completed its investiture of the new College of Commissioners presided over by Romano Prodi on 15 September. Three Commissioners will be more particularly responsible for implementing Community structural activities: Michel Barnier, Anna Diamantopoulou and Franz Fischler.**

Michel Barnier (F) is responsible for regional policy and will oversee assistance from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund. Anna Diamantopoulou (GR) is responsible for the European Social Fund as part of her duties in the field of employment. Finally, Franz Fischler (A) as Commissioner for Agriculture and Fisheries will be responsible for rural development schemes under the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) and the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG).

Assistance provided by the Pre-Accession Structural Instrument (ISPA) and the Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD) will come under Michel Barnier and Franz Fischler respectively.

Before being installed in office by Parliament, all the new Commissioners appeared before MEPs to outline their priorities in their different fields. They also sent Parliament their written answers to a series of questions put to them beforehand.

The reports of these hearings, together with the Commissioners' written answers, can be found on the European Parliament's website:

<http://www.europarl.eu.int/dg3/com/en/default.htm>

Detailed portraits of the Commissioners are available on the Europa website at:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/index_en.htm)



**European Commission**  
Directorate-General for Regional Policy

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