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The Commission's regional policy priorities for the year 2000

Regional GDP: new figures from Eurostat

Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, recently published updated figures for regional gross domestic products (GDP) based on the new European System of Accounts.

The new figures, which are based on the averages for 1995-97 in the 211 NUTS II areas of the Union, show that the centre of London continues to enjoy the highest per capita GDP, followed by Hamburg, Luxembourg and Brussels.

At the other end of the table, 50 NUTS II areas have a per capita GDP lower than 75% of the Community average while the regions of Epirus in Greece and the Azores in Portugal stand at below 50%.

For further information, consult the full table available on the Inforegio site or visit Eurostat's Internet site <<http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat>>.

On 27 January Commissioner Michel Barnier outlined before Parliament the priorities of the Directorate-General for Regional Policy for the year 2000.

1. Strengthening the new programmes

The negotiations with the national authorities on the new Objective 1 and Objective 2 programmes will provide an opportunity for the Commission to enhance their strategic content and improve consistency with Cohesion Fund projects in the Member States concerned. The definitive guidelines for the Interreg and Urban Community Initiatives will also be adopted.

2. Preparing regional policy for an enlarged Union

In the year 2000, the departments responsible for regional policy will also be involved in the negotiations on enlargement with the applicant countries. The second report on economic and social cohesion, which will be ready by the end of the year, will for the first time look into the future of regional policy in an enlarged Union of 27 Member States. The Commission will also ensure that aspects of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) are incorporated in the regional programmes and will continue to discuss regional and urban development policies with all parties concerned.

3. Launching pre-accession aid

The year 2000 will also be the first to see the implementation of the Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-accession (ISPA), which will finance transport infrastructure and environmental protection projects. The proposals will be given careful consideration,

bearing in mind the measures provided for in the special programme for agriculture and rural development (SAPARD), the Phare programme for technical and economic cooperation and the possible contribution of the Interreg programmes.

4. Improving information

To bring regional policy closer to the individual citizen, major information and communication campaigns will be undertaken to explain how the Structural Funds and ISPA function, to present new programmes and to facilitate the dissemination and exchange of good practices.

5. Tightening up management and controls

To respond to the concerns expressed by the institutional partners (Parliament, Court of Auditors, etc.), new provisions will be adopted to improve management and controls relating to Structural Fund loans. Cooperation with the European Investment Bank and the European Investment Fund will also be stepped up to ensure that there is complementarity between aid from the Funds (ERDF, Cohesion Fund and ISPA) and loans from those institutions.

The full text of the work programme may be consulted on the Directorate-General's site on Europa <http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/regional_policy/index_en.htm> or may be obtained on request by fax: +32 2 296 60 03.

First 2000-06 programmes for Finland

On 9 February the Commission adopted two draft Single Programming Documents (SPDs) for Objective 1 in East and North Finland for 2000-06. These are the first programmes for the new Objective 1 for the 2000-06 programming period.

The total budget allocated to these two programmes amounts to EUR 948 million, two thirds of which is for eastern Finland and the remainder for northern Finland. The programmes cover three main fields:

- support for enterprises,
- rural development (including aid for farmers),

- development of knowledge, technology and active labour-market policies.

The Commission's final decision is expected in March. Three advisory committees comprising representatives of the Member States are to express an opinion on these programmes.

Programme summaries can be consulted in English and French on the Inforegio site or may be obtained on request by fax to +32 2 296 60 03.

Interreg and Urban 1994-99: drawing the first lessons

A few weeks after adopting the definitive guidelines for the Interreg and Urban programmes for 2000-06, the Commission drew preliminary conclusions from the implementation of the operations financed between 1994 and 1999 under these two Community Initiatives.

The aims of **Interreg II** were to step up crossborder cooperation (Section II A), to supplement certain energy networks (Section II B) and to promote balanced spatial development (Section II C).

The first conclusions show that implementing the programmes has indeed brought many regions belonging to often very different institutional structures closer together. The programmes enabled particularly disadvantaged border areas to develop and backed the accession process for applicant countries through the transfer of know-how. More practically, Interreg contributed to the development of the transport, tourism and training sectors and consequently to job creation. However, Interreg's real crossborder character does not yet appear clearly in all cases. Coordination with the financial instruments used in the framework of cooperation with third countries (Phare, Tacis and Meda) remains complex.

To breathe new life into urban areas in crisis, the **Urban** programmes take all aspects of city life into account with the aim of developing real local-development momentum.

As the analysis of the last five years shows, Urban's success is due partly to the residents' active participation in the projects to regenerate their neighbourhoods. All the programmes form part of long-term development strategies that support new economic activities or stimulate the growth of existing activities. In the social field, specific projects have been financed to assist particularly disadvantaged groups, involving namely services to help in finding jobs or accommodation.

These two summaries can be consulted on the Inforegio site <<http://inforegio.cec.eu.int/news>> or obtained on request by fax to +32 2 296 60 03.

