

Germany, Belgium and Sweden: new Objective 1 is launched

Information and publicity

The final text of the Regulation designed to reinforce the visibility of structural assistance was adopted by the Commission on 24 May and published in the Official Journal on 31 May (L series, no. 130).

The Regulation identifies the information and communication activities which Member States must undertake to ensure transparency of the programmes financed by the Structural Funds. From now on, the measures envisaged will have to be contained in a communications plan setting out clearly the proposed aims, target groups, content, strategy behind the activities and estimated budget.

The final text as published in the Official Journal is available on the Inforegio website at: <http://inforegio.cec.eu.int/information> or on request by fax from: +32-2-296.60.03

The Commission recently approved in principle the new Community support framework (CSF) for the new German Länder and east Berlin. In May it approved draft single programming documents (SPDs) for Objective 1 regions in Sweden and Belgium.

The development strategy for the **German Länder** eligible under Objective 1 focuses on five priorities for assistance:

- promoting competitiveness in industry and the small-business sector;
- developing infrastructure;
- environmental protection;
- vocational training and equal opportunities;
- developing rural areas and the fisheries sector.

These strategic priorities are to be implemented through six regional operational programmes and three national ones (transport, human resources and aquaculture). It is worth noting that east Berlin is no longer eligible under Objective 1 but will be receiving a diminishing amount of transitional support.

Hainaut (Belgium) is in the same situation as east Berlin in that its GDP is also greater than 75% of the EU average. The SPD for transitional support sets out six main priorities:

- support for investors;
- encouraging new information technologies;
- rural development;
- developing the area and its environment;
- training and reintegration into the labour market;
- combating social exclusion.

The two Objective 1 SPDs for the Swedish regions of **Norra Norrland** and **Södra Skogslän** contain very similar strategies. They focus primarily on developing high-tech companies and exploiting the information society. These SPDs also pay close attention to strengthening the attractiveness of the regions concerned in order to attract new businesses and combat out-migration. Each programme also contains specific schemes to promote the traditional culture and industries of the Laps (Sami people). These schemes will be managed directly by the Sami regional assembly.

Objective 1	Contribution of the Structural Funds *
CSF Germany	20 000
SPD Hainaut	645
2 SPDs Sweden	748

* In million euro.

Final Commission decisions on all these programming documents will be taken after consultation of the committees on which the Member States are represented.

Summaries are already available on the Inforegio website at: <http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int> or can be requested by fax from: +32-2-296.60.03.

Progress on 2000-06 programming

Speaking on 22 May to the European Parliament's committee for regional policy, transport and tourism, Commissioner Michel Barnier reviewed the stage reached in adopting programming documents under Objective 1.

He stated that the Community support frameworks (CSFs) for Portugal, Italy and Germany and the single programming documents (SPDs) for Finland, Austria, Belgium and Sweden had already been approved.

According to Mr Barnier, there were several reasons behind the delays on other programmes which should also have been adopted in the spring.

First of all, the reform of the Structural Funds had created a number of new management and monitoring requirements (different implementation structures, more structured partnerships, more rigorous controls, more strict evaluations, etc.) which had not all been fully understood at the practical level and called for new organisational systems to be put in place.

The Commission was also taking care to ensure genuine integration into the new programmes of environmental concerns and equal opportunities as well as measures to promote the information society.

Finally, the extended length of the programming period and the scale of the funding involved was forcing the Commission to ask, when negotiating these texts, for many more corrections than in the past so that the rules would be strictly applied.

To avoid the danger of a hiatus in the development process of the areas concerned, the Commissioner said that the date from which expenditure would be eligible for part-financing by the Structural Funds would be set retrospectively for all new programmes at 1 January 2000.

In brief

Sound management of the Structural Funds

The Commission held a conference on 5 June on "The sharing of responsibilities in the decentralised management of the Structural Funds". More than 500 political and economic figures discussed the consequences for Community assistance in 2000-06 of the new Structural Fund regulations on monitoring, financial management, controls and evaluation.

The participants came mainly from national and regional civil services, monitoring committees responsible for programmes, and from the other EU institutions (Council, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, Court of Auditors). The discussions concentrated on programme management under Objective 1; another conference of a similar kind will be held before the end of the year on Objective 2 programmes.

If you are interested in the issues discussed at the conference, the Commission has prepared a general, eight-page information sheet ("Sound management of the Structural Funds: a major issue for the Union's development") which is available on the Inforegio website or on request by fax. A series of transparencies used at the event is also available, as are the speeches made by the representatives of the EU Institutions.

Inforegio:

http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/wbpro/PRORD/prord2_en.htm
Fax: +32-2-296.60.03

On-line with Commissioner Barnier

Michel Barnier's Internet site has been expanded, with more information about his own activities. The major items in his diary (visits, meetings, work programme) are now accessible on-line and updated every week. The website also contains speeches, interviews and press releases in the two major fields for which the Commissioner has responsibility: regional policy and the Inter-Governmental Conference.

Available in French for the moment, but gradually in the other official languages as well:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/barnier/index_fr.htm

Regional policy and the challenges facing mountain areas

The Regional Policy Directorate-General has published a new booklet to increase awareness of Europe's mountain uplands, their potential and difficulties and the structural assistance designed specifically for them. The booklet is divided into two parts: the first deals with the specific characteristics of mountain regions, the second gives examples of development projects supported by the Structural Funds. With 36 illustrated pages and a store of practical information, this publication will provide an overview of Structural Fund support to regions that are trying to change their handicaps into assets.

Currently available in French, English, German, Spanish and Italian but soon also in the other official languages, on request by e-mail from regio-info@cec.eu.int or by fax from: +32-2-296.60.03.



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