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Programming for 2000-06: Round-up of the state of play

New study published

A new study has just been published on sustainable management of water resources in the Mediterranean regions of the Union. This is an important topic in the programming of the Structural Funds, which are contributing to the clean-up and distribution of water in Objective 1 regions. The study adds further detail to the section on water management in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) and puts forward a reference framework for new activities in this field.

The publication is available for the moment in French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish (French title: "Vers une gestion stratégique et durable des ressources hydriques"). Each version contains a common part covering all the regions studied and a separate part specifically devoted to the country of the language version.

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On 11 September the Commissioner for regional policy, Mr Barnier, gave the members of the European Parliament's Committee for regional policy, transport and tourism a round-up of the state of play on the programming of regional assistance for 2000-06. Given that 2000 is the first year of the new programming period, the rate of draw-down of funding under Objective 1 is encouraging. The same is not true for the Cohesion Fund, however, and Mr Barnier asked MEPs to help him make the Member States concerned more aware of the situation. "The beneficiary countries need to know that if they do not present a sufficient number of well-formed projects, there is a risk that they will lose funding for 2000 altogether", he said.

All Objective 1 programmes should be approved by the end of 2000. The complete series of regional development strategies (Community support frameworks) have already received approval in principle or final approval, as have all the single programming documents (SPDs), with the exception of five French SPDs due for finalisation by the end of October.

Programming under Objective 2 was slightly behind because of lengthy negotiations with some Member States about their lists of designated areas. Two of the three Finnish programmes have been adopted, as has the Danish programme (see below). In the case of the nine other countries concerned, almost 90% of programmes are being negotiated and a large number of them should be approved in the last three months of this year. The Commissioner recalled his commitment to integrating the Community guidelines into these programmes, in particular in the fields of vocational training, the information society, aid for small businesses, environmental measures and rural development.

The Commission had not yet received many proposals under the Community Initiatives Urban II and Interreg III. These would, however, have to be finalised by the end of November, i.e. six months from publication of the guidelines in the Official Journal of the European Communities. Adoption of a small number of Interreg programmes could certainly still be envisaged for

this year, but programmes under these two regional development initiatives would probably not start until the end of the first half of 2001.

Budget forecasts

Commissioner Barnier committed himself to doing everything in his power to arrive by the end of 2000 "at a satisfactory level of draw-down of funding without compromising on the Commission's duty to conduct quality controls." Since budgetary commitments depend directly on programmes being adopted, the Commissioner thought that the results would be "reassuring" for Objective 1, which accounts for the major part of funding available (70%). As for Objective 2 and the Community Initiatives, it would probably be necessary in 2001 to ask for a redistribution over 2002-06 of the resources not used in 2000. Turning to the Cohesion Fund, the Commissioner announced that "the number of projects received indicated the likelihood of a satisfactory execution of funding". If unused funds for 2000 were not to be lost, because they cannot be redistributed to later budget years, he called on the MEPs to help make it clear to the authorities concerned that they had an interest in putting forward more projects.

Finally, he said that the recent approval of a large number of projects for funding from the Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession (ISPA) suggested that all the commitment appropriations would be accounted for.

Adoption of two Objective 1 programmes for Italy

The Commission recently approved the "Security" and "School" operational programmes provided for in the Objective 1 strategy for southern Italy.

The "Security" programme sets out to encourage growth in the Mezzogiorno by strengthening public safety. The European Union's financial contribution will help to attract investment and increase employment by tackling, in particular, various illegal activities (crime in general,

organised crime in the economic and social sphere, undeclared employment, de facto monopolies, etc.). For instance, the communications technology available to the security forces will be augmented and modernised.

The "School for development" programme is aimed at actively combatting and preventing unemployment by ensuring that training provision meets demand. Emphasis will also be placed on employment among women, the information society and the social rehabilitation of marginalised people.

	Total cost*	Contribution of the Structural Funds*
Security	1112	573.1
School for development	792	547

* in million euro.

These programmes are available on the Inforegio website at <http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/wbpro/prord/pro2000_en.htm> or on request by fax to: +32-2-296.60.03.

Adoption of the Objective 2 programme for Denmark

On 2 October the Commission gave its agreement in principle to the single programming document for the Danish regions covered by Objective 2. Between 2000 and 2006, this programme will have a total budget of EUR 617 million, of which EUR 189 million will come from the Structural Funds.

The measures concentrate on three strategic priorities:

- Regional development, with the emphasis on conditions favourable to growth
- Developing the business sector and in particular small and medium-sized firms, for example through investment aid and advisory services;

- Improving skills, with emphasis on in-house training for workers.

Final adoption of the programme will take place after consultation of the committees representing the Member States.

A summary is available on the Inforegio website at: <http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/wbpro/prord/pro2000_en.htm> or on request by fax from: +32-2-296.60.03.

Approval of the last two designation lists for national regional aid

On 20 September the Commission approved the lists of designated areas in Belgium and the north of Italy where state-aid schemes with a regional purpose are allowed. These lists identify the areas in which government aid for investment may be granted to industrial and service-sector companies. In terms of surface area, 30.9% of Belgium and 10% of northern Italy are covered. Several different aid ceilings are allowed according to the individual area.

The adoption of these two designation lists completes the review of regional-aid maps started by the Commission in 1998 (see Inforegio News 71, 73, 76 and 77). The purpose of this operation was to concentrate government aid on the most disadvantaged regions and reduce the overall level of aid. In all, 42.7% of the Community's population is now eligible for such aid, to which the Structural Funds make a contribution in many cases under Objectives 1 and 2.

