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The future of cohesion: the debate is open

Closer surveillance of structural expenditure

Following consultations with the Member States and the Community Institutions concerned, the Commission formally adopted on 2 March two new regulations aiming to ensure better management of the Structural Funds, improve financial control and specify the financial corrections possible.

The first regulation covers management and control systems for assistance granted under the Structural Funds. It defines the duties of the responsible authorities in the States and regions, in particular with regard to accountability and the checking of expenditure, requests for reimbursement from the Commission and the methods used to inspect operations.

The second regulation lays down the procedure for making financial corrections in the event of bad management or inadequate control of Structural Fund expenditure. Any significant irregularity can involve, initially, the suspension of payments and then recovery of the amounts paid.

The texts of both regulations ((EC) Nos 438/2001 and 448/2001) are available on the Inforegio site http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/wbdoc/docoffic/official/reglem_en.htm and can also be requested by fax: +32.2.296 60 03

Following the publication of the second report on economic and social cohesion (see Inforegio News No 83), the Commission is organising the second Cohesion Forum in Brussels on 21 and 22 May. More than 1 000 people active in political, economic and social life will be invited to discuss the results of the cohesion policy implemented since 1989 and its future within an enlarged Union. The debate is already in progress on the Internet where a new forum for the exchange of ideas and proposals has been created.

The Commission wishes to use the second report on cohesion as the basis for as broad a discussion as possible with all the parties concerned. In a few years time, the replies to the questions raised by the report will have a direct and quantifiable impact on living conditions in the Union.

The work of the conference of 21 and 22 May will be marked by two round tables. The first, titled "Cohesion policy rising to the challenge" will look at the following questions: Why should regional policy be run from Brussels? What is the current policy achieving and what value is it adding? How should responsibilities be shared among the Union, the Member States and the regions? The second, titled "Cohesion policy from the point of view of enlargement", will permit discussions of questions such as: Solidarity in

response to a greater need for economic, social and territorial cohesion. What priorities for the new Member States? What will be the consequences for the current regions and countries of the Union?

The debate will also take place on the Internet since a special page devoted to the future of cohesion policy has just been created on the Inforegio site: <http://inforegio.cec.eu.int/forum>.

It contains all reference information and a structured presentation of the answers given by Mr Barnier to the questions put by Internet users in the on-line discussion on 26 March. It will also enable everyone to contribute to the debate and express a point of view on cohesion policy, the symbol of European solidarity.

Inforegio Panorama

The second number of the quarterly magazine Inforegio Panorama came out a few weeks ago. This information source devoted to regional policy is intended to be a showcase available to those working in the field who want to write about their experiences, their opinions, their bright ideas and their innovations. This number contains interviews with the chairman of the committee of the European Parliament responsible for regional policy, transport and tourism, Konstantinos Hatzidakis, with the Director-General for economic programming in the Spanish Ministry of Public Works, Antonio López Corral, and with the Director-General of the autonomous Port of Liège, Marie-Dominique Simonet, as well as a report on the archaeological heritage in the Swedish region of Västra Götaland.

Inforegio Panorama is available in the eleven official languages on the Inforegio Internet site: http://www.wbdoc/docgener/panorama/panora_en.htm and printed in five languages (FR, EN, DE, ES and IT).

Launching innovative actions

On 31 January 2001 the Commission formally adopted its guidelines for innovative actions to be funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in 2000-2006. The content of the guidelines and the arrangements for their implementation were explained to more than 500 regional representatives at an information day held in Brussels on 19 February.

The final text is the result of consultations on the draft guidelines proposed by the Commission in July 2000 which allowed the Member States, the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions to express their views.

The guidelines for the regions whose development is lagging behind or which are undergoing conversion focus on the following three strategic themes:

- regional economies based on knowledge and technological innovation;

- e-Europe: the information society at the service of regional development;
- regional identity and sustainable development.

Specifically, the ERDF will part-finance regional development programmes in one or more of the three key sectors and programmes to establish networks for cooperation and the exchange of experience among regions.

The relevant regional authorities in regions entirely or partially eligible under Objective 1 or 2 and those receiving transitional support under one of those Objectives are invited to submit their draft regional programme of innovative measures to the Commission before 31 May, either this year or in one of the next four years.

Documents concerning the innovative measures are available on the Inforegio site <http://inforegio.cec.eu.int/innovating> or may be requested by fax: +32.2.296 60 03

Objective 2: The Netherlands and the United Kingdom

During February, the Commission approved eight economic and social development programmes for areas undergoing conversion in the United Kingdom and a horizontal programme for urban areas in difficulty in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands.

The programme approved by the Commission concerns eleven urban districts in nine cities (Amsterdam, Arnhem, The Hague, Eindhoven, Enschede, Maastricht, Nijmegen, Rotterdam and Utrecht) and covers some 658 000 people. The three priorities supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) are the urban economic environment, the stimulation of economic activity and the exploitation of socio-economic potential. Three other programmes under Objective 2 will soon be approved for the northern, southern and eastern regions of the Netherlands.

The United Kingdom.

Eight regions saw progress on their economic and social development programme: West Midlands, North-West England, North-East England, Yorkshire and the Humber, Western Scotland, London, South-West England and Thanet and Hastings (South-East England). The range of topics covered by these programmes includes competitiveness, particularly for SMEs, the fight against social exclusion, local

development, the environment and innovation capacity. Measures are also planned in the fields of infrastructure, new information and communications technology, the revitalisation of traditional sectors, heritage and regional planning.

The adoption of these eight programmes brings to an end the programming of the new Objective 2 in the United Kingdom. Almost €4.7 billion (1999 prices) from the Structural Funds is thus made available to the 14 eligible regions between 2000 and 2006 (see also Inforegio news Nos 81 and 83). For more information, please consult the Inforegio site:

http://www.inforegio.org/wbpro/Prosr/prog_en.cfm

Programme	Total cost*	Contribution of Structural Funds*
Netherlands		
Urban areas	588.3	199.8
United Kingdom		
West Midlands	2 324.8	854.2
North West of England	1 907.6	808.3
North East of England	1 893.1	717
Yorkshire and the Humber	1 411.6	517.8
Western Scotland	1 171	483.3
London	663.9	259.9
South West England	445.3	189.7
Thanet and Hastings	100.5	35.7

* million euro



European Commission
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