



inforegio | news

1025-7039

Regional policy debated at informal Council in Namur

Better integration of the spatial dimension

In his speech at the informal Council in Namur (see text opposite), Michel Barnier stressed the need to integrate the spatial dimension of development into debate on cohesion policy and to bear in mind the guidelines of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), which defends the polycentric development of the European Union.

"It has been established by the ESDP that Europe's territory has a substantial proportion of economic activity and population concentrated in a limited space. This centre versus periphery pattern will become even more marked with the accession of the less prosperous Central European countries," Mr Barnier stated. In fact, the regions situated within a triangle formed by North Yorkshire, Franche-Comté and Hamburg account for only 14% of the surface area of the enlarged Union, but represent 33% of its population and generate 47% of total added value. "Regional policy, which together with other Community policies has powerful territorial implications, cannot disregard this situation," Mr Barnier concluded.

For additional information, consult:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/barnier/index_en.htm

On 13 and 14 July 2001, Namur was the venue for an informal Council of Ministers responsible for regional policy and spatial planning. Michel Barnier, Commissioner for regional policy, set out the Commission's views on two key aspects of regional policy: the Second Report on Economic and Social Cohesion, and programming for Objective 1 of the Structural Funds for the period 2000-06.

In analysing the importance of maintaining **cohesion policy** at Community level, Mr Barnier stated that he would oppose any attempt to dismantle or renationalise regional policy. In his view, renationalisation would deprive the less wealthy Member States of the resources they need to reduce regional imbalances and would expose the wealthier Member States to the risk of new mechanisms being introduced, which would distort competition.

In order to combat an increase in regional disparities deriving from enlargement, he recommended reinforcing genuine convergence, "the only relevant criterion" on which cohesion policy should be based, because it is "useful not only to regions which are catching up, but also to the others, which are benefiting from expanding markets".

Without prejudging the financial discussions that lie ahead, Mr Barnier repeated that the rate of assistance provided for under Agenda 2000 (0.45% of Community GDP) "must be regarded as a minimum, below which future cohesion policy will lose its credibility". In his view, such credibility also means "concentrating Community support on measures with high added value".

Although, as stated by Jean-Claude Van Cauwenberghe, Minister-President of the Walloon Region, "on the whole, everyone agreed that things have gone better than in the

previous programming period [1994-99]", Mr Barnier, in analysing the **assessment of negotiations on Objective 1**, identified certain aspects requiring a more sustained effort. Emphasising the central role played by partnerships in shaping regional policy, he requested Member States to provide more details on the nature of the partners' involvement in preparing programmes. He also expressed regret over the time taken by Member States to set up financial management and control systems, which are essential to the smooth operation of a policy based on decentralisation.

Replying to criticisms of excessive bureaucracy, the Commissioner pointed out that the credibility of the implementation of regional policy depends on sound and efficient management, in which the regions themselves play a part. He said there was no reason to call into question the regulatory framework adopted at the 1999 Berlin Summit, because it provides the legal stability required for a medium-term policy and gives taxpayers a guarantee of proper use being made of the European Union's financial resources. Mr Barnier said he was convinced, however, that greater simplification of structural policy management should remain a chief concern of the Commission and the Member States.

For further information, consult:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/barnier/index_en.htm

Objective 2 for the Netherlands

The Commission has adopted three development programmes for South, East and North Netherlands under Objective 2.

South Netherlands includes the provinces of North Brabant and Limburg, and **East Netherlands** those of Gelderland, Overijssel and Utrecht. The development programmes are based on three priorities. The first is geared towards the diversification of economic activities based on spatial development. Measures concern the revitalisation of economic sites, the strengthening and creation of knowledge-oriented infrastructure and the development of tourism. Focusing on small businesses and tourism, the second priority aims to make businesses more competitive by improving their capacity for innovation, encouraging transfers of know-how and promoting co-operation between firms. The third is aimed at developing the skills of workers in local businesses and strengthening the cultural identity of the regions concerned.

North Netherlands comprises the provinces of Friesland, Groningen and Drenthe. The first priority of the programme is to help the region meet the conditions required for the creation of new businesses, with special attention being focused on innovation and technology transfer. The tourist sector, also very important to the region, is also the focus of measures, especially skills development. The second priority is to revitalise urban areas by boosting service-oriented business start-ups in city centres, combating social exclusion and developing tourist and cultural amenities. The third priority is to improve the operation of the labour market.

Programmes 2000-06	Total cost*	Structural Funds contribution*
South Netherlands	395.89	139.87
East Netherlands	391.43	141.56
North Netherlands	1 237.45	341.90

* EUR million

For further information, consult:
http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/wbnews/new_en.htm

New Interreg III programmes

An impressive array of Interreg III programmes is scheduled for adoption in the weeks ahead. Four cross-border co-operation programmes (Interreg IIIA) were already adopted during the summer. They involve Bavaria, Saxony, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia.

The programme between the German Land of **Bavaria** and the **Czech Republic** contains four priorities: economic development and business co-operation, the creation and improvement of infrastructure, spatial and environmental development, and human resources.

Where **Saxony** is concerned, co-operation will be encouraged with the neighbouring regions of Poland and the Czech Republic. The programme between Saxony and **Poland** (Lower Silesia) comprises measures in six areas: economic development, business co-operation, the construction or improvement of infrastructure, rural and urban development, education and employment, and co-operation in the areas of culture, social affairs and security.

The programme with the **Czech Republic** has four priorities: economic development and business co-operation, the construction or improvement of infrastructure, spatial development and the environment, and human resources.

Three priority areas have been defined for the programme **between Austria and Slovenia**: economic co-operation to encourage business start-ups and cross-border infrastructure, regional co-operation in the fields of education, training and culture, and sustainable spatial development.

Programmes 2000-06	Total cost*	Structural Funds contribution*
Bavaria-Czech Republic	127.6	63.8
Saxony-Poland (Lower Silesia)	56.9	42.7
Saxony-Czech Republic	244.2	170.7
Austria-Slovenia	54.5	27.3

* EUR million

For further information, consult:
http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/wbnews/new_en.htm



European Commission
Directorate-General for Regional Policy

KN-AB-01-008-EN-C