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Towns, Regions and the future of cohesion policy

The future of cohesion policy is the theme of a conference being organised by the Committee of the Regions on the 5th and 6th of May 2003 in Leipzig. The aim of the conference is to discuss possible guidelines for cohesion policy in an enlarged Europe. Workshops will focus specifically on territorial cohesion, the management of Structural Funds regional co-operation, creating employment and urban and rural development. The conference will bring together over 500 participants, representing towns and regions in the current and future EU Member States, European regional associations and the European institutions. Michel Barnier, Commissioner for Regional Policy will also attend. Contact: Jens Nordmeyer: Tel: +32 2 282 23 47, E-mail: jens.nordmeyer@cor.eu.int

From ISPA to the Structural and Cohesion Funds

This year's annual meeting of ISPA (Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-accession) partners, which took place in Brussels on the 9th and 10th of April, focussed particular attention on the transition from ISPA to the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund.

At the Copenhagen Council in December 2002, a major milestone was reached on the road to enlargement. Since then, the role of ISPA in preparing the new Member States for European Cohesion Policy has become even more relevant and more important than it was before.

At the same time, the first wave of ISPA projects is now being implemented. These projects are giving greater visibility to ISPA, as people begin to see the positive impact on the ground. They are also providing public administrations in the new Member States with their first experiences in the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects, under circumstances that are very similar to the instruments of EU

Cohesion Policy, and in particular to the Cohesion Fund.

Against this background, the aim of this year's annual meeting was to provide for the exchange of experiences and to jointly discuss the challenges ahead, both for implementing ISPA and for the transition to the Cohesion Fund and the Structural Funds. The meeting brought together representatives from the relevant authorities in the Candidate Countries, the Commission, and from financial institutions (EIB, EBRD).

For further information:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/index_en.htm

Dialogue with regional and local authorities

The European Commission recently launched a new consultation process on the establishment of a formalised process for dialogue with national and European associations of regional and local authorities.

On the basis of commitments entered into in the context of the White Paper on Governance, the Commission is now preparing for the adoption of a communication, which will provide the framework, and outline the objectives and the procedures for a more systematic dialogue

with associations of local and regional authorities. Interested parties are invited to submit their views before May 23rd 2003. Further information is available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/consultation/index_en.htm



New network programme of innovative actions

The European Commission has just approved EUR 600 000 for a network programme of innovative actions in the field of technological innovation. The programme was submitted jointly by the regions of Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna.

The new Network, known as "Erik", aims to enhance the exchange of information, experience, know-how and expertise between the regions involved in innovative actions programmes. The overall objective is to improve the use of Structural Funds' investment, with a view of enhancing the processes of knowledge creation and technological innovation at the regional level.

The following 13 regions will initially participate in the Network: Emilia-Romagna, Lombardia, Tuscany (Italy), Lower Austria (Austria), Wallonia (Belgium), Lower Normandy and Lorraine (France), Bremen (Germany), Thessalia (Greece), Alentejo (Portugal), Aragon, Murcia (Spain), and West Midlands (United Kingdom). However, the Network remains open for other regions, especially those participating in innovative action programmes.

The Erik Network will use a variety of networking tools, such as printed and electronic newsletters and a dedicated website. Public events will also be organised to publicise the activities of the Network. These activities will be open

to member regions of the Network, and also to other regions expressing an interest in the Network.

Erik will work in close cooperation with IRE (Innovating Regions in Europe) and other similar networks. It will coordinate its initiatives with IRE thematic networks and the other networks stemming from the innovative action programmes (IANIS, Network for Sustainable Development).

It will also use the experience of other EU initiatives, such as RINNO (Resource for Regional Innovation & Technology Transfer).

During the period 2003-2004 the European funding will attract a further EUR 600 000 from the public sector creating total resources of EUR 1.2 million. Contact: Simone Sorbi, Regione Toscana Innovation and Research Area (Managing Authority), Department of Economic Development. Tel.: +39 055 4382413, [E-mail:s.sorbi@regione.toscana.it](mailto:s.sorbi@regione.toscana.it)

Website:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/innovation/index_en.htm

Guidelines for Successful Public Private Partnerships

DG Regional Policy has recently published "Guidelines for Successful Public-Private Partnership". The publication provides an analysis of the inherent risks and opportunities in Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) and presents guidelines for the conception and design of PPP arrangements.

In recent years there has been a marked increase in cooperation between the public and private sectors. These PPP arrangements have been largely driven by limitations in the availability of public funds, but also by efforts to increase the quality and efficiency of public services.

In general, PPPs have been successful, particularly in those countries that are undergoing a process of rapid economic expansion. Based on this experience, it is envisaged that they could also have an important role to play in helping to advance reform and the upgrading of infrastructure and services in the candidate countries.

However, while PPPs can present a number of advantages, they are also complex to design, implement and manage. In order to profit from the advantages of PPP, all potential participants must fully understand the different approaches and the optimal methods to structure such arrangements.

To facilitate this, DG Regional Policy has published the above Guidelines, which are designed as a practical tool

for PPP practitioners in the public sector. The Guidelines focus on four key topics:

- ensuring open market access and fair competition;
- protecting the public interest and maximising value added;
- defining the optimal level of grant financing, both to realise a viable and sustainable project and also to avoid any opportunity for windfall profits from grants;
- assessing the most effective type of PPP for a given project.

To promote the publication, DG Regional Policy is organising dissemination seminars in the candidate countries.

A copy of the Guidelines (available in English) can also be downloaded from:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docgener/guides/ppp/ppp_en.pdf



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