



inforegio news

1025-7039

New REGIO websites

A revamped homepage for the Regional Policy DG and a new-look site for Commissioner Barnier were launched on 27 October. Still at the same address, the new Regional Policy DG site has been refreshed and modified to facilitate easier navigation. In particular, news and the debate on the future of the Structural Funds have been given greater prominence. The site of Commissioner Barnier, which is available in the 11 official EU languages, now has a newsroom and several new sections covering specific topics. The Regional Policy DG homepage can be found at:

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

The new site of Commissioner Michel Barnier can be found at:

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

Spreading the news!

On 10 November, the Regional Policy DG organised a seminar in Brussels entitled, 'Successful communication on the Structural Funds: working together'. The seminar brought together authorities responsible for the implementation of Objective 2, Interreg, Urban and the Innovative Actions programmes with a view to establishing networking, cooperation and the exchange of good practices in relation to information and publicity activities. A similar event in March 2002 led to the establishment of a network for Objective 1 programmes. Further information on the seminar is available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/newsroom/index_en.htm

Sneak preview of new cohesion policy proposals

Addressing the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Cohesion Policy in Rome on 20 October, Commissioner Michel Barnier outlined some key aspects of the proposed reform of cohesion policy, which will be officially presented in the Third Cohesion Report in early December.

Based on the results of the debate launched almost three years ago, the Commissioner said that three principal objectives had emerged: convergence and competitiveness for less developed regions and Member States; competitiveness and employment for other regions; and cooperation for all Member States.

Mr Barnier indicated that the Commission's proposals would call for a concentration of resources in the new Objective 1, which would also include special arrangements for regions or Member States 'phasing out', those losing eligibility for 'statistical' reasons and the seven outermost regions. Objective 1 priorities would include 'the knowledge-based economy', 'basic infrastructures' and 'reinforcing administrative capacity.'

Outside of these areas, Mr Barnier indicated that all other regions would be eligible under a proposed new Objective 2, with Member States having the freedom to choose which areas within their territory receive aid. Objective 2 would have two components. A 'regional' component, providing support for innovation and the new economy, the environment and the prevention of risks, and accessibility. And a 'national' component focusing on the objectives of the European Employment Strategy.

In terms of cooperation the Commission will propose a simplified but expanded Interreg initiative, which will be coordinated with a new

neighbourhood instrument for the Union's external borders. Overall, the Commissioner indicated his preference for a seven-year programme and insisted that a budget equal to 0.45 % of EU GDP would be 'the credibility threshold for the EU's cohesion policy'.

Ministers attending the meeting agreed that cohesion policy could contribute significantly to implementing the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas but that the policy must undergo reform. As to the shape of this reform, most countries agree that EU cohesion policy must involve all EU regions. Some however, most notably the United Kingdom and the Netherlands believe that attributions should depend on the degree of poverty of States, and not regions.

Almost all countries agree that cohesion policy should be oriented more decidedly to the supply of infrastructure, both physical and non-physical (research, innovation, accessibility, and human capital), as this is likely to have a greater long-term impact on regional competitiveness. In terms of delivery, there were calls for greater subsidiarity, with a more clear-cut separation of responsibilities among different levels of governments, and greater attention to institution and capacity building, especially at regional level. Further information is available at:

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

New growth initiative to focus on infrastructure and R & D

At the European Council meeting in Brussels on 16–17 October, the Heads of State or Government of the 15 current and 10 future Member States decided to back proposals for a European initiative for growth. However, the final decision on the initiative will not be taken until the next summit meeting on 12–13 December.

The European initiative for growth aims to mobilise investment in two key areas of the Lisbon agenda: networks and knowledge. Presenting the Commission's proposals to the Council, Romano Prodi said the initiative did not seek to alter priorities but rather to bolster and speed up implementation of the Lisbon strategy.

The Commission's proposals include a call for: the quick adoption and implementation of proposed policies in the areas of trans-European networks (TENs) and research and innovation; the TENs budget line to be made more efficient by increasing the allocation to priority projects from 10 % to 30 % of the total budget; and, Member States to refocus their spending strategies to take account of the objectives of the European initiative for growth.

The 25 leaders have already given their approval to a EUR 50 billion contribution of the European Investment

Bank (EIB) to infrastructure projects, but the specific list of projects will not be discussed until December. However, the Summit decided to go ahead with the Ecofin Council's proposal for a 'quick-start programme' to identify a list of priority projects that should be implemented immediately.

No agreement was reached on precise figures for investment in research and development (R & D), but EU leaders did call for better partnership between the public and private sectors and greater use of the Structural Funds for R & D projects. The European Council also emphasised that the growth initiative would have to be consistent with the Stability and Growth Pact and the current financial perspective ceilings. Further information is available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/councils/bx20031016/index_en.htm

Big response to latest Interreg IIIC call

A total of 247 regional partnerships applied for funding under the latest Interreg IIIC call for proposals, which closed on Friday, 26 September. This represented an increase of over 50 % on the first round.

All four programme zones experienced an increase in the number of applicants received, with the south zone receiving 118, the east zone 63, the west zone 37 and the north zone 29. The biggest increase occurred in the east zone, which more than doubled its number of applications. 22 out of the 63 projects submitted to the east zone target the special priority for border regions. This is a significant increase, up from only 3 projects in the first round.

The border regions priority aims at linking up EU border regions with regions in the accession countries. The EU has made an extra EUR 15 million budget available for

strengthening the capacity of these regions to tackle the challenges of transition and EU enlargement. In total, 16 % of the 2 040 regions and public organisations involved in the second call come from the accession countries.

The four joint technical secretariats are currently assessing the eligibility of the applications received and it is expected that funding decisions will be taken at the end of 2003 or the beginning of 2004. Further information is available at:

http://www.interreg3c.net/web/home_en



European Commission
Directorate-General for Regional Policy

KN-AB-03-011-EN-C