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## Open Days 2005

On 9 March, European Commissioner Danuta Hübner and Peter Straub, President of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), presented a new partnership for the 'Open Days — European Week of Regions and Cities 2005', which will take place in Brussels in October and will be based around the theme 'Working together for regional growth and jobs'. Jointly organised by the European Commission and the CoR, and with the participation of 110 regions and cities from 27 European countries, Open Days 2005 will focus on regional development issues and cooperation. More than 2 000 regional policy stakeholders are expected in Brussels for the event to discuss the next generation of regional development programmes.

## Seminar on the future of Objective 3

On 21 and 22 February, the Regional Policy DG organised a seminar on the future of Objective 3 of the Structural Funds, which focuses on territorial cooperation. More than 200 participants, including representatives of the 25 Member States and Bulgaria and Romania, attended the seminar, which included five workshops: cross-border cooperation within the EU; cooperation at the external borders (in association with the External Relations and Enlargement DGs); the future 'European grouping of cross-border cooperation' (EGCC); transnational cooperation; and inter-regional cooperation.

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/debate/forum\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/debate/forum_en.htm)

## Interreg IIIB north-west Europe

The Interreg IIIB north-west Europe (NWE) programme has launched a limited call for proposals concerning its priorities 1 and 5 ('An attractive and coherent system of cities, towns and regions' and 'Enhancing the maritime functions of NWE and promoting territorial integration across seas of NWE'). Closing date: 26 September 2005. To find out more:

<http://www.nweurope.org>

## Cohesion and the Lisbon strategy: a clear signal to the cities and regions

**For the 550 regional players who gathered in Brussels on 3 March at the invitation of Commissioner Danuta Hübner, the 'Cohesion and the Lisbon strategy: the role of the regions' conference was the occasion to take the real measure of the importance of the Union's cities and regions as partners in a strategy for lasting growth, competitiveness and employment. It is a strategy that implies a strong cohesion policy benefiting from sufficient resources throughout the EU.**

Recalling the three keywords — attractiveness, knowledge, employment — proposed by the Commission to relaunch the Lisbon strategy (see *Inforegio News* No 131), Commission President José Manuel Barroso stressed in his welcoming address the important contribution that cohesion policy can make: 'Local and regional elected representatives have a better understanding of the link between cohesion — economic, social, territorial — and competitiveness. The Lisbon strategy must draw inspiration from the partnerships that cohesion policy has set up between the national, local and social players. It must benefit from regional dynamism.' Mr Barroso expressed a desire to see 'a voluntary agreement on the financial perspectives that awards cohesion its rightful place'.

The objectives of the Lisbon strategy and of the Structural Funds are closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Citing the volume of funding as evidence (about EUR 80 billion since 2000), Commissioner Danuta Hübner illustrated the contribution of the Structural and Cohesion Funds to growth and jobs, research and innovation, human resources and social inclusion. She also stressed that regional programmes make it possible to respond to needs in the field and in this way to encourage ownership of the Lisbon strategy: there is no standard solution and regional diversity 'provides us with a large potential for the exchange of best practices, for building synergies and for networking'. In return, Lisbon encourages an awareness, at regional level, of the crucial role of an efficient economy for the European social model and for the environment. 'The regions need Lisbon and Lisbon needs the regions. We are opposed to any renationalisation of regional policy, as [...] that would undermine what has been created, which constitutes the basis of cohesion policy.'

Concluding a rich and lively debate, in which the presidents of the regions, elected local and regional representatives, representatives of regional associations and various experts participated, Danuta Hübner stressed the following needs.

• **Active participation of the cities and regions.** Essential for a new start for 'Lisbon', this participa-

tion is based on a unique mechanism that makes it possible to convert Community priorities into results in the field and to disseminate them in the EU.

- **Sufficient resources for cohesion.** In advocating a budget that remains at the present percentage of the EU's GDP, despite the growing disparities following enlargement, the Commission has made a prudent proposal. A smaller budget would lead to — at the very least — a drastic reduction in European aid.
- **Keys to growth, in the poorest regions and others.** Although the financial priority of cohesion policy must be concentrated where needs are greatest, strategic priorities must be supported throughout the EU. Investments must be focused around well-defined priorities — first and foremost innovation — that provide optimal results in terms of growth and jobs.
- **Less bureaucracy and better quality programmes.** Regional policy must be more flexible and effective; its implementation must be more decentralised, while strictly applying the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, and take quality criteria as its basis.
- **A policy that appeals to the people.** For citizens, projects supported by the EU are the most visible proof that 'Brussels' is intervening usefully to improve living conditions. It would be a mistake to deny European integration this asset.
- **Coherent policies.** Finally, it is very important to ensure coherence between cohesion policy and other areas of EU policy, especially competition policy.

Participants also expressed their views on questions such as aid to regions in the far north or to mountain areas, and the effects of the future reform of State aid on regional aims. For further information:

[http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/sources/docconfr/lisbon/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docconfr/lisbon/index_en.htm)

# Gothenburg revisited

**Back in February, the Commission published constructive guidance for a first update of European strategy for sustainable development as adopted in 2001. Given the mixed results, the revised strategy needs to tackle the most serious threats to the well-being and living conditions of future generations.**

'Setting long-term objectives must not mean postponing actions that must be taken now.' This is the concern running through the Communication (1) that the European Commission presented on 9 February to the Council and Parliament by way of an initial stocktaking of the EU's sustainable development strategy (SDS). Also known as the 'Gothenburg strategy', this was adopted in June 2001 by the European Council to complete the Lisbon strategy. The SDS, which is based on three complementary pillars — economic, social and environmental — implies acting in synergy to achieve progress in present patterns of production and consumption.

Despite some advances, the results targeted four years ago have not been achieved, stresses the Commission. Many environmental problems are in fact worsening and the social divide persists. European economic performances are stagnating, while at global level the emergence of major new industrialised countries and the growing north-south divide create increased risks for sustainable development.

The communication takes stock of the principal components of the SDS:

- its basic principles, which must be reaffirmed;
- its methodology, based on improved policy-making with greater coherence and coordination, the exchange of good

practice, incentive measures and prices that reflect environmental costs, investment in science and technology;

- its priorities, concentrating on the climate and energy consumption, the management of natural resources, transport and land use, threats to public health, poverty and social exclusion, and the effects of demographic ageing and of globalisation; the Commission stresses the role played by the Structural and Cohesion Funds in the field of environmental infrastructures, reduced environmental impact by transport, the rehabilitation of industrial or natural sites and urban regeneration.

In its proposals, which take into account a public consultation organised in October 2004, the Commission places the emphasis on both the need to provide long-term responses and to set clear interim goals. It wants to set new deadlines for improving control mechanisms. Finally, it calls for increased awareness on the part of the general public and closer cooperation between the public and private sectors, at all levels. In short, it is society as a whole that needs to take ownership of SDS.

On the basis of the results of the interinstitutional dialogue, and in particular the debates of the European Council of 22 and 23 March, the Commission will present later this year a second communication that takes into account the opinions of all the players concerned.

(1) 'The 2005 review of the EU sustainable development strategy: initial stocktaking and future orientations' (COM(2005) 37 final).  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/sustainable/docs/COMM\\_PDF\\_COM\\_2005\\_0037\\_F\\_EN\\_ACTE.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/sustainable/docs/COMM_PDF_COM_2005_0037_F_EN_ACTE.pdf)

## Danuta Hübner meets, for the first time, presidents of the most remote regions

**The Commissioner welcomed a delegation of presidents of these seven regions — Azores, Canary Islands, Madeira, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, Réunion — headed by Mr Paul Vergès, President of the Conference of Presidents of the most remote regions.**

Discussions focused on the measures that must be adopted on the basis of Article 299(2) of the Treaty that is concerned with remoteness and the specific provisions proposed for the most remote regions in the framework of Structural Funds reform for 2007-13. Danuta Hübner repeated the Commission's desire to maintain a privileged partnership with the most remote

regions and to take into account their specific needs in debates on topical issues such as regional integration, State aid, reform of Community instruments in the sugar and banana sectors, research and maritime policy. To find out more:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/themes/rup\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/themes/rup_en.htm)

**'Lisbon' and the regions: a new page on the Inforegio site**

**A new page devoted to the contribution of the regions and regional policy to the Lisbon strategy has just been added to the 'Lisbon' section of the Inforegio website. [http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/themes/lisbon/lisbon\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/themes/lisbon/lisbon_en.htm)**



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