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Second Cohesion Forum

Inforegio Panorama No 3

The third issue of the quarterly magazine Inforegio Panorama is now available. This information medium devoted to regional policy gives those involved a forum for sharing their experience, thoughts, creativity and innovations. No 3 contains interviews with Jos Chabert, Chairman of the Committee of the Regions, Charlie McCreevy, Ireland's Minister of Finance, and Juan Carlos Rodríguez Ibarra, President of Spain's Extremadura region, which is profiled in this issue. There is also a description of the new programme to improve competitiveness in Greece and an article on Athens' new international airport part-financed by the Structural Funds.

Inforegio Panorama is available in the eleven official languages at:
http://www.europa.eu.int/wbdoc/docgener/panora_en.htm
and is printed in five languages (English, French, German, Spanish and Italian).

The second European Cohesion Forum, held in Brussels on 21 and 22 May, provided the opportunity for the 1 800 attendees to participate actively in the debate on the future of regional policy. Several national ministers from Member States and applicant countries, Members of the European Parliament and representatives of the Union's regional authorities were thus able to present their points of view and share their expectations or fears with regard to implementing regional aid in an enlarged Union.

The challenges facing economic and social cohesion between now and 2007 are well known. The second cohesion report, published on 31 January 2001, refers to the increasing disparities engendered by further accessions. In his opening speech, Commission President Romano Prodi noted that the number of European citizens living in regions which are lagging behind would increase significantly with enlargement and that the key word in the debate on the future of regional aid had to be «solidarity». European Parliament President Nicole Fontaine emphasised that the Union's regional aid, and the solidarity principle underlying that aid, constituted the very essence of European «union». In Mrs Fontaine's view, renationalising that aid would favour nations' individual interests rather than the objectives of economic and social cohesion at European level. Commissioner Barnier pointed out: «This debate is about how Europe wishes to promote its social model and how firmly it intends to defend the position of all its regions in a globalised world.»

Although the Forum was intended to focus less on financial aspects than on the thinking behind future European regional policy, financial resources were nevertheless frequently discussed. Several speakers called for an increase in both regional aid ceilings:

- as regards the Union budget: 0.45% of total GDP;
- as regards financial transfers: 4% of national GDP for each recipient country.

In Polish Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek's view, the 4% threshold might prevent new Member States from receiving the same levels of aid per capita as current Member States.

And several representatives of southern regions stressed the statistical illusion of enlargement, whereby regions currently classified as poor would acquire «nouveau riche» status in a Europe comprising 27 Member States.

The regional issues discussed in the second cohesion report - such as the urban question and rural diversification, naturally and geographically disadvantaged areas, and redevelopment problems - were also the subject of many speeches, which led Commissioner Barnier to propose that they should be examined in greater depth over the coming two years.

Most of the speeches are available on the Inforegio site:
http://www.europa.eu.int/temporum/forcom_en.htm

The full record of the two half-day discussions will be published early this summer.

Interregional cooperation guidelines adopted

At the beginning of May, the Commission formally adopted guidelines on drawing up interregional cooperation programmes that will be supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under strand C of the INTERREG III Community Initiative.

All the Union's regions may take part in the programmes, which are designed to make regional development policies and instruments more effective through exchanges of experience.

The final version of the guidelines results from the consultation process following the proposals tabled by the Commission in November 2000 (see Inforegio News No 80). INTERREG III C will be implemented by means of four multiannual programmes in the north-west, north-east, east and south of the Union. After the Commission has adopted a programme, a steering committee appointed by the Member States concerned will select the projects eligible for financial support from the ERDF.

In order to encourage a more strategic approach, at least half the funding granted to each INTERREG III C programme should be allocated to mini-programmes or regional

framework operations comprising several projects. The two other categories of interregional operations eligible are individual projects in one of the specified fields, and networks enabling views on project implementation to be exchanged through seminars, study visits and staff exchanges.

The five key areas of cooperation covered by INTERREG III C are:

- activities supported under Objectives 1 and 2;
- cross-border and transnational cooperation;
- urban development;
- areas covered by the ERDF new innovative measures;
- others, such as developing areas with low population density or mountain areas, or spatial development issues.

Regions in non-EU States, and more particularly in applicant countries, are invited to take part in the programmes by using the appropriate Union financial instruments (Phare, Tacis, CARDS, MEDA, EDF).

The full text of the communication is available at: http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/wbdoc/docoffic/official/orient_en.htm

Objectives 1 and 2: new programmes

Italy: A new technical assistance programme has been adopted for Objective 1 regions. The programme concerns the monitoring, intermediate evaluation and information and communication work to be undertaken by the managing authorities of other development programmes, as well as the training of public authorities in job market integration policy.

Portugal: The technical assistance programme for Portugal's Objective 1 regions comprises support for management, follow-up, evaluation and supervision, as well as for information and publicity measures. The programme also aims to improve the technical and educational quality of vocational training.

Greece: The new Objective 1 programme for the Attica region will endeavour to enhance the international role of Athens, improve the quality of life and the environment, reduce unemployment and social exclusion, and restore areas damaged by the earthquake of 7 September 1999.

Germany: The Objective 2 programme for Berlin comprises three priority areas: making businesses (particularly SMEs) more competitive, improving infrastructures (particularly those connected with innovation and research), and protecting and improving the environment.

Also under Objective 2, the programme for Hessen aims to create competitive jobs through measures to promote businesses, improve SMEs' innovative capabilities, and strengthen infrastructures serving businesses.

Programme	Total cost*	Contribution from Structural Funds*
<i>Objective 1</i>		
Attica (Greece)	1 534.0	1 120.0
Technical assistance Italy	432.6	312.4
Technical assistance Portugal	108.4	81.3
<i>Objective 2</i>		
West Berlin	1 179.0	384.0
Hessen	542.0	184.0

* EUR million



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