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Inforegio homepage proves a big 'hit'!

A recent statistical review of visits to the Europa website indicates that the Inforegio homepage is by far the most visited of all the homepages on the Commission's server. The review, published in April 2002, reveals that the 'top 10' list of most visited homepages includes: Regional Policy DG homepage with 237 149 hits, EUR homepage 102 119, Futurum Discussion Forum 88 167, Information Society Portal 77 733, Eurostat homepage 76 959, Enlargement homepage 55 388, External Relations homepage 53 825, Education homepage 37 396, EuropeAid homepage 36 276 and the Competition homepage 34 187.

New publication on 'Regional innovation strategies' (RIS) under the ERDF innovative actions 2000-02

Between 2000 and 2002, nearly one in five European regions (30 in total) have received financing under the ERDF innovative actions for the development of an RIS/RIS+. This publication provides a summary of the lessons learnt from this first initiative, which will be further pursued under the new generation of ERDF innovative actions until 2006. Copies are available online at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/innovation/pdf/guide_ris_final.pdf

The URBAN II Community initiative: the Commission makes an initial assessment

On 14 June 2002, the Commission published a communication which provides an initial assessment of the URBAN II Community initiative. A total of 70 programmes have now been approved, covering a population of some 2.2 million inhabitants and with an ERDF contribution of EUR 730 million (total investment EUR 1 600 million).

The areas selected face severe social and economic challenges. Unemployment and crime rates are around twice the EU average and the proportion of immigrants more than twice the EU figure. In addition, the proportion of green spaces, an indicator of environment and amenity, is only half the EU average for urban areas. It is the tendency of these challenges to combine which makes urban deprivation such an issue. The URBAN programmes, therefore, have a holistic approach, combining measures to promote physical and environmental regeneration, social inclusion, entrepreneurship and employment, the information society and environmentally friendly urban transport.

The communication was discussed by 620 delegates from over 170 cities across the EU and

beyond at the 'Cities for cohesion' conference in London on 8-9 July. Delegates welcomed the communication's key conclusions, agreeing that the URBAN method provides potential lessons for the future of cohesion policy. Interesting features include: administrative simplifications; the network for exchange of experience; and the strong emphasis on local partnership (most URBAN II programmes are run by town councils, with input from local community groups). Moreover, 75 mayors and city leaders, representing 56 million people across the EU, signed a declaration asking for an increase in the scale of EU urban actions.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/pdf/urban/com_2002_308_en.pdf

Objective 1 assistance indirectly benefits non-Objective 1 areas

For the period 2000-06, 24 % of the Objective 1 funds allocated to the six least developed regions will also benefit other more developed regions of the EU.

This is one of the conclusions of a recent study on the economic impact of Objective 1 assistance, which was prepared for the European Commission by Dr Jörg Beutel of the University of Konstanz in Germany. According to Dr Beutel's report, because of the close integration of EU markets, the richer Member States will indirectly recuperate a consid-

erable proportion of their original contributions to the EU budget (EUR 135 billion for the period 2000-06). It is estimated that 42.6 % of Objective 1 assistance for Greece, 35.2 % of assistance for Portugal, 26.7 % of assistance for Italy (17 % of that for the Mezzogiorno), 18.9 % of assistance for East Germany and 14.7 % of assistance for

Spain will also benefit the other Member States. Furthermore, a further 9 % will benefit third countries. The study also shows that the impact on the level of gross domestic product (GDP), fixed capital formation and employment will be significant. This is expected to cause an increase in the average level of GDP of 3.5 % in Portugal, 2.4 % in Greece, 1.7 % in the Mezzogiorno, 1.6 % in East Germany and 1.1 % in Spain in

the period 2000-06. Up to 700 000 jobs will depend on EU assistance throughout the period. Further information is available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/study_en.htm

Cohesion policy beyond 2006: progress of the debate between the Member States

The Council of the EU approved a document from the Working Party on Structural Measures on the First Progress Report on economic and social cohesion.

The delegations from the Member States gave a positive feedback on the first progress report and greeted the opening of the debate on Structural Funds reform. However, no definitive positions have yet been adopted.

Members States are generally in agreement that the least developed regions must remain the priority of future cohesion policy, especially in view of the upcoming enlargement.

A regional approach as against a national approach, mentioned in the first progress report on economic and social cohesion, was at the heart of the debate between Member States.

Other topics discussed included the need for a cohesion policy outside the less developed regions benefiting from Objective 1 and the statistical effect stemming from a lower Community average GDP per capita after enlargement as well as the financing of future cohesion policy in Europe.

Interreg: European Union contributes an additional EUR 30 million for regions bordering candidate countries

On 29 July, Commissioner Michel Barnier announced the adoption by the Commission of a decision which makes available an extra EUR 30 million to 14 Interreg programmes for regions bordering candidate countries.

The following cross-border programmes are involved: Finland-Estonia; Germany-Poland (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern/Brandenburg-Wojewodschaft Zachodniopomorskie; Brandenburg-Wojewodschaft Lubuskie; Saxony-Woiewodschaft Niederschlesien); Germany-Czech Republic (Saxony/Czech Republic; Bayern/Czech Republic); four Austrian programmes with the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Hungary and Slovenia; Italy-Slovenia; two Greek Programmes with Bulgaria and Cyprus. The programme promoting cooperation in the Baltic Sea area is also included.

Actions may cover projects in the following fields: strengthening transport systems, supporting SMEs particularly affected by enlargement, as well as supporting training and intercultural cooperation actions including those favouring the integration of different language and cultural groups.

For further information, please consult memo 01/280 of 25 July 2001 (<http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid>) and the following Commission website:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/interreg3/index_en.htm



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