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# inforegio news

## Cohesion and constitution: the roles and responsibilities of regions

At the initiative of Commissioner Michel Barnier, a European conference to explore the roles and responsibilities of those involved in cohesion policy against the background of a new constitution for Europe will take place in Brussels on 8 July 2003. The conference will also help to inform the debate on future cohesion policy for the enlarged Union. Participants will include the regional presidents of the existing Member States and the new Member States joining in 2004, as well as Members of the Convention and other interested actors. More information is available at

[http://europa.eu.int/comml/regional\\_policy/events\\_web/publiccalendar/calendar\\_en.cfm](http://europa.eu.int/comml/regional_policy/events_web/publiccalendar/calendar_en.cfm)

## Interreg call for proposals

The second call for project proposals for all four Interreg IIIC programme zones was launched on 16 June 2003. The deadline for submission of applications is 26 September 2003. The application pack for the second call, including the revised programme manual and the revised application form are available on the 'How to apply' section of the Interreg IIIC web site.

See <http://www.interreg3c.net>

## Encouraging start for innovative actions

**The first two years of the new ERDF regional programmes of innovative actions have been described by the Commission as 'encouraging', with a higher uptake than originally expected and an additional impetus provided for regional networking in the three priority sectors.**

Since its adoption in January 2001, 126 regional programmes of innovative actions have been approved, which means that four out of five of the 156 eligible regions now have a programme in place. In 2001, 103 eligible regions submitted programme applications, 81 of which were successful. In 2002, there was also a good response from the remaining eligible regions: 53 applications were submitted, including new or amended applications from nearly all of the regions whose proposals had been unsuccessful in the previous year. A further 45 programmes were approved in 2002.

To date, most regions have opted to include actions covering at least two of the three eligible themes. 'Technological innovation and the knowledge economy' has been the most popular field of intervention. Three quarters of the 126 regions chose to experiment totally or partially in this strategic theme, which accounts for 48 % of the total spending on all three themes.

'The information society at the service of regional development' has also proved popular. Of the 126 regions with a regional programme, 92 opted to test actions in this field and the budget allocated accounts for 39 % of total spending. The third theme, 'Regional identity and sustainable development', has attracted less attention, with only 48 of the 126 regions opting to experiment in this field. The budget amounts to just 13 % of total spending.

To help regions identify and disseminate best innovative practices, three specific network programmes, one per strategic theme, were also approved during 2001/02. These include: the ERIK network for technological research and innovation; IAANIS for IT at the service of regional development; a pan-European network for sustainable development.

In the autumn of 2003, the Commission will present a detailed report on the first two years of the regional programmes of innovative actions to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

## Prize for regional innovation

The Commission is also currently organising a regional innovation competition to highlight the most innovative projects. Regions with an approved programme of innovative actions are invited to submit details of their most innovative project to the Commission before 31 October 2003. The projects will be examined by a jury chaired by António Guterres, the former Prime Minister of Portugal. Prizes will be presented to the most innovative project in each of the three priority themes at a plenary session of the Committee of the Regions in April 2004.

**Contact:** Mr Jean-Pierre Berg, Regional Policy DG, Head of Unit 'Innovative Actions'.  
E-mail: [Jean-Pierre.Berg@cec.eu.int](mailto:Jean-Pierre.Berg@cec.eu.int)

## Interreg IIC funding for new Member States

**The Directorate-General for Regional Policy of the European Commission has announced that from 1 January 2004 project partners in the new Member States will qualify for funding under the interregional cooperation strand of the Interreg community initiative.**

The announcement was made at the Interreg IIC partner search forum in Vienna on 12 and 13 May 2003 and was welcomed by the event's 800 participants from regions and cities across Europe. Speaking at the forum, Mrs Elisabeth Helander, Director of the community initiatives and the innovative actions at the Regional Policy DG said that, 'with 10 new countries, the EU will gain nine new internal borders and 15 new external borders. Interreg funding will support interregional cooperation with all of these countries without losing time on unnecessary bureaucracy.'

The Interreg IIC partner search forum brought together representatives of regional and local authorities to meet potential partners, share their project ideas and find out more about Interreg IIC and its funding opportunities. Particular emphasis was given to the challenges and opportu-

nities of interregional cooperation in an enlarged Europe and across its new borders.

Speakers included managers of interregional projects already benefiting from the Interreg IIC funding programme and experts on the programme's implementation. There were also contributions from the new Member States, which highlighted their efforts to raise awareness of new opportunities under Interreg IIC and to encourage local and regional authorities to look for partners across Europe.

For further information, contact one of the four Interreg IIC zones. Details can be found at:

<http://www.interreg3c.net>

## Population size key to success of outermost regions and islands

**Population size is a key factor in determining the levels of disadvantage experienced by the outermost regions and islands. In regions with a population of over 4 000 to 5 000 inhabitants, population growth is usually positive, the level of equipment and infrastructure is good and the population is younger. However, when the population is below this threshold, these regions are especially vulnerable to out-migration and ageing and they are noticeably under-equipped.**

This is one of the main findings of a recent study, carried out on behalf of Regional Policy DG of the European Commission, on island regions and the group of seven outermost regions. Presenting the findings of the study, Michel Barnier, European Commissioner with responsibility for regional policy, said that the study would improve the Commission's understanding of the challenges faced by these regions and would be 'of immediate importance as the Commission prepares new proposals for the future of regional policy for the period after 2006'.

Besides closer coordination of sectoral policies and better integration of these policies within the island areas, the

study recommends using existing instruments more effectively, or even reinforcing them. Recommendations for the outermost regions also include the development of a specific action plan for these regions, with measures geared towards training and improved productivity, better use of new technologies, training to support innovation and new business start-ups, and the promotion and exchange of best practice. For further information, see:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/studies/study\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/study_en.htm)



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Directorate-General for Regional Policy

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