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Europe Direct accessible in the 25 Member States

By 1 May 2004, the Europe Direct information service on the European institutions will also be available in the 10 new Member States. Europe Direct can be contacted free of charge on 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11.

Regional innovation strategies

The Commission has published a call for proposals on regional innovation strategies under the specific programme for research, technological development and demonstration entitled 'Structuring the European research area'. Closing date: 16 June 2004. Contact: European Commission, FP6 Information Desk, Directorate-General for Research, B-1049 Brussels.
<http://www.cordis.lu/fp6>

Interreg IIC newsletter

This is a quarterly newsletter published jointly by the four technical secretariats (north, south, east and west) of the Interreg IIC Community initiative for interregional cooperation. The newsletter is available in French and English. The second edition contains an article by Commissioner Barnier on interregional cooperation, a presentation of the results of the second Interreg IIC application round, a list of '10 golden rules for successful project proposals' and portraits of the four regions Värmland (Sweden), Upper Austria, Catalonia (Spain) and Overijssel (Netherlands).
<http://www.interreg3c.net/sixcms/detail.php?id=4396>

Interreg II and Urban evaluations

The *ex post* evaluations of the Interreg II and Urban (1994-99) initiatives are now available on the Inforegio website. The Interreg II evaluation concerns the initiative's three strands (cross-border cooperation, energy distribution networks and transnational cooperation) and four pilot actions co-financed by the ERDF. The Urban evaluation concerns 118 programmes.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/rado_en.htm

A welcome to the new Commissioners

Jacques Barrot succeeds Michel Barnier. Péter Balázs, one of the 10 Commissioners from the new Member States, will be his partner at the Regional Policy DG until the new Commission takes office in November 2004.

On 31 March, the French Government announced the appointment of Jacques Barrot as European Commissioner with responsibility for regional policy. He replaces Michel Barnier, who had almost completed his mandate and who becomes French Foreign Minister. Following his appointment, Michel Barnier made the following statement: 'In the sphere of regional policy and cohesion I have recently introduced proposals to reform this policy with a view to the future. (...) Becoming Minister for Foreign Affairs of France is not the breaking off but rather a continuation of my career and political commitment. Europe will naturally remain at the heart of my attention in this new role.'

Deputy for the Haute-Loire (Auvergne) since 1967 and a passionate advocate of European integration, Jacques Barrot (67) is particularly attentive to economic and social problems. Previous offices held are Secretary of State for Housing (1974-78), Minister for Trade and Crafts (1978-79), Minister for Health and Social Security (1979-81) and Minister for Labour and Social Affairs (1995-97).

Péter Balázs (62) is a former university lecturer, Hungarian ambassador to Denmark and then Ger-

many, and Secretary of State for European Integration. Before being appointed to the Commission he was Hungary's permanent representative to the EU. He also represented his country at the Convention on Europe's future charged with drawing up a draft Constitution for the European Union.

By the terms of the Treaty of Accession, signed in Athens on 16 April 2003, the Commissioners from the 10 new Member States will be joining the present Commission from the date of accession (1 May 2004), after which they will play a full and active role in the decision-making process. The list of 10 new Commissioners was published on 18 February 2004, with Mr Balázs proposed by Hungary.

Given the brief and interim nature of their mandate, the new Commissioners will not have a specific portfolio but will assist with the work of the present Commission members. This 'twinning' is designed to facilitate their integration into the Commission's activities.

To find out more about the Commissioners from the new Member States:

http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/233|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=

Structural Funds performance reserve: more than EUR 8 billion allocated

The European Commission has announced that it will be allocating an extra EUR 8 246 billion to particularly successful regional and social development programmes.

Representing 4% of the Structural Funds resources, the 'performance reserve' is an innovation introduced for the 2000-06 programming period which, for the first time, partially links the granting of structural aid to the performance of the programmes in question. According to the rules, this reserve can only be allocated to regions and programmes inside the same Member State.

As part of the mid-term review of structural aid, the national authorities, in close cooperation with the European Commission, measured the performance of more than 200 programmes, using a

set of indicators targeting effectiveness, good management, implementation and the take-up of funds.

Following this exercise, approximately 90% of the programmes are to receive funds from the reserve, the amount determined in accordance with the quality of the results. The programmes judged to be most successful will receive a financial supplement of between 6% and 9% of the budget they were granted initially. This supplement will be used by the Member States and regions concerned as a lever for investment, growth and jobs.

The European Commission plans to undertake a detailed analysis of the experience and to draw the necessary lessons for the future, as programme performance and quality is one of the orientations proposed for future cohesion policy.

To find out more:

[http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/438\[0\]RAPID&lg=en&display=](http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/438[0]RAPID&lg=en&display=)

Civil protection: strengthening the effectiveness of Union solidarity

Two weeks after the Madrid attacks and one day before the European Council which looked at Europe's response to terrorism, the Commission presented its proposals to strengthen Community intervention and coordination between Member States in the field of civil protection.

Terrorist attacks and recent natural disasters such as floods and forest fires in Europe and the earthquakes which hit Algeria, Iran and Morocco, have highlighted the need for a more concerted and better defined Community approach in the field of civil protection. No single Member State is able to provide an effective response to events of this kind.

In the communication (COM(2004) 200), drawn up by Commissioners Michel Barnier and Margot Wallström and adopted on 25 March 2004, the Commission proposes action on three fronts.

1. Each Member State should be aware of resources available in other countries, whether these are sufficient and whether they can be mobilised rapidly. The Commission invites Member States to provide a detailed inventory of all the resources and competences available so that these can be shared as part of a more coordinated response to disasters.
2. The national and Community response capability must be strengthened by increased training for intervention teams. This will enable more efficient use of available resources, and teams of experts from throughout the European Union will be able to work together more effectively at the scene of the disaster as part of a genuine European civil protection force.
3. The Commission stresses the need for increased financial resources to cover the various costs engendered by a disaster, whether inside or outside the Union. The Commission's

proposal on this point will be included in its financial plan for post-2006.

Presenting the communication, Commissioner Michel Barnier declared that: 'Citizens expect European solidarity with the victims of natural disasters and terrorist attacks, certainly when it is beyond the immediate capacity of the affected country to provide an adequate response. Europe must show solidarity not only in words but also in deed. Interventions of European civil protection experts will express this solidarity already proposed in the draft Constitution.'

European financial solidarity is in fact already a reality, as on 9 March 2004 the Commission proposed to mobilise the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) in order to grant France, Spain and Malta aid of EUR 21.9 million towards the costs of emergency measures and basic infrastructure repairs following the natural disasters they recently suffered.

A conference entitled 'The Solidarity Fund and the immediate response by the EU to natural disasters' will be held on 14 June 2004, providing an opportunity to exchange opinions on the questions raised by the Commission.

To find out more:

[http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/385\[0\]RAPID&lg=EN&display=](http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/385[0]RAPID&lg=EN&display=)

Structural Funds and eligible expenditure: new regulations in force

Due to necessary amendments to certain eligibility rules for expenditure on actions co-financed by the Structural Funds, a new Commission Regulation, (EC) No 448/2004 of 10 March 2004, amends Regulation (EC) No 1685/2000 and cancels Regulation (EC) No 1145/2003.

The new regulation replaces in particular the 12 'eligibility rules' annexed to Regulation (EC) No 1685/2000. These 12 rules relate to: (1) expenditure actually paid out; (2) accounting treatment of receipts; (3) financial and other charges and legal expenses; (4) the purchase of second-hand equipment; (5) the purchase of land; (6) the purchase of real estate; (7) VAT and other taxes and charges; (8) venture capital and loan funds; (9)

guarantee funds; (10) leasing; (11) costs incurred in managing and implementing the Structural Funds; (12) the eligibility of operations depending on the location.

To find out more:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/reglem_dep_en.htm

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European Commission
Directorate-General for Regional Policy

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