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Shared management of the Structural Funds

On 6 September, the Commission published a communication (COM(2004) 580 final) on 'The respective responsibilities of the Member States and the Commission in the shared management of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund'. Part II of the document sets out the principles that guided the Commission in drawing up the legislative proposals for the reform of regional policy after 2006, which it adopted on 14 July.

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/newsroom/document/COM\(2004\)580final_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/newsroom/document/COM(2004)580final_en.pdf)

Interreg III

In a communication of 2 September 2004 (2004/C 226/02), the European Commission updated and consolidated the provisions of the Interreg III Community initiative to encourage cross-border, transnational and inter-regional cooperation. In particular, the communication presents a list of the new cooperation areas following Union enlargement.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/guidelines/index_en.htm

Solidarity Fund

The conference on 'The European Union Solidarity Fund and the immediate response to disasters', scheduled for 8 December in Brussels, has been postponed until early 2005. More detailed information will be given in a future issue.

'Open Days 2004': the regional development players meet in Brussels

Organised by the Committee of the Regions, the Directorate-General for Regional Policy and 12 offices representing Europe's regions and cities, 'Open Days 2004' brought together more than 2 000 regional development players in Brussels between 27 and 30 September.

Focusing on management of the Structural Funds and the future of cohesion policy, the event involved more than 100 regions and cities.

Presenting the event on 17 September, Commissioner Jacques Barrot declared that: '2004 is a crucial year for the Union's cohesion policy. (...) May the Open Days facilitate the Europe-wide exchange of best practices in order to strengthen administrative capacities and develop debates based on the concrete reality of the EU regions.'

Peter Straub, President of the Committee of the Regions, added: 'Our regions and cities are the lifeblood of the European economy: make them strong and we make the European economy strong. Open Days 2004 will enable us to remind Member States of that reality. It will also give local and regional authori-

ties a better understanding of the practical impact of the Commission's reforms. We believe these refusals will result in a more decentralised, simplified and efficient funding system, which can only be good for the EU's competitiveness.'

Open Days 2004 consisted of more than 70 seminars and workshops on the subject of 'The practice and reform of regional policy', which were held in the offices of Europe's regions and cities. The Commission's programme of 30 workshops on 'Managing regional development' was organised by the Directorate-General for Regional Policy. The objective: to encourage the transfer of know-how between the 'old' and 'new' Member States.

To find out more: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/opendays/

Competitiveness, accessibility and regional integration: Commissioner Barrot at the 10th Conference of the Presidents of the outermost regions

Jacques Barrot spoke on a number of occasions at the 10th Conference of the Presidents of the outermost regions that was held on 2 and 3 September in Ponta Delgada in the Azores.

The Commissioner responsible for regional policy summed up the Commission's strategy in favour of the outermost regions as being to find ways to achieve the sustainable development of these regions, in association with their surrounding geographical areas and with the growth strategy pursued at Community level.

Taking as his basis the proposals for regulations adopted by the Commission on 14 July 2004, the Commissioner repeated that the outermost regions will benefit from future developments in regional policy bringing increased public intervention. The communication adopted by the Commission on 26 May 2004 (COM(2004) 343 final) provides for a specific programme to compensate for handicaps, allo-

cated EUR 1.1 billion between 2007 and 2013, as well as a 'wider neighbourhood action plan' that will co-ordinate the policy needed for the development of these outermost regions: agricultural policy, fisheries policy, cooperation policy with third countries, trade policy and competition policy.

Financed by the ERDF, the new programme to compensate for handicaps aims to improve the conditions of access to the Community single market and to compensate for the effects of specific constraints linked to isolation. This programme will be able to cover operating expenses, the assistance granted to the beneficiary being based on the additional costs of the operation. The eligible fields of expenditure are very broad and correspond to those covered by

the convergence objective. By way of example, the ERDF will be able to contribute to the additional cost of goods transport or of electronic communications.

To successfully meet this regional integration challenge, the wider neighbourhood action plan will concentrate on two main areas.

- The first concerns transnational and cross-border cooperation in the framework of the European territorial cooperation objective. The Commission has indicated that the ERDF will also be able to provide limited cofinancing for cooperation projects based in the territory of third countries.
- The second is aimed in particular at trade policy actions. Trade policy can serve to improve the integration of the outermost

regions into their regional economy, both in terms of goods and services and in other trade-related fields.

The Commissioner also presented an inventory of Community policy in fields of intervention that are of particular interest to the outermost regions: agriculture and fisheries, specific guidance programmes for remoteness and insularity (POSEI), and State aid for regional objectives. Finally, Mr Barrot mentioned the launch of two studies: one on the quantification of the effects of handicaps on the economies of the outermost regions, the other on the additional costs of access to the new information and communication technologies. In this respect, the conference was notable for an initiative by the Canary Islands to create a specific website devoted to the outermost regions.

Communication on the Structural Funds: fourth SFIT meeting

The fourth meeting of the informal working group 'SFIT' (Structural Funds Information Team / *Equipe d'information sur les Fonds structurels*) was held in Brussels on 10 September 2004, during which some 65 participants had the opportunity to discuss their communication practices.

This was the first opportunity for the managing authorities in the new Member States to get together to discuss the sensitive subject of implementation of Regulation (EC) No 1159/2000 on information and publicity measures to be implemented by the Member States concerning Structural Funds assistance. This regulation introduces the obligation to implement a communication plan for every Structural Funds measure and to evaluate communication actions in order to increase the renown and transparency of measures financed by the European Union.

Devoted to the evaluation aspect, on this occasion the meeting enabled the participants (most of them responsible for information within the managing authorities of programmes financed by the ERDF) to exchange ideas and information on their communication practices and actions. On the basis of the three experiences presented (by Sweden, France and Italy), the information managers from the 'old' and 'new' Member States

were able to put their questions to the Commission and share the problems they are facing, such as a lack of time and know-how (for many of them, information is not their main area of responsibility); the limited budget compared with the high cost of certain communication actions; the difficulty of defining the public's information needs; the sometimes uncertain interest of the media and the lack of cooperation even on the part of the beneficiaries themselves.

During the second part of the day, eight working groups discussed the evaluation of information and publicity actions, the promotion of networks for the exchange of information between communication managers, and the transferability of good communication practices in the different national contexts.

Regulation (EC) No 1159/2000 and the practical guide to communication on the Structural Funds 2000-06: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/country/commu/index_en.htm

The Structural Funds are just a click away

The Inforegio site now enables you to access information on the Structural Funds in your country and your region by clicking on a map that takes you from the European to the national and regional levels.

At each level you can print out two-page fact sheets on action by the Funds, together with project examples and useful contact details. The national and regional levels are available in French and English as well as the official language or languages of the country concerned. The European fact sheet is available in 19 Community languages.

(http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/atlas/index_en.htm)

Actions by the Funds and other structural instruments are now also presented in a new section of the site in 19 Community languages plus Bulgarian and Romanian.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/intro/working1_en.htm

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