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ISPA in Croatia

Recognised as a candidate for EU membership by the European Council in June 2004, Croatia has benefited from the Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession (ISPA) since 1 January 2005. The country is set to receive EUR 25 million in 2005 and EUR 35 million in 2006. The project submission files are currently being drawn up and the first approval decisions are expected for the autumn of 2005.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/croatia/index.htm

The regions in figures

The *Regions: statistical yearbook 2004*, published by Eurostat, covers the 254 NUTS 2 regions of the 25 EU Member States and the 14 regions of Bulgaria and Romania:

http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?_pageid=1073,1135281,1073_1135295&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&p_product_code=KS-AF-04-001

Eurostat has also just published the latest figures (2002) on GDP in the regions of Europe. They confirm that the Commission's proposals for regional policy and social cohesion in 2007-13 are well founded:

<http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/107&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

'Sustainable European regions'

The Sustainable European regions network, set up under the ERDF's innovative actions programme, has published a report on good practice in sustainable development, based on eight case studies:

<http://www.sustainable-euregions.net>

CPMR and territorial cohesion

'A giant leap for Europe, a small step for the regions': The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe has published (in FR, EN, DE, EL, ES, IT) a paper calling for an ambitious territorial cohesion policy. It is available from the CPMR Secretariat:

secretariat@crpm.org

Working together for growth and jobs: a new strategy for Europe and its regions

With a view to the mid-term examination of the Lisbon agenda (2000–10) by the European Council on 22 and 23 March, Commission President José Manuel Barroso presented, on 2 February, a communication urging an ambitious strategy for growth and jobs for the Union. For cohesion policy, this implies further increasing the efforts of all the regions to achieve the Lisbon and Gothenburg objectives for a competitive and sustainable European economy that generates jobs. It also means successfully completing the reform of the Structural Funds proposed by the Commission for the period 2007–13.

Refocused priorities. Revitalised and refocused on clearer and more realistic priorities, the guiding theme behind the Lisbon strategy will remain sustainable development. To achieve this, it will pursue three main goals:

- to render Europe more attractive for investment and jobs;
- to place knowledge and innovation at the heart of growth;
- to create more and better jobs.

Particular emphasis will be placed on optimising the internal market, SMEs, sectors with high growth potential, European infrastructures, research and development, innovation and eco-innovation, the consolidation of the European industrial base, and public-private partnerships.

Better targeted resources. Regarding cohesion policy in particular, the communication recommends that the next generation of programmes should adopt a more strategic approach in order to better target resources, especially in the least favoured regions, on:

- creating quality jobs through increased investment in human resources and the creation of new activities;
- the growth of the knowledge economy by strengthening research capacities and innova-

tion networks, drawing on information and communication technologies in the process; a special effort will be made to promote innovation centres linking regional centres, universities and companies;

- making the regions more attractive by providing them with improved infrastructure.

The means to realise an ambition. Given the sharing of responsibilities between the Union and Member States in the principal fields targeted by the Lisbon strategy (employment, macroeconomic policy, structural reforms, etc.), the communication clearly distinguishes between actions at European level, through a European action programme, and actions taken by Member States through 25 national programmes. But ambition has a cost: the EU will only be able to achieve its goals, especially in the field of cohesion, if the Member States allocate a budget to match its economic and social priorities and the undertakings to which they jointly commit.

To find out more, consult the text of the communication: http://www.europa.eu.int/growthandjobs/pdf/COM2005_024_en.pdf

as well as the press release: <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/130&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

The Structural Funds in 2004: a lever for regional competitiveness

The budgetary allocation for 2004 — EUR 41 billion — is the highest annual budget in the history of the Structural Funds. For the second time in succession, payment requests from the Member States exceeded budgetary resources, causing the Council and European Parliament to approve a supplement of EUR 2.4 billion that has been fully taken up.

With commitments and payments close to 100 % for the 25 Member States, the take-up of alloca-

tions has increased sharply in the 10 new Member States. For Commissioner Danuta Hübner this

means that 'The Structural Funds are being well used and are necessary for the economic development of the regions. This is particularly true of the new Member States, whose results meet our expectations. [...] I am convinced that in the future cohesion policy will be able to contribute even more to achieving the Lisbon objectives.'

Hungary — where the authorities approved 3 705 projects out of 15 620 submitted between May and November — is just one example of the rapid progress made by the Member States who joined in May 2004 in taking up the Funds. In Poland, too, major projects were adopted, concerning in par-

(1) Automatic decommitment of amounts not spent within two years of making the allocation.

ticular water distribution and treatment facilities and new motorway sections, the latter alone representing an investment of EUR 500 million. In the EU-15, less than 15 % of the allocations made in 2002 had not been used in 2004 and are therefore subject to the 'n + 2' (1) rule. It should be remembered that in March 2004 these countries were allocated more than EUR 8 billion out of the 'performance reserve' for the most efficient programmes and measures.

The annual reports on implementation of the Structural Funds are available on the Inforegio site: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/repor_en.htm

Mid-term evaluation of Objectives 1 and 2

The report on the mid-term evaluation in the Objective 1 and 2 regions (period 2000–06) shows that the strategies adopted were generally pertinent with a clear improvement in financial absorption thanks to the introduction of the 'n + 2' rule in 2000.

It is nevertheless premature to draw any conclusions on the efficiency of programmes, due both to their slowness in starting up and inadequacies in the monitoring system that often required a review of the indicators. The same is true when gauging their socioeconomic impact, although in some cases the evaluation did permit recommendations to be made concerning adjusting objectives on the basis of the initial years of implementation. The macroeconomic modelling produced for the principal Community support frameworks (CSFs) nevertheless suggests that the programmes will be able to achieve their global objectives. On the other hand, there appears to be an urgent need to improve the systems for quantifying objectives.

Although the mid-term evaluations are not designed to measure the Structural Fund contributions to the Lisbon and Gothenburg priorities, they nevertheless show that this contribution is very real in fields such as transport and accessibility, the knowledge-based economy, entrepreneurship, social inclusion and the environment.

The results also reflect the improved evaluation capacity of the Member States. This 'evaluation culture' is part of the added value of European aid and needs to be further strengthened. For the new Member States, the challenge is to draw on Com-

munity experience prior to enlargement. The Commission plans to encourage the development of a platform for the exchange of experiences and, for the period 2007–13, has proposed that mid-term evaluations should be replaced by a system of continuous assessment of all or some of the programmes depending on national and regional needs — thereby optimising the value of the evaluations by correcting the weak points linked to too rigid deadlines for a very wide field of applications.

The report is available online at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/tech_en.htm

To prepare the *ex post* evaluation and programming for the period 2007–13, an update to the mid-term evaluation is required by the end of 2005. The Commission has published a working document to this effect: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/doc/midterm_update_en.pdf

Another mid-term evaluation, of the Interreg 2000–06 programmes, is available at the website of the Interact trans-European technical assistance programme: <http://www.interact-eu.net/4107/0/0/634797>

See also the 'Evaluation of socioeconomic development' guide at: www.evaled.info



The Structural Funds on CD-ROM

This issue of Inforegio News is accompanied by a CD-ROM presenting European cohesion policy for the present programming period. Including all the information (descriptions, maps, etc.) found on the Inforegio site (http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/atlas/index_en.htm), the CD-ROM summarises the Structural Funds action in the 25 Member States and Bulgaria and Romania. For the old Member States (except Denmark and Luxembourg), cohesion policy is also presented at regional level.



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Editor: Thierry Daman, European Commission, Regional Policy DG, Unit 01, Fax (32-2) 29-66003. The texts of this publication do not bind the Commission.
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