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Open days 2005

The Committee of the Regions and the European Commission's Regional Policy DG have issued a call for regional offices based in Brussels to participate as partners in 'Open days 2005'. The event will take place in Brussels from 10 to 13 October 2005 and will be concerned with preparing regional programmes for the post-2006 period. As many as 2 000 participants are expected. The closing date for applications is 31 January 2005. Application forms can be downloaded from:

http://www.cor.eu.int/document/presentation/open_days2005.pdf

New post-2006 regulations

The proposed Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund regulations for the period 2007–13 are now available online in 20 language versions on the Inforegio website at the following address:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/newregl0713_en.htm

Interreg IIIB Baltic Sea Region: next call for projects in February 2005

The seventh call for project proposals for the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) transnational cooperation programme will be launched on 1 February 2005. To find out more:

<http://www.bsrinterreg.net/news.html>

Cohesion and competitiveness at the heart of the debate

On 3 March 2005, in Brussels, the European Commission's Regional Policy DG is holding an important conference chaired by Commissioner Danuta Hübner on the subject 'Cohesion and the Lisbon agenda: the role of the regions'.

This initiative is linked to the review of the Lisbon strategy, which will be the subject of a Commission communication at the beginning of February and of European Council conclusions on 22 and 23 March. In November 2004, the mid-term report from the high-level group charged with reviewing the strategy (Wim Kok report) concluded that results remained disappointing and stressed the need for Community financial incentives to encourage competitiveness, growth and employment, as well as improved ownership of the Lisbon objectives by all the parties involved.

Danuta Hübner believes that many regions have already taken ownership of these objectives, a fact reflected in the programmes co-financed by the Structural Funds. About 500 participants are expected to attend the conference (presidents of the regions and other cohesion policy players), which will be the occasion to consider what means can be employed to further strengthen this contribution during the period 2007–13. The Wim Kok report is available at the following address:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/lisbon_strategy/index_en.html

New Interreg III cross-border and 'neighbourhood' programmes

At the end of 2004, the European Commission approved nine Interreg IIIA cross-border cooperation and/or 'neighbourhood' programmes covering the border regions of several new Member States and neighbouring third countries. The total cost of these nine programmes is EUR 336.04 million, including an EU contribution of EUR 260.84 million: EUR 215.34 million from the ERDF, EUR 21.5 million from Tacis CBC (cross-border cooperation), EUR 15 million from Phare CBC and EUR 9 million from CARDS (¹).

Some of these programmes concern all or part of the new 'European neighbourhood policy' in regard to third countries that are not candidates for EU membership (Russia, Belarus and Ukraine). The objectives of the nine programmes can be briefly summarised as follows.

- **Czech Republic/Poland:** The aim is to improve living conditions and competitiveness by encouraging modernisation and further development of infrastructure as well as local socioeconomic development in the cross-border area.
- **Poland/Slovak Republic:** There is a need to build on the achievements of the previous Phare CBC programme by developing environmental protection and transport infrastructure as well as local socioeconomic life.
- **Slovak Republic/Czech Republic:** This programme aims to create an economically, socially and culturally integrated cross-border area, in particular through tourism, rural development, and preservation of the landscape and traditions.
- **Poland/Belarus/Ukraine:** The challenge is to create the conditions for a better quality of life

and to strengthen local competitiveness, cross-border infrastructure, human resources, institutional cooperation and border security.

- **Lithuania/Poland/Russia (Kaliningrad region):** With the focus on sustainable development, this programme aims to overcome obstacles to the integration and competitiveness of the beneficiary zones created by the border. The programme will also help consolidate their cultural and historical links.
- **Hungary/Slovak Republic/Ukraine:** In the wake of the Phare CBC, this programme, which is now extended to include Ukraine, aims to strengthen socioeconomic integration and is concerned in particular with human resources, the natural and cultural heritage and cross-border infrastructures (transport and environment).
- **Hungary/Romania and Hungary/Serbia and Montenegro:** This programme seeks to foster closer relations between populations, local authorities and economic players to create a solid foundation for optimising development opportunities for the whole area.

(¹) Tacis (technical assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States); countries that are former members of the USSR; Phare: pre-accession aid; CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation): aid for the stabilisation process in the western Balkans.

■ **Slovenia/Hungary/Croatia:** The aim is to overcome obstacles created by the border and to create a common space conducive to increased competitiveness in a European context, improved living conditions, economic and social cohesion and sustainable development.

■ **Italy/Malta:** By pursuing a policy of cross-border cohesion and sustainable development, this programme seeks to encourage the economic, social and cultural integration of Malta and south-east Sicily.

(million EUR)

Programmes	Interreg		Actions in third countries (*)				Total cost	Population (millions)
	ERDF	Member States	Tacis CBC	Phare CBC	CARDS	Contribution by third countries		
CZ/PL	34.5	10					44.5	3.8
PL/SK	20	6.67					26.67	4.2
SK/CZ	13.7	4.6					18.3	4.8
PL/BY/UA	37.8	12.6	8			0.8	59.2	13.9
LT/PL/RU	36.5	12.2	9.5			0.95	59.15	6.7
HU/SK/UA	23.8	7.9	4			0.4	36.1	10.8
HU/RO/CS	23.94	7.98		15	3	1.8	51.72	8.2
SL/HU/HR	20	7			6	0.6	33.6	4.3
IT/MT	5.1	1.7					6.8	0.4
Total	215.34	70.65	21.5	15	9	4.55	336.04	57.1

(*) Tacis (technical assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States): countries that are former members of the USSR; Phare: pre-accession aid; CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation): aid for the stabilisation process in the western Balkans.

ISPA for broader cohesion

The ISPA annual report 2003 states that the 10 countries that benefited from ISPA (Instrument for Structural Policy for Pre-Accession) in 2003 received during that year a total contribution of almost EUR 1.25 billion for 75 new projects. That same year, payments made totalled almost EUR 424 million, 14 % more than in 2002.

The year 2003 was the last for ISPA's activity in eight of the countries covered by the instrument because, in 2004, they became EU Member States. The Cohesion Fund consequently took over from ISPA, and ongoing projects were transferred. It should be remembered that the ISPA instrument was modelled on the Cohesion Fund with the object of co-financing major environmental and transport infrastructure in the central and east European countries (CEECs) and to help them adapt to Community legislation in these fields. It is also worth noting that the annual resources of the Cohesion Fund for the new Member States for the period 2004–06 are more than three times what they were under the ISPA instrument: EUR 2.8 billion compared with EUR 0.75 billion. Bulgaria and Romania continue to benefit from ISPA, with gradually increased financing until the end of 2006. Croatia also became a beneficiary on 1 January 2005.

The projects adopted in 2003 included 60 environmental projects (65 % of the EU's total contribution, mainly for water management and wastewater and waste management) and 15 road and rail projects situated along pan-European transport corridors. From the time of its launch in 2000 to 2003, ISPA provided more than EUR 7 billion (about 65 % of the total eligible costs), co-financing

324 projects including 212 for the environment, 102 for transport and 10 for the related extended decentralised implementation system (EDIS). At the end of 2003, some 90 % of the ISPA allocation for the whole of the period 2000–06 had been allocated to projects that had already been, or were about to be, implemented, with financing commitments of 61.7 %. For the new Member States, this means that some of the Cohesion Fund grants are already covered by the ISPA commitments for eligible projects.

The report highlights the considerable progress in implementing measures and stresses ISPA's role in helping the CEECs adapt to Community legislation, undertake major reforms of the sectors concerned, embark on a strategic approach to priority investments, prepare for the EU's structural policy and, in particular, manage Cohesion Fund aid. The implementation of quality projects, supported by many technical assistance measures, made it possible for the responsible administrations to 'learn by doing' and to strengthen their abilities in concluding public works contracts, management and financial control, and in public/private partnerships. For more information, consult the report at the website http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/rep03_en.htm



The Structural Funds near you

This issue of *Inforegio news* is accompanied by a factsheet presenting cohesion policy in your country for the present programming period. An identical factsheet exists for each Member State as well as for Bulgaria, Croatia (to be published) and Romania. Factsheets on cohesion policy at regional level are available for the old Member States (except Denmark and Luxembourg). These documents are available online in English, French and the national language(s) by clicking on the relevant map area.

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