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Consultation on Community strategic guidelines

On 6 July, the Commission published its 'Community strategic guidelines for cohesion policy', the first stage in defining the priorities for future regional development programmes (2007–13). The guidelines invite all interested parties (regional and local authorities, networks of local authorities and others) to express their opinions on this communication by sending their contributions to the Regional Policy DG.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/consultation/index_en.htm

Consultation on State aid

The Commission has launched a public consultation on State aid for the period 2005–09. The guiding principles for the envisaged reform are set out in an action plan. Interested parties are invited to submit their comments on this action plan before 15 September 2005.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/state_aid/others/action_plan

Extension of the Peace programme

On 3 June, Commissioner Danuta Hübner signed the operational programme that extends until 2006 Community support for the peace process in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland. This extension implies additional Peace funding of approximately EUR 144 million for 2005 and 2006. The total amount allocated to this programme during the period 2000–06 will thus reach EUR 852 million.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/themes/peace_en.htm

Solidarity Fund for Slovakia

Danuta Hübner has announced that the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) will grant aid to the value of EUR 5.667 million to be used to help repair the damage caused by the storm that struck Slovakia in November 2004. At the request of the Slovakian authorities, most of this aid will go to the regions of Banská Bystrica, Košice, Prešov and Žilina to compensate for the cost of emergency measures.

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/671&format=HTML&aged=0&language=en&guiLanguage=en>

The 'Acquis URBAN': Using the best practices of cities for the benefit of cohesion policy

Almost 300 regional development players from 22 countries attended the 'URBAN Future' conference on 9 June in Saarbrücken (Germany). The aim was to learn the lessons from the urban development Community initiative. A common declaration was adopted and presented to Danuta Hübner, Regional Policy Commissioner, sending the signal that the 'Acquis URBAN' should be included in future European programmes.

The 10 years of experiences with the Community initiatives URBAN I and II have demonstrated that the integrated, cross-sector and participative approach to urban development has been effective in helping to stabilise neighbourhoods in difficulty. For those present at the Saarbrücken meeting, a broad integration of the URBAN approach in the three new objectives of the future European cohesion policy is seen as an essential precondition for urban issues to be effectively taken into account during the next financing period.

Due to the difficulties but also the potential and important role of the cities and towns for regional development and for the cohesion of EU territory, the participants considered that they should benefit from more EU support in terms of the number of programmes adopted and budget allocations. They also felt that the Member States should acknowledge the added value of the 'Acquis URBAN' and integrate this approach in all the European funding programmes for the period 2007–13.

The URBAN players welcomed the Commission's proposals on the urban dimension, as defined in the third report on cohesion of 18 February 2004 and in the draft Structural Funds regulation of 14 July 2004.

The urban dimension must also be taken into account by all the Member States and the URBAN players stressed the need for the 'urban chapter' to be included in the Structural Funds regulation.

A 'Common declaration of Saarbrücken' was presented to the assembly and welcomed by Commissioner Danuta Hübner. This sets out four priorities.

- The integrated and cross-sector approach must be retained.
- New instruments for urban management and governance, successfully tested by URBAN, are needed.

- Cities and urban areas must be selected on the basis of clear and transparent socioeconomic criteria.
- Initiatives for the exchange of experiences and knowledge should be intensified in order to capitalise on the acquired knowledge and to benchmark the different approaches and methods.

To conclude, the URBAN players highlighted the following five key points.

- (1) The urban dimension must be ... integrated in the Structural Funds ...
- (2) For reasons of the limited financial means, as well as greater visibility and effectiveness, urban interventions should be concentrated on geographically urban districts showing deprivation. However, regarding the Lisbon objectives, there is a need to ensure that the projects implemented encourage these areas to become more competitive and more innovative.
- (3) The 'Acquis URBAN' must be reflected in full when defining the field of action in the various strategic and programming documents.
- (4) The local players must be involved directly in developing and implementing urban measures in order to achieve increased efficiency and visibility with a better orientation of local problems and the resources of citizens.
- (5) As not all the cities and towns have the opportunity to participate in EU-funded programmes, there should be stronger support on the part of the European and national networks and exchanges to gather good practices and spread them throughout the Union.

To find out more:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/newsroom/document/pdf/saarbrucken_urban_en.pdf

The intensity of research and development varies greatly from one region to another

A recent Eurostat report reveals that the intensity of research and development (R & D) activities varies greatly in the EU and within the Member States.

Germany shows the greatest national disparity between the region with the most intense R & D activity and the region with the weakest, with Brunswick at the upper end and Weser-Ems at the lower end of the scale. Among the regions covered by the data, Brunswick shows the most intense R & D activity anywhere in the EU. In some countries, such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Romania and the United Kingdom, the strongest R & D regions are significantly ahead of the national average. This is an indication that R & D activities are highly concentrated in economic clusters and/or in the most developed regions of a country.

The Île-de-France ranks first in terms of R & D personnel as a share of the total working population in the EU's NUTS 1 regions, with a ratio of 3.52 %. The region of Manner-Suomi (Finland) ranks second with 3.05 %. Next comes Berlin in third place. The Brunswick region leads the German and European NUTS 2 regions in terms of R & D personnel as a percentage of people employed, with just over four R & D personnel out of

every 100 employed people. Again, the discrepancies between regions in the same country are sometimes considerable. The proportion of R & D personnel out of total employed persons in Prague is 16 times that of Severozápad, while the Austrian capital Vienna has a 'density' of R & D personnel that is 26 times that of Burgenland. The widest disparities are found in Germany (3.7 %), the Czech Republic and Finland (3.3 %). Again, the highest concentrations of R & D personnel are found in the capitals and/or principal industrial or technological regions, such as in southern Germany or northern Italy. In the new Member States, high concentrations of R & D personnel are more scattered across one or two regions per country.

The German regions are also among the EU's 15 top regions for the intensity of R & D in the business enterprise sector, government sector and higher education.

To find out more:

http://epp.eurostat.ec.eu.int/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-NS-05-006/EN/KS-NS-05-006-EN.PDF

Financial corrections for irregularities: agreement between the Commission and the Greek authorities

The Commission has reached agreement with the Greek authorities on the future management of public works' contracts in Greece. It has set a financial correction of EUR 518 million for the irregular expenditure declared by the Greek authorities during the period 2000–04. Recovery will be spread over four years in order to limit the impact on Greece's budget.

This correction is related to public works contracts that were not tendered or managed in accordance with European legislation. The Greek authorities have also undertaken to make further corrections of their own accord that are expected to amount to around EUR 220 million for this same four-year period. At the same time, the Greek authorities have undertaken to ensure that their national legal basis for public procurement is brought strictly into line with European legislation and have tightened up management and control procedures concerning the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This will provide the stable framework needed for the successful completion of the third Community support framework (2000–13) and to prepare for the next programming period that begins in 2007.

Commissioner Danuta Hübner stated that she wished to 'acknowledge the considerable efforts made by the Greek authorities in recent months to establish the basis for a confident partnership from now on. As a result, the Commission will not suspend interim payments by the ERDF to Greece, and expects to be in a position shortly to formally acknowledge the conformity of the management and control system established in Greece for the ERDF with regulatory requirements.'

To find out more:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/687&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

2007–13: Preparing the next generation of programmes with the Inforegio site

The Member States and regions are beginning to prepare the upcoming 2007–13 programming period. The Inforegio site presents extensive information and important documents of interest to all the players interested in the process. The aim is to facilitate exchanges between these players and at the same time inform the general public of the progress made. Do not hesitate to address your questions and contributions to the Regional Policy DG.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/debate/forum_en.htm



European Commission
Directorate-General for Regional Policy