

Informal ministerial meeting in Strasbourg

At the invitation of the French presidency of the European Union, the ministers responsible for planning and regional policy met on 30 and 31 March 1995 in Strasbourg. Three items were on the agenda: continuing discussion on drawing up a Community spatial development perspective, the importance of assessment and financial control in guaranteeing the effectiveness of Community regional policy, and the desirability of developing regional cooperation in the Mediterranean.

Although land-use planning is not a Community responsibility, the ministers stressed the need for a common European approach. As Mrs Wulf-Mathies, Member of the Commission, pointed out, the persisting imbalance between regions, the accession of the three new Member States and the prospect of further enlargement to include eastern European countries all confirm that need. Furthermore, recent very specific examples such as the floods around the Rhine and Meuse basins and the establishment of trans-European networks show the growing need for European organization of land use.

Looking to the future, the Ministers invited the Spatial Development Committee to continue its work towards presenting a first draft of a Community spatial development perspective in

1996. The ministers recommended that the Commission should conduct experiments towards achieving a transnational approach to planning to complement the Community Interreg initiative, and expressed a desire to see a European network of planning research institutions established before the end of 1995 as part of the European Observatory programme.

With regard to Community regional policy, the ministers put special emphasis on the need to assess the programmes, in order to analyse the results in terms of the objectives set and the funds committed. There was also general agreement on the need for rigorous financial management, and hence for stepping up financial control by both Member States and the Commission.

Finally, the ministers also addressed the possibilities for developing a Euro-Mediterranean partnership based on the communications on this subject drawn up by the French presidency and the Commission. Specific proposals for cooperation in the field of planning could be studied as early as the Euro-Mediterranean conference in Barcelona at the end of 1995.

The next informal meeting of ministers responsible for planning and regional policy will be held in Madrid on 30 November and 1 December 1995.

ERDF financing of the Tallaght Hospital

On 11 April 1995 the Commission approved a grant of ECU 39.37 of Community assistance to the Tallaght Hospital in Ireland. It is the first instance of ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) assistance for the health system in Ireland.

The ERDF subsidy will be used to part-finance the building and equipping of a university hospital at Tallaght, near Dublin. When it is completed, the new hospital will have a

capacity of 513 beds and should provide around 1 500 jobs directly and around 1 100 jobs indirectly.

The programme, implemented under the Community support framework adopted by Ireland and the Commission in July 1994, follows up on the operations conducted during the preceding period, in particular the financing of the Tallaght regional technical school.

Relations with the Committee of the Regions

On the initiative of Mrs Wulf-Mathies, Member of the Commission with special responsibility for relations with the Committee of the Regions, the Commission recently decided to improve its collaboration with the Committee.

To that end, the Commission will ensure that it provides the Committee with all the assistance needed to carry out its work properly. In the interests of transparency, the Commission will regularly provide the Committee with an information report on what action has been taken in response to its recommendations. In addition, to help the Committee plan its work, every year the Commission will identify those matters in its work programme which will be submitted to the Committee on the basis of the following criteria:

- whether the matter being dealt with comes under the regulatory or implementing powers allocated to local and regional authorities,
- whether the rules planned are likely directly or indirectly to affect regional or local administration,
- whether the impact of Community measures is likely to vary from region to region.

Following these criteria, the Commission has selected approximately 40 subjects for 1995 on which it feels it would be useful for the Committee of the Regions to give its views.

At the plenary session of the Committee of the Regions on 20 and 21 April 1995, Mrs Wulf-Mathies also stated that after 1996 she would support an increased consultative role for the Committee of the Regions, in particular with regard to land-use planning.

In Brief

Jacques Santer visits Ireland

On 10 and 11 April 1995 the President of the European Commission, Mr Jacques Santer, and the Member of the Commission with special responsibility for regional policy, Mrs Wulf-Mathies, visited Northern Ireland and Ireland. In Belfast they met Sir Patrick Mayhew, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, as well the three Northern Irish Members of Parliament, as part of a conference organized by the latter on the "Peace and Reconciliation" Initiative (reported on in Inforegio News No 13). In Dublin, Mr Santer met the Prime Minister, Mr John Bruton, while Mrs Wulf-Mathies met the Ministers for Finance, the Environment and Energy.

Inauguration of Autoeuropa

On 26 April 1995, Mrs Wulf-Mathies attended the opening of the Autoeuropa (Ford/VW) car manufacturing plant on the Setúbal peninsula in Portugal. On that occasion she stated that this project, which has received the largest Structural Fund contribution ever granted for investment in private sector production, must now help to generate a maximum number of skilled jobs and improve the region's technological capacity, while also establishing an open working relationship between all the partners involved, namely the State, municipal authorities, and the companies concerned, both employers and employees.



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