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The reform of structural assistance: the next stages

Following the European Council in Cardiff (15 and 16 June), where the Member States expressed their desire to reach political agreement on the package as a whole no later than March 1999, negotiations on Agenda 2000 have begun in earnest.

The Austrian Presidency is striving to reach the broadest possible agreement on key points in time for the European Council in Vienna on 11 and 12 December. These include the main guidelines for the proposed regulations to govern the Structural Funds, the Cohesion Fund and the pre-accession instruments in 2000-06.

On 5 October, the General Affairs Council, which ensures coordination of work across the board, will look at the progress of negotiations and lay down basic guidelines. Ministers will by then have the first opinions on the reform of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, adopted by the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee at their September plenary meetings.

Then Parliament should adopt at first reading a resolution presenting precise policy recommendations concerning the general regulation governing the Structural Funds and the regulation on the Cohesion Fund, at its plenary session from 16 to 20 November. This resolution will also propose amendments to the regulations on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Pre-Accession Structural Instrument (PASI). The Committee of the Regions should also give its opinion on the Cohesion Fund in November.

If there is general agreement at the extraordinary summit in March 1999, the General Affairs Council will meet to adopt the regulations formally as soon as possible. Once this has been done, the Commission will draw up the list of regions eligible under Objective 1 and begin negotiations with the Member States to define the areas eligible under Objective 2.

In brief

Architectural heritage

A seminar on archaeology and tourism in the Mediterranean countries will be held from 12 to 14 November at Paestum in the province of Salerno, Italy. It will concentrate on pilot projects under Article 10 of the ERDF Regulation, which aim to develop local assets and establish cultural networks for towns and regions. Contact Leader s.a.s., tel: +39 89 253170, fax: +39 89 253238, e-mail: leader@xcom.it

<http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int>

This is the new address of Inforegio, now one of the official sites of the European Commission. Developed under the supervision of the Directorate-General for Regional Policy (DG XVI), it has been providing specific information on assistance from the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund for over a year. Now is the time to tell us what you would like to find on the site by completing the on-line questionnaire: http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/study_en.htm

1997 Annual Report on the Structural Funds

The Commission will shortly adopt its ninth Annual Report on the implementation of the Structural Funds. By the end of 1997, the Funds' third full year of operation during this programming period (1994-99), 1 026 programmes had been adopted and most of them had been implemented at local level.

The Report draws attention to the sharp increase in the budget execution of programmes undertaken at national initiative: by the end of 1997, 62% of Community contributions had been committed and 46% paid. In the case of Objective 1, for example, implementation of appropriations in 1997 met initial forecasts. The situation with regard to the Community Initiatives is quite different, with 56% of assistance committed and 36% paid. These

delays in implementation are often due to the late approval of programmes.

The Report provides an update on Structural Fund assistance in each Member State, particularly on how the Funds are helping small businesses. During the current programming period, 15% to 20% of total resources (ECU 23 to 30 billion) has gone specifically to help such firms. This finance is provided through a wide variety of schemes, of which some examples are given.

The text will soon be available in 11 languages on the Internet <http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/wbdoc/docoffic/official/repor_en.htm>

New publications

• European assistance for employment

The ten best Objective 2 projects selected under the 'European Job Challenge' (see Inforegio News No 52) feature in a booklet entitled "Europe is creating jobs - ten innovative projects tell their stories". The main criterion for selection was the impact of the programmes on employment but other factors, including originality, transferability and impact on long-term unemployment, were also taken into account.

Catalogue No CX-14-98-405-C

Available in the 11 languages on request by fax to: +32 2 230 49 15.

• A guide for the future Member States

"European Union assistance for regional development - A brief guide for future Member States" is aimed mainly at the 11 countries which have applied for EU membership. The bulk of the guide sets out how to prepare the development programmes that will be supported by the Structural Funds after accession.

Available in English, French and German on request by fax to: +32 2 230 49 15.

• The magazine "Recite"

Since 1990 the ERDF has been supporting cooperation networks between towns and regions in the Union through the Recite pilot scheme. This magazine, produced by the Recite technical assistance office, looks at the implementation of the first 36 networks supported. A new series of some 60 projects is being approved. The Commission is proposing that for the period 2000-06 Recite should form part of a new and enlarged Interreg Community Initiative.

Available in English, French and German on request by fax to: +32 2 734 44 81.

• Regional Innovation Strategies

This bulletin looks at regional innovation projects implemented under two Community schemes: regional innovation strategies (RIS) financed by the ERDF and regional innovation and technology transfer strategies (RITTS) financed by the Innovation R&D programme. It is published by the joint secretariat for the two schemes and is intended to increase interregional cooperation on innovation. More than 100 regions in the Union have implemented, or are implementing, RIS and RITTS projects. Available on request by fax to: +33 1 30 67 23 39.



European Commission
Directorate-General for Regional Policy and Cohesion

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