



## 2002 annual reports

The 2002 annual reports on the implementation of the Structural Funds, the Cohesion Fund and the Instrument for Structural Pre-Accession (ISPA) were recently adopted by the European Commission. In relation to the Structural Funds, 2002 was marked by the finalisation of the programming for Objective 2 and the Community initiatives. For the Cohesion Fund, the final amount of the resources for 2002 was EUR 2 788 million and ISPA payments in 2002 were double that in 2001, reflecting a considerable degree of progress in ISPA implementation. Further information is available at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/repor\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/repor_en.htm)

## Territorial cohesion

A document just published by an expert group on spatial and urban development presents some new ideas and reflections on territorial cohesion. Progress in the application of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) is analysed and ideas are presented for the next stages in the 'ESDP process', particularly in light of the challenges presented by EU enlargement and the Lisbon strategy. The document goes on to examine questions of territorial governance in the EU and possible ways in which the territorial dimension can be incorporated into cohesion investments, particularly the EU Structural Funds. Further details are available at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/space\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/space_en.htm)

## EUR 62 billion boost for EU economy

**On 11 November last, the European Commission presented a final action plan for the European initiative for growth. The plan, which proposes the release of EUR 62 billion to boost the European economy, will now be discussed by the European Council on 12 and 13 December 2003 in Brussels.**

The Commission's action plan, which was developed in close cooperation with the European Investment Bank, proposes supporting investment in infrastructure, specifically relating to the promotion of networks and knowledge.

It confirms the Commission's initial proposals aiming to speed up investment in the 29 priority trans-European transport networks proposed by the Commission last October. It equally aims to put the EU at the cutting edge of innovation and technology through the launch of pan-European projects in these areas as spelled out in the Commission's interim report. In this way, it reinforces the Union's wider structural reform agenda launched at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 to boost European competitiveness and growth.

Three avenues will be pursued. Investment in the trans-European transport networks: 31 projects have been identified involving a total investment of EUR 38 billion between now and 2010. Investment in gas and electricity projects: EUR 10 billion. And investment in broadband

networks, research and development and innovation: EUR 14 billion. This amounts to a total investment of EUR 62 billion between now and 2010. 60 % of the financing will come from public sources and 40 % from private sources.

The Commission's action plan envisages a 'quick-start' programme of 56 projects. All of these projects are ready to start immediately, have a strong cross-border impact and will yield positive results in terms of growth, jobs and protection of the environment. They above all offer a significant return for Europe. For example, supporting complex cross-border transport links can make other national links more viable, helping to attract private investment. By focusing on rail and sea links, the Commission takes account of benefits for the environment. Equally, supporting high-speed Internet access, promoting the next generation of key technologies or strengthening Europe's position in space are part of the Lisbon strategy and can deliver dividends in terms of innovation, cohesion and jobs. Further details are available at:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/prodilindex\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/prodilindex_en.htm)

# Rural and regional issues, a common challenge

**Attending two conferences in Salzburg (Austria) in November, Commissioner Michel Barnier addressed regional presidents on the implications of the new EU constitution and spoke to rural actors on the role of the future cohesion policy in helping to meet the challenges facing rural areas.**

In his speech to the conference, '[Planting seeds for rural futures: Rural policy perspectives for a wider Europe](#)' on 13 November, Mr Barnier emphasised the role of all the actors in rural development who, with the help of the CAP, were 'the main hope' for areas feeling in decline or even abandoned. He insisted that European competitiveness could not succeed without the regions nor the European growth be built on a deserted countryside. As rural issues were a common challenge, he considered that they should be tackled in a broader perspective and made central to the European project.

In this context, he outlined his proposals for the reform of cohesion policy, also supported by Commissioners Fischler and Diamantopoulou. Referring to the three chapters of the proposals focusing on convergence, competitiveness and employment, and cooperation, he described how each chapter could contribute to helping to meet the challenges facing rural areas.

He indicated also that, together with Franz Fischler, they were considering ways of simplifying and decentralising the policy. In particular, it was necessary to clarify the distinction between, on the one hand, what agriculture-based rural development involved (to be managed alongside the common agricultural policy) and, on the other hand, what the economic and technological development in the countryside involved (to be managed under regional policy).

The previous day Mr Barnier addressed the conference of the Presidents of Regions with Legislative Powers, where he spoke about some of the positive aspects for the regions of the new draft EU constitution. In particular he referred to the recognition of territorial cohesion as a key EU objective and the commitment to advance consultation with regional and local authorities in legislative matters. Mr Barnier said that the Commission would adopt a document on the latter before the end of the year. Further information is available at:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/barnier/visite/salzburg1103\\_fr.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/barnier/visite/salzburg1103_fr.htm)

## Spotlighting regional disparities

**Three documents published by Eurostat in November confirm the persistence of important regional disparities.**

Two Eurostat reports entitled *Unemployment in the regions of the EU in 2002* and *Regional unemployment rates in 2002 in the acceding countries* show that regional unemployment rates in 2002 ranged from 2.0 % (Tyrol) to 29.3 % (Réunion) in the EU and from 3.3 % (Cyprus) to 26.3 % (Lubuskie, Poland) in the acceding countries. Regional unemployment rates rose between 2001 and 2002 in nearly two thirds of the regions of the EU, as well as in 60 % of the regions of the acceding countries. Unemployment doubled the EU average in half of the regions of the acceding countries.

For a wider overview, Eurostat's *Regional statistical yearbook 2003* provides general socioeconomic data on

the 211 EU NUTS 2 regions: population, GDP, labour force and unemployment. It looks in more detail at certain economic sectors (agriculture, transport) or transverse economic issues (scientific and technological development, the structure of business). The daily life of Europeans in their own region is depicted through statistics on health, tourism, urbanisation and household wealth. The publication also covers indicators available for 55 regions in 12 candidate or accession countries. Further details are available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/Public/dashop/print-catalogue/EN?catalogue=Eurostat&collection=01-Press%20Releases>

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**European Commission**  
Directorate-General for Regional Policy

KN-AB-03-012-EN-C

Responsible editor: Thierry Daman, CEC, Regional Policy DG, Unit 01. Fax (32-2) 29-66003. The texts of this publication do not bind the Commission.  
Electronic address of the Regional Policy DG on the Internet: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/)  
Commissioner Barnier: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/barnier/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/barnier/index_en.htm)  
Orders for publications: [regio-info@cec.eu.int](mailto:regio-info@cec.eu.int) — This newsletter is published in all 11 official languages of the European Union.  
Printed on recycled paper.

Text finalised on 1 December 2003.