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## 'Open days 2004': the website is up and running

The Committee of the Regions has launched a website providing information and registration details on the 'Open days 2004', to be held in Brussels, which are organised jointly by the Committee of the Regions, the Directorate-General for Regional Policy and 12 offices representing Europe's regions and cities.

<http://www.cor.eu.int/opendays/opendays>

## 'Competitive regions'

We now know the dates of this seminar organised by the Finnish Interior Ministry and Lapland Region in Rovaniemi (Finland): 13 to 15 October 2004.

<http://www.lapinliitto.fi/bestpractice>

## 'City summit'

The European Commission and the Netherlands Government are organising, on 18 and 19 October 2004 in Noordwijk/Leiden (Netherlands), a 'city summit' at which the following subjects will be debated: the urban dimension of the regulations proposed by the Commission for the Structural Funds after 2006; efforts by the Netherlands Government to strengthen European cooperation on urban issues; the results of the 2004 'Urban audit'; lessons and good practices to be drawn from the URBAN programmes and Urbact network.

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/city\\_summit/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/city_summit/index_en.htm)

## Cohesion policy 2007–13: the Commission proposals

**On 14 July 2004, the European Commission adopted its legislative proposals on the reform of cohesion policy from 2007. With total resources of EUR 336.1 billion, or approximately one third of the Community budget, the proposed approach is designed to achieve action which is more targeted on the Union's strategic priorities, more concentrated on the Union's least favoured regions while anticipating changes in the rest of the Union, more decentralised, and implemented in a way which is both simpler and more efficient.**

The proposals consist of a general regulation, a regulation for each of the sources of financing (ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund) and a new proposal to create a cross-border cooperation structure.

### The general regulation

Here is a brief summary of its key elements. The three priority objectives of the Funds for the current period will be replaced in 2007 by the three priorities listed below.

> **Convergence** (ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund; EUR 264 billion, that is 78.54 % of the contribution of the Funds rather than the present 75 %). The convergence objective will focus on Member States and regions whose per capita gross domestic product (GDP) is less than 75 % of the average for the enlarged European Union — which is mainly the case for the majority of the new Member States. The outermost regions will benefit from specific financing under the ERDF, regardless of whether or not they qualify under the convergence objective. Transitional and specific 'phasing out' support will apply, on a decreasing basis, to regions that exceed this 75 % figure solely as a result of the statistical effect of enlargement. Finally, this objective will also cover Member States whose gross national income (GNI) is below 90 % of the Union average and that will therefore be assisted under the Cohesion Fund.

> **Regional competitiveness and employment** (ERDF, ESF; EUR 57.9 billion, 17.22 % of total). A twofold approach is proposed for the rest of the Union. On the one hand, the regional development programmes (ERDF) will strengthen regional competitiveness and attractiveness. On the other, programmes at the national or appropriate territorial level financed by the ESF will promote, on the basis of the European employment strategy, the ability of workers and businesses to adapt to change and the development of job markets which are socially inclusive. All the zones not covered by the convergence objective will be liable to benefit from the competitiveness objective.

> **European territorial cooperation** (ERDF; EUR 13.2 billion, 3.94 % of the total). The aim is to strengthen cross-border cooperation, cooperation between transnational zones and networks for cooperation and the exchange of experiences throughout the Union. Cross-border cooperation will also contribute to the future 'European neighbourhood and partnership instrument' and the 'Instrument for pre-accession' which will replace the present Phare, Tacis, MEDA, CARDS, ISPA and Sapard programmes.

### Community participation and increases

The programme will take particular account of the specific characteristics of the following territories: towns, rural areas or areas dependent on fisheries, outermost regions, areas with a natural handicap (islands, mountains), sparsely or very sparsely populated regions, and former external border areas.

For each programme priority, the contribution of the Funds to public expenditure will be subject to the following ceilings: 85 % for the Cohesion Fund; 75 % for the ERDF or ESF under the convergence objective, and exceptionally as much as 80 % in countries benefiting from the Cohesion Fund; 50 % for the ERDF or ESF under the competitiveness objective; 75 % for the ERDF under the cooperation objective; 50 % for the new additional allocation to the outermost regions (to compensate for extra costs). For the operational programmes in the outermost regions and outlying Greek islands, the participation is increased to 85 %. Finally, increases are proposed in the following cases: + 10 % for interregional cooperation actions under the convergence and competitiveness objectives; + 5 % under the competitiveness objective for zones with a natural handicap (islands, mountain areas), sparsely populated areas and areas which were external borders until 30 April 2004.

### Strategy, decentralisation, simplification

While maintaining the basic principles of the implementing mechanism (multiannual programming, partnership, co-financing, evaluation), the proposed reform contains a series of innovations

aimed at making cohesion policy more efficient. These include those listed below.

- > A more strategic approach to programming, based on the 'Community strategic guidelines for cohesion' and the new 'national strategic reference frameworks' to be presented by the Member States and approved by the Commission. These reference documents will replace the present Community support frameworks, single programming documents and programme complements.
- > A clear delimiting of the framework, the nature and the division of responsibility between the various actors charged with managing the Community budget and the follow-up and evaluation of actions: the implementing Member States, regions and implementing bodies on the one hand, and the Commission on the other.
- > As part of the same approach, increased confidence will be placed in the control systems of Member States when these are the principal financial contributors and the Commission has obtained assurances regarding the reliability of these systems: this is the new principle of 'proportionality'.
- > Improved concentration by balancing geographical, thematic and financial aspects. It is this that results in abandoning the pre-established 'micro-zoning' for future programmes under the competitiveness objective.
- > More coherent action by each of the Structural Funds (ERDF, ESF) by virtue of the principle of 'one fund, one programme'. On the other hand, to better coordinate heavy investments by the ERDF and Cohesion Fund, the latter will no longer fund separate projects but priorities within joint ERDF/Cohesion Fund programmes, which will be subject to the same rules.

> In the area of financial management, three important simplifying elements are introduced: (i) payments will be made in terms of priorities and not measures; (ii) the Community contribution will be calculated on the basis of public expenditure only; (iii) national regulations will largely determine the eligibility of expenditure.

#### **ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund and EGCC**

Here is a brief look at just a few of the elements in the proposed regulations.

- > Under the convergence objective, new stress is placed on action by the ERDF in the field of research and innovation as well as the environment and risk prevention. Under the competitiveness objective, this action will concentrate on three themes: innovation and the knowledge economy; the environment and risk prevention; accessibility to transport and telecommunications.
- > ESF action under the convergence objective will highlight good governance and the strengthening of institutions.
- > The Cohesion Fund will have a wider field of action, including energy efficiency, renewable energy, intermodal transport and urban and collective transport.
- > Finally, the final regulation proposed would allow the creation of 'European groupings of cross-border cooperation' (EGCC), invested with legal personality, which would oversee implementation of cross-border programmes on the basis of an agreement between national, regional and local administrations or other public services.

To find out more: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/debate/forum\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/debate/forum_en.htm)

## **Mid-term evaluation of the Structural Funds and Interreg**

**A new Commission working document entitled 'The update of the mid-term evaluation of Structural Fund interventions' was recently placed on the Inforegio site, in English, French and German.**

Mid-term evaluations were carried out in 2003 and an update is due for 31 December 2005 for the Community support frameworks, operational programmes and single programming documents. The purpose is to prepare future interventions. The key elements of the mid-term evaluation update will be an analysis of the 2003 mid-term evaluation recommendations and of outputs, results and impacts. The working document also contains a table of core indicators to be used. The Commission recommends that the new Member States should carry out an update of progress in implementing their programme by the same deadline that applies for the update of the mid-term evaluation.

The mid-term evaluations of the Interreg III Community initiative are now also available on the Interact website. Covering the period 2000–03, these evaluations have generated documents which constitute a huge reservoir of information, practical experiences and lessons to be drawn from Interreg programmes in progress.

Structural Funds: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/working/sf2000\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/sf2000_en.htm)

Interreg: <http://www.interact-eu.net/226918/471522/0/0>

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