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Open Days 2005: programme and registration online

The programme and registration form for Open Days 2005 are now available online. 'Open Days 2005 — European Week of the Regions and Towns' is organised jointly by the Committee of the Regions and the Regional Policy DG, in cooperation with 106 European regions, and will run from 10 to 13 October 2005. The 66 workshops and seminars are expected to attract some 2 000 regional policy stakeholders at EU, national and regional levels. In parallel, a series of more citizen-oriented events will be held in the regions and cities involved.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/opendays/program.cfm

The Solidarity Fund in action

Danuta Hübner has announced aid of EUR 5.67 million from the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) to help repair the damage caused by the storm that hit Slovakia in November 2004. Following a Commission proposal, a further EUR 93 million should soon be granted to Sweden, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in response to storm damage suffered by this region in January 2005.

<http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/g24217.htm>

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

Celebrating Cornwall

Cornwall (South West, UK) is implementing a very important Objective 1 integration project between its universities, known as CUC (Combined Universities in Cornwall). The project will be honoured in Brussels on 14 September 2005. The day will begin with an exhibition on the CUC at the Regional Policy DG headquarters, followed by a seminar on Objective 1 best practice, held in the same building. A reception will be held at the European Parliament in the evening, attended by Commissioner Danuta Hübner.

To find out more:

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The new Community strategic guidelines for cohesion, growth and jobs

On 5 July, Commissioners Danuta Hübner (Regional Policy) and Vladimír Špidla (Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) presented to fellow Commissioners a communication on the Community strategic guidelines for economic, social and territorial cohesion. These guidelines will determine the priorities for the next generation of cohesion policy programmes by helping the Member States to place the emphasis on fields of vital importance to growth and jobs.

Danuta Hübner declared that: 'The Community strategic guidelines are an essential aspect of the Commission's efforts to align cohesion policy with the Lisbon agenda for growth and jobs. The guidelines are the missing link between our legislation and the regional programmes on the ground.'

The Community strategic guidelines are a key element in the device put into place for the new post-2007 cohesion policy. They are the link between the Member States' operational programmes and the regulations governing the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund. It is on the basis of these strategic guidelines that the Member States will set out their own strategic priorities to be incorporated into their 'Lisbon' national action programmes for growth and jobs.

The strategic guidelines provide the Member States and regions with indicative Community priorities for cohesion policy, placing the emphasis on the need for increased synergy between cohesion policy, national and regional priorities and the Lisbon strategy. They also strengthen ownership of cohesion policy by the regional and local authorities, social partners and other stakeholders.

Three general priorities were defined.

Guideline I: Making Europe a more attractive place to invest and work — expanding and improving infrastructures; improving the environmental contribution to growth and jobs; addressing the issue of Europe's intensive use of traditional energy resources and supporting the development of renewable and alternative technologies.

Guideline II: Improving knowledge and innovation for growth — increasing and improving investment in research and technological development; facilitating innovation and promoting entrepreneurship; promoting the information society for all; facilitating access to finance.

Guideline III: More and better jobs — attracting and retaining more people in employment and modernising social protection systems; improving the adaptability of workers and enterprises and the flexibility of the labour market; increasing investment in human capital through better education and skills; strengthening administrative capacities, and helping to maintain a healthier labour force.

The guidelines also pay particular attention to territorial cohesion and cooperation. They confirm the contribution of cities to growth and jobs, support the economic diversification of rural areas and strengthen cross-border, transnational and inter-regional cooperation.

They do not seek to impose a uniform approach. On the basis of the priorities set, each Member State or region must implement actions in line with its own path to development that takes into account its particular economic, social, institutional and cultural circumstances. The Commission will propose the guidelines for formal adoption by the Council and European Parliament once the legislation on which the new cohesion policy is based has been adopted. In the meantime, a public consultation will help determine the document's final form (1). The guidelines will be adopted unanimously by the Council after adoption of the regulations (following agreement on the 2007–13 financial perspectives) and on the basis of a Commission proposal.

In the absence of an agreement on the financial perspectives at the last European Council in June, the adoption of this communication will enable the national and regional authorities in preparing their future programmes.

To find out more:

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

(1) Interested parties are invited to submit their comments by Internet to the following address, before 30 September:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2007/osc/index_en.htm

Rural development 2007–13

On 8 July 2005, the Commission adopted the 'Strategic guidelines for rural development' in the wake of the 'Strategic guidelines for cohesion', adopted on 5 July. This new generation of rural development strategies and programmes will revolve around three main 'axes': the competitiveness of agriculture, agri-foodstuffs and forestry; the environment and the countryside; quality of life and the diversification of rural areas.

The competitiveness axis covers a range of measures targeted at human resources and the physical capital of the agricultural and agri-foodstuffs sectors (promotion of the transfer of knowledge and innovation) and at quality production. The environment and countryside axis includes measures to protect and improve natural resources while safeguarding agricultural and forestry systems with a high added value as well as the cultural landscapes of Europe's rural areas. The third axis will help strengthen socioeconomic links between agriculture,

forestry and the rural environment. A fourth 'horizontal' axis is based on the experience of the Leader community initiative and is concerned with opening up innovative governance through 'bottom-up' approaches to rural development based on local partnerships.

To find out more:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/845&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Providing better information on the Structural Funds

On 30 June 2005, around 50 communication experts from 23 Member States gathered in Brussels in the company of a dozen Regional Policy DG representatives. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the information challenges facing the managing authorities during the period 2007–13.

Article 46 of Commission Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 defines the obligations of the managing authorities in implementing information and publicity measures designed to ensure that activities supported by the European Structural Funds are sufficiently visible and transparent. The regulation also charges the Commission with organising networks for exchanges between regional and national communication experts. It is in this spirit that, in 2002, the SFIT was created as an informal information network on the Structural Funds. Network members have since met on a regular basis and the 30 June event was the fifth such meeting.

On 30 June, Regional Policy DG representatives presented the main lines of the proposed regulation concerning information and publicity measures for the period 2007–13. This new regulation confirms the provisions of the previous regulation (Article 46) in connection with communication plans and evaluation while also introducing new measures, such as an audiovisual production and the need to respect more unified standards for billboards and plaques.

Members of the informal network then went on to make their initial comments. A number of clear points emerged from the debate:

- the need to retain the obligations in regard to information and communication plans for the new period, as they are essential instruments for the work of communication experts and for Structural Fund management itself;
- the desire to see the development and formalising of the network for the exchange of experiences relating to information and publicity, including the use of communication professionals in its 'training' component;
- clarification of key notions such as evaluation, monitoring, the strategic communication plan and the annual action plan.

Concluding the meeting, the Regional Policy DG representatives invited members of the SFIT network to submit in writing to the Commission, by 15 September 2005, their comments on what they feel would be useful to include in the 'information' clauses of the future regulation.

The minutes of the 30 June meeting can be consulted at:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/country/commu/sfitbx1062005_en.htm

With the support of the SFIT network, the Commission has published a 'Practical guide to communication on Structural Funds 2000–06'. The guide can be downloaded at:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/country/commu/document/draftguide03_en.pdf

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



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