



Irish Regions Office

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FUNDING

Interreg IIIB NWE

The final Call for Proposals under the Interreg IIIB North West Europe (NWE) programme was published at the end of February. This call will be confined to certain objectives within Priorities 1, “An attractive and coherent system of cities, towns and regions”, and Priority 5, “Enhancing the maritime functions of NWE and promoting territorial integration across seas of NWE”. The total budget will be approximately €10.8 million and this will be shared equally between the two Priorities. To support the development of applications, two parallel thematic seminars will be organised in Brussels/Lille in late April. Deadline: 26th of September 2005. *Further details at:* <http://www.nweurope.org/page/document.php?p=148> or from Ronan Gingles, Liaison Officer - Interreg NWE, Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly. Tel: +353 51 860711, Email: rgingles@seregassembly.ie

eEurope Awards for eGovernment

A call for applications will be published on the 22nd of March 2005 for the eEurope Awards for eGovernment 2005. The eEurope Awards are organised by the European Institute of Public Administration with the support of the EU's Information Society Technologies Programme. The objective of the awards is to promote best practice and facilitate the sharing of experience and mutual learning. The awards ceremony will take place at the Ministerial eGovernment Conference 2005 in Manchester in November.

All public administrations (inc. local and regional) delivering eGovernment services are encouraged to apply. Deadline: 1st of June 2005. *Further details at:* <http://www.e-europeawards.org>

Vocational Training & Education

The European Commission has published a call for proposals under the Leonardo da Vinci Programme (2000-2006). This call aims to support conferences and exhibitions to promote the exploitation of results from Leonardo da Vinci projects or projects from other EU programmes linked to vocational education and training. Between 15 and 20 projects will be supported. Total budget: €1.5 million. Maximum grant: €100,000 per project, up to a maximum of 75% of eligible costs. Deadline: 3rd of May 2005. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/leonardo/new/valorisation/callevts_en.html

Maximilian Prize 2005

The Province of Tyrol and the City of Innsbruck in Austria invite local and regional authorities to submit nominations for the 2005 Maximilian Prize. This year's prize will reward a personality or institution for their achievements in the area of regional policy, with special consideration given to endeavours to implement the principle of subsidiarity and the contents of the Charter of Local Self-Government and the Charter of Regional Self-Government of the Council of Europe. The prize consists of a certificate, medal and €10,000. *Further details at:* http://www.innsbruck.at/io30/download/Dokumente/Content/International/KaiserMaxPreis/Ausschreibung_2005_deu_eng_fra.pdf?disposition=inline

New Digital Content Programme

The EU Council of Ministers has approved a €149 million package to develop online digital content. Known as eContentplus the programme will run from 2005 to 2009 and will aim to increase the content available to internet users and to drive demand for broadband access. EU funding will target projects to put educational, spatial / geographical and cultural material online and to make content available to users of different software platforms. *Further details at:* <http://www.cordis.lu/econtent/>

Science and Society

Under the 6th Framework Programme for Research, €2.2 million is being made available to support activities for European Science Week 2006 and for general activities matching science and society. This include activities to encourage and assist public and private actors to organise themselves around new science and society initiatives. Deadline for applications: 24th of May 2005. *Further details at:* http://fp6.cordis.lu/fp6/call_details.cfm?CALL_ID=199

NEWS & POLICY

Funding for Rural Diversification under Threat

In recent weeks both the EU Agricultural Council and the European Parliament's rapporteur have expressed opposition to the European Commission's proposals for minimum budgetary allocations for the different

axes of the future rural development programme. This opposition to minimum allocations poses a serious threat to the "ring fencing" of funds for rural diversification and is seen by many as a response to growing pressure from the powerful farm lobby to retain rural development spending within the farming sector. The Commission is proposing that each Member State should adhere to the following minimum allocations: 15% for axis 1 (improving the competitiveness of farming), 25% for axis 2 (environment and land management), and 15% for axis 3 (rural diversification). However, EU farm ministers meeting on March 14th objected to this proposal, insisting that Member States should have more control over how the estimated €96 billion rural development budget is used. Some Member States called for lower minimum rates while others spoke out against the minimum spending idea altogether. Meanwhile, in her draft report for the Parliament's Agriculture committee, Agnes Schierhuber MEP calls for the minimum budget for Axis 3 (rural diversification) to be reduced from 15% to 5% and for the minimum allocation for the LEADER Axis to be reduced from 7% to 3%. She also calls for a reduction in the performance reserve for LEADER from 3% to 2% and for modulated funds (estimated at €9 billion) to be reserved for farming and forestry measure (Axis 1 and Axis 2). A final decision on the future rural development proposals is expected before the end of 2005. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

Deal on EU Budget Unlikely in June

Speaking at the Centre for European Policy Studies on February 23rd, Luxembourg Prime Minister and current President of the EU, Jean-Claude Juncker indicated that he was now less

optimistic about getting agreement on the EU budget for 2007-13 before the end of his country's presidency in June. Mr Juncker's comments came as it emerged that the Presidency would not be in a position to table a first draft compromise on the budget to a meeting of EU Member States' permanent representatives on March 2nd, as had been planned. The delay is believed to be due to the fact that several Member States, led by Italy, are insisting that the compromise must include options on dealing with the British rebate. The draft compromise is now expected to be presented to EU Finance Ministers on April 12th. The Presidency is then planning to have further ministerial meetings to look at the compromise on April 24th, May 22nd and finally on June 12th ahead of the summit of EU leaders on June 16-17th. If a deal on the budget is not struck by then it is not likely to happen until 2006, after the UK presidency. This could mean delays in Structural Funds and Rural Development programmes which are due to commence in January 2007. The chances of an agreement would however be greatly enhanced by an agreement on the Stability and Growth Pact at the EU summit on March 22nd 2005. *Further details from the Irish Region Office.*

Structural Funds post 2006 – What can be funded?

At the end of January 2005 the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional Policy began bilateral consultations with the 25 EU Member States on the content of Community Strategic Guidelines (CSG's) for the implementation of EU Structural Funds in the period 2007-2013. As a basis for these discussions the Commission presented a working document that highlights "10 key

issues” for which future investment could be prioritised. These focus mainly on investment in basic infrastructure in Convergence (Objective 1) regions and on maximising the use of infrastructure outside these regions. Issues of particular interest to Ireland include: Issue 4. “Kyoto+”. What can be done to increase progress on reducing greenhouse gas emissions? Can the progress on renewables in Denmark, Germany and Spain be replicated elsewhere? Issue 6. “Enlarging the labour force”. How can activity rates be increased? What are the key skills, training and childcare needs? Issue 7. “Towards an ideas economy”. What role is there for regional research strategies and how might they be developed? What measures can be employed to develop regional research and innovation capacity? Issue 8. “Speeding up innovation”. What can be done to reduce lead times from ideas to products and processes? How can technology transfer to SME’s be further promoted? Issue 9. “Access to finance”. How can this be improved? Issue 10. “Pacts with cities and rural areas”. How can the role of cities as motors for regional growth be enhanced? What is needed to promote rural diversification? Following the series of meetings with each Member State, the Commission will prepare a draft CSG’s to be discussed at an Informal Meeting of Ministers on May 20th, 2005. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office*

EU to Promote Research Capacity of Regions

Speaking to the press in Brussels on March 2nd EU Commissioner for Research, Janez Potočnik, said that the next EU Framework Programme for Research (FP7) would aim to increase research capacity at

regional level and to promote greater synergies with the Structural Funds and with the proposed new Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP). Mr Potočnik also indicated that with the EU’s research budget set to double in the period 2007-2013 there would be a move towards greater “de-centralisation and externalisation” in terms of the management of research funds. The Commission’s proposals on the new research programme are expected to be published in early April. The new programme will be strongly oriented towards delivering on the Lisbon objectives and this will influence the thematic areas to be supported. The instruments of the new programme will aim to facilitate co-operation (‘collaborative research’), ideas (new European Research Council), people (Marie Curie actions) and capacities. In terms of capacities, the Commissioner indicated that the new programme would include specific proposals on measures to boost research capacity at regional level. This new regional dimension will build on the experience of the Regions of Knowledge pilot action and will include specific actions targeting less technologically advanced regions and promoting greater complementarity with the Structural Funds. *Further details on future EU research policy are available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/future/index_en.cfm*

Consultation on Future EU Maritime Policy

On March 2nd in a Communication presented jointly by President Barroso and Fisheries Commissioner, Joe Borg the European Commission announced its decision to launch a consultation process on a future EU maritime policy. The Communication highlights the

contribution and potential contribution of maritime activities to the EU economy and to quality of life. It refers to the challenge of exploiting this potential in a sustainable manner and suggests that an integrated approach is required in order to avoid conflicts and optimise synergies between the various activities in order to boost their economic potential and safeguard the environment. A task force of Commissioners, under the leadership of Commissioner Borg, has now been set up to draft a consultation paper. The task force comprises Commissioners for enterprise and industry, transport, environment, regional policy, research and energy. Public authorities, NGOs and elected and other representative organisations in the fisheries, tourism, energy and transport sectors are to be consulted in the preparation of the consultation paper, which is to be published in the first half of 2006.

Further details at:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/05/72&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

EU Action Plan for Sustainable Forest Management

In a Communication published on March 11th the European Commission has proposed the preparation of an EU Action Plan for Sustainable Forest Management. The need for an Action Plan has emerged from a review of the activities implemented in the context of the EU Forestry Strategy since its adoption in December 1998. The review concludes that forests now provide multiple benefits to modern society and that these benefits are increasingly appreciated by the public. It suggests that while there has been progress in the sustainable management of EU forests in recent years, the

policy context is now changing and a more proactive approach to governing the EU's forests is needed. The Communication highlights issues concerning the competitiveness and the economic viability of the "EU forestry model". The viability of the EU's 15 million private forests, which currently rely largely on wood sales for revenue, is under threat. However these forests provide a wide range of environmental and social goods and services to society, which the Commission believes must be addressed if multipurpose forest management, simultaneously serving economic, social and environmental objectives, is to be maintained in the EU in the future. The Action Plan is to be presented by the Commission in 2006. *Further details at:*

http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/publi/rep_orts/forestry/index_en.htm

Open Days 2005

On March 9th Danuta Hübner, European Commissioner for regional policy, and Peter Straub, President of the Committee of the Regions, presented proposals for Open Days-European Week of Regions and Cities 2005. Open Days is an annual event focusing on regional development issues and is jointly organised by the two institutions in partnership with selected regional offices in Brussels. This year's event will be held between the 10th and 13th of October in Brussels and will focus on the theme "Working together for Regional Growth and Jobs". During the four days 16 conglomerates of regional offices, as well as the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions will organise a series of seminars and workshops on issues such as regional development, innovation, sustainable development, and cross-border and

transnational cooperation. Having participated successfully in Open Days 2004, the Irish Regions Office (IRO) has once again been selected to participate in this year's event. The IRO will participate in a conglomerate known as the "Natural Effects Regions for Competitiveness and Innovation", which will bring together 6 partner regions and will focus on the challenges facing regions emerging from Objective 1 status. Two seminars are foreseen, one on "Elements providing dynamism to competitiveness at regional and local level" and the other on, "Regional clusters: a tool for boosting innovation". There will also be an exhibition of best practices from the 6 regions. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

EVENTS

8 April 2005, Tullamore

EU Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta Hubner will be among the speakers at the "Regional Policy Forum 2005 – A new Reality for Regional Policy", which is being organised by the Chamber of Commerce of Ireland. The conference will examine the key aspects of the Commission's new regional policy proposals and will assess the implications for regional development and businesses in Ireland. Other speakers include Minister for Finance, Brian Cowen TD, Marian Harkin, MEP, and Gerry Finn, Director of the BMW Regional Assembly. *Further details from: Dara Calleary, Tel: 096 78731 or E-mail: dara@chambersireland.ie*

18 April 2005, Brussels

The Committee of the Regions will be the venue for the launch of the Mutual Learning Platform (MLP). MLP is a new initiative of DG Enterprise which aims to enable regions to benefit from increased investment in research and innovation by organising workshops and creating networks in the fields of regional foresight, regional benchmarking and regional profile in research and innovation. For each of these fields a working group will be created to develop the MLP initiatives. Registrations before April 9th. *Further detail at: http://www.innovating-regions.org/network/events/eventDetails.cfm?event_id=280*

28-29 April 2005, Barcelona (Spain)

The European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) and its antenna in Barcelona, the European Centre for the Regions (EIPA-ECR), are organising a conference entitled "Mid-Term Review of the Lisbon Strategy and Process: The Need for Regional and Local Players to Step up Their Involvement." The aim of the conference is to deepen understanding of the current challenges and the updated policy objectives and governance mechanisms for delivering the Lisbon strategy from the viewpoint of regional and local actors. *Further details at: <http://www.eipa.nl> (follow the links: "Conferences" – "Open Conferences & Seminars 2005" – "Open Barcelona").*

19-20th May 2005, Killarney

"The Knowledge Economy and Regional Competitiveness; The Implications for Regional Development" is the theme for this year's

Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly annual conference. *Further details will be published in the next EU Bulletin, or contact the Assembly at, Tel: 353 (0)51 860700, E-mail: info@seregassembly.ie*

31 May to 3 June 2005, Brussels

“Get to Grips with Climate Change” is the theme for this years Green Week conference and exhibition, which is being organised by the European Commission's Directorate-General for the Environment. Green Week 2005 will look at all aspects of climate change and in particular at the human factor and how lifestyle, production, consumption and transport impact on global warming. Green Week is aimed at local, regional and national decision-makers, businesses, NGOs and the general public. In addition to a programme of conferences Green Week will also include an exhibition with stands featuring best practices, projects and partnerships. *Further details at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/greenweek>*

13-14 June 2005, Lille (France)

The IANIS (Innovative Actions Network for the Information Society) Annual Conference 2005 will focus on the theme, “Building Competitive Regions: The Role of Innovation and ICTs in Transformation, Competitiveness, Employment & Cohesion.” The conference will examine how to use ICTs to build competitive regions, with more profitable enterprises, more and better quality employment, increased social inclusion and enhanced territorial cohesion. *Further details at: <http://www.ianis.net/index.php?page=events&sub=detail&devent=958>*

PUBLICATIONS

Blueprints for Regional Foresight

In 2003 the European Commission's Directorate General for Research established five working groups, which were given the task of preparing “blueprints” for how to initiate foresight actions in European regions. Each working group subsequently prepared a blueprint structured around a specific regional policy issue. One of these, the ‘FOR-RIS Group’ blueprint, is designed to help regional policy-makers to initiate, organise and conduct a foresight exercise and to demonstrate its role in improving policy design and implementation for enhancing regional competitiveness and social cohesion in a knowledge-based economy. *Further details at: http://www.innovating-regions.org/download/foresight_Blueprint-FOR-RIS.pdf The other four blueprints are: UPGRADE - Foresight strategy and actions to assist regions with the transition from traditional to knowledge based economies. (http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/conference/s/2004/foresight/pdf/upgrade_en.pdf); TECHTRANS - Transregional integration and harmonisation of technology support (http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/conference/s/2004/foresight/pdf/techtrans_en.pdf); TRANSVISION: Bridging historically and culturally close neighbouring regions separated by national borders (http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/conference/s/2004/foresight/pdf/transvision_en.pdf); and AGRIBLUE: Sustainable Territorial Development of the Rural Areas of Europe (http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/conference/s/2004/foresight/pdf/agriblue_en.pdf).*

NETWORKS

The Silver Economy Network

At a conference in Bonn on February 17th and 18th on “The Silver Economy in Europe” 10 European Regions, including the Mid-East and the Midland regions in Ireland, officially launched a new network called the “Silver Economy Network of European Regions (SEN@ER)”. The objectives of the Network are to promote regional economic development and to improve the quality of life for older citizens through promoting the development of products and services better targeted at older people. The Network's activities include: supporting regional businesses and service providers in the "silver economy" sector; initiating and stimulating the exchange of experience on building regional silver economy clusters; the creation of a European pool of expert knowledge on economic, social and political issues involved; supporting network members in both regional development initiatives and global marketing focusing on silver economy products and services; fostering policy initiatives at regional, national and European level; and setting an agenda for creating a highly competitive European silver economy. *Further details at: http://www.silvereconomy-europe.org/index_en.htm*

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