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FUNDING

Environmental Protection

The European Commission's Environment Directorate has published a call for proposals in the field of environmental protection (2005). The objective of the call is to support awareness raising activities relating directly or indirectly to the themes of climate change, biodiversity and Natura 2000. The total budget for this call is €2.08 million and it is expected that between 30 and 38 projects will receive support. The deadline for submission of applications is May 10th, 2005. Further details at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/funding/general/index_en.htm

Mainstreaming Disability Actions

The European Commission's Employment & Social Affairs Directorate has published a call for proposals for pilot projects aimed at facilitating and encouraging activities to mainstream disability actions. The call refers to mainstreaming in all relevant policy areas, at all levels (EU, national, regional and local), at all stages of policy-making and with all relevant actors. Actions under this call must be transnational in scope and must involve actors from at least five Member States of the EU. Funding of up to 80% of the total eligible costs is available, with a minimum grant of €180,000 and a maximum grant of €500,000. Between 6 and 10 projects will be supported. Deadline for applications: July 11th, 2005. *Further details at:*

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/calls/2005/vp_2005_006/tender_en.htm

Entrepreneurship and Local Development Awards

At the end of March, DG Enterprise announced that it is in the process of planning a European entrepreneurship campaign as part of its action plan to promote entrepreneurship in Europe. In this context, it plans to launch, in late 2005, an award scheme for centres/regions that actively promote enterprise and local development. The objective of the scheme is to promote a high level focus on enterprise and entrepreneurship throughout the EU, highlighting and championing best practice in policy-making and implementation across Europe. *Details to be published later in the year at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/index_en.htm

Technology Transfer

The European Commission has published a call for proposals under the specific programme for research, technological development and demonstration: "Structuring the European Research Area". The aim of the call is to identify new methods of promoting and encouraging transnational technology transfer. Total indicative budget: €10.5 million. Applicants are requested to submit their proposals (only in electronic format) by 15 June 2005. *Further information at:* <http://www.cordis.lu/fp6>. Call FP6-2005-INNOV-7, OJ C 63 of 15 March 2005.

NEWS & POLICY

€140 million to Promote Research in Regions

On April 6th the European Commission adopted its proposals for a new generation of research programmes, the 7th EU Framework Programme for Research (FP7). The Commission is proposing a doubling of the research budget for 2007-2013, to €67.8 billion and for the first time this would include €140 million for a new “Regions of Knowledge” initiative to promote research at regional level. The new programme will be divided into four sub-programmes: (1) *Cooperation*, aimed at promoting collaborative research; (2) *Ideas*, aimed at promoting basic research; (3) *People*, aimed at reinforcing career prospects and mobility of researchers; and (4) *Capacities*, aimed at developing research capacities by supported activities to enhance research and innovation capacity throughout Europe. The Capacities sub-programme will be of most interest to EU regions. It includes support for research infrastructures; regional research driven clusters; stimulating the research potential in the EU’s “convergence” regions; clustering regional actors in research to develop “regions of knowledge”; research for and by SMEs; “science in society” issues; “horizontal” activities of international co-operation. The details of the Commission’s FP7 proposals will be set out in specific legislative proposals to be published in September.

Further details at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/future/index_en.cfm

New €4.2 billion Competitiveness and Innovation Programme

On April 7th the European Commission published proposals for a new Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP). The new CIP will have a budget of €4.2 billion for the period 2007-2013 and will bring together several existing EU programmes under three main pillars: an “Entrepreneurship and Innovation” pillar, which will facilitate access to finance and support investment in innovation; an “ICT Policy Support” pillar, which will stimulate a wider adoption and more efficient uptake of ICT, including in the public sector; and an “Intelligent Energy Europe” pillar, which will encourage a wider uptake of new and renewable energies, improved energy efficiency and support the strengthening of administrative capacities. New elements in CIP include: a risk capital instrument for high-growth and innovative companies, in particular SMEs developing or using environmental technologies; an instrument for “securitisation” of banks’ SME loan portfolios; an enhanced role for innovation and business support networks (Euro Info Centre and Innovation Relay Centre); and a twinning programme to help policy makers in Member States and regions to learn from examples of good practice.

Further details at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/enterprise_policy/cip/index_en.htm

EU Budget Cuts to Affect All Policy Areas

Developments in recent weeks suggest that an agreement on the EU budget for 2007-2013 is now dependant on a compromise, somewhere between the Commission’s proposal (1.14% of EU GNI) and the 1.0% of EU GNI being sought

by 6 Member States. Speaking at a conference on “The Future of European Cohesion and its Financing” at the Committee of the Regions on April 6th Nicholas Schmit, Minister Delegate for Foreign Affairs of the Luxembourg EU Presidency, said there was a “general desire” in the Council for an agreement on the budget (Financial Perspective) at the EU Summit in June but that this would fall short of the 1.14% of EU GDP proposed by the Commission. However, Mr Schmit said that the Structural Funds would not be expected to take the full brunt of the cuts, as had been feared. Cuts would be required in all policy areas, including agriculture, he said. Latest indications suggest that Ireland could expect somewhere in the region of €800 million in Structural Funds for 2007-2013, which would be divided relatively evenly between the BMW and the S&E regions. Two special Council meetings are planned, in order to try and reach agreement on the budget by June. Without an agreement in June delays in launching the round of new regional programmes are seen as inevitable. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

New Platform for Regional Innovation

On Monday, April 18th the European Commission launched the Mutual Learning Platform (MLP), an initiative aimed at encouraging investment in research and innovation in Europe’s regions. The MLP is developed under the leadership of the European Commission’s Enterprise and Industry DG, with the participation of DG Research, DG Regional Policy and DG Information Society. An MLP Board has also been established to co-ordinate the Platform’s activities. The MLP will provide regional policy-makers and practitioners with the opportunity to learn with and from each

other. It is expected to result in concrete tools for regional policy-makers involved in research and innovation activities. The activities of the MLP will focus on three core topics: regional foresight, regional benchmarking and regional profiles in research and innovation. Working groups have been set up around these themes, and two workshops presenting case studies are being organised for each topic with the objective of producing concrete suggestions for regional policy makers. *Further details at: http://www.innovating-regions.org/network/presentation/mlp_details.cf Contact: Ms Petra Falchetto, Tel: +43 1 876 7991 0, e-mail: p.falchetto@inno-group.com*

European Investment Bank Support for Regional Development

Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta Hübner and the President of the European Investment Bank (EIB), Philippe Maystadt, met on April 11 to discuss future cooperation between the EIB and the European Commission on EU regional policy. One of the key issues discussed was the development of micro-credits (less than €25,000) in synergy with aid granted in the context of the EU Structural Funds. The aim would be to facilitate access by SMEs to micro-credits in regions eligible for Structural Fund assistance in order to promote entrepreneurship in these regions. Discussions are still at a preliminary stage, but the intention is to agree initiatives before the launch of the next round of regional programmes in 2007. A conference to be staged by the European Commission in November on “funding growth and cohesion in an enlarged EU” will assess progress at that stage. The EIB, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank will participate. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

Parliament Calls for Increase in Rural Development Budget

A draft report by the European Parliament’s (EP) Temporary Budget Committee backs the European Commission’s proposal for a budget equivalent to 0.41% of EU GNI for EU regional policy and calls for a significant increase in EU funding for rural development. The report describes the Commission’s proposals on the EU’s Financial Perspective (future budgetary proposals) as “acceptable”, but outlines a series of alternatives for areas deemed to be over or under-funded. It calls for rural development funding to be “increased significantly”, suggesting that the Commission proposal is “extremely limited”. The draft report also proposes a budget of €21 billion for the Natura 2000 programme and suggests that spending on agriculture still “represents a disproportionate volume of funding”. On grounds of “democratic accountability”, it proposes cutting the next Financial Perspective to five years’ duration so that it coincides with the next Parliament and European Commission mandates. As this is an own-initiative report it is not binding. However, in the context of an inter-institutional agreement the Financial Perspective must be approved by the Parliament and therefore the report warns that if the priorities outlined are ignored in the Council’s final position, Parliament “will not sanction the next Financial Perspective”. The Parliament is due to adopt the report on June 6-9, before the European Council on June 17-18. *Further details from the Irish regions Office.*

Regional GDP and Structural Funds Eligibility for 2007-2013

On the basis of the latest Eurostat figures for regional GDP for 2002, the European

Commission’s Regional Policy Directorate has revised the eligibility of regions for Structural Funds’ support in the 2007-2013 period. Since the publication of provisional figures in January 2005 changes in regional GDP means that the eligibility status of Malta, and the regions of Burgenland, Austria, and Dresden, Germany, has changed. Burgenland (now below 75% of GDP in EU15), which was previously one of the Phasing-in (Natural Effect) regions, now joins the group of Statistical Effect regions. The eligibility of the Irish regions remains unchanged. Average GDP per capita in the BMW region for the period 2000-2002 was 93.6% of the EU average while the S&E region was 142.58%. If the new Structural Funds Regulations are adopted later this year then 2000-2002 will most likely be taken as the reference period for Structural Funds eligibility. Otherwise, the 2003 figures may come into play. The three leading regions in the ranking of regional GDP per capita in 2002 were Inner London (315% of the average), the Brussels Capital region (235%) and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (213%). A total of 37 regions, including the S&E region had an average GDP of over 125% of the EU average. 64 regions had an average GDP per capita of below 75% of the EU average. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/newsroom/document/pdf/gdp20002002.pdf*

Open Days 2005: Call for Papers

The European Commission’s Regional Policy Directorate has published a “call for papers” for Open Days 2005. The Commission is looking for up to 80 national and regional programme managers to be speakers at the Open Days seminars and workshops, which will take place in Brussels from the 11th to 13th of October

2005. The Commission is seeking contributions from practitioners in the field of regional development and the management of structural funds and instruments. Presentation topics should refer to best practices in the region or Member State and to preparations for the next generation of Structural Fund programmes (2007-2013). Specifically, proposals for contributions should reflect on one of the following headings: Programmes for "Convergence" regions; Programmes for "Regional competitiveness and employment"; Programmes in the field of "European Territorial Cooperation"; and/or Managing the Structural Funds in the 2007-2013 period. Invited speakers will be reimbursed for travel and accommodation costs. No fees will be paid. The deadline for submitting papers is May 3rd, 2005. Selected speakers will be informed before May 17th. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/open_days/papers.cfm?ban=1

Active European Citizenship

A new programme to promote active European citizenship was adopted by the European Commission on April 6. It will replace the current programme, which comes to an end in 2006. Called "Citizens for Europe", the programme will have a budget of €207 million for the period 2007-2013 and the overall aim will be to bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens. The programme will have three separate actions. The first, "active citizens for Europe" will include town-twinning activities (continuation of the current Town Twinning schemes). The second, "active civil society for Europe", is targeted at Europe-wide civil society organizations; and the third action, "together for Europe", will support high-profile

events, studies and information tools. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education_culture/activecitizenship/index_en.htm

EVENTS

5 May 2005, Tullamore (Ireland)

This year's Border Midland & Western Regional Assembly annual conference will address the theme, "Innovation: The Key to Regional Competitiveness". Speakers will include Mr Micheál Martin, TD, Minister for Enterprise, Trade & Employment, Mr. Enda Kenny, TD, Mr. Eoin O'Driscoll, Chairman of the Enterprise Strategy Group, Mr. Frank Ryan, Chief Executive of Enterprise Ireland and other key speakers from the public and private sectors who will discuss the question of innovation in private firms and among public and third level institutions. *Further details from: Geraldine Lafferty, Tel. 094 9862970, E-mail: glafferty@bmwassembly.ie*

19-20 May 2005, Killarney (Ireland)

The theme for this year's Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly annual conference is, "The Knowledge Economy & Regional Competitiveness: Implications for Regional Development". Speakers include officials from the European Commission and from other EU regions. Professor Liam Downey, Chairman of a high level EU committee on Blueprints for Regional Foresight, Mr Gerry Finn, Director of the BMW Regional Assembly and Dr Eoin O'Leary from UCC will also present examples

of tools to develop regional competitiveness. *Contact: Dolores Keating, Tel: +353 (0)51 860710, E-mail: dkeating@seregassembly.ie*

31 May to 5 June 2005, Europe

The European Commission is inviting European towns and cities to participate in "Urban Green Days 2005". The aim of "Urban Green Days" is to inform citizens and exchange good practices in the field of sustainable local government to promote a better quality of life. Candidate towns can propose "open-door" days, field visits, school events, public events in markets, public squares and in shopping centers. "Urban Green Days" 2005 will focus on climate change, with topics such as sustainable transport, energy efficiency and renewable energy. "Urban Green Days" is an initiative of the European Commission's Environment Directorate. *Further details at:* <http://www.urbangreendays.org>

2 - 4 June 2005, Krakow (Poland)

The 2005 European Information Society Conference will include the presentation of 24 best practices, covering themes such as eGovernment, eTransport and eHealth. The agenda combines plenary and parallel sessions on themes such as, how to avoid the digital divide, information society's contribution to the reformed Lisbon Agenda, and inter-municipal cooperation in IT services. Speakers include the EU Commissioner for Information Society and Media, Viviane Reding, as well as representatives from DG Regional Policy, the Polish government and from local and regional authorities. *Further details at:* <http://www.eisco2005.org/>

7-8 June 2005, Ljubljana (Slovenia)

The 4th Innovating Regions in Europe (IRE) plenary conference will give a comprehensive overview of regional innovation support schemes in Europe. The conference will also provide an opportunity for members of the network to share experiences and exchange information on new projects and to discuss future activities. The conference is being organised by the European Commission in collaboration with the IRE Secretariat and will be hosted by the City of Ljubljana. *Further details at:* <http://www.innovating-regions.org/network/events/events.cfm>

13-14 June 2005, Lille (France)

This Interreg IIC West Communication seminar will provide training and information on communication activities relevant to Interreg IIC operations. Workshops will cover organising effective events and attracting publicity, running pan-European PR campaigns, creating effective messages, working with the media, as well as other communications tools. *Further details at:* http://www.interreg3c.net/sixcms/list.php?page=home_en

14 – 15 June 2005, Cork (Ireland)

The South-East and South-West Regional Authorities (Ireland) are jointly hosting a conference on 'eGovernment in Practice', in Midleton, County Cork. The conference will showcase eGovernment initiatives implemented by Irish regional and local authorities. Both Authorities are currently participating in the Interreg IIIB 'e-bygov' project (with regions

from the U.K. and Spain), which is examining how ICT can be used to make local government services more responsive, easier to use and more accessible to citizens and businesses. *Further details at:* www.sera.ie or www.swra.ie or e-mail: s.crowley@swra.ie or dir@sera.ie.

PUBLICATIONS

New European Tourism Portal

The European Travel Commission (ETC), an association of national tourism organisations from 33 European countries, recently announced the development of a new European tourism portal (www.visiteurope.com). Funded by the European Commission, the new portal will be an access point to all national tourism information websites. The portal will be run by ETC and should be on-line from Autumn 2005. It will assist in selling Europe as a tourist destination to the rest of the world. *Further details at:* <http://www.etc-corporate.org/>

NETWORKS

e-Forum

e-Forum is a European e-government association whose mission is to accelerate exchange of e-government best practice. Innovative e-government applications have been developed at national, regional and local level in different parts of Europe. e-Forum is a broker for the transfer of these applications, which it does through regular

events, known as Learning Journeys. e-Forum is planning to launch working groups in 2005 that will actively work to transfer existing e-government applications working at regional level. For its members, e-Forum acts as a network for the exchange of ideas, a gateway to the latest e-Government information, and a showcase of e-government excellence. *Further details at:* <http://www.eu-forum.org>.

PARTNERS

Twinning with Chinese cities

The EU-China Environmental Management Cooperation Programme (EMCP) is seeking local and regional authorities interested in establishing practical partnerships and exchanges with cities in China. The objective of the programme is to develop and improve environmental management in China and to strengthen contacts and exchanges between China and the EU in order to promote sustainable development. Projects include urban renewal, air quality management, sustainable community management, integrated watershed management, ecological land use and city planning, sustainable tourism in mountain and forest ranges and sustainable development planning. *Contact: Rosalie Callway, e-mail: rosalie.callway@gib.gov.uk*

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