

EU News Bulletin

The latest news, funding and events from the EU for local and regional government

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Irish Regions Office



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FUNDING

Structural Fund “bonus” for Research

A step-by-step guide to accessing additional “bonus” funding through the Structural Funds for EU funded research projects in Objective 1 and Objective 1 in transition regions has been published by the EU’s CORDIS service. The aim of this special Structural Funds provision is to compensate project contractors from less prosperous regions for the resources required to participate in the EU 6th Framework Programme for Research. Project promoters apply directly to the Structural Funds Managing Authority in their region. *Further details at:* <http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/stepbystep/bonus.htm>

Communicating Europe

The Communicating Europe Initiative (CEI) provides funding for projects aimed at raising wider public awareness about the European Union and on explaining how the EU affects the lives of its citizens. During the course of 2005, alongside various other activities, the CEI is particularly interested in funding projects aimed at increasing understanding and awareness of the European Constitution. *Further information is available from the Department of Foreign Affairs at: E-mail: communicatingeurope@dfa.ie or Tel: (01) 408 2000.*

Enterprise Grants Programme

The European Commission’s Directorate General for Enterprise has published its Enterprise Grants Programme for 2005. This list of planned calls under this programme, most of which will be published in the second quarter of 2005, include actions covering: Mainstreaming Corporate Social Responsibility among SMEs (already published); Preparation of the

Implementation of Tourism Satellite Accounts; Awareness Raising Action on Intellectual Property Rights; Supporting eBusiness Best Practice Exchange for SMEs; Cooperation and Cluster Building among SMEs; Dissemination of Good eBusiness Practices; and Train the Trainer Programme. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/funding/grants/themes_2005/calls_prop_2005.htm

eLearning

In the framework of the eLearning programme, the European Commission is expected to publish the 2005 call for proposals before the end of May. The 2005 call will concern action lines: 1. Digital Literacy, 2. Virtual campuses, and 4. Transversal Actions. Action line 3 (eTwinning) will be the subject of a separate restricted call. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/elearning/index_en.html

Linking Local Actors

The European Commission’s DG Employment & Social Affairs has published a call for tender within the framework of the European Employment Strategy concerning the provision of a web-based tool to support the exchange of relevant information between the Commission and actors in local employment development (LED) and between those actors themselves. The project will cover the 25 Member States and Rumania and Turkey. The web-based tool would provide: information on events (conferences, workshops, etc); information on funding sources for LED activities from different institutions (EU-based and others); a partner search facility; and a database of best practices in LED. The total budget is €600,000. Closing date for tenders: 6 June 2005. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/calls/2005/vt_2005_038/tender_en.htm

NEWS & POLICY

Structural Funds for Ireland under Threat

The latest draft paper from the EU Luxembourg Presidency on the future EU budget (2007-2013) proposes a reduction of €40 billion in regional aid (Structural and Cohesion Funds). This latest proposal, which is to be presented to EU Foreign Ministers on Sunday, 22 May, poses a serious threat to the new Competitiveness & Employment Objective, which concerns Ireland. However, the Presidency is hoping that the new compromise proposals will secure agreement on the Financial Perspective (EU budget for 2007 – 2013) at the European Council on 16-17 June. Responding to the proposals, Danuta Hubner, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, expressed pessimism as to the continuation of the Competitiveness & Employment Objective. In the event of a lower budget “Objective 2 (Competitiveness & Employment Objective) would be most at risk,” she said. These latest proposals come on top of proposals already tabled at a meeting of Foreign Ministers on 25 April, which also included a number of changes to the Structural Funds proposals. The most important of these from an Irish perspective include: proposals for a decrease in funding for the Regional Competitiveness & Employment Objective (17% to 15% of the total Structural Funds budget); a shorter transition period for regions phasing-in to the new Regional Competitiveness & Employment Objective, which includes the BMW region; greater flexibility in terms of the distribution of ERDF and ESF funding within operational programmes; and a modified system for calculating each region’s Structural Funds entitlement. Further details at: <http://www.eu2005.lu/en/actualites/documents/travail/2005/04/27negociatingbox.pdf>

Parliament wants EU budget of 1.07%

On 11 May the European Parliament’s Temporary Committee on the Financial Perspectives adopted a report on the EU budget framework for 2007-2013. The report proposes a lower budget than that proposed by the Commission but, importantly, no reductions are proposed to the Structural Funds or rural development budgets. The report calls for spending over the next

Financial Perspective period to be limited to 1.07% of EU GNI (the Commission wants 1.14%, whereas the six net contributor member states want a limit of 1%) and for the period of the next financial perspective to run from 2007-2011 (instead of 2007-2013). To facilitate a lower budget the report suggests that savings can be made in administrative and agricultural expenditure. While ‘renationalisation of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) is not proposed, the report does refer to the possibility of “compulsory” co-financing of agricultural payments by member states if financial needs are bigger than expected when Romania and Bulgaria join in 2007. The report considers that the restructuring of the CAP needs to be accompanied by a substantial increase in rural development funds and argues that the Commission’s proposed rural development budget is an absolute minimum. Cohesion policy (Structural Funds) is singled out as one of the main priorities for the future and the report considers the cohesion policy budget of 0.41% of GNI, as proposed by the Commission, as “adequate”. The Parliament’s plenary is expected to vote on the report on 8 June, in advance of the European Council on the 16-17 June at which the Luxembourg Presidency is hoping to finalise a deal on the Financial Perspective. However, Parliament must also approve the Financial Perspective, which could now be crucial to defending the Structural Funds budget. Further details at: http://www.europarl.eu.int/meetdocs/2004_2009/organes/Finp/FINP_20050510_1500.h

Lisbon Roadmap and Structural Funds

On May 3rd the European Commission adopted a proposal for the first integrated guidelines for growth and jobs for the period 2005-2008. The guidelines will serve as the basis for Member States to draw up their first National Reform Programmes by 15 October 2005. This is a direct response to a request by the March European Council to boost Member State participation in attempts to relaunch the Lisbon strategy. The National Reform Programmes will be conceived as forward-looking political documents setting out a three-year strategy to deliver growth and jobs and should encompass economic, social and environmental dimensions. The guidelines also stipulate that, “in their 2005 programmes, Member States should include a section on the use of

the structural and cohesion funds in support of the Lisbon objectives”. The reform programmes will be geared to the specific needs and situation of each Member State and will facilitate policy priorities at national level. However, a degree of coherence is considered necessary as regards their structure and contents in order to facilitate their use at EU level, also with a view to improving mutual learning. As a counterpart to the National Reform Programmes, the Commission will shortly present a Community Lisbon Programme, covering all actions to be undertaken at European level in support of the goals of growth and employment. Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/growthandjobs/pdf/SEC2005_622_en.pdf.

“State of the regions” report published

On 17 May Danuta Hübner, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, presented the “Third Progress Report on Cohesion”, which presents an update of the situation and trends emerging in the regions since the publication of the Third Cohesion Report in February 2004. The report assesses levels of income, employment and productivity in the regions and addresses a number of important themes in the field of European regional and cohesion policy arising from the mid-term review of the Structural Funds. It also provides details of how Member States and regions have used the opportunity of the mid-term review of the Structural Funds to make adjustments to their development programmes and outlines current perspectives on the situation post 2006. In relation to Ireland, the report notes that Ireland is now the second most prosperous country in the EU, with a GDP of 132% of the EU average (in sharp contrast to the EU GDP average of 41% in Latvia). The report also notes that in terms of the additionality principle (which aims to ensure that the Structural Funds add to, rather than substitute for, national expenditure), the mid-term verification, which was completed at the end of 2004, found that four of the thirteen Member States covered by Objective 1, including Ireland, did not comply with this principle. During the remainder of the programming period Ireland will now have to bring its public structural expenditure back into line with the levels required by Article 11 of the general Structural Funds regulation. Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/interim3_en.htm

Enhanced CoR Cooperation with the European Commission

The EU Committee of the Regions (CoR) has initiated discussions with the European Commission on strengthening cooperation between the two institutions. Meeting with the European Commissioner for Institutional Relations, Margot Wallström, in Strasbourg on 11 May, Peter Straub, President of the CoR, proposed that certain amendments be made to the Protocol of Cooperation between the two institutions to “better reflect the CoR's political role”. In particular, Mr Straub is seeking a new role for the CoR in contributing to the pre-legislative analysis done by the Commission to assess the economic, social and environmental impact of its initiatives. He is also requesting that the annual “structured dialogue”, which brings together the two institutions as well as representatives of European and national associations of local and regional authorities, be more policy orientated in the future. Specifically, the CoR is proposing: the compilation of strategic documents by the CoR on subjects which the Commission believes to be important; better information flow on follow-up to Opinions adopted by the CoR; wider participation by Commission officials at CoR meetings; and the creation of a working group to review projects which could potentially benefit from CoR input. The revised Protocol of Cooperation is scheduled to be signed in the autumn. Before the CoR's plenary session in February this year, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso had appealed for a “renewed and strengthened” protocol, stating that the current text was an “excellent base” but that the time had come to be “more ambitious”.

Local EU Information Centres Selected

The European Commission recently announced the setting up of eight EU information centres in Ireland. The new “Europe Direct Centres” will provide a wide range of information services to the public, including guides to EU law, programmes and policies, Treaty texts (including the European Constitution), as well as a public feedback mechanism. The centres will also have access to the ‘Europe by Satellite’ TV station enabling Irish people to keep abreast of the latest EU news as it happens. Seven of the new Europe Direct Centres are to be based in libraries (Macroom, Longford, Letterkenny, Dooradoyle (Limerick),

Blanchardstown, Ballinasloe and Carraroe) and will be managed by An Comhairle Leabharlanna, the Library Council. The other centre, which is based in Waterford, will be run by Waterford Leader Partnership Ltd. In all 393 Centres have been selected across Europe, following an open call for proposals earlier this year. The European Commission will provide operational co-funding to each centre (€12,000 to €24,000) as well as publications and training. *Further details at:*

<http://europa.eu.int/europedirect/index.en.htm>

“.EU” in early 2006

The European Commission announced on 21 April that the “.eu” top level domain name will be operational by the beginning of 2006. The announcement follows official recognition on March 23 of EURid (European Registry for Internet Domains) by ICANN, (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) as the official EU body administering the “.eu” top level domain name. The EURid consortium was selected by the Commission on 12 October 2004 to manage the “.eu” top level domain for a period of five years. Regarding registration of “.eu” domain names, the Commission emphasises the risk of fraud and warns citizens and enterprises against companies already offering to “pre-register” or “reserve” domain names. The registration process is not expected to begin before October 2005 and will be divided into two phases. The first “Sunrise period” will permit public institutions and bodies holding established rights to reserve their address. It notably concerns enterprises and brand names. It will last for four months. The second phase will be launched at the beginning of 2006, opening registration to individuals and enterprises in Europe. It will be run on a first come first served basis. *Further details at:*

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/doc/factsheets/017-doteu.pdf

EU Policy on Sustainable Tourism

Meeting on April 18th the EU's Tourism Ministers invited the European Commission to present an “Agenda 21 for European tourism” before the end of 2007, along with recommendations on concrete measures to be implemented by the various public and private players. Their conclusions urge the European tourism industry to propose

products and services based on sustainable production modes, to promote social responsibility in enterprises and to integrate notions of sustainability and eco-efficiency in commercial strategies. The Commission, the Member States and other players in the sector are invited to cooperate on enhancing the sustainability of tourist destinations, notably through protection of natural areas, biodiversity and cultural heritage. The conclusions also call on the Commission to integrate sustainability considerations in EU initiatives and policies that have an impact on tourism and to facilitate the creation of a system of networking of bodies and players at all levels (international, national and regional). *Further details on EU tourism policy at:* <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/services/tourism/tourismeu.htm>

Venture Capital for SMEs

The European Commission has approved under EU state aid rules a scheme that promotes the establishment of venture capital funds for SMEs in the UK. This decision paves the way the establishment of similar schemes in other Member States. The new Licensed Enterprise Capital Funds (ECFs) in the UK will combine private and public money and will supply equity finance to SMEs. Public money will be used solely to leverage private money and will have to be repaid by the ECFs with interest plus a share of the profits. The investment tranches proposed by the UK range between £250,000 (€357,000) and £2 million (€2.9 million) and therefore exceed the maximum investment tranche foreseen by the [Commission's Risk Capital Communication](#) (i.e. allowable under EU State Aid rules). In such cases, the Communication states that the Member State needs to provide evidence of market failure. In May 2004, the Commission opened a formal investigation under Article 88(2) of the EC Treaty. This investigation concluded that there is an equity gap reaching up to at least €3 million. The result is a finance gap in the small to medium range deal size that slows down company growth and job creation. As all other conditions of the Risk Capital Communication are fulfilled, the Commission has concluded that the Enterprise Capital Funds are compatible with the common market pursuant to EC Treaty state aid rules (Article 87(3)(c)). *Further details at:* <http://www.dti.gov.uk/raisingfinance/>

EVENTS

3 June 2005, Athlone (Ireland)

The EU's Regional Policy Commissioner, Danuta Hübner, will be the keynote speaker at the "Regional Policy Forum 2005", which is being organised by the Chambers 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 will 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 (Note: this conference was previously scheduled for April 7th)

29 June 2005, Brussels

The 9th annual conference of the Innovation Relay Centres (IRC) Network will look at the topic, "From Regional Innovation to International Competitiveness". The conference will gather experts from all the IRCs for 2 days of meetings. It will examine the current status of regional innovation in the EU and draw together the lessons of 10 years of successful IRC support for innovation and technology transfer. The conference will also launch a new debate on innovation and technology transfer. Further details at: <http://www.birc.be/10years-irc/>

4-7 July 2005, Brussels

To coincide with its July plenary session, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) is organizing a Forum on, "European Cities & Regions as Catalysts for Research & Innovation". The Forum will highlight the contribution made by regions and cities in the European Research Area (ERA) and, more specifically, their role in the 7th Framework Programme for Research (FP7). The event, consisting of a workshop and exhibition is being organised in cooperation with the European Commission's DG Research and the ERRIN network. Further details at: <http://www.cor.eu.int/en/activities/events.htm>

13 September 2005, Gloucestershire (UK)

The Countryside and Community Research Unit at the University of Gloucestershire is organising the 5th National Seminar on Common Land and Town and Village Greens. The aim of the conference is to disseminate information on best practice in the management of common land and town and village greens, and on developments in common land legislation. The cost of attending the seminar is £90. Further details at: <http://www.glos.ac.uk/shareddata/dms/C9E01DADBCD42A039DD6A8F4E3DCCCC7.pdf> or from Jill Harper, Tel: +44 1242 54 40 83, e-mail: jharper@glos.ac.uk

19-20 Oct 2005, Ljubljana (Slovenia)

The aim of the "e2005 eChallenges" conference is to stimulate the uptake of Research & Technological Development (RTD) results by industry, in particular SMEs, and the public sector. The conference will focus on eGovernment, eBusiness and eWork, and eEurope beyond 2005. The conference will also look at future ICT research priorities and trends. Further details at: <http://www.echallenges.org/2005/default.asp?page=home&#>

PUBLICATIONS

EU Funding for the Environment

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) recently published a handbook on "EU Funding for the Environment" in the 2007-13 programming period. The 104-page publication analyses the proposed Structural Funds regulations and instruments and the LIFE+ programme and looks at future funding options for different fields (nature and water conservation, energy efficiency and renewables, sustainable transport). The handbook also presents a series of 18 best practice projects which receive support from Structural Funds and instruments in the current period. Copies available at: <http://www.panda.org/downloads/europe/eufundingforenvironmentweb.pdf>

New Website to Promote Business Partnerships

A new website has been created to facilitate Pan European Business Cooperation Schemes (PES). The PES are being supported by the Commission's DG Enlargement in collaboration with DG Enterprise. The overall aim is to encourage an environment favourable to business cooperation and inter-enterprise relations in a wider Europe. Over the next two years upwards of 4,000 SMEs from more than 20 different economic sectors are expected to take part in 32 matchmaking events at major international trade fairs. Further details at: <http://eic.cec.eu.int/PES>

NETWORKS

Network of Peri-Urban regions

The PURPLE network (Peri-Urban Regions Platform Europe), campaigns for better consideration of peri-urban regions in the EU. The members of the network include: Randstad and Limburg (Netherlands), Ile-de-France (France), Flanders (Belgium), Mazovie (Poland), South-East England (UK), Stockholm (Sweden), Frankfurt Rhein/Main (Germany), Malta, Lower Silesia (Poland), and Catalonia (Spain). Nord-Pas-de-Calais (France), Rhône-Alpes (France) and West Midlands (UK) are also in the process of becoming members. Further details at: <http://www.purple-eu.org/default.aspx>

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