

# 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

### **Award for Cross-border Cooperation**

The Association of European Border Regions' (AEBR) Award – 'Sail of Papenburg' will be awarded in 2006 to an out-standing action (either a project, activity or programme) which demonstrates how practical cross-border cooperation helps to bring the EU closer to citizens and the role that border and cross-border regions play in doing so. The topic of this year's award is: 'Experiencing Europe - cross-border cooperation - regional and local actors mobilise the citizens'. Emphasis will be placed on actions implemented and their tangible benefits during the period 2004-2006. Deadline for applications is 31 July 2006. *Further details at:*

<http://www.aebr.net/>

### **Raising Awareness of Social Inclusion**

The European Commission has published an open call for proposals under the Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion (2002-2006) for national awareness raising actions on social inclusion and social protection. The general aims of this call are: (a) information and awareness raising among stakeholders and the wider public about the EU's social inclusion and social protection processes; and (b) promoting the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of EU strategies in this area. Activities to be supported could include: seminars; leaflets and pamphlets; newsletters; press releases; websites; and media campaigns. Total budget: €2.6m. 10 to 15 projects will be selected for co-financing of up to 80%. Deadline for applications: 30 June 2006. *Further details at:*

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/emplweb/tenders/tenders\\_en.cfm?id=305](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/emplweb/tenders/tenders_en.cfm?id=305)

## Getting to Know Europe

The European Commission delegation in Washington DC invites proposals for local programmes to promote greater knowledge of the EU and its international role, including its relations with the US. Activities should be targeted at local communities and local government. Eligible actions include: (a) Competitions (essay, poetry, painting, etc.); (b) Publications about Europe and the EU; (c) Other information products such as posters, leaflets, newspaper features, radio/TV, videos, websites, etc.; (d) Training programmes and briefing sessions for local officials; (e) Study and exchange visits; (f) Town twinning arrangements with EU counterparts. Total budget: €450,000, with a maximum of €80,000 (75% of costs) per project. Closing date for applications: 23 August 2006. *Further details at:*

<http://www.eurunion.org/infores/CallforRoposGetttoKnowEU.htm>

## e-Business for SMEs

The European Commission has published a call for proposals to encourage the exchange of best practice and the sharing of practical experience in e-business policy implementation. Actions to be supported include: (a) the implementation of priorities identified in the "Framework for SME Specific e-Business Policies – Challenges and Objectives"; (b) co-operation among e-business policy initiatives from different regions or countries; and (c) Specific initiatives in support of the above mentioned priorities, reflecting both the specific needs of SMEs in a region (or sector) and the practical experience from another region. Total budget: €900,000. The maximum per project is €150,000 (50% of costs). Closing date for applications: 24 July 2006. *Further details at:*

[ec.europa.eu/enterprise/funding/grants/themes\\_2006/06\\_1.3/call.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/funding/grants/themes_2006/06_1.3/call.pdf)

## Cultural Heritage Awards

The Europa Nostra Awards 2006 aims to promote high standards of conservation practice and to stimulate the exchange of knowledge and experience throughout Europe. The prize is divided in several categories: (1) Outstanding project in the field of: (a) Architectural heritage; (b) Cultural landscapes; (c) Collections of works of art; (d) Archaeological sites; (2) Outstanding studies in the field of cultural heritage; and (3) Dedicated service to heritage conservation by individuals or groups. There are six prizes of €10,000 for each of the above categories. Projects and studies must have been completed within the last three years. Closing dates are: 1 and 15 September 2006. *Further details at:* [www.europanostra.org/downloads/awards\\_2006/call\\_for\\_entries%20%202006\\_conditions.pdf](http://www.europanostra.org/downloads/awards_2006/call_for_entries%20%202006_conditions.pdf)

## NEWS & POLICY

### Council and Parliament approve EU Budget 2007-2013

On 15 May, Member States approved the provisional agreement secured on 4 April by the EU institutions on the EU's budgetary framework for 2007-2013 (See Bulletin 26 for further details). This Inter-Institutional Agreement (IIA), which contains new provisions on budgetary discipline as well as improvements to budgetary procedure was also approved by the European Parliament at its Plenary Session on 17 May. Approval of the IIA paves the way for agreement on the detail of EU programmes for 2007-2013. On 24 May, the European Commission is expected to issue a package of revised proposals to reflect the IIA and thus facilitate the completion of the legislative process and the start of programmes from January 2007. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

### Structural Funds Regulations Approved

On 5 May, the Council of Ministers officially approved an agreement on the five draft Regulations governing EU Regional Policy (Structural Funds) for 2007-2013. These proposals will now be examined by the European Parliament, with an agreement likely in July (the Parliament has little scope for modifying the proposals at this stage). The broad

principles outlined in the Commission's initial proposals can still be found in the Council's agreement, though there are some major differences. In particular, making any performance reserves optional; softening the proposals on businesses that receive aid relocating to another region; allowing both public and private spending to be used to calculate national co-financing (the Commission had wanted that only public spending should be considered) and also that VAT will be eligible in this regard. Finally, following on from the decision of the European Council in December, the Commission and each Member State will agree a list of categories of expenditure which will contribute to the targets earmarked for contributing to the Lisbon Strategy. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/comm/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/new\\_regl0713\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/new_regl0713_en.htm)

### Commission proposals on the Future of Europe

On 10 May, the European Commission launched two Communications, "A programme for the future of Europe" and "Plan D and the period of reflection". The Communications take account of the messages the Commission has received from the Plan D and the national debates during the period of reflection called by Europe's leaders following the rejection of the EU Constitutional Treaty by France and Holland and presents the Commission's proposals on how to move forward. The debate on the future of Europe has clearly highlighted the gap between what the EU does and the public's perception of what it does. To regain the confidence of the public, the Commission is proposing to harness all its resources, both internally and externally, to deliver solutions to the issues raised by citizens. The Commission has come up with twelve policy initiatives revolving around five areas of intervention in its programme for the future of Europe, touted as the 'positive agenda'. The June European Council will discuss the future of the Constitutional Treaty and is expected to extend the existing period of reflection for another 18 months. *Further details at:*

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/president/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/index_en.htm)

### e-Government Action Plan Launched

The European Commission is calling for increased use of information and

communication technologies (ICTs), or e-Government, in public administration, in a bid to cut operating costs. On 25 April, it adopted an action plan designed to help member states to speed up reforms in this area. The action plan sets two key objectives: (1) a 100% take-up of electronic invoicing; and (2) online access to public procurement. It also outlines five priorities for action. Firstly, to promote more 'democratic access' to ICT (using digital television, computers, mobile telephones). Secondly, to introduce a framework for benchmarking the impact of e-Government on national budgets, in order to reduce operating costs for state and local authorities. The third priority is access to government procurement on the internet (government procurement represents about €1,500 billion a year). The member states have committed to achieving 100% availability and at least 50% take-up of online procurement by 2010. The Commission's fourth priority consists of identifying common specifications for electronic ID management during 2007 and reviewing rules on electronic signatures in 2009. Finally, the Commission wants to strengthen democratic participation in decision-making and demonstrate the effectiveness of ICT in reducing Europe's democratic deficit by supporting trials involving the public in policy making. *Further details at:* [http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/activities/egovernment\\_research/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/egovernment_research/index_en.htm)

### Council Endorses Increased Research Budget

EU Research Ministers have welcomed the proposed 40% increase in the EU's budget for research and are expected to reach agreement soon on the allocation of the €50 billion between the different sub-programmes of the new 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme for Research & Technological Development (FP7). On April 21, at their first meeting since the recent deal with the Parliament on the EU's budget for 2007-2013, EU Research Ministers focused on the distribution of funds between the FP7's four individual sub-programmes. The Commission proposes allocating €32 billion to the sub-programme entitled *Co-operation*, €7.5 billion to sub-programme for *Ideas*, €5 billion to the *People sub-programme* and €4.2 billion to the sub-programme for *Capacities (which includes the Regions of Knowledge initiative)*. However, some Member States have expressed their wish to see more funds allocated to supporting SMEs (*Capacities* sub-

programme), at the expense of the European Research Council (*Ideas* sub-programme). Final agreement is expected at the next Ministerial meeting on 29-30 May 2006. *Further details form the Irish Regions Office.*

### **Authorisation for Household Waste in Organic Farming**

The European Commission has decided to extend authorisation to use composted or fermented household waste in organic farming, under certain conditions. The new Regulation amends a number of existing Regulations coming into force on 1 April 2006, and extends authorisation indefinitely. The use of composted household waste meets a real need in certain Member States, and this product is strictly regulated as regards the origin of the waste, the operation of the collection system, which must have been accepted by the Member State, and the maximum content of heavy metals, such as copper and its compounds, without prejudice to any other requirements for use of such product in general farming. Composted household waste and mixture of vegetable matter were in common use according to codes of practice on organic farming followed in Europe before 1991. *Further details at:* [http://europa.eu.int/eurlex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l\\_104/l\\_10420060413e\\_n00130014.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eurlex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_104/l_10420060413e_n00130014.pdf)

### **Higher Funding Rates for Energy Programme**

The association of European local authorities for the promotion of local sustainable energy policies (Energie-Cités) has written to the Commission's Directorate-General for Energy and Transport (DG TREN) to demand an increase in the intervention threshold for the Intelligent Energy Europe programme, currently set at 50%. Many bodies (local energy agencies, local authorities and their associations, NGOs, etc) are hard-pressed to find 50% co-financing and do not therefore proceed with submitting proposals. Energie-Cités has urged the Commission over the 2007-2013 period to raise the aid ceiling to 70% for all proposals tabled by non-profit-making organisations and bodies not attached to national administrations. DG TREN has indicated that it is considering the proposal. Energie-Cités has more than 130 members in 21 countries and represents almost 300 towns and cities. *Further details at:* <http://www.energie-cites.org/>

### **New Rules on Ferry Links to Small Islands**

Shipping companies operating public service links to small islands can now be selected through a simplified procedure instead of the normal tendering procedure, provided links with these islands do not concern more than 300,000 passengers a year. Under the previous threshold for small islands of 100,000 passengers per year, 40% of islands were covered by the simplification exercise. However, the traffic volume to and from these islands only accounted for around 1.8% of the total number of passengers carried by ferry on intra-Community lines. This will increase to 8% with the new threshold of 300,000 passengers. This threshold is also included in the Commission Decision on the funding of general economic interest services as benefiting from the notification exemption (under State aid) for compensation granted to maritime links with islands. The updated measures are outlined in a Communication adopted by the European Commission on 11 May (COM(2006)196). *Further details at:* <http://europa.eu.int/eurlex/lex/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52003DC0595:EN:HTML>

### **State Aid for Irish Projects Approved**

On 10 May, the European Commission approved financing schemes for two new road projects in Ireland, judging that they were compatible with EU State aid rules. The projects, the M3 Clonee to north of Kells motorway and the Limerick tunnel, will be run as Public Private Partnerships. Private partners will be chosen through a call for tender, which was published in the Official Journal in 2004. Also on 10 May, the Commission declared that the joint financing by the UK and Irish governments of the City of Derry Airport was compatible with State aid rules. The two Member States intend to jointly fund a number of essential infrastructure projects at the airport, together with Derry City Council, the airport's owner. The two governments will provide €15.2m of financial assistance, representing 75% of the capital development projects at the airport. Each government will pay 37.5% of the expenditure while Derry City Council will contribute the remaining 25%, approximately €5m. The City of Derry Airport had 205,000 passengers in 2005. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

### **New EU Plan on Biodiversity**

On May 22, the European Commission adopted a Communication on halting the loss of biodiversity. The Communication identifies four key policy areas: biodiversity in the EU, the EU and global biodiversity, biodiversity and climate change, and the knowledge base. It proposes 10 priority objectives in relation to these, addressing the most important habitats and species: actions in the wider countryside and marine environment; making regional development more compatible with nature; reducing impacts of invasive alien species; effective international governance; support to biodiversity in international development; reducing negative impacts of international trade; adaptation to climate change; and strengthening the knowledge base. The Communication suggests four supporting measures relating to adequate financing, strengthening EU decision-making, building partnerships and promoting public education, awareness and participation. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/index_en.htm)

### **Consultation on Civil Society**

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has launched a public online consultation on the 'representativeness of European civil society organisations'. For a number of years, civil society organizations active at European level have been demanding the right to be involved in drawing up and implementing EU policies. At the same time, EU institutions have expressed increased interest in engaging in dialogue with civil society resulting in the setting up of different consultation and participation methods. The EESC, however, feels that the only way that members of civil society will have the right to participate effectively in drafting policies and preparing Community decisions is by establishing clear representativity guidelines. The EESC believes that the full participation of civil society organisations is required in drawing up such criteria and has therefore decided to seek the opinions of both European and national civil society organisations on the direction to take. The consultation will be accessible online from 24 April until 30 June 2006. *For further information:* [www.esc.eu.int/sco/registrations/index\\_en.asp](http://www.esc.eu.int/sco/registrations/index_en.asp)

## EVENTS

### 1-2 June 2006, Barcelona (Spain)

The conference, "Preparing Urban Actions in the Future Structural Fund Programmes 2007-2013," will debate the use of Community Funds for urban development in the upcoming financial programming period. The debate will focus on three main issues: Priorities for urban development in the period 2007-2013; Involvement of cities and local actors in the preparation and implementation of urban actions; Innovative methods for financing urban regeneration by combining EU Structural Funds and EIB assistance. The event is being co-organised by the European Commission. *Further details at:* [www.gencat.net/regionsandcities](http://www.gencat.net/regionsandcities)

### 14-16 June 2006, London (UK)

The conference, "Innovation in Urban Biodiversity" is being organised in the context of the EU LIFE-funded 'SUN' project (Sustainable Urban Planning Networks for Green Spaces), which involves the London Boroughs of Bromley, Redbridge, Richmond and Sutton, CiP (Hounslow) and Legambiente (Rome). The project aims to increase community involvement in urban biodiversity, through innovative means of consultation and project delivery. *Further details are available at:* [www.sun-project.org](http://www.sun-project.org) or from Aimee Jones, at: [aimee.jones@sutton.gov.uk](mailto:aimee.jones@sutton.gov.uk)

### 15-16 June 2006, Ronneby (Sweden)

The annual conference of the IANIS+ project, coordinated by eris@ (the European Regional Information Society Association) will focus on the topic, "Towards eREGIO 2010 - Challenges & Threats for the competitiveness of the regions in the Global Knowledge Economy." The conference will highlight issues relating to the development of the information and knowledge-based societies and on the threats posed by global competition. *Further details from:* <http://www.ianis.net/blekinge2006/>

### 12-13 October 2006, Quimper (France)

The conference, "River Basin Management and European Territorial Co-operation" will focus on the European dimension of river basin management, with the aim of encouraging and nurturing mutual and sharing of know-how among EU regions. The conference is being organised as part of the Cycleau project, a European partnership co-funded by the North West Europe INTERREG IIIB programme, and involving organisations from Ireland (Moy Valley Resources), the UK and France. The aims of the project are to: find innovative ways of managing and improving the water environment; share knowledge and experience of water management; and involve local communities in the management of their local rivers. *Further details at:* <http://www.cycleau.com>

### 16-22 September 2006

Climate change is the theme of this year's European Mobility Week (EMW). The aims of EMW are to influence long-term mobility and urban transport patterns as well as to improve the health and quality of life of citizens. Local authorities are being encouraged to promote clean modes of transport, invite citizens and stakeholders to express their views and wishes for urban transport, as well as organize a car-free day. Interested local authorities are asked to: (a) register their events on-line; and (b) formally sign the European Mobility Week Charter. There is also a European co-ordination team for EMW which can provide additional information and a communications kit. *Further details at:* [www.mobilityweek-europe.org](http://www.mobilityweek-europe.org) There are also national coordinators for EMW and car-free day. The Irish coordinator is Mr. Eddie Forsythe: [eddie.forsythe@environ.ie](mailto:eddie.forsythe@environ.ie)

## PUBLICATIONS

### Guide to Sustainable Energy for Local and Regional Authorities

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) has published a new guidebook which

aims to help local and regional authorities to use energy in a sustainable way. Entitled, 'Save Energy, Save the Climate, Save Money - A Guide for Local and Regional Authorities', the new guidebook outlines ten actions that can help local and regional decision makers to start implementing sustainable energy policies. It also contains a pool of ideas and concrete measures, and presents examples of good practices in the different areas of planning, design, construction, management of facilities and in the provision of services. *The guidebook can be downloaded from:* [http://www.ccre.org/bases/T\\_599\\_34\\_3524.pdf](http://www.ccre.org/bases/T_599_34_3524.pdf)

## NETWORKS

### European Network of Village Tourism

The European Network of Village Tourism is a project financed by the Interreg IIIC South programme, which joins eight partners from five European regions with a common goal of creating a new tourism product based on the preservation of traditional rural villages. Partners include: Évora Tourism Region (Lead Partner), Alentejo, Portugal; Centre for Alpine Ecology, Trentino Italy; Consortium Bim Brenta, Trentino, Italy; University of Lapland (Finland); University of Évora (Portugal); Regional Directorate of Agriculture of Alentejo (Portugal); Municipality of Arad (Romania); Municipality of Zbójna (Poland). *Further details from:* [euronet.village@mail.telepac.pt](mailto:euronet.village@mail.telepac.pt) Tel. +351 266 730 440

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