

EU News Bulletin

The latest monthly EU opportunities, news & policy, publications and events of relevance to Ireland's local and regional level.

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FUNDING, NETWORKING & PROJECTS

Call: LIFE+ Environment

As flagged up in December's *Bulletin* the 2011 call for the LIFE+ Programme was launched on 26 February. The programme comprises three components.

1) Nature & Biodiversity:

Innovative best practice or demonstration projects on the protection, conservation, restoration, monitoring and facilitation of the functioning of natural systems or habitats, wild flora and fauna, with the aim of halting the loss of biodiversity or that contribute to the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives.

2) Environment Policy & Governance:

Projects that contribute to the implementation of Community environmental policy, the development of innovative policy approaches, technologies, methods and instruments, the knowledge base as regards environment policy and legislation, or environmental monitoring. Applications dealing with sustainable management and use of natural resources and waste (including the environmental performances of products, sustainable production and consumption patterns, waste prevention, recovery and recycling) are particularly encouraged although applications are welcomed across all the following themes:

- Climate Change;
- Water quality and river basin management plans;
- Air quality;

- Soil (sustainable use and restoration);
- Urban environmental performance;
- Noise;
- Chemicals (REACH and pesticides);
- Environment and Health;
- Natural resources and waste (sustainable management and use to improve the environmental performances of products, sustainable production and consumption patterns, waste prevention, recovery and recycling);
- Forests;
- Innovation (green technologies implementing the Environmental Technologies Action Plan);
- Strategic approaches (improving the knowledge base for environmental policy; improving SMEs' environmental performance).

3) Information & Communication:

Awareness-raising campaigns, events and training on environmental issues including forest fire prevention.

A budget of up to €267 million is available with at least half of this amount being ring-fenced for measures to support the conservation of nature and biodiversity. The amount allocated to successful Irish projects will be just over €4 million. The general co-financing rate will be 50% or 75% for projects focusing on priority Birds and Habitats Directives species/habitats.

It is envisaged that successful projects will get underway in mid 2012. No national priorities have been set for potential Irish projects.

Deadline: 18 July

[Further details](#)

Call: ICT services & solutions

On 1 March, the fifth call for proposals, covering 2011, for the ICT Policy Support Programme was opened. ICT-PSP supports the practical realisation of European policies in response to societal and productivity challenges and in particular the 'Digital Agenda for Europe'.

The programme aims to create the conditions for smart sustainable and inclusive growth by accelerating the wider uptake and best use of innovative digital technologies and content by citizens, governments and the private sector, particularly with a view to creating new SME business opportunities. The overall intention is to enable Europe to address key challenges and provide a better quality of life through improved healthcare, safer and more efficient transport solutions, a cleaner environment and easier access to public services and cultural content.

A budget of €115.5 million has been set aside for transnational projects to be based in the main on Type 'B' Pilot projects bringing together actors from different perspectives to deploy and/or integrate innovative ICT-based services (e.g. best practices or pre-tested prototypes under realistic conditions). In some cases, 'Thematic Networks' involving practitioners and policy-makers in exploring definite new ICT solutions and approaches will be supported.

This year's Work Programme will operate according to five themes:
1: ICT for a low carbon economy and smart mobility; (€24 million across 3 objectives: Solid State Lighting (SSL) systems; energy efficiency in public buildings; and smart connected electromobility);

2: Digital content (€38 million across 4 objectives including e-learning);

3: ICT for health, ageing well and inclusion (€18 million across 4 objectives: solutions for fall prevention; digital competences and social inclusion; eAccessibility; and empowering patients. Networks on 'ICT and ageing' and 'supporting widespread deployment of

telemedicine services' will also be supported);

4: ICT for innovative government and public services (€21.5 million across 3 objectives including developing public service 'cloud' systems and IPv6 upgrade for eGovernment services);

5: Open Innovation for Internet-enabled services in 'smart' cities (€14 million).

129 projects have been approved since the 2007 call. The initiative is part of the wider Competitiveness and Innovation framework Programme (CIP).

[Further details including presentations from the 28 February Information Day](#)

Deadline: 1 June

Call: Ireland Wales Interreg

The fifth call for proposals under the Ireland Wales Cross-border Programme opened on 24 February. This call is restricted to Priority 1 Themes: 1 – Innovation and competitiveness; and 2 – Skills for competitiveness and employment integration.

Projects need to demonstrate either a strong practical employment and/or business support component in line with Ireland's national 'Smart Economy Strategy'; a focus on business innovation; obvious and practical business outcomes; or links with energy efficiency and/or renewable energy to assist competitiveness in SMEs. Priority 2 – Climate Change and Sustainable Regeneration – is not open to new applications.

To date, the Programme has approved 33 projects worth over €41 million in ERDF support. Up to €7.6 million remains to be allocated.

Deadline: 19 May

[Further details](#)

Contact: srudden@sereqassembly.ie

Closing Call:

Civil Protection – Marine Pollution

The Civil Protection Financial Instrument's 2011 call for proposals is providing €3.6 million to encourage joint activities reflecting cooperation between Member States to ensure adequate civil protection and responsiveness to disasters and marine pollution.

'Prevention Projects' (€2 million) must be based around one of three objectives:

- Developing knowledge-based disaster prevention policies (e.g. hazard identification and risk modeling);
- Implementing disaster prevention measures (e.g. awareness-raising);
- Improving the effectiveness of existing policy and financial instruments supporting disaster prevention.

'Preparedness Projects' (€1.6 million) may reflect the following objectives:

- Improve emergency response effectiveness by enhancing the preparedness and awareness of civil protection professionals and volunteers (e.g. through cross-border cooperation for direct response to natural and man-made disasters);
- Support and complement national efforts for the protection of citizens, environment and property in the event of disasters;
- Facilitate reinforced cooperation between the participating states in preparedness for civil protection and marine pollution in response to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear acts of terrorism and industrial accidents.

Up to €500,000 for any one project at a maximum 75% intervention rate is available.

Deadline: 18 March. The call will follow a two stage submission procedure whereby, at this stage, applicants need only submit a summary note (Form S) of the action proposed.

[Further details](#)

Call: Education & training specialists study visits

Local and regional specialists in education such as VET professionals, teacher trainers, inspectors, guidance counselors, workers, and trade union representatives are encouraged to apply for a study visit to explore themes of common European interest in their area of specialisation. The aim is to enable greater European cooperation and understanding in the field of education and training.

Deadline: 31 March
[Further details](#)

Call: Embedded Computing Systems

The ARTEMIS 2011 call for proposals within the 7th Framework Programme aims to implement a Joint Technology Initiative (JTI) in Embedded Computing Systems. The main component of this JTI is a research programme addressing the design, development and deployment of embedded systems.

Deadline: 31 March
[Further details](#)

Call: Industrial relations and social dialogue

This DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion call for proposals aims to support the European social dialogue process and improve expertise in the field of industrial relations.

Deadlines: 25 March/30 August
[Further details](#)

Call: Workers' organisations and Europe 2020

This call for proposals aims to help workers' organisations to contribute to addressing the overarching EU

employment and social policy challenges as laid down in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Deadline: 18 April
[Further details](#)

Call: Information, Consultation and Participation of Representatives of Undertakings

This call for proposals aims to ensure the conditions for fostering the development of employee involvement in undertakings. Average grants for 12-month projects are expected to amount to approximately €130,000 at an 80% EU support rate.

Deadline: 28 March / 6 September
[Further details](#)

Upcoming Call: Eco-Innovation

The 2011 Call for Proposals relating to the Eco-Innovation element of the Competitiveness and Innovation framework Programme (CIP) will be launched on 28 April with an information day in Brussels. The deadline for applications will be 8 September.

The initiative promotes the commercial market prospects of pre-developed and proven products, techniques, services, management practices and processes that reduce CO2 emissions use resources efficiently and promote recycling.

[Further details](#)

Catch up on other recent calls for proposals through previous issues of this Bulletin: [January](#), [December](#) and [November](#).

New local eco-innovation support network

Meanwhile a new network for local and regional eco-innovation policy makers is

to be launched under the PRO INNO Europe initiative. The 'Better policies and instruments in support of eco-innovation' INNO-NET will aim to develop exchange of best practices and expertise on the role to be played by public policies and actors, in particular innovation agencies and programmes, in creating the conditions under which innovative technologies and approaches to challenges such as climate change and scarcity of natural resources can deliver business opportunities. The principle themes are expected to be Green Public Procurement, policies supporting innovative waste and recycling management, and international cooperation in diffusing environmental technologies. This action will run for 3 years as part of the Environmental Technologies Action Plan (ETAP) and will be implemented through an open call for proposals.

[Further details](#)

Dell workers' Globalisation Fund deadline approaches

Workers made redundant due to the downscaling and ultimate closure of the Dell Limerick factory between January 2009 and April 2010 have until 31 March to submit an application for business start-up funding through the European Globalisation Fund (EGF).

Grant support in the region of €8,000 per head is being provided on the basis of covering 50% of costs associated with starting a new business, including equipment and capital costs, training, websites and taking on employees.

The scheme is being administered through the various City or County Enterprise Boards across the Mid-West Region and in Kerry, North Cork and South Tipperary. Ex-Dell workers who have already started a business may apply retrospectively for eligible costs, dating back to June 2009. Funding for approved applications must be claimed by 27 May at the latest.

PROGRESS Microfinance

A year after its establishment as a joint venture between the Commission and European Investment Bank, the Progress Microfinance Facility is formally underway. The €200 million initiative is set to be made available in all EU Member States (subject to uptake by public or private financial intermediaries) and has now announced its inaugural agreement to guarantee over €20 million worth of loans of up to €25,000 to support Dutch micro-enterprises of less than 10 employees.

[Further details](#)

Sligo design project recognised

A project involving the Centre for Design Innovation in the Institute of Technology Sligo has been chosen as a finalist in the European Commission's RegioStars Awards for 2011. The scheme seeks to identify good practices in regional development and to highlight original and innovative projects which could be attractive and inspiring to other regions.

SEE ("Sharing Experience Europe") has been undertaken to pool knowledge and experiences from 9 EU Member States and to compare strategies and delivery of regional and national design support programmes. By stimulating debate, developing new thinking and building the profile and credibility of design issues as a factor in influencing policies on innovation, sustainability, social and economic development, the ultimate goal is to create better conditions for SMEs to make use of design resources as part of the development of innovative products and services.

The project, which is due to conclude this summer, has been supported by Interreg IVC since 2008.

[Further details](#)

Danish town twinning opportunity

The Central Denmark EU Office in Brussels has contacted this office on

behalf of the municipality of Skanderborg (population 57,303), looking for an Irish town with which to establish a long-term twinning cooperation relationship.

Possible subjects for future cooperation might include:

- Education
- Climate, energy and environmental issues
- Town planning
- Citizen services through digitalisation.
- Tourism
- Local business development
- Welfare (health and social care)
- Welfare technology
- Volunteering as a local resource

For further information contact this office or Malene.hojberg@skanderborg.dk

Partner search requests received:

Interreg IVC (deadline: 31 March):

Contact us immediately for details!

- **New approach to share and use complex digital data (e.g. on energy, water, transport, waste and natural environment) to inform policy and planning. ([YouTube clip](#)).**
- **Collaborative regional networks of social economy enterprises, private companies and public administrations to identify necessary change measures favouring employability, Labour Market integration and implementation of more effective social responsibility measures.**
- **Innovation in the Agro-food Industry**
- **Toolkit for creative industries**
- **Development of appropriate coordinated spatial planning measures in geographically sensitive areas**
- **Revitalisation of Historic City Centres**

Other programmes:

- **Piloting clusters of rural renewable energy producers and consumers with local farmers at the core -**

Including technological and social aspects including development of local smart grid applications where production, distribution and consumption of sustainable energy will be fine tuned (Intelligent Energy Europe).

- **a linked multi-sectoral system of Centres of Excellence for technology or knowledge transfer, promoting the translation of research knowledge into business innovations (Interreg NWE) .**
- **Developing personal, social and intercultural skills of Senior Volunteers (Grundtvig)**
- **Meeting the academic language needs of pupils from migrant/second language learning backgrounds in diverse education settings (Comenius)**
- **'Young people in active rural villages'**
- **Municipal Health Promotion Leadership**

Contact the office for further details.

We can also circulate your own draft project ideas to regions across Europe as required.

NEWS & POLICY

Waste Management review

The Commission has published an assessment of the 2005 Thematic Strategy on the Prevention and Recycling of Waste. The report includes a summary of the major actions taken by the Commission in the intervening period, the key statistics available on waste generation and management, plus a summary of the main challenges and recommendations for future actions.

It indicates that while general progress is being made, the amount of waste being produced in the EU continues to rise. The report notes that national recycling rates vary from 3% to 70%, whilst some Member States continue to consign over

90% of their waste to landfill sites. A number of recommendations are made:

- Introduce combined economic and legal instruments used by best performing Member States;
- Ban landfill;
- Apply producer responsibility concept to additional waste streams;
- Introduce greater consistency between product design and waste policy to boost recycling;
- Improve stakeholder participation and public awareness.

[Assessment](#)

[Summary](#)

[Background Document](#)

2008 comparative regional statistics confirm Ireland's economic woes

Figures released by Eurostat on 24 February confirm the slide in Ireland's wealth levels measured against those of our EU neighbours.

When comparative purchasing power is taken into consideration, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the Border, Midland & Western (BMW) Region for 2008 stood at €23,300 per inhabitant. This equates to 93% of the average across the EU (€25,500) and represents a fall of €1,400 per person or more than 6 percentage points against the 2007 figures.

The 2008 figures for the Southern & Eastern (S&E) Region were €37,000 per person or 148% of the EU average. This was sharply down from the €41,400 figure of a year previously (166% at the time). S&E was the only high-performing economic region in Europe to have experienced a dramatic fall according to this scale and has now been leapfrogged by a host of competitors including Bratislava.

This is the classification by which future Structural Funding arrangements for the post-2013 period will be determined on a region-by-region basis. The 2008 set is the final that will be available in advance of the Commission presenting its

legislative proposals on the future of Cohesion Policy in July. Average GDP figure for 2007-2009 are likely to determine regions' extent of qualification for the next Structural Funding period.

Within these NUTS 2 regional figures the 2008 situation at NUTS 3 (Regional Authority) level by reference to the EU average was as follows (2007 figure in brackets):

- Dublin: €48,500, 194% (210%)
- South-West: €38,800, 155% (176%)
- Mid-West: €27,700, 111% (127%)
- Mid-East: €25,600, 102% (116%)
- South-East: €24,900, 99% (110%)
- West: €23,900, 96% (104%)
- Border: €23,400, 94% (102%)
- Midlands: €21,800, 87% (97%)

While figures for all Irish regions fell from their 2007 levels, the decline was most stark for the Mid-West, Mid-East and South-West, all of which have lost approximately 12% in their wealth in a single year. The South-East has been the next worst affected.

The figure for Northern Ireland was €22,800 per inhabitant (91%).

[Further details](#)

[All EU regions \(NUTS 2\)](#)

Figures for NUTS 2 and 3 regions are available through [this database](#) (search for 'nama_r_e3gdp')

Ministers' partial support for regional funding reforms

Several of the Commission's proposals for reforming EU Regional Policy from 2014 onwards as set out in the Fifth Cohesion Report (see *Bulletin* articles over recent months) have been positively received by national ministers meeting at the General Affairs Council in Brussels on 21 February. Notably, there was endorsement of the key idea that all regions should be eligible to take part in structural funding programmes and for greater coherence and improved coordination of Member States' management of the regional

(ERDF), social (ESF), rural development (EAFRD) and fisheries (EFF) funds.

The principle of concentrating resources on a more limited number of priority themes in each programme received widespread backing, although ministers are insisting that Member States and regions should choose their own priorities. Regional Policy Commissioner Hahn has expressed agreement with this provided the priorities are linked to the Europe 2020 Strategy common objectives and targets in relation to employment, poverty, education and energy efficiency.

Placing a greater emphasis on the objective of 'territorial cohesion' by taking into account the individual needs of different regions and sub-regions as well as 'functional urban areas' was another proposal to gain support. Ministers also agreed upon the need for a more results-based approach to be adopted in EU programming - backed up by improved evaluation and monitoring and measured by reference to a limited number of well-defined targets and core indicators.

Other issues to gain approval were continued support for Territorial Cooperation (Interreg programmes) and an emphasis on 'macro-regional' strategies such as that under consideration for the Atlantic.

The Commission's ambition to promote the use of loan-based Financial Engineering Instruments, along with the traditional EU grant system received a more cautious reaction with ministers insisting that the option to avail of these approaches in regional and national programmes should be left to the discretion of individual Member States.

Certain other controversial areas remain as stumbling blocks requiring further discussion. These include the possible creation of a new intermediate category for regions whose GDP is below the EU average yet who are not poor enough to automatically qualify as Objective 1/ 'Convergence' region status; the negotiation of "partnership contracts" between Member States and the

Commission; the notion of attaching pre-conditions to the payment of EU funding; and mechanisms to incentivise high performance among programmes.

The Commission is due to publish the necessary draft regulations in the summer – though only after it has presented proposals regarding the long-term financial framework that will define the overall size of the EU budget over the next programme period.

The Conclusions of this meeting are available from this office.

Small Businesses Act updated

A review of the EU's SME policy framework – the Small Business Act (SBA) – was published on 23 February as an overview of the progress achieved since 2008 at EU and national level in improving the business environment for SMEs. Actions reflecting most initiatives foreseen by the SBA such as a speeding up of payments and providing easier access to procurement opportunities are at least underway at this stage, however, the review has identified steps forward as being slow and uneven. Areas for improvement and definite actions to further boost entrepreneurship, reduce red tape and provide effective support for SMEs in light of the additional challenges resulting from the economic crisis are identified in the review.

The new set of proposals – somewhat adapted from a draft circulated in December – is particularly intended to align the SBA and SME potential with the priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy and its Flagship Initiatives on the "Innovation Union," "Industrial policy for the globalisation era" and the "Digital Agenda for Europe". They include measures to:

- improve access to finance (including awareness-raising among potential investors);
- proof emerging Commission's legislative proposals by reference to

their varying impact on micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises;

- make standards more SME-friendly and easily accessible;
- reduce excessive stipulations ("gold plating") imposed by national authorities when transposing EU directives into national law;
- deploy the widely-established Enterprise Europe Network of offices as an instrument to deliver regional knowledge transfer between environmental and energy experts;
- aid overseas business expansion;
- allow business organisations a more prominent role in assuring the act's implementation;

The review also addresses the Commission's controversial ambition to harmonise corporation tax rates by couching the issue in terms of differences in national systems presenting potential difficulties and generating costs "to the extent that they discourage entrepreneurs from expanding their business to other Member States".

[Further details](#)

Green Infrastructure initiative

On 25 February, the Commission DG Environment launched a search for experts to contribute towards the design of a future EU Initiative on Green Infrastructure with the objective of obtaining a representative picture of the positions of relevant stakeholders.

Last year's Commission Communication on 'the options for an EU vision and target for biodiversity beyond 2010' foresaw the development of an EU strategy on Green Infrastructure and received backing from the European Council. Further links can be drawn with the upcoming 2020 Biodiversity Strategy. Equally, the 2009 White Paper on 'Adapting to Climate Change' also advocated developing Green Infrastructure to provide essential

resources for social and economic purposes.

The Commission is now planning to publish another Communication to inform about the Green Infrastructure concept, and to explore possible ways forward at EU level, including by delivering a tool box for implementation, facilitating exchange of practices and integrated planning approaches.

To assist the process, a Working Group of engaged expert stakeholders is to be convened to provide concrete input. Those interested in being involved in the group's first meeting in Brussels on 31 March (plus subsequent meetings in May and September) need to register by **11 March** and await notification of acceptance by the organisers.

[Further details](#)

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/green_infrastructure.htm

Louth – Newry & Mourne strategic alliance signed in Brussels

Local cross-border cooperation on the island of Ireland took a significant step forward in Brussels on 2 March with the ceremonial signing of a major new strategic alliance between Louth local authorities (the County Council, Drogheda Borough Council plus Dundalk and Ardee Town Councils) and Newry and Mourne District Council. Devising more permanent arrangements by which to consolidate progress in overcoming national frontiers to deliver economic development, competitiveness and social cohesion through Interreg programmes and other initiatives is something the European Commission's DG REGIO have been placing increased emphasis upon in recent years.

The joint Memorandum of Understanding, which was presented to an influential audience of EU officials and MEPs, reflects these ambitions by pioneering a new form of cooperation in

terms of North-South relations which is intended to complement traditional structures and arrangements. The pact will commit the authorities to strengthening and promoting social, cultural and economic links within their combined local authority areas as well as to developing joint policies and actions in areas of mutual interest to improve delivery of services and achieve increased efficiencies through a pooling of resources.

Under the coordination of the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD), four themes for enhanced co-operation have been agreed upon and prioritised: emergency planning; renewable energy and green technology; tourism and recreation; and sustainable economic growth and job creation. A detailed joint Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth – a local/regional take on the Europe 2020 Strategy – has been devised to provide practical new proposals to copper-fasten the bond between the areas into the future.

The alliance will be driven by a joint committee of elected members supported by a joint senior management team on behalf of the participating authorities. A cross-border advisory forum incorporating representatives from local industry, commerce, and the voluntary sector will also be created.

Representatives of the North-South Ministerial Council, Special EU Programmes Body and InterTrade Ireland were present at the event having contributed to the process. The formal signing of the Memorandum of Understanding will be completed on 7 April in Dundalk.

[Further details](#)

Atlantic Strategy resolution in EP

On 9 March, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution from its Regional Development Committee (which includes

Pat the Cope Gallagher and Sean Kelly) calling for the Commission to devise an action plan to concretely deal with the specific development challenges facing Atlantic regions.

The Resolution sets out priorities for a future Atlantic Strategy, notably the integration of transport networks, marine energies, protection of the environment, innovation, fisheries competitiveness and sustainability. Additionally, a number of recognised Irish priorities – the seafood sector; leisure; safety, security and surveillance; and marine services – have now made their way into Parliament's thinking as themes to be addressed by the Strategy.

Significantly, the Parliament favours the prospective strategy being incorporated within Objective 3 of the post-2013 Cohesion Policy – a move designed to allow for future activities to be implemented based on an identifiable financing package.

[Further details](#)

Resource efficiency and bio economy

On 25 February, the Commission launched a pair of online consultations in the field of the environment.

The first seeks opinions on policy options that could encourage a switch to a more efficient use of natural resources in the European economy. It focuses on three broad areas: general views on resource use, scarcities, current obstacles and major areas of concern; policy areas that could be included in the forthcoming 'Roadmap for a resource-efficient Europe', to detail objectives and priority directions for the recently launched flagship initiative on resource-efficiency (see last month's *Bulletin*); and options for encouraging individual shifts of behaviour.

A related consultation, organised by DG Research & Innovation, relates to resource efficiency and other aspects of Europe 2020 – particularly the state and

future potential of Europe's bio-based economy to foster innovation and address societal challenges. The results will support the preparation of the 'European Strategy and Action Plan towards a sustainable bio-based economy by 2020'.

[Consultation on a Roadmap for a resource-efficient Europe \(Deadline: 22 April\)](#)

[Consultation on the "bio-based economy for Europe: state of play and future potential" \(Deadline: 2 May\)](#)

Future of CAP: balanced territorial development

The meeting of the Agricultural and Fisheries Council in Brussels on 21 February debated aspects of the Commission Communication 'The CAP towards 2020: Meeting the food, natural resources and territorial challenges of the future' (published in November).

On this occasion, the debate focused on balanced territorial development, the third key objective for the future CAP as identified in the communication. This follows similar policy debates within the Council in recent months on viable food production (including the question of farm income support and market safety net measures as well as promoting innovation, research and training) and on developing sustainable management of European agriculture (including how to "green" the CAP).

Several Member States noted that although rural development policy remains important for Europe's rural areas, there is still a need for more co-ordination and synergy with other EU policies such as Regional Policy in order for CAP in its future incarnation to contribute towards territorial balance. In addition, there would appear to be broad consensus that the vitality of the rural economy should be based on the presence of a competitive and dynamic farming sector characterised by

diversification, development of local markets and other agriculture-related activities, particularly tourism and the production of renewable energies.

The current Hungarian Presidency will use the outcome of the three policy debates that have now taken place to prepare Council conclusions by consensus among delegations, for adoption in March. On the basis of the outcome of the institutional debate, the Commission is scheduled to present its legislative proposals on the CAP towards 2020 in July of this year.

Europe's Small Towns Association

Small and medium-sized towns - home to half of Europe's population - finally have a dedicated umbrella organisation at EU level after the establishment on 15 February of an association to make their voices heard and increase their influence over EU policy-making and funding decisions.

The European Confederation of Towns and Municipalities of the European Union (CTME) intends to collectively fill the representative void on behalf of smaller urban centres in a manner replicating the network approach of the continent's large cities. It further intends to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and exchange of experience on shared characteristics and common challenges among its members.

As of now, CTME brings together eight national associations representing small and medium-sized towns in seven Member States: France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania and Spain. Interestingly, each country's definition of the scale of a "small town" and their administrative structures for municipalities differ from each other. Members have agreed on a series of political positions that they will use as a basis for dialogue with the EU institutions, national governments, and other associations and stakeholders. Among its positions are calls for greater

recognition of the extent of territorial diversity that exists within regions, and for simplification of administrative procedures to enable small municipalities to obtain EU financial support.

[Further details](#) (*machine translation from French*)

Private investment bonds for infrastructure projects

On 28 February, the Commission launched a public consultation on the 'Europe 2020 Project Bond Initiative' to boost the financing prospects of Member States' infrastructure projects which have long-term revenue potential in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy policy priorities. The initiative was flagged up in Commission President José Manuel Barroso's State of the Union Address last September as an instrument to relieve pressure on overstretched government finances by fostering the participation of the private sector in the financing of projects relating to transport, energy, information and communication networks.

The overall objective is to help companies to attract capital market funding from investors such as pension funds and insurance companies through the issue of bonds. This will entail the Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) absorbing a capped percentage of the risk of a given project.

The purpose of the consultation is to obtain market participants' and decision makers' feedback on the chosen mechanism, to gauge demand for the initiative in terms of market volumes and the depth of the investor base. In the meantime, the Commission and the EIB will organise a conference on the subject on 11 April.

Deadline: 2 May

[Consultation](#)

Energy infrastructure permits

A public consultation on the planning and development of European energy infrastructure was launched by the Commission on 1 March. This is intended to build upon the 2010 Commission Communication on an integrated European energy network [COM(2010) 677/4] for 2020 and beyond which gave consideration to various measures to improve the often lengthy and uncertain permit granting process associated with major projects as part of its proposals for a new European energy infrastructure strategy to coordinate and optimise network development across Europe.

This latest exercise aims to identify possible measures to ensure that necessary energy networks can be delivered on schedule and in budget with a view to delivering a properly functioning internal energy market, enhancing security of supply, enabling the integration of renewable energy sources, increasing energy efficiency and allowing consumers to benefit from new technologies and intelligent energy use.

Deadline: 30 April

[Further details](#)

Green Paper on streamlining Research & Innovation Funding

On 9 February, the Commission presented a consultation paper which proposes major changes to the structures of EU research and innovation funding post-2013. Making participation more straightforward, increasing scientific and economic impact, and providing better value for money are at the forefront of the proposals which are considering the merits of bringing together the next Framework Programme for Research (FP8), the Competitiveness & Innovation Programme (which includes the Intelligent Energy Europe, Entrepreneurship & Innovation and ICT Policy Support Programmes), and European Institute of Innovation and Technology funding under a Common

Strategic Framework. This would standardise rules and criteria for participants as well as reducing the risk of overlap between different initiatives.

The ultimate form of the proposals, arising from this process, is to be presented to the Council and Parliament by the Commission by the end of 2011.

Deadline: 20 May

[Further details \(including questionnaire\)](#)

PUBLICATIONS

ICT-enabled Energy Efficiency in Construction

'ICT Supported Energy Efficiency in Construction: Strategic Research Roadmap and Implementation Recommendations' is a new Commission-supported publication, based on a collection of best practices which sets out to provide a vision of the future of this topic. It includes contributions from both ICT and Buildings and Construction sector stakeholders.

[Further details](#)

EVENTS

Competitiveness through cultural heritage Brussels, 24 March

'Increasing Europe's competitiveness through cultural heritage research' is a one-day conference to discuss the findings of the FP7-supported 'European network on Research Programmes applied to the Protection of Tangible Cultural Heritage'. By bringing together cultural authorities from 14 countries to identify best practices and common research priorities, the network has laid the foundations to better coordinate national research funding approaches

www.netheritage.eu

Green mobility for Active Ageing Brussels, 8 April

The final conference of the AENEAS (Attaining Energy-Efficient Mobility in an Ageing Society) project will highlight the challenges of demographic change, illustrate how the project's proposals for future activities fit into advanced urban mobility policies and demonstrate how other cities can apply the innovative set of soft measures developed and piloted by the five participating cities.

[Further details](#)

Local & Regional Action for Sustainable Energy Brussels, 13 April

A pair of back-to-back events taking place during EU Sustainable Energy Week in April may be of particular relevance to local and regional actors.

The first involves the Annual Conference of the Commission's ManagEnergy technical support service to assist public sector organisations operating at these levels in dealing with energy efficiency and renewable energy. This morning session will address the latest developments in EU sustainable energy policy and support structures as well as looking at concrete examples of close collaboration between energy agencies and local authorities.

The afternoon is devoted to the Covenant of Mayors local energy policy pledge. It will examine some actions being undertaken in cities and regions across the EU, including the innovative use of ICT, to reduce emissions and the practical differences these have made. The ELENA technical assistance fund and the forthcoming EU energy efficiency investment facility will both be profiled along with the Smart Cities initiative. The latter has been established to demonstrate the feasibility of instituting ambitious and rapid improvements in energy efficiency, low carbon

technologies and supply and demand management at a local and regional level - particularly measures relating to buildings, energy networks and transport.

[Morning session](#)

[Afternoon session](#)

Urban Transport Campaigns Toulouse, 17-18 May

Free training on organising an individualised campaign for sustainable transport solutions in cities is being made available courtesy of the CIVITAS Vanguard initiative. This workshop will provide participants with theoretical background plus a step-by-step guide to setting up a social marketing campaign from planning, to implementation and evaluation. A number of inspiring good practice examples will be provided.

The European Conference on Mobility Management follows from 18-20 May.

[Training Registration](#)

[Conference](#)

Upon request, IRO staff may be available to attend events in Brussels on behalf of local and regional authorities.



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