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Regions of Knowledge 2nd Call

On December 31st the European Commission published the second call for proposals under the Regions of Knowledge initiative. The aim of this call is “to promote increased and better regional investment in research and innovation through mutual learning, coordination and collaboration between regional policies and initiatives, by applying the following: foresight, benchmarking, networking and coordination activities and exchange of personnel.” The Regions of Knowledge initiative is aimed at enhancing the role of regions in helping to achieve the Lisbon objectives. For the period 2007-2013 the Commission has proposed a considerable increase in resources to strengthen this role. Applicant consortia for Regions of Knowledge 2 must include at least one partner from a new Member State or an Objective 1 region. Deadline for applications: 19th of May 2005. Total budget: €8.95 million. *Further details at:* http://fp6.cordis.lu/fp6/call_details.cfm?CALL_ID=180

Interreg IIIA Ireland/Wales

The seventh Ireland/Wales INTERREG IIIA application round is now open and potential project partners in Ireland and Wales are invited to submit joint applications. With a significant portion of the overall budget now allocated the focus of the seventh call is on areas which to date have been undersubscribed. Some of the priorities areas for which applications are sought include: knowledge transfer from higher education institutions to business; better

exploitation of non-infrastructure broadband technology; co-operation between clusters; rural enterprise and employment; environmentally friendly transport; tourism SMEs and research and development of growth products for either tourism, arts or culture. Closing Date for applications: 1st March 2005. *Further details at:* <http://www.wefo.wales.gov.uk/default.asp?action=newsdetail&ID=1380> or contact Paul O’Keefe Tel:04 046 6058, or Simon Bailey, Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly, Tel: 051 860709.

Interreg IIIC: no further calls

On January 17th, 2005 the Interreg IIIC West Steering Committee approved 22 new operations under the fourth application round. This brings to 65 the total number of operations now approved in the West Zone. With the total budget now allocated it was subsequently decided that no further calls for proposals would be launched in the West Zone. *Further details from:* west@interreg3c.net As regards Interreg IIIB (NWE) 95% of the budget has now been committed and a final call is expected in the second half of 2005. At this point no further calls are planned under Interreg IIIB (Atlantic Area). A Programme Monitoring Committee is scheduled to take place in March 5th at which a final decision will be made. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office*

‘Intelligent Energy - Europe’

On December 23rd the European Commission published a call for proposals under the ‘Intelligent Energy - Europe’ 2004 work programme. This call for proposals has a strong local focus. Horizontal actions will focus on promoting “Sustainable Energy Communities”, including: promoting “energy citizenship” and

mobilising local energy actors; local community planning for the efficient use of Renewable Energy Systems and conventional energy; support for the creation of local and regional energy management agencies and for the operation of national associations of agencies. Deadline for applications: 23 March 2005. Total budget €52 million, with up to 50% co-financing. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy/intelligent/index_en.html.

Gender Equality: the role of men

The European Commission recently published a call for proposals under the Community Programme on Gender Equality. In 2005, the priority theme for funding is, "the role of men in the promotion of gender equality, in particular the role of men and fathers in the reconciliation of work and private life". Projects must have a strong transnational dimension and must involve parties from at least three countries (Member States of the EU or partner countries). Deadline for applications: 15th April 2005. Maximum EU co-financing of 80%, maximum funding per project of €500,000. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/calls/2005/vp_2004_018/tender_en.htm

Tempus III

The European Commission recently published a call for proposals under Tempus, the EU programme for trans-European cooperation in higher education. The programme's three principal instruments for cooperation are: individual mobility grants; structural and complementary measures; short-term projects aimed at reform at national level and joint

European projects; and "bottom up" medium-term projects aimed at institutional reform. Institutions and organisations which may participate in the programme range from higher education institutions through to non-academic institutions such as NGOs, businesses and public authorities. Grant rates range from 95% to 100%. Annual deadlines are: 15th February, 15th June, 15th October, and 15th December for joint European projects. *Further details at:* <http://www.etf.eu.int/tempus.nsf>
National Contact: Tel: +353 1 6612748, web: <http://www.heai.ie/index.cfm/page/sub/id/648>

NEWS & POLICY

Luxembourg Presidency prioritises deal on future EU budget

Luxembourg, which took over the Presidency of the EU on January 1, 2005, has made getting a deal on the EU budget for 2007-13, the Lisbon Strategy and strengthening transatlantic relations its top three priorities. On the EU budget, the Luxembourg Presidency aims to reach an agreement by the end of June, which is necessary to get agreement on the new regulations for EU programmes for the post-2007 period. Luxembourg's Prime Minister has conceded that this will be a "difficult" process, but he warned that if agreement was not reached it would be very difficult for the next Presidencies (after Luxembourg, the UK takes over the Presidency, but a deal on the budget is considered unlikely under their term of office because of the UK's refusal to give up its budget rebate which is worth €3-4.5 billion a year). The Luxembourg Prime Minister said his presidency was holding

discussions with various EU leaders to try and bridge the gap between those who wanted to limit the EU's budget to 1% of EU Gross National Income (GNI) and those who wanted higher expenditure. He said that work on the budget would intensify in May and June. Meanwhile, the French press has reported that the European Commission is willing to compromise on its proposals for a budget of 1.14% of GNI. The new Commission President, José Manuel Barroso, is reported to be prepared to reduce the amount requested, possibly to as low as 1.05% of GNI. Any reduction on the Commission's original proposal of 1.14% will have serious implications for the Structural Funds budget, and in particular for the richer Member States, including Ireland. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

Extension of PEACE Programme approved

As foreseen in the December EU Bulletin, on January 11th the European Parliament formally approved the extension of the PEACE programme until late 2006. MEPs voted by 598 to 15 in favour, with 18 abstentions. This paves the way for the extended programme to be up and running by March 2005. The aim of the extension is to have the measures funded under PEACE coincide with the programming period for EU Structural Funds. The total budget agreed is €108 million, with the possibility of additional funds for 2006. The EU's annual €15 million contribution to the International Fund for Ireland is also to be extended by a further two years. *Further details from the IRO*

Ireland in breach of EU Environment Law

The European Commission has decided to pursue infringement proceedings against Ireland in eight cases involving breaches of EU environment law.

In the first case, the Commission has sent Ireland a first warning letter asking it to comply with the judgment by the European Court of Justice in March 2004, which condemned Ireland for failing to adopt a nitrate action programme, as required under the Nitrates Directive. Ireland subsequently submitted its nitrate action programme in October 2004, but the Commission has concluded that this is not compliant with the Directive. In particular, proposed mandatory liquid manure storage periods and prohibited periods for land-spreading are too short. In seven other cases, the Commission has sent Ireland final written warnings aimed at securing compliance with EU law. These cases concern: delays in upgrading waste-water treatment (Bray, Shanganagh, Howth, Letterkenny, Sligo and Tramore); the lack of satisfactory rules for preventing malodours from urban waste-water treatment plants; the disposal of construction waste from the former Tynagh Mines in Co. Galway; failure to remove waste from and to restore wetlands in the Boyne Estuary; failure to submit reports on the use of certain ozone-depleting substances; failure to meet national emission limits for certain air pollutants; and failure to give any commitment to carrying out a fresh environmental impact assessment before resumption of work on the wind farm at Derrybrien, Co Galway (following the major landslide in 2003). *Further details from the IRO.*

EU ratifies Århus Convention

In December 2004 EU Environment Ministers approved ratification of the Århus Convention. Adopted in Denmark in June 1998, the Århus Convention lays down a set of basic rules to promote citizens' involvement in environmental matters and to improve enforcement of environmental law. More specifically, the

Convention grants the general public access to environmental information, provides for participation in environmental decision-making, and allows the public to seek judicial redress when environmental law is infringed. All EU Member States have signed the Convention, though only about half of them have ratified it to date (Ireland has not yet ratified it). Two EU directives - adopted in 2003 - regulate access to environmental information and public participation in environmental decision-making across the EU. These directives have to be implemented in national law by February 2005 and June 2005 respectively. A third directive, concerning access to justice in environmental matters, was submitted by the Commission in October 2003 and is still under discussion by the Council. Ratification of the Århus Convention by the EU means that henceforth all EU institutions and bodies will have to comply with the document disclosure obligations. EU institutions and bodies will also have an obligation to provide genuine opportunities for citizens' participation in the development of environmental plans and programmes. It also means that NGOs will be entitled to contest environmental regulations. *Further details at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/aarhus>*

Positive impact of eGovernment

A recent survey of eGovernment services, carried out on behalf of the European Commission, has found that a huge majority (90%) of users "appreciate" the quality of eGovernment services and more than 60% are "very satisfied". The most commonly reported benefits are savings in time and greater flexibility. The survey found that online income tax declarations, for example, now save 7 million hours per year and online VAT declarations save about €10 per declaration. The survey observes

that if such services were widely used across all Member States the savings could rise to more than 100 million hours for citizens each year, with online VAT declarations yielding savings of some €0.5 billion. There were also some clear messages about areas for improvement. Citizens want systems to be more user friendly and with much better on-line help facilities. Businesses want services that are easier to find and that save them money. The survey, commissioned to assess progress on eGovernment in the context of the eEurope 2005 action plan, involved 48,000 users. The European Commission is now planning to present proposals before mid-2005 for a new eEurope 2010 initiative, including concrete proposals for public services. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/egovernment_research*

Making ICT services more accessible

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on how to make the benefits of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) more accessible to citizens, including older people and people with disabilities. The consultation is a first step in the Commission's endeavour to remove the technical challenges and difficulties that people with disabilities and others experience when trying to use electronic products or services, such as computers, mobile phones or the Internet. The Commission estimates that over 90 million EU citizens are directly affected, with about 48% of people over 50 years old saying that ICT does not fully meet their needs. The public consultation focuses on three key areas in which the EU could promote eAccessibility: public procurement, certification, and the use of legislation. The consultation document also considers a number of support measures, such as the development of eSkills, the further deployment of ICT Research, and monitoring

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regarding web accessibility and the development of digital TV. Interested parties have until 12 February 2005 to comment on the proposals. The results of the consultation will feed into a Commission Communication on eAccessibility to be adopted before June 2005.

Further information at:

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/policy/accessibility/com_ea_2005/index_en.htm

http://europa.eu.int/comm/lisbon_strategy/index_en.html

New eTwinning initiative for schools

On January 16th the European Commission launched the new “eTwinning” in Europe initiative. eTwinning is funded under the eLearning programme (2004-2007) and aims to give 30,000 European schools the chance to learn from one another and to build partnerships by using new information technologies (ICT). The objective of eTwinning is to give education a European dimension. It will promote longterm partnerships where at least two primary or secondary schools from at least two different European countries use ICT to carry out some form of joint together. It can take place at several levels: an exchange between individual teachers, teams of teachers or subject departments, librarians or head teachers. The intention is that the staff of two schools interact for an extended period of time. Schools from the 25 Member States as well from as Norway and Iceland can join the scheme by registering on-line at www.etwinning.net

Irish not considering self-employment

The latest “Eurobarometer” of Entrepreneurship, which assesses European and US attitudes to entrepreneurship, finds that a higher percentage

of Americans (61%) would prefer to be self-employed than Europeans (45%). However, the response in Ireland (58%) is closer to that of the US and second only to Portugal (62%) in the EU. A relatively low percentage (29%) of Irish respondents said the risk of failure would deter them from self-employment, compared to an EU average of 50% and a US average of 33%. However, despite this, the Irish are less remarkable when it comes to actually “doing”, with only 38% indicating any likelihood of becoming self-employed in the next 5 years. This was slightly above the EU average (33%), but well below the US average (46%) and many other EU countries (50% in Spain & Portugal). This might be partly explained by the fact that for 61% of Irish respondents self-employed, “never came to mind” (EU average 57%). Further details at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/enterprise_policy/survey/eurobarometer83.htm

LEADER at risk of decommitments

At a meeting of the EU LEADER+ Steering Committee in Brussels in December 2004 the Commission drew attention to the financial situation as regards compliance with the “N+2 rule”. On the basis of the figures to the end of November, it appeared that about one-third of the 2002 budget (36%) was at risk of being decommitted. This situation is to be reassessed in the light of the December figures. The meeting also focused on how to improve transnational cooperation. One obstacle cited is the lack of information on rules at national level. Therefore it was decided to set up a working group to produce country information sheets. *Further details to be posted at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/index_en.htm

3 March 2005, Brussels

DG Regional Policy is organising a conference in Brussels on, “*Cohesion and the Lisbon agenda: the role of the regions*”. A progress report on the Lisbon agenda, published in November 2004, concluded that implementation was disappointing and calls for financial incentives at EU level to improve performance, and for greater “ownership” of the Lisbon objectives on the part of stakeholders in the Member States. The conference will seek to examine how the regions can contribute more effectively to the Lisbon process in the context of the next generation of regional programmes for the period 2007-2013. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docconf/lisbon/index_en.htm

2 – 4 March, 2005, Wels (Austria)

World Sustainable Energy Days, the largest annual conference in Europe on this subject, will be held in Wels (Austria) in 2005. The event will examine the latest technological developments, best practice and European strategies, and will provide the opportunity for leading thinkers in the field from all over the world to meet and create new partnerships. In 2004, more than 900 participants from 64 countries attended. A highlight of this year’s event is a conference on Sustainable Communities, which will explore the role of local authorities and regions in promoting energy sustainability. *Further details at:* <http://www.esv.or.at/esv/index.php?id=224&L=1>

6 - 10 April, 2005, Kauhajoki (Finland)

The European LEADER Observatory is organising a three-day seminar in Ostrobothnia (Finland) on the theme, "The use of new know-how and new technologies". The seminar is primarily aimed at LEADER+ groups who have opted to carry out projects under this theme. The event will give information and practical guidance through presentations, field visits and workshops. A special session on transnational cooperation will also help to develop transnational partnerships and networking. *Further details from: Kristiane Hallermann, Leader+ Contact Point: Tel: +32 (02) 235 20 26, E-mail: k.hallermann@leaderplus.org*

12 – 14 April, 2005, Brussels

"Meeting Europe's employment goals - the review of the 'Lisbon strategy' and the revised ESF" is the theme for Employment Week 2005, which is being organised by the European Commission's DG Employment & Social Affairs. Employment Week 2005 will provide an opportunity to catch up on the latest policy developments, to participate in focused discussions on EU proposals for revising its financial instruments, notably the ESF, in tackling regional disparities, and to hear about successful regional and local job creation experiences in pursuit of EU policy goals. Conference fee: €50 or €25 (early bird), with discounts available for NGO's. *Further details at: <http://www.employmentweek.com/index.asp>*

30 April 2005, Brussels

This year's "Open Doors" at the EU Institutions will focus on the theme of the EU Constitution. Members of the public will have the opportunity

to visit the offices of the EU's institutions in Brussels and to find out more about their work and about the new Constitution. For this years event the Committee of the Regions (CoR) are also inviting regions and local authorities to display documentation on their areas, or to present their cultural or culinary heritage. Those interested in participating are requested to contact the IRO or the CoR (e-mail: lambrini.yalamboukidou@cor.eu.int) before January 31st.

19-20 May 2005, Wroclaw (Poland)

Decentralisation will be the main theme of the "European Summit of Regions & Cities", which is being organised by the Committee of the Regions (CoR). With three key issues: the new EU Constitution; the Lisbon Agenda; and the EU budget for 2007-2013, now dominating the EU's agenda, the event will provide an opportunity to present sub-national positions on these issues and to highlight the important role of local and regional authorities in the EU. It will also provide an opportunity to input into the political debate on the EU financial perspectives. *Further details from the CoR or from the Irish Regions Office*

PUBLICATIONS

Regions: Statistical yearbook

On January 13th Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities published a new edition of the Statistical Yearbook of EU Regions. For the 254 regions of the EU25 (defined at NUTS II level), and the 14 regions in Bulgaria and Romania, the Yearbook sets out

general socio-economic data: population, GDP, household wealth, labour force and unemployment. It also investigates agriculture and covers transverse economic themes. The structure of business and life in the different region is depicted through statistics on health, tourism and urbanisation. *Further details at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/>*

NETWORKS

European Regions of the Year

On January 1st Piedmont (Italy) and Kiev (Ukraine) took over from Madeira and the German-speaking Community of Belgium as European Regions of the Year. European Regions of the Year is an initiative which aims to increase knowledge and recognition of European regional affairs, to make new contributions to regional construction and European integration, and to project the regions designated as European Region of the Year onto the European and international scene. Any region of the 46 member states of the Council of Europe (which includes Ireland) may apply to be chosen as European Region of the Year. Application should be presented to the headquarters of the promoting organisation in Barcelona. *Further details at: <http://www.tery.org/>*

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