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The future of urban development

The Committee of the Regions will hold a forum in Brussels consisting of: three workshops on 25 April (towns as motors for growth and employment, urban social cohesion, and sustainable urban development); a plenary session debate on 26 April in the presence of Commissioner Danuta Hübner, on urban mobility, transport and social cohesion; and an exhibition on 25 and 26 April on completed and foreseen urban planning projects. More information is available at the Committee of the Regions' website:

<http://www.cor.eu.int/en/index.htm>

Under the title 'Urban Future 2.0', the Swedish Government and the City of Stockholm, in cooperation with the Regional Policy DG, will hold on 3 Mai a conference on the future of urban governance.

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/events_web/public/events_specific.cfm?event_id=286&status_flag=1

Another conference, 'Regions and cities: Partners for growth and jobs', is to be held on 1 and 2 June in Barcelona. Organised by the Government of Catalonia with the cooperation of the Spanish Ministry of Finance and the European Commission, it will look at the use of Structural Funds for urban development under the 2007–13 programmes. More information will be placed on line at the following site:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/events_web/public/calendar/calendar_en.cfm

Most remote regions and telecommunications

A report drawn up for the Regional Policy DG finds that telecommunication networks and services are less accessible in the EU's seven most remote regions than in the home country in general or compared with the Community average.

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/themes/rup_en.htm

The cohesion partners make the 2007 rendezvous: two reports take stock of the situation

Following an intense interinstitutional dialogue, the cohesion policy actors will dispose of the necessary legislative and financial framework with which to prepare the start-up of programmes for the 2007–13 period. Driving their efforts will be the partnership for growth and jobs set up to relaunch the Lisbon strategy. Two Commission reports help take stock of the situation.

The General Report on the Activities of the European Union in 2005 (1) is set against the background of the relaunch of the Lisbon strategy for a highly competitive and sustainable European economy that generates jobs. The need is to refocus priorities and to harness all national and Community policies to promote growth and jobs. On the basis of the Commission proposals, the European Council of March 2005 defined the three main lines of this relaunch as: placing knowledge and innovation at the heart of growth; rendering Europe more attractive for investment and jobs; and creating more and better jobs.

In July 2005, the Council approved the 'Employment guidelines for the Member States' and the 'Broad economic policy guidelines for the Member States and the Community'. Together, these form the 'integrated guidelines' for the period 2005–08. The Commission subsequently presented a Community Lisbon programme covering actions on a European scale to supplement the national reform programmes (NRPs) announced by the Member States in October.

The regional dimension. The report evokes the role of cohesion policy in relation to 'Lisbon'. In this respect, in 2004 the Commission had formulated its legislative proposals (2007–13) for the Structural and Cohesion Funds. In addition to redefining the principal goals of development (convergence, regional competitiveness and employment, European territorial cooperation), this involved ensuring more strategic programming, increased decentralisation as part of a strengthened partnership, greater transparency and simplified management. These proposals were modified in October 2005 on the basis of the opinions formulated by the various institutions.

Presented by the Commission in July 2005, the 'Community strategic guidelines 2007–13' identify the European priorities of the new cohesion policy. These will help the Member States to draw up their 'national strategic reference frameworks' on the basis of which the new generation of programmes will be drawn up.

The fact remains that the EU needs stable resources that are equal to the challenges faced. The year

2005 was marked by difficult negotiations on the 2007–13 budget. After the consensus reached at the European Council on 17 December, the interinstitutional agreement expected in the spring must permit the adoption of legislative texts and the finalisation of the strategic guidelines. The following months must therefore be put to the best possible use with a view to the start-up of the regional development programmes in January 2007.

Moving up a gear. 'Member States must now get in the driving seat and speed up reforms. (...) We are aiming for top-class universities, highly trained and educated workforces, strong social security and pension systems, the most competitive industries and the cleanest environment,' declared Commission President José Manuel Barroso at the end of January when presenting the annual progress report (2006) on growth and jobs (2) and looking towards the spring European Council on 23 and 24 March.

In this document, the Commission analyses the 25 NRPs, identifies their strengths with a view to encouraging the exchange of good ideas, and highlights shortcomings and possible solutions. It stresses the need for coordination between the authorities responsible for the NRPs and those in charge of the Structural Fund programmes. The report concludes with four priority actions:

- investment in knowledge and innovation, in particular by increasing the share of State and Structural Fund aid allocated to R & D;
- freeing up the potential of companies, especially SMEs, by means of measures including the creation of a 'one-stop shop' for their administrative formalities;
- getting more people into work, in the context of globalisation and an ageing population, as part of a life-cycle approach in which people of all ages receive the support they need;
- promoting efficient and sustainable energy, in particular through a better coordination between grids and support for R & D and innovation in this field.

(1) <http://europa.eu.int/abc/doc/off/rg/en/welcome.htm>

(2) Press release, access to the full text of the report and various links:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/71&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr>

Financing structural actions: a vintage 2005 augurs well for the new programmes

Less than a year before the start of the new programming period, the latest budgetary results for the Structural and Cohesion Funds make 2005 the best year yet.

'During 2005, we managed to commit almost 100 % of the funds allocated to structural actions and ISPA [Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession]. It is becoming clear that 2005 has been the best executed budget ever. The use of the Structural Funds for the European regions in 2005 'shows once again that cohesion policy is a powerful tool in creating quality jobs and promoting growth on the ground. (...) Our major challenge is now to put into place all the necessary mechanisms to enable cohesion policy to contribute even further to the economic modernisation of European regions during the 2007–13 period,' declared Commissioner Danuta Hübner on 26 January (1). The level of payments was also very satisfactory in 2005 and remains high at the beginning of 2006, confirming that the good results are due to a sustained effort and sound programming.

In 2005, EUR 27.1 billion was committed under the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the pre-

accession instrument for candidate countries (ISPA). In terms of commitments, this is the highest amount ever recorded for a single year in the field of regional policy. For the four Structural Funds, Cohesion Fund and ISPA combined, payments made in 2005 reached a total amount of EUR 33.1 billion. At the end of 2005, for the 10 new Member States, the reimbursement of expenditure in the field by the Commission was similar to the amount paid to the Member States of the EU-15 after two years of programming. Funds destined for pre-accession actions were used so well that additional funds had to be found in other fields of action.

Commissioner Hübner stressed that the Commission is determined to build on the dynamic generated to guarantee, in cooperation with the Member States and the regions, optimal implementation of cohesion policy in terms of growth and jobs.

(1) <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/84&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr>

The annual reports on the Structural, Cohesion and Pre-Accession Funds are published in the following section of the Inforegio site: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/repor_en.htm

Research and innovation: 'before it's too late'

In a report presented on 20 January, entitled 'Creating an innovative Europe', independent experts sound the alarm.

A wide gap separates the political rhetoric about the knowledge society and the reality of budgetary and other priorities, believe the four experts, headed by former Finnish Prime Minister Esko Aho, who produced this report for the Commission. They call for the conclusion of a Pact for Research and Innovation to be signed by EU political, business and social leaders 'before it's too late'.

The authors recommend major changes to the implementation of the Community budget, believing in particular that the Structural Funds are an ideal instrument with which to support

research and innovation and to achieve cohesion in this field. They propose a four-pronged strategy: the creation of markets favourable to innovation; more resources for research and for links between science and industry (in particular the trebling of the proportion of the Structural Funds' allocation and a halt to the decline of investments in risk capital in the EU); the promotion of financial, organisational and human mobility; and the encouragement of an innovation culture.

The document can be accessed at:

http://europa.eu.int/invest-in-research/action/research06_en.htm

Open Days 2006: welcome to the site

From 9 to 12 October 2006, the fourth European Week of Regions and Cities — Open Days, on the theme of **'Investing in Europe's regions and cities: public and private partners for growth and jobs'**, will be held against the backdrop of the preparation of the programmes for the 2007–13 period. The debates within the 35 workshops will revolve around five subthemes: competitive companies and high-quality jobs; regional innovation; the use of natural resources and environmental technologies; major infrastructure projects; and simplification of procedures and management of the Structural Funds. Visit the site at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/conferences/od2006



European Commission
Directorate-General for Regional Policy