

## **EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE EUR-03-02(p5)**

**Date:** 8 May 2002  
**Time:** 9.30am  
**Venue:** Committee Rooms 3 and 4, National Assembly Building  
**Title:** Update on Trans-European Co-operation Programmes

### **Purpose of Paper**

1. The Committee has requested a progress report on the Interreg III European Community Initiative Programmes (CIPs), specifically strands IIIB and IIIC.

### **Summary/Recommendations**

2. The programmes allow countries to co-operate on mutually beneficial or shared projects and to tackle issues that go beyond national boundaries. Participating organisations benefit through accessing new skills and ways of working, and increasing their connections to European networks and markets. In a nutshell, organisations are invited to address local priorities through transnational cooperation.
3. The Committee is invited to note and comment on the paper.

### **Timing**

4. There are no particular timing issues.

### **Background**

5. The Interreg III Community Initiative covers the 2000 - 2006 programming period with eligible expenditure to the end of 2008. The aim is to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by promoting trans-European co-operation. There are three strands:

- Interreg IIIA focuses on co-operation between border regions, in our case between west Wales and south-eastern Ireland. IIIA is being managed by WEFO.
- Interreg IIIB promotes balanced development across large groupings of European regions. Wales is eligible for funding under the North West Europe (indicative UK allocation £68m) and the Atlantic Area (indicative UK allocation £24m) programmes. There are no separate allocations for Wales. Compared to previous programmes the emphasis has shifted from research towards concrete projects, including small-scale infrastructural investment.
- Interreg IIIC is a smaller strand aimed at large-scale information exchange and sharing of experience (research type projects) and promotes the involvement of third countries, particularly

the EU candidate countries. It is divided into four zones and Wales is in the West Zone which has an indicative UK allocation of over £14m.

## **Benefits of Trans-European co-operation**

1. Besides the financial support provided by the Structural Funds, the following are examples of reasons to become involved in the new programmes:
  - Environmental pollution knows no borders and has to be tackled through transnational or international action;
  - Issues such as urban decline and regeneration, conservation, urban transport, social exclusion and peripherality are common across Europe and co-operation can lead to more effective, innovative and integrated solutions;
  - European countries and regions are becoming closely interdependent both economically and in terms of physical infrastructure and co-ordinated responses are called for when regions have interests in measures taken outside their territory;
  - Borders cut off communities from each other and future enlargement will progressively shift the communities external borders eastwards. The Commission refers often to the European Spatial Development Perspective when Interreg III B is under discussion, and this links Wales' involvement in the programme to the Wales Spatial Plan. We therefore need a shared planning culture and creation of a wider European culture;;
  - Economic and social cohesion is a key goal of the EU and trans-european programmes have a part to play in the wider EU regional Cohesion policy; there have been hints from the Commission's DG Regional Affairs that it sees trans-European cooperation type programmes as possibly taking a higher profile post-2006 as a way of addressing the issue of distributing structural funds among a much-enlarged EU.
  - There is a need to co-ordinate Community and Member State policies and ensure they are implemented at local or regional level through a sectoral approach.

## **Activities in Wales**

1. Although the previous Interreg Ireland/Wales programme was very successful, and is to be built upon as a result, our involvement in wider trans-European programmes was very patchy. The new programmes are much larger and have moved firmly away from the previous academic/localised projects. They will provide a real opportunity to raise awareness and the profile of Wales in a wider European context.
2. Two seminars have been held in mid Wales to raise awareness of the possibilities offered by the programmes and were attended by over 100 people. European and External Affairs D have also

now started to issue an information flyer to potential project sponsors and a more detailed guidance note will be ready shortly. DTLR are also considering holding further thematic seminars across the UK. A small working group, chaired by EEA and including representation from local government and economic development forums, was established in Wales over a year ago and will now assist in taking forward the programmes in Wales. In addition the programme secretariat (based in France) will be available to assist project sponsors in developing their ideas and a UK National Contact Point will similarly be available to offer guidance and assistance in developing projects.

8. We have had a number of expressions of interest across Wales although most projects are in the early stages of development. The Assembly Government's own priorities are expected to be reflected in projects brought forward in Wales, for example those set out in A Winning Wales and the Wales Spatial Plan. By their very nature these programmes require a good deal of time and effort in the early stages not least of all in developing true trans-European partnerships, and partners will need to sustain good relationships during the life of projects. The advice from the secretariats is that time spent on developing ideas are key to the eventual success of projects.

## **Compliance**

9. The EC decided on 28 April 2000 to establish a Community Initiative concerning trans-European co-operation as set out in Article 20 of Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999. This responsibility has been delegated to the Economic Development Minister. There are no issues of regularity or propriety. The management of the day-to-day implementation of the programmes is the responsibility of the individual International Joint Technical Secretariat who act on behalf of the participating Member States and Programme Monitoring Committees. The Programme Steering Committees are responsible for selecting projects for funding. The Devolved Administrations will be represented on these committees at various stages during the lifetime of the programmes, with John Griffiths AM holding a seat on the North West Europe programme PMC for 2002-03. Normal State Aids regulations will apply to these programmes.

## **Financial Implications**

10. There will be no financial implications for the Assembly from projects because it is the responsibility of DTLR to provide public expenditure cover. DTLR will also be making nearly £3 million available to UK partners to assist them with project development costs. As with other Structural Fund programmes Interreg III projects may be considered for match funding from relevant Assembly budget lines e.g. the Local Regeneration Fund provided that it can be demonstrated that there is no other more appropriate and accessible match funding sources. If, however, policy Divisions wish to recommend to their Ministers that the Welsh Assembly Government should participate in particular projects they will need to ensure that match funding provision can be found from within their existing baselines

[just needed for the covering submission but not the paper, I think]

### **Cross-cutting themes**

11. As with other Structural fund programmes the cross-cutting themes of equal opportunities, the environment and sustainable development, social cohesion, and accessing the information society underpin the programmes.

### **Action for the European and External Affairs Committee**

12. This paper has been prepared for information.

### **Contact points**

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Interreg IIIA Ireland/Wales programme information available on the INTERREG pages of the Welsh European Funding Office website: [www.wefo.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wefo.wales.gov.uk)

[Our own website ??????]

Interreg IIIB and IIIC programmes: [francis.cairns@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:francis.cairns@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

The DTLR UK Interreg IIIB website: [www.interregiiib.org.uk](http://www.interregiiib.org.uk)

The North West Europe secretariat website: [www.nweurope.org](http://www.nweurope.org)

The Atlantic Area secretariat website: [www.atlanticooperation.org](http://www.atlanticooperation.org)

The European Commission website: [www.inforegio.cec.eu.int](http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int)