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**COMMITTEE  
OF THE  
REGIONS**  
of the  
European  
Communities

# **OPINION**

on the

## **Future of Community initiatives under the Structural Funds**

(COM(94) 46 final)

Brussels, 17 - 18 May 1994

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Memorized text.

## Introduction

It is the Community's task, under Article 2 of the EC Treaty, to promote economic and social cohesion and solidarity among Member States, while Article 130a of the EC Treaty stipulates that the Community is to aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least-favoured regions, including rural areas.

In order to achieve this objective, the European Council decided at its meeting in Edinburgh on 11-12 December 1992 to provide more funds for structural actions. The Conclusions of the Presidency not only list general figures for the resources to be committed under the Structural Funds in the period 1993-1999 but also address the question of "Community initiatives" under the heading of Structural Fund assistance. The European Council specified that the allocation for these initiatives should amount to 5-10% of the total resources committed under the Structural Funds. It was also stated that the Community initiatives should mainly promote "cross-border, transnational and inter-regional cooperation and assistance for the outermost regions, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity".

The General Affairs Council decided at its meeting on 6 July 1993 to set aside 9% of the Structural Fund assistance for Community initiatives. Thus, a total of ECU 13.45 billion (at 1992 prices) is available for common actions by the EU from 1994 to 1999.

On 16 June 1993 the Commission presented its Green Paper on the future of Community initiatives under the Structural Funds. This Green Paper set out the Commission's general principles and priorities. Not only the Member States, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, but also local and regional authorities, development agencies, economic and social partners and other interested parties were called on to participate in the debate. Suggestions were to be submitted to the Commission by the end of September. Since the Committee of the Regions was set up only this year, it was unable to deliver an Opinion within the framework of the consultation procedure chosen by the Commission.

After the consultations had been completed and the numerous suggestions evaluated, the Commission published draft guidelines and explanatory memorandums on the most important Community initiatives on 16 March 1994 (COM(94) 46 final).

The Committee of the Regions, acting under Articles 130d and 189c of the Treaty on the European Community, discussed the question of the future of Community initiatives at its third Plenary Session.

On 16 March 1994 the European Commission decided to consult the Committee of the Regions on

The future of Community initiatives under the Structural Funds  
(COM(94) 46 final).

### **The Committee of the Regions**

- **HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission's Green Paper of 16 June 1993 on Community initiatives (COM(93) 282 final);
- **HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission proposals on the future of Community initiatives under the Structural Funds (COM(94) 46 final of 16 March 1994), on the Community initiative concerning urban areas (URBAN) (COM(94) 61 final of 2 March 1994) and on the Community initiative on the modernization of the textile and clothing industry of Portugal (COM(94) 82 final);
- **HAVING REGARD TO** the views submitted within the framework of the consultation procedure by the Consultative Council of Regional and Local Authorities and other regional organizations such as the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and the Association of Traditional Industrial Regions of Europe (RETI),

**adopted the following Opinion unanimously at its 3rd Plenary Session on 17 May 1994.**

### **The Committee of the Regions**

- underlines the positive effect of the consultations held by the Commission with regard to the Green Paper on Community initiatives;
- regrets that the Committee of the Regions was unable to deliver an Opinion at the time;
- hopes that when taking its decisions the Commission will nonetheless now make appropriate allowance for the views of the Committee of the Regions;

### **I. THE COMMUNITY INITIATIVES IN GENERAL**

1. welcomes the Commission's efforts to improve the efficiency of the Community initiatives, while at the same time emphasizing the Community initiatives' benefit for regions and local communities;
2. stresses that, in application of the subsidiarity principle, the framing and implementation of the plans and programmes is mainly the responsibility of the regions and local authorities;
3. welcomes therefore the bottom-up approach selected by the Commission which accords with the partnership principle;

4. is pleased in this context to note the future involvement of the social partners, which will be of great importance especially in connection with the Community "employment and development of human resources" initiatives and the ADAPT initiative;
5. would point out, however, that structural assistance should not become less manageable as a result and demands that the practical rules and procedures must be the preserve of regional and local bodies;
6. gives its fundamental approval to the areas proposed by the Commission for assistance, which do justice to a large extent to the principle of continuity and also take current developments into consideration;
7. confirms the principle that it is necessary to concentrate on a few Community initiatives;
8. regrets that the Community initiatives' objectives and measures often overlap considerably among themselves and with those of the Community Support Frameworks, and calls in this context for the Community initiatives to be coordinated with the Structural Funds;
9. emphasizes the necessity for an initiative on Industrial Change and considers that the emphasis here should be placed on (a) diversification in regions facing structural problems and (b) the adjustment of industries in Objective 1 regions to the internal market;
10. appreciates the Commission proposal to discontinue ENVIREG as a separate initiative and to take account of environmental concerns in general in the Community Support Frameworks, but also calls for greater efforts to be made with regard to the environment within the framework of the Community initiatives;
11. agrees with the Economic and Social Committee and the European Parliament that the "reserve for past and future actions" provided for in the budget (B2-1407) may be inadequate, since it must cover not only the possible cost of other new initiatives but also the possible extension of initiatives which are planned only up to 1997;
12. considers that the administrative machinery must be simplified, opposes the creation of additional administrative structures and calls in particular for swifter approval procedures;
13. calls on the Member States' representatives on the "Community initiatives" management committee to take account of regional and local interests in their decision-taking in accordance with the Committee of the Regions' present Opinion;
14. is pleased to note that the new German Länder are to be given full equal treatment in connection with the Community initiatives, and calls for the new Länder to receive all the aid promised them from the Structural Funds, including the Community initiatives instrument;

15. regrets that so far the Commission has been unable to appraise the Community initiatives, calls for a periodic evaluation in future of the initiatives' effect on regions and local communities, albeit on the basis of only a few macroeconomic indicators, since in view of the relative paucity of the funds the spending of more time and money on assessments would appear justified in only special cases, and also calls for the submission of regular reports to the Committee of the Regions;
16. assumes that the procedure for adopting the Regulations will be speeded up so that funds can be disbursed in 1994 and calls on the Commission to take the precaution of ensuring that any funds not disbursed in 1994 can be carried over to the following financial year;
17. calls finally on the Commission to present uniform and transparent criteria for assessing the quality of each initiative's operational programme;

## **II. THE INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVES**

### **INTERREG II (including REGEN)**

18. refers to the conclusions of the Edinburgh European Council, which gave top priority to cross-border cooperation in connection with the new generation of Community initiatives;
19. is pleased to note the strengthening of the role of regional and local authorities under INTERREG II;
20. welcomes the Commission proposal that in future all areas along internal land borders are to be eligible for assistance;
21. supports the efforts to strengthen the measures at external borders, with due regard being paid in connection with cross-border measures on the external borders to Central and Eastern Europe to the importance of involving regional and local institutions on both sides of the borders and using PHARE funds for this purpose;
22. advocates the possibility of giving support to cooperation between maritime border regions, including regions situated on the European Union's external maritime borders;
23. gives its fundamental approval to a flexible approach towards the supporting of areas located away from borders, insofar as it is ensured that border regions benefit from the programme in the final analysis;
24. supports the view expressed by the Economic and Social Committee that assistance should also be given within INTERREG to measures which serve transnational and interregional cooperation and also assist the establishment of networks that extend beyond the Union, but

also agrees with the European Parliament that priority must continue to be given to cross-border cooperation at internal borders;

25. agrees with the European Parliament that one of the main objectives of INTERREG must be to improve neighbourly relations in border regions, and places special emphasis in this connection on the necessity to promote cross-border measures in the field of school education which promote language learning and lead to the acquisition of mutually recognized school-leaving certificates;
26. welcomes the extension of the measures to new areas such as education and training, health, media services, language teaching, regional planning in border regions and additional measures for the trans-European networks, and calls for greater assistance within the framework of INTERREG for infrastructure measures in the field of environmental protection;
27. considers separate budget lines for (a) Objective 2 and 5b regions and (b) regions not covered by any of the Objectives to be problematic from the point of view of INTERREG assistance, and asks the Commission to remedy this problem;
28. calls for support to be given to the work of existing cross-border organizations and others that still have to be created, and supports the establishment of joint secretariats to administer individual INTERREG programmes in each border zone;
29. considers that energy network projects already started under REGIS should be terminated and continued within the framework of the Community initiatives;
30. agrees, however, with the European Parliament that the inclusion of support for energy projects (REGEN) in the INTERREG initiative is debatable, and therefore calls on the Commission to amend this accordingly;
31. considers that the Commission's list of border regions which are eligible for INTERREG assistance is not exhaustive;
32. considers finally that the provisional amount allocated to INTERREG by the Commission is not commensurate with the planned objectives with regard to cross-border cooperation;

## **LEADER II**

33. regards integrated rural development as a vital prerequisite for attaining the economic and social cohesion target set in the EU Treaty, and notes that the CAP reform makes new demands on rural development;

34. welcomes therefore the continuation of LEADER as an important support programme for innovative rural development projects based on local and regional initiatives;
35. would point out, however, that innovation cannot be the sole criterion for selecting projects;
36. approves the Commission proposal to decentralize implementation, and trusts that local authorities will play an important role in selecting the local action groups and other rural bodies;
37. emphasizes in this connection the promotion of measures which serve cross-frontier cooperation, and points also to the important role of producer groups and the importance of very small businesses and craft enterprises for rural economies;

## **REGIS II**

38. welcomes the continuation of the REGIS initiative for supporting the Community's outermost regions as proposed by the Commission, and emphasizes in particular the importance of measures aimed at economic diversification and the inclusion of vocational training measures;

## **"Employment and development of human resources" (NOW, HORIZON, YOUTHSTART)**

39. supports the Commission's integrated approach to employment and the development of human resources and the main points of the Commission's plan (transnationality, bottom-up approach, strengthening of Community policies and programmes).
40. regards the initiatives mainly as a flexible instrument for combating unemployment at a local level;
41. agrees with the European Parliament that improving the integration of women into working life is to be regarded as a priority objective, and demands that apart from the special NOW initiative the principle of equality of opportunity must be observed in all Community initiatives;
42. welcomes in particular the Commission's plan to extend the initiative for improving handicapped persons' employment prospects (HORIZON) to other socially excluded and disadvantaged groups of persons (minorities, migrants, refugees);
43. gives its express approval to the proposal to introduce a special initiative for reducing youth unemployment (YOUTHSTART), and calls for the raising of the planned age limit from 20 to 25 years in line with the Objective 3 limit;



## **ADAPT**

44. supports the Commission's idea to launch a separate initiative for helping workers to adjust to industrial change so as to encourage the Member States to bring in the reforms suggested in the White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment;
45. would, however, criticize the Commission proposal to give ADAPT the same allocation as the Community initiative on employment and the development of human resources, calls for more resources to be committed to NOW, HORIZON and YOUTHSTART than to ADAPT in view of the problem of unemployment and especially long-term unemployment and deplores in this connection the amount to be deducted from the financial measures for Objectives 3 and 4 in order to fund these Community initiatives.

## **RECHAR II**

46. underlines the need to continue with RECHAR for the purpose of restructuring the economies of mining regions;
47. proposes that the Objective region criterion should not be strictly applied in exceptional cases so that mining areas which have been particularly hard hit by job losses are also eligible for assistance outside the Objective regions;
48. points out that the regeneration of coal mining regions requires the general improvement of the environment and modernization of the economic and social fabric and urges that eligible measures take these factors fully into account;
49. considers that it makes sense to use the possibility afforded by RECHAR to promote cross-border cooperation between (former) mining areas;

## **RESIDER II**

50. supports the Commission proposal to continue with the RESIDER initiative in order to solve the structural problems facing the steel industry;
51. proposes in accordance with the principle of flexibility that funds also be provided for steel producers outside the Objective regions insofar as they have been particularly hard hit by the steel crisis;
52. urges that these funds be used for conversion measures in firms which receive no subsidies;
53. calls on the Commission to include existing vocational training facilities in the facilities that are to be eligible for support, and also to specify the sums to be allocated to this initiative by the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund;

## **KONVER**

54. welcomes the inclusion of the KONVER 1993 ad hoc programme instigated by the European Parliament in the overall package of Community initiatives for 1994-1999;
55. is pleased to note that the KONVER initiative is to be highly flexible and that as a result areas particularly hard hit by arms reductions and troop withdrawals can be taken into consideration to a large extent from 1994 onwards when funds are allocated;
56. joins the European Parliament in regretting that the KONVER initiative is to cover only four years instead of the full period from 1994 to 1999, since the numbers employed in the arms industry and defence will undoubtedly continue to fall right through to the year 2000;
57. considers that there is an urgent need for more funds, because KONVER is the only new Industrial Change initiative which could not be brought under Objective 2 and which has serious effects on both regions and industry;
58. would further point out that military bases must be treated on a par with arms manufacturers when aid is given for conversion, and trusts that high priority will be given to the elimination of environmental damage when bases are converted for civilian use;
59. calls therefore on the Commission to add criteria for assisting the conversion of military property to the criteria already proposed;

## **RETEX**

60. approves the Commission proposals for continuing the RETEX initiative aimed at tackling the special problems besetting regions dependent on the textile, clothing and footwear industries by providing assistance for economic diversification;
61. proposes that the Objective region criteria be applied flexibly by analogy with the RECHAR and RESIDER initiatives;

## **SME**

62. supports the Commission's attempt to amalgamate a number of earlier initiatives (STRIDE, PRISMA, TELEMATIK) and to continue them under the umbrella of the new SME initiative;
63. agrees with the priorities laid down by the Commission, but calls for a measure of flexibility with regard to the aid criteria in order that SMEs in Objective regions can form links more easily with SMEs in more prosperous regions;