2004 enlargement: impact on regions bordering candidate countries, action for border regions

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PURPOSE : to present an Action Plan for regions bordering candidate countries. CONTENT : the Community Action for Border Regions presented in this Communication covers a wide range of measures which can be applied to meet the specific needs of the different sectors concerned. The Commission proposes better co-ordination of existing instruments in border regions, use of the flexibility margin of applicable state aid rules and additional investment in specific areas, in particular to transport and environmental infrastructure. A further important task is to develop an effective information and communication strategy that can help to maximise the benefits of enlargement in the border regions. The proposed new measures should help to enhance cross-border co-operation and the development of new economic regions, creating new opportunities for growth and employment on both sides of the border. To be more specific, the Commission's main recommendations include: - higher investment in the transport infrastructure in the framework of the trans-European network (TEN) through an increase in the maximum level of Community support for TEN-projects to 20% and with special financial assistance for TEN projects in border regions amounting to EUR 150 million in the period 2003-2006; - co-operation activites for SMEs funded through a specific EUR 15 million pilot project initiated by the European Parliament for the period 2001-2002; - Community support of up to EUR 20 million for networking measures between border regions and candidate countries in the framework of INTERREG; - better co-ordination of the INTERREG III A and Phare Cross-Border Co-operation programme; - facilitate the co-financing for transnational (INTERREG B) or interregional (INTERREG C) co-operation projects in well-founded cases; - a special programme of the EIB to support environmental and transport infrastructure projects; - a EUR 10 million boost in funding for the European YOUTH programme; - making full use of the flexibility provided by existing state aid rules on the geographical eligibility and intensity of state aid for regional purposes. With regard to the budgetary aspects, the Commission proposes to dedicate an additional EUR 195 million for border regions with applicant countries in the period 2001-2006. Lastly, with to the principle of subsidiarity, this Action needs to be complemented by, and co-ordinated with, appropriate measures at the national, regional and local levels.