Development of European territory: trans-European cooperation Community initiative, INTERREG

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PURPOSE : to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by promoting cross-border, transnational and interregional co-operation and balanced development of the EU territory. CONTENT : the overall aim of the INTERREG Initiatives has been, and remains, that national borders should not be a barrier to the balanced development and integration of the European territory. The isolation of border areas has been of a double nature: on the one hand, the presence of borders cuts off border communities from each other economically, socially and culturally and hinders the coherent management of eco-systems; on the other hand, border areas have often been neglected under national policy, with the result that their economies have tended to become peripheral within national boundaries. The single market and EMU are strong catalysts for changing this situation. Nevertheless, the scope for strengthening co-operation to the mutual advantage of border areas throughout the Union remains enormous. The challenge is all the greater when the future enlargement of the EU is considered, as this will increase the number of internal EU borders and, progressively, shift the Union's external borders eastwards. In this context, the objective of the new phase of INTERREG is to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by promoting cross-border, transnational and interregional co-operation and balanced development of the EU territory. Action in relation to the borders and border areas between the Member States and between the EU non-member countries is, therefore, at the heart of the Initiative. Particular priority needs to be given to the external borders of the European Union in view of enlargement as well as to insular and ultraperipheral regions. Building on the experience of the previous INTERREG Initiatives, this new phase of the Initiative will be implemented under three strands: - promoting integrated regional development between neighbouring border regions, including external borders and certain maritime borders (Strand A); the bulk of the financial resources is devoted to this strand; - contributing to the harmonious territorial integration across the EU (Strand B); - improve regional development and cohesion policies and techniques through transnational/interregional co-operation (Strand C); this is by far the smallest strand financially. The main challenge for the new phase of INTERREG is, therefore, to build on the positive experiences of genuine co-operation within current programmes and progressively develop structures for such co-operation across the European Union and with neighbouring countries. To achieve these goals, the development of co-operation under the INTERREG Initiative will be governed by the following principles: - joint cross-border/transnational strategy and development programme; - partnership and a "bottom up" approach; - complementarity with the "mainstream" of the Structural Funds; - a more integrated approach to the implementation of the Community Iniatives; - effective co-ordination between INTERREG and external EU policy instruments especially with a view to enlargement. In the course of 2000 the Commission will make appropriate proposals to further strengthen co-ordination between ERDF and PHARE, TACIS, MEDA, SAPARD and ISPA funding. In addition, the INTERREG Community Initiative shall be jointly financed by the Member States and the Community. The total contribution by the ERDF to INTERREG during the period 2000-2006 is fixed at EUR 4.875 million at 1999 prices. The Commission shall adopt financial allocations for each Member State. They shall ensure that between 50 and 80% of their total allocation is allocated to cross-border cooperation under Strand A. 6% of each Member State's indicative amount will be allocated to Strand C. For the period 2000-2002, for relevant non member countries participating in INTERREG, cooperation will be assisted by Phare-CBC, with up to EUR 480 million, as well as by Phare national programmes, ISPA and SAPARD, as appropriate. For TACIS and MEDA, allocations for coordinated activities will be determined in the course of the annual budgetary procedures, and in accordance with existing operational rules, with a view to maximising cross-border and trans-national cooperation across the Union's external borders.