

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

RELEX-029

Brussels, 13 May 2005

OPINION
of the
Committee of the Regions
of 14 April 2005
on the
**Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing an Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
(IPA)**
COM(2004) 627 final – 2004/0222 (CNS)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing an Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) (COM(2004) 627 final – 2004/0222 (CNS));

Having regard to the decision of the European Commission of 29 November 2004 to consult it on this matter, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

Having regard to the decision of its Bureau of 28 September 2004 to instruct the Commission for External Relations to draw up an opinion on this subject;

Having regard to the whole package revising the external aid framework adopted by the European Commission on 29 September 2004 including in addition to the instrument for pre-accession assistance: 1) Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (COM(2004) 628 final – COD 2004/219); 2) Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing a financing instrument for development cooperation and economic cooperation (COM(2004) 629 final); 3) Proposal for a Regulation of the Council establishing an Instrument for Stability (COM(2004) 630 final – CNS 2004/223);

Having regard to the decision by the European Council on 16-17 December 2004 to open negotiations with Turkey;

Having regard to the conclusions reached by the European Council in 17-18 June 2004, to the effect that Croatia is a candidate country for membership; to the presidency conclusions of the European Council of 16 and 17 December 2004 on opening accession negotiations with Croatia; and on the decision of the Council of the European Union of 16 March 2005 that the commencement of accession negotiations has been postponed until such time as full cooperation with the ICTY has been confirmed;

Having regard to its opinion on the financial perspectives: Communication from the European Commission Building our common Future - Policy challenges and Budgetary means of the Enlarged Union 2007-2013 COM(2004) 101 final, CdR 162/2004 fin, (Rapporteur: Cllr Sir Albert Bore, Birmingham City Council (UK, PES));

Having regard to the Resolution of the Committee of the Regions of 18 November 2004 on the opening of negotiations for Turkey's accession to the EU;

Having regard to its draft opinion (CdR 498/2004 rev. 1) adopted on 7 February 2005 by the Commission for External Relations (rapporteur: Ms Ruth Coleman, Leader of the North Wiltshire District Council (UK/ELDR));

- 1) **Whereas**, the draft regulation is dependent on an agreement between the Member States on the financial perspectives (see above);

adopted the following opinion at its 59th plenary session, held on 13 and 14 April 2005 (session of 14 April).

1. **The Committee of the Regions' views**

The Committee of the Regions

- 1.1 **welcomes** this Instrument as a response to the demands for more flexibility and simplicity in the system for pre-accession assistance and as an improved tool for bridging the gap between pre-accession and accession;
- 1.2 **recognises** that lessons have been learnt from earlier accession instruments and therefore welcomes the creation of a single framework for pre-accession assistance to Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries as a means of streamlining support and enhancing co-ordination between the different components of support;
- 1.3 **recognises** the difference between pre-accession aid and traditional development aid, in that pre-accession aid is (a) directed towards the goal of accession in the short or medium term and (b) intended to prepare countries for the time after accession. The overall objective of pre-accession assistance is progressive alignment with the standards and policies of the European Union;
- 1.4 **welcomes** the decision to offer pre-accession assistance both to Candidate Countries and Potential Candidate Countries: both groups to have access to the components:
 - Transitional Assistance and Institution Building
 - Regional and Cross-Border Cooperation;Candidate Countries to have access in addition to the components:
 - Regional Development
 - Human Resources Development
 - Rural Development;
- 1.5 **welcomes** the reduction in the number of budget lines covering pre-accession assistance as this will enable greater flexibility to meet the needs of Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries;

- 1.6 **believes** that the proposal that management of assistance to Candidate Countries may include decentralised management whereas assistance to Potential Candidates Countries will continue to be centrally managed is a balanced one;
- 1.7 **welcomes** the merge of the budget lines provided by DG Regio and DG Enlargement for cross-border cooperation. This will enable a more flexible system with one management authority;
- 1.8 **welcomes** the streamlining and improved coordination of pre-accession support to Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries and to the democratic institutions in those countries, including local and regional government.

2. **The Committee of the Regions' recommendations**

- 2.1 **highlights** the fact that the scope of the proposed assistance includes many areas in which local and regional government has experience and thus could take an important role, including:
- strengthening democratic institutions
 - economic reform
 - promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and enhanced respect for minority rights
 - the development of civil society
 - regional and cross-border cooperation;
- 2.2 **recommends** that local and regional government within the European Union should offer a wide range of expertise in the areas for assistance listed in paragraph 1.4 (above), which could be delivered for example by means of information exchange or technical assistance programmes or by assisting in conferences with the aim of familiarising local/regional government in the Candidate/Potential Candidate Countries with the Community acquis;
- 2.3 **urges** local and regional authorities to consider using the opportunity offered in Article 16 to participate in tenders and contracts for delivery of the programmes for assistance under this Instrument;

- 2.4 **suggests** conducting regular monitoring and evaluation of the IPA by the European Commission. Where regional and local matters are concerned, this should be in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions. This would improve the management of projects to cover the actual needs of both sides, the EU and candidate or potential candidate countries.

Brussels, 14 April 2005

The President
of the
Committee of the Regions

Secretary-General
of the
Committee of the Regions

Peter Straub

Gerhard Stahl
