

## Speech given by Michel Barnier (Brussels, 5 June 2000)

**Caption:** Speech by Michel Barnier, European Commissioner with special responsibility for regional policy and responsible, ad personam, for the intergovernmental conference on the sharing of responsibilities in the decentralised management of the structural funds (5 June 2000).

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## Speech given by Michel Barnier at the conference on the sharing of responsibilities for the decentralised management of the Structural Funds

Chairmen,  
Minister,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for accepting my invitation to help clarify the sharing of responsibilities for the monitoring, management, control and evaluation of operations cofinanced by the Structural Funds.

I hope that today's meeting will prove useful in providing information and explanations to the players directly responsible for implementing the programmes on the ground. I thank the representatives of the various authorities responsible for the management, payment and control and those responsible for the evaluation and monitoring of Objective 1 regions for coming to Brussels for this meeting.

Shortly, in the workshops, they will be able to question Commission officials, whom I thank for their involvement and their most professional preparations.

I hope that you will all go home with a clearer idea of the new regulatory framework adopted for the programming period 2000–2006 and of its implications for individual responsibilities and that you will pass this on to your regional and national partners.

The Commission hopes to repeat this event and propose other working meetings geared towards Objective 2 and Objective 3 regions.

### **I. Ensuring a balanced sharing of responsibilities so that every party may assume its responsibilities**

Some of you are already familiar with the new legal framework for the management of the Structural Funds; others have come here to point to certain ambiguities.

It is not my intention to go into detail here. Let me simply remind you that we are not starting from scratch, nor are we dismissing what has been achieved in terms of better management and partnership, with a view to improving control and evaluation. We want to identify our shortcomings and the ways in which we can tackle them together.

So let me just point out that I want to maintain a cooperative and preventative approach with the various states and regions. If, however, this approach does not produce adequate results, the Commission will assume its responsibilities under the new regulations.

The national or regional management and control systems are defined on a basis of subsidiarity. The Member States will also play a prime role in detecting irregularities and recovering appropriations in the most serious cases.

The Commission is, however, accountable for the effectiveness of the national systems. The Council regulation calls on it to ensure that the states assume their responsibilities. Where they do not so, the Commission must recover any undue payments on their behalf or urge them to do so by making financial adjustments in the event that they have not taken the measures required to avoid further irregularities.

The provisions specifying the framework within which the Commission proposes to exercise its new responsibilities have been set out in proposals for implementing regulations and guidelines, which were discussed in the advisory committees in which your national and regional specialists are represented. Their comments and your views today will be taken into consideration before draft implementing regulations pursuant to Article 53 of the General Regulation are submitted to the Commission. Your work today will, therefore, be doubly useful.

## **II. Constant partnership**

I hope to see the opening of a dialogue, an exchange of views between the various institutions and partners involved in the management of the Structural Funds. That is the purpose of the debate that will begin with a round table this morning.

Pursuant to Article 274 of the Treaty, the Commission implements the Community budget. The Commission, however, is not solely responsible for ensuring that the appropriations are used in accordance with the principles of sound financial management: this comes under the regulatory framework determined by the legislative authority, in particular the Council. We implement the budget under the control of the Court of Auditors and, ultimately, have to account for our management before the discharge authority, i.e. Parliament. The Commission entrusts all or part of the management to the Member States.

I am grateful to Mrs Ferreira, President-in-Office of the Council and Portuguese Minister for Planning, to Mrs Theato and to Mr Hatzidakis, respectively Chairman of the Committee on Budgetary Control and Chairman of the Committee on Regional Policy and Transport of the European Parliament, and to Mr Bernicot who is representing the Court of Auditors, for coming here to tell us at the start of this round table about the institutional context of the Commission's activities.

## **III. Ensuring sound and effective management in the interests of the beneficiaries of this policy**

It is in the interests of every one of us to have clear rules on the implementation, management, control, monitoring and evaluation of the Structural Funds and to have a common resolve to apply them.

This policy and these Funds will acquire greater legitimacy if we can explain to what use they have been put, if we can guarantee that they have been used effectively and properly.

They will acquire greater legitimacy if we can say that we have continued to ensure equal treatment throughout Europe, while respecting the different national and regional systems. The progress we have achieved in recent years, for instance in coordinating the exercise of financial control at Community and national level, shows that good and bad administration are no longer a question of geography. I will not let that idea take hold.

I have confidence in this policy, which, at EUR 30 billion a year, represents the second-largest EU budget. Statistics apart, this is one of the most specific and most widely appreciated policies in the regions. It is this capital in terms of confidence and sympathy that I want to preserve in the eyes of the general public, the media and our institutional partners. I want to preserve it and reinforce it for the new period that is beginning, during which this policy will no doubt be applied to new countries.

It is in that spirit that I envisage the implementation of the new framework established by the regulations on the Structural Funds for the programming period 2000–2006, adopted by the Council and by Parliament in spring 1999, and in particular the three aspects that we shall be considering today:

— sound management of the EUR 30 000 million a year: the Commission is responsible for this, but almost the entire amount is disbursed in the Member States;

— proper control: the Member States are responsible for the first level of financial control; the Commission has to trust them, but it also has to carry out checks;

— making the evaluation more operational: this evaluation exists, and we have to make greater use of it as an instrument for planning and for checking the results so as to enhance this entire policy.

I now give the floor to my interlocutors, beginning with the representatives of the three institutions, in the order set out in the Treaty: Parliament, the Council and the Court of Auditors. They will explain the salient points of their thinking about the respective roles of the Member States and the Union in the management of

the Structural Funds, so that we can discuss this among ourselves and with you.