

Brussels, 12 September 2007

## The Commission adopts a new Communication on the outermost regions

***The European Commission has reaffirmed the importance it attaches to the seven outermost regions of the Union (the Azores, Madeira, the four French overseas departments and the Canary Islands) by adopting today a Communication entitled "Strategy for the Outermost Regions: Achievements and Future Prospects". Presented by Danuta Hübner, the Member of the Commission responsible for regional policy, the document takes stock of the action taken since the previous Communication of 2004 and proposes new measures to secure the future of these regions.***

Danuta Hübner reiterated the fact that specific support measures for the outermost regions remain an overall priority of Community policies: *"We must always seek ways to offset or alleviate the permanent handicaps faced by the outermost regions. With this in mind, and as part of EU cohesion policy, I have acted to ensure that specific resources are allocated to them under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)".* More than €5.9 billion has been allocated to the outermost regions under the Structural Funds (ERDF and ESF) for the period 2007-2013, on top of the special allocation of €979 million agreed by the European Council of December 2005 to compensate for the additional costs linked to their geographical situation.

The Member of the Commission responsible for regional policy, who is in charge of coordinating all measures adopted in favour of these regions across the Commission, welcomed the progress made since 2004. As an example, she referred to the specific provisions adopted to reform the European sugar and banana markets.

Danuta Hübner hopes that the efforts embarked upon to improve coordination of action by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the outermost regions and by the European Development Fund (EDF) for their neighbours will bear fruit.

The Commission's intention in future is to fully involve these regions in the Lisbon Strategy and to develop the competitiveness of their economies. One idea is to encourage the creation of centres of excellence in research and innovation. Specific measures will be taken through the cohesion policy 2007-2013, and also through the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Research and Development Programme.

This Communication marks the opening of a debate with the European institutions, the Member States and all parties concerned by the future of these regions (grass roots players, representatives of associations, trade unions, academics and researchers etc.). The Commission will organise a consultation phase lasting until March 2008, based on discussion workshops. The main themes at the centre of discussion will be climate change, demographic trends and migration, agriculture, and the role of the outermost regions in the European Union's maritime policy.

## Background

The European Union has seven “outermost regions” belonging to three Member States (France, Spain and Portugal). They are the four French overseas departments (Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Réunion and Martinique), the Portuguese autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira, and the autonomous community of the Canary Islands.

The special status of these regions is laid down in Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty (introduced by the Treaty of Amsterdam), which mentions the handicaps facing them: their remoteness, insularity, small size, difficult topography and climate, and economic dependence on a few products.

All Community policies must include specific measures for the outermost regions. The Treaty makes particular mention of customs and trade policies, fiscal policy, agriculture and fisheries policies, State aids and regional policy.

Under the 2000-2006 cohesion policy, €7.7 billion was allocated to the outermost regions (this included ERDF, ESF and EAGGF assistance for agriculture and rural development, and FIFG assistance for fisheries). This was the highest contribution **per inhabitant** in the entire European Union.

For more information:

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.htm)