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PRESS RELEASE

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Overcoming division along the former Iron Curtain between Austria and the Czech Republic: EU invests more than €97 million to foster cross-border cooperation

The European Commission has today adopted the new cross-border cooperation programme ("Interreg") between Austria and the Czech Republic. The programme is worth more than €97 million from EU Regional funds. With national "co-financing" included, it will be worth more than €115 million in investments to tackle the most important cross border obstacles confronting the regions.

The programme's main focus is on the environment: especially on biodiversity, on the preservation of the common natural and cultural heritage and on environmental innovation. Due to the restrictions that once characterised the former "Iron Curtain", the green belt along this border has kept its original character and remained a very valuable landscape. It will be carefully developed further to maintain this rich environmental and cultural diversity for future generations.

The new EU supported cooperation programme will also will help develop cross-border education schemes for example through language learning. This will be complemented by investments in research and development, in particular through support for technology transfer activities. Furthermore, regional and local initiatives to foster closer legal and administrative cooperation will be financed by the programme to create a better integrated border region.

European Commissioner for Regional Policy Corinne Crețu, who approved the programme today, said: *"This programme will make an important contribution to overcoming some of the disparities and divisions which still exist today for people living in these Czech and Austrian border regions. Our cross border projects are for many the most visible manifestation of how the EU is bringing communities and regions together to tackle common challenges and in some cases to also help heal historical divisions. This is a part of Europe once divided by the so called Iron Curtain. But thanks to this cross border programme, active cooperation can bring many concrete advantages to people living here : in terms of new jobs, boosting research and innovation, preservation of the marvellous natural heritage, and finding cutting edge technologies that improve people's lives and offer new areas for regional growth."*

She added: "I am happy to see that Austria and the Czech Republic have chosen an approach which will develop this border region in a sustainable and environmentally-friendly way. Preserving the natural areas along the border and carefully using their potential for economic development is an important step into the right direction."

The overall programme budget amounts to €115,134,884 with a contribution from the European Regional Development Fund of €97,814,933.

Background

The area covered by this programme "Interreg V-A Austria-Czech Republic" comprises the Czech regions Jihočeský kraj, Kraj Vysočina and Jihomoravský kraj, and the Austrian sub-regions Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen, Sankt Pölten, Waldviertel, Weinviertel, Wiener Umland-Nordteil, Innviertel, Linz-Wels, Mühlviertel, Steyr-Kirchdorf as well as the city region of Wien. Around 6.3 million people live in this border region.

The funding breakdown of the four priorities of the programme and some expected results are:

1. Environment and resources (EU-funding: 45.4 million euro or 46% of the total EU programme budget). This priority is primarily targeted at the conservation, promotion and development of natural and cultural heritage. It will also support projects which aim to protect biodiversity and to test and develop new environmental technologies. Among the results: Better developed and more attractive destinations for sustainable tourism, better protected habitats, increase in eco-innovation applications.
2. Human resource development (EU-funding: 13.7 million euro). This priority focuses on the provision of joint education and qualification activities. Among the results: more cross-border education schemes for inhabitants of the border region, including language and inter-cultural training, increased human resource potential for local SME.
3. Strengthening research, technological development and innovation (EU-funding: 12.5 million euro). This priority addresses in particular innovation networks and the inclusion of SME into innovation processes. Among the results: Increased R&I quota, increased number of researchers and RI institutions cooperating with each other, higher number of SME benefitting from cross-border research.
4. Sustainable networks and institutional cooperation: (EU-funding: 20.4 million euro). Among the results: better coordination of public services, increased intercultural understanding. Small civil society cooperation projects can also receive funding under this priority.

An additional 5.9 million euro (EU-funding) will be provided for technical assistance.

The EU-funding of 97,8 million euro will be complemented by 17,3 million euro co-financing from national sources. The total volume of the programme is 115,1 million euro.

More information:

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