
PRESS RELEASE

CIP: FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMPETITIVENESS AND INNOVATION

During today's half-day seminar organised by *Forum Malta fl-Ewropa* it has been acknowledged that the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) aims to encourage the competitiveness of European enterprises, supporting innovation while encouraging the use of information and communications technologies, promote the increased use of renewable energies and energy efficiency, as well as provide better financial accessibility to small and medium-sized enterprises. Participants were encouraged to address the right approach towards better participation on an EU dimension while tapping funds allotted under CIP.

The CIP budget totals €3.2billion for the period 2007-2013 and is structured around three operational pillars: Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (€2.166billion), ICT Policy Support Programme (€728million) and Intelligent Energy Programme (€727million).

In his opening address, Minister for Competitiveness and Communications, Hon. Censu Galea stressed that funding has been given priority to the extent that following discussions with the EU, it was established that Malta should be assigned an Objective One status, which resulted in Malta being allotted €850 million for the financial period 2007-2013. Minister Galea said that CIP calls for action to further growth and competitiveness and to make Europe a more attractive place in for investment. He said that CIP should be more favourable and user-friendly for Small States such as Malta so as to ensure the best use of this opportunity by entrepreneurs. Minister Galea appealed to the Commission to look into the “simplification of Procedures for Small portfolios without reducing those securities that such funds require”, while calling on the local financial institutions to be proactive and locate niche markets where together with Government or its agencies they can utilize these financial opportunities for the success of CIP locally. Minister Galea urged the SME sector and the General Public to tap these funds and make good use of them.

Today's seminar saw each of the CIPs three operational pillars being discussed at length by three distinct speakers.

Vilmos Budavari, from the European Commission's Directorate General for Enterprise and Industry, gave a brief overview of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme. Mr Budavari reiterated that this programme aims at supporting financial accessibility for the start-up and growth of SMEs in particular for young entrepreneurs, while ensuring the strengthening of SME cooperation. SMEs are financed at every stage of their lifecycle, from start up, to expansion and business transfer. Vilmos Budavari said that the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme supports investments in technological development, and initiatives which invoke entrepreneurship and innovation in particular eco-innovation through innovative products, processes and services which aim at reducing environmental impacts, preventing pollution or achieving a more efficient and responsible use of natural resources, as well as private-public innovation partnerships.

Mr Budavari further expanded on the differences between the Multiannual Programme for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship (MAP) which ran between 2000 and 2006, and the CIP, outlining the financial benefits which CIP has given to SMEs, in particular because it aims to help enterprises innovate by providing access to finance, sharing risks and reward with private equity investors and providing counter or co-guarantees to national guarantee schemes.

Mr Bernard Agius, Policy Coordinator from the Information Society Secretariat (MIIT) explained to participants the requirements which have to be met for the first call for proposals of the ICT Policy Support Programme. This programme aims at testing solutions to the bottlenecks that delay wide European deployment of electronic services and supports the modernisation of public sector services that enhance services while increasing productivity. In a detailed explanation, Mr Agius outlined the three complimentary instruments to which all legal entities established in EU Member States may apply for. The opening of this first call follows the adoption of the Work Programme for 2007 by the Commission and the call's deadline is the 23 October 2007.

The Intelligent Energy Europe (IEE) Programme encourages the wider uptake of sustainably renewable energies such as the use of biomass, solar and geothermal heating in buildings and industry at large, and to foster energy efficiency while maintaining competitive energy prices in the EU and inducing best practice. Dott. Daniele Fantechi, from Open Source (Coopen) Ltd, discussed at length the opportunities available for grants to SMEs under this funding programme for improving energy efficiency and fostering compliance with the EU energy regulatory framework. The Budget for this year's IEE Programme is of €52 million with the expected number of grants for projects for this year being 65, while it is expected that there are 12 grants for their creation of energy agencies. Dott. Fantechi encouraged participants to apply for grants under the IEE programme. The deadline for submissions of applications is the 28 September 2007.

Feedback from the floor clearly indicated the need for more EU funding programmes' awareness. *Forum Malta fl-Ewropa* has taken up this challenge with another seminar on EU funding opportunities for the education and training sector being organised on the 10th of July. Dr Gabriella Pace, *Forum Malta fl-Ewropa*'s Chief Executive, explained that today's Conference was only one of a series of EU Funding-related initiatives which Forum has lined up for the coming weeks and months. Dr Pace also referred to '*Funding 4 yEU*', the new e-bulletin launched recently by *Forum Malta fl-Ewropa*, which focuses exclusively on EU funding. Through this new e-Bulletin, EU funding-related information is provided in a simple reader-friendly manner. It also includes experiences of Maltese individuals or organisations that have benefitted from EU funding. In its Workplan, *Forum* is giving a lot of importance to the dissemination of these funding experiences from Malta, in the conviction that they are of great interest and use to potential applicants.