

European programmes bring economic benefits to Northern Ireland - Wilson

Finance Minister Sammy Wilson today launched a major initiative to encourage greater Northern Ireland participation in European co-operation programmes.

The Minister was speaking at the, 'Making European Co-operation a Reality' Conference, in the Ramada Hotel, Belfast to highlight Northern Ireland's recent success in working in partnership with other EU regional organisations.

He said: **"The EU INTERREG IVB Transnational and Interregional Programmes encourage regions across different Member States to form partnerships to work together to share experiences, to learn from each other and develop approaches to common economic and social problems.**

"Involvement in these programmes has real economic benefits for Northern Ireland. They involve working with partners from across Europe on economic, urban, rural, environmental, and spatial issues among others.

"I am greatly encouraged that, for the 2007-13 funding period, Northern Ireland is already participating in 22 successful project partnerships and is working with partners from 12 EU Member States and other European Countries including Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland."

Mr Wilson continued: **"All too often we sell ourselves short as a region but these programmes represent a significant achievement. These projects are in a whole variety of fields from innovation to environmental protection. We are not only learning from our European counterparts, but also sharing our own experiences on tackling common issues. In many cases, European regions are specifically seeking partners from Northern Ireland to take advantage of our experience."**

Improving participation in these programmes has been a key action in the Executive's response to the European Commission's Taskforce for Northern Ireland as part of the Executive's commitment to deepen engagement across Europe. The Minister encouraged others to become involved and take advantage of the opportunities available in these programmes and partnerships.

He concluded: **"We are now entering a crucial period. Over the next 18 months the remaining monies for these programmes in the 2007-13 period will be allocated.**

"Now is the time to get involved. There is a lot of advice available and my simple message is to take advantage of it and to take the step to put your own ideas forward. My department and the Special EU Programmes Body will continue to help local organisations search for project partners and take the next steps. With a renewed effort, I have no doubt that we can double our number of these successful projects."

Notes to editors:

1. Northern Ireland is eligible for funding under three programmes of the transnational strand within INTERREG IV, the North West Europe (NWE), Atlantic Area (AA), and Northern Periphery (NPP) programmes, as well as the Interregional programme (INTERREG IVC). Each of the programmes has a different focus and covers a different geographical area within Europe. Funds are awarded competitively on a project by project basis.
2. Photos available on request from DFP Communications Office on 028 9052 7378.
3. Media enquiries to DFP Communications Office on 028 9052 7378. Out of office hours please contact the Duty Press Officer via pager number 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.