

Transparency drive extends to EU structural funds

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The EU's current transparency drive challenges national governments with the new requirement to fully disclose information on recipients of EU structural funds. If the European Commission has its way, Member States will be asked to publish detailed data on the recipients, projects and amounts of structural aid cash they receive from the EU.

Unless applicants of EU aid agree to provide full openness, they risk losing their funding eligibility.

The latest demands on Member States is part of Brussels' current transparency drive, known as the European Transparency Initiative (ETI). Initially, organisations such as EPHA hoped that the ETI would bring a substantial review of transparency in Brussels and introduce mandatory reporting requirements, but the Green Paper published in May 2006 has seen effective transparency measures significantly watered down.

The structural funds currently in question are mainly used for regional policy, designed to boost infrastructure, job creation, local development and small firms' competitiveness in relatively poor regions of the EU. Such funds amount to about a third of the EU's budget, which will hit €864.4 billion over the 2007-2013 period.

Within this EU budget, the Common Agricultural Policy is by far the largest item, representing about 44% of the EU's budget. In July 2006, Commission Vice-President Siim Kallas and Agriculture and Rural Development Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel pledged their support for more transparency in the Common Agricultural Policy. The farm subsidy campaign is being pursued by NGO farmsubsidy.org, whose purpose is to publish data about farm subsidy payments obtained through freedom of information requests.

Several member states, such as the UK and the Netherlands, have already made information on EU agricultural handouts available, with some surprising and occasionally shocking results. According to the EUobserver end-beneficiaries include large European agro-giants as well as UK royals.

But states like Germany say data protection rules prohibit it from following the same route, with Berlin also expected to resist the latest transparency initiative.

See: <http://admin.corisweb.org/index.php?fuseaction=news.view&id=122332&src=dcn>