

**Annual Press Conference 2007****Briefing Note No 14****The Bank promoting European objectives**

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Transparency, Public Information and Relations with Civil Society**Public Disclosure of Information**

The EIB considers openness and transparency on how it makes decisions, works and implements EU policies crucial to strengthen its credibility and accountability towards European citizens and citizens affected by its operations elsewhere.

Public disclosure of information is a key reference for implementing the Bank's commitment to transparency. On 28 March 2006, the EIB Board of Directors approved a revised Public Disclosure Policy, bringing the Bank's public information policy from 2002 in line with its own transparency standards and taking account of European policy initiatives and international principles. To allow interested stakeholders to contribute to the policy review a public consultation was held, the Bank's first-ever. The process ran through two rounds and generated substantial stakeholder input. The Bank adopted a very flexible approach in terms of timetable and procedures to allow as full a consultation as possible. The results were positively received both by contributors and the Bank itself. A Consultation Report was published, outlining how the consultation was conducted and bringing together all stakeholder submissions and the Bank's reasoned positions on the extent in which these were taken into account.

The new disclosure policy is based on a presumption of disclosure, which means that all information held by the Bank is subject to disclosure on request, unless there is a compelling reason for non-disclosure. As the EIB operates as a bank, there are certain constraints on the information that it can disclose which are set out in the policy. Formal reviews of the policy will take place every three years. In addition, the Bank will review the policy from a legal perspective in the first half of 2007 to apply the provisions of the Aarhus Regulation on the application to EU institutions and bodies of the provisions of the Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters.

Key to public access to information are the Bank's website, with up to 3 million visitors in 2006, and the EIB Infodesk, which handled around 30 000 requests for information from a multitude of stakeholder groups.

The Bank will also launch a public consultation on a review of its Anti-Fraud Policy, which was announced on the EIB website in November 2006 and will run in 2007. The consultation will focus on the Bank's existing policy and guidelines on combating corruption, fraud, money laundering and the financing of terrorism and the procedures for the conduct of investigations.

Relations with civil society organisations

The Bank's relationship with civil society organizations (CSOs), including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other interest groups, is based on the acknowledgment that these organisations can have a valuable input in the development of EIB activities. They can also contribute to the Bank's awareness of local issues and provide useful information on projects.

A Civil Society Unit within the Communication Department coordinates the Bank's contacts with NGOs and other interest groups. As the EIB's interface with these organisations, its task is to ensure consistency and quality of communication and to engage with civil society in an active way. The Bank increasingly seeks closer contacts with organisations which can help the public and, more specifically, citizens affected by EIB operations, finding their way to information about the Bank. Inside the Bank, the Unit provides coordination on civil society contacts and issues. The Unit also runs, together with the Human Resources Department and external experts, in-house awareness and capacity building programmes on the Bank's interaction with civil society to build and improve the knowledge base and commitment among staff for communication with civil society representatives.

The current interaction with CSOs is characterised by new ways of engagement. First of all, the Bank started partnering with expert organisations, which share particular objectives with it, such as the EU's Lisbon agenda, sustainable development, environmental protection, or poverty alleviation. Another key development contributing to the quality of relations with CSOs is the Bank's new practice of public consultation on selected policies, strategies or guidelines.

A first example of the Bank's cooperative relationship with expert CSOs is a Memorandum of Understanding that it signed, in September 2006, with IUCN (The World Conservation Union) on biodiversity issues. The agreement provides a framework for joint initiatives and collaboration on matters related to biodiversity aspect of EIB activities, with IUCN providing expert advice on the Bank's initiatives, policies and strategies, such as reviews of guidelines on due diligence or assistance to monitor aspects of EIB-financed projects. IUCN is also assisting in the Bank's in-house training and awareness building on biodiversity issues. The Bank is exploring other opportunities with CSOs for cooperation based on expertise and pragmatism.

While the Bank will further pursue such targeted working relations, it is also keen on sustaining and improving its contacts with critical policy advocacy NGOs campaigning on the Bank's activities. Contacts with these organisations have increased over the last years and developed a dialogue component. This is underscored by the Bank's participation in events that these organisations organised on EIB related issues, such as a conference on an independent compliance and appeal mechanism for the Bank that CEE Bankwatch Network and other NGOs held in Brussels (November 2006).

As part of its regular Workshops for NGOs and other CSOs, the Bank held two Workshops in 2006. As usual, EIB and interested CSOs together set the agenda and provide speakers. The Spring Workshop in Brussels tackled R&D and Innovation in the framework of the Lisbon process; human capital formation; and the role of civil society in the Bank's project cycle. The Autumn Workshop in Berlin addressed issues pertaining to the triangle environment - climate change - energy. Corporate responsibility was also part of the agenda. The Workshops also provide CSOs an opportunity to arrange side events with EIB staff on bilateral issues, notably projects.

In 2006, the Bank received over 100 enquiries and requests for disclosure of information from NGOs which, because of the complexity of their content or association with activities of other parties, required a certain level of coordination within the Bank or with external parties, in particular project promoters and borrowers, the European Commission and other international financing institutions. A third of these covered road transport projects, the majority relating to schemes in the New Member States and Accessions Countries (*please note that a number of projects and issues attracted more than one enquiry or request*). Attention was also focused on port infrastructure (Spain), urban transport and waste incineration (Bulgaria), flood damage reconstruction schemes (Poland), and the activities of JASPERS (Joint Assistance in Supporting Projects in European Regions – a new project preparation facility set up by the EIB together with the European Commission and the EBRD). Another considerable number of letters related to disclosure of information.

For further information on the EIB, visit its website www.eib.org.

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