



## **Transparency, Public Information and Relations with Civil Society**

### **Transparency**

Transparency is an important element of the corporate responsibility of the EIB. A high level of transparency is part of the Bank's mission to contribute to the policy objectives of the European Union. As a public body, the EIB considers the transparency of how it makes decisions, works and implements EU policies to be crucial to strengthening its accountability and credibility towards European citizens and citizens elsewhere affected by its operations. Transparency also contributes to increasing the efficiency and sustainability of the Bank's operations.

### **Public disclosure of information**

Public disclosure of information is an important benchmark for implementing the Bank's commitment to transparency. The EIB website is the main platform for actively disseminating information to the public, with some 4 million visitors in 2008. The "EIB InfoDesk" provides a first contact point at the Bank for the public at large. In 2008, the InfoDesk received some 25 500 *eligible* e-mails, originating total activity of 17 500 exchanges (a 40% increase compared to the previous year).

The Bank's communication with the public is subject to the "EIB Public Disclosure Policy" (2006). This is based on a presumption of disclosure unless there is a compelling reason for non-disclosure. The Bank has committed itself to formal reviews of the Public Disclosure Policy every three years. Consequently, in 2009 the policy will be reviewed and include a public consultation as part of one large consultation process, with interconnected elements, also covering a review of the Transparency Policy and the Complaints Mechanism Policy.

Every year, the Bank publishes an evaluation of the implementation of the Public Disclosure Policy. The 2008 edition will be available in March/April.

### **Public consultation**

The Bank conducts public consultation on selected corporate and important multi-sector policies which are typically of interest to all EIB stakeholders. The main objectives of a consultation are to generate valuable stakeholder contributions and to reinforce transparency and accountability. As a general rule, these web-based consultations include two rounds of respectively 45 and 20 working days and in principle go together with public meetings with a view to facilitating a direct (face-to-face) dialogue with interested stakeholders. Stakeholder contributions are examined and evaluated by an EIB Review Panel. After approval by the Management Committee, the final draft policy is published for information on the EIB website 15 working days prior to Board consideration, together with a Public Consultation Report. The report outlines how the consultation was conducted and brings together all stakeholder submissions and the Bank's reasoned positions on the extent to which these were taken into account. After Board approval, the policy is published on the EIB website and, if appropriate, in the Official Journal of the European Union. In 2008, a public consultation was held on the "EIB Statement of Environmental and Social Principles and Standards". The constructive contribution towards this consultation of civil society organisations (CSOs), in particular the NGOs traditionally scrutinising the Bank, was very much appreciated by the Bank.

In addition to formal public consultation, simplified web-based consultation or informal stakeholder meetings on other selected policy documents may be held, depending on the type and content of the document in question.

## Interaction with civil society

### *EU institutions and bodies*

At EU level, an intensive dialogue further contributed to the constructive and deepened relationship between the EIB and the European Parliament. EIB President Philippe Maystadt traditionally presents the EIB Group's strategy and activities before several parliamentary committees such as the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and the Committee on Budgetary Control. The President also participated in the plenary discussion on the European Parliament's report on the EIB Group's 2007 activities. At staff level numerous contacts on a large number of issues took place during the year not only with the parliamentary committees, but also with individual Members of Parliament. The very strong increase in visibility produced by the Bank's involvement in the EU response to the current economic difficulties gave rise to an equivalent increase in the number of enquiries from MEPs and in the Parliament's general interest in the EIB.

The Bank also maintained a regular and open dialogue with the European Economic and Social Committee. As is traditional, the President was invited by the President of its Economic and Monetary Section to give a general presentation and have a broad exchange of views on the Bank's 2007 activities. Furthermore a meeting at the Committee was organised for presenting the EIB's activities in the field of micro-credit financing to the Internal Market Committee. As to the Committee of the Regions, the Bank participated in the annual "Open Days" organised by the Committee in close cooperation with DG REGIO.

The Bank and the European Ombudsman (EO), who investigates complaints from citizens or associations about maladministration in the EU institutions and bodies, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Autumn 2008 to improve stakeholders' protection from any possible maladministration as regards the activities of the EIB. This MoU clearly builds on the good cooperation already existing between the EIB and the EO regarding the Ombudsman's inquiries into the activities of the EIB. As a result of this agreement it was also agreed between both institutions to meet at least once a year to review and discuss the practical implementation of the MoU.

### *Civil Society Organisations*

The Bank's relationship with CSOs, including Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other interest groups, is based on the acknowledgment that these organisations can have a valuable input into its policy development. They can also contribute to the Bank's awareness of local issues and provide other useful information contributing to the quality of EIB-financed projects.

Interaction with CSOs is coordinated at the corporate level by the Civil Society Unit within the Communication Department. Acting as an interface with CSOs, its task is to ensure the consistency and quality of communication and to engage with civil society in an active way. The Unit seeks contacts with organisations which can help the public and, more specifically, citizens affected by EIB operations, to find their way to information about the Bank. Inside the Bank, the Unit provides advice on civil society contacts and issues. It 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 in order to build and improve the knowledge base and commitment among staff for communication with civil society representatives.

As part of its ongoing dialogue with civil society, the EIB organises regular workshops with CSOs. The Spring CSO Workshop (Brussels, June), chaired by Vice-President Philippe de Fontaine Vive, focused on climate change issues. The Autumn Workshop on road transport, which was due to be held in Bucharest in November, was postponed to the first half of 2009, due to a lack of participants. Another key event was the Annual CSO Briefing in Brussels on 29 February, at which Vice-President de Fontaine Vice presented the first results of the previous year to Brussels-based CSOs. The Annual CSO Briefing is held back-to-back with the Bank's Annual Press Conference.

The Bank engages in dialogue and cooperative partnerships with specialist organisations which share particular objectives or interests with the EIB, such as the Lisbon agenda, sustainable development, environmental protection, or poverty alleviation. In 2008, the Bank pursued its cooperative relationship with Transparency International and IUCN. Furthermore, the EIB also announced its support for, and endorsement of, the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI).

While the Bank will further pursue targeted working relations with expert CSOs, it is also keen to sustain and improve its contacts with policy advocacy NGOs campaigning on the Bank's activities. Contacts with these organisations have increased over the last few years and have increasingly developed a dialogue component. The importance attached to these contacts was underscored by the Bank's participation in events organised by these NGOs in 2008, such as three conferences on the Bank's role in developing countries, in particular in Africa, and on its appeal mechanisms. The Bank itself organised several roundtable discussions with the same NGOs on specific issues such as the MoU between the Bank and the European Commission on the EIB External Mandates (June and November), Nuclear and Renewable Energies (July), Human Rights (July) or Solid Waste (September).

At the project level, the Bank continued to engage and work together with CSOs and citizens' groups, for instance on a number of environmental and water projects in the Mediterranean region and in Sub-Saharan Africa, where Technical Assistance funds are used to build closer links to civil society.

For further information on the EIB, visit its website [www.eib.org](http://www.eib.org).

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