

A fresh start for "LIFE+"

EU makes available 2.1 billion euros until 2013 to support environmental protection projects

The funding of nature conservation and environmental protection projects by the European Commission can commence: On Tuesday, upon publication in the Official Journal of the European Union the "LIFE+" Programme will be put into place. The programme will have a financial volume of 2.1 billion euros and it will run until 2013.

After successful conclusion of the negotiations under the chair of Federal Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel, the programme received unanimous approval in the Council and a vast approval in the European Parliament at the end of May. The rapporteur of the European Parliament, Marie Anne Isler-Béguin, expressly thanked Minister Gabriel for the work and wise conduct of the negotiations by Germany.

"The vast support of the result of our negotiations shows that there is universal agreement across Europe on the importance of this programme. Moreover, the focus given to the LIFE+ programme also demonstrates that the EU is serious about advancing environmental policy as a driving force for innovation and employment", Minister Gabriel noted at the end of the negotiations.

It is now possible for the first funding round to start in 2007. Delays in the negotiations had led to an involuntary disruption of EU funding of environment projects in 2006. Therefore all stakeholders had hoped for a rapid end of the negotiations and a swift start of the programme.

LIFE+ is the only funding programme of the EU geared towards EU environmental objectives. 2.1 billion euros have been made available to this end until 2013 and 78% of this sum are earmarked for projects in member states. Measures which contribute to halting the loss of biological diversity by 2010 are particularly eligible to support by the programme. Hence half of the project funds are allocated to nature conservation projects. Pilot projects for the introduction of innovative environmental technologies are also funded under the programme.

As was the case with the preceding instruments, the European Commission is responsible for the set-up of the programme. However, in the annual project selection the Commission now has to observe a balanced distribution of funds among the member states. The volume of funds to be allocated is calculated on the basis of the population size and the total surface area of "Natura 2000" sites of a given member state. According to this distribution key Germany is entitled to an amount of 22 million euros for its projects in 2007. This amount will rise to a total of 33 million euros in 2013.

The European Commission is expected to publish draft application documents and application guidelines on its homepage at the end of July (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life>). The first round of project applications will take place in September.

