

## IFI Advisory Group – Plenary Session

23 January 2008

### Conclusions

On January 23, 2008 the IFI Advisory Group (IFI-AG) held its second plenary session. The objective of the meeting was to take stock of the first 10 months of operation of the Advisory Group and hold strategic discussions on the AG priorities and plans for 2008. The group is fully operational and has held four working group meetings since its inception in March 2007. The work of the IFI AG was also welcomed at the IFI – IPA Coordination Days in December 2007.

The following conclusions were reached:

- Participants welcomed the progress achieved by the IFI AG on the priorities agreed at the first plenary session in March 2007, including the creation of four working groups in the area of transport, energy, environment and social sectors.
- The chairpersons of the working groups reported to the plenary session on the main conclusions of the first working groups and illustrated the immediate priorities on which the groups will focus in 2008. Participants agreed that extension to new topics, including social issues, is useful. They confirmed the need for the working groups to meet again before the summer and that future meetings should be organized on a regular basis. It was, however, agreed that a more intensified collaboration and a regular exchange of information should take place via a network system of the experts participating in the group. A draft work programme for each group will be finalized and distributed to participants for confirmation in early February.
- Participants supported the idea that the Joint Office help to establish a network of experts within the sectoral working group of the IFI AG on the identified priority issues, as well as a database of relevant programmes and projects reference for each of these areas. This will facilitate ongoing exchanges among IFI AG members under the coordination of the EC (DG ELARG).
- The meeting also confirmed that the IFI AG should focus on improving coordination at two levels:
  - Country and regional level: the IFI AG should regularly review the progress achieved by Commission and IFIs offices on the ground, providing orientations for future activities and cooperation between the Commission and IFIs.
  - Headquarters level: efforts should be made to support EU/regional policy agendas. In this context, the Group confirmed its support to all relevant regional sectoral organizations and initiatives.
- The discussions confirmed the need for the group to continue monitor the macroeconomic developments in the region, including public finance related issues, and to continue exchanging views and opinions on how these can impact IFI interventions in the region. In this respect, unemployment and labour markets issues should be followed as well.
- Participants provided an overview of their ongoing and planned activities in the region. In this respect, the three-strand approach agreed by the Commission and IFIs aiming at focusing cooperation in the area of private sector development, energy efficiency and infrastructures (in the transport, energy environment and social sectors) was reconfirmed.

- It was agreed that cooperation among IFIs in Pre-Accession countries should take place with strong link to EU strategies and priorities. It is fundamental to ensure common drive towards promotion of EU standards, and in particular for investments the respect of EU procurement and environmental standards to support convergence of PreAccession countries towards the EU, as well as to jointly ensure the economic and financial viability of investments.
- The Commission provided an update on its main facilities, EFSE, the EEFF and the Infrastructure Projects Facility (IPF). The Concept Paper on the IPF agreed in November 2007 by the Commission, the EIB, the EBRD and the CEB was distributed to participants. Concerning the IPF, the IFIs welcomed the update provided by the Commission and expressed support for the new facility. All IFIs expressed interest in participating in the IPF under the conditions spelled out in the concept paper.
- Participants held a brainstorming session on the future priorities and methodologies of work of the IFI AG. They converged on the need for the Group to continue holding plenary sessions at least twice a year. The Working Groups should intensify their thematic work on issues of common concern. To this aim, participants, supported the idea of focusing the work plan of the Group in 2008 on the following priorities:
  - each working group should focus its work on a limited number of well focused priorities;
  - the IFI AG should concentrate on cross-cutting strategic and methodological issues of relevance to all sectors (e.g. reforms agendas and prioritization of interventions, governance and public procurement mechanisms, delivery of services at the local level)

Adequate pre-work and focus on operational discussions leading to tangible outcomes in improved cooperation are considered important. In addition, there should be a clear link between IFI AG working groups and existing committees establishing project priorities (e.g. SEETO, Energy Community for SEE, Danube and Black Sea task force).

- It was also underlined that on the priority issues, exchange of experiences and of best practices should be pursued both within the sectoral groups and within the IFI AG. This is, inter alia, in line with the participants' expressed need to establish a better mapping of IFI activities in the region. The data collection exercise carried out by the EC-WB Joint Office for SEE, should prove useful in this respect. Participants were therefore encouraged to provide the necessary information to the JO.
- Participants agreed to convene the next IFI AG Plenary session in June and December 2008.