

EUROCHAMBRES' Atlas of Regional Competitiveness highlights "little Chinas" in Europe

We tend to admire and sometimes feel disconcerted by the growth rates of developing economies, such as China or India. But a closer look at the economic performance of EU regions shows that growth rates in parts of Europe are in fact comparable to those of the most dynamic global economies. In other words, there are several "little Chinas" very close to us.

This phenomenon is revealed by the second edition of EUROCHAMBRES' 'Atlas of Regional Competitiveness', a study comparing the performance of the 268 European regions (NUTS2 classification) in relation to a number of key indicators: GDP, employment, education, innovation and transport. This year, the Atlas focuses on the regions which have made the best progression in comparison to the first edition of the study.

Pierre Simon, President of EUROCHAMBRES – who officially presented the Atlas during the opening of the Investors' Café in the frame of the Open Days at the Committee of the Regions – said: *"You sometimes don't need to look far to find outstanding examples of economic development. An example: in 2005, Bratislava region, in Slovakia showed the fastest growth, with a 15% increase in GDP. An impressive result, considering that China's performance for the same year was "only" 10%!"*

The Bratislava case is not an isolated one. Other regions, mainly in new Member States such as Romania, Latvia or Bulgaria, display a growth rate above 10% for the reference year. And remarkable results can be found for other indicators as well.

Employment: Berkshire (UK) best result; Severozapaden (BG) best progression

The British region of Berkshire, Bucks and Oxfordshire tops the ranking for this indicator, confirming last year's results, with a 78.7% employment rate in 2006. But the Bulgarian region of Severozapaden experiences the highest increase, with +4.1% (the EU average was +0.9%). Cumbria (UK) witnesses the greatest setback, yet the two regions are not comparable as Cumbria had an employment rate of 72.3% in 2006, and Severozapaden 53.5%.

Education: Brabant Wallon (BE) best result; Corsica (FR) best progression

The province of Brabant Wallon in Belgium ranks again first in educational attainment with 45.5% of the population aged 25-64 having completed tertiary education (ISCED 5-6). Corsica (France) shows the highest increase, with +15 points. As far as lifelong learning is concerned the EU27 average decreases to 9.1% in 2006, moving away from its 2010 target of 12.5%. Denmark, Aland (Finland) and Sydsverige (Sweden) have the highest participation rates, each above 20%. In Yuzhentsentralen (Bulgaria), the participation rate is below 1%.

Innovation: Oberbayern (DE) highest number of patent applications

The number of patent applications filed with the European Patent Office is a good indicator of a region's innovative dynamism. The results for 2005 show again the strong domination of EU15 regions in this respect. Oberbayern in Germany becomes n°1 region for number of patent application per million inhabitants (1131.25). Nevertheless the EU's expenditure in Research & Development is still well below target (1.84% against 3% foreseen by the Lisbon Agenda).

In the light of these findings, Mr Simon said: *"Although the Atlas mainly places the emphasis on successful regions, we must not forget that the economic performance of some other regions is still unsatisfactory, and that the gap between the richest and the poorest regions is still wide. Nevertheless, the Atlas teaches us that we must not slow down our efforts. Some European regions have already found a way to meet the Lisbon competitiveness targets: we should pay greater attention to their performances and learn from their experience."*

The full "Atlas of Regional Competitiveness" can be downloaded from www.eurochambres.eu/content/default.asp?PageID=1&DocID=1300

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