

Extract from the White Paper on the reform of the Commission (5 April 2000)

Caption: On 5 April 2000, a White Paper detailing the programme for reform of the Commission is published.

Source: Commission of the European Communities. Reforming the Commission. A White Paper - Part I, COM(2000) 200 final/2. Volume I. Brussels: 05.04.2000. 48 p.

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Reforming the Commission

[...]

I. Meeting the challenge

The Role of the Commission

The Treaty of Rome assigned a special role and responsibility to the European Commission in the newly created European Community. It was established to act impartially in the interests of the European Community as a whole and to act as guardian of the founding Treaties, notably by exercising its right of legislative initiative; controlling Member States' respect of Community law; negotiating commercial agreements on behalf of the Community; implementing the common policies and ensuring that competition in the Community was not distorted.

Since then much has changed. The Community of six Member States has become a Union of fifteen, with further enlargement on the horizon. The Commission has been an engine of change in the transformation from customs union to economic and then political union. Its achievements have been substantial, providing much-needed vision in the move towards a European integration which serves the interests of the Union and meets the aspirations of its citizens. In addition to the important economic landmarks of a single market and now a common currency, it has laid the foundations for a cohesive Europe built on solidarity between its people and its regions. Along the way, many managerial tasks have been attributed to the Commission by the Council and the European Parliament. The societies and economies of the European Union have themselves changed significantly.

One thing is constant. A strong, independent and effective Commission is essential to the functioning of the European Union as a whole and its standing in the world. Fulfilling the tasks established by the Treaties requires substantial improvement in structures and in systems. Working practices, conventions and obligations that have accumulated over decades now inhibit the Commission's effectiveness. Administrative Reform will help the Commission to fulfil its institutional role as the motor of European integration. It is thus a political project of central importance for the European Union.

The Prodi Commission has made the strategic decision to focus more on core functions such as policy conception, political initiative and enforcing Community law. This approach implies building new forms of partnership between the different levels of governance in Europe and should allow the Commission to better reach its key policy objectives set for the period 2000–2005:

- Promoting new forms of European governance by giving people a greater say in the way Europe is run and making the European Institutions work more transparently and effectively. To this end, the Commission will adopt a White Paper on Governance shortly;
- A stable and enlarged Europe with a stronger voice in the world;
- A new economic and social agenda to modernise our economy for the digital age in a manner that promotes employment and sustainable development;
- Support a better quality of life by giving effective answers to issues which affect the daily lives of our citizens.

However, nowadays, almost half of the Commission officials are fully occupied in executive tasks, notably in managing programmes and projects and directly controlling the latter. This is not an efficient use of scarce resources. More importantly, it detracts from the Commission's role as defined in the Treaties and the Prodi Commission's five-year priorities.

Against this background, this Commission has recently launched an overall assessment of its activities and

resources. The objective is to concentrate activities on its core policy objectives. The Commission will therefore identify activities which can be stopped because they are not priorities with sufficient value-added at European level. In addition, resources will need to be re-allocated within and across Commission departments on an unprecedented scale. As part of this the Commission will identify the activities which could be more usefully and efficiently executed by other bodies, where necessary, under the control of the Commission. Together, these projects will enable the Commission to focus better on its core functions. By September 2000, the Commission will have completed a comprehensive assessment of its current activities.

The Commission will then be in a position to assess accurately whether its resources are commensurate with its tasks. If they are proven not to be, additional resources will have to be made available. If such resources are not forthcoming, the Commission will need to discontinue tasks and all Institutions will need to face up to the choices honestly. The Commission will report the results of this assessment to the Council and the European Parliament in September 2000 and make the necessary proposals.

In this context, it is clear that to be effective, the Commission also needs optimal structures and systems for the deployment of its resources. This White Paper therefore sets out a programme for a fundamental review of working practices, the programming of activities and the management of human and financial resources. Obviously, the Commission's political priorities in no way absolve it of responsibility to meet the highest standards of effectiveness and integrity in the handling of public money. A reformed system of financial control will allow it to do so. The events of 1999, including the resignation of the College of Commissioners, graphically demonstrated this need.

Making reform a reality

Upon taking office, the Prodi Commission immediately embarked on preparing a programme of Reform. In doing so, it could draw on the two reports of the Committee of Independent Experts and a series of internal analyses, notably the Williamson report and the DECODE exercise, which provided essential starting points for the present Reform. The SEM 2000 and MAP 2000 programmes have also provided useful experience. However, the scope and ambition of the Reform programme far exceeds that of any previous exercise.

On this basis, the Commission published a consultative document on 18 January for detailed discussion on the proposed Reform strategy within the Commission and with the other European Institutions. The degree to which Commission staff participated individually and collectively in the consultation exercise was unprecedented. It manifested the strong interest of staff, and the overwhelming majority of responses showed the clear commitment of staff to the process. Those responses were highly constructive and they have led to significant modifications in the proposed approach (See Annex 2). The European Parliament's resolution of 19 January on the Committee of Independent Expert's Second Report strongly supported the approach proposed in the Consultative Document and provided an important input to this Reform. Following on from the conclusions of the European Council in Helsinki, the Council too adopted conclusions on the proposed approach on 14 February "warmly welcoming" the approach.

Following this intensive consultation exercise, the Commission now proposes a strategy with three related themes that are reflected in the structure of this document:

— Reform of the way political priorities are set and resources allocated. New policy-driven decision-taking mechanisms will ensure that activities undertaken by the Commission are carried out with the necessary human, administrative, IT and financial resources. The evaluation of results will become a routine part of management activities.

— Important changes to human resources policy, placing a premium on performance, continuous training and quality of management, as well as improving recruitment and career development. These changes will also place an emphasis on improving the working environment and equal opportunities, as well as the evaluation of management and staff, and will enable disciplinary matters or cases of under-performance to be dealt with properly and fairly.

— An overhaul of financial management, empowering each department to establish an effective internal control system appropriate to its own needs. In doing so, departments will be able to draw on the advice of the Commission's specialist services. Reform is predicated upon a precise definition of the responsibilities of each actor, and upon regular checks by the new Internal Audit Service on the quality and reliability of each internal control system.

The Reform is backed by an Action Plan set out in Part II of the White Paper. The programme runs up to the second half of 2002 and a full review will be published in December 2002 and transmitted to the other institutions. Regular monitoring reports will be made to the Commission throughout the period of the programme. These reports will deal not only with the delivery of the measures set out in the Action Plan but also their qualitative impact as measured by staff feedback.

Some of the Reform's effects will be visible in the near future. Others will take longer to be fully evident because certain measures need changes in law to be adopted by the European Parliament and the Council. This ambitious timetable can, therefore, be realised only with the full participation of all European Institutions. All institutions share the need for reform to succeed. And they all have a shared interest in the benefits it will bring — for example improvements in the way external aid is managed brought about through the application of the reform will increase the European Union's standing in the world.

Reform requires technical change. Describing this unavoidably means using technical terms — jargon. This should not obscure the radical nature of the proposals put forward, to which the Commission is fully committed. A glossary of key terms and acronyms is annexed (Annex 3).

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ANNEX I TO CONSULTATIVE DOCUMENT ON REFORMING THE COMMISSION — KEY REFORM ISSUES

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II. Chronology of key reform actions

Calendrier des réformes de la Commission

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