Speech by Romano Prodi concerning the White Paper on the Reform of the European Commission (Brussels, 1 March 2000)

Caption: Speech by Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, concerning the White Paper on the Reform of the European Commission, given before the European Parliament in Brussels on 1 March 2000.

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Speech by Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, concerning the White Paper on the Reform of the European Commission, given before the European Parliament on 1st March 2000

Madame President,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

The reform of the Commission is one of the political priorities I accepted when I was appointed President. In July last year, I outlined to this House the scope of the task, i.e. the need for a real revolution in the Commission's way of working.

I have kept my word. The revolution I spoke of is here before you, in the form of this White Paper on Reform, which was adopted by the Commission this morning.

We are taking action on three main fronts:

a) setting political priorities and translating them into practical measures by focused and flexible use of resources. This is the heart of the system and it will enable the political sphere to assert its primacy and take full responsibility.

A policy planning mechanism is being set up through which the College, duly assisted, can instruct the administrative departments to formulate proposals in the fields of operation assigned to them. Activity-based management is the key instrument to establish the relationships between objectives, actions and resources.

b) making the best possible use of human resources. This is the supporting framework of our structure because it relates to our real assets: our staff.

Recruitment, career development, mobility, disciplinary measures: no stone will be left unturned in our attempts to ensure that the European civil service exploits its potential to the full. A greater degree of meritocracy, more credible and verifiable performance appraisal, lifelong learning, and devolved management responsibility are just some of the details contained in the proposals before you.

c) financial management. As you know, this is perhaps the trickiest knot, where responsibility for management and control need to combine in the interests of efficiency and security.

The objective is to set up a management and control system in each Directorate-General to ensure that optimal and careful use is made of resources. This involves changes from the current system of centralised microcontrols to a new system combining the decentralisation of management control with an effective central audit system.

The strategy we have decided to adopt is a real organisational and cultural Big Bang, and we will be especially vigilant until the transition is accompanied by all the necessary safeguards.

I shall leave to Neil Kinnock the honour and the task of explaining the details of the White Paper. I would like, however, to compliment him for the intelligence, enthusiasm and energy he brought to this difficult exercise, which he has carried through with invaluable support from the Task Force and the many others who worked with him on it. I would also like to thank all the staff, who by playing an active part in the broadest debate ever organised at the Commission and making invaluable contributions have shown their willingness to meet the challenge of change.

With the adoption of the White Paper the Commission intends to turn the page. I hope that we have now broken completely with the past.

We now need to look to the future, to the difficult challenges facing the Union set out in the 2000–2005 Work

Programme.

This is the real reason for the reform policy. We need, the Union needs a strong Commission, a political entity recognisable as such in all its actions.

This is why we are redefining our priorities, offloading activities it is no longer appropriate for us to manage.

This is why we are reforming the administrative machinery, to create the right conditions for us to carry out our tasks efficiently.

We will make the best use of the limited resources at the Commission's disposal, but I cannot rule out coming back to you to request additional resources if they are needed.

The objective of the reform is to provide the Commission with an administration which is a model of excellence, in Europe and throughout the world. An administration which is also exemplary in its advanced use of information technology, a model of a completely computerised administration, a paperless Commission.

In September we undertook to reform. Over the past few months we have worked to translate this commitment into a plan of action with a vision and a strategy, expressed in practical measures to be carried out in accordance with a strict schedule. With the submission of this White Paper we are fulfilling our undertaking. We have still got a long way to go, but we are already on course. Many preparatory steps have already been taken and will very shortly bear fruit. Other measures, those requiring legislative amendments, take longer. It will not be easy and we will need your active support, as well as that of the Council.

The Commission wants to be judged on results, on what it achieves. But the Commission is not the only Community institution.

The people of Europe have a right to be proud of the whole of the European civil service.

Parliament and the Council are also called on to fully accept the challenge of the reforms.

The Commission has steadfastly paved the way. I hope that all the institutions will complete the course, in the service of the people of Europe, for an ever-stronger Europe.