

Better management and improved accountability through externalisation of management of Community programmes (Strasbourg, 13 November 2001)

Caption: On 13 November 2001, the Commission adopts specific measures in two large areas of its externalisation policy concerning the management of Community programmes.

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Better management and improved accountability through externalisation of management of Community programmes

The Commission today adopted more specific measures in two major areas of its externalisation policy concerning the management of Community programmes: the management of Community programmes through networks of national agencies and the outsourcing of technical and administrative assistance in the execution of Community programmes. Budget Commissioner Michael Schreyer declared, 'Externalisation allows better management because the scarce permanent staff of the Commission can only be assigned to its essential tasks. But it is clear that externalisation cannot not absolve the Commission of the responsibilities conferred by the Treaties, of the implement powers delegated to it by the Council or its responsibility to implement the budget. Certain limits and constraints have to be observed when tasks are externalised. The continuity of the chain of responsibility must be maintained. This dual necessity of improved management and responsibility is fully reflected in the principles and the instruments decided by the Commission.'

Externalisation can take several forms: **devolution**, i.e. delegating executive tasks to Community public bodies, the new 'executive agency', for which a draft regulation was adopted by the Commission in December 2000; **decentralising**, i.e. delegating executive responsibilities to national public bodies, which act as partners in implementing some Community programmes; and **outsourcing**, through contracts let to the private sector in the framework of the execution of Community programmes.

The Prodi Commission has undertaken to correct the maladministration caused by the poor control of the various technical assistance offices (TAOs) and to re-focus its administration on its core tasks and activities. Thus, the Commission has decided to phase out 99 out of the 119 existing TAOs and has adopted concrete measures in order to develop a coherent and manageable externalisation policy.

The Commission today forwarded its externalisation approach by focusing on decentralising and outsourcing technical assistance.

First, the Commission adopted a communication that sets out principles for the implementation of certain Community policies by networks of national agencies designated by the Member States. The model has so far be developed for Education, Youth and Training programmes. Management by network is particularly suitable in the implementation of large programmes, which require proximity of the final recipients. Pre-allocation of appropriations per country and cofinancing by the Member States also constitute elements pleading for national networks.

A convention would define precisely the respective tasks and responsibilities of the Commission and the national agencies and the role of coordination, 'ex-post control and evaluation assigned to the Commission, would be reinforced. Management by national networks could be extended, for example, in the fields of statistics or through innovative actions in the structural funds. This form of externalisation is, however, more limited than the tasks that could be assigned to 'executive agencies'.

Second, the Commission adopted a vademecum and a standard contract for outsourcing technical and/or administrative assistance in order to mobilise resources and expertise which it cannot find among its own staff, and which it would not be appropriate to entrust on a long-term basis to an agency. The vademecum provides the Commission's services with practical guidelines on what conditions to satisfy for outsourcing this kind of assistance, when it is appropriate to outsource and how to improve the results of outsourcing.

Background

In December 2000, the Commission already dealt with the 'devolution' form of externalisation by adopting a proposal for a Council Regulation on a new administrative body, the 'executive agency'. The executive agency would be a separate legal entity created by the Commission with an annual grant from the Commission for its administrative expenditure. A Commission official, specially seconded for this function and supervised by a steering committee appointed by the Commission, would direct it. The adoption of this

Regulation is pending in the Council and should take place in 2002.