

Bulletin EU 1/2-2001 The Commission's work programme for 2001 (2/2)

Introduction

A year ago, the Commission set out its main strategies for action over the next five years. This ambitious programme resulted from in-depth analysis of the challenges facing the European Union and identification of new areas in which to pursue European integration.

The Commission thus outlined the following priorities for its present term of office:

- (1) promoting new forms of governance to bring Europe closer to the people and make our institutions more transparent and democratic;
- (2) stabilising the European continent and strengthening Europe's role in the world, seizing the historic opportunity to unify our continent, harness globalisation and help the international system to function more effectively;
- (3) launching a new economic and social agenda to modernise our economy and make it more competitive, while strengthening the European social model;
- (4) achieving a real improvement in daily life for all, particularly with regard to the environment, respect for individual rights, food quality and mobility.

In response to these challenges, the Commission has already identified, in its document *Strategic objectives 2000-05*, ⁽¹⁾ certain key actions of its mandate, such as the Lisbon strategy, the new economic and social agenda, the pursuit of enlargement, the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, the White Paper on governance, etc.

Our current task is to persevere in the pursuit of these strategic objectives. The Commission will address the four priorities both by proposing legislation and by launching initiatives and taking practical steps to carry them out. All the action to be taken is detailed in the annex to the annual work programme, indicating how the Commission's medium-term strategy will be adopted and put into practice over the year in question.

The year ahead will be marked by several major events, each representing a milestone in the work of our institution. In March, the spring European Council will open a new chapter in the Lisbon strategy, particularly with the presentation of the 'Stockholm report'. In May, the Commission will host the United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries. The European Union supports these countries in their efforts to play a greater role in international affairs. Also in May, a major forum on the future of regional and cohesion policy in an enlarged Union will be organised with the participation of the Member States and the applicant countries, following the adoption of the second report on economic and social cohesion. At the Gothenburg European Council in June, the Union will adopt an overall strategy for sustainable development. Preparations will also be made for the next stages of the institutional reform process in the wake of the Nice European Council. There is the further possibility that a new round of multilateral trade negotiations within the framework of the WTO may be launched this year. Finally, 2001 will see the setting-up of the European Food Safety Authority.

In this context and bearing in mind the guidelines laid down by the Commission when it came into office, it will pursue the following priority objectives in 2001.

Promoting new forms of governance

If Europe is to consolidate its efforts to achieve closer integration, it will need institutions which are responsible, transparent, efficient and open to new forms of democratic governance. Harnessing public support is the key to successful European integration, although the feeling of belonging to the Union is far from equally shared; the European Union and its structures still seem remote and complex, and are not readily understood by the general public or by those active in local life and civil society. Enlargement will have a considerable impact on the way in which our institutions function and makes integration all the more necessary. The imminent prospect of using the euro makes it even more necessary to assert the Union's political character. We must therefore think hard about how we build Europe and we must bring about corresponding reforms of the methods we are using.

This will be the rationale for the White Paper on governance which the Commission will present in 2001. It will seek to bring together various proposals in a coherent manner with a view to ensuring that our institutions, and not just the European Commission, function more clearly, more

responsibly and in a more decentralised way. Attention will therefore be given to aspects of communication, the quality of consultations and of the broader European legislative process, and the conditions for executive delegation and for participating in policy-making. Certain elements of the White Paper could help clarify the responsibilities and contribute to the wide debate launched by the Nice European Council prior to the next revision of the Treaties in 2004.

The Commission intends to play a full part in these deliberations, which began at Nice, in conjunction with the successive Council Presidencies, Parliament and all interested parties. The first significant meeting will be the Laeken European Council.

Mindful of the need to promote transparency, efficiency and sound management, the Commission will resolutely pursue the key process of administrative reform, which began in 2000 and which must now enter a decisive phase. A proposal for amending the Staff Regulations of EU officials, to be tabled in December, will represent the culmination of a large number of initiatives provided for in the White Paper on administrative reform. These were due to be launched in 2000 and 2001, mostly in the form of consultative documents (working conditions, disciplinary measures, career, remuneration system, pensions, etc.). In addition to this proposal, 2001 will see coming into effect other reform measures relating in particular to training, middle management and performance evaluation. Furthermore, the reform of financial management, the reinforcement of the European Anti-Fraud Office, the action plan on simplifying procedures, the new provisions on transparency and the new strategic planning and programming initiative will start to come into their own. Finally, the administrative preparations for the next stage of the enlargement process will, in themselves, represent a major challenge.

The Commission likewise hopes to put in place a new framework for the Union's communication and information policy, geared to improving the services provided to the public, establishing a comprehensive and coherent approach by the institutions and promoting partnership with civil society and with national, regional and local authorities. A communication dealing with these issues will be presented in the middle of 2001. Moreover, steps designed to improve the links between the Union and its citizens include the work already under way to consolidate Community law, the opening to the public in mid-2001 of a single portal for accessing legislative and legal texts, and the steps being taken to make consolidated instruments available so that they can be codified and recast. Finally, a White Paper will be presented in the autumn, looking at how European integration affects young people.

Stabilising our continent and strengthening Europe's voice on the world stage

In view of the challenges posed by geopolitical change in Europe, by the need to harness globalisation and by the shortcomings of the international system, the European Union has a duty both to share our fundamental values with others and to create stability on our continent. Europe must play fully its role as a pole of stability and prosperity.

The Commission is resolved to support the accession strategy, consolidate relations with our neighbours, play an active role in crisis management and conflict prevention, and work more effectively to combat global poverty.

With these objectives in mind, the Commission will pay particular attention to the accession strategy in 2001. Negotiations with the applicant countries, which will follow the 'road map' proposed by the Commission, will thus enter a new phase when the most complex matters, such as the transition periods, will be dealt with. Priority will be given to establishing a final common position for the Community on 18 additional chapters under negotiation so that they can provisionally be brought to a close.

The Commission will also pay more attention to the ability of the applicant countries to implement Community provisions and the steps they are taking to this end. This concern will be reflected in the regular reports which will be compiled on the individual applicant countries' compliance with the Copenhagen criteria.

Preparations for accession will be continued, in particular by implementing the new Phare guidelines, by using the pre-accession instruments Sapard (Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development) and ISPA (Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession), and by involving the applicant countries in Community programmes and agencies. A financial regulation will be proposed for implementation of the Accession Partnership with Turkey.

The Commission is also to intensify its communication strategy on enlargement, which is essential if the process is to be successful in view of the ratification of the Treaties.

The Commission will pursue its reform of external aid, which is crucial to ensuring that Community external action is both credible, efficient and visible. It intends to concentrate its efforts on priority areas in order to maximise the impact of the reform. With the opening of the new EuropeAid office for Cooperation on 1 January 2001, the Commission will begin to reform its external service - a process which will primarily involve transferring some staff and the management of the corresponding aid to an initial group of 23 delegations, and regionalising the network. Moreover, as a corollary to the more strategic approach and consolidated programming procedures at the heart of the reform, the Commission will propose a change in the sphere of application of the committee procedures so that the discussions with the Member States focus more on overall strategies and less on individual projects, with a view to improving the implementation of the concepts of complementarity, coordination and coherence, which are anchored in the Treaties.

The Commission intends also to strengthen its policy towards neighbouring countries. The stabilisation and association strategy with the Balkans will be pursued in the light of the decisions adopted at the recent Zagreb Summit. Our relations with Russia and Ukraine must be cultivated within the framework of existing agreements, while paying particular attention to nuclear safety and the unique case of Kaliningrad in the framework of the northern dimension. The Commission hopes also to speed up the relaunch of the Barcelona Process on the basis of the guidelines put forward in 2000 and the conclusions of the meeting in Marseille.

As regards the CFSP (common foreign and security policy) and the ESDP (European security and defence policy), the Commission has an obligation to put in place without delay the operational mechanisms which will enable the rapid reaction mechanism to function effectively. The Commission will shortly submit its proposals on crisis management and conflict prevention, particularly with regard to the Community instruments, and on the new decision-making procedures for the ESDP.

In the field of external trade, the priority for 2001 will be to boost the new round of multilateral negotiations. The Commission favours a comprehensive round, based on an ambitious agenda and on the principle of the single enterprise. We will therefore have to reinforce our efforts to promote mutual understanding and build strategic alliances with our partners in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), particularly the developing countries. At the same time, the Commission will have to continue the negotiations on agriculture and services, which began in January 2000.

The Commission also plans to proceed with the negotiations under way with Mercosur and Chile, and to finalise the arrangements for China's accession to the WTO. Steps will be taken to ensure that trade disputes - mainly with the United States - are settled in a way that is compatible with WTO rules. Moreover, the Community must take a more comprehensive look at the priorities it sets in its trade relations with other regional groups.

The Commission will also examine the situation of the least developed countries, particularly in the light of the Conference on the Least Developed Countries, to be held in May 2001, and the reworking of the Generalised System of Preferences, and it intends to put action against poverty at the heart of its development policy. The instruments of commercial policy and regional cooperation must be fully mobilised in order to integrate these countries further into the global economy. The role of humanitarian aid will chiefly be to fulfil its prime function: namely, to safeguard and protect life during humanitarian crises. Measures will also be taken to speed up aid and make it more efficient.

Finally, work is also to be undertaken in 2001 to prepare for key events such as the EU-Latin America Summit, which will take place the following year.

Towards a new economic and social agenda

Our ongoing priorities are: to combat unemployment, to boost our economic competitiveness and to create a fairer society more attuned to the well-being of every individual. With this in mind, the Lisbon European Council established a new strategic objective for the Union: namely, to become the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy capable of sustained economic growth with more jobs of better quality and greater social cohesion.

In pursuit of these goals, the new spring European Council, which will meet in Stockholm in March, will mark the high point of 2001 and will define the guidelines for the Commission's activities in the social and economic fields. In preparation for the discussions at this European Council, the Commission will present an overall assessment in the form of the report requested in Lisbon. The report will use structural indicators to measure the progress made since Lisbon and will identify new areas in which to take action.

In the economic field, it is of prime importance that we continue to reap all the benefits of economic and monetary union, particularly in terms of macroeconomic stability, growth and employment. The Commission will actively help to strengthen economic coordination between the Member States, which is one of the cornerstones of EMU. The general economic policy guidelines to be presented by the Commission will attach particular importance to the strategic objective established at Lisbon. Finally, it will be necessary to finalise the preparations for introducing euro coins and notes on 1 January 2002 so that this crucial step can be taken in the best possible circumstances, particularly for the most vulnerable user groups.

In the field of employment, the Commission will follow this new approach on the basis of the strategy for employment adopted in Luxembourg. It will put forward its employment guidelines for 2002, which will focus particularly on the quality of employment, the development of entrepreneurship, the all-embracing objective of lifelong learning and the social partners' contribution to the European employment strategy. In addition the Commission will continue the debate on the development of an immigration policy based on labour market needs.

2001 will see for the first time the implementation of the social agenda ratified by the Nice European Council and which applies equally to employment and to social policy. The new open coordination method, adopted at Lisbon, will be applied to the problem of social exclusion, with this method thereby being used for the first time outside the employment sector. This approach, which is designed to help the Member States develop their own policies and is based on the analysis and dissemination of best practice in the economic and social fields, as well as education and training, is an ideal way of attaining the Union's principal objectives in these areas. Furthermore, the Commission will launch several legislative proposals as regards industrial relations and health and safety in the workplace.

With regard to economic and social cohesion, the programmes for the Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund during the new 2000-06 period will become fully operational, thus maximising their impact in the field. As an extension to this second report, the Commission will adopt a communication on the Union's border regions in the perspective of enlargement.

As regards the internal market, the Commission will continue to introduce structural reforms to strengthen the competitiveness of European markets and will continue to implement the strategy for the internal market in services. A priority will be to achieve the completion of the internal market in financial services. Moreover, the Commission will propose Directives on the supervision of financial conglomerates, on bank capital adequacy and on the regular provision of information. It will also continue its efforts to modernise public procurement law. The ongoing work on the creation of the Community patent and on the postal services will be resolutely pursued.

Taxation remains one of the prime obstacles to reaping the benefits of a true internal market. In 2001, the Commission will produce a communication on its new fiscal strategy. It will also propose a recasting of the Sixth VAT Directive and will continue to take steps to modernise the system of excise duties. Furthermore, the Commission will present a communication on a strategy for the customs union and will work towards adopting several proposals designed to simplify customs procedures.

In order that European companies and citizens may benefit from effective competition, the Commission will continue to apply rigorously the relevant Community rules. It will develop international cooperation and will modernise its legal instruments, in particular by reviewing the Merger Regulation, bolstering the rules on state aid and continuing the work in the Council on its proposed new regulation implementing Articles 81 and 82 of the Treaty.

The Commission will pursue its efforts to make Europe an integral part of the information and knowledge-based society. One of the key elements of the Commission's response to Lisbon will be to identify future priorities and to implement the eEurope 2002 action plan both within the Union and with the applicant countries. It will also be essential to provide everyone with the technology and the basic and continuing training they require in this new digital age. Increased efforts will be required on the part of the Member States to implement both the elearning initiative and the employment guidelines for 2001 and 2002. The Commission will present a communication on the future objectives of education systems to the Stockholm European Council. It will also support action aimed at meeting the Lisbon objective of ensuring that all schools throughout the Union are connected to the Internet by the end of 2001. The Commission will put forward proposals to boost consumer confidence in online systems, particularly with regard to the security of networks. In order to make it easier for small businesses to assimilate the new information and communication technologies, the Commission will also strengthen the 'Go Digital' initiative.

The Commission recalls the commitment entered into in Lisbon that the Council and Parliament will adopt the 'telecoms regulatory package' as early as possible in 2001, increasing competition in the electronic communications sector.

As far as the business sector is concerned, the Lisbon Summit encouraged the sharing of experience and best practice among businesses and Member States, bolstered by 'benchmarking' activities and action to simplify the business environment. This will be put into practice via the multiannual action plan for enterprise. The Commission will also propose further support for innovation as part of the sixth framework research programme.

By the same token, the Commission plans to take a close look at specific sectors such as chemical products, PVCs and medical appliances, and will also re-examine the approach we take to technical standards. Proposals will be tabled in the course of 2001.

In the field of research, the key aim of the Lisbon process is to create a European research area. With this in mind, proposals will be submitted at the beginning of 2001 for the sixth framework research programme, which will be launched in 2002. This should enable the Community to help integrate European research, shape the European research area and reinforce its foundations. Particular consideration will be given to the mobility of researchers, to infrastructure-related cooperation and to the impact of research on all the Union's regions.

In the energy sector, the Commission will table proposals at the Stockholm European Council with a view to speeding up the completion and deepening of the internal market in electricity and gas.

2001 will be a challenging year for the common agricultural policy at international level, in particular in the context of enlargement, which will enter a decisive phase. Negotiations on agriculture will also continue as part of the WTO discussions and will be conducted independently of any new round of multilateral negotiations. Furthermore, 2001 will be marked by new efforts to integrate the common agricultural policy and Community policies on food safety and sustainable development, particularly with regard to the environment. As a consequence, measures will be proposed in favour of biodiversity, genetic resources and the protection of forests.

Fisheries policy will be the subject of a comprehensive review, beginning in 2001 with the publication of a Green Paper.

Finally, the Commission will launch major initiatives in 2001 regarding the outermost regions with a view to implementing Article 299(2).

A better quality of life for all

Looking beyond the major political issues of today - whether they relate to institutional, macroeconomic or geopolitical matters - the Union must offer its citizens real and perceptible improvements in their daily lives and satisfy their expectations with respect to the protection of their rights to mobility, safety, education, recreation and food, thereby pinning their hopes on the Community institutions' sense of initiative and responsibility.

In view of the seriousness of environmental degradation and the fear it arouses among people in Europe, the Union must respond to this problem with an effective and multifaceted strategy. While continuing to take action to improve the implementation of existing legislation and integrate environmental issues into other Community policies, the Commission intends to launch major new initiatives in 2001 to meet this challenge.

At the beginning of the year, the Commission will present a draft Parliament and Council decision introducing the sixth environment action programme. This programme will establish the objectives of Community action over the next ten years and the necessary operational instruments. The priorities will centre on four major areas: action to combat climate change; promotion of nature conservation and biodiversity; health and the environment; and sustainable management of natural resources and waste.

This programme will constitute the environmental component of the sustainable development strategy which the Commission will present at the Gothenburg European Council. This strategy seeks to reconcile economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection. It should delineate a new European development model in which environmental protection is more attuned to the political and legislative context. Internationally, this strategy will represent a substantial contribution to European involvement in the 'Rio + 10' Conference in 2002.

Other far-reaching measures are also planned. In particular, the Commission will present a White Paper dealing with its future strategy on chemical products, which will encompass a range of measures designed to improve environmental protection and human health. Finally, after the Kyoto Protocol has been ratified as anticipated, the Commission will put forward a communication on the implementation of the European climate change programme.

The European Union has set itself the task of creating an area of freedom, security and justice where all citizens can feel protected while exercising their rights. Accordingly, the Union must step up its efforts to implement the programme adopted by the Tampere European Council and must evaluate it for the Laeken European Council in December 2001.

In this context, the Commission will pay special attention this year to the approximation of legislation and national practice on asylum and immigration, as well as judicial cooperation. It will also continue its efforts to endow the Union with appropriate instruments which will enable it to tackle in a more coordinated and effective manner problems relating to crime, which are becoming increasingly transnational in nature.

With regard to the protection of Community financial interests, the Commission will prepare a Green Paper to revive the debate on its proposal to create a European Public Prosecutor with a view to re-examination of the proposal at the next Intergovernmental Conference. It will also put forward proposals concerning efforts to combat fraud and other illegal activities which undermine financial interests, particularly money laundering, in order to reinforce cooperation between the competent authorities.

Food safety is a matter of increasing concern for European citizens, who have been calling for more stringent standards in this area. By adopting the White Paper on food safety in 2000, the Commission has shown that it considers this issue to be a matter of absolute priority. In 2001, the focus will be on getting the European Food Safety Authority up and running. The Commission will also put into practice the multiannual legislative reform programme laid down in the White Paper, aimed at establishing an integrated, coherent and effective legislative framework. Particular emphasis will be placed on evaluating and reinforcing monitoring activities in the sphere of food safety to ensure that the legislation brings about genuine improvements in food safety for consumers. Key measures will therefore be proposed to enhance the rules on the traceability and labelling of foods containing genetically modified organisms, to improve the evaluation of risks related to pesticides, and to increase protection from the risks associated with BSE and contaminants in foodstuffs.

In the more general field of consumer protection and public health, there are plans to introduce, among other things, new proposals on the advertising and sponsorship of tobacco products, on consumer credit and on air transport, which will seek to reinforce the rights of passengers. The Commission will pay particular attention to fair trade practices and to administrative cooperation.

Mobility is a fundamental aspect of daily life for everyone. The Commission will take new initiatives aimed at creating a 'single sky' and will issue a White Paper on future developments in the common transport policy, which will include the overhaul of trans-European networks. Similarly, the Commission will table important proposals for promoting intermodal transport and for developing the railways in the light of the decision to partially open the freight market by 2008. In all these areas, the Commission will strive to consolidate the rights of consumers and improve their safety, particularly in road, air and sea transport, which will be the focus of a number of specific initiatives. The Commission will also promote the full range of intelligent transport systems, notably by pursuing the Galileo project (satellite navigation system), and will work actively on the strategy for space as part of the task force set up by the European Space Agency. Later in the year, the Commission will approve a communication on 'clean' urban transport and, within the framework outlined by the Green Paper on security of energy supply, will also promote new forms of energy, energy-saving measures and the use within the Community of oil and gas stocks.

- Annex 1: List of new measures which the Commission intends to implement in 2001.
- Annex 2: List of measures carried over from the 1999 and 2000 programmes which the Commission intends to implement in 2001.
- Annex 3: List of measures carried over from the 2000 programme which the Commission plans to implement in 2002.

The work programme and its three annexes are available on the Internet at the following address:
http://ec.europa.eu/off/work_programme/index_en.htm.

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