Community legislation: simplifying and improving the regulatory environment

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The Council held an exchange of views, in which it emphasised the importance it attaches to an effective implementation of the Commission's Action Plan on simplifying and improving the regulatory environment. It adopted conclusions which emphasise the importance of EU rules and national legislation being proportionate to their objectives in order to enjoy greater legitimacy and ensure legal certainty, and to be simpler to understand and easier to apply to the benefit of our citizens, consumers and businesses. The Council underlines the critical importance of reducing the administrative burden and establishing an effective regulatory framework to help make European business, in particular SMEs, more competitive and generate sustainable economic growth and more jobs. In this context, it stresses the importance of giving appropriate consideration to alternatives to legislation. The Council expects to see, as of 2003, the Commission start attaching impact assessments to all substantial regulatory proposals and it states its intention not to consider such proposals without proportionate impact assessments, covering inter alia economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development unless in case of extreme urgency or in other exceptional circumstances. The Commission is urged to actively seek input from the Member States and interested parties with a view to identifying areas of law where the need for simplification is greatest and propose a rolling programme for simplification before the end of the year, giving particular attention to areas which can bring about tangible benefits to citizens as well as cost reductions and time-saving for enterprises and public authorities. The Council also emphasises the importance of an agreement on an appropriate inter-institutional framework in order to improve the quality of Community legislation. It recognises equally that all Community Institutions as well as Member States have to play their full part in implementing actions identified and affirms its intention of working constructively with the Commission and the European Parliament with this in mind. Lastly, the Council encourages the Commission to develop, in co-operation with the Member States and on the basis of best practice, instruments for monitoring progress in the improvement and simplification of the regulatory environment, including appropriate indicators. The Commission is called upon to submit to the European Parliament and the Council a comprehensive review of the Action Plan before the end of 2005.