Reforming the Commission: action plan, aspects concerning the Committee on Constitutional Affairs. White Paper

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PURPOSE: To present a White Paper on the reform of the Commission. CONTENT: The European Commission has approved an ambitious modernisation strategy. This master plan for the reform of the Commission is laid out in an action plan comprising 101 measures, published with a calendar identifying the main deadlines for each of the changes to be implemented. The aim of the White Paper is to supply a general framework to support holders of public office and officials in dealing with the more complex ethical issues involved in new ways of delivering public services and new management approach, and to prevent corruption. Consultation has been broad and fruitful in drawing up this White Paper: consultation has been carried out, particularly with the Commission's staff and their representatives, and the Council, Parliament and the Member States have also been closely engaged in the process. The reform strategy is built on three related themes: comprehensive reform of personnel policy, thorough modernisation of financial management and control, and a new system of strategic planning. Key developments include: 1) A culture based on service - A European Committee on Standards in Public Life to advise on appropriate ethical standards for all EU institutions. - A Code of Good Administrative Behaviour for Commission officials to be adopted at the conclusion of current consultations in April. - Cutting Red Tape: a top level progress chaser to streamline procedures will be appointed. Applications for this post will be invited next week. - New rules on Whistleblowing: A clear right - and duty - for members of staff to responsibly report concerns related to suspected wrongdoing at any level, and to get relevant action in response. 2) A new personnel policy - Comprehensive reform of all elements of personnel policy from recruitment to retirement. - Substantial and increasing provision for training for all staff. - More professional disciplinary procedures. - Radical improvements in the selection, training and evaluation of managers. - New practical measures to promote equal opportunities for women and men. - Strong emphasis on promotion by merit, in keeping with the Staff Regulations. 3) Modernisation of financial management - An end to the system of "rubber stamp" financial control. - Decentralisation of decision-making with explicit responsibilities. - A new independent Internal Audit Service led and staffed by qualified specialists. - An early warning system to increase protection of the Community's financial interests. - A comprehensive new policy on use of external resources that strengthens management and accountability. 4) A new system of strategic planning - Matching priorities with resources through Activity Based Management. - Integrating decisions on core activities with allocation of financial and human resources (Activity based budgeting) - An objective needs assessment by September 2000 to establish the facts relating to any proven needs for additional resources that may be necessary to enable the Commission to fulfil its given tasks, and to provide a firm basis for deciding what activities could or should be reduced or ended. 5) The pay and pensions regime The current regime for calculating adjustments to the pay and pension of the staff of the European Institutions - the 'Method' - is due to end in June 2001 and, conventionally, negotiations relating to that system would begin this Summer. Meanwhile, the Reform Timetable specifies that the Commission's broad proposals for revisions to the Staff Regulations, including a new career structure, will be produced in December 2001 following consultations with staff, Council, Parliament and Member States. These events offer the prospect of two or more successive years of necessary negotiations. Taking account of that, in the White Paper the Commission clearly sets out its view that the best approach for the Council, the Commission and the staff of the European Public Service would be to facilitate a single, consolidated negotiation process on pay, pensions and revisions to the Staff Regulations on the basis of a proposal put by the Commission by December 2001. This would involve prolonging the existing "Method" of salary adjustments for a period of up to two years, but that extension would not impose additional burdens on the Community budget.