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

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This report reviews the progress made by the Commission, after one year, in developing and introducing measures aimed at implementing the White Paper. It describes the approach used in each of the main areas of reform included in the White Paper as well as reviewing work resulting from the Reform of Management of Community Programmes which is considered as part of the Commission's Reform initiative. It also assesses overall progress and looks at likely developments over the coming year. In its conclusions, it is stated that the Commission can be statisfied with the progress it made since 1 March 2000 when the 'Reforming the Commission' White Paper was adopted. The report concludes that the first year of implementation was a challenging one. Staff at all levels had to develop and embrace wide-ranging new systems, while sometimes also having to continue to live within the 'old' ones. Overall, progress on the ambitious Action Plan of 1 March 2000 has been substantial. One of the Reform's major objectives was a restructuring of the organisation in order to allow the Commission to fulfil the role bestowed on it by Member States through the treaties. In this respect, the first year of the Reform has been highly productive. In the first instance, the comprehensive assessment made by the Commission of its current activities provided a clear vision of its mission and core activities and an accurate picture of the resources it required. As a result of this Peer Group process, a strategy for the allocation of existing resources and the externalisation of certain activities was drawn up and the Budgetary Authority has allocated additional resources. Secondly, the structures and systems put in place for financial management, control and internal audit have now been brought up to the highest international standards of modern and effective management. One year on, the Commission's lead services have fully taken over the ownership of the Reform both in terms of planning and implementation. Operational services also begun to take on board those aspects of the Reform which directly concern them. In the financial field, a tangible change of culture has been achieved in the way that the Community's budget is managed. This year has seen the first experiment in the development of the Annual Policy Strategy for 2002 in which the whole of the organisation has been involved. Staff are also immersed in a comprehesive review of the Commission's human resources strategy. This is not to say that the Commission has been able to implement every planned reform action without delay or modification. Some target dates have had to be re-assessed e.g. in the human resources field where timings were redefined in order to maintain the coherence of the process, i.e. the necessary conceptual 'grouping' of related activities such as appraisal and promotion. Nevertheless the general timetable has been respected and none of these delays have been caused by fundamental problems with the direction of the Reform. The White Paper also recognised that the ambitiopus timetable could not be achieved without the whole-hearted commitment of staff at all levels and the full participation of all theEuropean Institutions. If the milestones the first year of Reform have been globally met, it is not least because of the genuine commitment of the Commission's staff to the new agenda and the support and co-operation of other European Institutions. The Ultimate benefit of this unprecedented project will be the restoration of public confidence in a streamlined, professional public service which aspires to the highest international standards of best practice.