European governance: greater openness and participation. White Paper

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PURPOSE : to propose the White Paper on European Governance. CONTENT : Europeans' lack of interest in and distrust of politics and institutions is increasing. The problem is acknowledged at national level, and is particularly acute at the level of the European Union. Many people are losing confidence in a poorly understood and complex system. Yet people also expect the Union to take the lead in responding to environmental challenges, unemployment, concerns over food safety and regional conflicts. The Union must take action to adapt governance under the existing treaties, but also prepare for a broader debate on the future of Europe in view of the next Inter-Governmental Conference. The White Paper proposes opening-up the policy making process to get more people and organisations involved in shaping and delivering EU policy. The Commission makes clear that action is also required from national and local government, EU institutions and civil society. It makes the following proposals: 1) Better involvement and more openness. The Community method must be renewed through following a less top-down approach and complementing the EU's policy tools more effectively with non-legislative instruments. The Commission will provide particularly: - on line information through all decision-making stages; - a more systematic dialogue with regional and local governments at an early stage in shaping policy; - greater flexibility in implementing legislation to take account of regional and local conditions; - the establishment and publication of minimum standards for consultation on EU policy. 2) Better policies, regulation and delivery. The Commission will: - promote greater use of different policy tools; - simplify existing EU law and encourage Member States to simplify the national rules which give effect to EU provisions; - publish guidelines on collection and use of expert advice, so that it is clear what advice is given, where it is coming from, how it is used and the alternative views available. 3) Global governance. The Commission will: - improve dialogue with the governmental and non-governmental actors of third countries when developing policy proposals with an international dimension; - propose a review of the Union's international representation in order to allow it to speak more often with a single voice; 4) Refocused institutions. The EU institutions and Member States must work together to set out an overall policy strategy. The Commission will: - reinforce attempts to ensure policy coherence; - bring forward the next IGC proposals to refocus the Commissions executive responsibilities. The Council must reinforce its capacity to take decisions and cut through different sectoral interests, and should establish a stronger link between EU policy and national action. By assuming its political responsibility under the Community method, the Council would free the European Council to establish and follow long-term strategic orientations. TheCouncil and the European Parliament should focus more on defining the essential elements of policy and controlling the way in which they are executed. The Parliament should enhance its role in feeding into the political debate the views of its electors.