European governance: greater openness and participation. White Paper

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In presenting its report on European governance, the Commission is convinced of the importance of improving European governance and takes the view that the basic objectives and approaches of the White Paper are supported, in particular the need for: - improving bottom-up involvement in EU policy shaping and implementation, - widening the choice of regulatory instruments to respond to governance challenges, - more focused European institutions with clearer responsibilities. This report outlines the progress over the last 16 months. It shows that the Commission has already developed and launched the majority of the actions proposed in the White Paper. Some key issues raised in the public consultation, e.g. democratic legitimacy of EU institutions, will be addressed further in the Convention. However, the potential for European governance will not be fully realised until the magnitude of the challenges is recognised. In particular, the White Paper stressed that European governance must be a joint effort by all players. In addition, the European governance agenda cannot be limited to the Commission's White Paper and should continue beyond 2003. In parallel to its report, the Commission has adopted a series of follow-up documents on measures to improve decision-making in the European Union, in the framework of the existing treaties: 1) Towards a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue - General principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties by the Commission : through the present document the Commission therefore lays down a number of general principles that should govern its relations with interested parties, and a set of minimum standards for the Commission's consultation processes. These measures offer a general and flexible framework for consultation of civil society and stakeholders, ensuring transparency and access to consultations, feedback to contributors and a reasonable minimum delay for responding within 8 weeks. The general principles and minimum standards as regards consulting will apply from the beginning of 2003 and with regard to all major Commission policy initiatives. 2) Improving the knowledge base for better policies : this Communication aims to encapsulate and promote good practices related to the collection and use of expertise at all stages of Commission policy-making. The first objective is to help Commission departments mobilise and exploit the most appropriate expertise, with a view to establishing a sound knowledge base for better policies. The second objective is to uphold the Commission's determination that the process of collecting and using expert advice should be credible. The core principles of quality, openness and effectiveness should underpin all activities of the Commission in this domain. The set of guidelines should be used to help departments implement the principles. Finally, a series of practical questions should help departments design methods for collecting and using expert advice appropriate to the circumstances of specific cases. The Commission's principles and guidelines on expertise apply to the collection and use of expertise in a wide sense, not only scientific expertise, and will apply from the beginning of 2003. 3) Reaching out to regional and local actors : with the aim ofensuring better involvement of regional and local authorities and allowing a more adapted and flexible implementation of legislation and programmes, the Commission proposes to explore the possibility of target-based tripartite contracts and agreements between Member States, local authorities and the Commission for implementation of Community policies. Making a distinction between target-based tripartite contracts (concluded in direct application of basic Community law) and target-based tripartite agreements (concluded outside the framework of Community law) between the Commission, a Member State and a regional or local authority, the communication sets out aims and scope of this new instrument. 4) A framework for new regulatory agencies : in the perspective of a growing role for regulatory agencies, the framework proposes detailed criteria concerning the creation of regulatory agencies, their functioning and control mechanisms. The aim is to enhance implementation and enforcement of Community rules while emphasising the unity and integrity of the executive function at the Community level.