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

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The present report focuses on the main progress achieved in implementing reform in 2003 and the outlook for 2004. It also shows that Reform can succeed only if its implementation continues with undiminished vigour. With the exception of the annexes to this report, the report does not repeat the specific information provided in previous progress reports, because virtually all of the 98 White Paper actions are implemented. It therefore deals in more detail with some of the issues highlighted in January 2003 and the lessons learned from the experience of implementing reform last year. In particular, due to the importance of the dossier and its relationship with the reform project, this report describes the measures that must be taken as a follow-up to events at Eurostat. This report also provides detail about the administrative preparations for the forthcoming enlargement. 1) Creation of a culture based on service : - Payment delays continue to decrease from 54 days in 1999 to 43.7 in 2002 and 42.9 in 2003; - Positive response rate to public enquires for access to documents remain stable at around two thirds despite increase in number of enquiries; - Impact assessments for policy proposals successfully introduced as a new procedure in the Commission; - The Commission's Manual of operating procedures completely updated and put on line in December 2003. 2) Strategic Planning and Programming and policy coordination : - The process of gradual introduction of Activity-Based Budgeting comes to an end providing a more transparent and easily comprehensible budget; - Consolidated Activity-Based Management tools for planning, monitoring and reporting are now used across Commission services; - Coordinating mechanisms in the Commission are streamlined and consolidated in four interservice coordination groups. 3) Personnel Policy : - Negotiations on the Staff Regulations have been finalised pending verification of the legal text in the Council. There are no further obstacles on substance to their timely adoption; - EPSO launched 32 enlargement competitions and completed the first phase, which should lead to sufficient numbers of available laureates by the end of 2004; - Officials dedicated on average 8.32 days to training; - The general training budget received an increase of 37%, and 99% of the general training budget and 100% of the language training budget were committed; - All 9 Commission Decisions adopted under the existing Staff Regulations to execute the personnel policy chapter of the White Paper have been implemented; - The first staff appraisal and promotion exercise based on the new system was carried out within the foreseen deadlines; - No Director General has been in their current post for more than 5 years. 4) Internal Control and Financial Management : - New Financial Regulation enters into force; - Accounting Reform project develops as planned; - Reform actions on financial liability of officials and the Financial Irregularities Panel are being finalised; - Commission adopts Action 13 decision and the 2002 SynthesisReport, strengthening internal control communication. 5) IMPLEMENTING REFORM IN 2004 : If the main challenge for 2003 was the need for robust implementation of major structural and procedural reforms, then 2004 will be the year when reform needs to become fully operational. The main emphasis of the Reform programme for 2004 will be on implementation of changes, in particular those contained in the new Staff Regulations, which should enter into force on 1 May 2004, once the European Parliament has provided an opinion and the Council has adopted the Commission proposal. In addition, the new Staff Regulations will be needed to ensure that the Commission and the other Institutions can successfully integrate personnel from the acceding countries. In addition to providing the next Commission with a strong programming and planning framework, it will be crucial to ensure that it inherits a coherent and stable personnel policy system. Guaranteeing stability during the enlargement phase and ensuring a smooth transition to the new Staff Regulations are clearly the main challenges in this area for 2004. Implementation in 2004 will, while maintaining the orientations already set by the personnel reform, focus on revising and fine-tuning the details on the basis of practical experience. It should also be noted that the accounting reform should be finalised for implementation at the start of 2005. After implementation of

measures adopted in the wake of the Eurostat crisis, the internal control system will be stabilised. Lastly, the report also details - inter alia - the further reinforcing measures being taken in response to irregular practises detected in Eurostat; it incorporates new proposals relating to the work of the EU's anti-fraud office, OLAF; and it sets out guidelines to improve the use of existing rules to facilitate 'Whistleblowing'.