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

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The committee adopted the report by Malcolm HARBOUR (EPP-ED, UK) on the aspects of the Commission's White Paper falling within its remit. The report stressed that an independent, impartial European civil service provided the best guarantee for strengthening the role of the EU institutions and for promoting the Community interest. It agreed with many of the reform measures proposed by the Commission, such as the performance appraisal strategy, the emphasis on continuous training and the proposal to set up an interinstitutional recruitment agency. Although it supported the early retirement scheme, it pointed out that people should also be able to retire later. The Commission was urged to consider a funded, portable pension scheme so as to promote greater mobility. The committee stressed that officials needed to be given clear objectives, clear job descriptions (for all grades) and the right resources. It also called for procedures to deal with persistent under-performance and said that the idea of a job for life, irrespective of performance, must disappear. Recruitment, grading and pension plans should facilitate external recruitment, and flexible short- or long-term fixed contracts should be available. The compensation package should be competitive with the private and public sectors in order to attract suitably talented and well-motivated people. The committee also felt that managers should be able to operate performance-based pay rises as an incentive for staff, and praised the current ECB scheme. On the question of disciplinary structures and procedures, the committee wanted to see early action to redesign the system and review the provisions dealing with officials' personal financial liability. There should be a formal definition of officials' rights and obligations to report wrongdoing. The committee warned that the reforms must be implemented as quickly as possible to avoid staff demoralisation and public disenchantment. Lastly, it called on the Commission to put forward urgent proposals for reforming the Staff Regulations to take account, inter alia, of the new employment realities for Parliament, where flexibility and mobility were needed in the light of its cyclical workload and the staffing requirements of political groups, involving large numbers of temporary officials.