Resolution on the Commission's legislative and work programme for 2005

2004/2563(RSP) - 24/02/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

By 264 votes in favour to 201 against with 37 abstentions, the European Parliament has adopted a resolution on the Commission's legislative and work programme for 2005.

This comprehensive overview included the following points, amongst others:

- A more competitive and cohesive European Parliament : the Parliament welcomes the central importance attached to implementing the Lisbon Strategy and support attempts to target fewer and more complementary objectives. They invite the Commission to review the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy alongside the Lisbon Strategy. They also stress the importance of action at Member State and regional level as well as by the EU and call for rigorous impact assessment of all new initiatives.

Parliament calls for further action to complete the single market, notably in energy, transport, telecommunications and financial and other services. It invites the Commission to review its proposal for a software patents directive (in line with the decisions already taken by the Legal Affairs Committee and the Conference of Presidents). On financial services, Parliament support approval of measures already in the pipeline, but ask the Commission to avoid bringing forward new proposals unless they are duly justified and assessed. They applaud steps to improve the business environment, including entrepreneurship and good corporate governance, while stressing the importance of consistency in the contract law area. Parliament welcomes the high priority given to strengthening the EU's research and development effort.

MEPs state their belief that a strong competition policy and the effective enforcement of its rules are extremely important in improving competitiveness. They welcome the Commission's plans to promote competitive practices in a number of sectors, while supported the aim of ensuring less, better focussed state aid - though there should be no discrimination between the Members States on this matter.

Parliament call for the essential structure of the Stability and Growth Pact to be safeguarded in any proposed reform, in particular regarding the three per cent deficit rule, but also with more attention to be paid to the public debt position of the Member States. Cohesion policy, they assert, is important in its own right, but also as a method for achieving the Lisbon objectives. They support the Commission's efforts to persuade Member States that the Trans-European Network projects should be planned and financed on the basis of support both from the EU budget and, where possible, through public-private partnerships.

- Improving Europe's quality of life : Parliament says the effective implementation of the EU Biodiversity Plan will require appropriate financial resources, including for the Natura 2000 network. They call for the Commission and Parliament to work together to find a balanced solution on the REACH proposals. They also say it is time to update the rules on animal health and welfare in the light of new scientific developments. They call for the use of renewable and innovative energy solutions to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

Parliament welcomes the ongoing reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, but is concerned that this should not lead to distortions of competition among farmers in the Member States, while opposing renationalisation. On the other hand, MEPs regret the lack of proposals on the Common Fisheries Policy, given the large number of outstanding issues for the fundamentally important fisheries sector.

Parliament looks forward to concrete guidelines for the manifold challenges linked to an ageing population, especially proposals to provide the highest possible quality of life for the elderly, while ensuring sustainable pensions and health systems. They call on the Commission to work with Member States to increase the labour market participation of people over the age of 55, and call for a stronger emphasis on a 'child-friendly' working environment. They repeat that a strong and vibrant social dimension is an important component of a successful and dynamic economy. Parliament also calls for adequate EU funding for education, culture, youth and media programmes, and looks forward to the Commission communication on youth policy. It also wants to see detailed proposals on how to tackle the gender pay-gap in coming years.

- A safer Europe for the citizen : Parliament stresses the need to seek an appropriate balance between increased security for citizens and proper protection for their fundamental rights. This requires a proper evaluation of measures already adopted. The fight against terrorism and organised crime is critical to building a safer Europe, and the Commission should urgently work on clearer definitions of certain cross-border crimes. Parliament welcomes the common approach to border control, asylum and immigration, including better external border security and agreements with third countries. They call for national governments to forewarn other Member States before taking significant unilateral steps in this area. They also call for the creation of a proper EU legal base for Europol.

Parliament wants the new European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control to be up and running as soon as possible, and stresses the need for early warning and immediate response mechanisms for natural disasters and health crises. It calls for intensified research into HIV/AIDS medication.

On consumer protection, the need for simplification of the rules on cross-border contracts is stressed, while opposing the merging of consumer policy and public health programmes.

- A stronger Europe in a safer world : Parliament calls for the steady and determined development of the EU's common foreign, security and defence policies to help project European values on the world stage. It wants to see rapid agreement on the setting up of the joint external action service, in a way which protects the prerogatives of both the Commission and Parliament.

A high priority on implementing a comprehensive neighbourhood policy is requested, while developing a strong new Eastern dimension and a strengthening and deepening of the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. MEPs also ask for every possible effort to be made to achieve the reunification of Cyprus.

Parliament calls again or a strengthening of EU-US relations, including a genuine Transatlantic Partnership agreement, with commitments to remove the remaining trade barriers by 2015. MEPs oppose any lifting of the embargo on arms sales to China. They also call for clear and balanced EU input into the process of finding a lasting peace between Israel and a viable, democratic Palestinian state. They welcome the EU's positive role in the reconstruction of Iraq and in efforts to prevent Iran form acquiring military nuclear capability.

Parliament is gravely concerned that none of the eight Millennium Development Goals for sub-Saharan Africa have been met or are on track to be met by 2015. It says the international community must dramatically increase both the quality and quantity of its development assistance.

The Commission's aim to build a strong coalition for further post-Kyoto action on climate change is encouraged, while also encouraging the USA to bring forward its own proposals in this field. They also underline the importance of a multilateral approach to trade policy and a successful conclusion of the Doha Development Agenda. They stress the importance of progressively removing import barriers on goods from developing countries and progressively eliminating all forms of EU export subsidy on agricultural products.

- A Europe that works better - closer to the citizen : the House welcomes the Commission's commitment to applying an impact assessment process for all legislative measures of substance. They invite the Commission to develop a more ambitious approach for guaranteeing Member States comply with their obligations to implement EU directives. They also want a considerably more ambitious approach to the simplification of existing legislation.

Parliament stresses the paramount importance of making Europe work better and bringing it closer to the citizens, and that therefore the EU institutions should work together to help ensure the ratification of the Constitution.

Lastly, Parliament welcomes the Commission's emphasis on value for money and accountability as well as the suggestion of a roadmap aimed at securing a positive statement of assurance from the Court of Auditors. They again call for reforms to the EU Financial Regulation to remove all obstacles to proper implementation. They ask the Commission to create a secure and comprehensive internal control environment for the EU budget to address the problems arising from 'shared management' and to take a much tougher approach with decentralised paying agencies. Parliament emphasises the importance of including 'fraud-proofing' measures in all relevant legislative texts and expect the revision of the OLAF regulation to enhance that body's independent status. It urges the Commission to adopt a pro-active approach to encourage whistle-blowers to come forward, while stressing that the complete and successful implementation of the new accounting system is a priority for the year ahead.