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The Commission's Legislative and Work Programme for 2004

The Commission has published its Legislative and Work Programme for 2004. This is the last Legislative and Work Programme of the Prodi Commission, as the new Commission will take up office on 1 November 2004.

Aims of the programme

The principal aim of the Legislative and Work Programme is to focus on the Commission's priorities, announce its major new proposals for 2004 as well as a limited number of major proposals carried over from 2003 and finalise the selection of proposals requiring an extended impact assessment. It also provides a preliminary assessment of the progress made so far towards achieving the strategic objectives of the Prodi Commission, highlights the need for legislative follow-up by the Council and European Parliament to proposals already presented by the Commission, and reports on further work concerning simplification and codification of the *acquis*.

Outlook and challenges for 2004

According to the Commission, the European Union faces three major challenges in 2004: Shaping the future Union, prioritising the policy agenda, and developing the Union's external action.

The weak economic performance observed in the EU economies at the end of 2002 continued throughout the first half of 2003. Consequently, the Commission believes that, for a third consecutive year, growth is likely to be disappointing. However, they also believe that the confidence of economic market is returning and the international environment is improving. Despite this projected recovery, the protracted period of sluggish growth has taken its toll on the performance of the labour market and employment growth is expected to be slow.

The Commission confirms the political priorities that it identified in its Annual Policy Strategy for 2004: Accession of ten new Member States, stability, and sustainable growth (http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2003/com2003_0083en01.pdf).

Conclusions

The conclusion of the programme is that 2004 will be a crucial year for the European Union. The overarching task in 2004 will be to complete the successful integration of ten new Member States into the European Union and to define its future shape. At the same time, the European Union will need to press forward with its policy agenda, ensuring that citizens of the EU can enjoy good prospects for stability and sustainable growth.

The Commission's Legislative and Work Programme for 2004:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/off/work_programme/index_en.htm

Priorities for the Irish Presidency

On 1 January, Ireland took over the Presidency of the EU for the sixth time and will hold it until 30 June 2004. According to the tradition, the Irish Presidency has defined a number of priorities within the different policy areas. Within the area of education, the three top priorities are availability of education, training and lifelong learning, Europass and the interim implementation report.

Availability of education, training and lifelong learning.

The enlargement of the European Union on 1 May 2004 will enrich the human capital in the Union even further. The Irish Presidency will therefore foster measures to ensure the availability of education, training and lifelong learning, which will be required if people are to realise their full potential in the knowledge society.

Europass

Due to the importance of improved mutual recognition of qualifications for mobility, the Irish Presidency will focus on the "Europass" initiative for transparency of qualifications and competencies.

The interim implementation report.

The Council will also prepare its interim implementation report for the Spring European Council, setting out directions for the future on how best to pursue the essential educational, skills and training aspects of the Lisbon programme and advancing work on the new generation of European education, training and youth programmes.

For further reading see the website of the Irish Presidency at:
<http://www.eu2004.ie/templates/homepage.asp?sNavlocator=1>

New website on the implementation of "Education & Training 2010"

The Commission has launched a new website entitled "Education and training 2010 – Diverse Systems, Shared Goals". The website presents all relevant information concerning the Lisbon strategy and education.

The website is well arranged with a chronological introduction that specifies the main actions taken in connection with the Lisbon strategy and the education area. Furthermore, it is possible to find more detailed information as all the important background documents are available at the website, as well as the different types of programmes and actions and policy areas. Documents from the working groups and the latest news about the Lisbon strategy are also available in order to update readers about the latest actions and initiatives taken.

See the website:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.htm

European Year of Education through Sport

The European Year of Education through Sport started on 1 January 2004. In the coming year 28 countries will focus on the promotion of the educational values of sport and reinforcing the links between the worlds of sport and education.

The Year has many aims, of which perhaps the most important are to raise the European public's (and in particular young people's) awareness of the importance of sport in the development of the personality and social skills. Furthermore, it aims to encourage sport in the development of the personality and social skills and to encourage the links between education and sport in Europe, states the Commission.

At ETUCE's General Assembly in December 2003 the European Year of Education through Sport was also on the agenda. The participants at the General Assembly agreed upon the following initiatives to be taken during 2004:

- Consult Member Organisations on initiatives to be taken in relation to the European Year on Sports.
- Support Member Organisations' initiatives by compiling national reports and assess activities in the light of the need for further initiatives at the European level.

- Submit conclusions to Member Organisations and the European Commission.

In order to arrange events associated with the European Year of Education through Sport, the Commission launched in May a call for proposals for the selection of transitional projects for the first six months of 2004. The last phase of the call for proposals will be closed on 1 March 2004 and will relate to projects planned to run from July 2004 onwards.

The official launch of the Year will take place in January and will be one of the key events at the start of the Irish Presidency. A national co-ordination body has been designated in each participating country in order to oversee the year as it unfolds.

The decision to name 2004 the “European Year of Education through Sport” was adopted by the Parliament and the European Council this year, on the basis of a proposal from the Commission.

More information: <http://www.eyes-2004.info>

Council Meeting – Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

The Council (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs) meet on 20 October in Luxembourg.

Undeclared work

A resolution concerning undeclared work was adopted. The resolution was an initiative of the Presidency. The Resolution will not affect the European Employment Guidelines, nor is it binding for the member countries.

Immigration, integration and employment

The Council held a policy debate on the Commission's Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment (June 2003). This Communication reviews integration policies nationally and at EU level and looks at the role of immigration in the context of ageing populations, while suggesting ways of promoting the integration of immigrants.

All delegations welcomed the Commission's communication as a good basis for future work and stressed that any initiatives should be taken in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy and the European Employment Strategy;

A number of delegations pointed to the limited role of immigration from third countries in addressing the problem of

labour shortages resulting from population ageing. They stressed the importance of exploiting the full resources of the internal labour market, including the potential of the future Member States;

A large majority of delegations was in favour of drawing up general principles for the integration of legal immigrants into the labour market at EU level, while allowing Member States to respond to their specific labour market situations

Specific measures should be taken to obtain a better integration of legal immigrants on the labour market according to the principle of non-discrimination particularly regarding better access to education (notably linguistic skills) and training. This should take into account the situation of both new immigrants and second and third generation immigrants;

On the basis of the discussion, the Council instructed Coreper to prepare a set of conclusions, with a view to these being submitted to the Council at its December meeting.

Co-ordination of Social Security Systems

The Council reached a general agreement on the pre-retirement and family benefits chapters of the proposal for a Regulation aiming at replacing the current social security co-ordination system. The Council instructed the Committee of Permanent Representatives to progress rapidly on this task with a view to enabling it to reach overall agreement at its December meeting.

Due to a specific need of Luxembourg to mitigate the consequences of the current draft of Chapter 6 (unemployment benefits), agreement on this chapter had to be delayed until December.

Due to the complexity and the urgency of this file, it had been decided to reach agreement in Council on a chapter-by-chapter basis. Partial agreements have already been reached under the Spanish, Danish and Greek Presidencies. Final approval will be subject to agreement on the text as a whole, pending which agreements on the different chapters are considered provisional.

The proposal is aimed at replacing and simplifying the Community legislation contained in Regulation 1408/71/EEC. The main objective is to remove obstacles to the free movement of persons within the Community derived from the co-existence of different national social security systems.

DAPHNE II¹

The Council reached political agreement on the proposal for a Decision establishing a second phase of the DAPHNE II programme (2004-2008). The Council will formally adopt its common position at one of its forthcoming sessions following finalisation of the text.

This programme is aimed at preventing and combating violence against children, young people and women and at protecting victims and groups at risk.

Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

The Council adopted a resolution on combating trafficking in human beings, in particular woman.

Council Meeting - Education, Youth and Culture

The 24 and 25 November 2003 the Council (Education, Youth and Culture) met in Brussels.

Erasmus Mundus

The Council unanimously adopted the education programme Erasmus Mundus. The programme, which will run for a period of five years (2004-2008), aims to enhance quality in higher education and to promote intercultural understanding. The budget has risen from €200 million in the original proposal to €230 million.

e-Learning

The e-Learning programme was also adopted unanimously by the Council. The programme will be established for a period of three years (2004-2006) and seeks to integrate information and communication technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe.

Community action programme

On the basis of a Presidency compromise, the Council reached unanimous political agreement on this Community action programme. The Presidency compromise entails two changes compared to the original proposal. The duration of the programme has been reduced to three years (2004-2006) instead of five years (2004-2008). The budget is reduced from €129,620 million to €77 million. This political agreement opens the way to the subsequent formal adoption of a Council common position.

¹ DAPHNE II. See among others:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/funding/daphne/funding_daphne_en.htm

Education and training systems in Europe

The Council had a useful exchange of views on the basis of a Presidency questionnaire concerning a draft joint interim report on implementation of the detailed work programme for the pursuit of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe.

A majority of delegations were able to agree on the following points:

- The pursuit of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe should be geared towards action. A high-level working group is therefore unnecessary at this stage.
- The Commission's monitoring of training and education actions must be non-bureaucratic, flexible and must observe the principle of subsidiarity. Annual reports from the Member States are therefore not necessary.
- The work programme and the reference indicators must take into account the specific characteristics of each Member State and their respective levels.
- The interim report must emphasise the steps forward and progress made by the Member States in implementing the detailed work programme.

The Education Ministers and the Commission are to submit a progress report on the achievement of the objectives set under the Lisbon strategy for education and training systems in Europe at the spring 2004 European Council. The Education Council and the Commission will therefore adopt an interim report on 26 February 2004, to be presented to the European Council.

Action plan for languages

The Council took note of the Commission's presentation of its action plan for 2004-2006 on "Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity". The European Year of Languages 2001 has provided the background for preparing this action plan, as the Commission experienced/observed the need to improve language knowledge and linguistic diversity. The focus areas in the programme will be lifelong language learning, better language learning and the building of a language-friendly environment. The main aim of the plan is to enable all pupils to learn two languages in addition to their mother tongue. An evaluation report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council is scheduled for 2007.

Combating the social exclusion of young people

A Resolution on “Making school an open learning environment to prevent and combat early school leaving and disaffection among young people and to encourage their social inclusion” was unanimously adopted by Council. The Resolution suggests in particular that Member States promote partnerships between schools, parents' associations, companies and local authorities and support the training of educators, trainers and teachers.

Knowledge society

The Council also adopted a Resolution on "Development of human capital for social cohesion and competitiveness in the knowledge society".

Promotion of bodies active at European level in the field of youth

The Council reached unanimous political agreement on the proposal to establish a Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth. The action programme comprises two parts, namely grants for the operation of the European Youth Forum and grants for the operation of international non-governmental youth organisations. The grants will be given directly by the Commission. The budget is set at €13 million and the programme will run for a period of three years (2004-2006).

Future of co-operation in the field of youth

The Council adopted a Resolution on common objectives for participation by and information for young people and had an exchange of views on links between youth policy and other Sectors; the outcome of the discussion will be used by the Commission in its future initiatives. The debate concentrated on the effectiveness of national initiatives taken in the context of a combined approach to the youth sector and other sectors and complementarity between national and Community programmes.

Council meeting – Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

Another council meeting (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs) was held on 1 and 2 December in Brussels.

Co-ordination of Social Security Systems

The Council unanimously reached a partial political agreement on the proposal for a Regulation aiming at replacing the current social security co-ordination system, on the basis of a Presidency compromise proposal. The Council invited the Permanent Representatives Committee to continue work on the Annexes

with a view to reaching full political agreement on the draft Regulation before the end of the year.

The two outstanding issues connected with this dossier, which has been on the table of the Council since 1999, concerned the provisions regarding the unemployment chapter.

The first issue related to the payment of unemployment benefits to unemployed frontier and seasonal workers. There were still reservations regarding the cost of unemployment benefits to be provided by the State of residence to unemployed persons who do not reside in the State in which they were previously employed. As the State of residence did not receive the corresponding contributions, it was proposed that the State of last activity should, within certain limits, reimburse the cost of the unemployment benefits provided by the State of residence.

All delegations and the Commission were able to accept the Presidency's latest compromise proposal.

The second issue concerns Luxembourg's request for a specific transitional period in view of the need to reinforce its employment services related to frontier workers being able to register additionally with the employment service of their State of last activity. The Council agreed that a two-year transitional period should be granted to Luxembourg.

Social Protection Committee

The Council reached agreement on a General Approach with a view to establishing the future Social Protection Committee (SPC) in line with its new legal basis. The Committee will continue to promote co-operation on social protection policies between Member States and with the Commission

Equal Access

The Presidency provided written information to the Council regarding the resolution adopted by the Council on 26/27 November 2003 on equal access to and participation of women and men in the knowledge society for growth and innovation. The Commission also provided a document to the Council on the presentation of a Council Directive implementing the principle of equal treatment between women and men in the access to and supply of goods and services, adopted on 5 November 2003.

DAPHNE II (2004-2008)

The Council unanimously adopted a common position on the Decision establishing a second phase of the DAPHNE II Programme (2004-2008). This programme is aimed at preventing

and combating violence against children, young people and women and at protecting victims and groups at risk.

The Item was approved without debate.

Invitation to the encounter: “Modern Biology and Visions of Humanity”

The European Commission, Research Directorate, is organising an encounter entitled: “Modern Biology and Visions of Humanity” to be held in Genoa (Italy) on March 22-23, 2004.

Recent biological advances have called into question many of the convictions we have held for centuries about the nature of humanity. What impact is this having on how we see ourselves, and how can we use the new knowledge not only to create a better society but also to reach a fuller understanding of what it means to be human?

To find answers to some of these questions, the [European Group on Life Sciences](#) is organising a special encounter, bringing together experts from a wide range of disciplines: scientists, psychiatrists, philosophers, sociologists, politicians, journalists, writers and poets. Their task will be to put the modern biology in a broader context of historical, philosophical and emotional understanding, and assess how this new knowledge is affecting humanity’s vision of itself.

All ETUCE’s member organisations and associated member organisations are invited to be part of the public in the encounter.

The preliminary programme as well as further information can be found on the website:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/conferences/2004/biology/index_en.html

Furthermore, it is possible to register online at:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/biology.html>