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Conclusion statement on Commission Work programme 2012

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

EP Plenary session

Strasbourg, 15 November 2011

Mr President, I will try to react to the most frequent questions and comments, but first I would like to thank all honourable Members for a very interesting and lively debate. I believe that most of us in this room feel the same way: we are really going through the defining moment in European history.

I think, judging from most of your interventions, that we have come to the same conclusions: we need more Europe, not less; we need to move forward together, or risk fragmentation. How much more proof do we need of how interdependent we are in Europe? Therefore I think that the answer should be a stronger, more responsible Union, and one which safeguards what makes us unique: the Community method.

Our work programme for 2012 brings us closer to deeper integration of economic policies and governance in the euro area. Clearly, the deepening of euro area integration must be done through the Community method.

I agree absolutely with Mr Swoboda. The Commission will do everything possible to prevent a possible split in the European Union. I also agree with the many speakers who said that we need to offer even more assistance and help to the countries in need. Therefore, we are exploring all the possibilities we have at our disposal. We have just established a Task Force for Greece and we are looking at other ways to help the countries with problems to absorb European funds better. I am sure that the discussions we will be having next year about how to simplify our programmes will also be very important in that respect.

To return to the subject of what action we intend to take, I would like to assure you that we really do feel a sense of urgency in the Commission. We know that we are in an extremely demanding and difficult situation and that urgent steps are needed. You have seen how many steps we have taken so far. I think the governance package will truly change the character of how we govern – from both the macroeconomic and the microeconomic point of view – the European Union as such and Member States' economies in particular.

We will be having a deep debate on this issue tomorrow with President Barroso and Vice-President Rehn, so I will not go into further detail now. I would just like to assure all of you that we will soon be presenting you with a list of proposals and a request to fast-track them. Some of them have been mentioned here in this Chamber this afternoon. These are the proposals through which we believe we can guarantee growth and speedily create jobs. They relate to the single market and are oriented towards removing barriers in the market. They are focused on using new technologies, including digital technologies, to create jobs and growth.

Turning to the economic situation, the Commission will come on 23 November with a new package, alongside the Annual Growth Survey. It will comprise not only an analysis of the state of the economy in the European Union, but also very clear and concrete country-specific recommendations concerning what the Commission believes should be improved in this or that Member State. Here again, we will need your help to reinforce the message

from the European Union and support the measures which, sometimes, can only be taken at national level.

In addition, we will put forward two other very important proposals in this area which are based on Article 136. One will be a Communication on the external representation of the euro area and the other – as promised – will be the Green Paper on stability bonds. We know that we need to have a very thorough look at this proposal, and you know how important that discussion will be.

Some of you referred to the discussion on Treaty change. As you know, the President of the European Council has been asked, in close collaboration with the President of the Commission and the President of the Eurogroup, to explore the possibility of limited Treaty changes in the context of the strengthening of economic governance. An interim report, including a roadmap, will be presented in December 2011 and should offer the first orientations. As you know, the report should be finalised by March 2012.

We are absolutely convinced in the Commission that Treaty change is not a short-term remedy for the crisis and that it has to be seen as part of the wider thrust towards reinforced economic governance. I think what is very important for this Parliament is that we are also absolutely convinced that Parliament should be consulted on this measure. Parliament should be involved in the process of thinking about how to approach this issue, and the Commission will definitely proceed in this manner.

With regard to programming, I think that this is the first programme on which the European Parliament and the Commission have cooperated so closely. I calculate that we have had more than 80 meetings between the Commissioners and the respective committees. Many of them were devoted to the so-called structured dialogue, so we really see it as a common project.

In response to Mr Szájer, we are also reflecting on the proposals we heard from the European Parliament. There will be a proposal on the status of the European political parties. We will continue making progress on comitology. As has been said, on the trade area our work is done. In AGRI we are continuing, and we promise that this process will be completed by 2012. I believe that this will be done.

Some of you asked about the proposals which we promised to deliver this year. As you know, we promised to deliver 40 strategic initiatives. 23 have already been delivered to the legislator and 11 will be done before the end of the year. Here I would like to assure Mrs Trautmann, Mr Őry and Mr Cercas that both the Posting of Workers Directive and also the Social Services of General Interest Directive will be presented to Parliament in December of this year. In the end, we aim to deliver to you 34 out of 40 promised directives. Clearly, the rest need more elaboration and analysis, but I can assure you that they will be coming very soon next year.

To reply to various interventions from the floor, with regard to SMEs, I would like to assure you that every impact assessment now contains a chapter on SMEs and how our policies will influence them and their ability to perform in the single market. We are very much aware of how important it is to reduce

the administrative burden and, as was correctly pointed out, a 25% reduction of the administrative burden has already been delivered.

The Commission has delivered even more. We have delivered 31% of the proposals, and 6% of them are now in the legislative process. But legislation at European level is one thing; how it is transposed at national level is another. Therefore we need the good cooperation of the national Member States to actively reduce administrative burdens at national level.

In response to Mr Duff, who asked about where we stand on the accession of the European Union to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, I would like to briefly assure him that the Commission is committed to speedy accession and that the current draft accession agreement results from technical negotiations with the Council of Europe. We believe that this is a well-balanced compromise text. Therefore the Commission would be willing to reopen this package only if absolutely necessary, to address the concerns of the two Member States. The Commission and the Presidency are working very hard to reach a common position and to find a possible compromise so that we can conclude this process as quickly as possible.

I will respond very briefly to all the various interventions on the Financial Transaction Tax. I think that we have to be very fair about this question. What we are looking for is a fair contribution back to society from the financial industry, bearing in mind how much society has helped the financial industry. European governments had to provide EUR 4.6 trillion in credit guarantees alone.

I think it is a fair approach to try to look for additional revenues in the European Union. Should we tax labour? Should we tax consumption? Should we again transfer the burden to the citizens? We in the Commission do not think so. Therefore the legislative process will continue and we believe that, in the end, we will be able to find a good solution. Apart from the revenue side, we also have to look at how healthy the regulatory effect will be, especially when we see what kind of results high-frequency trading can cause. This process will have a positive effect on this as well.

Lastly, on Mrs Grässle's question concerning the Staff Regulations, I am sure that she is well aware that we are going through what I believe will be the last phases of the social dialogue. I have a conciliation meeting with staff unions planned for tomorrow afternoon and we definitely would like to present the proposal for Staff Regulation reforms before the end of the year.

Concerning the enforcement of European law, this is a very important issue and we are taking our powers very seriously. To give just one concrete example, we are taking three Member States to court for failure to transpose the Service Directive. In this case, we are asking for financial penalties as well.