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The Commission's Work Programme for 2000

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

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Madame President,

Honourable Members,

2000 will be a landmark year – the start of what I expect to be the “decade of Europe”, a decade of successful enlargement and of unprecedented economic and social progress amounting to a veritable renaissance.

2000 will also be a landmark year for this Commission - the year in which we begin to implement the new priorities for our five-year term of office.

In February I set out these priorities in my strategy document "Shaping the New Europe". And Europe is indeed being reshaped. The enlargement process has begun, with the launch of new accession negotiations and of the Intergovernmental Conference. We are embarking on a radical modernisation of our economies and social protection systems, and the Lisbon Summit will give tremendous new impetus to this process. You will have read the Commission's contribution to the Summit, and I need not add to what I said to this House yesterday on this subject.

Within the framework of our strategic objectives for 2000-2005, the 2000 work programme sets out a clear and detailed agenda for the current year. Not only is it an exceedingly comprehensive document but it reflects the Commission's concern for openness and accountability and for improving communication between the institutions. You will have seen that the Commission department responsible for each initiative is specified, so that interested parties know whom to contact. The procedure and probable date of adoption by the Commission are also given.

In line with the wishes of this House, we have stated the type of legislation or paper involved in each initiative, and the legal basis proposed for it. Initiatives that are likely to involve a Parliament co-decision procedure are also clearly indicated.

This Work Programme thus provides a first example of the Commission's promised new approach to more effective organising and planning.

Finally, in the interests of transparency and effective communication with the citizens, we have published the entire document on the internet. It is, after all, an agenda for concrete action that will make a real difference in the lives of Europe's citizens.

Let me now turn to the substance of this Work Programme. I have said enough in recent days and weeks about the Commission's internal reforms, Europe's new social and economic agenda and the challenges of enlargement. In the few minutes remaining to me this morning, I shall therefore focus on just some of the ways in which the Commission, in 2000, will be working specifically for the citizens whom you represent.

Europe's citizens increasingly look for Europe-wide responses to everyday concerns which affect their quality of life. Concerns such as the environment, energy, transport, health and consumer issues.

Moreover, European citizenship will, to most people, remain a vague and intangible concept unless it is anchored in concrete, tangible realities such as Europe-wide security and access to justice for all. It is practical things, such as effective action to combat crime and to defend citizens' rights, which make Europe relevant to everyday life and give people a real sense of belonging together in a European Community.

In 2000, therefore, the Commission will make every effort to develop the Union as an area of freedom, security and justice, in line with the goals set by the Tampere European Council.

Citizens want to be able to go about their daily lives in safety. They are rightly concerned, for example, about the rise in drug-related crime on their streets and about the activities of international criminal organisations. That is why, in 2000, the Commission will be proposing more effective ways of combating organised crime at European level, through closer co-operation between Europe's police forces.

Citizens are also very much aware of the problems of inter-racial tension within their communities and of the need for a fair and effective immigration and asylum policy. In 2000, therefore, the Commission will be working closely with the Member States to develop such a policy – one that reconciles Europe's traditions of openness, tolerance and hospitality, and our international obligations, with the need to secure our external borders.

We shall also be working with the Member States to draw up a European Charter of Fundamental Rights. One of those fundamental rights is clearly the right to access to justice, and we will be proposing measures to improve the Member States' mutual recognition of judgments in civil and commercial law.

Our citizens need to see what progress we are making on all these fronts, so one of our first steps will be to establish a "scoreboard" for monitoring progress in a clear and visible way.

Another major area of concern for citizens is the environment. Europe has to reconcile environmental protection with social progress and economic development, and our continuing concern is to ensure that environmental considerations are integrated into all European policies. That is why the Commission will be working to develop a comprehensive programme for sustainable development, the environmental pillar of which will be the Sixth Environmental Action Programme.

We have recently adopted a White Paper on environmental liability and a twin track strategy for achieving the emission reduction target to which the EU is committed under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. At the same time, we are working to improve the legal framework for genetically modified organisms and we will be presenting a strategy for chemicals in the EU.

The need to reconcile environmental protection with social and economic development is well illustrated by the problem of fisheries conservation. Overfishing threatens not only the survival of certain species but also the future of the fishing industry. That is why we shall be implementing, in 2000, a new scheme for supporting the men and women who make their living from fishing while at the same time reducing the number of boats, promoting more selective fishing and protecting the environment. The scheme will encourage a greater diversity of economic activity in regions currently dependent on fishing.

We shall also make every effort to conclude a mutually beneficial fisheries agreement with Morocco and we shall review, consolidate and simplify Europe's fisheries legislation – which currently consists of more than 20 regulations.

This exercise in simplifying the rules is just one example of our new drive for greater transparency in complex legislative areas.

Although the problem of fisheries conservation is particularly sensitive in Europe, it is certainly not confined to Europe: in fact, eleven of the world's fifteen major fisheries are in decline and more than two thirds of the main fish species are under threat.

Consequently, action at European level on fisheries and, indeed, on all other environmental and sustainable development issues must tie in with action world wide. These are global concerns, and over the next year or two we shall increasingly have our sights set on the "Rio + 10" Conference, to be held in 2002.

Europe's citizens are also concerned about Europe's energy and transport policies. They want a safe and efficient transport system and a reliable supply of clean energy at affordable prices.

In 2000, therefore, the Commission will issue a strategy paper on the future role of different sources of energy, with the aim of ensuring security of supply. We shall also continue to develop a rational and sustainable transport policy. Traffic congestion must be eased by removing bottlenecks in the Trans-European Networks and seeking a better balance in the use of road, rail and maritime transport. We shall therefore produce a green paper on the role of urban public transport and work towards creating a Single European Airspace. We shall also bring forward proposals for improving safety in air travel and in the maritime transport of oil.

Finally, we shall be giving increased attention to public health and consumer issues. Consumers' rights need protecting in an increasingly border-free world, where e-commerce is expanding rapidly. The Commission's priorities will therefore include the safety of products and services, better credit and mortgage legislation and action to protect consumers from misleading advertising.

Public health must also be protected, and the Amsterdam Treaty gives the Commission new powers to do so. We therefore intend to issue a Communication on health strategy, and to adopt an Action Programme on Health.

The Commission has already produced a white paper on food safety, proposing the establishment of a European Food Authority. In 2000 we shall present a concrete proposal for setting up this body and carry out a comprehensive reform of European food legislation. We will, furthermore, bring forward fresh initiatives to improve animal welfare, which is another growing concern of Europe's citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen, the 2000 Work Programme covers far more than I have time to comment on this morning, but you will have read the document and I look forward to a constructive debate on all its aspects. Although I have focused my comments on the issues of most direct and everyday concern to Europe's citizens, the whole programme is relevant to their lives and is an essential first step towards shaping the new Europe they are calling for.

You are the citizens' elected representatives, and you have a vital role to play in delivering the results they expect of us. Let us work together to make a success of this Programme and to ensure that 2000 is not just a great year for Europe but the first year of a truly great decade.

Thank you.