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White Paper on **European Governance**

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## BOOK REVIEW

*Doing Less to Do More : A New Focus for the EU*

Nick Clegg MEP

(Centre for European Reform, London, 2000)

The development of the EU is not historically determined or necessarily logical, but has also been influenced by accident and personalities. The EU currently handles too many policies, particularly in ill-justified areas. This causes administrative strain, as well as a crisis of legitimacy and accountability. The EU should trim its activities, which will free up institutions to focus on key issues and re-establish credibility.

Despite token declarations about subsidiarity, there is still an imbalance in the EU's powers. The EU cannot simply justify its action in terms of efficiency, particularly if it removes the political debate from the member states where it should be held and is an attempt to bypass legislative failings of member states (e.g. working time directive). On the other hand, giving powers to the EU can reinvigorate national debates (e.g. drug trafficking). It is important to find the right balance.

- **White Paper** : Prodi should convene a high level working group with representatives from the Commission, Council, Parliament and other academics. The group should present its findings to Nice. This project needs support from other actors.
- **Annual Work Programme** : The President's State of Union speech should include a detailed list of legislative and non-legislative proposals. The Parliament's committees should examine these proposals, and national parliamentarians could also be involved.
- **Budget** : It should be scrutinised by an EP standing committee. The author made several proposals to streamline the budget (e.g. abolish small budget lines, transfer development aid to independent agency, review CAP and community initiatives).
- **Social Policy** : The Commission should review its aims and effectiveness, and should also establish new guidelines.
- **Define Core Activities** : The author identified key competences (single market, environment, consumer protection, transport, RD, external trade, crime and asylum, foreign and defence, enlargement). He suggested that others should be removed (education, health, employment, culture, media, tourism), including those with little bearing on the single market.

- **Internal Procedures** : Commission Secretariat General (or senior commissioner) could amend or reject individual commissioners' proposals that are not well-justified. Each proposal should justify action in terms of subsidiarity. The Commission should abandon its meaningless annual reports on 'Better Lawmaking'. EP standing scrutiny committee needs more authority to question Commission's annual programme and to rein in misguided MEP amendments (e.g. develop model like the UK Table Office). There is a need to address the lack of transparency in the Council (e.g. states could post Ministers for Europe permanently in Brussels to prevent political decisions being taken by PermRep officials, establish new General Affairs Council, hold in public all meetings where the Council acts as a legislature).
- **Constitutional Issues** : The author's proposals are linked to wider debates. One issue is the need to clarify competences ; the author does not support a defined list, although an ntermediate step could be a treaty declaration that says certain policies are the exclusive competence of states. A second issue is the proposal to develop a second legislative chamber that is comprised of national MPs. Although the author says this is unworkable and unnecessary, MPs could join MEPs in evaluating the Commission's annual work

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