

**Members' Research Service
Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau**



Cynulliad National
Cenedlaethol Assembly for
Cymru Wales

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Equality of Opportunity Committee

Date: 15 February 2006
Time: 9.00 - 12.30
Venue: National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay
Title: EU policy and legislative priorities for 2006

Purpose of Paper

1. This paper invites Members to note which European Union policy and legislative issues the Committee may wish to prioritise and focus on in its forward work programme for 2006. The Welsh Assembly Government has provided a summary of the European Commission's Legislative and Work Programme 2006 (hereafter, 'Work Programme') and its implications for the Assembly Government - extract from the Welsh Assembly Government's paper to the European and External Affairs Committee (18 January) is attached at Annex A.

Background

2. At this meeting, this Committee has been invited to note suggested priority areas for the coming year from the European Commission's Forward Work Programme. Each of the Subject Committees, the Equality of Opportunity Committee and European and External Affairs Committee have been invited to do the same, with the European and External Affairs Committee maintaining a strategic overview of the process.

3. The European Commission's Work Programme was published on 25 October 2005. It lists all priority items which the Commission will propose in 2006, under the Commission's four key aims: prosperity, solidarity, security and Europe as a world partner. A further non-priority list of items is also published by the Commission. These documents can be accessed on the Commission's website:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/atwork/programmes/index_en.htm

4. The Welsh Assembly Government paper to the European and External Affairs Committee includes their analysis of the implications of the work programme for the WAG, according to subject area.

Under the heading of "Health & Social Affairs Policy", the paper notes that:

"The Commission will set out ideas about how the EU can contribute to tackling the problem of Europe's demographic ageing; consideration of current labour law, including policies on gender equality and health and safety at work"

"With regard to civil justice the programme covers areas such as divorce and matrimonial property regimes and enforcing compensation, the rights of the child in areas like family reunification, parental responsibilities and human trafficking. Enhancing health and confronting risks also important elements in the programme"

The paper further notes that the dossiers of interest (within the health and social affairs policy area) are:

Extract from the Welsh Assembly Government's paper to the European and External Affairs Committee (18 January).

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EUROPEAN & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Date: 18 January 2006

Time: 09.00 – 12.00

Venue: National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Title: European Commission Legislative and Work Programme 2006: the implications for the Welsh Assembly Government

Extract:

Introduction

The Commission work programme for 2006 feels lighter, in terms of potential impact on Wales, than its programme for 2005. Some of the most important issues for the Assembly Government during 2006 will be “carry-overs” from the 05 programme. Specifically these will include the Working Time Directive, the chemical registration REACH Directive and the Directive for a single market in Services.

Structural Funds will be at the forefront of the Assembly's work. With the budgetary arrangements in place, the Assembly Government will be heavily occupied negotiating programmes with partners in Wales and with the Commission in Brussels.

2006 will be the year of preparation for the start of the new programme on 01/01/07. Beyond the Structural Funds, a new generation of programmes in areas like **rural development, innovation, research and education** will open up. Wales has benefited from all of these in the past and demand should remain high. 2006 is also a critical year for the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs which reaches a key implementation stage.

In the context of **Wales' Presidency of the Regions with Legislative Powers** (REGLEG) during 2006, the Commission's ambitions for “Delivery and Better Regulation” will be particularly important. A reduced legislative burden, in itself, indicates part of the Commission's response to improving regulation. The Commission has committed itself to the “rigorous application” of better regulation discipline through simplification, modernisation, consultation, and a careful evaluation of the impact of policies. Our role, with partners, is to assist the Commission in this work and to help hold them to account against commitments.

The Commission Preamble

The present Commission set out some key strategic aims at the start of its mandate - **prosperity, solidarity, security and Europe as a world partner** – and its programme for

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2006 is designed to reflect these themes. In the absence of a ratified Constitution the Commission has launched a communication programme – “Plan D for democracy, dialogue and debate” – to help stimulate debate on Europe’s future. The precise format of this effort and the extent of Member States’ involvement will vary.

Prosperity: the Commission will report to the spring European Council on progress towards Lisbon through the 25 national reform programmes adopted by Member States. A European Institute of Technology is proposed and work will continue to launch the new framework programme for research from 2007. 2006 is designated the European Year of Mobility for Workers. Emphasis is placed on finalising the **internal market for energy** and work will continue to explore new technological solutions such as **clean coal and renewable energies**. The single market will be simplified in general but strengthened specifically on **postal services, public procurement** and banking. The potential for enlargement of the eurozone will be examined in the light of macroeconomic conditions.

Solidarity: the Commission will set out ideas on coping with the problem of demographic **ageing**; alongside this will be thoughts on the effective management of **migration flows**. There will be further discussions on **climate change** and proposed measures such as bringing the aviation sector into the emissions trading scheme. The sustainable management of natural resources will extend to **reform of the wine, fruit and vegetables and the bananas sectors** – this will bring the current process of agricultural reform into its final phase following the agreement on sugar reform. Soaring oil prices have under-lined the importance of competitive and secure energy supplies for Europe. **Energy efficiency and renewable sources** will be promoted and the **potential of biofuels** further explored. A new **maritime strategy** will pioneer an integrated approach to developing the maritime economy supported by excellence in marine science and technology.

Security: the cross-border nature of terrorism calls for better co-ordination between law enforcement authorities; the same applies for organised crime. A number of initiatives are planned in relation to confronting health risks, specifically in the fields of food safety and transport.

Europe as a world partner: enlargement preparations will continue for Bulgaria and Romania as well as accession talks with Turkey and Croatia. Further accession requests may be dealt with and neighbourhood action plans progressed, particularly in developing integrated energy markets. Major development commitments were made in 2005; the Union must deliver on these in 2006. The consequences of **the Doha round** of negotiations in Hong Kong will be followed up. The Union will contribute to an efficient multilateral approach to **sustainable development** worldwide.

Delivery and Better Regulation: Impact assessments are now standard for legislative and policy defining proposals. As a result of following Better Regulation principles, the Commission withdrew 68 proposals in 2005 and is committed to testing all proposals against subsidiarity and proportionality (in plain English, acting only when necessary and “in the lightest form consistent with achieving its objectives”). The Commission’s approach to value for money is thus defined: **“The EU Budget should only be used when it can offer better value for money than spending at national level.”** The Commission is committed to simplifying legislation and will focus on the automotive, construction and waste sectors during the first phase.

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Below is a more detailed summary of the Commission's plans divided into work sectors that reflect Assembly organisation...

... HEALTH & SOCIAL AFFAIRS POLICY

...“The Commission will set out ideas about how the EU can contribute to tackling the problem of Europe's demographic ageing; consideration of current labour law, including policies on gender equality and health and safety at work”

“With regard to civil justice the programme covers areas such as divorce and matrimonial property regimes and enforcing compensation, the rights of the child in areas like family reunification, parental responsibilities and human trafficking. Enhancing health and confronting risks also important elements in the programme”

And:

...“There are no specific proposals for youth and culture in the work programme but the Commission and Council will focus on implementing the **European Youth Pact** and on **the contribution of culture to the Lisbon agenda**”.

Annex B: items for Equality of Opportunity Committee

i. Suggested priority items

There is one suggested priority item **for the Equality of Opportunity Committee from the EC work programme.**

	Title	Brief Description
1	<p>Gender equality</p> <p>Communication de la Commission au Conseil, au Parlement européen, au Comité économique et social européen et au Comité des régions "Croissance, prospérité et solidarité dans une société égalitaire et démocratique : feuille de route pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes"</p> <p>NON-LEGISLATIVE</p>	<p>Despite progress made in the last decades towards equality between women and men, several gender gaps in employment, unemployment, pay, decision making positions, as well as the phenomenon of violence against women and trafficking still remain. This Communication will represent the road map on gender equality and will define objectives and actions for EU policies in order to achieve gender equality, and to tackle remaining problems and obstacles.</p> <p><i>From the initial impact assessment</i> - Article 2 of the EC Treaty provides that promotion of equality between men and women is a task of the European Community. Article 3(2) provides that it should aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women in all its activities. The current Framework Strategy for gender equality, created to answer this requirement, will expire at the end of 2005. A prorogation of the Programme for gender equality for 2006 has been decided.</p> <p>Estimated date of adoption: March 2006</p>

ii. other items which may be of interest to the Committee

2	<p>Rights of the Child</p> <p>Communication sur les droits des enfants</p>	<p>The Communication intends to set a framework where concrete actions will allow the implementation of the rights of the child within the European Union. Also, the defence of children's rights in the external Policy of the Union will be included.</p> <p>The action plan included in the Communication should help the Union and the Member States to fulfil their obligations vis-à-vis the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.</p> <p>From the initial impact assessment - Around thirty Directives, Framework Decisions or Green Papers were adopted during the last 5 years in the frame of c.a. ten European policy areas, with children as principal target (see table 1 in annex), notably related to family reunification, parental responsibilities, trafficking in human beings, sexual exploitation, children in armed conflict, safety of toys, paediatric use of medicinal products, etc. As a complement, a dozen community programmes fund actions in</p>
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		<p>favour of children and young people, notably against violence against them, for a safer use of the Internet, against trafficking in human beings, against sexual tourism, in favour of the participation of young people in the functioning of democracy, to ensure access of Roma children to education, etc. It is clear that, although the Commission is quite active, there is a breaking up of these actions and a lack of co-ordination. The evaluation currently carried out by UN of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration Goals shows a lack of serious progress, especially on the topics impacting on children, such as access to primary school, reducing world hunger, reducing mortality below 5 years old, etc.</p> <p>Estimated date of adoption: March 2006</p>
3	<p>Rights of the Child</p> <p>Framework of Community actions on the implementation of the Rights of the Child</p> <p>NON-LEGISLATIVE</p>	<p>This is a framework where concrete actions will allow the implementation of the Rights of the Child within the European Union within the limits of the competences of the Community and the Union. Also, the defence of Children's Rights in the external Policy of the Union will be included.</p> <p>This framework will enhance and improve co-ordination within the EU institutions amongst legislative work and programmatic actions related to the Rights of the Child.</p> <p>Estimated date of adoption: 3rd quarter 2006</p>
4	<p>Fundamental Rights Agency</p> <p>Décision de la Commission adoptant un cadre pluriannuel pour l'Agence des droits fondamentaux de l'Union européenne</p> <p>LEGISLATIVE</p>	<p>The Multiannual Framework will determine the thematic areas of activity of the Fundamental Rights Agency, which include always the fight against racism and xenophobia. It will cover five years, and be in line with the Union priorities as defined in the Commission's strategic objectives. The Multiannual Framework will have due regard to the Agency's financial and human resources. It will include provisions with a view to avoiding overlap with the remit of other Community bodies, offices and agencies.</p> <p>The Regulation establishing the Fundamental Rights Agency obliges the Commission to adopt the Multiannual Framework.</p> <p>Estimated date of adoption: 4th quarter 2006</p>

Annex C Protocol for committee scrutiny and action on EU policy

This protocol was agreed by the Panel of Chairs in April 2005.

1. The key to influencing proposals is to engage with the right players at the right time. This is a suggested general approach to European issues, Committees may wish to consider some or all of the following in order to maximise their effectiveness:
 - i. Inviting the Welsh Assembly Government to explain the impact of a proposal on Wales, to give its response to the proposal and explain how it is making its views known to the UK government and Commission.
 - ii. Inviting a Commission representative, UK government officials or MEPs for a direct exchange of views.
 - iii. Inviting Welsh or UK organisations to the committee or expert witnesses to give their views on any particular issue, (e.g. business representatives, ASPBs, Welsh Local Government Association, social and environmental NGOs, universities).
 - iv. EU proposals may sometimes cut across several committees remit and will therefore require co-ordination of views and perspectives. In such a case, it may be appropriate for one committee to take the lead.
 - v. Having agreed its position on an issue, Committees may wish to promote this to the key institutions in the decision-making process, and other relevant players, as follows:
 - vi. The European Parliament: for example, by communicating this to Wales MEPs and inviting them to pursue the issue in the European Parliament. Channels open to MEPs to do so include:
 - influencing relevant EP committee rapporteurs;
 - tabling amendments;
 - tabling questions to the Commission and representatives of the Council of Ministers;
 - influencing the position of their EP political grouping.
 - vii. The European Commission:
 - by responding to Commission consultations;
 - inviting the Commission to Committee meetings or engaging in dialogue with the Commission through other opportunities, such as European conferences;
 - write to the relevant Commissioner responsible for the policy to promote the Committee's view.
 - viii. In addition to scrutinising the WAG's position, the Committee may wish to write to the relevant UK government Minister to make its view known.
 - ix. Other potential players include:
 - the European committees of the Houses of Parliament, for example, submitting evidence to House of Lords' enquiries;

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- Assembly Members of the Committee of the Regions may table amendments to the CoR's reports;
 - European associations on which the Assembly is represented and other networks of like-minded regions and organisations. Forming a pan-European coalition on an issue is important for having a wider impact and takes the debate beyond national boundaries.
- x. Monitoring the progress of the proposal through the decision-making process, either through updates from the Welsh Assembly Government in particular on the outcome of Council meetings (Minister's report, for example), or through European update briefings from the Members' Research Service.
- xi. In the interest of transparency, the Committee Chair should request that WAG systematically brief committees on the outcome of Council of Ministers meetings which are relevant to the committee's remit.
- xii. It may be necessary for the committee to re-assess its view in light of the evolving negotiations and to issue a further response at a later stage.