

Equality of Opportunity Committee

EOC(2)-01-07(p.1)

Date: 24 January 2007

Time: 9.30 - 12.30

Venue: Committee Room 3, Senedd

Title: EU policy and legislative priorities for 2007

Purpose of Paper

1. This paper invites Members to note which European Union policy and legislative issues in 2007 are relevant to the remit of this Committee and which it may want to refer to in its Legacy Report as issues to be taken forward in the Third Assembly. The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has provided a summary of the European Commission's Legislative and Work Programme 2007 (hereafter, 'Work Programme') and its implications for the WAG - attached at Annex A.

Background

2. The European Commission's Work Programme was published on 2007. It lists all priority items which the Commission will propose in 2007, under the Commission's four key aims: prosperity, solidarity, security and Europe as a world partner.

3. A summary of the programme is provided in the WAG statement on the Work Programme at Annex A.

Suggested Priorities for 2007

4. Members Research and Committee Services have sifted the work programme for items which are relevant to this Committee's remit. These are mainly identified on the basis of the Commission's 2007 political priorities and are proposed in view of their impact and relevance to Wales and taking into account this Committee's previous interests.

5. The protocol for dealing with EU issues, as agreed by the Panel of Chairs, is attached as Annex B.

6. The following therefore are suggested areas of interest for the Committee for 2007, taking into account the Welsh Assembly Government's statement:

A. Strategic Initiatives

These are concrete actions at the core of the Commission's political delivery during

2007.

1. Legislative proposal for a general framework directive addressing labour migration.

The Commission published a policy plan on labour migration in December 2005. The different measures proposed in the Policy Plan deal with how to ensure the effective management of future economic migration flows towards the EU, plus promoting better integration of economic immigrants in the labour market and establishing fair and clear rules and rights for them. The Commission states that a secure legal status for economic immigrants will protect them from exploitation, therefore increasing their contribution to economic development and growth.

Expected date of adoption: September 2007

2. Proposal for a directive on the conditions of entry and residence of highly skilled workers - Specific objectives to be addressed under this proposal are:

- Pursue the further development of EU immigration policy;
- Complement the set of policies and measures aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of the EU economy, as well as at addressing the negative consequences of demographic ageing;
- Respond to existing demands for highly skilled migrant labour and render the EU attractive for this category of workers.

Expected date of adoption: September 2007

3. Proposal for a Directive on minimum sanctions for employers of illegally resident third-country nationals - To contribute to effectively tackling/reducing employment of illegally staying third-country nationals in order, at the same time, to reduce illegal immigration and exploitation of such workers.

B. Priority initiatives

To be adopted over the next 12 to 18 months depending on the depth and intensity of preparation needed to meet the quality standards of Better Regulation.

1. Green Paper on the establishment of the second phase of the common European Asylum System – The aim of this Green Paper is to stimulate debate and dialogue with all stakeholders involved in asylum policy which will be taken into account in the preparation of the second stage legal instruments to be proposed by the Commission in order to complete the Common European Asylum Policy by 2010.

C. Other issues

1. Social reality stocktaking

This is a report which does not involve legislative action.

In June 2006, the European Council, recognising that the complex dynamics of social change within our societies need to be better understood in order to strengthen Europe's response to globalisation, asked the Commission to take stock of the social situation in the Union, with a particular emphasis on questions of access and opportunity.

This stock-take will examine the main drivers behind the social transformations in European societies. It will look at how these changes can be assessed against benchmarks of well-being. It will attempt to open a debate about some of the key factors that contributes to wellbeing – such as economic opportunity, the quality of working life, the challenges of the ageing society, demography and new patterns of family life, poverty and inequality, the barriers to good health and social mobility, crime and anti-social behaviour, and diversity and multiculturalism. This exercise in exploring Europe's social reality aims at building a new consensus on the social challenges facing Europeans.

(Except from the European Commission Legislative and Work Programme 2007)

2. European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

Members will be aware that 2007 is the European Year of Equal Opportunities. The key themes for the year are:

Rights - to raise awareness of the right to equality and non-discrimination, and the problem of multiple discrimination. The Year aims to make groups that are at risk of discrimination more aware of their rights and of existing European legislation in the field of anti-discrimination.

Representation - to stimulate a debate on ways to increase the participation of under-represented groups in society, in particular groups that are victims of discrimination. The Year should encourage discussion and reflection on the need to promote greater participation in society.

Recognition - to celebrate and accommodate diversity and equality. The European Year will highlight the positive contribution that people, irrespective of their sex, racial and ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, can make to society as a whole, in particular by accentuating the benefits of diversity.

Respect - to promote a more cohesive society. The European Year will raise awareness of the importance of eliminating stereotypes, prejudice and violence, promoting good relations between all in society, in particular among young people, and promoting and disseminating the values that underlie the fight against discrimination.

The programme for the UK will focus on four key areas:

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Best practice in giving advice on discrimination and EU legislation (particularly employment);

- How equality impacts on independent living;
- An award scheme for people in local communities
- Workshops around the issue of mediation where there are conflicting rules on rights (for example, whether a church will be able to ban gay groups from using its facilities).

The Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) are the nominated lead organisation in the UK and expect to start event to mark the year in April 2007. The CEHR will have funding of €620,000 from the EU for the implementation of the programme.

Action for Committee

8. The Committee is invited to note the relevant issues from the Commission's work programme for 2007, as suggested above, taking into account the Welsh Assembly Government's Statement at Annex A. These will then be included in the Committee's Legacy Report.

Gwenda Thomas AM

Chair, Equality of Opportunity Committee

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