

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

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Annex A: Welsh Assembly Government paper for the European and External Affairs Committee (18 January 2006)

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 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.

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

Health and Social Policy

The main aims include the streamlining of the open methods of co-ordination in the social area, and the launch of co-operation on health and long-term care, to reinforce the support the EU provides to Member States in their efforts to modernise social protection systems and tackle social exclusion.

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.

Dossiers of interest:

· Communication on Gender Equality	Non-legislative	To set out a road map on gender equality
· Communication on Health and Safety at Work strategy 2007-12	Non-legislative	Develop current strategy to increase quality of work and productivity
· Green Paper on the evolution of labour law	Non- legislative	Encourage debate on labour law to help identify major issues
· Communication on the demographic future of Europe	Non-legislative	Bring together the results of the Green Paper on Ageing and pilots to set out further action
· Proposal on the applicable law and jurisdiction in divorce matters	Legislative / Regulation	To establish Community rules in this field
· Green Paper on the property rights of married/unmarried couples	Non-legislative	Consultation on legal and practical issues
· Communication on implementing children's rights	Non-legislative	Framework / Action Plan to implement children's rights, in line with UN Convention of the Rights of the Child

· Green Paper on drugs and civil society	Non-legislative	Working with civil society to take forward the EU Drugs Action Plan 2005-2008
· Communication on tackling alcohol-related problems	Non-legislative	To reduce the health and social harm due to alcohol consumption
· Communication on organ donation and transplantation	Non-legislative	Measures to ensure high standards/ quality/safety.