

Brussels, 10 May 2006

## **Questions & Answers on the Commission paper A Citizens' Agenda: Delivering results for Europe**

### **So what is new in this paper? What are the concrete proposals?**

The clear message we receive from the Plan D dialogue is that citizens want a Europe of results. A Europe that delivers for them. The paper outlines the Commission's philosophy on how to move Europe forward. The paper makes the following concrete proposals:

- A commitment to remove remaining barriers to the single market. The Commission will launch a fundamental, forward looking review of the single market and present a report with concrete proposals next year;
- Creation of an entitlement card which will enable every European citizen to be aware of and enjoy full access to their rights;
- Launching a comprehensive stocktaking of today's European society and an agenda for universal access and solidarity, in parallel with the single market review;
- Improving decision-making to make Europe a safer place to live, through use of the existing Treaty provisions for greater use of the Community method in areas like organised crime, terrorism, trafficking of persons and cooperation between police forces;
- Taking forward the debate on the value added of enlargement and the Union's capacity to absorb new members with a Commission paper on enlargement strategy;
- A new approach to external competitiveness including looking into improved access to markets overseas and new priorities in trade relations;
- A strategy paper (Concept Paper) with concrete ideas on Europe's role in the World;
- A further set of proposals to make cutting red tape (better regulation) a reality across the EU;
- Work on access to documents in the European Union will be accelerated;
- A new relationship with national Parliaments, including direct transmission of new proposals and consultation papers;
- A proposed timetable with a step by step approach to a solution to institutional questions;
- A declaration inspired by the Messina declaration to ensure that Europe moves ahead on a common footing.

## **So has the Commission changed its priorities?**

No, this is an agenda which flows from the Commission's agreement, at the start of its mandate, to its key strategic objectives to the end of the decade: prosperity, solidarity, security, and Europe as a world partner. They point to the balance needed in the Union's work: a policy mix which allows Europe to pursue competitiveness and social justice, to protect its citizens and promote their freedoms, to work inside Europe and to promote its values in the world beyond.

These are supplemented by a work programme each year that presents the legislative and non-legislative proposals for the coming year. These objectives remain relevant and are confirmed as forming the core of the Commission's work.

The proposals outlined today respond to the concerns raised by citizens during the period of reflection. They reinforce, rather than replace, the priorities and work currently being undertaken by the Commission.

## **What were the main findings of the special Eurobarometer on the Future of Europe?**

The special Eurobarometer on the Future of Europe polled 24, 750 citizens from all 25 member states on their opinions toward the European Union. The main findings were as follows:

- There is greater optimism about the direction in which things are going at the European level. 39% of Europeans consider that things are going in the right direction in the EU in comparison to the national situation (34% share the same view regarding the national level). On the contrary, if 43% of Europeans think things are going in the wrong direction in their own country, there are only 27% who state the same in the EU.
- The European Union has a positive "image". It is above all perceived as democratic (67%), modern (67%) and protective (54%). However, close to one in two respondents considers it to be technocratic (49%) and inefficient (43%).
- Although almost one in two respondents (49%) considers that membership of the European Union is positive the fact remains that certain criticisms are levelled at the lack of political and cultural integration at the European level.
- According to Europeans, peace among all Member States (60% of citations) and the single market (56%) are the most positive achievements of European unification.
- For Europeans, the element which is perceived to be of most importance for the future of Europe is by far, comparable living standards (51%), followed then by the introduction of the Euro in all Member States (26%) and a common Constitution (25%). The latter remains true for 29% of the French and 32% of the Dutch.
- The elements that could most strengthen the feeling of being a European are a "European social welfare system" (32%), a European Constitution (27%) and the right to vote in all elections in the Member State where citizens live (21%).
- In different policy areas, related to social, environmental, political and security issues, a majority of Europeans call for more decision making at the EU level. Areas where the EU already has good records should be reinforced (e.g. the promotion of democracy and peace in the world, cooperation in research and innovation).
- 47% regard globalisation as a threat to the national employment situation (a fear particularly felt in France and Greece, 72%) while 37% hold the opposite view (77% in Denmark).

- 55% of Europeans consider that the enlargement of the EU is something positive. For 61%, it means improving the influence of the EU in the world.

The full special Eurobarometer reports can be found at the following website address:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/index_en.htm)

### **Is Plan D really sufficient as a tool for debate on the future of Europe?**

“Plan D” suggests a series of concrete actions aimed at stimulating a wider debate at national and European levels. It is not the only Commission contribution to the debate on the future of Europe, as demonstrated by its contributions on the European Social model or globalisation.

Plan D was triggered by the French and Dutch referenda, but it is not a rescue operation for the Constitutional Treaty, nor is it limited in time to the reflection period: it is a starting point for a long term democratic reform process.

The political thrust is to create a citizens’ ownership of EU policies, to make them understandable and relevant, and to make EU Institutions accountable and reliable to those they serve. This process will take time if tangible and lasting results are to be achieved, and it will require a genuine commitment primarily by the Member States, but also by the EU Institutions.

### **The single market was meant to be complete in 1992. What are the barriers that still exist?**

While the single market has been a remarkable success, barriers and inefficiencies remain and new issues need to be tackled as the economy changes. A number of examples illustrate the point. Cross border roaming charges for mobile phone users and banking charges are still subject to wide fluctuations depending on the member state consumers reside in.

The European Union has still not been able to agree on the Community patent which is essential for business to protect their intellectual property.

### **What does the proposed entitlement card aim to achieve?**

European citizens enjoy many rights and freedoms under the current treaties and current legislation: rights to live anywhere in the Union, rights as travelling passengers, to vote and stand for election in local and European elections. But citizens are often unaware of these rights – and the same is often true of the public authorities responsible for enforcing those rights. An “entitlement” card would make these rights easier to understand and to enforce. The card would be entirely optional: citizens could choose to have one if they considered it useful. It would not create new rights. It would not be an identity card.

### **How does the Commission hope to improve decision-making in the area of freedom, security and justice?**

Existing Treaty provisions agreed in Amsterdam in 1996 allow police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters to be brought under Community rules. Legal migration policies can also be fully integrated into the Community procedures with proper scrutiny by the European Parliament. The role of the European Court of Justice can also be strengthened.

The Treaty provisions affected are Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union and Article 67(2) of the Treaty establishing the European Community. A change in the decision-making system requires the agreement of all member states. At the same time, the Council determines the relevant voting conditions, meaning either applying qualified majority voting or keeping unanimity. Moreover, the Treaty recommends that Member States adopt “that decision in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements”.

The Commission will present a proposal in good time for discussion to start during the Finnish Presidency.

### **Does the Commission support further enlargement of the European Union?**

The enlarged, integrated Europe has a powerful potential to shape globalisation in the interest of all EU citizens. The Commission remains fully committed to further enlargement. Enlargement is one of the European Union’s most powerful policy tools to pursue peace and prosperity, liberty and democracy. The Eastern enlargement of 2004 sealed the peaceful reunification between Western and Eastern Europe. Now our energy is focused on peaceful unification in Southeast Europe. At the same time, we need to be rigorous in our task of applying the rules and conditions for accession.

The Commission also recognises that there is an ongoing debate on enlargement and that the European institutions have a responsibility to show that the value added of enlargement and the Union’s capacity to absorb new members are being considered in depth. This is why the Commission will issue a special report ahead of the December European Council.

### **You say you want to listen to the citizens. But they are against enlargement. So why do you endorse it?**

The special Eurobarometer on the Future of Europe has shown that 55% of Europeans consider that the enlargement of the EU is something positive. Enlargement is a win-win scenario for Europe. It has brought huge benefits to citizens from both the new member states and those already in the European Union.

Two years on the biggest enlargement ever of the European Union can be seen as an economic success: the 10 new Member States’ economies are growing at a rapid pace enabling them to progressively bridge the gap with their richer neighbours. But the latter also win as the increase of the EU’s single market by 75 million to 450 million inhabitants brings a wealth of trade and investment opportunities.

### **What is the Commission’s position on the accession of Turkey?**

Europe needs a stable, democratic and increasingly prosperous Turkey, at peace with its neighbours, firmly on track towards modernisation and the adoption of European values. This is why the EU has started accession negotiations with Turkey.

The Commission has not altered its position on the future accession of Turkey to the European Union. Turkey has a clear prospect of joining the EU, provided it fulfils all the rigorous accession criteria. It will certainly be a long and sometimes difficult journey and it depends on Turkey’s ability to carry out the reforms to prove whether it is able to make it. The process will last certainly more than a decade and the journey, i.e. the reforms is just as important as the destination.

## **What is the objective of the concept paper on Europe's role in the World?**

The Hampton Court informal European Council last October highlighted a set of key issues where globalisation had to be factored into European policies. These included the need for a strong and coherent external projection of the European Union. The concept paper will survey the internal and external policies and instruments that determine the Union's external role, look at the EU's capacities and capabilities and propose practical measures to help the EU respond to current challenges.

## **Why involve national Parliaments more closely? What about there requests to implement the subsidiarity early warning mechanism in the Constitutional treaty?**

The European Union's policies can only be made real through a partnership approach. Given their pivotal role in national democracies, it is of particular importance that national parliaments play an important role in European Union affairs. This trend has been under way for many years, but the Commission considers that it could usefully be accelerated.. This would go beyond the targets for the Commission's relations with the National Parliaments, which it started implementing in early 2005. These targets revolve around three main themes: mutual service; concrete networking; connecting with people and their elected representatives, since a greater voice for Parliaments is a greater voice for Europe's citizens.

The Constitutional Treaty makes a series of important proposals on the role of national Parliaments. It states that every draft European law must be sent to all national parliaments of the Member States. The parliaments would then have the opportunity (within 6 weeks) to assess whether the draft complies with the principle of *subsidiarity*<sup>1</sup>- in other words, whether the proposal goes beyond what is necessary at European level.

If a third of the Parliaments (a quarter in the area of freedom, security and justice) considered that the proposed legislation did not comply with the principle of subsidiarity, the draft would be reviewed.

The Commission welcomes this provision. But such a formal system could not be introduced without Treaty change. In the meantime, the involvement of national parliaments could be facilitated, in particular by the direct transfer of documents. The Commission would pay particular regard to any comments from national parliaments during the stage of policy formulation.

## **Does the Commission still support the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty?**

Yes, The Commission's preferred option would be for the Constitutional Treaty to be ratified in all 25 Member States.

The current situation is as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> "Subsidiarity" means that – in the areas of shared competence – the Union may only act if it can demonstrate that the proposed action can be better achieved at Union level than by Member States (it has to show that there is an "added value").

To date, 15 Member States have approved the Constitutional Treaty: Hungary, Lithuania, Slovenia, Italy, Greece, Slovakia, Spain, Austria, Germany, Latvia, Cyprus, Malta, Luxembourg, Belgium and Estonia. Finland has announced a possible ratification in the coming months. France and the Netherlands have held referenda which resulted in negative votes. The remaining seven Member States have suspended the ratification process.

### **Why do we need the Constitution? Can't we live with the treaties we already have?**

The European Union works reasonably well under its present treaties. But the system has become very complex and hard for most people to understand.

That's why, several years ago, Europe's leaders asked a team of experts to draw up a single, simplified Treaty - the "Constitution for Europe". EU leaders finalised the new text in 2004.

The Constitutional Treaty brings together the achievements of the last fifty years. It makes the European Union clearer and more transparent for everyone. Simpler decision-making rules also make the EU work more effectively.

The Constitutional Treaty makes the European Union more democratic by giving a bigger role to the European and national Parliaments, and by giving EU citizens the right to ask the Union to launch new initiatives.

All in all, the Constitutional Treaty is a big improvement over the present treaties, and brings important new benefits to the EU's citizens and its Member States.

That does not mean that more cannot be done under the existing treaties. The Commission proposes that in a number of areas, the existing treaty articles can be used more effectively. Freedom, security and justice is one area where the decision-making possibilities have not been fully utilised. These improvements would not pre-empt the entry into force of the Constitutional Treaty.

### **Does the Commission support proposals to amend or add to the current text?**

As stated earlier, the Commission wants to see the Constitutional treaty ratified. The Commission believes that there is currently no consensus amongst Member States on the fate of the Constitutional Treaty. A range of different options have been raised in the public debate. The Commission believes it is too early to consider these options.

### **What is your timetable for the next steps on institutional questions?**

The Commission believes that the current priority is for its institutions to deliver the new policy agenda for Europe.

No consensus exists at this stage on the way to achieve an institutional settlement. The Commission therefore suggests a step by step approach to pave the way for a positive outcome on institutional questions. It proposes:

- A shift to a new policy agenda for citizens;
- A continuation of the promotion of a public debate on Europe, with a broader policy focus;
- The European Council in June to adopt a step by step approach designed to create the conditions for a future institutional settlement;

- On the same year of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, Europe's leaders should adopt a new political declaration setting out Europe's values and ambitions. This should be signed by the Member States, Commission and European Parliament;
- The new declaration should serve as the basis for decisions by the European Council next year to launch a process designed to lead to a future institutional settlement.

### **What about the composition of the Commission?**

The Treaty of Nice (article 4 of the Protocol on the enlargement of the European Union) states that as soon as the Union consists of 27 member States, the Commission shall be composed of fewer Commissioners than Member States<sup>2</sup>.

If Bulgaria and Romania join the Union in 2007 or 2008, the next Commission (2009-2014) will thus consist of less than 27 Commissioners.

The protocol foresees that Commissioners will be chosen according to a rotation system based on the principle of equality. Equality both in the determination of the sequence of Member States and in the amount of time nationals from each Member State can serve in the Commission (consequently the difference between the total number of terms of office between to member States may never be more than one).

Each College will also have to satisfactorily reflect the demographic and geographical range of all the member states of the EU.

The exact number of Commissioners and the implementing arrangements for the rotation system will be adopted by the Council acting unanimously.

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<sup>2</sup> The system foreseen by the Constitution is different: the first Commission designated after the coming into force of the Constitution would consist of one national from each Member State. The Commission would only be reduced from the second Commission after the coming into force of the Constitution. It will then consist of a number of Commissioners corresponding to two thirds of the number of Member states (18 if only Bulgaria and Rumania have joined the EU at that time), unless the European Council, acting unanimously, decides to alter this number).