



HOUSE OF LORDS

European Union Committee

50th Report of Session 2002-03

The Commission's Annual Work Programme

Report with Evidence

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The European Union Committee

The European Union Committee is appointed by the House of Lords “to consider European Union documents and other matters relating to the European Union”. The Committee has seven Sub-Committees which are:

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Internal Market (Sub-Committee B)
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Policy (Sub-Committee C)
Agriculture and Environment (Sub-Committee D)
Law and Institutions (Sub-Committee E)
Home Affairs (Sub-Committee F)
Social and Consumer Affairs (Sub-Committee G) (established in December 2003)

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Information about the Committee

The reports and evidence of the Committee are published by and available from The Stationery Office. For information freely available on the web, our homepage is:

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Some recent reports from the Committee are listed inside the back cover.

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Contacts for the European Union Committee

Contact details for individual Sub-Committees are given on the website.

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Evidence from the Commission on the Commission's Annual Work Programme

Background

1. The Commission's Annual Work Programme is one of the main elements of the annual planning cycle in the European Commission. When this procedure was introduced in 2001 the Government argued that a second chamber of the European Parliament was required to scrutinise such over-arching policy documents. This Committee rejected that proposal, and suggested instead that there was a need for thorough scrutiny of the Work Programme by national parliaments.
2. In July 2002 the Committee published a report detailing how national parliaments could best scrutinise the Annual Work Programme¹. The Committee concluded that there should be annual parliamentary scrutiny of the work programme on the basis of a final draft produced by the Commission in September. This resulted in our first evidence session with the Commission in October 2002 which was later published².

Annual Work Programme 2004

3. The purpose of this Report is to present to the House our session of evidence with the Commission held on 19 November 2003 which was based on the Commission's draft of the Work Programme. We are grateful to the Commission witnesses for appearing before us. An index of the topics covered in the evidence appears below.
4. In devising the Legislative Programme for 2004 the Commission has been faced with two over-riding constraints: the need to integrate the ten new Member States and the European elections in June and the end of this Commission's mandate (see Box). As a result, the Legislative Programme for 2004 has been reduced to those initiatives that are said to be 'absolutely necessary and feasible'³.
5. Our seven Sub-Committees will pursue individual policy questions raised during this evidence as part of their ongoing scrutiny over the coming year. The Committee intends to report again to the House in the New Year on any substantive issues arising from the final text of the Annual Work Programme for 2004 when deposited for scrutiny. In the meantime, we make this Report for the information of the House.
6. The topics covered in the evidence printed below are as follows:

¹ The Scrutiny of European Union Business: The Commission's Annual Work Programme (HL Paper 141, 25th Report session 2001-02, 2 July 2002)

² The Commission's Annual Work Programme 2003 (HL Paper 188, 38th Report session 2001-02, 5 November 2002)

³ The Commission's Legislative and Work Programme for 2004 (COM(2003) 645 final, 29 October 2003), p.3

- Introduction (Q 1)
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 - Multi-Annual Programming (QQ 2-4)
 - Better Law Making (Q 5)
 - Impact Assessments (QQ 6, 7)
 - Volume and Timing of Proposals (Q 8)
- Economic Affairs (QQ 9-12)
- External Affairs (Q 13)
- Environment and Agriculture (QQ 14-17)
- Justice and Home Affairs (QQ 18-20)
- Law and Institutions (Q 21)

BOX

EU Legislative Process up to June 2004

On 1 May 2004 the accession countries will formally join the European Union. European parliamentary elections for the period up to 2009 will take place on 10 June 2004. Finally, a new Commission will take office on 1 November 2004.

These changes affect the EU legislative process in a number of ways. Any proposal subject to the co-decision procedure will be severely delayed by the 2004 European Parliament election. Because of the accession of ten new Member States to the Union on 1 May 2004, it is expected that most of the May European parliamentary session will be taken up with ceremonial matters. This means that the last session at which a vote can be taken on first or second reading of legislative proposals subject to the co-decision procedure will be in April 2004. July will be taken up with internal European Parliament elections and parliamentary work will not properly resume before the September 2004 session.

Parliament hopes to leave as many proposals as possible with a decided first or second reading at the end of its session. There is no formal deadline for the Commission to propose a new piece of legislation, but any proposal put forward after November 2003 is unlikely to reach the end of parliamentary first reading by April 2004. The Commission is expected to act in accordance with this.