Questions and Answers: the 2015 Work Programme

Strasbourg, 16 December 2014

What is the Commission Work Programme?

Every year, the European Commission adopts a plan of action for the next twelve months. The Commission Work Programme tells our citizens, our institutional partners and our staff how we will turn our political priorities into concrete action.

In most years the Work Programme is adopted in October. This changes in years where we have European elections, which is the case in 2014. This is the first Work Programme to be presented by the Juncker Commission, which took office on 1 November 2014. It translates into concrete actions the Political Guidelines on the basis of which President Juncker was elected Commission President by a large majority of MEPs in the European Parliament. It reflects the clear message sent to European citizens that the Commission will be big on big things, and smaller on smaller things.

It marks a change from the past: it represents the new Commission's political commitment to an approach more focussed on priorities and on results. Time and energy will be invested in those proposals that will have the biggest impact on jobs and growth. It presents a limited number of new proposals, a list of initiatives from the previous Commissions which we propose to withdraw, and a list of existing legislation which we intend to review to see if they are still fit for purpose.

To build consensus across the EU institutions, the Commission has prepared this Work Programme in dialogue with the European Parliament – in the context of the Framework Agreement - and for the first time after also discussing with the Council.

What are the priorities for the Commission in 2015?

The Commission's Political Guidelines define our priorities for the next five years and are the basis on which we have received a clear mandate from the directly elected European Parliament representing Europe's citizens. They are consistent with the Strategic Agenda defined by the European Council in June 2014.

In 2015, our first year in office, the Commission has selected the initiatives where there is the most pressing need for action, and where we can deliver quickly on our promises to Europe's citizens. It is our 'to do list' for 2015 – it sets out what the Commission will deliver this year. In the coming years the Commission will also propose other actions to fulfil the priorities of the Political Guidelines and for some of them preparatory work will also start already next year.

The headline plans for 2015 include:

- **Delivering on our Investment Plan for Europe** – Implementing the €315bn investment plan announced by President Juncker and Vice-President Katainen on 26 November, to boost the real economy and create jobs and growth.

- **An Ambitious Digital Single Market Package** – Creating the conditions for a vibrant digital economy and society by complementing the telecommunications regulatory environment, modernising copyright rules, simplifying rules for consumers making online and digital purchases, enhancing cyber-security and mainstreaming digitalisation.

- **Building a European Energy Union** – Taking action to ensure energy supply security, integration of national energy markets, reducing energy demand in Europe, and promoting green technology.

- **A Fairer Approach to Taxation**: An Action Plan on efforts to combat tax evasion and tax fraud, including measures at EU level in order to move to a system on the basis of which the country where profits are generated is also the country of taxation; including automatic exchange of information on tax rulings and stabilising corporate tax bases.

- **A European Agenda on Migration** – Developing a holistic approach covering both legal migration, to make the EU a more attractive destination for highly skilled people and companies, and improving the management of migration into the EU through greater cooperation with third countries, solidarity among our Member States and fighting human trafficking.

- **Deeper Economic and Monetary Union**: Strengthening the architecture of the EMU to maintain
citizens' and markets' confidence, improving economic governance and reinvigorating social dialogue at all levels.

The Commission will also present proposals on strengthening the EU's single market for goods and services to benefit consumers and the competitiveness of industry, develop a new trade and investment strategy, continue to promote stability at Europe's borders through effective external action and neighbourhood policies, and bring a fresh dynamic to our interinstituional relations, and greater transparency and accountability to citizens.

The Commission will apply the principle of political discontinuity to ensure that all the work that we take on is in line with our political priorities.

**What is political discontinuity?**

The principle of political discontinuity applies at the start of a new political mandate. The incoming authority, in this case the European Commission, reviews the proposals which have been put to the legislators by its predecessor, but not yet adopted. It then decides whether or not to pursue work in these areas. This principle is set out in Article 39 of the Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and European Commission. This Article states that "The Commission shall proceed with a review of all pending proposals at the beginning of the new Commission's term of office, in order to politically confirm or withdraw them, taking due account of the views expressed by Parliament". The Commission has reviewed around 450 proposals, and has taken the decision to recommend the withdrawal of a significant number of them.

**How does the Commission decide which proposals to withdraw?**

The new Commission has taken note of the fact that our citizens want our time and efforts to be focused on the things which will have the biggest impact on jobs and growth already in 2015, and which have good prospects of being adopted in the near future and delivering concrete results on the ground. We have also been careful to reflect the mandate given to us by the European Parliament who voted in favour of the focused Political Guidelines of President Juncker.

Therefore, the Juncker Commission has carefully examined each of the around 450 proposals put on the table by the previous Commissions and currently still pending, to assess whether they should be maintained, amended or withdrawn. In doing so, it has checked:

- whether the pending proposals are in line with the ten priorities of this Commission and still fit to address current challenges;
- what their prospects are for adoption in the near future;
- whether they will can be successfully implemented on the ground;
- whether they still serve their initial objectives.

Following this thorough analysis, the Commission is proposing to withdraw or amend 80 proposals. In many cases, in particular in the social and environmental fields, the Commission remains strongly committed to the objectives of the pending proposals, but wants to present new and better ideas for how to achieve them. Proposals are of no use if they are overtaken by events, have no prospects for adoption in their current form, or if the long negotiations between Parliament and Council have watered them down to a point where they can no longer achieve their initial purpose.

Some proposals will be withdrawn because they have become obsolete, for example where new measures were adopted in the meantime. Others because the substance of the proposal has been denatured in the negotiations in Council or Parliament and does not match the Commission’s original ambitions. That is the case for a recommendation for common European standards on tourism, where Member States are not ready to accept the changes we proposed to improve energy efficiency by taking account of CO2 and real energy content in tax levels. Other proposals we have decided to withdraw and replace with a new proposal if no agreement is reached within 6 months - including a planned Directive on the dissemination of Earth observation satellite data, regulation on labelling of organic products and the original Maternity Leave Directive. In this particular case society has moved on since the original Commission proposal was made – for example the vast majority of Member States have improved maternity leave arrangements at national level, partly thanks to the mobilising effect of the Commission's proposal.

There also proposals we withdraw for the sake of clarity for our stakeholders. For example, the ACTA proposal is still on the pending proposals list despite being rejected by the European Parliament, and we wish to officially withdraw it. The same applies to proposals to liberalise the market for ground handling services at European airports.

In some cases the Commission is proposing to withdraw proposals in order to replace them
subsequently by more ambitious proposals or to tailor them more closely to its ten priorities (for example to present a new proposal with a broader approach on the circular economy to meet our ambitions in a more effective way).

The Commission will await the views of the European Parliament and the Council on these proposals before confirming the withdrawals in the coming months.

**How does this Work Programme compare with past years?**

In the past five years, the Commission has proposed an average of over 130 new initiatives in each annual Work Programme. The new Commission is taking a radically different approach, and will be presenting only 23 new initiatives, which we commit to adopting in 2015.

Over the past five years, the Commission has proposed to withdraw on average around 30 proposals each year. The new Commission is taking a stricter approach and making sure only legislative proposals with good chances of being adopted are left on the table. Our 2015 Work Programme proposes to withdraw 80 pending pieces of legislation.

We are also stepping up our scrutiny of existing legislation. We want to see what is already on the statute books, and what we need to amend and withdraw depending on how it impacts citizens' lives. For the past five years, the Commission has reviewed on average around 30 existing pieces of legislation each year; we intend to review 79 in 2015.

**When will you implement the proposals set out in the Work Programme?**

The work programme includes all the key policy initiatives that the Commission has committed to present in 2015. The Commission will publish Roadmaps for each of the 23 new proposals. This will give further details on timing.

**Is this Work programme a comprehensive list of everything the Commission will do in 2015?**

Much of the Commission's work is to ensure that existing legislation or programmes are well-implemented and deliver concrete results on the ground.

For example, in 2015 the Commission will run the European Semester process, prepare secondary legislation in the area of financial services following important recent reforms, and put the new programmes for the European Structural and Investment Funds into operation. Implementation of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy will also be a priority.

We will also continue to investigate cases where European law may be infringed, guaranteeing the Rule of Law and defending citizens' rights within the internal market and their fundamental rights.

More broadly, we know that citizens' scepticism about our work often comes from the existing EU rules they have to face, which is why the Commission is making a political priority of lightening the regulatory load. We will of course protect our high social, health and environmental standards and consumer choice when we do this.

Where the rules we have make sense and serve our objectives, the Commission will work actively to ensure they are properly applied, implemented and enforced so they deliver real benefits to citizens.

Better Regulation is at the heart of the Work Programme: the Commission will overhaul any rules which impose unnecessary red tape or administrative burdens. Where rules are outdated or out of line with our priorities, we will improve them. Where there is unnecessary red tape the Commission will take action to cut it.

The Commission can also take unplanned initiatives in response to events throughout the course of the year which require urgent action to address issues where action at European level is more effective than purely national responses.

**Technically speaking, what does the Commission Work Programme look like?**

The Commission Work Programme consists of a political Communication and four annexes. The new initiatives in Annex I focus on concrete actions to implement the ten priorities in the Political Guidelines of the Juncker Commission. It is important that we give a new boost to jobs, growth and investment, including following up on the Investment Plan. Annex II is the list of initiatives which we propose to withdraw, applying the principle of 'political discontinuity'. In Annex III, the Commission is actively pursuing its better regulation agenda by proposing fitness checks and evaluations of existing legislation. Annex IV lists legislation that has already been adopted and will become applicable in 2015, to improve visibility of upcoming changes for citizens and business.

**How is the Work Programme prepared and adopted?**

This Commission was elected by the European Parliament on the basis of clear political guidelines. Since getting to work on 1 November, the College of 28 Commissioners has worked intensively to turn this political programme into a concrete Work Programme.
We have also held many meetings with MEPs in the European Parliament, with Member States in the Council, and with our other institutional and social partners to gather their input. The exchanges with the EU's co-legislators (Parliament and Council) have helped us to understand which proposals they support politically, and which ideas they think will never reach agreement. We will be putting on the table in 2015 only things that we believe we can 'get done' next year.

**Does this programme need to be endorsed by Council and Parliament?**

The Work Programme is discussed with both the European Parliament and the Council before and after its adoption. The Commission takes the views of the other institutions into account when preparing its priorities for the coming year. It is however the Commission itself that assumes the political responsibility of what it puts on the table, in line with the right of initiative that it has under the Treaties.

The Commission does not want to present draft legislation which will never be adopted by Parliament and Council. It also does not want them to keep discussing proposals which have been on the table for many years and have no prospect of adoption. Our approach is a pragmatic one, not a bureaucratic one.

To strengthen our work with the other institutions and improve inter-institutional programming, in 2015 the Commission will present a proposal for a new Inter-Institutional Agreement on Better Law Making, to ensure a common sense of direction while respecting each institution's role under the Treaties.

**If you are doing less work, does that mean you need less staff?**

A leaner work programme does not mean less work. The Commission must deliver better regulation in the future, and that means better using our resources to address our political priorities.

Drafting new initiatives is only part of the work of the Commission. A lot of our work is about taking the proposals already on the table through the legislative process, ensuring that existing legislation is well implemented and enforced, evaluating its impact, and identifying possible improvements we can bring to the lives of citizens and business by cutting existing red tape.