

Danuta Hübner
Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs in the European Parliament

Discussion on the European Commission Work Programme 2017

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All of us here are committed to making the European Union a working democracy capable to deliver the best possible for its citizens. I think here of democracy working at all levels of Europe's architecture and governance and of subsidiarity understood as a well orchestrated effort of cooperation among those levels.

I would like to share with you the story on how the European institutions agreed to create an institutional framework for working together on issues of utmost importance for European citizens.

For us in the European Parliament, annual Work Program of the European Commission (CWP) is a building block of the multi annual programming. It must be also seen as an element of the entire cycle of the European decision making, including its implementation and monitoring. It must be also seen not as a one off event but as a part of a continuous and sincere cooperation between the institutions.

Without any doubt the program substance and its delivery is crucial. But we believe that this is one of those issues where not only the final outcome but also the process of making it happen matters strongly. An efficient, effective and democratically accountable inter-institutional process behind the CWP has a value on its own. Especially in those times when caring about the democratic legitimacy and accountability of European decision making has become more relevant than ever.

So let me say a few words on the process of the Commission Work Program.

It has its legal basis, the article 17 of the TEU. It is worth to remind also that the 2010 Framework Agreement on relations between the EP and the European Commission already foresaw a triologue between the EP, the Commission and the Council with a view to reach agreement on the Union's programming. But then the entry into force in 2016 of the new Inter-institutional Agreement on Better Law Making on BLM has concretized the idea of the joint inter-institutional programming, both annual and multi annual. We agreed that a joint declaration on broad objectives and priorities for the following year, identifying major priorities in the legislative process, will be signed by presidents of the three institutions.

Also, we agreed to have joint conclusions on the principal policy objectives and priorities for the three institutions for the whole new legislature which translates into a joint multi annual programming.

We took the agreement on programming as reflected by the IIA on BLM very seriously in the EP. We are working on an implementation and interpretation report and working group to monitor the implementation of this IIA has been established in which representatives of nearly all countries participate. Crucial role in this context is played by the Conference of Committee Chairs drawing on individual Committees' contribution.

Additionally, the new Rules of Procedures of the EP, that have entered into effect this month give the new programming procedure an internal legal framework, ensuring that the EP delivers on the reinforcement of the role of programming within the inter institutional cooperation framework. We trust, and we will spare no effort to ensure it, that the joint programming while respecting the competences and duties of each of the institutions, will enhance both efficiency and democratic legitimacy of the whole process. We are also committed to serious monitoring of the process. In this context the fact that the three institutions, on the Commission's initiative, will carry out a mid term review of joint conclusions on multi annual programming, is of great relevance.

I equally trust that the IIA on BLM and the new Rules of Procedures of the EP will contribute to making the multi step dialogue among the European institutions more profound and effective. We have a framework envisaging dialogue at all stages of the programming process. We have commitment from the Commission to duly take account of views expressed by the EP and the Council at each stage of the dialogue. And we have the joint declaration signed by Presidents of the three institutions. The implementation of the declaration is monitored throughout the year.

It is also important for the EP that the IIA on BLM envisages the inclusion in the Commission work program of major legislative and non legislative proposals, but also repeals, recasts, simplifications and withdrawals.

We agreed to work in accordance with the principles of sincere cooperation and of institutional balance. The Commission is also obliged to provide regular updates on its planning, justify delays and regularly report to both institutions. We have also committed ourselves to cooperate and coordinate any effort to accelerate procedures when needed.

As to multiannual programming, I mentioned that the IIA on BLM foresees a midterm review of joint conclusions adopted on the initiative of the Commission. In this context it could be useful to have a debate between the institutions and also with national parliaments on some elements of the multiannual program, notably on the follow-up to the Bresso/Brok, Verhofstadt and Boege/Beres reports, proposals for an overhaul of the own resources system (Monti report) and a new mechanism for fundamental rights and the rule of law (Sophie in t Velt report).

Now, moving to the substance of the Commission Work Program 2017, it would not be an exaggeration if I start by saying that the European Parliament, due to its contribution to its preparation, has had a chance to develop a feeling of co-ownership and support for it.

The European Parliament and its committees are in a constant exchange with the European Commission on the preparation of the Work Program and the political preferences for the future programming. Every June, the committee Chairs adopt an in-depth catalogue of actions which we want the Commission to include in the program for the coming year (CCC Summary Report), based on detailed exchanges with each Commissioner by the committees.

On this basis, Parliament expresses in the July resolution its views on what the Commission should deliver in its next work program. Then, early October, shortly before the Commission presentation of its work program, a last political fine-tuning takes place in a dialogue between the Chairs of parliamentary committees in thematic cluster meetings with the College. We did all that in 2016, it therefore doesn't come as surprise that Parliament is supportive of the main features of the 2017 Work Program. This is true for most of the priority issues of the 2017 program.

Frans Timmermans referred to what we have in terms of substance in the CWP 2017. Most of the policy areas and measures proposed in the program reflect the most serious worries and concerns of European citizens that require solutions at European level. Some of those issues need improvements in European capacity to deliver and good cooperation among European institutions. The IIA on BLM works in this direction.

In the context of the recent internal electoral process in the European Parliament, let me reassure you that the EP will continue to be a pragmatic and responsible co-legislator in all areas of the program:

- boosting jobs, growth, trade and investment
- ensuring security of citizens
- implementing Digital Single Market and an ambitious Energy Union
- enhancing the social dimension of the Union
- ensuring fairness of European policies

To conclude let me say a few words about national parliaments' role in this context. Of course, it is to large extent up to you to decide how you participate in this process. There is enormous amount of accumulated experience that you can share and exploit. National parliaments are actually in quite a unique position when it comes to influencing the Commission Work Program. You can present your political preferences via the Council and your government or/and directly. Many national Parliaments are debating their countries' EU policy priorities before their governments approach the Commission or before Council meetings.

The Commission - as it was explained by Mr Timmermans - carefully listens to the national Parliaments' input, which is given directly to the Commission in the framework of the enhanced political dialogue.

Also, the European Parliament can be a way for the national parliamentarians to bring their political messages to the EU level, in various forms. Actually, this can be done through all existing platforms of our dialogue.

Since the large part of the Commission Work Program is about amending or updating the present EU law, evaluation and analysis of the existing one has become more important. National parliaments are indeed in a unique position to provide it.

The European Parliament - as the co-legislator - has been investing both time and resources in guaranteeing that the laws it adopts are working properly. The Committees of the EP adopt annually several implementation reports, which are based on analysis and research, but also, increasingly, on visits to Member States and their Parliaments.

The exchange of views on implementation of EU laws can take place on both political and administrative level. The inter-parliamentary committee meetings, bilateral exchanges between the national Parliaments and the European Parliament and regular exchanges of documents are already in place. Also administrative networks and exchanges between research or analysis services are good tools for that.

As to the implementation and transposition of the EU law, the Working group on IIA on BLM will dedicate a meeting to this subject in Spring and there is the idea of a meeting with national parliaments on the subject. The timing is still to be defined in light of the outcome of the WG meeting and subject to discussions between Chairs and rapporteurs.

As the implementation of the Commission Annual Work Program is made through the legislative procedure, The European Parliament is working hard to make this as open and transparent as possible, to allow also the national Parliaments to follow it up properly

National Parliaments should push for a similar transparency on the side of the Council, and insist on full openness by their own Governments. This way the national parliamentarians can be fully involved in European law-making, including their involvement in identifying priorities and scrutinizing the implementation of the Commission Work Program.

In this context it is indeed a good news that the next Bi-Annual Report of the COSAC takes stock of the national scrutiny mechanisms.