



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 21.04.1999

COM(1999) 180 final

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

The Development of the External Service



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

CORRIGENDUM

Annule et remplace la page 9
du document COM(1999) 180 final
du 21.04.1999.

Concerne la version EN.

Brussels, 12.05.1999
COM(1999) 180 final/2

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However, this only became effective at the beginning of 1999. It is therefore too early to carry out any cost benefit analysis. However, there are some preliminary elements that could be borne in mind.

Transferring an official from Headquarters to a Delegation has the effect of, on average, doubling the cost to the Commission of that official. This is accounted for by the extra costs such as infrastructure, removal expenses, annual holiday travel, hardship allowances (ICV) etc. It is against this background that the expected benefits, which are hard to quantify, must be assessed.

In respect of Sarajevo, the de-concentration represents a radical departure from the original highly centralised approach. During 1999 and beyond, the Commission would expect to see improvements in its performance. These should include a better supervision of the Commission's assistance activities on the ground, more rapid implementation, better relations with the Bosnian authorities and better co-ordination with other donors represented in Bosnia. These should, in turn, give the Commission a reputation for enhanced efficiency and improve its overall image in a highly important area.

As regards **PHARE**, this programme has always been managed in a way that was partly de-concentrated (with decisions taken in Delegations on contracts up to € 500.000) and decentralised (within the limits of the Financial Regulation). The additional responsibilities transferred to seven of the ten PECO candidate country Delegations can be seen as an "extended" deconcentration parallel to the process of extended decentralisation (i.e. the transfer of responsibilities from the Commission to the beneficiary country) that the Commission plans to implement within the limits of the financial Regulation.

In 1999, contracts between € 500.000 and € 5.000.000 are subject to approval in Delegation and will therefore no longer be submitted to HQ for approval. The technical content of work programmes will be approved in the Delegation and submitted directly to the SCR financial services for payment. The reduction in the duplication of controls will speed up approvals and reduce administrative costs.

Finally it should be noted that the extended de-concentration is not expected to affect the quality of financial management (thanks to the introduction of a "contrepoids" in the Delegations). The increased de-concentration of responsibility requires the strengthening of financial management capabilities in the Delegation. The Financial Officer acts as a "contrepoids" to the operational section of the Delegation. To ensure the independence of the "contrepoids" the Financial Officer receives instructions from and reports to the headquarters/DG IA for all matters relating directly to the implementation of the PHARE and OBNOVA programmes. Moreover by increasing the level of decision-making in country it should facilitate the development of the capacity needed for extended decentralisation. This should help prepare the candidate countries for membership by developing the administrative capacities of their authorities. At the same time, the increased speed in examining and approving project proposals will improve the image of the EU as a partner.

As far as **TACIS** is concerned, the Commission is at present represented in only four (Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Georgia) of the thirteen countries concerned. This is insufficient to provide the necessary conditions for the de-concentration or the decentralisation of the management of co-operation activities.

The Development of the External Service

This paper sets out developments in the External Service in a number of areas, notably those which are the subject of the conditions of the European Parliament for the lifting of the reserve on the External Services budget for 1999.

Ia) Training for applicants to and members of the External Service

INTRODUCTION

Until the creation of the External Service in February 1994, virtually no specific training in external relations was envisaged for staff in Delegations or for those in RELEX DGs which, following the creation of the Rotation Exercise, are the principal - but not exclusive - source of recruitment into the External Service.

However, since the creation of the External Service, a number of initiatives have been taken and more are planned for the short and medium term. It is intended that, over time, the gaps in provision of training for Delegation staff will be substantially eliminated either by specific training activities organised by the Directorate responsible for the management of the External Service or by the competent geographical Directorate General. This increase in the provision of training over a period of years will require additional funds.

CONTINUOUS TRAINING

To remedy the absence of training for the External Service, a programme of "continuous training" has already been created. Organised since 1994 by the Directorate responsible for the management of the External Service, it takes place before and/or after the summer holidays in order to coincide with annual leave arrangements and thus avoid the travel costs otherwise involved. The purpose of this continuous training is not only to equip Delegation staff with specific skills and knowledge to enable them to enhance their performance and job satisfaction, but also to improve the overall ability of the Commission's External Service to rise to evolving management challenges.

The programme includes knowledge based modules covering the external impact of general policies of the European Union such as agriculture, the environment, trade policy, treaty developments, protocol matters, developments in decision-making procedures, EMU. These courses also update officials' knowledge of the CFSP and policies of the EU in specific areas of the world, such as the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Briefing officials on the wider aspects of EU policies enables them to command the essential tools of public diplomacy.

In addition, general skills courses are offered in areas required by officials in Delegations. These are, for example, negotiating techniques, presentation techniques, techniques for handling the media, staff and resource management, project cycle management, the evolution of management procedures within the Commission's External

Service etc. Many of the skills necessary are those required generally in diplomatic life, but there is particular emphasis on the project management roles of the Commission's delegations.

This training is also offered to officials from RELEX DGs and, indeed, from other DGs who have a specific interest in external relations. Since the year 1994, 321 officials of all categories have participated in these courses.

In addition, the RELEX DGs organise a series of courses for staff in Delegations in the area of their geographical or functional responsibility. These courses present the added advantage of bringing together staff in the External Service and their colleagues in Headquarters. Thus, for example, DG IA has organised courses on the management of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and on the management arrangements for PHARE and TACIS programmes, while DG VIII has organised courses on project cycle management and structural adjustment and DG I has organised courses on anti-dumping procedures. All courses organised by individual RELEX DGs are open to staff from other RELEX DGs and the External Service.

PRE-POSTING TRAINING

The Commission has also introduced pre-posting courses. These cover much the same subject matters as the continuous training mentioned above, but they also cover specific issues of relevance to work in Delegations, such as protocol arrangements, the Vienna convention, security issues, personnel management in a multicultural environment, estate management issues, rights and obligations of officials serving outside the EU. The course is aimed at officials of all grades before they take up a post abroad. Since the creation of the Association des Conjointes du Service Extérieur de la Commission (ACSEC) in 1997, the course is also open to spouses.

Pre-posting courses are offered as part of the induction training on the programme for "Young Experts in Delegations", who spend two years in Commission Delegations financed either by the Commission or by Member States under bilateral agreements concluded with the Commission.

A total of 257 officials, 40 spouses and 81 Young Experts have taken part in this training.

INFORMATION OFFICERS AND ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS

Specific attention has been given to two very important categories of staff in Delegations: Information Officers and Administrative Assistants.

As regards Information Officers (who are mainly local staff) training has been offered in Brussels jointly by DG X and by DG IA for officers from ACP countries (14 participants in Brussels in 1996), the Mediterranean (12 participants in Brussels in June 1997), Asia (15 participants in Brussels in 1997), PHARE and TACIS countries (18 participants in 1998) and, finally Latin America (12 participants in 1998). In addition, courses have been offered in South Africa for Delegations in the region (12 participants in Pretoria, in March 1998) and in the Middle East for Delegations in the region (11 participants in Amman in 1998). A total of 94 Information Officers have thus participated in this training.

The Commission has recently organised two training sessions in Brussels for Administrative Assistants: one in 1997 for 53 local agents responsible for administration and accounting in Delegations in which there are no Brussels-based Administrative Assistants and one in 1998 for 45 Brussels-based Administrative Assistants. It is intended to organise a further training courses for *both* local agents and officials in 1999.

In its concern to improve the overall quality of the administration of its Delegations the Commission is now casting its net wider in the search for suitable candidates for the post of Administrative Assistant. In 1998, it organised information and training sessions for those interested in such posts. Some 120 officials responded to a call to show interest. Information sessions and pre-training, involving three individual two-hour sessions in both Brussels and Luxembourg, have been offered to all such staff. The purpose is to provide prior training to ensure that, before officials are appointed, they become aware of the skills and knowledge required for this key post. These arrangements have the added advantage of ensuring that the appointment procedure for administrative assistants is as cost-effective as possible.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

As regards future development in training for the External Service, the Commission is focussing on five areas:

- linking training to career planning
- training Heads of Delegation
- creation of an induction course
- training local agents
- language training.

LINKING TRAINING TO CAREER PLANNING

The linking of training to career planning is an essential step in realising the objective of greater career planning as set out in the Report on the Longer Term Needs of the External Service of 1996. A series of training profiles have been prepared covering different categories. These are Heads of Delegation/Heads of Unit, Desk Officer and other Grade A officials, Information Officer, Administrative Assistant, Secretary. Training will be offered throughout the year but particularly in those periods when officials (who may not have had the opportunity before posting to fulfil core training requirements) are on leave from Delegations. This training will complete officials' suitability for jobs they already do or help prepare them as candidates in the annual rotation exercise.

HEADS OF DELEGATION

For Heads of Delegation, a new course is being created in co-operation with DG IX. This course will be based on plans in the Commission as a whole to introduce modular training for senior and middle management. The course will equip Heads of Delegation not only to manage the Delegation and its personnel but also to deal with new tasks such as political reporting, co-operation with embassies of the Member States in the framework of the CFSP, supervision of project management etc. The first course will be offered to new Heads of Delegation taking up their posts in the 1999 rotation exercise.

INDUCTION COURSE

A specific induction course for RELEX DGs and the External Service is being introduced. Although the Commission already has a general induction course for all new officials, this touches only marginally on External Relations. A specific course for officials entering the External Service or the RELEX DGs by recruitment or transfer will have a number of advantages. It will ensure that such new officials master certain basic skills and knowledge such as diplomatic correspondence, the history and role of the Commission's Delegations, political and economic reporting etc. It will also help to promote a certain "house style" enabling officials to transfer more easily from one RELEX DG or Delegation to another. The first induction course will take place in 1999.

TRAINING FOR LOCAL AGENTS

The training of local agents becomes ever more necessary as the Commission proceeds with the redeployment of its officials, notably A grades, and as the tasks and responsibilities of local agents increase. Part of the training of such local agents should involve a training visit to Brussels to gain first-hand experience of the Commission and other institutions at work. Achievement of this objective in the current context of severe budget restrictions will require a review of the budget for local agents' missions.

The preparation of audio-visual training means and the possibility of organising training on a regional basis are partial substitutes, which are currently under review. A first step has been made by the recording of the major interventions in the September 1998 Heads of Delegation meeting and the sending of these recordings to every Delegation. But this is clearly insufficient. Without an increase in budgetary resources, the Commission's arrangements for training local agents are bound to fall below what is required.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

For any External Service, language training is a fundamental element. Although most Commission officials master at least two of the more widely used EU languages, there remain certain languages, which are less widely spoken, as well, of course, as non-EU languages. DG IX provides support to organise such training but to be effective it

requires the Commission to make its posting decisions sufficiently far in advance to enable the official to acquire at least a good grounding in the appropriate language. Certain initiatives, such as for Japanese and Chinese, already produce a steady stream of speakers of these languages. This should be repeated for other languages, e.g. Russian and Arabic.

lb) Mandatory rotation

The Commission decided, on 8 April 1997, SEC (97) 605, that, while the External Service's staff policy should ideally be based on consent, service in Delegations would be compulsory for A grades in RELEX DGs after a transitional period of three years. This means the obligation will become effective from the year 2000.

This transitional period does not apply to category A officials in the RELEX DGs who, when they joined, were duly informed that they might, in the interests of the service, be offered a posting in a Commission Delegation.

The obligation to serve abroad will function as follows:

Where an official has not applied for and received a posting outside the Community in the course of six years' service in the Directorates-General, his name will automatically be placed on the list of people who may be posted to a Delegation. The wishes of each official on the list will be considered in the course of the annual rotation exercise, without losing sight of the interests of the service.

The Steering Committee, on the initiative of its chairman and on a proposal from the Director-General concerned, will decide which of the officials thus listed are to be included in the definitive rotation list. They could therefore be required to move to a Delegation and their posts would be offered to others, including those who have to return from a Delegation as part of the rotation exercise. The Steering Committee, on the initiative of its chairman and on a proposal from the Director-General concerned, will also decide which vacant posts at headquarters are to be included in the rotation exercise.

Nothing in the foregoing will preclude headquarters-based officials being moved to a Delegation before expiry of the six-year period or officials listed as having more than six years' service in the RELEX DGs being moved independently of the rotation exercise.

Ic) Measures to encourage incorporation of Member States diplomats into the staff complement of the Commission's external delegations

Since the creation of the External Service, the Commission has sought to maintain close contact with Member States' diplomatic services in order to benefit from their long experience in the organisation and management of external representation.

The Commission not only participates in the CFSP Working Group on Administrative Co-operation (COADM) but also organises five training sessions per year in Brussels for

Member States' diplomats on CFSP and Community matters. These will soon be extended to include diplomats from applicant countries.

Additionally, officials responsible for the management of the External Service are in regular contact - including visits - with their opposite numbers in Member States' Foreign Ministries. The object of these contacts is to obtain information not only on current practices in administration covering such matters as leave, hardship allowances, cost of living allowances, length of postings, housing, travel allowances etc. but also to exchange views on planned changes/reforms in the future caused notably by budgetary restrictions, changing political priorities and modern communications.

For some time, a number of Member States diplomats - and other officials - have served in RELEX DGs. In 1996, the Commission decided to extend its "Partnership Programme" with Member States to offer them the possibility of placing officials in Delegations. All Permanent Representatives were informed of this, given a list of the Commission's priorities and invited to nominate candidates. In doing so, the Commission hoped principally to recruit diplomats who, by their experience in diplomatic missions, could add to the Commission's store of knowledge and expertise in the Delegations where they would serve and also in the External Service as a whole.

To date, 9 such officials (known as National Officials on Secondment - FND to use the French acronym) are serving in China, Korea, Japan, Ivory Coast, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, Poland, Vietnam and the U.S.A. While several of these officials have previous experience of serving in Member States' Embassies, none of them is a serving member of a diplomatic service.

One reason for this is that diplomatic services plan their movement of personnel well in advance and the precarious nature of the Commission's budgetary appropriations for this activity means the Commission is unable to give Member States sufficient advance warning of the definite availability of posts to enable them to be included in time in Member States' career planning. Furthermore, some Member States' diplomatic services, which are required by the "Partnership Programme" to meet the salary and allowance costs, have said that they do not have the resources to fund their diplomats for activities outside their own service.

The Commission proposes to recruit a further four or five FNDs in 1999, budgetary resources permitting, and will continue to discuss with Member States methods of enlarging the programme. It must be stressed that the development of this programme will require a significant increase in the funds available.

One possibility under consideration by the Commission is to offer the facilities of the Delegations to Member States no longer able to fund the maintenance of a whole Embassy, but wishing to retain a presence in a particular country.

The Member States could place a diplomat (probably at First Secretary or Counsellor level) in the Delegation.

The Member States and the Commission would agree a basis on which to share the costs - probably similar to that for the Partenariat described above. The diplomat would become a member of the Delegation of the Commission but would also remain available

to provide certain services – when required and on a basis to be mutually agreed – for his/her Member State.

One early – though atypical – example of what can be achieved by co-operation between the Commission and Member States – has been seen in Liberia. On an ad hoc basis, a number of Member States based their field operations on the Commission's Aid Co-ordination Office. In addition to the policy and political co-ordination that resulted, the Commission was able to provide considerable logistical support to Member States.

Id) Relations with the competent parliamentary committees and interparliamentary delegations

The External Service has been the subject of growing interest from the European Parliament both from a budgetary point of view and as an essential component in the implementation of EU policies towards third countries.

It has always been the Commission's policy that its Delegations offer assistance to visiting parliamentary delegations: assistance in the preparation of the programme, preparation of briefing material, etc. This means that a large number of the Commission's Delegations already have close contacts with either individual MEPs or with official groupings representing Parliament as a whole.

Heads of Delegation could appear before Parliamentary Committees and Interparliamentary Delegations in the same way as officials of the Commission based at Headquarters do. On such occasions they could answer specific questions concerning the exercise of their functions. This could take place during their visits to Brussels on mission or on leave.

The invitation of the Parliament should be addressed to the Commission in the person of the Commissioner in whose geographical area of responsibility the Head of Delegation is serving. Heads of Delegation may not accept invitations addressed directly to them.

II Report on the functioning of the SCR

On 15 October 1997, the Commission decided¹ that a Common Service for the Management of Community Aid to Third Countries ("SCR") should be created. The creation of the SCR is to be seen in the context of other, wider ranging plans for the reform of the Commission's services, notably through the means of the exercise "Designing Tomorrow's Commission". This exercise has studied in depth the functioning of the External Service as well as each of the RELEX DGs and Services. The human resources for the SCR were to be taken from all RELEX DGs. Another Commission Communication of 10 December 1997² further specified the financial and budgetary responsibilities of the SCR as well as the division of tasks between the RELEX DGs on the one hand and the SCR on the other hand. (This decision foresees

¹ SEC(97)1813/5 of 10 October 1997

² Document SEC(97)2305

basically that the SCR is responsible for the implementation of aid projects, once the financing agreements subventions are signed).

The SCR started operations in September 1998. The IGS study had identified some 660 posts (including 30% external personnel posts) to be transferred to SCR from the RELEX DGs. Such transfer has progressively taken place and by December 1998 virtually concluded.

The SCR is responsible for the implementation of the EDF and some 70 different budget lines. In practical terms this involves some new 9000 contracts and 2000 tendering procedures per year. By the end of 1998 the amount of funds committed but for which contracts had not been signed amounted to approximately 11 billion Euro, while the amount of funds for which contracts had been concluded but which had not been spent amounted to approximately 8 billion Euro. At the same date, there were some 14,500 commitments and 30,000 contracts still open.

The present organisational structure of the SCR (three "geographical" directorates and three "horizontal" ones partly mirrors the geographical distribution of tasks among the original RELEX DGs. While this solution was perceived to be the most suitable one for the SCR's first years of operation, it is nevertheless possible that an entirely horizontal structure will be introduced at a later stage. Such a step will, however, only be possible once progress has been made regarding a simplification of the applicable procedures. Since a significant simplification involves i.a. a change in legislation, it is clear that this will be a process that cannot take place from one day to the other. At present, the SCR's efforts are not only concentrated on working towards a unification and simplification of procedures, but also to ensure a smooth transfer of all documentation concerning ongoing projects. Due to the massive amount of files involved, this has so far proved to be not exactly an easy task.

III De-concentration from Headquarters to Delegations

Although the Commission re-deployed 15 posts (of which 13 from Headquarters to Delegations) in 1997, it was only in 1998 that redeployments took place with the specific objective of de-concentration (i.e. the transfer of responsibilities for the management of projects from headquarters to the Delegations). In 1998, 8 posts were re-deployed from Headquarters to the Representation Office in Sarajevo and its sub-offices in Mostar and Banja Luka. Additionally, 9 officials' posts were transferred to PHARE Delegations and the credits for 11 non-official posts were transferred to the External Service budget to enable the recruitment of local agents.

As far as deconcentration is concerned, Sarajevo is a pilot project. The Head of the Representation Office is nominated as deputy authorising officer for commitments and payments with no limits as to the amount. He equally has the authority to launch calls for tender and to sign contracts (up to 5 million Euro) between the Commission and the operators or economic partners. To enable this to be done, the Commission has established:-

- a direct connection with the accounting system SINCOM 2.
- a Finance/Contracts sector which ensures the necessary financial counter balance (as required by SEM 2000) inside the Delegation.

However, this only became effective at the beginning of 1999. It is therefore too early to carry out any cost benefit analysis. However, there are some preliminary elements that could be borne in mind.

Transferring an official from Headquarters to a Delegation has the effect of, on average, doubling the cost to the Commission of that official. This is accounted for by the extra costs such as infrastructure, removal expenses, annual holiday travel, hardship allowances (ICV) etc. It is against this background that the expected benefits, which are hard to quantify, must be assessed.

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As far as TACIS is concerned, the Commission is at present represented in only four (Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Georgia) of the thirteen countries concerned. This is insufficient to provide the necessary conditions for the de-concentration or the decentralisation of the management of co-operation activities.

As far as MEDA is concerned, it is still too soon to come to a definitive judgement. However, it is felt that the results of this de-concentration would be improved once new harmonised and simplified procedures for the awarding of contracts are adopted and some management competences deconcentrated.

The legal basis for budget line B7-3200 (**European Programme for reconstruction and Development in South Africa**) is contained in Council Regulation No. 2259/96 of 22/11/96 under which a financial allocation of MECU 500 is foreseen for the Programme over a four-year period from 1996 to 1999 to contribute towards South Africa's economic and social development.

Pending the conclusion and ratification of the EU/South African Trade, Development and Co-operation Agreement (the 'Bilateral Agreement') implementation procedures are governed by the Commission Financial Regulation dated 21/12/77, and in particular by Title IX (Special Provisions Applicable to External Aid). Any matters relating to the decentralisation or de-concentration of responsibilities under the Programme must therefore be examined in the light of those Regulations.

Responsibility for the implementation of the Programme is shared between the Commission's central services of DG VIII and the RELEX Common Service (SCR), the Commission's delegation in South Africa, the Beneficiary State, and the Decentralised Partners under the Programme.

It is anticipated that a certain decentralisation and de-concentration of present administrative responsibilities will take place once the Bilateral Agreement with South Africa has been concluded and enters into effect. These modifications may include the areas of tender document approval, decisions on award of contract, and payments. Furthermore, the SCR is currently examining the possibility and feasibility of annual work-plans being approved at the level of the delegation in certain cases where the delegation has the appropriate professional expertise among its staff.

In anticipation of the conclusion of the bilateral agreement, and in order to assist the delegation in South Africa to carry out its existing responsibilities under the Programme, an official was re-deployed from DG VIII headquarters to the delegation with her post in 1998.

As a general principle, Commission Services have started the analysis on how to further pursue the de-concentration/decentralisation process. However a reflection on the consequences of further de-concentration and decentralisation – not only in Asia and Latin America but also in the MEDA area – suggests that, without additional personnel, the result would simply be to transfer blockages from headquarters to the Delegations.

In conclusion, it must be said that, while the Commission believes that de-concentration and decentralisation have the potential to improve its performance in the field of development aid, it is too soon to carry out cost-benefit analysis, based on hard evidence.

The recent creation of the SCR and the "Designing Tomorrow's Commission" exercise, whose results are not yet known, will form the basis of a profound reflection on the decisions to be taken in the future as regards decentralisation and de-concentration.

In the meantime, the various services of the Commission concerned in these matters will continue to follow closely the development of their initiatives in de-concentration. They

will exchange experiences in order that they may collectively benefit from the experiences of each other.

ISSN 0254-1475

COM(1999) 180 final

DOCUMENTS

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11 01 09 06

Catalogue number : CB-CO-99-174-EN-C

Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

L-2985 Luxembourg