



FLEISHMANSM
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS
HILLARD

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
WORK PROGRAMME 2013

FH Analysis & Insights



20
13



THE 2013-2014 COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

Each year, the annual work programme explains how the European Commission President's Political Guidelines for 2009-2014 will be implemented in the coming year (process outlined at end of document).

While it indicates the legislative and non-legislative proposals that the European Commission will initiate in the coming year, the work programme is seen as a concrete and practical translation of the political priorities spelled out by President Barroso in his "State of the European Union" annual address.

The 2013-2014 Work Programme is of particular importance as it is the last to be presented by the current Commission before the end of its term in 2014. It is effectively the last opportunity for the Barroso II Commission to shape its legacy and potentially highlight what the EU could – or at least should – achieve to lift itself out of what is now the existential crisis it currently faces.

The headline reactions to the Work Programme include:

- ❖ The Work Programme carries a "Eurolite" agenda and does not, it would appear, set out a bold framework for European action in 2013 to address the fundamental challenges that Europe faces.
- ❖ By relative silence on the Euro crisis and political steps to address it, the Commission leaves a stark void in laying out either the vision or a clear roadmap towards further integration (the key theme of President Barroso's State of the Union speech) – instead, Council President Van Rompuy remains in the clear leadership role on what is the EU's most fundamental priority.
- ❖ The Work Programme suggests the focus of the Commission is "clearing the deck" of existing pieces of legislation, before European Parliament elections and a new Commission in 2014.
- ❖ On the basis of the Work Programme at least, it remains unclear what the final Barroso legacy will be or indeed what it is intended to be.

A "EUROLITE" AGENDA?

Initial reactions to the Commission's 2013-2014 Work Programme have been underwhelming. Suggestions are that it certainly does not live up to the magnitude of the challenges identified in Barroso's recent State of the European Union address with the Commission showing limited appetite for new proposals.

An interesting, if anecdotal, metric could be the number of pages for the annex to the work programme year-on-year (these have generally stretched to 45 pages under this Commission, whilst 2013's Annex reaches only 18 pages) which would suggest that the level of ambition compared to earlier in the mandate has waned.

However, it would be churlish to assume that the Commission has simply run out of steam.

PRAGMATIC REALISM OVER REGULATORY IDEALISM?

From a macro-economic point of view, one could well assume that the Commission is simply being *pragmatically realist* by adopting a "Eurolite" agenda for 2013. With major Member States threatening to veto EU budget increases, discussions on a possible UK referendum, and continuing economic hardship across Europe's Member States, now could easily be seen as justification for a more streamlined and focused European policy agenda.



One has to ask if a reduced policy-making prerogative for the European Commission is a long-term trend or short-term breathing space for Europe's Member States. Only time will tell.

CLEARING THE DECK

Of course quality is more important than quantity - generally the last year of the Commission's mandate is "lighter" given the focus on getting existing legislative proposals through the door.

No doubt the Commission is anticipating that large proposals will not be processed by legislators before 2014 when Parliament will halt work before entering election mode.

In this sense we can assume there was significant pressure from individual Commissioners to allow their key proposals to be included in the programme for 2013 given the limited space in the EU's agenda.

FROM REGULATION TO IMPLEMENTATION?

It is noteworthy that the Work Programme more broadly stresses the importance of implementation of existing pieces of legislation as opposed to creation of new rules.

One impact of the financial crisis is the perception that the non-implementation of the financial framework within Member States was a central cause of the current debt crisis across Europe.

A future "enforcement focus" by the Commission could create opportunities for any industry operating across the EU given potential for greater harmonisation of standards and rules. "Eurolite" might not mean "Euroless" in this sense.

However, the reality is that the EU has a tradition of being a strong regulator, and less so as a strong enforcer of regulation. The question is whether the Commission has the mindset to subsequently re-orientate towards better implementation or whether its "rationale to regulate" will ultimately remain its *raison d'être*.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT REACTION

Not surprisingly, the tone from the European Parliament was one of disappointment regarding the level of ambition showcased by the Commission for 2013. MEPs have described the programme as "incomplete", arguing that the Commission should have presented the entire work programme, including the implementation of legislation and work already started. In this sense, MEPs highlighted that half of the 2012 Work Programme has not been executed.

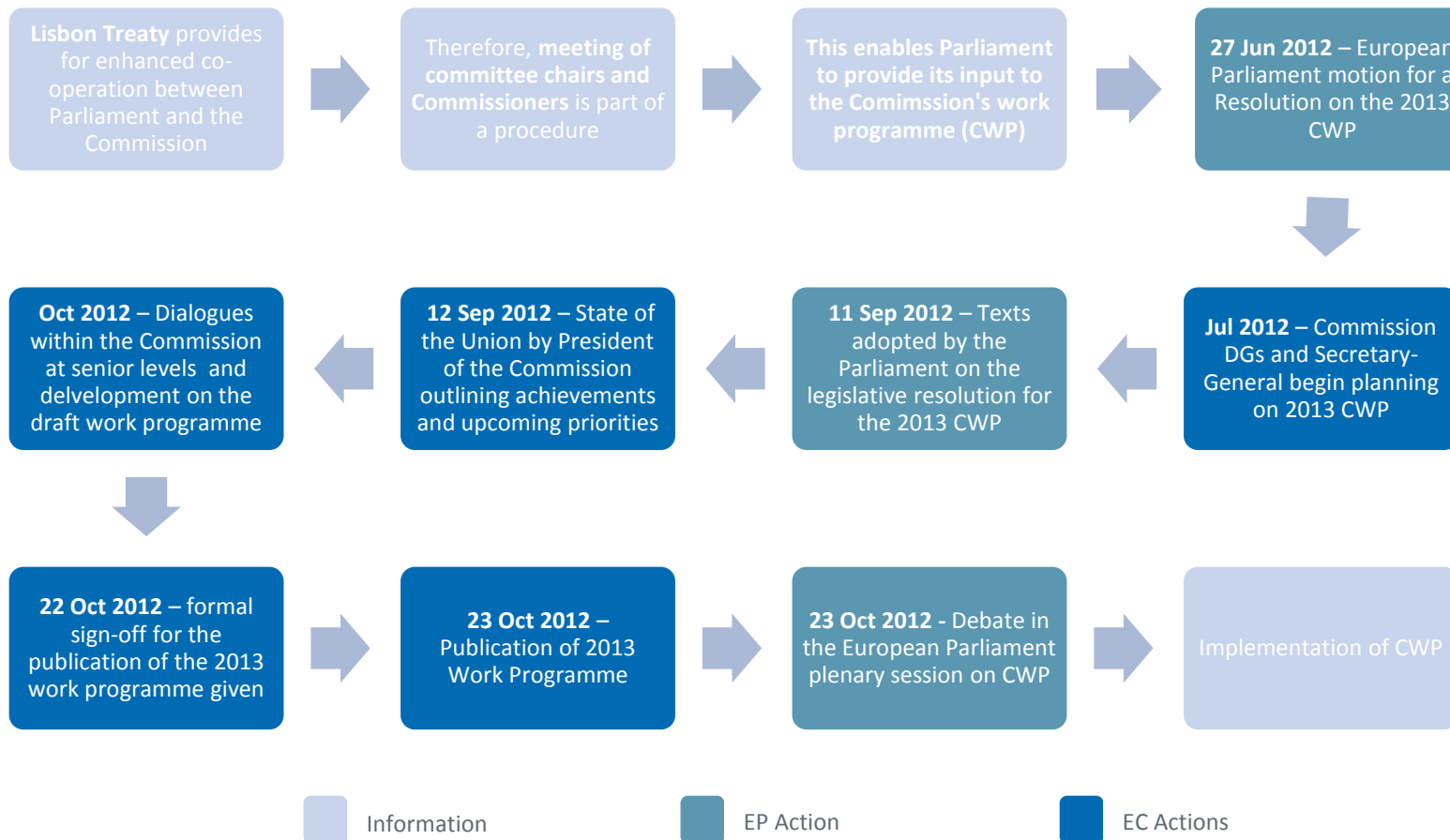
A LASTING LEGACY?

In terms of defining the Barroso II legacy, it is clear this will be set by actions not work programmes. A key question remains - can the EU help rescue Europe from its current economic travails, given the limited window of opportunity and limited arsenal of measures at its disposal?

More likely is that, on the back of a conservative programme lacking an interventionist approach favoured by federalists of the past, the European Commission becomes permanently demoted to a position of second regulator behind Mr. Van Rompuy's Council of Ministers.



FORMULATION OF THE COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME



Fleishman-Hillard Brussels
Square de Meeûs 35
B-1000 Brussels

Tel :+32 2 230 05 45

www.fleishman-hillard.eu

FLEISHMANSM
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS
HILLARD