

Final Plenary Session, Dr Marianne Klingbeil, Director for Better Regulation; Acting Chair of the Impact Assessment Board, Secretariat-General of the European Commission

We have a very well functioning impact assessment system in the European Commission, recognised by our stakeholders, and by the European Court of Auditors. Thanks to this system we can better prepare proposals that deliver policy objectives, and at the same time avoid unintended consequences.

In practice, many of these new proposals to be adopted by the Commission are revisions of the existing policies. While we are doing very thorough evaluations of any expenditure programmes, and nearly all legislative acts require close monitoring of how well they are implemented, we have realised that this is not enough - and that there are gaps to be bridged.

We need to look at how different elements of policy work together. Do they really go in the same direction? Or perhaps there are some overlaps and contradictions that result in bringing the implementation costs up or delaying the benefits? Do we have many infringement cases or strong signals from stakeholders that something is going wrong?

What do we do in practice to fix these problems?

To start with, we will launch pilot new-style evaluations in four policy areas: transport, environment, social policy and employment and industrial policy. Then, we will make sure that at the end of the day no new major initiative is planned until the results of the existing instruments have been evaluated. Finally, we will make sure the results are fed into the impact assessments.

What we have learned from our successful programme for the administrative burden reduction, and significant simplification effort, will naturally be very useful in that process.

In parallel, in 2011 we will rethink the way we communicate with our stakeholders. They provide us with valuable inputs to the policy making and we need to make sure that the process through which they can contribute is as easy for them as possible. And - needless to say, - we need to make sure that we reach all those who should be consulted.

We also realise that we tend to focus on costs - forgetting about benefits. We have good expertise in valuating EU action even in some difficult policy areas, such as environment or social and employment policy, but we need to invest in it even more.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the quality of the EU legislation and policies depends also on the European Parliament, Council and the Member States. The Commission can make - and already has made - a great difference, but clearly there is a limit how much we achieve acting alone.