

Brussels, 30 April 2008

The European Commission proposes to improve public access to documents of the EU institutions

The Commission has today adopted changes to the rules of access to documents from EU institutions. These changes reaffirm the Commission's commitment to transparency, up-date the rules to reflect recent case-law and aim to allow the institutions to be more efficient in responding to requests from citizens.

President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso said, *"At the start of my Commission I stressed the need to increase the transparency of our work. The access to documents rules are working well. These changes seek to respond to the evolving case-law of the Court and improve the access to documents for European citizens"*.

Margot Wallström, Vice-President, Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy said: *"Our objective is increased transparency, increased access and increased outreach and understanding. This is fundamental in any democratic system: the citizens' right to know. Access to documents is an essential tool for democracy and now we want to improve it."*

The Commission's proposal with a new consolidated text puts more emphasis on active dissemination of information and it aligns the Regulation to the provisions on access to environmental information of the Aarhus Convention. It also clarifies the definition of "document", for example to include the content of electronic databases, when it can be extracted as a printout or an electronic file.

The proposed text is also more explicit on protection of documents related to ongoing investigations. This gives more legal clarity, but it will not lead to fewer documents being made accessible to the citizens.

The Commission also proposes to improve the access to names and functions of persons acting in a professional capacity, to documents from the Member States and to the institutions' written submissions to Courts. These changes follow recent case law of the European Courts.

The Treaty grants citizens and residents of the European Union a right of access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents. The principles governing this right of access have been determined by Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001, which has been applied since 3 December 2001.

When the Commission launched its drive towards more transparency in November 2005 – the European Transparency Initiative – it also decided to review the Regulation.

As a first step, the Commission published a Green Paper and held a wide public consultation in spring 2007.

The improvements now suggested by the Commission are based on the outcome of this consultation, as well as on recommendations made by the European Parliament, and on the case law of the European Courts.