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COURT OF JUSTICE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
COUR DE JUSTICE DES COMMUNAUTÉS EUROPÉENNES
CÚIRT BHREITHIÚNAIS NA gCÓMHPHOBAL EORPACH
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HOF VAN JUSTITIE VAN DE EUROPESE GEMEENSCHAPPEN
TRYBUNAŁ SPRAWIEDLIWOŚCI WSPÓLNOT EUROPEJSKICH
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EUROPEISKA GEMENSKAPERNAS DOMSTOL

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COURT OF JUSTICE – 2004 JUDICIAL STATISTICS

2004 – The most productive year in the history of the Court

2004 was the most productive year in the history of the Court: this is shown by the latest statistics on its judicial work. Never before had the Court brought so many cases to a close, the number increasing by 30% by comparison with the previous year. It has therefore been possible to reduce the number of pending cases by approximately 14%, and the average length of proceedings before the Court has been shortened appreciably.

This marked improvement in the administration of justice in the European Union has not arisen by pure chance. It is the result, first of all, of the Court's review of its working methods, which was carried out at the beginning of 2004 and led to the adoption of a series of measures which were put into practice progressively from May 2004 with a view to improving the efficiency of the Court and to reducing the average length of proceedings.

Moreover, the Treaty of Nice, which entered into force in February 2003, has made a series of changes to the way in which the Court works. These include in particular the ability of the Court, in certain circumstances, to rule without first hearing an Opinion of the Advocate General. The full effect of those changes could already be felt in 2004.

Finally, ten new judges joined the Court following the enlargement of the European Union on 1 May 2004. Their arrival was accompanied by a considerable increase in the number of staff at the Court of Justice and, as a result, in the Court's capacity for coping with its workload.

The Court thus brought 665 cases to a close in 2004. That figure represents a significant increase by comparison with previous years (494 cases brought to a close in 2003, 513 in 2002, 434 in 2001 and 526 in 2000). At the same time, 531 new cases were brought before the Court, whereas 561 were brought in 2003. The logical consequence of this positive differential between cases brought to a close and new cases has been a reduction in the number of cases pending before the Court, which was 840 at the end of 2004 (974 at the end of 2003). The number of cases pending on 31 December 2004 is thus lower than it has been for five years.

The increase in the length of proceedings, a trend observed throughout recent years, was brought to a halt in 2004. Within one year, the average length of preliminary reference proceedings has thus fallen from 25 to 23 months. The reduction is even more significant in relation to direct actions: these are now dealt with in 20 months instead of 25 as in 2003. Only 21 months are now required for appeals (28 months in 2003).

That improvement in the judicial statistics also owes much to the means at the Court's disposal for accelerating the treatment of certain cases (priority treatment, the accelerated or expedited procedure, the simplified procedure and the possibility of giving judgment without an Opinion of the Advocate General). It should be noted that approximately 30% of the judgments delivered in 2004 were delivered without an Opinion.

The changes in the allocation of cases between the various formations of the Court are also worthy of mention. More and more cases are heard by the five-judge chambers, which are therefore becoming the usual formation dealing with cases brought before the Court. In 2004, they disposed of 54% of the cases, the remainder being distributed between the three-judge chambers (34% of cases) and the full Court (12% of cases).

Thus, the positive judicial statistics of the Court are not due to special circumstances or a special event. They are the result of a series of structural changes to the Court's internal organisation and the conduct of its proceedings. Given the effect, already perceptible at the end of 2004, of measures which were only put into practice from 1 May of that year, it can be predicted that the trends identified in 2004 will be consolidated in the years to come, as a result of which justice at the Community level will be administered more efficiently and to a higher standard.

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Languages available: all

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