

Press and Information Division

PRESS RELEASE No 24/04

24 March 2004

**2003 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COURT OF JUSTICE AND THE COURT
OF FIRST INSTANCE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES**

The Court of Justice of the European Communities publishes its annual report

The Court of Justice of the European Communities is publishing, as it does every spring, its Annual Report summarising its case-law and other activity of the preceding year.

Mr Vassilios Skouris, who was elected President by the Judges of the Court of Justice on 7th October 2003, notes in his foreword to the Annual Report that 2003 was marked by very intense activity - both at the legal level and with regard to adjustment of the administrative structure - and was not just a year of transition between the Court's 50th anniversary (in 2002) and the enlargement of the European Union (in 2004) from 15 to 25 Member States.

In the course of 2003, the Court took the steps necessary to implement the changes in its operation provided for in the Treaty of Nice which entered into force on 1st February 2003. These changes include the creation of the Grand Chamber, the election of the Presidents of the chambers of five Judges for a period of three years and the possibility of determining cases without an Opinion from the Advocate General where no new point of law is raised. The Court likewise began to consider how to adapt its working methods to take account of the increase in the number of Judges from 15 to 25 on 11th May 2004.

So far as concerns its administrative functioning, the Court has done everything necessary at an internal organisational level and has unrelentingly progressed with large-scale property projects in order to prepare for enlargement and to have offices available for the new Judges and other colleagues from the new Member States. The Court is thus ready to continue its work in an effective manner after enlargement, with regard to both the above procedures and its infrastructure.

As regards the case-law itself, 2003 again bears witness to the richness and diversity of the matters of Community law dealt with by the Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance.

The statistics presented at the end of the Report summarise the judicial activity and show that there was again a high level of activity in 2003, taken as a whole yielding results comparable to those of the preceding year.

The number of cases brought to a close was 494 by the Court of Justice and 339 by the Court of First Instance (in 2002, 513 and 331 respectively); an appreciable increase in the number of new cases lodged may be observed, that is to say there were 561 new cases for the Court of Justice and 466 for the Court of First Instance (in 2002, 477 and 411 respectively).

Of the cases brought to a close by the Court of Justice, 47% concerned references for a preliminary ruling and 39% were direct actions, while the remainder essentially constituted appeals. The distribution of the subject-matter of the cases highlights the significance of cases concerning the environment and consumers (13%), agriculture (10%) and harmonisation of laws (9%). In 2003, 86 cases against Member States for failure to fulfil obligations were brought to a close, the Court finding in 77 of them that the Member State had breached its obligations.

Staff cases form the largest category of cases brought to a close by the Court of First Instance (32%), followed by intellectual property cases (14%) and competition cases (12%).

Unofficial document, for media use only, which does not bind the Court of Justice or the Court of First Instance.

Available languages: all the official languages

For additional information please contact Christopher Fretwell

Tel: (00352) 4303 3355 Fax: (00352) 4303 2731