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COURT OF JUSTICE – STATISTICS OF JUDICIAL ACTIVITY 2008

THE DURATION OF PRELIMINARY RULING PROCEEDINGS REACHES ITS LOWEST LEVEL FOR 20 YEARS, IN SPITE OF THE CONSTANT INCREASE IN THE CASELOAD OF THE COMMUNITY COURTS IN RECENT YEARS

Exceptional year for the Court of First Instance: 52% increase in the number of cases dealt with compared with 2007, but strong increase in number of cases brought

The Court of Justice

2008 marked a turning point in terms of both the efficiency and the particularly sustained rate of the Court's judicial activity. The statistics for 2008 show, on the one hand, a very significant decrease in the duration of preliminary ruling proceedings compared with previous years and, on the other, a continuing increase in the volume of cases brought before the Court.

As regards the duration of proceedings in 2008, there was a considerable improvement. Thus, for preliminary rulings, the duration of proceedings was on average 16.8 months, that is 3 months less than in 2006. A comparative analysis shows that the average duration of preliminary ruling proceedings has reached its lowest level for 20 years. As regards direct actions and appeals, the average duration was 16.9 months and 18.4 months respectively (18.2 and 17.8 months respectively in 2007).

The Court completed 567 cases in 2008. 592 new cases were brought before it, a number which exceeds even the 580 cases brought in 2007, which had been the highest in the history of the Court. The number of cases pending at the end of 2008 is almost identical to that in previous years.

In addition to the reforms to its working methods introduced in recent years, the improvement in the Court's efficiency in dealing with cases can also be explained by the wider use of the various procedural instruments at its disposal to accelerate proceedings in certain cases, in particular the urgent preliminary ruling procedure, the expedited and accelerated procedures, the simplified procedure and the possibility of ruling without an Advocate General's Opinion.

In 2008, the first year in which the new urgent preliminary ruling procedure was applied, that procedure was requested in 6 cases and the designated chamber found that the conditions required were satisfied in 3 of them. Those new provisions on the urgent preliminary ruling

procedure enabled the Court to complete those cases in 2008 within the particularly short period of 2 months.

The Court of First Instance

The Court of First Instance dealt with 605 cases during 2008, which represents a 52% increase compared with 2007, whilst the number of hearings held in 2008 doubled: 341 compared with 172 in 2007. The average duration of proceedings decreased: 24.5 months compared with 27.7 in 2007.

Faced with the constant increase in its caseload and, as a corollary, in the backlog of cases, the Court of First Instance has updated its working methods, its organisation and its modus operandi, at every stage of case management. The Court's objective was to improve its efficiency whilst also ensuring that the quality of its decisions was not prejudiced. Furthermore, the Rules of Procedure were amended to enable the Court to rule on actions on intellectual property matters without an oral stage in the proceedings, unless one of the parties submits a reasoned application.

The Court will be pursuing its efforts in this direction in the course of 2009 and expects to derive greater benefit from the full application of the reforms introduced. Whilst the past year was exceptional in terms of cases dealt with, so it was in terms of cases brought: 629 cases were brought in 2008, compared with 522 in 2007 and 432 in 2006. The stock of cases pending slightly increased: it stands at 1 178 compared with 1 154 in 2007. This presages a risk of increase in the duration of proceedings. In the light of the systemic increase in the caseload, it will be necessary to pursue the consideration of the ways and means, in particular structural, which will enable the Court to continue to ensure, in the interest of citizens, that cases are dealt with to a high standard but that the duration of proceedings is also reduced.

The Civil Service Tribunal

With 111 new applications, the number of actions brought in 2008 was, for the first time in ten years, down. It should also be noted that that number is much lower than the 157 actions brought in 2007.

In 2008, the Tribunal completed 129 cases. The difference between cases completed and cases brought is thus positive, with the result that, for the first time since the Tribunal's establishment, the number of cases pending is slightly down: 217 in 2008 compared with 235 in 2007.

The average duration of proceedings is 17 months, which represents a slight increase in the average duration compared with 2007.

In the course of 2008, the Tribunal also continued its efforts to respond to the legislature's request to facilitate the amicable settlement of disputes at every stage of the proceedings.

Languages available: All

This information for the press is also available on the Court's internet site

<http://curia.europa.eu/en/actu/communiqués/index.htm>

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