

ROMANO PRODI
PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Brussels,
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Dear Mr Söderman,

Thank you for your letter of 7 March in which you set out your objections to the imposition of age limits during the recruitment process.

The Commission made its position clear on this subject as long ago as January 1998 when it announced its decision in principle to abolish age limits. In the Consultation Document on Competitions and Recruitment (February 2001) the intention to implement this policy with effect from 1 July 2001 was stated. Following consultation with the staff representatives and with the other Institutions, it was decided that an inter-institutional approach would be the most appropriate solution and that the European Recruitment Office would provide the ideal forum in which to take such a decision. The short consequential delay does not reflect a lack of commitment on the part of the Commission, but a recognition of the importance of social dialogue on the issue and the need to move forward on a consensual basis.

While still convinced of the need for an inter-institutional approach, it is clear that the growing public aversion to all forms of ageism makes it important that the Commission should be seen to set an example of best practice in this area, in line with its own clearly stated policy. Vice-President Kinnock has therefore taken the decision to abolish age limits for all competitions run by the Commission with immediate effect. No Commission competitions published after today will apply an upper age limit for applicants. I understand that the Bureau of the Parliament also intends to deliberate on a proposal to reach an analogous decision on 8 April. Mr Cox intends to make a similar commitment on behalf of the Parliament.

As regards the legal admissibility of imposing age limits the Commission fully upholds the position taken in its Communication of 4 December 2001. However, in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding, the Commission will amend its detailed proposals for changes to the Staff Regulations, to ensure that they more clearly reflect this position.

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The creation of the European Recruitment Office (ERO) will provide a framework within which recruitment policy may be harmonised across all Institutions by common consent. Within that forum the Commission will strongly advocate the abolition of age limits. This matter has been identified as one which will be decided by the Management Board on the basis of qualified majority voting. Given the strong support of the Commission and of the European Parliament, we can be confident that the abolition of age limits will be confirmed on an inter-institutional basis.

The Commission remains firmly committed to making the ERO operational as from 1 January 2003. The changes which you have requested to the Draft Agreement between the Secretaries General on the Common Principles for a Shared Selection and Recruitment Policy and on the Draft Decision on the Organisation and Operation of the European Communities Recruitment Office would necessitate re-opening the consultative process. The setting up of the ERO would be considerably delayed, with a similar delay in securing agreement to the abolition of age limits.

I believe that we are agreed upon our goal. We both wish to see the abolition of age limits for recruitment competitions at the earliest opportunity. The inter-institutional approach was agreed by the Secretaries General and offers a pragmatic but effective solution to the problem. The decisions by the Commission and the European Parliament to discontinue the use of age limits with immediate effect would resolve the problem for the few competitions that they will be running in the interim.

I hope that, given these assurances, you will now feel able to sign up to the draft decision and draft agreement.

Yours sincerely,

Van der Laan
J. Manólis