

One in 20 EU officials could lose jobs in 'solidarity' cuts

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EUOBSERVER / BRUSSELS - The European Commission is to propose cutting five percent of jobs in the EU institutions in line with austerity measures in member states. But EU countries may want more.

A high ranking EU official told EUobserver the commission will propose the cut on 29 or 30 June as part of its plans for the next seven-year-long EU budget covering 2014 to 2020 and a related white paper on staff regulations.

"The commission is aiming for zero growth in the administrative budget. With ongoing pay rises related to promotions, this means a reduction in the head count. If the commission proposed lower wages and perks, they would face a strike by the trade unions," the contact said.

"They are talking about five percent across the board. But you could imagine that member states will ask for 10 percent or more. If you go for 10 percent, that would harm the functioning of core institutions - then you would begin looking at shutting down one of the peripheral institutions instead."

The Liberal group in the EU parliament in January named the Brussels-based Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee as surplus to requirements.

Antonio Gravili, the commission's spokesman for administrative affairs, declined to comment.

"Anything to do with the multi-annual financial framework or associated with this will be decided at the college meeting next week. Until that happens everything is pure speculation, and we don't comment on speculation," he said.

A source in the EU parliament said selected departments were already briefed on the



Carpenito: 'Our national leaders are imbeciles. There are about eight northern countries pushing for cuts, the UK, Denmark, Holland, Finland' (Photo: Gary Denness)

measures.

He noted that "if they are smart" the job losses will target people who are near to retirement or on long term sick leave and who could be pensioned-off with minimum pain. "They already did something like this in the run-up to the 2004 enlargement in order to avoid an explosion in staff numbers. At the time they used the unfortunate French word 'degagement'," he added.

'Degagement' in French means 'clearing' but also 'freeing prisoners' or 'releasing gas'.

The high ranking EU official said that with some 50,000 EU fonctionnaires serving all 27 member states compared to more than 50 million civil servants in the EU countries themselves, any cuts would be about showing "solidarity" rather than saving big money.

For their part, the EU trade unions are in a pugilistic mood.

"We just held our general assembly and I heard the same thing [about the five percent lay-offs], but we haven't seen any official papers," Renzo Carpenito, an official in the FFPE union, told this website.

"Our national leaders are imbeciles. There are about eight northern countries pushing for cuts, the UK, Denmark, Holland, Finland. What they don't say is that out of the EU's €142 billion annual budget, we [staff] do not even represent five percent, and that includes the cost of [EU] buildings."