

EU red tape is now over 130 miles long

New research by Vote Leave shows the true size of the mountain of red tape produced by the EU:

- The EU's *acquis communautaire* was over 714,000 pages long in 2013 when printing of the *Official Journal of the European Union* stopped. Stacked, this would be the same height as Nelson's column, weighing as much as a small whale or rhinoceros.
- Printed on A4, the *acquis* would run on the M1 from London to further north than Nottingham, a distance of 131.9 miles.
- The number of words in the *acquis* is over 310 million, which would take the world's fastest reader 358 days to read without a break.
- The *acquis* in force would be taller than two Routemaster buses when stacked, would be longer than the length of a marathon when printed on A4, and would take the world's fastest reader 84 days to read without a break.

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The *acquis communautaire* is the name for all the EU's collected laws and regulations that have been introduced over the last sixty years. Today, it today accounts for an extremely large - and ever growing - library of red tape that Europe's citizens and businesses have to obey.

The European Commission has repeatedly pledged to cut the *acquis*, but is yet to deliver on its promises. As early as 1985, the Commission stated that it would 'review all pending proposals in order to withdraw such proposals as are considered to be non-essential'.¹ In 1998, Mario Monti, the European Commissioner for the Single Market and Taxation, claimed that the Commission would 'eliminate superfluous rules and those imposing a disproportionate burden on business', alleging 'new legislative proposals from the Commission have been reduced to a trickle'.²

In July 2001, the then Commission President Romano Prodi told the *FT* that the *acquis* 'is 80,000 pages long. It is far too much. The Commission has to significantly reduce the number of pages'.³ The EU announced a few days later that it intended to reduce the *acquis* 'by between 30,000 and 35,000 pages'.⁴

These promises were not delivered. The number of pages in the EU rule book continued to increase. By adding up the number of pages in the many volumes of the EU's *Official Journal* (Legislation series), Vote Leave has calculated that the EU passed a staggering 714,707

¹ European Commission, 'Completing the internal market', 14 June 1985, COM(1985)310, pp. 20-23 <http://ec.europa.eu/white-papers/pdf/com85-310-internal-market_en.pdf>.

² M Monti, 'Commissioner responsible for Single Market and Taxation', (Vienna, 13 October 1998), <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-98-196_en.htm?locale=en>.

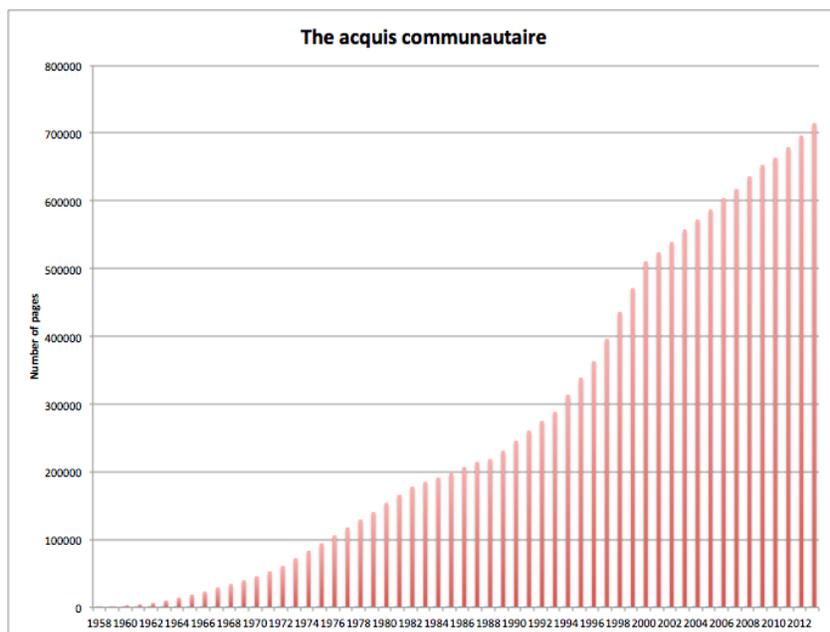
³ *Financial Times*, 26 July 2001.

⁴ European Commission, 'Commission Staff Working Paper, 2001 Interim Report', (26 June 2001) <europa.eu/rapid/press-release_DOC-01-11_en.doc>

pages of law between 1957 and 2013 (when the *Official Journal* ceased to be published in print).

By using the EU's own legislative database, EUR-Lex, we adjusted the number of pages published in each year to reflect the number that were still in force on 21 December 2015.⁵ Using this method, we estimate that there are 168,349 pages still in force. Of these, over 80,000 have been produced in the last ten years alone. This is a comparable figure, albeit higher, to the European Commission's 2014 estimate that the total number of pages in force was over 154,000.⁶

If you were to print out the entire *acquis communautaire*, it would be over 46 metres in size, the same height as Nelson's column, weighing approximately a tonne, or as much as a small whale of rhinoceros.⁷ Even if you printed out just the law in force, the pile would be over 10 metres high, over twice the height of two of London's old Routemaster double decker buses, which stand at 4.3 metres. If you were to print all the pages of the *acquis* on A4 pages, laying them out lengthways, they would stretch 131.9 miles - more than the distance from London to Nottingham on the M1. EU legislation currently in force, at 31 miles, stretches further than the length of a marathon.



Taking an average number of words per page of 435, it is possible to calculate that the total number of words in the *acquis* exceeds 310,000,000 (or over 73,000,000 words for laws still in force). This would take the world's fastest reader, Steve Woodmore, 358 days to read without a break (or 84 days to read without a break in the case of laws still in force).⁸

⁵ For example, EUR-Lex states that, for 2013, 64% of laws were still in force, so the 18,317 pages introduced in 2013 were adjusted to 11,712 pages. For 1959, only 13% of laws are still in force, so the 1,088 pages of law that were introduced were adjusted to 142 pages.

⁶ Freedom of Information request made to EUR-Lex in 2014.

⁷ Assuming paper thickness of 0.065mm.

⁸ 'Rap anthem for culture bid', *BBC News*, (10 February 2003), <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/2746763.stm>> (at a rate of 600 words per minute).

Today, the European Commission claims that it has finally learnt its lesson and is at last scrapping unnecessary EU laws. In September 2013, the Commission described how its 'efforts to reduce the regulatory burden, including the administrative burden, are part of its smart regulation agenda.'⁹ These claims are being made more and more frequently. In May 2015, it argued that 'the Juncker Commission represents a new start... The Commission cannot, and should not, be involved in every issue in the EU... This applies both to new and the large body of existing EU legislation.'¹⁰

Previous experience shows that we should be extremely sceptical of such promises. As this study has shown, promises by the Commission to cut the amount of red tape have resulted in long-term increases in the regulatory burden on businesses.

⁹ European Commission, 'Commission initiatives to cut red tape and reduce regulatory burdens: Questions and Answers', (Brussels, 9 September 2013), <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-786_en.htm>.

¹⁰ European Commission, 'Better regulation for better results: An EU agenda', COM(2015)215, (19 May 2015), p. 5 <http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/better_regulation/documents/com_2015_215_en.pdf>.