

## **Communicating Europe in partnership**

### ***Questions and answers***

#### **Why does the EU need a new communication strategy?**

An EU of 27 members has brought new challenges and new perspectives: a larger, more diverse European Union dealing with increasingly complex issues where its role is significant but not easy to communicate. The EU continues to transform and reform itself to respond to world challenges such as globalisation, energy efficiency and independence, competitiveness, migration, security or climate change. A properly conceived, adequately resourced and democratically executed communications policy is an essential element in the range of EU policies.

Also the 2007 June European Council underlined the crucial importance of reinforcing communication with the European citizens, providing full and comprehensive information on the European Union and involving them in a permanent dialogue.

#### **What is the general objective of the initiative?**

We need to empower citizens. Communication on EU issues is the responsibility of all those involved in the EU decision-making process. The overall objective is to strengthen coherence and synergies between the activities undertaken by the different EU institutions and by Member States, in order to offer citizens better access and a better understanding of the impact of EU policies at European, national and local level.

#### **In short, what does the new strategy focus on?**

Commission communication activities need to provide information adapted to national, regional and local contexts, promote active European citizenship and contribute to the development of a European public sphere. While the Commission and the EU institutions retain their prerogatives, a new institutional framework will steer the process of communicating Europe with the strong involvement of interested Member States.

#### **What other communication initiatives has the Commission adopted by now?**

This Commission has already adopted three initiatives centred on listening, communicating and 'going local'. The Action Plan kicked off a major internal reform of the Commission's use of communication resources. Plan D created a long-term framework for citizens' dialogue to go beyond the current "future of Europe" debate. Most recently, the White Paper on a European Communication Policy advocated two-way communication, involving active public participation of citizens with a shift in emphasis from a Brussels-based to a 'going local' approach.

## **Have the Commission proposals been discussed with stakeholders?**

From February to September 2006 individuals and institutions were able to comment on the main ideas put forward in the White Paper on a European Communication Policy. In addition, the Commission organized a series of stakeholder conferences (Madrid, Bergamo, Helsinki, and Berlin) and public opinion surveys, with a view to complementing the opinions expressed in the public consultation and comparing them with the results of the polls.

## **What proposals have not been put into action?**

The public consultation made it clear that stakeholders' views on certain proposals in the White Paper diverge. For example, the idea of a charter or code of conduct on communication did not find enough support. Nor did stakeholders expect the Commission to create an observatory for European public opinion.

Secondly, the Commission took a step-by-step approach. It is virtually impossible to put all the good ideas into action at once. Therefore, the Commission decided to focus on a limited number of initiatives. However, "Communicating Europe in Partnership" will be followed up, and the Commission might also come back to other proposal made in the consultation.

## **What are the main proposals in particular?**

In particular, the Commission is proposing:

- an inter-institutional agreement to provide a framework for better cooperation on the EU communication process, while respecting the autonomy of the EU institutions and Member States,
- management partnerships with Member States (*proposing means offering, not obliging*) as the main instruments to carry out joint communication initiatives,
- development of the network of European Public Spaces in the Representations,
- identification of the aspects of school education where joint action at the EU level could support Member States,
- strengthening the Eurobarometer polling instrument,
- implementation of the Pilot Information Networks (PINs) to improve communication between European and national politicians, journalists and other opinion formers.

## **What are the next steps?**

In the coming months, the Commission will:

- adopt a new internet strategy to support networks of civil society and private or public sector websites with EU focus which promote contact with or between European citizens,
- adopt a new audiovisual strategy to support networks of broadcasters across Europe to produce and broadcast EU affairs programmes,
- launch a follow-up communication to Plan D, as well as a new set of Plan D civil society projects, with the overall objective of supporting the participation in the 2009 European Parliament elections.

### **What is the purpose of the inter-institutional agreement?**

All public actors in the EU have a responsibility to give everyone access to fair and diverse information about the European Union and to enable everyone to express their views and to participate actively in the public debate on European issues. While recognising the autonomy and different responsibilities of each EU institution, the inter-institutional agreement on "Communicating Europe in Partnership" highlights the need for and the added value of better coordination in the way EU institutions and bodies communicate on EU issues, and provides a framework for coordinated action to this end. Together with the EU institutions and bodies, Member States have an essential role to play in disseminating information on EU issues at national, regional and local level in order to reach out to as many citizens as possible.

### **What is a management partnership?**

National governments are responsible for setting the course of European policy in the Council and for communicating their mandates and policies to their citizens. Polling results show that citizens expect their national government to inform them about what the EU is doing and how this affects their daily lives.

Management partnerships between the Commission and Member States will enhance the coordination of communication activities based on joint communication plans. Consequently, this cooperation will help to adapt communication to local circumstances and to link it to national political agendas (such as elections, major national events, and specific interests). The implementation of management partnerships is a shared responsibility of the Commission and the respective Member State's authorities. While the Commission provides funding, human resources and infrastructure are provided by the Member State.

Management partnerships exist in Germany, Slovenia and Hungary. Negotiations are underway with several interested Member States.

### **What is the Commission proposing for civil society?**

The Commission promotes relations with civil society organisations through an internal network of civil society contacts to share good practice, to reflect on common problems and to develop a coherent approach between the services for relations with civil society. The Commission will develop the access of civil society organisations to the Commission by naming a specific civil society contact point in each of its departments.

The Commission wishes to encourage the development of a network of civil society and private or public sector websites which promote contact with or between European citizens by supporting websites that devote particular attention to European affairs and stimulate debate on EU policy issues.

### **Is the Commission going to boost policy consultations with stakeholders?**

In order to encourage better feedback, greater pluralism and inclusiveness in the views and interest expressed by national, regional and local stakeholders at this early stage of policy development, the recent practice of involving the Representations in promoting consultations in Member States will be strengthened. The Representations will, for example, organise sufficiently in advance contacts and meetings with stakeholders in order to encourage their contributions to the main consultations linked to communication priorities.

### **And what is envisaged for the media?**

The Commission's contacts with the media must be executed in a way which guarantees full editorial independence of the broadcasters. The Commission will contribute to achieving greater and more sustainable coverage of EU affairs on existing audiovisual channels, and to encourage the networking of broadcasters at European level.

The existing policy of co-financing radio and TV programmes has encouraged audiovisual channels to develop EU programmes. To enhance its effectiveness, the Commission will offer multi-annual contracts for networks of broadcasters across Europe. These networks will independently produce and broadcast EU affairs programmes according to their own editorial standards using common programme formats. The contracts will contain a binding editorial charter guaranteeing the editorial freedom of the operators.

The Commission will put forward concrete proposals to better respond to challenges related to new media technologies in the coming months.

### **What future for Europe by Satellite?**

Demand for time on EbS has reached saturation point, with live coverage of events such as the European Parliament's plenary and committee meetings conflicting with the transmission of raw footage news packages for professional journalists and press conferences. The Commission will propose to the other European institutions the option of doubling EbS' capacity, to cover a wider range of EU activities.

### **What will be the role of the SPP?**

The Spokespersons' Service will remain a cornerstone of the Commission's communication policy, concentrating on the delivery of Commission news to written and audiovisual media in Brussels and beyond and on responding to media enquiries.

In addition, proposals were adopted to support more Commission staff in their contacts with the media, including the necessary training for a pool of staff in each service of the Commission.

### **Why does the Commission support European political parties?**

National and European political parties, and their elected representatives, are in a privileged position to raise European issues in national debates and to contribute to creating cross-border public debates across Europe. It is precisely the contested and often polarised nature of the debate between political parties which generates interest and a demand for greater levels of information on the issues concerned.

### **What are the Pilot Information Networks?**

The Pilot Information Networks (PINs) are networks of internet discussion forums and meetings across the EU and in the European Parliament designed to improve communication between European and national and regional politicians, journalists and other opinion makers, with the aim to share knowledge on the European Union.

## **What are the innovations in Eurobarometer?**

Measuring public opinion is central to listening to what Europeans think about, and what they expect from the EU. The goal is to use surveys more strategically in relevant phases of the policy process, such as policy formulation, impact assessment, as well as design and evaluation of communication activities.

Concrete improvements will include a more widespread use of qualitative research tools and the combination of analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to give a fuller picture of public expectations. Targeted public opinion research methods will be used more widely to measure the impact of communication, as will on-demand secondary analysis of available data to answer targeted questions. A network of national experts on public opinion will be set up, with a consultative function, to exchange best practice, promote synergies, and advise on methodological issues.

## **What about multilingualism?**

The importance of multilingualism is crucial. In the last few years, the Commission has doubled the number of languages in which it communicates. The Commission has also established a network of field offices for multilingualism in the Representations. In a situation of limited resources, trade-offs between increasing the amount of information published and broadening the audience appear inevitable, and will require coherent planning.

## **Will the Commission strengthen activities at regional and local level?**

Going local is one of the principles of communicating Europe. Communicating at regional and local level is essential for involving citizens in a European debate, as has been confirmed by our experience in implementing the Action Plan and Plan D. Therefore the Commission will examine the added value and possible extension of pilot representations. The Commission will also focus on the development of its networks across EU-27.

Commission Representations and Europe Direct Relays will also invite groups from different social sectors (including students) to seminars and debates on their premises, using existing information materials.

The visits made by around 400 German European Union officials to their former schools during the German Presidency in 2007 were highly successful, generating debate inside the schools as well as local media coverage. The Commission intends to continue this experience with future Presidencies.

The Commission has also reinforced its cooperation with the Committee of the Regions whose elected members are in a privileged position to convey European issues to the regional and local levels.

## **What are European Public Spaces?**

A common pilot project with the European Parliament is being launched in 2007-2008 to create European Public Spaces to host a wide range of European activities, starting in the Houses of Europe in Tallinn, Dublin and Madrid. As a "meeting place" for citizens, NGOs, political actors and the media, the European Public Spaces will be designed to host exhibitions, films, meetings, visits, discussions, forums of debate and lectures focusing mainly on civil society, politics, education, academia, think tanks and the cultural world. European Public Spaces will offer new facilities, such as a conference centre, an information office, an exhibition area and a reading area.

### **But education and training are the domain of the Member States?**

Education and training for active citizenship are the responsibility of the Member States. Peoples' rights and duties as European citizens are part of the school curriculum in less than half of the EU Member States, and the history of European integration is included already in 20 Member States.

However, there is an added value that can be provided by co-ordinating the exchange of best practice on a European level. The Commission will identify the aspects of school education where joint action at EU level could support Member States. This will examine how schools can best provide students with the key competences, and how school communities can help prepare young people to be responsible citizens, in line with fundamental European values.

### **Will the new strategy replace Plan D initiatives?**

No. Plan D will further boost the Commission approach to debating EU issues with citizens. The first six trans-national Plan D civil society projects were launched in 2006. In 2007, a second set of projects has been supported, this time locally, targeting primarily youth and women. In the course of the coming months, the Commission will take stock of the results of Plan D and present proposals to widen the democratic debate throughout Europe. A third group of civil society projects will be launched for 2008-09, including supporting initiatives to increase the turnout in the next European elections.

### **Why do we need a single contact point for civil society?**

Civil society is a key partner for the Commission, both in the decision-making process and execution of EU policy. For example, NGOs provide valuable input in consultations on Commission policy initiatives. However, civil society access to the Commission does not seem easy and equitable, with bigger organisation with their seat in Brussels in a privileged position. If EU issues are to be better communicated on the ground, the Commission needs to open up towards smaller organisations which effectively operate at local and regional level.

Civil society dialogue appears as a mean to bring the citizens back in the policy-making process, as their voice is not always sufficiently heard. Yet inclusiveness and participation are regularly confronted with requests for more efficiency. The consultation process on the White Paper on a European Communication Policy confirmed strong demand from civil society for closer involvement in the European process. Yet NGOs do not feel recognised as a valued dialogue partner of the EU policy-making process. In order to involve citizens through increased awareness of participation opportunities, two main challenges arise:

- ensuring access to a plurality of organisations,
- efficiently involving national NGOs (in particular from EU-12) in the decision-making process.

The public consultation championed the idea of a single contact point within the Commission (CEDAG). The civil society forum in Bergamo called for a structured mechanism of dialogue between civil society and the EU institutions, so as to make it truly representative and transparent, while new forms of partnership were requested at the Berlin conference.

The Commission already promotes relations with civil society organisations and their networks through an internal network of civil society contacts (run by the SG). However, communication is a two-way process, and a clear need emerged for developing a more dynamic approach towards civil society. While highlighting the Commission's commitment to transparency and equality of treatment, single access points for civil society offer the necessary flexibility to better reflect national and local diversity and needs. Further to this, single access points will enable civil society's participation in policy-making already at an early stage (without formally committing the Commission) and not when the outlines and objectives of the policy have been drawn up. Only then could the Commission use feedback from civil society to improve its policy proposals.

Concerning human and financial resources, we are aware of the scarcity of resources in the Commission. However, no new resources are needed. Commission services work with civil society regularly, so it is a question of giving a more formal status to the people in charge rather than creating new posts.

### **What is the timeline for action?**

Communication must be integral part of all EU initiatives. A number of actions are already on-going; others will start in the coming months. Obviously, the communication dimension will be particularly important in the run-up to the 2009 European elections.

### **What is new in terms of communicating Europe?**

The very idea of communicating EU issues has changed. In the fluctuating political, economic and social environment a more sophisticated way of working is required, one that heavily relies on a partnership between different actors across European society to deliver results that matter to European citizens and are adequately debated with them. There is an underlying conviction amongst European citizens that our societies can only tackle today's challenges by working on a European scale. This shift in the purpose and focus of the EU thus fits well with the aspirations of citizens.

### **What are the main problems for communicating EU issues?**

The main issue is lack of knowledge of the European Union. This fact stays in clear contrast with growing information needs of the citizens provided with information of insufficient quality and quantity. Active participation of citizens in European affairs is low (45,6 % in the last Parliament elections). With the support of the European Parliament and Member States, this challenge shall be addressed before the 2009 European elections.