



COMMUNICATION POLICY

The need for effective communication has a legal basis in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which guarantees the right of all citizens to be informed about European issues. The EU institutions have developed several tools and services to stay in contact with and inform the public. Since its formal launch in 2012, the European Citizens' Initiative has allowed citizens to become more directly involved in new legislation and European issues.

LEGAL BASIS

The Treaties do not contain any specific chapter or article concerning communication policy. However, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, rendered binding by the Treaty of Lisbon, has the same legal status as the EU Treaties. It provides all EU institutions with a common framework for linking EU achievements to the underlying values of the EU when communicating to the public at large^[1]. Relevant articles in the Charter include Article 11 (right to information and freedom of expression, as well as freedom and diversity of the media), Article 41 (right to be heard and right of access to documents relating to oneself), Article 42 (right of access to the documents of the EU institutions) and Article 44 (right of petition). As there is no separate legal basis in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) for communication policy, any action at EU level needs to refer to Article 352 TFEU^[2].

OBJECTIVES

The EU has a responsibility to communicate its decisions and activities to EU citizens and other interested parties. The EU institutions have specialist staff and specific budgets dedicated to making sure that information about the EU is easily available in a language that citizens understand. The communication tools used include websites, social media accounts, facilities for visitors, liaison and local offices in all EU countries, as well as special services for the media. If citizens cannot find the answer to their questions via these channels, there are also contact centres (such as [Europe Direct](#) and [Ask EP](#)) to which citizens can write or call to get the answers they need.

With access to clear information, EU citizens are better able to exercise their right to participate in the democratic life of the Union, in which decisions are meant to be taken

[1] See [OJ C 83, 30.3.2010, p. 389](#).

[2] See Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union ([OJ C 115, 9.5.2008, p. 199](#)).



as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizens, observing the principles of pluralism, participation, openness and transparency.

Since 2005, the Commission has released a number of policy documents on communication. These reflect the high profile of this policy, which is based on three principles:

- Listening to the public, and taking their views and concerns into account;
- Explaining how European Union policies affect citizens' everyday lives;
- Connecting with people locally by addressing them in their national or local settings, through their favourite media.

Under the Juncker Commission, the Commission's Directorate-General for Communication has become a presidential service working towards the following overarching objective: 'Citizens perceive that the EU is working to improve their lives and engage with the EU. They feel their concerns are taken into consideration in European decision making process and they know about their rights in the EU'.

In the run-up to the European elections in May 2019, the EU institutions launched a special information campaign to inform citizens about the elections and why both the elections and their votes matter.

ACHIEVEMENTS

A. Main initiatives (a selection):

- The [Europe for Citizens Programme](#) (see also below);
- Communicating Europe in Partnership (see also below);
- Communicating about Europe via the Internet — Engaging the Citizens;
- Debating Europe — an online forum where people can voice their concerns to decision-makers;
- Making the Europa website the one-stop site for all EU institutions and information;
- Communicating Europe through Audiovisual Media, e.g. the European Radio Network (<http://www.euranet.eu>), and boosting coverage of EU affairs on new and existing audiovisual platforms;
- Closing the communication gap between the EU and its citizens through efficient cooperation and partnerships.

B. The Europe for Citizens Programme

Following calls made at both the Tampere (1999) and Nice (2000) European Councils for a more open dialogue with civil society, a first Community action programme to promote active European citizenship was initiated by the European Council in January 2004 (Council Decision 2004/100/EC). In the wake of the failure of the Constitution for Europe project, active European citizenship was succeeded by the Europe for Citizens programme, established by Decision No 1904/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council for the 2007 to 2013 period with an overall



financial envelope of EUR 215 million^[3]. Based on the recommendation made following the programme's mid-term evaluation in 2010, the Commission formally suggested, in December 2011, continuing the Europe for Citizens Programme — albeit in a slightly revised form — within the next multiannual financial framework 2014-2020^[4]. The principal objectives are stated as 'strengthening remembrance and enhancing capacity for civic participation at Union level'^[5], and the new programme was formally adopted by the Council of the European Union on 14 April 2014 (Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014)^[6]. Its budget amounts to EUR 185.5 million, thus representing a reduction in comparison with both its predecessor programme and the original Commission proposal. Europe for Citizens 2014-2020 offers funding in two thematic areas: (1) European Remembrance, focusing on the historical coming into being of the European project; and (2) Democratic Engagement and Civic Participation, aimed at strengthening citizens' understanding of EU policies and, in particular, securing the active involvement of civil society in European policymaking. The mid-term evaluation of the Europe for Citizens programme 2014-2020 focuses on its overall positive role in encouraging civic participation and democratic engagement^[7].

On 30 May 2018, the Commission published its proposal for a regulation establishing the Rights and Values programme (2021-2027), whose Citizens' engagement and participation strand replaces the current Europe for Citizens programme, with a proposed budget of EUR 233 million. On 6 March 2019, the European Parliament and the Council reached a [provisional agreement](#) on the programme, which now has to be formally approved by both Parliament and the Council.

C. Communicating Europe in Partnership

The year 2009 was the first in which interinstitutional communication priorities were agreed between Parliament, the Council and the Commission under the joint declaration on Communicating Europe in Partnership^[8], signed in December 2008. The four priorities selected were the European elections, energy and climate change, the 20th anniversary of democratic change in central and Eastern Europe, and sustaining growth, jobs and solidarity, with a particular link to the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. The aim stated in the document 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 EU, national and local level'^[9].

D. The European Citizens' Initiative

The introduction of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) under the Lisbon Treaty provides — as from 1 April 2012 — a stronger voice for the EU's citizens by giving them the right to call directly on the Commission to bring forward new policy initiatives. It is meant to add a new dimension to European democracy, complement the set of rights relating to Union citizenship and increase the public debate around EU policies,

[3] See [OJ L 378, 27.12.2006, p. 32](#).

[4] See [COM\(2011\) 0884](#).

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[6] See [OJ L 115, 17.4.2014](#), p. 3.

[7] See [COM\(2018\) 0170](#).

[8] See [COM\(2007\) 0569](#).

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 4.



helping to build a genuine European public space. It is hoped that its implementation will essentially reinforce the involvement of citizens and organised civil society in the shaping of EU policies. As required by the Treaty, on a proposal from the Commission in 2011 Parliament and the Council adopted a regulation defining the rules and procedure governing this new instrument^[10]. The ECI allows one million citizens from at least one quarter of the Member States to invite the Commission to bring forward proposals for legal acts in areas in which the Commission has the power to do so. The organisers of a citizens' initiative — a citizens' committee composed of at least seven EU citizens resident in at least seven different Member States — have one year to collect the necessary statements of support, the number of which has to be certified by the competent authorities in the respective Member States^[11].

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon has had a great impact on the work of the EU institutions, with a stronger focus on delivering results to EU citizens through more streamlined and democratic decision-making. In particular, the Reform Treaty has reinforced the role of Parliament in shaping Europe. As the directly elected representative of the body of EU citizens, Parliament has a clear responsibility to communicate what Europe is about and to articulate and act upon citizens' interests in Europe.

The European Parliament is the house of the citizens in Europe. In its reports, Parliament has repeatedly made detailed proposals for improving the relationship between the EU and its citizens. For instance, in a resolution adopted in September 2010, it proposed concrete ways in which EU citizens can be more involved in debates on European issues^[12]. Here, Parliament looked at how communication can initiate, encourage and further develop the European debate. It stressed that better communication by governments, political parties, universities, public service broadcasters and the EU institutions themselves is vital for constructing a 'European public sphere' of debate.

Parliament provides information and documents on its website in all 24 official languages of the EU, and has a strong presence on social media platforms. The media are key opinion multipliers. Parliament supports the media with factual information, tools and facilities to help them cover its activities, and media coverage is monitored and false information about Parliament corrected by means of rebuttals. Furthermore, citizens are welcome to visit the plenary chamber (in Strasbourg and in Brussels), the [Parlamentarium](#) — Parliament's visitor centre — and the [House of European History](#) (both in Brussels). Parliament has at least one liaison office in each Member State, some of which also have visitor centres. The role of these liaison offices is to help citizens understand what the European Parliament is, what it does and what it stands for. They do this by engaging strategically with citizens, stakeholders and the media.

[10]See [OJ L 65, 11.3.2011, p. 1](#).

[11]For more information on the European Citizens' Initiative and an overview of open and closed initiatives, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/welcome>

[12][OJ C 308 E, 20.10.2011](#), p. 55.



There is currently an increased feeling of belonging to the EU among EU citizens, which is encouraging after years of often outright hostility towards the EU arising from the most recent financial and political crises. Nonetheless, this sense of belonging to the EU fluctuates, and appropriate communication strategies and policies at EU level are needed. Taking an active part in shaping such strategies and policies is not only one of Parliament's obligations towards the EU citizens it actually represents, but is also in its own interest.

As in previous years, Parliament kept citizens informed about the 2019 elections and their importance for the future of Europe. The institutional communication action was non-partisan and ran in support of the political parties' and candidates' individual campaigns. As it was non-partisan, it focused on what the EU and Parliament had achieved and not on what they ought to achieve. In the framework of the Parliament 2019 elections campaign, a platform — thistimeimvoting.eu — was launched in 24 languages. It supported over 150 000 volunteers in all Member States, who signed up to get more people involved in the European elections and encouraged as many as possible to vote. Furthermore, Parliament's liaison offices in all Member States act as information hubs tailored to local needs.

Katarzyna Anna Iskra
05/2019

