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on the implementation of the European Union's information and
communication strategy
(2004/2238(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the implementation of the European Union's information and communication strategy (2004/2238(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on implementing the information and communication strategy for the European Union (COM(2004)0196),
 - having regard to Rules 45 and 112(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A6-0000/2005),
 - whereas the turnout at the last European elections fell in nine of the pre-enlargement EU Member States,
 - whereas, in the context of the European democratic process, the ultimate aim of any information and communication policy must be to promote the value of participation in the political system, in particular through the act of voting, which requires long-term planning and carefully targeted measures,
1. Has decided to draw up a five- year proposal at the beginning of each parliamentary term to ensure that budgetary provision is available to celebrate all important cultural events adequately;
 2. Considers it vital, in the interests of improved cooperation and efficiency, for the Commission regularly to submit the European Union's information and communication policy to parliamentary scrutiny;
 3. Considers it necessary to pay greater attention to the content of the messages put out, so as to stimulate the interest of citizens by tackling their concerns;
 4. Stresses the need to establish a decentralised information system to make it easier to reach specific groups which should be targeted with individually tailored messages in all cases;
 5. Stresses the need to find a formula that will make it possible to involve regional and local media more closely in information and communication policy, for example by awarding cash prizes to those which have most effectively broadcast the idea and values of Europe which devote most space to Union-related news;
 6. Stresses the importance of making greater use of communications media with the technological capacity to reach the homes of all European citizens, such as television, radio and the Internet;
 7. Is convinced that information and communication policy will not be effective until knowledge of the EU and its institutions is included as a subject in the Member States'

school curricula;

8. Stresses the need for Parliament and the Commission to make greater use of the scope for pooling their staff to achieve a higher degree of professional excellence, with the possible assistance of expert journalists, since this would benefit all parties concerned and reduced costs;
9. Invites the EU institutions to improve conditions for and working relations with accredited journalists and, more generally, to create the widest possible access to sources for all citizens seeking information on the European Union's policies and activities; invites each EU institution to designate a member of staff to act as an ombudsman to whom concerns and problems of media access or working conditions of professional journalists can be addressed with a view to finding swift solutions;
10. Stresses the need for the institutions to improve their press releases and the quality of all information intended for the press, in order to facilitate the work of all professional journalists closely following events in Brussels; calls also for the institutions' press releases to be prepared as far as possible by professional communications experts;
11. Considers that the Institutions, by means of public tender, should reach agreements with independent television producers able to devise drama series, competitions, films, news reports and in general all kinds of high-quality and accessible programmes which appeal to popular taste and serve to promote the idea and values of Europe;
12. Calls for detailed consideration to be given to the idea of reaching agreements with Euronews (without excluding out of hand the option of signing a programme contract or even purchasing the station) or with television stations already operating in Member States at national, regional or local level;
13. Calls for greater pooling of existing audiovisual infrastructures currently dispersed between the different institutions; also believes that these infrastructures should be catalogued and their individual efficiency assessed;
14. Believes that it would be very useful to seek in an intelligent and methodical manner to 'place' links to the Europa website on the most frequently visited web pages, working on the general principle that it is not citizens who should have to go looking for information, but information that should come looking for the citizen;
15. Calls on the Institutions to examine the possibility of designing modern and accessible virtual visits and making available to the public recordings of all important events involving the institutions through a high-quality archive with search engine;
16. Believes that consideration should be given to using some of the resources from certain Community programmes to promote the Europe 'brand' and believes that in the next few years a measure should be introduced on an experimental basis under which some of the funds earmarked for programmes such as 'Media', 'Youth', 'Culture' or 'Education' could be used to promote the 'image' and 'spirit' of the Union;
17. Believes that serious consideration should be given to holding debates on European policy

in national parliaments, with the active participation of MEPs from the country concerned, so as to give communications media the opportunity to follow more closely debates which are usually held in Brussels and Strasbourg;

18. Proposes to conduct an objective study on the efficiency of its information policy; in this context, welcomes the Bureau request, dated 10 January 2005, for a review of the role of the information offices in the Member States;
19. Takes note of the discussions currently being held within Parliament's Bureau concerning the possibility of creating a publicly owned parliamentary channel;
20. Invites its political groups to fully participate in the information and communication policy by enhancing their efforts to supply citizens, through various means, with relevant information on their political views and consequent action on European issues;
21. Calls on the Commission to hold an 'ideas competition' to enable the leading specialised agencies to put forward their proposals on the best ways of putting the European message across;
22. Urges the Commission to commission a prestigious outside agency to conduct a thoroughgoing analysis of what it really spends on information and communication;
23. Calls on the Commission to introduce a system that will make it possible to continue funding the Infopoints network in accordance with the rules laid down by the new Financial Regulation;
24. Believes that greater financial resources should be allocated to Eurobarometer, to enable it to compile much fuller and more rigorous reports;
25. Urges the Commission to improve the Europa website, since many of its pages are available only in English or French which not only represents discrimination favouring some languages over others, but also makes it impossible for the vast majority of citizens to gain access to the information provided;
26. Stresses the need for the Prince Programme to include more priority action lines, cutting back specific actions by individual institutions to what is strictly necessary;
27. Believes that the Interinstitutional Group on Information should be predominantly political in character and that its composition should be scaled down to enable it to operate more effectively;
28. Invites all EU institutions concerned to improve internal coordination with a view to enhancing the efficiency of the agreed communication and information strategy, thereby achieving better results;
29. Calls on the institutions to examine the possibility of setting up a lower level coordination group in which representatives of the relevant directorates-general in the different institutions would be represented and whose main task would be to coordinate the specific measures designed to implement the guidelines laid down by the

Interinstitutional Group on Information;

30. Believes it would be highly effective to establish a consultative body consisting of representatives from the European institutions and Member States and communications experts to provide guidance for the proper application of information and communication policy;
31. Stresses the need to consider more persuasive measures to secure the cooperation of the Member States, such as publishing a list of those countries which show no interest in such cooperation;
32. Is looking forward to receiving the Commission's communication on a renewed information and communication strategy, announced for May 2005; intends to engage in an enhanced dialogue with the Commission and the Council on its implementation; reiterates its willingness to cooperate fully with a view to achieving the objectives that will be agreed upon;
33. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The aim of this report is to review the implementation of the EU's information and communication strategy. Your rapporteur has re-read all relevant documents with the aim of putting forward constructive ideas that will serve to promote a more effective information strategy in future. The main conclusions he has reached are as follows:

1. The information and communication strategy has fallen far short of achieving its objectives.

The information and communication strategy is required to bring Europe closer to its citizens. However, the latest Eurobarometer data show that the level of public knowledge of basic EU matters is lamentable. In the old Member States, only 25% of people are aware of the existence of the Union's anthem and almost half believe that the main seat of the institutions is in Strasbourg. In addition, turnout in European Parliament elections has continued to decline, falling to its lowest ever level in 2004 (45.7%).

2. The information and communication strategy will not be effective unless the institutions act on the recommendations they receive.

From 1993 to the present day, all Parliament reports have called for an annual debate to be held on information and communication policy. No such debate has ever been held. Other examples will emerge in the course of the report, but for the moment this fact alone is sufficient justification for the requirement that the Commission should regularly submit its information and communication strategy to parliamentary scrutiny.

3. The information and communication strategy will not be effective unless it is possible to convey to the general public what the 'spirit' of the European Union really means.

In 1993, a European Parliament resolution acknowledged that reducing European integration to little more than an economic community had undermined public interest and trust.

The legitimate expectations of citizens to play an active part in developing the Union will only be realised if we are able to touch people's feelings. The future constitution is an example of the fact that Europe is first and foremost a common project whose goal is to make Europe a better human society. Articles I-1 and I-2 of the Constitution speak of the will of the citizens and States of Europe to build a common future, based on common values. These values define Europe's identity. The EU is not an ordinary international organisation with economic goals, but a community of values.

In the eyes of your rapporteur, there is no better definition of the 'spirit' of the new Europe. The question now is how to make it visible. A Commission communication has already suggested that consideration should be given to the possibility of working with genuine opinion leaders, a series of personalities who would lend their face to the Union. It would also be useful to hold an 'ideas competition' that would enable the leading specialised agencies to give shape to their best ideas, but it should not be forgotten that

often the figures which best incarnate the true identity of Europe are indelibly etched in the history of our common culture. For example, this year marks the fourth centenary of Don Quixote, although sadly the institutions have not seen fit to honour the memory of Miguel de Cervantes. Nor will they do so for Hans Christian Andersen. America may be able to sell the Statue of Liberty as a brand image or the marketing concept of the 'land of opportunity', yet it will never be able to lay claim to such a star-studded galaxy of human genius as Europe can.

Parliament must draw up a five-year proposal to ensure that budgetary funding is available to celebrate all-important cultural events properly

4. The information and communication strategy will not be effective if it continues to be based mainly on the instruments used hitherto.

A system of networks and links has been set up to provide information to citizens who have already decided to seek out such information. However, a change in approach is needed: it is not citizens who should go looking for information, but information which should go looking for citizens. If this is to work, a sound decentralised information system is needed that will provide access for the specific groups which should be targeted with individually tailored messages.

Decentralisation of information, based on the system of networks and links, is a useful way of improving the flow of information, but is neither the most effective nor the most cost-efficient. Nor does it resolve the work coordination problems derived from the coexistence under the same roof of officials from different European institutions, Parliament and the Commission. They may share the general expenses, but they do not share the most important thing, which is their work. Citizens see the EU as a single entity and have no way of knowing whether requests for information should be addressed to the Commission or the Parliament. If the two institutions pooled their staff this would improve professional standards and work to the benefit of all concerned, while reducing costs.

5. The information and communication strategy will not be effective unless cooperation between Parliament and the Commission is improved.

The Commission's former DG II, which previously brought together all departments dealing with information and communication under its control, has now been divided up into four separate DGs.

In Parliament there is a single DG dealing with information. Nevertheless, the way it spends its budget makes little sense: 43% of Parliament's budget is allocated to the financing of visitors' groups (half a million per year), 30% to the production of printed material, while 18% is spent on infrastructures. This leaves only 10% (2.5 million euro) for other measures. Is it worth spending so much money for so little return?

The only forum in which the Commission and Parliament share their views is the so-called IGI. Its task is to set the priorities for the PRINCE programme. All measures not covered by this programme are deemed to be specific actions by individual institutions.

The PRINCE programme should include more priority action lines and specific measures by individual institutions should be confined to what is strictly necessary.

The IGI should be predominantly political in character and its composition should be reduced to make it more efficient. A lower level coordination group should also be set up, with representatives from the relevant DGs from the various institutions, to coordinate specific measures to put into practice the guidelines set by the IGI. It would also be useful to revive the Commission's old idea of setting up a consultative body consisting of representatives of the institutions, and Member States and communications experts to provide guidance on the proper application of the information and communication strategy.

Under Annex VI of the Rules of Procedure, responsibility for information and communication policy within the European Parliament rests with the Committee on Culture. However, major discussions, decisions and actions within its sphere of competence take place behind its back. For example, the Committee on Culture is not represented on the working group on information and communication policy, where topics of great importance are currently being discussed. Steps should be taken as a matter of urgency to ensure that our committee is not excluded from any debates concerning these matters.

6. The information and communication policy will not be effective until Member States and national parliaments decide to work actively together with the European institutions.

Member States have shown their willingness to take part in the information and communication policy through the signing of memorandums of understanding. Eleven such memorandums have so far been signed, while a further 11 are under negotiation.

Furthermore, previous rapporteurs such as Herzog and Andreaesen put forward the idea of trying to secure the cooperation of national parliaments.

The rapporteur believes that consideration should be given to more persuasive measures to gain the cooperation of the Member States.

The holding of debates on European policy in national parliaments, with the active participation of MEPs from the country concerned, would attract greater attention and give communications media and the public the opportunity of following more closely debates which usually take place in Brussels and Strasbourg.

7. The information and communication policy will not be effective unless the groups to be targeted by each specific action are carefully selected.

One of the main problems facing Europe is its lack of legitimacy. Citizens feel that Community law does not concern them and that they have no part in creating it.

The Andreasen report pointed out that the Union's lack of credibility derived from its metaphysical inability to reach each and every one of its citizens. It is vital that one of the main objectives of the new strategy should be to identify the correct audience. There is a need to ensure that messages stimulate interest on the part of the public by responding to its concerns.

We must also find a formula which makes it possible to involve regional and local media more closely in information and communication policy. One way of doing so would be to award cash prizes to those media which have most successfully put across the ideas and the values of Europe or to those which have devoted most space to broadcasting Union-related news.

8. The information and communication policy will not be effective until it openly puts its faith in the use of new tools.

As mentioned above, one of the most serious mistakes the future strategy could make would be to think that it must be the citizen who comes looking for information, rather than the information going in search of the citizen. The best way of avoiding this mistake is to make greater use of communications media which give access to all European homes, such as television, radio and the Internet.

The most recent Eurobarometer statistics show that television is the preferred source of information for European citizens (76%), followed by the written press (52%) and the radio - so often overlooked - (43%). Indeed, the European Parliament has frequently stressed the need to give a more prominent role to audio-visual media.

In addition, Parliament's Bureau is known to be examining the possibility of setting up a publicly-owned parliamentary television channel. Your rapporteur urges members of this committee to demand the right to take part in a debate of such importance, as they are entitled to do. In any case, without wishing to prejudice the final outcome of the debate in progress, it is worth pointing out that three basic principles, at least, are not negotiable:

- (a) independent management, not owing political obedience to the majority of the day.
- (b) the quality of information
- (c) variety and accessibility of content.

Information from the European Parliament should not pertain solely to the institution itself. There is a need to ensure that the various political points of view also reach the general public. According to Eurobarometer, only 36% of citizens from the new Member States believe that the coverage of Europe in their national media during 2004 was objective.

Television is first and foremost content based. Any strategy based on television must ensure that the programmes made available to the public are accessible, varied and of high quality. By means of a tendering process, the institutions should reach agreement with independent television producers capable of devising drama series, competitions, films and other kinds of programmes appealing to popular taste, which are of high quality and accessible and can promote the idea and values of Europe.

Support for the broadcasting of such programmes, complementing conventional information programmes and the broadcasting of institutional events (part-sessions, committee debates, etc.) need not necessarily be linked to the introduction of European public service television or a parliamentary channel. It would also be possible to explore the idea of reaching agreement with Euronews (without rejecting out of hand the option of signing a programme contract or even purchasing the channel) or with television stations already operating in the Member States either at national, regional or local level.

Another possibility worthy of consideration is making joint use of existing audio-visual infrastructures which are scattered between the institutions. These need to be catalogued and their efficiency assessed.

Nor should we forget the extensive resources offered by the Internet. The Europa website needs to be improved. Many of its pages are available only in English or French, which not only represents discrimination in favour of some languages over others, but also makes it impossible for the vast majority of citizens to have access to the information provided.

The Internet is also an excellent vehicle for transmitting information targeted at a specific public. The intelligent and methodical placing of links on most frequently visited web pages is all that is needed to reach audiences fitting a homogenous profile. Consideration should also be given to the possibility of devising modern and accessible virtual visits to the institutions and making available to the public recordings of all important institutional events through a high-quality archive with search engine.

9. The information and communication policy will not be effective until it is allowed to make use of other Community programmes, either fully or in part.

The European Union has a multitude of programmes which in themselves represent a way of bringing Europe to its citizens. Consideration should be given to devoting part of the resources from some of these Community programmes to promoting the Europe 'brand'. By way of example, the Media programme could devote part of its budget allocation to funding the best projects by European producers, directors and distributors for spreading the idea of Europe, to be identified via a public tender.

10. The information and communication policy will not be effective until knowledge of the EU and its institutions is included as a subject in the Member States' school curricula.