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FOREWORD

The main mission of the European Parliament Information Offices in the 28 Member States is to bring the European Parliament, its decisions and the debates taking place in Brussels and Strasbourg, closer to European citizens by informing and entering into dialogue with them. The Information Offices act as small-scale ‘embassies’: they are a contact point for citizens with the European Parliament and its Members in all 28 Member States. But their work extends beyond national capitals, into the regions, cities and local communities. There they regularly organise a wide range of activities, providing platforms for debate between Members and citizens on topical subjects which are being discussed in the European Parliament.

Faced with the challenging task of trying to reach out to 500 million citizens, Information Offices prioritise multipliers, including the media, but also stakeholders and civil society organisations, in particular, young people in schools and universities, with a view to increasing outreach and making information about the European Parliament known as widely as possible.

Based on a common strategy and with overall goals defined by the Bureau, Information Offices organise activities which are adapted and tailor-made to the national and regional context in their respective Member States. Activities include seminars for journalists, Regional Discussion Fora, Citizens Fora and Cross-Border Fora for citizens and stakeholders on ongoing legislative topics and political priorities, as well as a great number of activities for young people. Through different activities they also promote values which are of a crucial nature of the European Parliament such as human rights, cultural diversity, and gender equality.

Members are the political actors, as direct representatives of the citizens; they are the ‘ambassadors’ and the face of the European Parliament and its work. They are central to the mission and all activities of the Information Offices. The platforms of debate organised by the Information Offices present a good opportunity to bring political debate with Members from Brussels and Strasbourg to the place where citizens live with a view to discussing what the European Parliament does and how its decisions on policies affect citizens in their daily lives.

This brochure aims at giving an overview on the main communication activities carried out by the Information Offices. We would like to strongly encourage all Members of the Parliament to make the best use of the Information Offices in their Member States and we wish that it will encourage them to further explore the possibilities that they offer for a closer contact with EU citizens.

We wish you a pleasant reading.
INTRODUCTION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT INFORMATION OFFICES

WHO THEY ARE - WHAT THEY DO - HOW THEY WORK

There are 28 Information Offices of the European Parliament in the capitals of the Member States and 6 regional offices in the larger Member States (in Barcelona, Edinburgh, Marseille, Milan, Munich and Wrocław). They have been created to bring the European Parliament, a unique democratic institution, closer to the EU 500 million citizens.

In 1994 the European Parliament and the Commission developed the concept of a common location for their external offices in the Member States ("Houses of Europe"). As a result, most European Parliament Information Offices (EPIOs) are co-located with the Representation Offices of the Commission, taking advantage of shared common spaces and economies of scale, while each maintains its specific institutional identity; the exceptions are Athens, Brussels and Edinburgh.

In the "Houses of Europe", jointly-run "Info Points" and "European Public Spaces" are small-scale visitors’ centres for citizens, where they can contact their elected Members and find information about the European Parliament, its activities and how it makes the voices of citizens heard in the European decision-making process.

In addition, there is an office in the Strasbourg building of the Parliament which deals with activities outside plenary weeks related to the role of Strasbourg as a seat of Parliament, including visits and the "Euroscola" programme.

Information Offices are part of Directorate-General of Communication (DG COMM). They are responsible for implementing the EP Communication Strategy as defined by the Parliament’s Bureau in the 28 Member States and their constituent regions, towns and cities.

Opening of the new Information Office in Wrocław, Poland
Information Offices

...inform citizens directly and via European, national, regional and specialist media of decisions taken by the European Parliament
...promote and project as widely as possible the Parliament and its activities*

*Quoted from the Mission Statement of the European Parliament Information Offices adopted by the Bureau of the European Parliament on September 2007

The strategic approach for the Information Offices has been defined by the Bureau as:

“to raise the profile of the EP and its representatives and to provide comprehensive communication about its policies and impact on people’s daily lives” (Updating Parliament’s Communication Strategy, EP Bureau, 05.07.2010)

The Action Plan 2011-2014 (adopted by the Bureau in March 2011) has translated this approach into 21 concrete Actions. Of these Actions, the following are mainly carried out by the Information Offices, in cooperation with other DG COMM central services:

- Legislative Campaigns
- Campaigns on Values
- Regional Discussion Fora and Cross-Border Fora
- Creation of Enduring Networks
- Online Strategy
- Further development of Euroscola
INFORMING AND ENGAGING...
CITIZENS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Information Offices ...

... inform citizens and the media about the European Parliament
... answer questions by citizens
... organise a number of high profile events and campaigns related to the work of the European Parliament

Mission Statement of the Information Offices

Information Offices organise platforms for topical debate between Members and the general public, as well as civil society organisations, national and regional stakeholders and other partners. The aim is that these stakeholders and partners will act as multipliers, to increase outreach to audiences interested in specific subjects through their own networks.

Information Offices are not only active in capitals and those cities where regional offices are established. One of their main objectives is to “go local” and to reach out to citizens in the regions.

All Information Offices focus on the following activities:

Campaigns on values

Communication about the main values promoted by the European Parliament takes place through 4 major annual campaigns, implemented both centrally and through all Information Offices:

1. Human Rights in the context of the Sakharov Prize
2. Cultural diversity in the context of the LUX Film Prize
3. Gender equality and non-discrimination in the context of Women's Day
4. “European Year” (EY of citizens in 2013 and 2014)

Information Offices organise a large variety of activities around these subjects, ranging from debates with Members and general public or specific target groups, to open-air and street events, and from events for young people to screenings of the LUX Prize laureate films with related debates and much else besides. These events take place both in capitals and in other parts of the Member States.
Legislative Campaigns

Every year Information Offices focus on at least 3 or 4 major legislative issues and undertake specific communication activities, working in coordination with DG COMM central services, principally the Media Directorate.

In 2011, a successful pilot project was organised around food legislation. For the following years 10 priority subjects were defined per each year. For 2013, the main subjects were: asylum, economic stability and recovery, financial framework and related programmes, agriculture reform, women on company boards, privacy and data protection, CO2 car emissions, tobacco, railway reform, passengers’ rights, food-related issues.

These campaigns include a major media campaign (organised by the Media Directorate and implemented in the Member States by press officers in the Information Offices) as well as many other communication activities, including debates and seminars involving Members, stakeholders and interested parties. These are organised by the Information Offices both in capitals and regionally.

Activities organised by the EP Information Offices on Legislative Campaigns in 2013:

- 204 activities covering legislative issues
- 291 000+ participants
- 188 MEPs present
- 3 280+ journalists present
- 10 700+ stakeholder organisations with estimated outreach of 46,594,000+

Legislative Campaign in Germany on Financial and Economic Crisis

Legislative Campaign in Greece on CAP reform
Regional Discussion Fora (RDF) are communication platforms for Members aimed at reaching out specifically to regions where a legislative topic under discussion in the European Parliament is of particular relevance to citizens in that region.

Information Offices decamp for one or two days to a particular region (the “go-local approach”) and organise several activities there to reach out to local stakeholders, civil society organisations and the wider public, especially through generating local media coverage. Activities are tailored according to the focal topic and the region concerned, but always involve MEPs and typically might involve a seminar or round table, a public debate, street events, a media tour or press conference, activities for young people, Info Points and so on.

Regional Discussion Fora so far have been very successful in terms of reaching target audiences, raising interest, generating debate and developing networks. Without doubt, the key element of this success is that audiences can debate and discuss with MEPs from different parties who hold different positions and views on the topic in question. Topical debate like this also helps raise media interest. Moreover, these events have been successful in involving local stakeholders and other partner organisations who themselves then disseminate information to their own specific audiences and networks, acting as opinion multipliers.

In 2013 the EP Information Offices organised:

- 74 Regional Discussion Fora
- with more than 136,200 participants
- with 5,852 stakeholder organisations involved and
- 57 MEPs present
Cross-Border Fora

Developing further the concept of Regional Discussion Fora, many Information Offices are also organising a specific platform for debate involving MEPs from two or three Member States, where citizens on either side of a border are interested in a given topic. Often, these events have taken place in areas of considerable historic significance (for example at the German-Polish border or the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland). Cross-Border Fora offer the chance to highlight a truly European dimension of issues that matter to citizens.

They present a platform for Members to discuss issues on a cross-border basis, often building relations and developing synergies between stakeholder organisations on either side of the border. These cross-border discussions have proved extremely useful and productive, both in raising the profile of the Parliament and in generating worthwhile debates on matters of common interest.

The analyses of public opinion trends throughout the European Union made by DG COMM’s Public Monitoring Unit provide support and indications for the choice of topics and regions.

In 2013 the EP Information Offices organised:

- 11 Cross-Border Fora
- with 177 stakeholder organisations and
- 76 journalists participating
Activities for Young People

All Information Offices have developed a wide range of activities for young people, schools and first-time voters. Special focus has been given to this target group after the 2009 European elections when only 29% of 18-24 year-olds voted.

Activities aimed at younger people include simulation games (which mirror EP processes), the development and production of educational materials, competitions, and the provision of tool kits, resources and training seminars for teachers. In addition, Information Offices increasingly use social media to help communicate and interact with young people.

Euroscola

Euroscola remains the main communication tool for the European Parliament to reach young people. Since 1990, the Euroscola programme has provided the opportunity for secondary school students to visit Strasbourg and to participate in a simulation of the European Parliament. They experience a day as an MEP, engaging in the EU decision-making through debates in the hemicycle, negotiations with their colleagues, votes and adopting resolutions on topical European issues. Euroscola days are organised 15-20 times a year in Strasbourg. Information Offices participate in the selection of participants through competitions, which are organised at national level.

Euroscola in 2013:

- 10 106 students participating in Euroscola
- 425 separate groups participated, which represents an increase of 26% compared to the previous year
- First Euronest Scola with 160 students from EU Member States and the 6 countries of the EU’s Eastern partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine)
Charlemagne Youth Prize

Since 2008, the annual Charlemagne Youth Prize has been jointly organised by the European Parliament and the International Charlemagne Prize Foundation in Aachen. The prize is awarded to a project undertaken by people aged between 16 and 30, which should serve as a sort of role model for young people living in Europe and offer practical examples of Europeans living together as one community. Youth exchange programmes, artistic and internet projects with a European dimension are amongst the winning projects.

The award ceremony takes place every year in May and is co-organised by the European Parliament and the International Charlemagne Prize Foundation and hosted by Aachen University. The three winning projects receive funding of €5 000, €3 000, and €2 000 respectively and their representatives are invited to visit the European Parliament.

Information Offices play an essential role promoting the Prize in the Member States and encouraging young people to participate. They also organise national juries consisting of at least two Members of the European Parliament and one representative of a youth organisation in order to select one national winner from each of 28 Member States. Information Offices also help promote the winning projects. Representatives of the 28 national projects selected are invited to the award ceremony in Aachen, Germany.
All Information Offices in national capitals have a press officer dealing with media relations in their Member State. The role of the press officers is to support the Information Office in all media relations and provide a link between the EP central Press Service and national media.

Press officers disseminate information about European Parliament positions and activities to national, regional and specialised media in the Member States, highlighting, where appropriate, a national angle, as developed by the Media Directorate of DG COMM. In cooperation with the Media Directorate and the Head of Office, they seek to rebut inaccurate reporting and distortions in press coverage about the European Parliament. They are also responsible for promoting activities organised by the Information Office to the media.
Information Offices provide regular press reviews for Members and the EP Headquarters, organise visits and seminars for journalists from the Member States in Brussels and Strasbourg, where they meet Members of the European Parliament, as well as workshops for journalists and press activities in the Member States. Information Offices also ensure an active social media presence.

- 4,586 journalists took part in EPIO events, which resulted in
- 16,832 media reports
ESTABLISHING CONTACTS AND NETWORKS...
CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND POLITICAL AUTHORITIES

Information Offices...

- maintain contacts with national and regional public authorities, in particular with national and regional parliaments
- develop and maintain wide-ranging contacts with civil society
- have their own website as a main communication tool with the general public (see all websites addresses at the end of this brochure)
- follow and report on national and regional developments in the Member States which have a bearing on the work of the Institution
- monitor trends in public opinion and public attitudes to the European Parliament
- give support to visits by members of the European Parliament, who fulfil an institutional role, such as members of the Bureau, the Conference of Presidents, the Conference of Committee Chairmen, the Conference of Delegation Chairmen, rapporteurs and official Parliamentary delegations

Mission Statement of the Information Offices

The Bureau’s Communication Strategy adopted in July 2010 clearly defines the establishment of enduring networks with civil society organisations and stakeholders as a priority for the activities of Information Offices in the Member States. It says: “Civil society organisations can act as multipliers by reaching out to specific target groups, and should therefore be systematically involved in the information offices’ planning of activities”.

Through activities targeted at specific audiences, such as the Legislative Campaigns, Regional Discussion Fora and Cross-Border Fora, Information Offices are developing networks with civil society organisations on national and regional level. These constitute direct communication channels with various target groups, stakeholders and opinion multipliers, on topics of interest to them. The education sector presents one of the main networks of all Information Offices which is built up through seminars and workshops for teachers and students as well as through students participating in the Euroscola programme.

All Information Offices have their own website, social media accounts and produce electronic Newsletters to keep their networks informed about legislative activities of the European Parliament and to maintain contact with, for example, those who have participated in an Information Office activity.
WORKING TOGETHER IN PARTNERSHIP...
EUROPEAN COMMISSION,
EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPACES,
EUROPE DIRECT NETWORK,
PARTNERSHIPS

Information Offices...

...cooperate with the Commission Representations such as pooling of logistical resources and organising joint information activities

Information Offices not only share the “Houses of Europe” with the European Commission Representations in the Member States, but they also play an important role ensuring EU inter-institutional cooperation in the field of information and communication in the Member States.

The main areas of cooperation with other European institutions are:

"INFO POINTS"

Situated in the Houses of Europe and jointly run by the Commission Representations and the EP Information Offices, Info Points are the places where citizens can find general information about the EU and the work of the Parliament and its Members as well as the Commission.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are aiming at enhancing coordination of communication activities in the Member States between national and regional/local authorities and the EU institutions. They are joint agreements between national governments, the European Parliament and the Commission.
EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPACES (EPS)

Since 2007, European Public Spaces have been created jointly by the European Parliament and the Commission in a number of Europe Houses to host a wide range of activities such as exhibitions, films, meetings, visits, discussions, debates and lectures. The aim is to encourage dialogue and democratic debate by creating public spaces and meeting points for interaction with citizens on European issues. Particular emphasis is placed on the worlds of politics, culture, education, civil society, academia, think tanks and the arts.

Priority is given to topical debates with Members of the European Parliament on European legislative issues and cultural events, emphasizing the heritage and richness of the EU and its Member States in cinema, literature and other kinds of artistic expression. Highlighting the cultural dimension of the European Union is an essential part of EPS: theatrical performances, screening of movies (e.g. the European Parliament LUX Prize laureates), children’s competitions, debates and forums, book launches and lectures on EU-related issues. EPS work on the basis of an annual work programme established jointly by the respective Information Offices and Commission Representations. Currently 18 Houses of Europe have a European Public Space: Athens, Berlin, Copenhagen, Dublin, Helsinki, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Nicosia, Prague, Riga, Rome, Tallinn, The Hague, Stockholm, Vienna, Budapest and Bucharest.
EUROPE DIRECT NETWORK

Europe Direct is a network of information centres. It is present in all EU countries and its staff provide information on the EU to the general public and assist universities and research institutes in promoting the EU and active European citizenship. They offer citizens tailored information and assistance related to queries about the EU. They also organise events and develop information products for target groups.

The Europe Direct Network consists of:

- 468 EU information centres in every EU country
- 403 documentation centres at European universities and research centres
- 418 expert speakers (Team Europe) available to participate in events and write press articles.

By working with Europe Direct Centres in their Member States, Information Offices are able to reinforce their presence and widen the dissemination of information at a regional and local level.
REACHING OUT TO CITIZENS

- more than **2 000 000** direct and indirect participants at events organised by the Information Offices
- more than **434** MEPs participating in EPIO events
- **136 200** direct and indirect participants in **74** Regional Discussion Fora
- **11** Cross Border Fora with **177** stakeholder organisations
- **10 000** students attending Euroscola
- **204** activities covering legislative issues
- Participants in EP Values campaigns organised by the EPIOs:
  - **672 000** participants in the “European Year of Citizens” events
  - **399 000** participants in Europe Days
  - **7 500** participants in International Women’s Day celebrations
  - **1 900** participants in Citizens’ Prize events
  - **28 600** participants in Lux Film Prize events
- over **1 384 000** visits to the EPIO websites

SOCIAL MEDIA

- **1 384 277** visits to EPIO websites in 2013
- more than **160 000** fans on all EPIO Facebook accounts
- **38**

MEDIA RELATIONS

- **4 586** journalists participating in EPIO events, which resulted in
- **16 832** media reports
WHERE TO FIND
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
INFORMATION OFFICES

PARLEMENT EUROPÉEN
BUREAU D’INFORMATION EN BELGIQUE
EUROPEES PARLEMENT
INFORMATIEBUREAU IN BELGIË
EUROPÄISCHES PARLAMENT
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EP INFORMATION OFFICES