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REPORT

on the White Paper on a European communication policy
(2006/2087(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

Rapporteur: Luis Herrero-Tejedor

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the White Paper on a European communication policy (2006/2087(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the communication from the Commission ‘White Paper on a European communication policy’ (COM(2006)0035),
- having regard to Part II of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to Articles 195, 211 AND 308 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to Articles 11, 41, 42 and 44 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents¹,
- having regard to the communication to the Commission ‘Action Plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission’ (SEC(2005)0985),
- having regard to the communication from the Commission ‘The Commission’s contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate’ (COM(2005)0494),
- having regard to its resolution of 13 March 2002 on the Commission communication on a new framework for cooperation on activities concerning the information and communication policy of the European Union²,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 April 2003 on an information and communication strategy for the European Union³,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 May 2005 on the implementation of the European Union’s information and communication strategy⁴,
- having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education and the opinions of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (A6-0000/2006),

A. whereas communication is an important element of both representative and participatory

¹ OJ L 145, 31.5.2001, p. 43

² OJ C 47 E, 27.2.2003, p. 406.

³ OJ C 64 E, 12.3.2004, p. 591.

⁴ OJ C 92 E, 20.4.2006, p. 403.

democracy,

- B. whereas, for this reason, one of the strengths of the democratic elements of the EU is connected to communication structures at the European level which link the institutions with citizens,
- C. whereas the right to information and freedom of expression should be at the heart of democracy in Europe and underpin the political systems at European and national levels and thus, insofar as possible, information should be made available to the public,
- D. whereas the experience of European elections and referenda is that those who were aware and interested in EU issues were more likely to participate, whereas those lacking information were less likely to do so,
- E. whereas there is no consolidated European public sphere at present but very lively national public spheres; those national public spheres reveal deep variations as regards the extent to which European issues are debated as well as the content,
- F. whereas it would be an important improvement if in the national public spheres European issues were more prominent,
- G. whereas in order to create a European public sphere, a first step would be to overcome the isolation of national spheres through European communicative action; whereas this is closely related to pan-European or at least transnational media structures,
- H. whereas there is clear evidence of under-information of citizens on European issues, as reflected in the results of various Eurobarometer polls,
- I. whereas communication is also linked to the issue of transparency, simplified procedures, citizenship and shared values,
- J. pointing out that European issues and the added value of Community legislation are rarely acknowledged during national debates, with national politicians often taking credit for European success stories, while, conversely, being quick to criticise the EU, often for failures in policy that arise at national level,
- K. whereas the June 2006 European Council put the issue of institutional reform back on the agenda,
- L. whereas the aim of a 'period of reflection' is to make the Union more democratic and effective and to 'reconnect' it with the citizens,

Communication policy and the European public sphere

1. Welcomes the presentation of the White Paper and endorses the Commission's intentions to make communication policy a policy in its own right;
2. Sees the need to improve communication between the EU and its citizens; therefore supports the attempt to overhaul the way communication with citizens is organised; underlines that better communication cannot compensate for insufficient policies but can

improve the understanding of conducted policies;

3. Welcomes the Commission's recognition of the fact that communication can never be divorced from what is being communicated and that it should be a two-way process that involves listening to citizens, but regrets that these principles, asserted at the beginning of the White Paper, do not find any practical expression; calls on the Commission, therefore, to specify how it intends to take into account citizens' views and suggests, to this end, that possible initiatives launched by other institutions, such as 'Agora', a body that Parliament has decided to set up for the purpose of consultation with civil society representatives, are incorporated;
4. Urges the Commission to support the creation of a European public sphere, primarily structured through national, local and regional media, though without losing sight of the important role played by quality national and regional newspapers and television news in dedicating sufficient coverage to European affairs; and to that end, calls on the Member States to encourage the national public audiovisual channels adequately to inform the citizens about the policies conducted at European level;
5. Notes that the aim of a European communication policy should not be the creation of a communication sphere that competes with the national public spheres, but rather a close alignment of national debates with the debates at EU level;
6. Urges the Commission to take into consideration the concrete proposals set out in Parliament's resolution of 12 May 2005 on the EU information and communication strategy when designing a communication policy;

Definition of common principles

7. Supports the idea of setting up a two-way communication between the EU and its citizens, which is able and willing to listen more closely to what citizens wish to say about Europe; points out, however, that the idea of citizens becoming drivers of participation and dialogue does not seem reasonable, since it is not citizens who should seek out information, but rather information that should seek out the citizens;
8. Does not consider it appropriate to submit the Parliament to a code of conduct that regulates its communication with EU citizens;
9. Asks the Commission to propose a draft interinstitutional agreement defining the common principles that could channel cooperation between the European institutions as regards communication;
10. Urges the Commission to explore the possibility of launching of a genuine Community programme, for information and communication on Europe, based on Article 308 of the EC Treaty, in order to improve existing interinstitutional partnership mechanisms in this field; states that should the Commission come forward with a corresponding proposal, Parliament shall be fully involved in defining and framing the precise content and scope of the programme;
11. Is of the opinion that stronger reference be made to the principles and values enshrined in

the Charter of Fundamental Rights in order to determine the scope of a European communication policy;

12. Stresses that the Charter of Fundamental Rights already lays down citizens' rights regarding information and that any new instrument should respect the prerogatives of Parliament as an elected assembly, in particular its power to freely address citizens from across the Union; calls for its Committee on Constitutional Affairs to examine the possible form and content of an interinstitutional instrument of this kind;
13. Points to the importance of a Constitution for Europe to make the Union more political and democratic and capable of attracting citizens; points out that Parliament, the Council, and the Commission have a political responsibility to support this process.

Reinforcing the role of citizens

14. Welcomes the desire shown by the Commission to take Europe to all levels, in other words, to communicate European issues to national, regional and local level in order to decentralise the message, and insists on the need for such communication to take place on a very regular basis; welcomes the Commission's Action Plan and expects its prompt implementation;
15. Considers that the development of a local European administration, able to support the numerous existing European Union information points, would help to form strong direct links between the Union and its citizens, in particular by improving citizens' access to the European initiatives and programmes that affect them; believes that the Commission's and Parliament's information offices in the Member States play an important role in this connection; sees a need in this connection for a thoroughgoing review and rethink of the work carried out to date in the Member States by these information offices, since their public relations activities do not appeal to citizens and the resources earmarked for them could be used far more efficiently; feels, therefore, that they should be more political and less bureaucratic;
16. Welcomes the transparency initiative, launched by the Commission in November 2005, which stresses that high standards of transparency are part of the legitimacy of any modern administration; the European public is entitled to expect efficient, accountable and service-minded public institutions;
17. Sees regions and cities as the most suitable platforms for promoting the idea of Europe among citizens and calls for the involvement of the Committee of the Regions in the implementation of a future communication policy;
18. Supports the idea of enhancing debates in national and regional parliaments;
19. Encourages the national parliaments to enhance the scrutiny role of their governments when they act at the Council, thus raising awareness and thereby the democratic accountability of the EU institutions;
20. Stresses that national parliaments should strive to pay more attention to European legislative projects much earlier in the decision-making process;

21. Draws attention to the Presidency Conclusions of the Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments of 6 and 7 May 2005, which called upon the national parliaments to hold an annual debate, preferably in plenary session, on the Commission's annual legislative and work programme,
22. Points to the importance of convening interparliamentary forums on the future of Europe, one of which will be meeting to mark the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome; calls, as far as European communication policy is concerned, for the discussions among the representatives of the European people to be taken into account;
23. Underlines the importance of civic education on EU integration; considers that having a certain level of understanding about Europe is a prerequisite for successful interactive communication with the EU, and for contributing to a sense of European citizenship;
24. Regrets that support for sectorial programmes with a strong multiplier effect such as Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates and Erasmus has been cut, since they accentuate the European dimension and facilitate the establishment of transnational networks;
25. Is of the opinion that in order to reach the citizen, it is important to communicate better and show the relevance and impact of EU decisions for daily life through cooperation with regional and local institutions; suggests that emphasis be placed on communicating regularly to the citizens about relevant regional and local projects in which the EU has participated, with the objective of favouring a common European project;
26. Considers that the debate should take into account the specific needs and activities of disabled people and minority groups as well as national and local audiences and specific target groups; points out that more attention should be paid to channelling relevant, as well as regionalised information, to defined target audiences, thereby connecting European issues with citizens' daily lives;
27. Welcomes the initiatives taken by certain Commission representations and by national administrations so as to collaborate on EU-related information campaigns; points out that such collaboration could contribute to the creation of a more direct link between citizens and institutions;
28. Calls on the Commission to ensure consultation with stakeholders and the public at an early stage of policy shaping; considers that key proposals could be accompanied with the additional section in the impact assessment specifying how citizens' concerns have been taken into account when drafting the proposal; points out that the impact of public consultations on the EU's decision-making process should be clarified;
29. Calls on the Commission to develop a dynamic and reactive communication policy, which, instead of mostly reporting the final consensus achieved, is more focused on reporting the evolution of decisions that are adopted at different stages in the decision-making process; considers that the aim of the Union's communication policy is to give citizens a clear understanding of how European law is made;

Working with the media and new technologies

30. Stresses the importance of the media as intermediaries, creators of opinion, and carriers of messages to the citizen in the European public sphere which the Commission is aiming to develop; in that context, urges the Commission to support concrete initiatives such as discussion forums on European cultural and political issues where materials would be available in several languages so that many European citizens could interact and exchange;
31. Emphasises that the informed citizen is the basis of a functioning participatory democratic system;
32. Asks the Commission to define, with the greatest precision possible, which role it would like to assign to the media and stresses the need to find a formula that involves national, regional and local media more closely in communication policy, for which the use of alternative media as a communication channel should also be considered;
33. Takes the view that cross-border cooperation on European policy projects between regional and local media must be stepped up; believes that European cooperation between media and journalists benefits reporting on the European Union, and asks the Commission to set up, as part of the budget, a European Fund for (Investigative) Journalism that supports projects in which journalists from several Member States together explore a European subject in depth and apply it to the differences in local and regional situations;
34. Welcomes the withdrawal of the proposal on the creation of an EU news agency;
35. Recommends that the Commission use clear and concise language when communicating with the media and citizens, and that it does so systematically in the official languages of their Member State of origin or residence; believes that EU jargon increases rather than closes the gap between the EU institutions and citizens;
36. Recommends the creation of regular exchanges of views on European communication matters between the European institutions, particularly the Parliament, and the media;
37. Sees it as the responsibility of the Commission in general, and the Member States in particular, to provide objective, reliable and impartial information on European policies as a basis for well-informed debate; accordingly calls on the latter to improve efforts to inform the Member States' civil servants about policies conducted at European level;
38. Welcomes that with respect to the new technologies, the White Paper is in line with the Parliament's last report on the EU information and communication strategy;
39. Welcomes the Commission's proposals for a better use of new communication technologies, but calls for measures to be taken to prevent the 'digital divide' making access to information about the Union even more difficult for a section of the population; underlines the need, in the interests of ensuring a coherent approach, to incorporate the means of communication peculiar to each institution, such as the European Parliament's planned 'Web TV', while respecting its autonomy; maintains also that the traditional mass media, such as television, must be turned to account;

Understanding European public opinion

40. Asks the Commission to inform Parliament about the assessment of the consultation it has undertaken;
41. Sees as questionable the establishment of an Observatory for European Public Opinion in the short term and considers that before such a task is carried out, more coordinated use should be made of the data and resources already available;
42. Notes that no satisfactory communication policy is possible without exact knowledge of the gaps in the information which Union citizens have, whether relating to the substance of Community action or to the institutions and procedures that serve to implement it; calls, therefore for Eurobarometer personnel to be instructed to carry out an exhaustive specific opinion survey in order to gauge exactly how well informed Community citizens are, distinguishing them according to their country of origin, socio-professional category, and political leanings;

Collaboration

43. Asks the Commission to draw up concrete proposals for the implementation of the communication policy and to evaluate its legal and financial implications;
44. Considers that the work of the Interinstitutional Group on Information should be analysed to see if improvements are possible; considers that the group should be predominantly political in character and act as guarantor and the number of its members should be reduced to enable it to operate more effectively;
45. Stresses the need for closer involvement of pan-European political parties in dialogue with their constituencies on EU matters;
46. Attaches special importance to the role of political parties in sustaining parliamentary democracy at all levels; regrets that the potential of the transnational political parties remains unfulfilled; deplores the reluctance of many national political parties to embrace the European dimension in a coherent or convincing way; urges political parties to address EU politics in their policy-making and electoral campaigning, and to promote on behalf of the citizen real political choices about the future of Europe;
47. Underlines that a communication policy must take into account the 'pace' of European affairs, which is often far removed from that of national political agendas, and cannot really develop separately from the specific Union policies and measures, which each have their own particular timetable; considers that the Commission, the Council, and Parliament should agree on a timetable for the key issues likely to be of more direct interest to the different sections of European public opinion in order to channel their communication efforts into these subjects;
48. Calls on the institutions to examine the possibility of setting up a second-level coordination group, on which the competent DGs of the various institutions and representatives of the Parliament's committees are represented, to coordinate the specific activities implementing the guidelines laid down by the IGI;
49. Reiterates that the European Union is often viewed as a single whole by citizens, who are

not thought to understand the finer distinctions between the institutions, and that the respective communication policies of each institution should therefore be coordinated in a joint approach, while respecting the responsibilities and autonomy of each of them; repeats its call for a large-scale annual interinstitutional debate to be held in plenary for the purpose of adopting a joint declaration on the objectives and means of implementing this policy;

50. Endorses the strengthening of dialogue, and jointly organised public debates, among the European institutions and national and regional bodies; stresses the importance of basing communication on initiatives promoted through popular communication channels such as cultural programmes (literary or film prizes), sporting events etc.; considers that communication should not lose sight of the strategic need to be aimed at 'target audiences' such as universities, local and regional authorities, or professional associations;
51. Supports the strengthening of the role of the Ombudsman in giving greater credibility to transparency;
52. Points out that the Prince Programme has traditionally been based on a partnership between the Commission and the Member States; in its most recent report on the EU's communication strategy the Parliament underlined the need for parliamentary involvement in establishing the Prince Programme's priorities, and therefore takes the view that MEPs should be fully involved in the events organised under the programme's auspices;
53. Recommends increasing the appropriations allocated to existing funding programmes for the purpose of better communication of European integration, such as Lifelong Learning, Youth, Citizens for Europe, Media, and Culture, provided that the objectives of the individual programmes are fully respected;
54. Supports replacing the five budgetary lines for the Prince Programme that exist at present with a single programme run by the Directorate-General for Communication, as this would bring greater flexibility and a central interlocutor;
55. Maintains that the financial support granted by Union needs to be made as visible as possible and hence that every institution, association, or scheme subsidised under a Union programme should be obliged to publicise the aid received;
56. Stresses that for successful communication, the active involvement of the Member States is essential and therefore invites them to find the technical and financial means for contributing to the joint communicative efforts of the EU;
57. Urges the Member States to transpose Community legislation appropriately and promptly in order to ensure that all EU citizens enjoy the same level of rights as conferred by Community legislation; calls on the Commission to ensure more actively that provisions of Community legislation are applied; encourages the Commission to work in partnership with Member States' governments to inform citizens of their right of access to justice and redress should their rights be infringed.
58. Calls on the Commission to prioritise better its communication partnerships by pursuing special relationships with partners with a 'transnational mission', such as the organisations

representing the emerging European civil society, European political parties and journalists; affirms the importance of including media aimed at young people, with a view to consolidating a European citizenship area;

59. Points to the need to adapt and further the strategies and substantive areas set out in the White Paper, taking into account the ongoing debates in European society and among the Member States;
60. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Committee of Regions, the European Social and Economic Committee and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

In February 2006 the Commission published a White Paper on European communication policy. The text was intended to counter the effect produced by the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in the French and Dutch referendums and halt the general rise of Euro-scepticism.

In the White Paper the Commission outlines the thrust of a new European communication policy designed to bridge the divide between the Union and its citizens. In this report the rapporteur will offer his own comments on the proposals put forward in the Commission White Paper.

1. Defining common principles

The Commission has proposed to establish a code of conduct on communication, that is to say, to draw up common rules for the European institutions, national bodies, and so forth, thereby laying foundations on which to cement communication policies. The rapporteur considers that this idea is not only fundamentally mistaken, but also undesirable to the extent that it would create a poor substitute for a genuine legal basis. In point of fact the European institutions have no legal basis for Community reports given over specifically to information and communication. As a result the Commission too often lays itself open to the charge of meddling in an area outside its responsibility or even of disseminating propaganda. The best way to avoid this pitfall, however, is not to base a communication policy on a code of conduct, but to seek a unanimous decision of the Member States in the European Council, thereby affording a means, under Article 308 of the Treaty, to provide a legal basis in the full sense.

In addition, laying down rules of conduct to be observed by the EU institutions could lead to adverse consequences reducing the scope for independent and self-determining opinion. The rapporteur does not, therefore, believe that Parliament should be subject to a code that would determine how it should communicate with European citizens.

2. Empowering citizens

Given that there is no European public sphere, the institutions must employ tools enabling as many European citizens as possible to gain access to information. If the Union wishes to be listened to, it has to take European affairs to national, regional, and local level. However, it is not sensible to view citizens as the prime movers of participation and dialogue. It would be pointless to listen carefully to what citizens had to say if they were ill informed. Before their input can serve a purpose, the European institutions have to find ways of passing on all the information that they need to involve themselves in, and identify with, the European project. Information must come first, otherwise no opinion is possible. Or at any rate, no useful opinion. That is why EU information and communication policy must be governed by the general principle that it is not citizens who should have to go looking for information, but information that should come looking for citizens.

3. Working with the media and new technologies

The White Paper overemphasises the idea that dialogue and communication with citizens can be coordinated through initiatives by the institutions. It consequently relies more on new technologies than on the traditional mass media. At times it appears to underestimate the impact that the mass media have on society.

The rapporteur believes that a list of priority measures should be drawn up, focusing, for example, on better working conditions for journalists in the European institutions, training for information professionals, better direct communication methods, and so on.

4. Understanding European public opinion

The Commission is proposing to set up a network of national opinion research experts to help exchange good practice and develop synergy. The rapporteur, however, believes that it would be better to use existing resources in a more coordinated way so as to derive maximum benefit. Information and good practice can be exchanged without setting up a new European public opinion observatory. Indeed, setting up the observatory would be a questionable course of action in the short term, since the data already gathered ought to be turned fully to account before embarking on a venture of that kind.

5. Collaboration

It is vital for Member States to be involved in EU information and communication policy. Without them, it would be virtually impossible for any message to get through. Attention needs to focus to a greater extent on what is said, so as to ensure that messages strike a chord with citizens by addressing their different concerns. We need to succeed in explaining what Europe can do for each and every citizen. We have to find a way to bring our weight to bear more decisively on information and communication policy at regional and local level. Stakeholders such as political parties have to be able to mobilise citizens in support of European politics and accordingly have a crucial role to play.

The rapporteur believes that Parliament, the Commission, and the Council should intensify their three-cornered dialogue and, to that end, coordinate their activities more closely.

The only forum that the Commission's and Parliament's information and communication services have for pooling their ideas is the Interinstitutional Group on Information. Its basic task is to set the priorities for the PRINCE programme. Any initiatives not covered by that programme are treated as specific measures and pursued at the instigation of either the Commission or Parliament, as the case may be. The rapporteur believes that the PRINCE programme should encompass more priority areas and each institution should take specific action only as and where necessary. The institutional group should, moreover, be primarily political in character, and its membership scaled down to make for greater operating efficiency.

18.9.2006

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON CIVIL LIBERTIES, JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

for the Committee on Culture and Education

on the White paper on a European communication policy
(2006/2087(INI))

Draftsman: Michael Cashman

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs calls on the Committee on Culture and Education, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas the right to information and freedom of expression should be at the heart of democracy in Europe and underpin the political systems at European and national levels and thus, insofar as is possible, information should be made available to the public,
- B. whereas democratic participation is a cornerstone of the political process and should have a direct bearing on the Union's policy formulation,
- C. whereas transparency and openness are preconditions for communication and such communication is a two-way dialogue with European citizens, which is an essential element of democracy and indispensable for fostering public debate,
- D. whereas the aim of a 'period of reflection' is to make the Union more democratic and effective and to 'reconnect' it with the citizens,
- E. pointing out that European issues and the "added value" of Community legislation are rarely acknowledged during national debates, with national politicians often taking credit for European "success stories", while, conversely, national politicians are quick to criticise the EU, often for failures in policy which arise at national level,
- F. drawing attention to the Presidency Conclusions of the Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments (6 and 7 May 2005), which called upon the national parliaments to hold a debate, preferably in plenary session, each year on the annual legislative and work programme of the European Commission,

1. Calls on the Commission to ensure consultation with stakeholders and the public at an early stage of policy shaping; considers that key proposals could be accompanied with the additional section in the impact assessment specifying how citizens' concerns have been taken into account when drafting the proposal; points out that the impact of public consultations on the EU's decision-making process should be clarified;
2. Believes that transparency and access to documents is one of the main pillars for ensuring communication with citizens on the EU and its activities in order to bridge the gap that currently exists; invites the Commission and the Finnish Presidency to take the necessary steps to review Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001, as requested by Parliament, to ensure that legal opinions, positions and amendments are made public on a public database before their final adoption; believes that, with a view to creating a common database, the current public databases must be linked and made as user-friendly as possible; considers that the Prelex database on monitoring the decision-making process between institutions could be used to this end;
3. Considers that all Council, Commission and European Parliament committees' agendas and documents, as well as easily understandable background information, should be published; points out that this information should be easily accessible to the public, notably via the Internet, through publication of such documents and the live and retrievable transmission of meetings;
4. Calls on the Commission to develop a dynamic and reactive communication policy, which, instead of mostly reporting the final consensus achieved, is more focused on reporting the evolution of decisions which are adopted at different stages in the decision-making process; considers that the aim of the Union's communication policy is to give citizens a clear understanding of how European law is made;
5. Encourages the national parliaments to enhance the scrutiny role of their governments when they act at the Council, thus raising awareness and thereby the democratic accountability of the EU institutions;
6. Encourages the Member States to build a European dimension into national debates, thus bringing the European agenda to the attention of citizens;
7. Considers that the debate should take into account specific needs and activities of disabled people and minority groups as well as national and local audiences and specific target groups; points out that more attention should be paid to channelling relevant, as well as regionalised information, to defined target audiences, thereby connecting European issues with citizens' daily lives;
8. Urges the Member States to transpose Community legislation appropriately and promptly in order to ensure that all EU citizens enjoy the same level of rights as conferred by Community legislation; calls on the Commission to ensure more actively that provisions of Community legislation are applied; encourages the Commission to work in partnership with Member States' governments to inform citizens of their right of access to justice and redress should their rights be infringed.

PROCEDURE

Title	White paper on a European communication policy
Procedure number	2006/2087(INI)
Committee responsible	CULT
Opinion by Date announced in plenary	LIBE 6.4.2006
Enhanced cooperation – date announced in plenary	
Drafts(wo)man Date appointed	Michael Cashman 15.5.2006
Previous drafts(wo)man	
Discussed in committee	12.7.2006 13.9.2006
Date adopted	13.9.2006
Result of final vote	+: 35 -: 2 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Alexander Alvaro, Alfredo Antoniozzi, Mihael Brejc, Michael Cashman, Charlotte Cederschiöld, Carlos Coelho, Fausto Correia, Panayiotis Demetriou, Agustín Díaz de Mera García Consuegra, Kinga Gál, Patrick Gaubert, Lilli Gruber, Timothy Kirkhope, Ewa Klamt, Magda Kósáné Kovács, Wolfgang Kreissl-Dörfler, Barbara Kudrycka, Stavros Lambrinidis, Henrik Lax, Sarah Ludford, Jaime Mayor Oreja, Claude Moraes, Lapo Pistelli, Martine Roure, Ioannis Varvitsiotis, Stefano Zappalà, Tatjana Ždanoka
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Marco Cappato, Bárbara Dührkop Dührkop, Maria da Assunção Esteves, Anne Ferreira, Ignasi Guardans Cambó, Sophia in 't Veld, Hubert Pirker, Antonio Tajani, Kyriacos Triantaphyllides
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Thomas Wise
Comments (available in one language only)	

5.10.2006

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

for the Committee on Culture and Education

on the White paper on a European communication policy
(2006/2087(INI))

Draftsman: Gérard Onesta

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Constitutional Affairs calls on the Committee on Culture and Education, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Welcomes the presentation of the White Paper and endorses the Commission's intentions to make communication policy a policy in its own right;
2. Welcomes the Commission's recognition of the fact that communication can never be divorced from what is being communicated and that it should be a two-way process that involves listening to citizens, but regrets that these principles, asserted at the beginning of the White Paper, do not find any practical expression; calls on the Commission, therefore, to specify how it intends to take into account citizens' views and suggests, to this end, that possible initiatives launched by other institutions, such as 'Agora', a body that Parliament has decided to set up for the purpose of consultation with civil society representatives, are incorporated;
3. Notes that no satisfactory communication policy is possible without exact knowledge of the gaps in the information which Union citizens have, whether relating to the substance of Community action or to the institutions and procedures that serve to implement it; calls, therefore for Eurobarometer personnel to be instructed to carry out an exhaustive specific opinion survey in order to gauge exactly how well informed Community citizens are, distinguishing them according to their country of origin, socio-professional category, and political leanings;
4. Points to the importance of convening interparliamentary forums on the future of Europe, one of which will be meeting to mark the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome; calls, as far as European communication policy is concerned, for the discussions among the representatives of the European people to be taken into account;

5. Is in favour of looking into a new interinstitutional instrument, in which the Member States can participate, setting out the principles of a European communication policy; believes, however, that the precise form of this instrument - whether it is a charter or code of conduct - should be considered carefully, on the basis of the 'guarantees' it would give to citizens and the commitments the EU institutions and Member States would have to undertake;
6. Stresses that the Charter of Fundamental Rights already lays down citizens' rights regarding information and that any new instrument should respect the prerogatives of Parliament as an elected assembly, in particular its power to freely address citizens from across the Union; calls for its Committee on Constitutional Affairs to examine the possible form and content of an interinstitutional instrument of this kind;
7. Underlines that a communication policy must take into account the 'pace' of European affairs, which is often far removed from that of national political agendas, and cannot really develop separately from the specific Union policies and measures, which each have their own particular timetable; considers that the Commission, the Council, and Parliament should agree on a timetable for the key issues likely to be of more direct interest to the different sections of European public opinion in order to channel their communication efforts into these subjects;
8. Reiterates that the European Union is often viewed as a single whole by citizens, who are not thought to understand the finer distinctions between the institutions, and that the respective communication policies of each institution should therefore be coordinated in a joint approach, while respecting the responsibilities and autonomy of each of them; repeats its call for a large-scale annual interinstitutional debate to be held in plenary for the purpose of adopting a joint declaration on the objectives and means of implementing this policy;
9. Points to the need to adapt and further the strategies and substantive areas set out in the White Paper, taking into account the ongoing debates in European society and among the Member States;
10. Endorses the strengthening of dialogue, and jointly organised public debates, among the European institutions and national and regional bodies; stresses the importance of basing communication on initiatives promoted through popular communication channels such as cultural programmes (literary or film prizes), sporting events etc.; considers that communication should not lose sight of the strategic need to be aimed at 'target audiences' such as universities, local and regional authorities, or professional associations;
11. Maintains that the financial support granted by Union needs to be made as visible as possible and hence that every institution, association, or scheme subsidised under a Union programme should be obliged to publicise the aid received;
12. Welcomes the Commission's proposals for a better use of new communication technologies, but calls for measures to be taken to prevent the 'digital divide' making access to information about the Union even more difficult for a section of the population; underlines the need, in the interests of ensuring a coherent approach, to incorporate the means of communication peculiar to each institution, such as the European Parliament's

planned 'Web TV', while respecting its autonomy; maintains also that the traditional mass media, such as television, must be turned to account;

13. Regrets that the present information policy is failing to serve its purpose and not reaching European citizens; maintains, therefore, that fundamentally new departures are needed, in particular in the form of specific journalistic coverage designed for television; supports, therefore, the idea of European news modelled on Universum programmes;
14. Calls on the Commission to prioritise better its communication partnerships by pursuing special relationships with partners with a 'transnational mission', such as the organisations representing the emerging European civil society, European political parties and journalists; affirms the importance of including media aimed at young people, with a view to consolidating a European citizenship area;
15. Attaches special importance to the role of political parties in sustaining parliamentary democracy at all levels; regrets that the potential of the transnational political parties remains unfulfilled; deplores the reluctance of many national political parties to embrace the European dimension in a coherent or convincing way; urges political parties to address EU politics in their policy-making and electoral campaigning, and to promote on behalf of the citizen real political choices about the future of Europe;
16. Stresses the essential role the media play in communication on European issues and insists on the need to establish specific forms of cooperation with this sector, scrupulously respecting its independence and editorial autonomy; considers that funding for the training of journalists specialising in European affairs should be visibly increased, particularly for the local and regional press; considers also that institutional publicity is a key way to project the image of Europe's political centre to the public at large and hence an important subject for discussion with the media;
17. Points to the importance of linking communication policy to the EU-sponsored active citizenship programmes, which generate a multiplier effect in the communication process;
18. Considers that the development of a local European administration, able to support the numerous existing European Union information points, would help to form strong direct links between the Union and its citizens, in particular by improving citizens' access to the European initiatives and programmes that affect them; believes that the Commission's and Parliament's information offices in the Member States play an important role in this connection; sees a need in this connection for a thoroughgoing review and rethink of the work carried out to date in the Member States by these information offices, since their public relations activities do not appeal to citizens and the resources earmarked for them could be used far more efficiently; feels, therefore, that they should be more political and less bureaucratic;
19. Points to the importance of a Constitution for Europe to make the Union more political and democratic and capable of attracting citizens; points out that Parliament, the Council, and the Commission have a political responsibility to support this process.

PROCEDURE

Title	White Paper on a European communication policy		
Procedure number	2006/2087(INI)		
Committee responsible	CULT		
Opinion by Date announced in plenary	AFCO 6.4.2006		
Enhanced cooperation – date announced in plenary			
Drafts(wo)man Date appointed	Gérard Onesta 21.2.2006		
Previous drafts(wo)man			
Discussed in committee	2.5.2006	12.7.2006	12.9.2006
Date adopted	5.10.2006		
Result of final vote	+: 17	–: 1	0: 1
Members present for the final vote	Carlos Carnero González, Richard Corbett, Panayiotis Demetriou, Andrew Duff, Maria da Assunção Esteves, Ingo Friedrich, Bronisław Geremek, Genowefa Grabowska, Ignasi Guardans Cambó, Jo Leinen, Íñigo Méndez de Vigo, Rihards Pīks, Johannes Voggenhuber and Bernard Piotr Wojciechowski.		
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Jean-Louis Bourlanges, Ashley Mote, Gérard Onesta, Georgios Papastamkos, Reinhard Rack and György Schöpflin.		
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote			
Comments (available in one language only)			

PROCEDURE

Title	Report on the White Paper on a European communication policy
Procedure number	2006/2087(INI)
Committee responsible Date authorisation announced in plenary	CULT 6.4.2006
Committee(s) asked for opinion(s) Date announced in plenary	LIBE AFCO 6.4.2006 6.4.2006
Not delivering opinion(s) Date of decision	
Enhanced cooperation Date announced in plenary	
Rapporteur(s) Date appointed	Luis Herrero-Tejedor 13.2.2006
Previous rapporteur(s)	
Discussed in committee	29.5.2006
Date adopted	9.10.2006
Result of final vote	+ 29 - 1 0 0
Members present for the final vote	Maria Badia I Cutchet, Ivo Belet, Guy Bono, Marielle De Sarnez, Marie-Hélène Descamps, Jolanta Dičkutė, Hanna Foltyn-Kubicka, Milan Gaľa, Vasco Graça Moura, Lissy Gröner, Luis Herrero-Tejedor, Ruth Hieronymi, Bernat Joan i Marí, Manolis Mavrommatis, Ljudmila Novak, Doris Pack, Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański, Pál Schmitt, Nikolaos Sifunakis, Hannu Takkula, Helga Trüpel, Thomas Wise, Tomáš Zatloukal
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Ignasi Guardans Cambó, Gyula Hegyi, Mary Honeyball, Reino Paasilinna, Sérgio Sousa Pinto, Grażyna Staniszevska
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Harald Ettl
Date tabled	16.10.2006
Comments (available in one language only)	