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Committee on Constitutional Affairs

2006/2087(INI)

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

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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)			