

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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2009

Committee on Constitutional Affairs

2008/2224(INI)

26.1.2009

OPINION

of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs

for the Committee on Culture and Education

on active dialogue with citizens on Europe
(2008/2224(INI))

Rapporteur (*): Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann

(*) Associated committee – Rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure

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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 Commission communication on building on the experience of Plan D, which stresses the importance of interactive communication with the citizens of Europe;
2. Calls on the Commission to involve large target groups in the dialogue by preparing communication plans capable of making the residents of small settlements and people of differing living standards and of different age groups party to European issues; proposes the adoption of a two-phased approach to strengthen the dialogue between the European Union and its citizens by providing information first and facilitating the debates with and among the informed citizens afterwards;
3. Notes with satisfaction that the Commission has taken into account many of the ideas that Parliament has previously put forward, such as citizens' forums on both a European and national level, a more prominent role for civil society organisations and innovative use of new media;
4. Regrets the fact that, in spite of the Commission's efforts and good ideas, the success achieved in increasing the European citizens' level of knowledge and interest in European issues has been very limited, something which was, regrettably, evidenced by the Irish referendum;
5. Shares the Commission's view that participatory democracy can usefully supplement representative democracy; stresses, however, that participatory democracy means not only listening to the citizens, but giving them real opportunities to influence European policy;
6. Points out that, to achieve the above aims, the institutions have to become much more open and adopt the approaches required to enable citizens and their organisations to participate effectively at every stage when EU issues are debated; also notes that public access to documents produced by the institutions needs to be granted on as broad a basis as possible, this being a sine qua non for the purposes of exerting influence;
7. Recalls the new opportunities for participatory democracy that the Treaty of Lisbon would provide, especially the citizens' initiative;
8. Welcomes the fact that the Commission supports the role of Parliament and the European political parties, and recognises the need to bridge the gap between national and European politics, especially during the European election campaigns;
9. Stresses the need for coordinated efforts and joint action by all EU institutions and Member States to communicate with the citizens of Europe on European issues; welcomes the joint political declaration on communication adopted in October; recalls, however, that Parliament has asked for an Interinstitutional agreement on communication policy between all the institutions;

10. Emphasises the particular role of civic education as an essential driving force of active citizenship; notes the need to support an active model of civic education that provides young people with the opportunity to engage directly with public life, with their political representatives at national level, at local level as well as at European level, with representatives of NGOs and with civic initiatives; suggests that the Commission support pilot projects promoting such a model of civic education in the Member States;
11. Calls on the Commission to improve the cooperation and coordination between its representations in the Member States and the European Parliament's information offices.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	22.1.2009
Result of final vote	+: 17 -: 3 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	Enrique Barón Crespo, Richard Corbett, Jean-Luc Dehaene, Andrew Duff, Anneli Jäätteenmäki, Aurelio Juri, Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann, Timothy Kirkhope, Jo Leinen, Íñigo Méndez de Vigo, Ashley Mote, Adrian Severin, József Szájer, Riccardo Ventre, Andrzej Wielowieyski
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Costas Botopoulos, Panayiotis Demetriou, Roger Helmer, Klaus-Heiner Lehne, Gérard Onesta, Sirpa Pietikäinen, Kathy Sinnott, Mauro Zani