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## **DRAFT 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 Article 195 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to Article 211 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to Article 308 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to Articles 11, 41, 42 and 44 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights,
- 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 documents,
- 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 Union<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 April 2003 on an information and communication strategy for the European Union<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 May 2005 on the implementation of the European Union’s information and communication strategy<sup>3</sup>,
- 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 in a participatory democracy,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 47 E, 27.2.2003, p. 406.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 64 E, 12.3.2004, p. 591.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 92 E, 20.4.2006, p. 403.

- B. whereas for this reason the strength of democratic elements of the EU is connected to the communication structures on the European level which link the institutions with citizens,
- C. whereas the experience of European elections and referendums has shown that those who were aware and interested in EU issues were more likely to participate, whereas those lacking information were more likely not to participate,
- D. whereas there is no 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,
- E. whereas it would be an important improvement if in the national public spheres European issues were more prominent,
- F. 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,
- G. whereas there is clear evidence of under-information of citizens on European issues, as reflected in the results of various Eurobarometer polls,
- H. whereas communication is also linked to the issue of transparency, of citizenship and shared values,
- I. whereas the European Council of 15/16 June 2006 put the issue of constitutional reform back on the agenda,

#### ***Communication policy and the European public sphere***

1. 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 it can make meaningful policies better understood;
2. 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 newspapers in dedicating sufficient coverage to European affairs;
3. Notes that the aim of a European communication policy should not be creation of a communication sphere which competes with the national public spheres, but rather a close alignment of national debates with the debates at EU level;
4. 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***

5. Supports the idea of setting up 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 them who should have to go looking for information, but information that should come looking for the citizen;

6. Does not consider it appropriate to submit the EP to a code of conduct that regulates its communication with EU citizens;
7. Urges the Commission to explore the possibility of launching of a genuine Community programme, for information and communication on Europe, based on Article 308 TEC, 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;
8. 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;

### ***Reinforcing the role of citizens***

9. Welcomes the desire shown by the Commission to take Europe to all levels, i.e. to take European issues to national, regional and local level in order to decentralise the message; welcomes the Commission's Action Plan and expects its prompt implementation;
10. 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;
11. Supports the idea of enhancing debates in national parliaments on European issues;
12. Underlines the importance of civic education on EU integration; considers that having a certain level of understanding about Europe is a prerequisite for successful two-way communication with the EU;
13. 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;
14. Is of the opinion that in order to reach the citizen it is important to communicate better and show the relevance of EU decisions for daily life;

### ***Working with the media and new technologies***

15. 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;
16. Asks the Commission to define, with the greatest precision possible, which role it would like to assign the media and stresses the need to find a formula that involves national, regional and local media more closely in communication policy;
17. Welcomes the withdrawal of the proposal on the creation of an EU news agency;

18. Recommends that the Commission use pristine and concise language when communicating with citizens and the media; believes that EU jargon increases rather than closes the gap between the EU institutions and citizens;
19. Recommends the creation of regular exchanges of views on European communication matters between the European institutions and the media;
20. Sees the Commission's responsibility in providing objective, reliable and impartial information on European policies as a basis for well-informed debate;
21. Welcomes that with respect to the new technologies, the White Paper is in accordance with the last report of the EP on the EU information and communication strategy;

#### ***Understanding European public opinion***

22. Asks the Commission to inform Parliament about the assessment of the consultation it has undertaken;
23. 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;

#### ***Collaboration***

24. Asks the Commission to draw up concrete proposals for the implementation of the communication policy and its legal and financial implications;
25. 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;
26. Stresses the need for closer involvement of pan-European political parties in dialogue with their constituencies on EU matters;
27. Supports the strengthening of the role of the Ombudsman in giving greater credibility to transparency;
28. Recommends the use of existing funding programmes such as Lifelong Learning, Youth, Citizens for Europe, Media, and Culture for the purpose of better communication of European integration provided that the objectives of the individual programmes are fully respected;
29. Stresses that for successful communication the active support of Member States is essential and therefore invites Member States to look for ways to contribute to the joint communicative efforts of the EU;
30. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

## 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.