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## COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMISSION

### ACTION PLAN TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATING EUROPE BY THE COMMISSION

#### *INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW*

This Commission has made communication one of the strategic objectives for its term of office, recognising it fully as a policy in its own right. A renewed commitment to communication with Europe's citizens is of vital importance and this is a task that goes beyond the Commission's remit. Its success depends fundamentally on a partnership with all other key players in European politics inside the EU, and particularly with Member States' governments. Politicians and institutional stakeholders at all levels have to gain Europeans trust through good policies and good communication about those policies.

Against this background the Commission has decided to proceed in two phases:

- First, to adopt an internal **Action plan** with concrete measures to be taken within the Commission.
- Secondly, to draw up a **White Paper** to engage all stakeholders, setting out the policy vision and the initiatives to be undertaken in the medium and long term, in cooperation with the other institutions and stakeholders. The White Paper will launch a reflection on how to work in partnership with Member States, the European Parliament and the other institutions and bodies. It will indicate ways to develop a European Public Sphere particularly through audiovisual media as well as a European narrative. The role of civil society and their active contribution to European dialogue and debate will also be addressed.

The **main objective** of this action plan is to ensure more effective communication about Europe supported within the Commission by a modern and more professional approach across all departments. The Commission needs therefore to put its own house in order, through a more efficient organisation and a better use of both human and financial resources and communication tools and services. The action plan establishes a working method to achieve this. By working and planning together, the various Commission departments will improve the communication and image of this institution and of the European Union as a whole. The Action Plan and its implementation will be regularly reviewed.

**Communication is more than information:** it establishes a relationship and initiates a dialogue with European citizens, it listens carefully and it connects to people. It is not a neutral exercise devoid of value, it is an essential part of the political process.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Between 2001 and 2004, the European Commission adopted **three communications<sup>1</sup> dealing with information and communication**. These communications improved partnership and cooperation with the European Parliament, the Council and the Member States. They adjusted the way communication activities are financed to the new Financial Regulation of the EU. They identified the main objectives: multi-annual programming, common approach to communication messages based on the interests of citizens, pooling of synergies, best practice and better evaluation of actions taken.

While this was an improvement compared to the past at strategic level, follow-up and implementation still had several weaknesses:

- **Continuous fragmentation of communication activities** by insufficient coordination and planning, therefore losing efficiency.
- **Messages reflecting political priorities but not necessarily linked to citizens' interests, needs and preoccupations:** current campaigns focus on the political elite and media and fail to portray the benefits and consequences for day-to-day life in a direct and understandable manner.
- **Inadequate implementation:** The strategies adopted in the past by the Commission were too focused on financing campaigns rather than on dialogue and proactive communication.

## A NEW APPROACH

Three strategic principles underpin the launching of the present action plan to earn people's interest and trust:

- **Listening:** communication is a dialogue, not a one-way street. It is not just about EU institutions informing EU citizens but also about citizens expressing their opinions so that the Commission can understand their perceptions and concerns. Europe's citizens want to make their voices in Europe heard and their democratic participation should have a direct bearing on EU policy formulation and output.
- **Communicating:** EU policies and activities, as well as their impact on everyday lives, have to be communicated and advocated in a manner that people can understand and relate to if citizens are to follow political developments at European level.

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<sup>1</sup> Communication on a new framework for cooperation on activities concerning the information and communication policy of the European Union (COM(2001)354); Communication on an information and communication strategy for the European Union (COM(2002)350); Communication on implementing the information and communication strategy for the European Union (COM(2004)196).

- **Connecting with citizens by “going local”:** Good communication requires excellent understanding of local audiences. The Commission’s communication activities must be resourced and organised in such a way as to address matching demographic and national and local concerns, and to convey information through the channels citizens prefer in the language they can understand.

The Commission will primarily **focus in a first phase** on priority actions:

- Establishing **communication priorities**, agreed by the College, on which efforts and resources will be focused. Core messages will be provided in order to ensure consistency impact among communication priorities (Chapters 1, 3 and 4, particularly action 2 and 14).
- Actively co-ordinating activities across Commission by a **network of Directorates General’s Communication units**<sup>2</sup> to maximise efforts and use our communication tools better, assisted by DG Communication (Chapter 2, particularly action 4).
- Improving the Commission’s ability to communicate in the Member States on EU issues as part of the drive to connect to citizens through rapid **reinforcement of some Representations as part of clearly targeted pilot projects** in order to achieve impact (Chapter 5, particularly action 23).
- **Better use of communication tools** which people prefer and in the language they understand, e.g. the access to the Commission’s home page on Europa through the Representations’ web pages (Chapter 6, particularly action 36).
- Describing the **tangible benefits** of EU policies through short, simple introductions to key Commission proposals, in a layman’s summary (Point 2.3, particularly action 7 and 8).
- Becoming more professional in communication through specific **training and recruitment** of communication specialists (Point 2.4, particularly action 11 and 12).

The proposed actions vary in nature, some being short-term, others to be implemented in the medium and long term. Some can be launched very soon (as of September 2005); others will only start as of 2006 and beyond. Some are dependent on significant changes in the Commission’s culture and working methods, and thus require many small steps to be taken before achieving the desired results. The success of the measures suggested in this action plan is highly dependent on sufficient financial and human resources being made available for their implementation, particularly in the Representations.

## 1. POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND OWNERSHIP

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<sup>2</sup> The action plan refers generally to “communication units” to name those units, sectors or groups of persons in Commission Directorates General and services dealing with information and communication, as there is not a single denomination, nor a standard job description or administrative position in the DGs’ organisation chart. In some cases these roles are undertaken by officials responsible for relations with the media and for information.

The whole Commission and particularly the Members of the Commission themselves are committed to participating actively in implementing the new communication approach. Additionally, the appointment of a Vice-President responsible for Institutional Affairs and Communications Strategy has emphasised the European Commission's desire to achieve results in this sphere.

### 1.1. Involving Commissioners more

**Commissioners are the public faces of the Commission. They are its main and most effective communicators.** Commissioners will individually or as a team enhance their role as key communicators, not only on their own portfolios but also on other priority issues when travelling to Member States. They will pursue coordinated actions on communication priorities, and ensure increased availability of their time for communication activities. They will also programme their activities and the College agenda having in mind the communication aspects.

They will regularly review the main communication issues and challenges following recommendations by the Group of Commissioners for Communication and Programming.

The action included in this chapter is detailed in the Annex, action 1

### 1.2. Group of Commissioners for Communication and Programming

The Commissioners Group for Communication and Programming under the chairmanship of the Vice-President for Institutional Affairs and Communication Strategy has the **leading role** in steering the communication process and overseeing the implementation of this action plan.

It identifies a **communication agenda** of medium- and long-term communication priorities which is adopted by the College. Comprehensive research-based communication plans will be developed on all communication priorities. This will allow a better choice of communication opportunities, in line with people's interests and political priorities, better preparation of key messages and efficient and consistent delivery. Communication plans will therefore be oriented towards the general public. All Commissioners should contribute with "human dimension" stories from their own portfolios to the communication priority topics.

The intention is to focus resources on communicating better on fewer subjects and approaching as many EU citizens as possible.

The action included in this chapter is detailed in the Annex, action 2

## 2. THE COMMISSION DGs AND SERVICES

Streamlining communication activities in line with the three principles mentioned above requires cultural and structural changes in the whole Commission.

Key to these changes will be **the communication units in all Commission departments**, whose tasks include: ensuring co-ordination with DG Communication; keeping permanent contact with the spokesperson's service; following up on information aspects of political initiatives from their inception; regularly providing the Representations and Delegations when necessary with material to brief the local and regional specialised press; and proposing and managing communication plans. They will be involved in the preparation of policy proposals in order to ensure that internal and external communication aspects are well integrated throughout the whole political process. They will continue and enhance, addressing their specific target audiences.

A stronger co-operation and coordination among those units will guarantee the use of synergies and the exchange of best practices on communication plans, tools and evaluation methods through a renewed **External Communication Network (ECN)**.

Similar to Commission Representations in Member States (see chapter 5), Delegations in third countries play a key role in communicating about the EU. In spite of having a different mission statement and target audience, their communication activities are part of this action plan.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in Annex, actions 3 and 4

## 2.1. Presenting a single face

Presentation and visual communication in all policy areas will **evolve towards a unified Commission presentation** to enhance recognition and avoid confusion in all material addressing and visible to the general public. Slogans and symbols should be simple and repetitive.

All contact centres through which the Commission communicates with stakeholders and individual citizens, and all information relays financed by the Commission will, for public awareness purposes, be streamlined **under a few, if not a single umbrella**, depending on target audience (e.g. business or general public).

The action included in this chapter is detailed in the Annex, action 5

## 2.2. More dialogue and transparency

Consultation with and listening to stakeholders and the public at an early stage of policy shaping helps to improve policy outcome and at the same time enhances the involvement of interested parties and the public at large. The Commission will **improve dialogue and publicise consultation** in order to ensure full transparency and wider public participation, also in the context of the European Transparency Initiative and Better Regulation action plan.

The action included in this chapter is detailed in the Annex, action 6

### 2.3. Integration and mainstreaming of communication in policy formulation

Commissioners and their DGs will ensure that **communication aspects are included** right from the beginning of all policy formulation. Staff preparing Commission proposals needs to think how to communicate from the very start of the process.

Key proposals will be accompanied with a “**layperson’s summary**” explaining the personal and societal benefits of the policy.

A communication plan will be prepared by the DG concerned when the topic so necessitates.

**Clear, simple and precise drafting** of Commission proposals is essential if they are to be transparent, readily understandable and their rationale fully endorsable by citizens and business. “Eurojargon” or “Eurospeak” is confusing, complicated and often elitist.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, actions 7 to 10

### 2.4. Making staff more professional

The staff members of the Commission are its **first “ambassadors”** in presenting and personalising EU policies to the public. They, particularly **senior staff**, should be empowered and encouraged to act accordingly in their contacts with the press (under the authority of the spokesperson) and the public, addressing visitors groups and by participating in public events on their subjects or in general in the Member States and third countries. To enable staff to fulfil this role, **internal communication** and communication training within each Commission department will be improved and an open culture of exchange of information will be promoted by each Director-General.

The Commission lacks communication specialists. Key to the development of this action plan’s objectives are more and better **training on communication** and the organisation of **recruitment competitions** for communication professionals.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, actions 11 to 12

## 3. NEW ROLE OF THE DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR COMMUNICATION

The Directorate-General for Press and Communication will be renamed **DG Communication** to illustrate the inclusive nature of the new approach to communication, including the adoption of a new organisation chart) and a mission statement stressing its role as supporting effective communication across the Commission.

The action included in this chapter is detailed in the Annex, action 13

### 3.1. Communication planning and coordination

Within a strategic function, a **“planning and coordination” team** will be responsible for preparing the communication agenda, with input from all DGs and DG Communication’s other departments.

Building on the experience of the existing planning ahead group, the “planning and coordination” team will prepare the communication plans on priorities selected in the communication agenda. The Representations’ input will be essential when the topic selected is relevant in their country.

The action included in this chapter is detailed in the Annex, action 14

### 3.2. Research and feedback

The Commission is aiming to listen better to its citizens although such an exercise of course goes beyond just the Commission – all political stakeholders have to be involved. While it is unrealistic to enter into dialogue with each and every one, it is possible to **draw** more systematically **on feedback from citizens** beyond the regular consultation process.

The research function will be the fundamental element of the **“listening process”**, through the analysis of Eurobarometer and other surveys<sup>3</sup> results, as well as media (particularly audiovisual) monitoring and political reporting by Representations, **feedback** from contact centres and information relays, as well as from consultation processes.

Research will be at the basis of the **selection of communication priorities**. The research function will also assist in preparing communication plans of the communication agenda, particularly in the **development of messages** to better communicate EU policies to people.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, actions 15 to 16

### 3.3. Assessment of communication impact

Communication activities need to be evaluated before, during and after **to check for effectiveness, cost-efficiency and relevance**.

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<sup>3</sup> Including data-banks, impact studies, research on audiences and ad-hoc studies

A specific **evaluation function** linked to strategic planning will be created within DG Communication. It will define quality standards for evaluating the main communication activities in the communication agenda and assist other DGs with the provision of impact evaluation tools and proposals for evaluation indicators.

The action included in this chapter is detailed in the Annex, action 17

#### 4. THE SPOKESPERSON'S SERVICE

The Spokesperson's Service under the political authority of the President, is a key component of DG Communication. It is responsible for communicating the Commission's political priorities to the media, and it sets the news agenda for EU correspondents in Brussels and beyond. It will react to media queries and report on the Commission's policies, in close cooperation with Representations, and provide more systematic **rebuttal of false claims**. Individual Spokespersons will **contribute to the political message** and media strategy of communication plans in conjunction with Cabinets and DGs.

The Spokesperson's Service establishes and implements the Commission's news on the basis of an internal short- to medium-term **news agenda**. It presents this agenda at the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet, when political planning is discussed.

The Spokesperson's Service will publish externally a **story-led news agenda** to increase the ability of the audio-visual media in particular to anticipate newsworthy Commission stories.

A thorough review of **press releases** is being initiated, and quality control will be increased. This should result in fewer, but better releases, and allow the most important texts to be adapted to local audiences.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, actions 18 to 20

#### 5. GOING LOCAL: THE REPRESENTATIONS

The Representations act as the **official representative of the Commission** in each Member State and serve the interests of the whole institution. They will have a key role implementing this action plan, in addressing target audiences in their own languages, particularly on items in the communication agenda, by:

- **listening to people** and providing the Commission with in-depth, accurate and timely information regarding the views of the Government and of civil society on issues within the Commission's remit;
- **communicating** Commission's policies and actions to people in a way that takes into account their specific demands and concerns, and provide the Government, national stakeholders and regional and local media with timely and relevant information about developments within the Commission.

Their mission statement will be adapted accordingly.

Each Representation will operate on the basis of financial and staff resources, better tailored to the specific needs and activities adapted to the local, regional and national conditions of the country in their own languages. Regional offices are key in certain Member States, depending on the size and the administrative nature of the country. The reinforcement of Representations will be progressive, based on the experiences gained in the pilot projects (see chapter 7) and its focus should be on an increased communication impact.

The Representations will continue to **cooperate closely with the Member State and the Offices of the European Parliament** in its Member State on communication activities. When appropriate, actions will be planned and implemented in partnership<sup>4</sup>.

In order to appropriately assist DGs in their communication activities when those are of special interest in their Member States, and to ensure optimum quality of delivery, **Representations have to be involved and given access by to information in each DG's and Commissioner's area** vis-à-vis the Member State in which they represent the Commission.

### 5.1. Listening and reporting

- **Identifying** the target audiences.
- **Understanding the country** through direct contacts with national, regional and local decision-makers and authorities, through regular media monitoring, and through public opinion polls.

Representations have to regularly report to headquarters and feed the research function and the preparation of communication plans on priorities identified in the communication agenda.

The action included in this chapter is detailed in the Annex, action 21

### 5.2. Communicating and connecting

- **Increasing Commissioners' profile** in the Member States, making more use of their capacities and importance as the main representatives and “faces” of the Commission: visits of Commissioners will be organised by cabinets in close co-operation with the Representations. **Regional and local media and project visits** should be a permanent feature of all Commissioners' programmes during their visits to Member States
- **Speaking for the Commission** in contacts with all media in the country: Heads of Representation and press officers act as spokespersons under the guidance of the Spokesperson's Service. They also contribute to an improved rebuttal system of the Commission's Spokesperson's Service and deliver the reaction locally.

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<sup>4</sup>The procedures for this form of cooperation will be addressed in the forthcoming White Paper on Communication.

- **Supporting the communication agenda** and implementing the subsequent communication plans if the topic is of interest in the respective Member State.
- **Organising national communication activities** on EU issues as part of the national political debate. Interests and political debates vary a lot between Member States and most communication activities cannot therefore be planned centrally.
- **Maximising the use of tools and network systems:** The Representations, whilst benefiting from the various tools set up by headquarters, will adapt them to national needs and deliver the message in the local language.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, actions 22 to 26

### 5.3. Improving the functioning of Representations

The share of administrative workload between the Representations and the centre is being further simplified and reduced: the help desk support for the Representations (establishing standard procedures, framework contracts, toolkits for launching calls for proposals and tenders, etc.) will be reviewed and reorganised. In parallel, ongoing simplification efforts will also be supported where possible.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, actions 27 to 28

## 6. BETTER USE OF TOOLS

The combined and extensive use of existing communication means is paramount to creating a critical mass of actions. Tools like the internet and audiovisual services should be **used in a more coordinated and cost-effective way across the Commission** and should be managed at the level which secures the most impact.

At the same time, the existence of different information tools has to be more actively **promoted** in order to make EU citizens aware of information sources.

The Commission has solid experience of networking and supporting – whilst guaranteeing the total editorial independence of - audiovisual programmes, particularly through its Representations. DG Communication will also set up **appropriate support mechanisms** for national and pan-European communication projects, either through the internet, printed media or events and continue funding for audiovisual programmes.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, actions 29 to 32

### 6.1. Audiovisual services

Currently, the European Parliament is exploring the possibility of setting up an EU Parliamentary Channel. The Commission is likewise looking at the feasibility of better networking of TV channels in Europe.<sup>5</sup> The Commission will continue to build up **networks between broadcasters**, both at national and at pan-European level, including Parliamentary Channels.

DG Communication will continue to run its **audiovisual news agency** “Europe by Satellite” and provide audiovisual journalists with all the professional and technical facilities needed. It will introduce, from the end of 2005, regular **“informal meetings”** between EU leaders, civil society and TV/radio journalists. The programme will be broadcasted on EbS.

The Commission will also take into account the special needs of audiovisual broadcasters when organising news events, such as visits to **ensure better visual communication**. The same applies to the presentation of the Commission’s buildings and symbols.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, actions 33 to 35

## 6.2. Internet

The EU website, “Europa”, is the **largest public website in the world** and a rich source of information and has a key role to play in the Commission’s communication efforts. There is, however, a need to shift the emphasis more towards communication, to facilitate navigation, to strive to ensure that Europa pages are fully multilingual at the appropriate level and to operate with **state of the art technology**, including a powerful search engine.

DG Communication will therefore establish **an Editor for Europa**, with the objective of ensuring a well-structured website and avoiding overlaps of texts.

DG Communication will concentrate its intensified editorial efforts on a **news site** focusing on EU Communication priorities and current ‘hot’ topics, and on a number of general sites for young people and other key target audiences. Information for the **general public** will be fed **locally** by the Representations in their language(s) and tailored to local needs and realities.

Thematic pages addressing a more **specialist audience** will be managed by the DGs responsible for any given topic, under the authority of the editor and with editorial help if necessary from DG Communication.

Thematic portals should move **beyond the Commission's** DGs and services so that anyone interested can, with just one click, get an overview of a subject from all the institutions.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, actions 36 to 38

## 6.3. Publications

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<sup>5</sup> Audiovisual questions will be further dealt with in the upcoming White Paper on Communication.

The production of publications, across the Commission **will be** addressed to specific target audiences following the principle “less is better”. A **publications editor** will be put in place to organise this exercise in close coordination with OPOCE and to continue to seek synergies between topics and DGs.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, actions 39 to 40

#### 6.4. Citizens’ contact centres and information relays

The Europe Direct free phone line (and information relays) provides a useful means not only as a communication channel but also as a way of obtaining direct feedback from citizens on their interests and concerns. As such, they are another input to feed research and analysis.

DG Communication also runs a set of European Documentation Centres in higher education establishments, and a network of independent conference speakers known as Team Europe; it also supports three large information centres in Lisbon, Paris and Rome.

As opposed to relays run specifically by other Commission DGs, these information sources cover all EU policy areas and are designed mostly for non-specialised audiences. Ultimately all information points of the Commission will be **networked**.

The large information centres will continue to receive support, namely for their programmes of activities.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, actions 41 to 43

#### 6.5. Visitors Groups

The Commission receives around 50 000 visitors a year whose experience and impressions matter to the image of the Commission.

The Commission will continue to devote particular attention to the needs of **audiences such as journalists, national and local politicians, civil society and young people, like students and pupils, as a priority**. It will also place the emphasis on information possibilities for teachers. Commissioners will likewise engage more with visitor groups and will receive them from time to time in the press room of the Berlaymont for discussions.

Complementary programmes within the European institutions in order to deliver a common pack of information to visitors on the EU as a whole and the role of each of its constituent bodies will be studied in the White Paper.

The action included in this chapter is detailed in the Annex, action 44

#### 6.6. Cooperation with journalists

Training for journalists on EU affairs will be stepped up to respond to increasing requests and needs.

In addition to the current training programme, the focus will be placed on local and regional journalists and systematic dialogue with the main editorial writers in the audiovisual and written press. Special attention will be devoted to accommodating student journalists in the Commission's programme of internships.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, actions 45 and 46

### 6.7. Events

Events, whether organised by the Commission or outside agencies, can have an important communication dimension. Organisation of, and participation in, such events should therefore be part of the overall strategic framework for communication as set out in this action plan.

The action included in this chapter is detailed in the Annex, action 47

## 7. ADAPTING THE MEANS TO THE OBJECTIVES

Communication has to be resource-intensive in terms of both budget and personnel if any significant impact is to be achieved.

A **qualitative and quantitative communication assessment** and screening will be carried out throughout the Commission in an effort to implement this action plan with maximum effectiveness.

While awaiting the results of this assessment, DG Communication will immediately redeploy and substantially reorganise its headquarters. Resources will also be redeployed within the Commission as part of a pilot project to reinforce some Representations, so that they can undertake professional communication activities in the Member States as soon as possible with a view to achieve greater communication impact. It will also recruit external professionals as contract staff. The redeployment should not impact on the resources available currently in the DGs for communication activities.

Once the above assessment has been carried out, further redeployment within the Commission could subsequently be sought.

When proposing the 2007 budget the European Commission will take account of the fact that communication is an inbuilt cost in all activities. It is not enough simply to adopt a law: it needs to be communicated in the language the citizens understand. The European Commission will explore the feasibility of allocating a defined share of the resources to communication for each policy or programme.

The actions included in this chapter are detailed in the Annex, action 48 to 50