Communicating Europe in partnership. Political declaration

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PURPOSE: to propose a general framework specifying the axes of the Commission's communication on Europe, entitled "Communicating Europe in Partnership".

CONTENT: within the current framework of the debate on the future of Europe, the Commission proposes a communication framework aimed at reinforcing communication with European citizens. The aim is not to enable citizens to have direct contact with the Commission but to plan a comprehensive strategy involving all institutions, Community bodies and Member States.

It is in this context that the Commission proposes the current communication, with a view to establishing a framework to reinforce communication in all directions, with a shift in emphasis from a Brussels-based to a 'going local' approach, initiated by the White Paper on a European Communication Policy (see INI /2006/2087). This White Paper advocates a two-way communication, characterised by the active participation of citizens, and Plan D ("Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate", which is a communication launched by the Commission following the failure of the draft constitutional treaty, in order to encourage debate on the relationship between the democratic institutions of the EU and its citizens – see COM(2005)0494).

This Communication uses the results of these types of initiative to build on current activities and to formulate a set of concrete proposals which could serve as the basis of an enhanced EU communication policy, respecting the autonomy of the different institutions.

The overall objective is to strengthen coherence and synergies between the activities undertaken by the different EU institutions and by Member States, in order to offer citizens better access to information, and a better understanding of the impact of EU policies on national, regional and local governments.

For its part, the Commission will reinforce its communication activities by providing information and engaging in debate and discussion with citizens in national, regional and local contexts, thus promoting a real "partnership" with other EU institutions, inviting Member States and all interested stakeholders to reach this objective. To support this partnership, the Commission is proposing an **inter-institutional agreement** (IIA), to structure the EU communication process, and to invite all stakeholders to engage themselves to work within the proposed coherent and flexible institutional framework (see summary of the non-legislative initial document).

Fundamental principles of the communication: the Commission will marshal all its resources to achieve effective and integrated communication in Europe.

To realise these objectives the Commission is proposing:

- The conclusion of an inter-institutional agreement to provide a framework for better cooperation on the EU communication process, while respecting the autonomy of EU institutions and Member States;
- voluntary management partnerships with Member States as the main instrument of joint communication initiatives;
- developing a "European Public Space" within the Representations;

- identifying aspects of school education where joint action, at an EU level, can support the Member States;
- strengthening Eurobarometer;
- implementing the Pilot Information Networks (PINs) to improve communication between European and national politicians and with other opinion formers.

In addition, the Commission, within the coming months, proposes to:

- adopt a new internet strategy to support civil society networks and private or public sector websites with an EU focus which promote contact with or between European citizens;
- adopt a new audiovisual strategy to support networks of broadcasters across Europe in producing and broadcasting EU affairs programmes;
- launch a follow-up communication to Plan D, as well as a new set of Plan D civil society projects, with the overall objective of supporting the ratification process for the Reform Treaty (Lisbon Treaty) and increasing participation in the 2009 European Parliament elections;
- examine the possible consolidation and extension of recent successful experiences in reinforcing the work of the Representations.
- It should be noted that, from a budgetary perspective, this communication will have a direct impact on the human and budgetary resources of the Commission (refer to the financial factsheet in the annex).