

Active dialogue with citizens on Europe

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Gyula HEGYI (PES, HU) on active dialogue with citizens on Europe.

The report recalls that a democratic and transparent European Union will require an **enhanced dialogue** between citizens and the European institutions. It notes that people with an inadequate understanding of European Union policies or of the Treaties are more likely to oppose them.

MEPs recall that surveys show that the less educated and less affluent a Union citizen is, the more likely he or she will be to oppose further European integration. In this context, they regret the fact that 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. They therefore stress the importance of creating cohesive communication links with targeted content both between the EU and the regions with particular characteristics and between the EU and particular social groups.

MEPs stress the need to complete the ratification process of the **Treaty of Lisbon**, which will further increase the transparency of the EU and the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. They recall, in this context, the new opportunities for participatory democracy that the Treaty of Lisbon would provide, especially the **citizens' initiative**. They stress, however, that participatory democracy means not only listening to the citizens, but giving them real opportunities to influence European policy.

The report also stresses the importance of the **consultation process** as an effective tool in empowering citizens by enabling them to input directly into the policy process at EU level. It therefore calls on the Commission to take further steps to disseminate information in time on future EU consultations via the media and other appropriate forums at national, regional and local levels.

The Commission is called upon to improve the cooperation and coordination between its representations in the Member States and the Parliament's information offices. Moreover, the Commission and Parliament representations in Member States should improve cooperation when it comes to consulting citizens, sharing information, knowledge and ideas about the EU with citizens. MEPs also call on the three main institutions to consider the possibility of holding **joint open debates** that would supplement the Parliament's open debates, addressing topics that concern consumers and their daily lives.

The report also calls on the Commission to extend its dialogue to all levels by adapting its message to **different target groups** according to their social backgrounds. Moreover, Member States should launch effective EU communication campaigns at national, regional and local level and the Commission should disseminate the best practices identified from such campaigns.

At the same time, the report calls on the Commission to launch local, small-scale communication campaigns with the involvement of local actors, and to promote activities enabling citizens to be better informed about immigrants' countries of origin and, equally, to better inform immigrants of the rights and duties attached to EU citizenship.

MEPs stress the importance of introducing European politics and history into the school curricula of each Member State so as to strengthen European values, and of developing the European Studies departments within university programmes. They call on the Commission to provide financial support for the promotion of these projects.

The report welcomes the Commission Communication entitled 'Communicating about Europe via the Internet – Engaging the citizens', which sets out clear objectives as to how the Europa website can be turned into a service-oriented web 2.0 site. It urges the Commission to complete construction of the new site as early as 2009. In particular, the report calls on the Commission to collect and publish on this webpage the experiences of beneficiaries of the activities funded under Plan D. Moreover, the Commission should make better use of the audiovisual material available on Europe by Satellite by establishing links with local television channels and community media.

MEPs also ask the Commission to strengthen its coordination efforts in the fields of consumer education and information on **consumers' rights and obligations** by increasing its financial and human resources. At the same time, Member States are called upon to boost the financial and human resources allocated to the European Consumer Centres Network in order to raise awareness and ensure the application of EU consumer rights. Member States should also increase the human and financial resources allocated to the SOLVIT network.

Lastly, MEPs call on the Commission to promote programmes and campaigns for **encouraging women's social, political, and cultural activeness**, taking into account women's role in the dialogue between generations and society's sustainability and prosperity. Girls and women should be given better information on the concept of European citizenship and the rights pertaining thereto and the Commission should include more women in task forces and working groups, engaged with the issues of family life, childcare and education.