Information and communication: strategy for the European Union

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Juan José de BAYONA de PEROGORDO (EPP-ED, E) on an information and communication strategy for the EU. MEPs underlined the crucial importance of information policy in the context of enlargement and of drafting a European Constitution. The report affirmed that citizens had the right to have access to a full, impartial and objective flow of information on the EU, in their own language and "in plain language". The diffusion of this information in all official languages recognised within the Member States and lesser-used languages should be ensured by the appropriate authorities. Information on the EU institutions should be available in the official and co-official languages of the existing information and representation offices and of the new offices in the applicant countries. The information distributed by the EU must highlight the "common European values", namely democracy, pluralism, security, solidarity, equal opportunities, cohesion, etc., and at the same time show citizens the practical advantages in their daily lives of belonging to the Union. MEPs expressed concern at the poor turnout in European elections (49% in 1999) and called on all the EU institutions, the Member States and the applicant countries to "make an exceptional information effort" for the elections to the EP in June 2004. They wanted the information campaign to be centred particularly on the use of television. Given the efforts that were needed, the committee was concerned by the insufficient short- and medium-term financial and budgetary estimates for a real information policy. However, it was appreciative of the Commission's intention to consolidate interinstitutional cooperation and establish a joint strategy in this area. MEPs confirmed their own commitment to closer cooperation between the EU institutions, the creation of more synergies between EP and Commission activities, a rationalisation of structures, the most effective use of staffing resources and making savings in administrative expenditure. They also welcomed the fact that the subject of the 'EU's role in the world' was regarded as a priority of the PRINCE programme. More generally, the committee wanted to see more decentralisation of the EU's information activities, involving not only the Member States but also the national parliaments and the regional and local authorities. It also said that Parliament's information offices should play a more significant role, in cooperation with their local partners, in implementing and adapting on the ground the institutional strategy that had been defined. The EU institutions were urged to enhance their efforts to develop specific training programmes for media professionals. In addition, MEPs wanted an annual debate on EU information policy to be held in plenary sitting before the budgetary guidelines for the following year were laid down. Lastly, the report called for the EU's information strategy to be directed towards women in the applicant countries as well, and for gender-neutral non-discriminatory language to be used in information and communication campaigns.