Information and communication: strategy for the European Union

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PURPOSE : to adopt a new information and communication strategy for the European Union. CONTENT : following a request from the European Council and the European Parliament, the Commission today agreed on a new approach to information and communication. The strategy outlines the importance of working more closely with the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament in real partnership with the Member States to inform citizens better about European issues and to enable them to participate in European debates. For the first time decision-makers at European, national and regional level will be working together to close the European information gap. The Commission proposes a two-pronged approached: - giving the European Union the capacity to formulate and disseminate messages geared to and focused on the various priority information topics; - establishing a voluntary working partnership with the Member States fostering synergy between their structures and know-how and the activities of the European Union. The new information and communication strategy stems from a political determination shared by the three institutions, which will be given shape by the decisions of the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI). It implies a change of culture for each of the institutions, entailing major adjustments, especially in terms of coordination, so as to improve the provision of information and ensure that it reaches the European public. In agreement with its partners, the Commission had already identified three priority information topics: - enlargement; - the future of the European Union; and - the area of freedom, security and justice. It is now proposing a fourth: the role of the European Union in the world. Besides the political awareness shared by the three institutions and the Member States, the proposed strategy is based on internal evaluations (consolidated result of the round table meetings organised by the representations and replies to a questionnaire from the various networks) and on preliminary external studies of the strategy itself and the state of public opinion in Europe (focus groups). In addition, information and messages must be geared to local realities, languages and perceptions and to the specific interests and concerns of the various target groups. The Commission will very shortly begin taking the main measures to put the strategy in place in line with the attached action plan (Annex 3). The strategy should be operational, at least as far as its broad lines are concerned, from the beginning of 2003; however, it will only be able to develop its full potential in the medium term. The Commission therefore proposes that a review be scheduled for 2005 with all the parties involved in order to carry out an exhaustive evaluation of progress achieved and to determine any new lines of action that are required for an enlarged Europe, once the new Commission and Parliament are in place and the next Intergovernmental Conference has been held.