The information and communication policy in the European Union

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In adopting the report by Mr Peter PEX (EPP, NL) on communication policy in the Union, Parliament considered the establishment of an effective information and communication policy for the European institutions to be essential. It called for the setting of a global financial envelope for support activities of the Union's priority policies and for support to encourage citizens' participation in the European Parliament elections in 1999. With regard to the Commission, Parliament considered that it should make better use of multimedia applications both in public and private places and at home. Activities should be undertaken in relation to schools and pupils using appropriate publications. Parliament stressed the need to match the information made available more closely to the main target groups such as the press, education establishments, industry and private citizens. The Commission should also carry out feasibility studies on European communication policy in order to ensure that citizens were provided with quality information. Specific campaigns aimed in particular at young people, women or those in a precarious situation would be welcome. Specific information for decision makers should also be planned. The Commission was called on in all its official documents to use simple and clear language and to submit a proposal allowing public access to legislative documents. Parliament also proposed the establishment of greater cooperation between Parliament and the Commission on all communication activities directed towards the general public concerning general information on the functioning of the institutions and the contents of policies adopted. However communication activities directed towards the press and those concerning activities of the two institutions as regards the specific institutional responsibilities would be executed by the separate information departments of the two institutions. Within the framework of the working party on ongoing information activities it called for the establishment of regular coordination meetings between the Vice-President of Parliament with responsibility for information, the chairmen of Parliament's Committees on Budgets and Culture and the Director-General of Parliament's DG III and the Commissioner with responsibility for information and the Director-General of the Commission's DG X. This Working Party would be responsible for the coordination of the information and communication activities of the European Commission and the European Parliament and the follow- up of the combined activities of both institutions. It would meet once every three months, would assess the activities on a regular basis and would propose the appropriate guidelines for their development. It would also be responsible for a series of associated initiatives. The Commission and Parliament should also recognize the need for greater coordination of their communication activities and more effective decentralization of information (making better use of the offices in the various Member States). Combined use of their audiovisual infrastructures and respective press centres should also be considered whenever possible in order to make most effective use of resources. Parliament also proposed the opening of European Union Houses combining the information offices of Parliament and the Commission. These centres would offer one-stop shopping to citizens seeking information on European Union activities and the specific responsibilities of both institutions. As part of the decentralization of the institutions and the strengthening of their presence at local level, Parliament called lastly for the strengthening of the Info Points (including funding). It also advocated a strengthening of interinstitutional cooperation, intensifying contacts with citizens, decentralization, mobility and rotation of staff at external offices and value for money. On this point Parliament, as the budgetary authority, considered that it should investigate the appropriate amount of funds necessary to realize an information policy in conformity with its targets. In particular it called for an increase in the information budget in 1999 and for the definition with the Commission of an action programme in this field.