Information and communication: strategy for the European Union

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This Commission communication concerns the implementation and communication strategy for the European Union. If the EU's information and communication strategy adopted on 2 July 2002 is to succeed it must be adopted at the highest policy-making level and must itself be based on the institution's policy priorities. The forthcoming years must be used to consolidate the achievements of the EU's information and communication strategy since July 2002. The enlargement of the EU only enhances the importance of the concepts of partnership and decentralisation that underlie this strategy.

Its successful implementation will depend on the tasks the Commission sets itself and the Member States in this growing field of communication and on the resources that are available.

In the case of the Commission, the initiating, coordinating and planning role of the central administration must be enhanced, but at the same time the tasks of the representations must be defined in a way that is more in keeping with their resources.

The cohesiveness of the strategy will also require better coordination of the Commission's own resources as regards both its means of communication and its internal communication culture

From now on, these objectives should be implemented in a new context characterised by the necessary adjustment of the resources available with a view to the Union's enlargement.

In accordance with its institutional prerogatives, the Commission will have to face this new situation with staff numbers unchanged for its headquarters and particularly limited human resources for the establishment of 10 new representations. Thus, 2005 will be the first year in which the information and communication strategy will apply in full in EU-25.

The Commission believes that the principal objective is "to improve perception of the European Union and its Institutions and their legitimacy by deepening knowledge and understanding of its tasks, structure and achievements and by establishing a dialogue with its citizens". This includes in particular raising the quality of European public debate, associating the public in European decision-making, listening to the public and their concerns more attentively, and the methodical, consistent rebuilding of the EU's image.

As stated in its communication of 2 July 2002, the Commission has so far concentrated on four defined priority information topics: enlargement, the future of the Union, the area of freedom, security and justice, and the euro. It has also obtained Parliament's and the Council's agreement for a fifth PRINCE topic in 2004 – the role of Europe in the world – the more fully to meet the concerns of the Union's citizens.

The fact that various significant events will be taking place in 2004 makes it absolutely essential to update the strategies underlying the different priority information topics mentioned. In the first place this concerns enlargement. This communication strategy must be pursued beyond the decisive date of 1 May 2004; it should not be confined to simply explaining the arrival of ten new Member States but should also cover the ongoing negotiations with the other candidate countries and the further dimension of the new neighbourhood policy. This involves educating the public about a continuing process of drawing the frontiers of tomorrow's Union. The guidelines laid down by the Commission in its communication of 10 May 2000 are still the appropriate reference.

A review is even more warranted where the future of the Union is concerned. The negotiations at the Intergovernmental Conference are still going on, and the new strategy to be implemented with regard to the new constitutional treaty will therefore have to take account of the European elections and, in particular, of the new timetable for future negotiations.

Beyond 2004, which is a transitional year, it is also essential to think about the relevance of other topics, which may, with an eye to consistency, correspond more fully to the Commission's policy priorities.

Apart from updating current topics, the timetable for 2004 will also provide an opportunity

for preparing, for 2005, a better match between the strategic priorities of the new Commission, set out each year in the Annual Policy Strategy decision, and the various priority information topics. Full account will also have to be taken of the fresh priorities identified in the new financial perspective.

The Commission is of the opinion that the enlargement of the EU will have to be flanked by a greater degree of interinstitutional cooperation, based on better programming and a more structured redefinition of the various priority information topics for 2005 and subsequent years. The programming will also have to be multiannual. It could, for instance, cover a four- to five-year period (2005-2009), accompanied by annual monitoring and mid-term review, based on impact indicators yet to be defined, the more accurately to reflect Parliament's term and the Commission's mandate.

The Commission deals with the issue of the means available to the Commission which are both centralised and dispersed. Meeting the challenge of developing information and communication strategy in the context of EU-25 requires not only the adaptation and extension of all means to this new horizon (partnerships proposed with the Member States as well as with their local and regional bodies, relays and networks, various audiovisual tools, multimedia and surveys), as well as the provision of sufficient resources both at headquarters and in the 25 representations.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT :

- Total allocation for action (financial intervention and technical assistance): EUR 193.239 million in CA (EUR 65.169 million in CA in 2004; EUR 63.835 in 2005; EUR 64.235 million in 2006.

- Period of application : 2004-2006.

- Overall multiannual estimate of expenditure 2004-2006 (commitment appropriations and by budget line) :

- Financial intervention : EUR 179.205 million broken down as follows:

16 02 02 – Citizens' information via the media : EUR 28.165 million;

16 02 03 – Direct communication – Media : EUR 8.300 million ;

16 03 01 - Public opinion analysis and proximity actions : EUR 22.800 million;

16 03 02 - Actions in the field of communication : EUR 27.190 million;

16 04 02 - Tools for information to the citizens : EUR 24.250 million;

16 04 03 - Communication tools : EUR 15.900 million;

16 05 01 - Information outlets : EUR 52.600 million.

Technical assistance : EUR 14.034 million broken down as follows :

16.01 04 01 - General information work concerning the EU : EUR 0.540 million;

16010402 – Information outlets : EUR 0.942 million;

16010403 - PRINCE Programme : EUR 8.352 million;

16010404 - Communication work : EUR 4.200 million.

- Overall financial impact of human resources and other administrative expenditure : EUR 3.900 (1.300 million EUR/year.

- Total cost 2004-2006: EUR 197.139 million.