Implementing the information and communication strategy for the European Union

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The Council has adopted conclusions on the information and communication strategy for the European Union. It agrees on the necessity to regularly update the selected information topics and the underpinning communication strategies in line with the information needs of citizens as identified, inter alia, in opinion polls and surveys. It underlines, in the context of the "Future of Europe" priority topic, the need for Member States and Institutions to deploy major efforts to ensure that European citizens are well-informed about the future Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. Council invites Member States and the Commission to implement special communication actions aimed at addressing the information needs of all schools students. The Council considers that the objectives and content of campaigns on "Enlargement" should be redefined and adapted in the light of the accession of the ten new Member States. It stresses the need to put greater emphasis on the "Area of Freedom, Security and Justice" by increasing budgetary allocations and by undertaking joint information initiatives on aspects of particular relevance to citizens like the fight against crime and terrorism.

Great importance is attached to the "Role of Europe in the World", including the need to inform citizens on ESDP, especially in connection with the missions being carried out under that policy; calls for interested Member States and Institutions to consider co-ordinated activities in this regard in the forthcoming years. It urges strongly that budgetary allocations and personnel resources for priority topics under the PRINCE programme should be consistent with the communication challenges ahead, at both institutional and local level. The need need to facilitate effective co-operation between Member States and the Commission's Representations in the Member States is underlined.

Moreover, it recommends the future regrouping of the PRINCE budget in a single budget line in

order to make the best use of available funds. It shares the Commission's view that PRINCE should continue to be based on partnership between Commission and Member States. "Strategic partnerships" are considered to be the most practicable option for implementation and invites interested Member States to define and carry out joint communication plans whose measures are financed separately but complementarily by Member States and the Commission.

Concerning the information relays and networks, the Council notes their extremely pro-active role as multipliers of information and considers them to be crucial suppliers of information to the general public and wishes to preserve their valuable experience and know-how. The need to create a stable legal framework which guarantees funding of networks from 2005 onwards and their operability, thus preventing any interruption in the flow of information provided to the public was agreed.

The Council reiterates the key-role of the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI) in laying

down guidelines for EU communication and information activities, selecting the priorities for future initiatives and making suggestions for the conduct and financing of the major information campaigns. Lastly, it stresses the need to implement the EU communication and information strategy in

conformity with the IGI orientations.