Basic information

2006/2087(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
European communication policy with citizens. White paper **Subject** 1 European citizenship 3.30.25.02 Information programmes and action plans	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
CULT Culture and Education	HERRERO-TEJEDOR Luis (PPE-DE)	13/02/2006

Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
LIBE Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs	CASHMAN Michael (PSE)	15/05/2006
AFCO Constitutional Affairs	ONESTA Gérard (Verts/ALE)	21/02/2006

European Commission

Commission DG	Commissioner
Communication	WALLSTRÖM Margot

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
01/02/2006	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2006)0035	Summary
06/04/2006	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
09/10/2006	Vote in committee		Summary
17/10/2006	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0365/2006	
16/11/2006	Decision by Parliament	T6-0500/2006	Summary
16/11/2006	Results of vote in Parliament		
16/11/2006	Debate in Parliament		
16/11/2006	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2006/2087(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Strategic initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	CULT/6/35389

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Amendments tabled in committee		PE376.783	29/08/2006	
Committee opinion	LIBE	PE376.362	18/09/2006	
Committee opinion	AFCO	PE376.431	05/10/2006	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0365/2006	17/10/2006	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0500/2006	16/11/2006	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Non-legislative basic document	COM(2006)0035	01/02/2006	Summary

European communication policy with citizens. White paper

2006/2087(INI) - 01/02/2006 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to present a White Paper on a European Communication Policy.

CONTENT: the European Commission has prepared this White Paper on Communications in order to address the perceived gap between the EU and its citizens. The purpose of this White Paper is to launch a wide ranging consultation process in European communication policy in general. Recent Eurobarometer opinion polls indicate that few know about the EU. Those that do feel they have little say in its decision-making process. Informed Communication, according to the Commission, is key to addressing this challenge. The ultimate aim of the White Paper is to implement specific proposals relating to the five areas for action which have been identified.

Last year, the Commission set out an Action Plan with a detailed list of specific measures to improve its Communication strategy. Measures include, for example, reinforcing the Commission representation offices, enhanced internal co-ordination and planning, language presentation and more access points for EU citizens. As well as these measures, the Commission has launched a “Plan D for democracy, dialogue and debate”. For these to succeed, however, the Commission states that other forces need to be considered. Hence the publication of this White Paper, the purpose of which is to propose a way forward and to invite all interested parties to contribute ideas on how to close the gap between the EU and its citizens. The result should be a forward-looking agenda for better communication and an enhanced European debate. The White Paper seeks to engage, long term, all levels of government and organisations. In Part I the Commission’s vision of what an EU Communication policy should be and do is outlined. Part II, identifies the key areas for consultation and future action. More specifically, the Commission has identified five areas for action in partnership with the other EU institutions, Member States and civil society:

1) Defining common principles: the **right to information and freedom of expression** are at the heart of democracy in Europe. References to these principles are included in the EU Treaty and in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights4. These must be the starting point in a process aimed at

defining common principles and a shared vision for an EU Communication Policy. Other important principles also lie at the heart of communication:

- **Inclusiveness:** all citizens should have access in their own language to information about matters of public concern. It also means that people from all walks of life in all EU countries should be helped to develop the skills they need to access and use that information.
- **Diversity:** European citizens come from widely diverse social and cultural backgrounds and hold a wide variety of political views. EU communication policy must respect the full range of views in the public debate.
- **Participation:** citizens should have a right to express their views, be heard and have the opportunity for dialogue with the decision-makers. At EU level, where there is an added risk that institutions are remote from the citizens, this principle is of particular importance.

The common principles and norms that should guide information and communication activities on European issues could be enshrined in a framework document – for example a European Charter or Code of Conduct on Communication.

2)Empowering citizens: Future work in this area could aim at **three main objectives**:

- **Improving civic education;**
- **Connecting citizens with each other;**
- **Connecting the citizens and public institutions.**

Even if civic education is a national or regional responsibility, the EU can help to ensure exchange of best practice and facilitate the development of common educational 'tools' so that the European dimension is reflected more effectively. Member States could be invited to explore the best ways to bring together European teachers in this field, for example through a network, a special programme within existing structures such as the College of Europe, or in a new structure with a view to exchanging ideas on innovative approaches to civic education and to learn new skills. Another important project to be developed by the Member States would be the transformation of libraries into digitally connected European libraries.

The EU institutions and bodies :

- could work together to co-ordinate, improve and extend their visitors' programmes;
- should explore the possibility of complementing EU websites with online forums - 'virtual meeting places' – with links to external information sources;
- must continue their efforts to connect better with citizens. The Commission's *minimum standards for consultation* could be reviewed to ensure a more balanced representation of interest groups and a more responsive follow-up;
- could also consider organising joint open debates to complement Parliamentary debates, taking questions from the public or from journalists.

3) Working with the media and new technologies: action should focus on the following targets:

- **Giving Europe a human face;**
- **Taking account of the national, regional and local dimension;**
- **Exploiting the potential of new technologies.**

The EU institutions should be better equipped with communication tools and capacities. They should also explore with a wide range of media players how to better provide the media (pan-European, national and local) with material which is relevant for them, with a view to adapting the information to the needs of different countries and segments of the population.

4) Understanding European public opinion: EU institutions could work more closely together on designing and planning ***Eurobarometer surveys*** and on disseminating the results. Public discussions between the EU institutions and civil society organisations could accompany every new Eurobarometer survey. The first stage could come with a special series of Eurobarometer polls and qualitative studies on EU Communication in spring 2006.

5) Doing the job together: a partnership approach must involve all key actors: Member States, institutions, local and regional authorities, political parties, civil society, etc.

Cooperation between the national and European levels could include new initiatives taken at national level: public and parliamentary discussion on the Commission's annual strategic priorities; face-to-face discussions between national ministers and European Commissioners, broadcast in the national media, etc. New, structured, forms of cooperation among national authorities dealing with public communication should be initiated with a view to sharing experiences on communicating Europe and in order to develop joint initiatives. The **EU institutions** should pursue a more co-ordinated and citizens-oriented approach. In particular, the scope for co-operation between the Commission and the **European Parliament** could be broadened and current working arrangements under the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI) could be upgraded. This would include a review of current initiatives under the PRINCE budget lines.

The consultation period will run for six months. At the end of this period, the Commission will summarise the replies and draw conclusions with a view to proposing plans of action for each working area.

For further information concerning the financial implications of this measure, please refer to the financial statement.

European communication policy with citizens. White paper

2006/2087(INI) - 16/11/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the White Paper on a European communication policy, based on the own-initiative report drafted by Luis **Herrero-Tejedor** (EPP-DE, ES). The resolution was adopted with 285 votes in favour to 54 against with six abstentions.

Communication policy and the European public sphere: Parliament welcomed the White Paper and saw the need to improve communication between the EU and its citizens. It felt, however, that certain principles on the two-way nature of communication did not find any practical expression in the White Paper. It called on the Commission to specify how it intended to take into account citizens' views and suggested that possible initiatives such as 'Agora', a body that Parliament has decided to set up for the purpose of consultation with civil society representatives, be incorporated. The Commission was urged to support the creation of a European public sphere, primarily structured through national, local and regional media. Parliament called upon Member States to encourage the national public audiovisual channels adequately to inform the citizens about the policies conducted at European level.

Definition of common principles: Parliament did not consider it appropriate to submit itself to a code of conduct that regulated its communication with EU citizens. It asked the Commission to propose a draft interinstitutional agreement defining the common principles that could channel cooperation between the European institutions as regards communication. The Commission was urged to explore the possibility of launching of a genuine Community programme, for information and communication on Europe, in order to improve existing interinstitutional partnership mechanisms in this field. Parliament emphasised the importance of reference to the Charter of Fundamental Rights and a Constitution for Europe.

Reinforcing the role of citizens: the development of a local European administration, able to support the numerous existing European Union information points, would help to form strong direct links between the Union and its citizens. It would improve citizens" access to the European initiatives and programmes that affect them. In this connection, there was a need for a thoroughgoing review and rethink of the work carried out to date by the information offices in Member States. Parliament felt that their public relations activities did not appeal to citizens and the resources earmarked for them could be used far more efficiently. They should be more political and less bureaucratic.

Parliament went on to state that, in order to reach the citizen, it was important to communicate better and show the relevance and impact of EU decisions for daily life through cooperation with regional and local institutions. Emphasis should be placed on communicating regularly to the citizens about relevant regional and local projects in which the EU had participated, with the objective of favouring a common European project.

On the question of consultation with stakeholders and the public, Parliament considered that key proposals could be accompanied by an additional section in the impact assessment specifying how citizens´ concerns have been taken into account when drafting the proposal.

Working with the media and new technologies:stressing the importance of the media as intermediaries, opinion formers, and carriers of messages to the citizen in the European public sphere, Parliament asked the commission to define with precision, which role it would like to assign to the media. A formula must be found that involved national, regional and local media more closely in communication policy, for which the use of alternative media as a communication channel should also be considered. Furthermore, European cooperation between media and journalists benefited reporting on the EU. Parliament asked the Commission to set up, as part of the budget, a European Fund for (Investigative) Journalism that supported projects in which journalists from several Member States together explored a European subject in depth and apply it to the differences in local and regional situations.

Parliament welcomed the withdrawal of the proposal on the creation of an EU news agency. It recommended that the Commission use clear and concise language when communicating with the media and citizens, and that it did so systematically in the official languages of their Member State of origin or residence. EU jargon increased rather than closes the gap between the EU institutions and citizens.

Understanding European public opinion: the establishment of an Observatory for European Public Opinion was regarded as questionable in the short term. Parliament considered that before such a task was carried out, more coordinated use should be made of the data and resources already available. It moved on to call for Eurobarometer personnel to carry out an exhaustive opinion survey in order to gauge exactly how well informed Community citizens were, distinguishing them according to their country of origin, socio-professional category, and political leanings.

Collaboration: Parliament asked the Commission to draw up concrete proposals for the implementation of the communication policy and to evaluate its legal and financial implications. The work of the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI) should be analysed to see if improvements were possible.

Parliament reiterated that the EU was often viewed as a single whole by citizens, who were not thought to understand the finer distinctions between the institutions. The respective communication policies of each institution should therefore be coordinated in a joint approach, while respecting the responsibilities and autonomy of each of them. There needs to be an annual interinstitutional debate for the purpose of adopting a joint declaration on the objectives and means of implementing this policy.