



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 7 May 2014
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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Working Party on Information on 25 April 2014

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda set out in document CM 2389/14 was adopted.

2. Transparency / access to documents

a) Confirmatory application No 10/c/01/14

– **Docs. 8198/14**

8199/1/14 REV 1

The Chair presented the application and explained the approach proposed in the draft reply (doc. 8199/1/14 REV 1), i.e. to confirm the full refusal given at the first stage to the requested documents pursuant to Article 4(1)(a), third indent of Regulation No 1049/2001 (protection of the public interest with regard to international relations) and, in the absence of an overriding public interest in release the documents, also pursuant to the second sub-paragraph of Article 4(3) of the same Regulation (protection of the decision-making process of the Council).

Delegations agreed unanimously to the draft reply which is planned to be submitted to COREPER II on 30 April 2014 and subsequently to the Council (ECOFIN) on 6 May 2014.

3. Communication / information policy

a) **Communicating Europe in partnership: results of the horizontal evaluation of the Management Partnership Agreements (MPs)**¹

The Commission's DG COMM representative outlined the methodology of the exercise (desk research on national evaluations for the 2009-2012 implementation period; online survey involving the three partners and the coordination teams and stakeholders from the 18 Member States concerned; phone interviews with national partners from a selected number of countries.

The horizontal evaluation confirmed that this cooperation model has contributed to the improvement of the overall cooperation between institutions and national authorities and to enhance coordination and synergies in inter-institutional communication. In most cases, the overall good functioning of the tripartite planning facilitated MS' smooth implementation.

The report therefore recognises the MP's positive impact on the implementation of common communication priorities and their effectiveness in reaching communication targets and audiences.

It was also noted that communication through classical tools and channels was favoured over web or social media and that outreach activities were favoured over dialogue-oriented activities.

¹ The report, which was distributed to delegations on 11 April, is published on Europa: <http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/evaluation/search/download.do?documentId=10529698>.

The critical issues were:

- the delays caused by the administrative burden, which often hindered efficiency;
- some weaknesses in delivery and distribution (timing of actions and dissemination and exchange of information across borders);
- the lack of balance between "outreach" (simple spreading of information) and dialogue-oriented activities;
- the lack of a better defined planning framework and of an equal reporting format (among others, the reporting process not being based on modern technology), which also caused some trouble to the contractor when carrying out the horizontal evaluation.

The main recommendations made in the evaluation report can be summarised as follows:

- to maintain the partnership approach between the Commission, the Parliament and the Member States;
- to ensure a clear identification of communication needs already in the planning phase;
- to make a better use of online technologies as communication tools (as well as for planning and reporting);
- to put a stronger emphasis on dialogue-oriented activities.

The Commission's representative concluded the presentation with an overview of the state of play of partnerships and presented the current partnership options:

- the "strategic partnership" (SP) model (still based on a joint communication planning and on a structured dialogue);
- the "one-off partnership" (cooperation on a case-by-case basis).

The Commission informed that, in addition to the five already existing SPs, three additional Member States have meanwhile signed an agreement of this kind, while other countries prefer to complete ongoing projects (which are still using the 2013 MPs budget) before signing new agreements.

It is to be noted that the two abovementioned partnership options do not provide for delegation of funds (as it was the case for MP's), each partner being responsible for the financing and managing actions.

Several delegations intervened in the discussion. Their comments can be summarised as follows:

FR: explained that it was very satisfied with the functioning of the MP in France. It can also agree with the main recommendations of the evaluation report. This delegation confirmed that it has signed in the meantime a strategic partnership agreement, however only until the end of 2014, as a temporary solution. It expressed its interest to continue with the tripartite partnership and highlighted the importance to put in place permanent structures. France remains attached to the principles set out in the inter-institutional declaration "Communicating Europe in Partnership" signed on 22 October 2008 ().

HU: reiterated the effectiveness of the MP in Hungary and could also concur with the report's recommendations. This delegation is prepared to continue partnership with the EU institutions, taking into account the current increasing wave of euro-scepticism which can only be effectively challenged by communicating in partnership. A "one fits all" partnership option is not a good solution, since communication activities need to be adapted to the local level. Due attention should continue to be paid to focusing on real needs of the audiences and enhancing openness, transparency and local ownership.

IT, supported by LV: explained that it was not surprised about the positive results on MPs' performance described in the evaluation report. Although MPs generated some administrative burden, they were a very effective tool to communicate in partnership. The Italian and Latvian delegations asked the Commission to elaborate more on the strategic partnership model, in order to better understand this instrument.

In a forward-looking spirit, Italy agreed on the importance to continue to work in partnership and wonders whether it is time to reconsider and update the 2008 interinstitutional declaration. In this context, it finally recalled the importance of the partnership approach in the selection of the interinstitutional communication priorities foreseen according to the declaration.

DE: is also satisfied with the horizontal evaluation, which it welcomed as an excellent tool to enhance interinstitutional cooperation in communication, also taking into account this period preceding the European elections. It shared the other delegations' concerns and agreed that it is now time to concentrate on the future and focus on how to go forward with strategic partnerships. In the German delegation's view (supported by LV, the good recommendations contained in the evaluation report deserve to be discussed within the WPI format.

The Latvian delegation suggested that the WPI should also work as a forum where Member States that have signed the strategic partnerships can share their views before signing a memorandum.

MT, which supported the DE, IT and LV delegations, expressed its regret that the shutting down of the management partnerships was announced only a few weeks after the Maltese authorities signed the new MP agreement. The way forward should be a permanent inter-institutional strategy based on a long-term partnership and not an ad-hoc case-by-case approach. Therefore this delegation is not in favour of one-off partnerships.

LT: agreed with the arguments and approach of the DE, IT and LV delegations. This delegation is also in line with the HU delegation: to promote European values effectively, it is of utmost importance to conclude a solid partnership with the Commission and the EP on the ground. The Lithuanian delegation did not see the added value in signing a strategic partnership agreement and pointed out that the lack of EU funds to support communication is particularly problematic when there is an increasing need to contrast euro-scepticism.

PT: doubts if the results of the horizontal evaluation are representative for all Member States. Some main findings of the report do not take into due account the very positive implementation of the MP in Portugal, which was not among the countries selected by the contractor for its interviews. Moreover, in the Portuguese delegation's view, random initiatives such as "Back to School" and other single activities could never be as successful as the ones organised in a more structured framework such as the MP.

SE: expressed its support to the DE, LV and IT delegations and explained that Sweden is now looking into the possibilities of concluding a strategic partnership.

BE: wondered if the model for a strategic partnership memorandum of understanding had been distributed to the Member States, in particular to the Permanent Representations in Brussels.

In reply to the comments and suggestions made by delegations, the Commission's representative:

- reiterated that the key feature of future collaboration remains the tripartite model and that its institution is committed to continue cooperation on this basis;
- clarified that the responsibility for the selection of MS for interviews belonged to the contractor, but all Member States which had a MP agreement where somehow reached during the horizontal evaluation, in particular through the on-line survey;
- explained that the Commission had already circulated a model for memorandum of understanding in view of strategic partnership agreements (circulated by the Council Secretariat by e-mail on 26 November 2013);

- explained that co-financing in the framework of strategic partnerships is fully flexible. It is up to the partners to decide how and how much they contribute. Strategic partnerships are flexible instruments which are adaptable to the local needs.
- supported delegations' proposal to analyse the report's recommendations further. The Commission does see the value in developing discussion within the WPI, but would also wish to see more practical than formal discussions.

At the end of the discussion, the Chair:

- acknowledged that the end of management partnerships has an impact on the functioning of the Declaration "Communicating Europe in Partnership", which had given an impetus to the interinstitutional cooperation on a day by day basis;
- suggested that, 2014 being a transition year (European elections, new Commission mandate), the WPI reflects on the following questions for preparation towards 2015:
 - = strategic partnerships: are they a bilateral or an interinstitutional tool irrespective of the number of Member States concerned?
 - = should the 2008 Declaration "Communicating Europe in Partnership" be revisited ? If so, talks should begin as soon as possible since it will take time to get the approval from all Member States.
 - = should the WPI select common communication priorities for 2015 ? Since 2014 is a transitional year because of the elections and the changes in the Commission, the Member States should decide whether 2014 is a year in which to talk about joint priorities within the WPI (no legal obligation) or postpone the exercise until 2015.

The Chair would welcome WPI delegations' replies to the above questions and suggested to come back to this issue at one of the next WPI meetings.

b) European elections 2014: update on the implementation of the communication strategy

The European Parliament DG COMM representative gave an update on the implementation of the EP's information campaign for the upcoming elections, in particular on the "offline" media plan in Member States such as the TV and radio spot and visuals for cinemas and public transport. The TV spot will be transmitted on Euronews and Eurosport in addition to national chains, while the radio spot will be transmitted also through the EURANET circuit.

The EP's presentation also included information on online communication tools such as the tablet application "Box your EP", social media youth activation (Fb app "I'm a voter") and the broadcast dynamics of the elections' results, as well as a "Story Changers" cartoon, a video for first-time voters and other relevant info from the dedicated website.

The representative of the EP's audiovisual services focused on the organisation of the presidential debate which will be held in Brussels' emicycle on 15 May with all 5 candidates and on the election night (TV-channels, stand-up positions, studio's, VIP invitations, etc.).

The Commission DG COMM representative provided complementary details on communication activities organised by the Commission Representations' in the Member States (also circulated in writing to delegations). She referred to the strong engagement of the Europe Direct network and to several initiatives planned at central level or in the individual Member States ("Back to School", "Running for Europe Team", a series of publications "EU explained", monthly articles being published on the Commission's homepage and on "Europa", a seminar for 120 journalists foreseen on 5-6 May, and the "Europe around the Corner" project).

c) EU institutions' Open Day, Brussels, 17 May 2014

The General Secretariat of the Council outlined its initiatives planned to celebrate "Europe Day":

- traditional activities (a guided tour in EN/FR/NL/DE; a variety of information stands, including the EEAS, the ECB, the EIB and several EU agencies; a quiz to test the public's general knowledge of the EU;
- new activities: film and debate in EN/FR/NL/DE , presentation on GALILEO applications, a social media stand with focus on the 10th anniversary of EU membership for 10 Member States.

The European Commission (DG COMM) presented the Commission's communication activities foreseen on 17 May which are inspired to the theme "European citizens and democracy" and are marked by 3 anniversaries (100 years WWI, 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the 10th anniversary of EU membership for 10 Member States). Apart from the traditional activities such as the guided tour to the College meeting room, workshops and stands, there will also be new activities such as interactive games, a "democracy tree" in front of Berlaymont, etc.

The European Parliament's representative gave a brief overview of activities foreseen in Brussels on 17 May in the EP's premises: debates with MEPs, visits to the hemicycle, stands of political groups and DGs, thematic villages on the esplanade, etc.

4. Any Other Business

a) **Twelfth annual report of the Council on the implementation of Regulation No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents**

– **Docs. 6972/14**

6972/14 COR 1 (fi)

6972/14 COR 2

Following the presentation of the report at the WPI meeting of 7 March 2014, delegations were requested to submit possible comments to the report by Monday 14 April in view of today's WPI meeting. No comments were received by the General Secretariat within the deadline or raised at today's meeting.

Consequently, the draft report will be listed on the agenda of COREPER II on 7 May in view of its adoption by the Council (General Affairs) on 13 May 2013.

The NL delegation wondered whether the General Secretariat saw any room for improvement where it concerns the documents in the public register of the Council.

The General Secretariat pointed out that all non-sensitive documents submitted to the Council or to one of its preparatory bodies, which are to serve as a basis for the deliberations and the decision-making process of the institution, are automatically recorded in the Council's public register as standard (ST) documents. The number of ST documents recorded vary over time, according to the overall activity level (e.g. the number of on-going legislative procedures) within the institution.

The NL delegation also raised the issue of the need for more transparency with regard to delegated and implementing acts and recalled that her Government had received several requests for improving the traceability of such acts from the Dutch national parliament. A solution to this issue should be found at the EU level rather than at national level.

A number of delegations (DE, FI, IT, SE and AT) shared the concerns expressed by the NL delegation.

Commission pointed out, that while procedures are in place for informing Member States of delegated and implementing acts, the information available to the general public is somewhat fragmented, in particular with regard to delegated acts.

The Chair concluded that discussions on this highly important topic might be held in various, different fora. However, since discussions on the issue had already been launched in the Friends of the Presidency Group, this Group should take the lead. The WPI would be informed and could contribute to the discussion as per necessary.

The Chair also recalled that the website of the Council is currently undergoing a general overhaul in order to adapt it to the users' requirements. A solution aiming at improving the traceability of delegated and implementing acts could be envisaged within the framework of this rationalisation process.

b) New Narrative for Europe: the way forward

The European Commission informed the WPI on the future steps on this initiative. The main output of this project is the declaration “The mind and body of Europe” made in Berlin on 1st March 2014 adopted as a result of interwoven conferences organized by the Commission in four Member States (http://ec.europa.eu/debate-future-europe/new-narrative/pdf/declaration_en.pdf).

The Commission Representations will organize ad hoc events to debate on the content of the document and to feed a debate on the *raison d'être* of the European Union and the way in which it is to be explained to citizens. The final goal is recovering citizens' confidence in the European project.

The Commission would welcome Member States authorities' participation in the above-mentioned events.

c) **Club of Venice plenary meeting, Riga, 5-6 June 2014**

The Latvian delegation presented the programme for this meeting, which consists of three sessions:

- Thursday 5 June (morning) : European elections: lessons learned and future cooperation challenges in the field of communication;
- 5 June afternoon: strategic communication, with focus on strategies in times of political unrest and economic crisis;
- Friday 6 June: governmental communication plans in progress.
