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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
On:	13 July 2022
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Summary of discussions at the meeting of the Working Party on Information (Communication) on 11 July 2022

The meeting covered as information points the communication priorities of the Czech Presidency, insights from Europe Day and a Commission project. The main item of substance was the exchange of views on communicating the impact of EU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted, as set out in CM 3852/2022. The Chair presented the agenda, going through each item briefly.

2. Communication priorities of the Czech Presidency of the Council

- *Information from the CZ delegation*

The Chair congratulated the Czech delegation on the start of the presidency. The Czech delegation made a short presentation, covering the logo and a few video clips explaining the rationale. The motto of the Presidency is Rebuild, Rethink, Repower (Europe as a task). The CZ delegation presented the communication priorities, activities prior to the start of the presidency, the official website, social media accounts, series of mini-festivals EU Roadshow, as well as the media campaign and debates for the general public.

The Czech delegation also listed several events planned for Brussels and Prague (details available on the presidency website www.EU2022.cz). The Presidency communication team was briefly introduced.

The Chair warmly thanked the French delegation about their work during the French presidency and the Commission echoed these thanks and welcomed the Czech presidency.

One delegation noted the CZ communication priorities focus a lot on communicating to CZ national audiences. CZ noted the eurosceptic trends in its population and the need to counter also national-level disinformation. Workshops in Prague are organised for Czech journalists, to brief them on what's going on in Brussels.

3. Communicating the impact of EU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in EU Member States

- Exchange of views

The Chair introduced the topic by summarising some of the latest findings from opinion polls organised at EU level (slides available), which showed broad support for EU actions, but also some concern regarding the economic impact of the war. The Chair also presented GSC communication products, with three main elements - EU response, solidarity, impact of the invasion. Visuals on the food crisis were shown as an example of a well-performing product. The webpages of the Council with content related to Ukraine attracted over 650k visits. A social media campaign in EU27 in June reached more than 10mln people.

The Commission delivered a presentation (slides available) on their communication activities on the topic. A website was launched on 25 February to help Ukrainians refugees find useful information, including links to relevant national websites. The relevant web content and the Europe Direct centre phone number became available also in Ukrainian and Russian (in addition to all EU official languages). The Commission also gave the example of food security as a key focus area in their communication.

The CZ delegation briefly presented how they communicate on the efforts to help the refugees and noted challenges linked to the expected population reaction to the economic situation. It was noted that the pro-EU sentiment increased at national level in recent times. Considering that spread of disinformation needs to be further addressed at EU level, the **CZ delegation** suggested a mapping exercise on countering disinformation, including non-state actors. Questionnaire to be drafted by the presidency and distributed to all WPI delegates.

EEAS expressed support in principle for such a mapping, while recalling the main types of work performed by Stratcom (EUvsDisinfo) and giving examples of recent well-performing, if unorthodox, products. The Commission and several delegations welcomed the initiative and look forward to its result. There was also a call to avoid duplicating work that happens in other working groups and bodies.

In general, disinformation is identified as a serious issue in the majority of countries. A few countries noted disinformation as a challenge and some have their network of experts dealing with early detection of disinformation.

In many countries the public opinion support for EU actions as response to Russia's invasion is high or broadly positive. At the same time, many delegations warned about the war fatigue, rising energy and food prices that could lead to lowering public support for EU actions. Some countries have mentioned public support for the candidate status for Ukraine.

Several countries have tailor-made communication activities to specific target groups. Those include, for example, to companies negatively impacted by the sanctions, to local population on help provided to refugees, to Russian speaking population.

Many countries praised the EU produced materials, and some called for more of factual explanatory content for customisable and adaptable materials in national languages. Some called for LTTs in connection with impact on third countries, with the Western Balkans and Africa being explicitly mentioned (in the context of the food crisis narratives by Russia). Several welcomed materials and analytical information produced by EEAS StratCom. Eurobarometer polls were welcomed, many countries shared their own national data and there were calls for further work in this direction.

The Chair invited delegates to share ideas and requests also after the meeting.

4. AOB

a) Insights from Europe Day 2022

- Information from the GSC and the Commission

The GSC shared main results from Europe Day 2022 (slides available), noting that this year's main challenge had not been reopening after the pandemic, as expected initially, but rather finding the right tone of voice in light of the war in Ukraine and thanking delegations for their support. GSC also noted the positive feedback from visitors on the interactions with Member States' stands and

information received. The GSC highlighted the cooperation with FR and CZ presidencies on the mobile expo.

The Commission welcomed the cooperation between institutions, described the main focus of its activities for the Open Day and outlined the numerous activities in the Commission representations and in the EU delegations marking Europe Day.

Some called for a more sustainable way of organising Europe Day in the future, aiming to engage more on content with the visitors. The Commission and the GSC shared this view.

b) Building Europe with Local Councillors

- Information from the Commission

COM briefly presented the project – a call for all local authorities to nominate locally elected councillors to build a pan-European network. Built on examples from some countries, they would communicate on EU topics in their constituencies and get privileged access to information. The Commission stated they aim for close cooperation with the Committee of the Regions. In this context, AT shared their experience with European councillors, which started in 2010, aiming to share what's going on European level within the municipalities (over 1900 local councillors are members).

COM mentioned the availability of all language versions of the brochure on the new visibility requirements.

5. Next procedural steps

The next meeting of the Working party on Information (Communication) is scheduled for 7 October 2022.
