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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Working Party on Information on 17 October 2014

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as set out in document CM 4494/14.

2. Transparency / Access to documents

- a) **Confirmatory application No 29/c/01/14**
Docs. 1355914
13560/14

The General Secretariat presented the draft reply contained in document 13560/14. It was pointed out that an additional paragraph explaining the reasons why partial access could not be granted to the requested documents would be inserted in the final reply.

SE underlined that it did not object to the proposed decision but only to the drafting of the reasons given. IT took the floor wondering whether it would not be better to release the two documents in question, in order to avoid unjustified concerns about the contents of the documents.

The General Secretariat indicated that the draft reply would be submitted to the European Council for adoption by written procedure.

3. Communication / Information Policy

a) Re-organisation of the Commission's spokespersons' services

The Commission's designated Chief Spokesperson outlined the main changes of the future spokespersons' service (SPP).

There will be no "portfolio spokesmanship", but a limited pool of (15+2) of political communicators who will speak *on the record* across the spectrum, each on a number of policy areas:

The 28 to 30 press officers assigned in the Commission's DG's will harvest and process more in-depth sectorial information to share with the spokespersons. They will also be able to speak *on the record* but mainly provide *off record backing*.

Each Commissioner will be assisted in his/her communication strategy by his/her communication advisors/private office members, who will not speak *on the record* themselves (no directly dealing with the media) but will be acting as a functional link for the spokespersons.

It is envisaged to bring more Commissioners to the press conferences.

The designated Chief Spokesperson highlighted that the Member States' spokespersons, considered a "friendly force", will be privileged contact points and the SPP wants to be a key service provider for them, considering their contacts with national media actors. He finally expressed the wish to organise formal (through the WPI) and informal meetings with MS' press officers on a regular basis, to provide updates on work in progress.

In reply to questions, the Commission representative:

- reiterated that the midday briefings will not be cancelled. They will however be upgraded and made more attractive, with more news-worthy stories;

- explained that the communications portfolio will not be attributed to a Commissioner. The Commission's SPP and DG COMM will fall under the direct responsibility of the President-designate Juncker and this will make it easier to develop a common SPP's and DG COMM's information and communication policy;
- the Commissioners-designate are all good listeners, taking into account that they are all former politicians. Responsiveness must be at high level.

In conclusion, the Chair welcomed the proposal for future cooperation, which could also take place through ad hoc meetings with spokespersons of Permanent Representations.

b) Communication aspects of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)

The Chair introduced the item by referring to the declassification of the TTIP negotiating directives as approved by Coreper on 9 October, which invited the Information Working Party to further discuss how the EU's communication strategy on this matter could be enhanced.

The Italian Presidency ('the Presidency') indicated that it has since long been advocating more transparency in communicating on the TTIP. It therefore considered that the publication of the negotiating directives was a good step forward, since citizens can now appreciate which issues are part of the mandate.

Reporting from the informal meeting of the External Trade Ministers held in Rome on 15 September. The Presidency recalled that:

- discussion was not focused on the information and communication aspects, but on the substance of the TTIP file;
- a large majority of the Ministers expressed satisfaction with the declassification of the negotiation directives, but recalled that this does not constitute a precedent;

- MS' authorities should continue to organise public events on this subject with representatives from civil society, the business sector and trade unions (one of these hearings took place on the eve of the informal ministerial meeting and was well covered by the media);
- seminars and conferences, in particular at the moment when there are fierce demonstrations against the TTIP, can help citizens better understand the issue and enable all stakeholders to better join discussions through/on the media.

The Commission (DG Trade) outlined the main elements of the Commission's response to the TTIP communications challenge. Against the background of large media interest (but mostly negative coverage), the growing large-scale campaigns in Member States, the public's misperceptions and the general scepticism around the TTIP, the aim of the Commission's communication strategy is mainly to explain the basics of the negotiations and to address criticism.

To do so, the Commission has undertaken to:

- upgrade media and press relations (e.g. by means of journalist seminars);
- ensure cross-communication coordination through the different Commission services;
- organise national debates (with the EC representations and/or in partnership with national authorities);
- discuss also communication and transparency implications in the meetings of the Council's Trade Committee;
- set up a network with Member States' contact points where to upload material, exchange best practices, etc. (MS are encouraged to contribute to it actively);

- increase transparency by publishing EU position papers, develop factsheets and infographics, EU and US negotiators exchanging views with stakeholders and public consultations as an input to prepare negotiations. It is worth to note that in this regard the Commission has set up an advisory group with representatives from the business, consumers and labour sectors;
- develop further the dedicated website, on-line conversations and social media.

A number of challenges remain:

- credibility and trust are still at low level;
- in the light of the decision to release the negotiating directives, there may be risks of implicitly generating a feeling of secrecy around the matter;
- there are still difficulties in showing benefits of an agreement with negotiations ongoing;
- there are not enough resources compared to the scale of opposition (grass-root action campaigns will be organised);
- the Commission has not enough resources to engage in national debates, thus governments' support and mobilisation of national stakeholders are crucial.

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

- delegations welcome the declassification of the negotiation directives, but some of them consider this only as a first step towards full transparency;
- several actions, though, have already been taken to enhance transparency: publication of the directives with specific comments for the public, publication of parliamentary requests and their reply, citizen's dialogues, public opinion research and explanatory publications, cooperation with stakeholders to communicate on the most controversial issues, provision of information material on the dedicated TTIP website, in all EU languages;
- cooperation with stakeholders is already taking place in a number of Member States (e.g. an advisory group of representatives of the trade unions, advocacy groups and public services set up in Germany, seminars organised in Stockholm, Washington and Brussels). Some Member States already collaborate intensively with the EC representations to organise communication activities in this domain, and some are ready to engage in a more structural exchange of information (studies, surveys, etc.);

- the different issues could be explained through micro-examples and real stories referring to future benefits. Those good examples showing the benefits of the agreement could be shared at transnational level, bilaterally or within the WPI, which is considered as a good format to discuss the different aspects of the communication strategy for the TTIP;
- the Commission's approach to enable Member States to inspect the negotiation documents only in meeting rooms located in Brussels should be revised. There is room for more transparency in this regard (e.g. by granting MS' authorities access to these documents through ad hoc secured electronic means);
- although reference was also made to public dialogues already organised between the EU Commissioner and the US representative, increased cooperation with the US partners and access to their position papers should also be taken into consideration.

In reply to delegations' comments, the Commission (DG TRADE and DG COMM):

- reiterated that communication on the TTIP will certainly remain a priority for the next year;
- informed that each EC Representation has a TTIP expert who is able to help Member States' authorities communicate on the TTIP and organise tailor-made communication activities;
- welcomed the initiative of some Member States to accompany the publication of the negotiation directives with annotations;
- recognizes that the current system which enables Member States to access the negotiation documents is not ideal. However, it should be noted that this is clearly an issue of handling of EU documents internally and should be kept distinct from the need for communication and transparency towards the citizens;

- explained that, in some aspects of the TTIP, there will be room for communication with the US counterpart;
- highlighted that cooperation with all Member States (e.g./ through the dedicated network) is crucial.

Concluding the debate and as "food for thought" for discussion in one of the next meetings of the Information Working Party, the Chair invited delegations to reflect on the following points:

- with regard to **informing** on the TTIP:
 - despite the communication efforts made, an information deficit remains. How can this be met ?
 - to what extent can websites/documents be put at the disposal of citizens in all EU languages ?
 - is there room for cooperation between the Commission and the Member States to monitor the development of public opinion on the TTIP ?
- with regard to **communicating** on the TTIP:
 - in which manner can best practice be exchanged ?
 - how can outreach through social media be increased ? Is there room for cooperation with Member States, the Commission and the Parliament ?
 - the TTIP website needs to be linked to Member States websites and vice-versa.

c) **Communicating Europe: inter-institutional communication priorities for 2015**

The Presidency recalled the main elements of its note forwarded to delegations ⁽¹⁾, underlining that:

- the exercise is in line with points 9 and 10 of the Declaration "Communicating Europe in Partnership" of 22 October 2008² ;
- the suggested topics for common communication priorities draw inspiration from the priorities of the current semester, the 18-month Trio Programme and the orientations emerged in the strategic agenda approved by the European Council in June 2014;
- it would be ideal to reach an agreement within the WPI by the end of the year. To this end, the European Parliament and the European Commission are invited to formulate suggestions as soon as they are ready to join discussion and, subsequently, to take note of converging views together with the Council at the next meeting of the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI).

The Commission (DG COMM) said they are working on guidelines for implementation of communication activities on the basis of the strategic agenda set out by the Commission President-designate Juncker. In the Commission's view, the objectives of that agenda overlap largely with the strategic points set out by the European Council.

The European Parliament said that Mairead McGuinness, the newly appointed Vice-President responsible for communication, already had a number of exchanges with the EP bureau on this matter. She also sent a letter to Commission President-designate Juncker inviting him to start cooperation with regard to communication matters as soon as possible.

⁽¹⁾ doc. 14055/14 INF 289

² Point 9: "*Whilst respecting the individual responsibility of each EU institution and Member State for its own communication strategy and priorities, the three Institutions will, in the framework of the IGI, identify yearly a limited number of common communication priorities.*"

Point 10: "*These priorities will be based on communication priorities identified by the EU Institutions and bodies following their internal procedures and complementing, where appropriate, Member States' strategic views and efforts in this field, taking into account citizens' expectations.*"

Several delegations expressed general agreement with the Presidency's proposal. In particular, they:

- welcomed the link with the European Council's strategic agenda and stressed the need to maintain this reference in the list of selected priorities;
- indicated that joint communication should be the norm, since diverging messages would give a fragmented vision of the EU and increase citizens' bad perceptions;
- recommended to keep the list of priorities short;
- insisted that the budgetary aspects of the implementation of the priorities should be discussed.

The future LV and LU Presidencies supported the Italian Presidency and explained that they will take all necessary actions to implement the communication on these priorities during their respective semester.

The Presidency will present an updated presidency note at the next WPI meeting.

In conclusion, the Chair:

- reiterated that the list of priorities should be kept short;
- with regard to the time table, further discussion will take place at the next WPI meeting on 20 November on the basis of a revised presidency paper; then, adoption through Coreper/Council as an I/A item and approval by the three institutions at a forthcoming IGI meeting;
- requested the Group to reflect on the following question: in absence of communication partnerships, how can the priorities be implemented ? Is there still room for manoeuvre for 2015, taken into account that the budgetary procedure for that year is almost completed ?

c) Redesign of Council website - state of play

The General Secretariat presented a preview of the new website for the Council family (Council, European Council and Eurogroup) which will be launched in November once completed.

4. Any Other Business

**a) Complaint 689/2014/BEH to the European Ombudsman
- Information by the General Secretariat
Doc. 12937/14**

The General Secretariat informed the Working Party on the Secretary-General's reply to the Ombudsman, as set out in doc. 12937/14.

**b) Initial request for access to documents relating to restrictive measures against Russia (ref. 14/1424)
- Information by the General Secretariat**

The General Secretariat informed the Working Party of the state of play as regards the initial request for access to documents relating to restrictive measures against Russia (ref. 14/1424), a request which had been received by the Commission, the EEAS and a majority of Member States in addition to the General Secretariat.

The General Secretariat also underlined the need for close coordination between the Member States and the General Secretariat in order to avoid discrepancies between the handling of the requests at national and European level, respectively. In this context, the delegations' attention was drawn to Article 5 of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001.

c) Latest EP post-elections survey and EP DG COMM orientations for the new legislature

The European Parliament informed delegations on the outcome of a recently conducted survey "after the elections", explaining in particular lessons learnt and summarizing citizens' reasons for not voting. The results of the survey will be published in the coming days.

The European Parliament also outlined the future plans of the EP DG COMM in the field of communication in the new legislative period. The Vice-Presidents in charge of communication will focus in particular on the following domains: corporate identity (branding), a new visitors' strategy, engaging with young people, rethinking web presence and a reflection on the evolving media landscape.

d) Club of Venice plenary meeting, Rome, 13-14 November 2014

The Presidency gave a brief overview of the agenda for this meeting.

e) "The Promise of the EU" joint conference, Rome, 12-13 September 2014

The Presidency informed the group about the main features of the event "Promise of the EU" which was organised jointly with the Commission DG COMM.
