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COMMISSION WORKING DOCUMENT

Proposal for an

INTER-INSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENT

on Communicating Europe in Partnership

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Proposal for an

INTER-INSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENT

on Communicating Europe in Partnership

The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission of the European Communities (hereinafter referred to as "the three Institutions"),

Having regard to the Treaty on European Union, the Treaty establishing the European Community and the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (hereinafter referred to as "the Treaties"),

Having regard to the Commission's Communication "Communicating Europe in Partnership" adopted on 3 October 2007 - COM(2007) 568.

Whereas:

Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states that everyone has the right to freedom of expression and this right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

Citizens expect to receive objective information concerning European issues and reflecting all views, to be provided as a public service in particular by the EU institutions and Member States.

Decisions should be taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen, pursuant to Article 1 of the Treaty on European Union.

The three Institutions attach the utmost importance to improving communication on EU issues in order to help European citizens exercise their right to participate in the democratic life of the Union.

The three Institutions attach the utmost importance to the principle of loyal cooperation between the Community and the Member States in order to achieve the objectives of the Union.

The three Institutions consider that an Inter-institutional Agreement would be a useful tool to facilitate cooperation among the institutions and bodies of the Community and also with the Member States.

The aim of such an Inter-institutional Agreement is to achieve a convergence of views on the main communication priorities of the European Union as a whole, to identify the added value of an EU approach to communication on specific issues, to develop synergies between the institutions when carrying out activities relating to these priorities and to encourage Member States to cooperate,

Have agreed as follows:

I. COMMON OBJECTIVES

1. Information and communication on European issues should pursue the following objectives:

- To give everyone access to fair and diverse information about the European Union;
- To enable everyone to exercise their right to express their views and to participate actively in the public debate on European issues.

All public actors in the European Union have a responsibility to pursue these objectives, observing the principles of inclusiveness and pluralism, participation and empowerment, openness and transparency.

2. While recognising the different responsibilities of each EU institution, this Inter-institutional Agreement highlights the need for and the added value of better coordination in the way EU institutions and bodies communicate on EU issues. It provides a framework for coordinated action to this end.

3. Together with the EU institutions and bodies, Member States have an essential role to play in disseminating information on EU issues at national, regional and local level in order to reach out to as many citizens as possible.

II. SIGNATORIES

4. The European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission agree to cooperate in implementing the above common objectives through this Inter-institutional Agreement. They invite the other EU institutions and bodies to support their efforts and to actively contribute to a coordinated approach to communication on EU issues.

5. While recognising that participation in this process is entirely voluntary, the three Institutions encourage all Member States to participate actively in this common endeavour to communicate on EU issues.

III. INTER-INSTITUTIONAL GROUP ON INFORMATION

6. The three Institutions recognise the leading role of the Inter-Institutional Group on Information (IGI) in coordinating communication on EU issues.

7. The three Institutions shall be represented in the IGI by the Vice-Presidents of the European Parliament and of the European Commission responsible for communication and by the competent representative of the Council, usually the Presidency.

8. The Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee shall participate in the work of the IGI as observers.

9. The IGI shall have the following tasks:

- Defining broad guidelines for coordinated communication on EU issues;
- Selecting the annual EU communication priorities based on a proposal from the Commission reflecting the Annual Policy Strategy (APS);
- Adopting the annual common work plan of communication activities, based on actions proposed by each institution;
- Monitoring the implementation and follow-up of the annual common work plan.

10. The IGI shall be assisted by an inter-institutional technical group whose task shall be to prepare, implement and follow up the decisions taken.

IV. PLANNING

(i) Selection of EU Communication Priorities

11. When presenting its Annual Policy Strategy, the Commission shall establish its own communication priorities. On this basis, the Commission, at IGI level, shall suggest to the other Institutions and the Member States a limited number of EU communication priorities for the year to come.

12. In addition to these EU communication priorities, each institution shall be free to develop its own separate communication activities geared to its specific stakeholders and public.

(ii) Common work plan

13. Once the EU communication priorities have been agreed upon by the IGI, each EU institution and body shall inform the IGI of their communication actions and the financial resources they intend to devote to implementing the agreed EU communication priorities. The Council shall present the corresponding actions and financial resources planned by the Member States.

14. On this basis, the Commission shall prepare a common annual work plan and submit it to the other EU institutions. The common annual work plan shall be sent for information to the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.

15. After validation by the IGI, the common annual work plan shall be duly taken into consideration by each institution when preparing the Budget.

16. Each EU institution and body shall implement the common annual work plan and related initiatives in accordance with its own competences and means.

V. GOING LOCAL

(i) Member States

17. The three Institutions recognise the role of each Member State in communicating Europe on a national, regional and local level, in its respective official language(s).

18. They encourage each Member State to nominate a high-level contact person as "national communication director" in matters relating to communication on EU issues and to submit an annual report on its own EU-related communication activities.

19. The three Institutions agree to organise, at least twice per year, meetings of all national communication directors in order to share information and disseminate best practices, thereby encouraging and supporting the involvement of the Member States in communicating on EU issues.

20. They also agree to develop the electronic EU Information Network (EU-Infonet) in order to facilitate the permanent monitoring of communication on EU issues.

(ii) European Institutions

21. The three Institutions recognise the need to organise the relationship and reinforce joint communication activities between Parliament's offices and the Commission's Representations in the Member States, in close partnership with national authorities.

22. They shall encourage in each Member State regular meetings between the Heads of the Commission's Representation, the European Parliament's Information Office and the corresponding national communication director to discuss matters relating to EU communication issues.

23. The three Institutions agree to develop new and extend existing partnerships with Member States in order to translate the EU communication priorities into specific action at national, regional and local level.

24. They agree to make best use of all existing communication tools and networks which act as an interface between the EU and its citizens.

VI. MONITORING, ASSESSMENT AND ANNUAL DEBATE

25. Without prejudice to their own autonomy, the three Institutions recognise the need to monitor efficiently the implementation of the jointly agreed work plan.

26. The IGI shall annually assess the results of the work plan on the basis of the reports presented by each EU institution.

27. The three Institutions agree to hold an annual debate on communication in order to assess the implementation of the work plan and to provide guidance for the coming year.

28. This annual debate will be held in the European Parliament. It will be attended by the three Institutions and will take place in the presence of the Council Presidency. The consultative bodies will be invited to participate.

VII. REVIEW CLAUSE

29. The functioning of this Inter-institutional Agreement shall be reviewed at the beginning of the term of office of the incoming Commission and Parliament.