



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 3 May 2013

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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

from: General Secretariat of the Council

to: Delegations

Subject: Outcome of proceedings of the Working Party on Information on 25 April 2013

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda set out in document CM 2498/1/13 REV 1 was adopted.

2. Communication / information policy

a. "Back to School"

The European Commission (DG COMM) gave an overview of the successful implementation of "EU Back to School" in 2012 and the ongoing 2013 campaign, on the basis of the feedback received from students, schools authorities and media coverage (an added value given the chance to report on EU issues to citizens through the regional and local media). It also informed about the training calendar and a wide variety of information material available to support officials who volunteer to join the initiative.

The Commission's representative emphasized the importance of this initiative in terms of awareness-raising and sharing knowledge with youngsters. Furthermore, reference was made in particular to the opportunities for Member States for joining the program and to the engagement of a number of political authorities who have visited their old schools in this context.

The General Secretariat of the Council (GSC) informed the Working Party about the revamping it has undertaken to promote the "Back to School" programme throughout its staff, bearing in mind that 2013 is the "European Year of Citizens" which is an ideal platform to raise awareness in view of the 2014 European elections (students who are now graduating will exercise their right to vote for the first time on that occasion). The Council Secretariat is also organizing information/training sessions for its staff, sometimes jointly with the Commission.

The GSC representative explained that Member States could choose to cooperate in different ways, e.g. by joining EU civil servants who visit their old schools, sending communication officers who could present national initiatives aiming to communicate Europe and interact with the young audiences, helping in logistics, sharing information material, providing internet coverage, etc.

The Italian delegation underlined that Italy has recently started taking part in the initiative by participating in joint conferences with the Council staff in that country. It also emphasised that the programme offers excellent opportunities to "give Europe a local face".

The Dutch, Austrian and German delegations gave a brief overview of the "Back to School" experience in their country, underlined the positive feedback received. In Austria, Germany and the Netherlands "Back to School" is organised directly by the competent national authorities and in some circumstances are merged with other initiatives focussing on communication with youngsters. In this context, the Dutch and Austrian delegations also informed the Working Party about the increase of visitors (and especially student groups) to their Permanent Representations in Brussels.

The Chair, taking note of the increasing success of the initiative, suggested :

- to put the "Back to School" item on the agenda of a future WPI meeting in order to continue to exchange feedback and exchange views on follow-up and enhancement;
- with regard to the issue of the visitors' groups: to share at a future WPI meeting statistics on visitors and latest information of the EU institutions' visitors' centres (including the results of a survey to be launched by the Council Secretariat among Member States' Permanent Representations regarding their visitors' policy).

b. EU institutions Open Day, Brussels, 4 May 2013

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

- traditional activities (a film; a guided tour in EN/FR/NL/DE; a variety of information stands with participation of the current IE and future LT Presidency; a general quiz on EU issues);
- new activities : guided tours interpreted into international sign (in FR and EN); an event at the Info Point Europa in Rond-Point Schuman, co-organised by the Council and "ThinkYoung", which will provide the opportunity for young people to debate with senior EU officials and professionals about their challenges and reflect on how to shape the future together; a social media stand.

The European Commission (DG COMM) presented the Commission's communication activities foreseen on 4 May (e.g. largest citizen's postcard, "EU admission tests", games, role-playing, guided tours, etc.). The Commission plans, drawing inspiration from the theme of the "European Year of Citizens", to celebrate the Europe Day 2013 by enabling the public not only to discover the Commission's working places and activities by visiting the Berlaymont building, but also to participate in citizens' debates organized throughout the city.

The European Commission also informed the WPI about its new Visitors' centre which is being inaugurated on that occasion. The Centre will open its doors from 14.00 to 17.00 with visit tours by groups of 20 people at the time.

The European Parliament's representative gave a brief overview of its activities foreseen in Brussels on 4 May, informing the WPI that the celebrations of the Europe Day in Strasbourg will take place on 19 May.

c. Preparation of the next meeting of the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI), Brussels, 15 May 2013

The WPI focused on the only discussion item foreseen on the agenda of the next IGI meeting, which is the implementation of the EP's communication strategy for the European elections 2014.

The European Parliament shared information on the structure of the campaign, which aims to raise awareness and will allow for a political debate highlighting the new legislative powers the EP has since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

The main calendar steps may be summarised as follows:

- September 2013: launch of the "general information" campaign
- October 2013 thru February 2014: "thematic months" to develop communication on the EU's achievements in the previous five years (focus on the economic crisis, financial and monetary issues, employment, role of the EU in the world and quality of life)
- March-May 2014 : launch of the "Go to Vote" campaign: raise awareness of the election date, presentation of candidates of European political parties for the post of Commission President
- After the elections: communication activities on the constitutional EP plenary session and the election of the Commission President

Implementing instruments and timeline:

- audiovisual material to launch the campaign through a strong visual message, public events and promotional material (posters, leaflets, billboards, information in the newspapers, social networking, etc.)
- support to TV debates organised at national level to amplify/magnify their impact (including connection with EbS and other circuits)
- A platform to connect the spokespersons of the EP political parties
- early December 2013: launch of the web portal on the elections, with two distinct sections ("politics" and "policies")
- end of December 2013: press pack on-line ("mémoire législative"), with links to press releases, information material and info-graphics in 24 languages

In reply to a question raised by the Irish Presidency, the European Parliament representative confirms that the material which will be published on the elections portal will be made available in all the official EU languages.

The Chair expressed his appreciation for the EP's efforts in adopting its communication strategy reasonably in advance and for providing information on the information campaign already at this stage. The EP's representative informed that updated information on this issue is expected to circulate at the next IGI meeting and in subsequent WPI meetings. The Chair encouraged Member States to take up contact with the European Parliament contact points as soon as possible to start exploring room for cooperation.

3. Transparency / access to documents

a. Annual report on the implementation of Regulation No 1049/2001 on access to documents

The General Secretariat of the Council presented the annual report 2012 contained in document 7952/13. As in previous years, the document reports on the implementation of the access to documents rules by the Council and contains

- an overview of the Council's transparency policy and practice,
- an analysis of the requests for public access received and processed during the year,
- information on complaints lodged with the European Ombudsman and legal action taken, and
- statistics on requests for access

In addition to the observations made following the presentation, delegations are invited to send possible further comments on the report to the GSC as soon as possible, so as to enable the GSC to submit an updated version of the document to the Working Party at its next meeting on 16 May before it is submitted to Coreper and Council for final approval.

b. Confirmatory application N° 06/c/02/13

The General Secretariat of the Council presented the application and explained the approach proposed in the draft reply (doc. 8292/13), i.e. to grant extended partial access.

The Working Party agreed with the draft reply which is planned to be submitted to Coreper on 2 May 2013 and subsequently to the Council on 13 May 2013 for adoption.

4. Any Other Business

a. Annual report on the implementation of the 2012 inter-institutional communication priorities

The European Commission (DG COMM) informed the WPI on the state of play of this report, outlining its conceptual aspects, its structure and some elements of its conclusive Chapter which will suggest ways to improve interinstitutional cooperation and future activities in partnership. The report is expected to be finalised towards mid-May 2013.

b. Exhibition "Strangers to Citizens: The Irish in Continental Europe" - Europe Info Centre, Rond-Point Schuman, Brussels, 3-24 May 2013

The Presidency informed the Working Party about this exhibition which will provide a visual history on Irish migration and integration, focusing on prominent Irish people and their experiences in "continental Europe" in the 17th and 18th centuries.

c. Joint WPI/Club of Venice seminar "Public communication in the evolving media landscape: adapt or resist?" (Brussels, 22 March 2013)

The Chair recalled this successful semi-annual event organised in the Council's premises and was attended by EU governmental and institutions' officials as well as by external experts. A detailed outcome of this seminar will be circulated at a later stage.

d. Complaint 167/2013/RT made by Mr David Price to the Ombudsman - Information by the General Secretariat

This complaint relates to the reply of the Council to the confirmatory application which was examined by the WPI at its meeting on 11 May 2012.

Although full access to this document should still be refused, the possibility of partial access has been reconsidered once more, given developments since the date of the Council's confirmatory reply (22 May 2012). The Council has therefore concluded that access to some further parts of the document may now be granted.

Following this meeting, the reply will be submitted to the Secretary General for signature and consequently sent to the Ombudsman.

In his letter, the Ombudsman has asked to inspect the document that has been withheld from the complainant. Coreper authorised this inspection on 27 February 2013, and a preliminary date for this inspection has been fixed.

**e. Complaint 1854/2012/KM made by Mr Lorand Bartels to the Ombudsman
- Information by the General Secretariat**

The complaint concerns the Council's decision of 28 July 2011 to refuse full access to three Council documents.

Following inspection by the Ombudsman's representatives on 28 January 2013 of the relevant documents in accordance with Article 3(2) of his Statute, the Ombudsman invited the Council to respond to the inspection report by considering whether further partial access to both documents was possible

The Council's reply does not contain observations on the complaint as such and is therefore without prejudice to any additional comments which the Council may wish to make should the Ombudsman decide to open a formal inquiry.

Given that a considerable amount of time has passed and that there have been developments relating to access granted to documents with a content similar to the documents under scrutiny here, extended partial access can now be granted to two of the documents.

Also in this case, the reply will be submitted to the Secretary General for signature and subsequently sent to the Ombudsman.

f. Handling of documents internal to the Council

The NL delegation drew attention to the limitations imposed by the "Guidelines for Handling of Documents internal to the Council" (doc. 11336/11), notably when dealing with such documents in parliamentary public discussions.

It was agreed to put the matter back on the agenda of the Working Party for one of its forthcoming meetings, once delegations have had time to reflect on the matter.