



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 20 September 2013
(OR. en)**

13847/13

**COMPET 664
MI 780
IND 255**

COVER NOTE

From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Mr Jordi AYET PUIGARNAU, Director
date of receipt:	17 September 2013
To:	Mr Uwe CORSEPIUS, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union
No. Cion doc.:	COM(2013) 636 final
Subject:	COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION Empowering businesses and citizens in Europe's single market: An Action Plan for boosting Your Europe in cooperation with the Member States

Delegations will find attached document [COM\(2013\) 636 final](#).

Encl.: [COM\(2013\) 636 final](#)



EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Brussels, 17.9.2013
COM(2013) 636 final

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Empowering businesses and citizens in Europe's single market:
An Action Plan for boosting Your Europe in cooperation with the Member States**

(Text with EEA relevance)

I. Aim of the Action Plan

The single market is a key driver for growth. This growth potential can only be unleashed, however, if businesses and citizens know and understand what rights and opportunities they have and are able to make effective use of them.

Your Europe (<http://europa.eu/youreurope>) offers practical and user-friendly information on EU rights in the single market, in 23 languages¹. Its target audience are citizens and businesses interested in exploring the many opportunities the EU has to offer them: people wanting to study, work, do business, travel, get healthcare or live abroad, as well as people staying at home but shopping on-line, looking for a bank account, for telecom services, etc.

People coming to Your Europe should find all the information they need to understand their EU rights and what it takes to exercise them in any Member State of the EU. Your Europe also aims to direct people to any further assistance or help they may need, as well as to relevant e-government services.

Your Europe was launched in 2005² and entirely revamped in 2010,³ in line with the Communication "Towards a Single Market Act"⁴ and the 2010 EU Citizenship Report on dismantling the obstacles to EU citizens' rights.⁵ As it is essential for people to find out about EU rights but also how to exercise them in a particular country, Your Europe is a joint project of the Commission and the Member States. The portal has become an important reference point for citizens and businesses. Its content is expanding continuously, and the number of visits it receives is steadily increasing, to about 16,000 visitors a day.

There is, however, more that can and should be done. Evidence shows that people are still in need of more and better information about their EU rights, in particular about what it takes to exercise rights at national level and in a cross-border context (*cf. infra*). In line with the 2012 Communication on Better governance for the Single market⁶ and in response to repeated calls from the European Parliament⁷ and the Council⁸, this Action Plan sets out concrete measures to help overcome this gap:

- It sets out the Commission's plans to further bolster, develop and promote Your Europe as a gateway to all the information and help businesses and individuals need to make use of their EU rights in the single market;

¹ Your Europe currently offers EU level information in 23 languages (all official languages but Irish) and information about national rules in the language(s) of the country and English

² Following Decision 2004/387/EC on interoperable delivery of Pan-European eGovernment services to public administrations, businesses and citizens (IDABC), Annex II.A.a.

³ Following the 2008 Action Plan on an integrated approach for providing Single Market Assistance Services to citizens and businesses, SEC(2008)1882

⁴ COM(2010) 608 final/2

⁵ COM(2010) 603 final, Action 21

⁶ COM(2012)259/2

⁷ [European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2012 on 'Single Market Act: The Next Steps to Growth' \(2012/2663\(RSP\)\)](#)

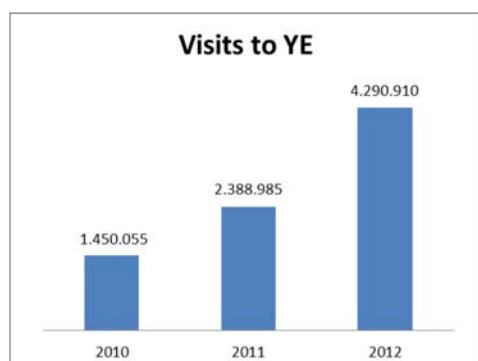
⁸ Conclusions of the Competitiveness Council meeting on 30 and 31 May 2012: "the Council underlines the importance of continuously updated and multilingual information through Your Europe by the Commission in cooperation with the Member States."

- It calls on Member States to provide practical information on the way EU rights apply in practice, and sets out concrete proposals to ensure that such information is within easy reach of citizens and businesses across Europe. It also calls on Member States to ensure that information offered through Your Europe is easily accessible via national governmental portals.

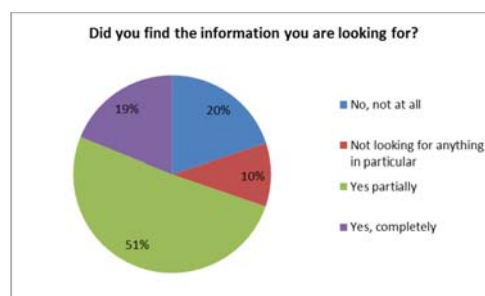
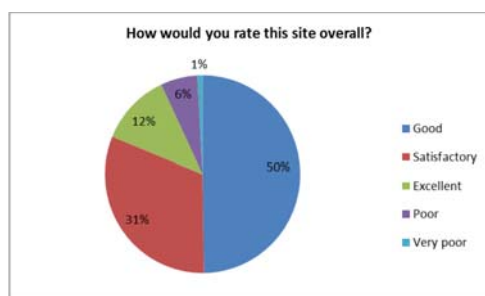
II. Your Europe – where we are today

As part of the Commission's web landscape, Your Europe is recognised, by portal users, policy makers and stakeholders, as a valuable tool for practical information on EU rights in the Single Market. Visitors find both EU level information provided by the Commission and national information provided by the Member States through an Editorial Board.

The number of visitors has steadily and considerably increased over the last three years and this upward trend is continuing in 2013:



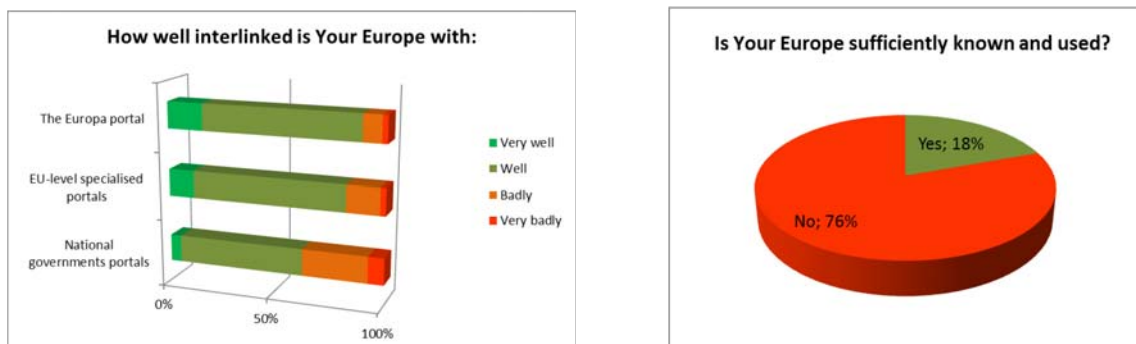
A recent online **user survey**⁹ confirms a high level of satisfaction with the information provided: 93% of users rate Your Europe satisfactory or better. 70% say they found the information they were looking for, fully or at least partly.



The survey also points at areas for improvement however. People not finding the information they need frequently say this is due to navigation problems or to missing national-level information. Suggestions for improvement concern better search and guidance, including to services at EU and national level, offering personalised help and assistance by phone, e-mail and chat. Furthermore, visitors coming to Your Europe for information would also like to complete tasks and procedures online, which requires better access to information and e-government tools available at national level.

⁹ Exit survey conducted in the beginning of 2013 on the citizens part of the portal

Another survey targeted at **policy makers and stakeholders**¹⁰ confirms that this group is also satisfied with the quality and presentation of information on Your Europe. Improving the connection between Your Europe and national portals, and enhancing awareness about Your Europe are seen as the main areas for improvement.



More generally, recent consultations and surveys point at a **persistent need for more and better information**,¹¹ in particular about rules and procedures at national level when facing cross-border situations. Likewise, there is a marked need for more and better e-government services.¹²

It falls on Member States to inform businesses and citizens about national rules and procedures. Your Europe helps to make such information available EU-wide, in a targeted and user-friendly manner. A number of Member States have invested in developing user-friendly multilingual national portals providing relevant practical information and online services to citizens and businesses. The continued expansion of the Points of Single Contact,¹³ which aim to provide both information and e-government services, can also be seen as a best practice example.

In many Member States however, information about national rules and procedures relating to EU rights remains fragmented, difficult to find, incomplete and not user-friendly. Even where information exists, it is often not tailored to the needs of those operating in a cross-border context.

III. Boosting Your Europe in cooperation with Member States – The Your Europe Action Plan

In a recent Resolution,¹⁴ the European Parliament called on the **Commission** to develop the 'Your Europe' portal in order to turn it into a genuine digital 'one-stop shop.' It also called on **Member States** to supply the national data currently lacking in the 'Your Europe' portal as soon as possible... and to develop references to 'Your Europe' from relevant local and national administration portals so as to facilitate access for citizens.

¹⁰ Survey conducted from December 2012 to February 2013 with EU officials, MEPs, representatives of Member States and EU information networks

¹¹ Flash Eurobarometer 365 "European Union Citizenship", published in February 2013; Eurobarometer Qualitative Studies: Obstacles citizens face in the Internal Market, Aggregate report, September 2011 and Local Authorities and the governance of the Single Market, Aggregate report, September 2011.

¹² Cf., the eGovernment Benchmark Report 2012, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-466_en.htm?locale=en.

¹³ http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/eu-go/index_en.htm

¹⁴ [European Parliament resolution of 25 October 2012 on the 20 main concerns of European citizens and business with the functioning of the Single Market \(2012/2044\(INI\)\)](#)

In line with this, and in response to the needs identified through recent surveys, the Commission proposes **three sets of concrete actions, to be implemented by the Commission and/or the Member States:**

- A. Actions to further develop and improve the Your Europe portal, so as to make it better respond to the needs of citizens and businesses;
- B. Actions to ensure that good-quality information on national rules and procedures is available and accessible through Your Europe; and finally,
- C. Actions to ensure that information on Your Europe is within better reach.

A. Further completing Your Europe and making it better respond to users' needs

Completing information. In line with the Commission's strategy to distinguish itself as an official source of information on EU rights with high quality, up to date, usable and reusable content, Your Europe aims to inform citizens and businesses about rights and opportunities in Europe's single market. It offers information on a cross-sectoral basis, matching the real-life situations and needs of EU citizens and businesses.

Your Europe constitutes a key, intrinsic part of the Commission web landscape. As a forerunner for cross-departmental cooperation with a relentless focus on user needs and preferences, it will further grow and contribute to the Commission-wide project to rationalise and professionalise digital communication.

Your Europe plays an important role in providing high quality information which allows users to serve themselves online. This avoids them having to use more costly channels such as phone, email and drop-in centres and contributes also to an effective use of resources at EU level.

The Commission will continue to update and, where needed, expand EU-level content on Your Europe. It will further build reliable partnerships with all content providers within the Commission, and will strengthen synergies between Your Europe and more specialised portals such as e-Justice, EURES and relevant thematic policy webpages, with the objective of avoiding duplications and overlaps and achieving the best quality of service for users.

The service offer through Your Europe will also be further completed, for instance through deep links to the Points of Single Contact for comprehensive information on specific national requirements to allow users to complete administrative procedures online.

Offering better guidance and help. To be successful over a longer period, Your Europe needs to keep up its quality standards and to increase its user-friendliness by adapting to the patterns of visitors and the changing IT environment.

Although the structure of Your Europe has been designed to be intuitive and has evolved further as a result of regular user testing, feedback received from visitors indicates that they do not always find the information they are looking for, even if it is present on the portal. The same is true for the personal assistance, e-government and problem-solving services to which Your Europe refers. Currently, a number of visitors either do not find access to the most suitable service, or do not complete all steps to submit their case.

To overcome this, the Commission will improve the search function within the portal and introduce a virtual assistant that provides online web guidance. The latter will ensure that users i) find the information they are looking for without lengthy navigation and ii) can more easily access the most relevant help services.¹⁵ The Commission will, in particular, further enhance synergies between Your Europe and Europe Direct with the objective of offering citizens and businesses a multi-channel platform – online, by telephone, by e-mail or in person - for information and help on their EU rights. Furthermore, Your Europe will also form part of the new corporate tool for better guidance of citizens on how to seek redress, as outlined in Action 11 of the 2013 Citizenship Report.¹⁶

Finally, the Commission intends to keep visitors on Your Europe better informed of new developments on the portal, by developing an electronic update notification service.

Improving the accessibility of Your Europe. Your Europe targets all Europeans and should therefore fully comply with rules and standards for web accessibility, in line with the Digital Agenda and the related Commission's proposal for a Directive on the accessibility of the public sector bodies' websites, once adopted.¹⁷ The Commission will launch a usability and accessibility study and implement its findings so that everybody, including people with special needs, can understand, navigate and interact with Your Europe in an appropriate way.

Furthermore, Your Europe aims at providing mobile visitors with the same experience and functionalities as a traditional PC would offer them. Statistics show that more than 18% of the current visitors are using mobile devices to access information for citizens on Your Europe and the percentage is steadily rising.¹⁸ The Commission will further improve the accessibility of Your Europe from mobile devices and gradually expand its mobile version to cover information for businesses.

Informing people ... but also listening to them. Your Europe's main function is to provide information. However, it is also an instrument for listening to Europe's citizens and businesses and to learn more about their practical experiences with the single market. For instance, by tracking the most frequently sought information on Your Europe, the Commission learns about persisting problems when people exercise single market rights. This knowledge can be used both as input for policy making and for targeted improvements of the Your Europe content. Your Europe also has feedback tools offering visitors the opportunity to leave their comments on the content of the website.

Further, Your Europe occasionally also invites visitors to participate in public consultations on the topics covered by the portal which, otherwise, they are unlikely to be aware of. This practice will be rendered more systematic in the future.

Finally, Your Europe is today present on and a topic of discussion in many different social media forums and platforms. This is beneficial in various ways. Thanks to social media, people can more easily share and access the information and help that is on offer to them through Your Europe. Social media also enable people to exchange concrete experiences they encounter in the single market. The Commission will further integrate Your Europe in the social media landscape, so as to further stimulate these developments.

¹⁵ Europe Direct and more specialised services such as Your Europe Advice, SOLVIT, Enterprise Europe Network, EURES, ECC-Net, Euraxess

¹⁶ COM(2013) 269 final

¹⁷ COM(2012) 721 final

¹⁸ Increase of about 10% since the launch of the mobile version in June 2012

The Commission will:	
- further develop Your Europe as an integral part of its corporate web strategy by further expanding the content of Your Europe to fully cover rights, obligations and opportunities in the single market, optimise links and synergies with existing portals and platforms and, for this purpose, elaborate a governance structure for the portal outlining responsibilities at EU and national level	June 2014
- improve online search guidance available on the portal, by introducing a virtual assistant, and optimise synergies with Europe Direct	July 2014
- conduct a usability and accessibility study and implement its findings in order to guarantee optimal access and navigation on Your Europe for everybody and in particular people with special needs and people using mobile devices	May 2014
- optimise feedback functions and ensure that its public consultations on topics covered by Your Europe are accessible through the portal so that visitors are given the opportunity to provide input to policy making in areas of their interest	March 2014
- integrate Your Europe into social media and support social media users to share their experiences with single market rights through Your Europe	March 2014

B. Matching EU-level content with national-level content

Citizens and enterprises turning to Your Europe are interested in very concrete information on how they can use their EU rights in a specific situation in a given Member State. They want to know and understand what national requirements they should comply with, if any. They also need to know where to turn to complete the necessary formalities and where to seek help or redress when their EU rights are denied. However, as the recent user and stakeholder surveys confirmed, such information is not yet sufficiently available.

Making national-level information available. As a matter of good government, and as part of their obligations to implement EU law, Member States should ensure that, whenever EU law lays down rights and creates opportunities for them, individuals and businesses easily find all information and help needed to make use of their rights on their respective national territories.

This ‘duty to inform’ is specified in various areas of EU legislation for example the Services Directive¹⁹, the Professional Qualifications Directive²⁰, the Cross-border Healthcare Directive²¹ and the Consumer Rights Directive.²² The 2009 Recommendation

¹⁹ Directive 2006/123/EC of 12 December 2006 on services in the internal market

²⁰ Directive 2005/36/EC of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications, currently under revision (2011/0435 (COD)), among others, to ensure better access to information and e-government services

²¹ Directive 2011/24/EU of 9 March 2011 on the application of patients’ rights in cross-border healthcare

on measures to improve the functioning of the single market also stresses how important it is for Member States to provide practical information on EU rights.²³

This requires, firstly, that Member States publish practical and user-friendly information on their respective national portals.

Secondly, national information should be easily understandable for everyone across Europe. This means that information should be within easy reach for all and in particular for those coming from another country with different language backgrounds.

In practical terms, Member States should improve and upgrade their Points of Single Contact (PSCs) according to the criteria of the PSC Charter to guarantee that the PSCs provide high quality and comprehensive services to businesses, including in cross-border situations. Additional efforts should be made above all by the Member States whose PSCs are performing poorly and fall short of business' expectations.²⁴

In line with the Communication on Better Governance in the Single Market, the Commission will ensure that, in all new proposals for legislation creating concrete rights in the single market, specific attention is paid to the way citizens and businesses are informed about their EU rights.

Your Europe offers Member States a platform through which they can spread national content to relevant target groups, including to nationals from other EU countries to make them aware of the rules and procedures in place.

Sharing content between Your Europe and national portals. Informing citizens and businesses about their EU rights and what it takes to exercise them in practice, is a shared responsibility of EU institutions and the Member States. The best results can be achieved when there is optimal interplay between EU- and national-level content, and where such content is available in a coherent manner and within easy reach for those navigating the web. As mentioned above, Your Europe gives more visibility to national-level content and secures, in particular, that specific target groups, such as non-nationals, can be effectively reached. On the other hand, Your Europe can also add value to national portals by providing information on basic EU rights in 23 languages as well as access to EU level assistance services and information sources of other Member States.

Given the need to secure this optimal interplay between EU- and national-level content, and the need to do so with scarce resources, both at EU and national level, the Commission is exploring and continuously improving models for exchanging content. This work is shared with Member States and steered through the Editorial Board for Your Europe, which gathers experts from all Member States. Various models exist:

- Where good-quality information is available at national level, tailored to the needs of all Europeans (including non-nationals), Your Europe can provide links (e.g., links to Points of Single Contact).

²² Directive 2011/83/EU of 25 October 2011 on consumer rights, amending Council Directive 93/13/EEC and Directive 1999/44/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directive 85/577/EEC and Directive 97/7/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council

²³ Commission Recommendation of 29 June 2009, (2009/524/EC)

²⁴ COM (2012) 261 final, 08.06.2012, http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/services/docs/services-dir/implementation/report/COM_2012_261_en.pdf

- Content syndication offers an alternative way of exchanging content. It allows relevant content to be extracted from national portals and made available through Your Europe and vice-versa. Compared to simple links, this method has the advantage of displaying only relevant national information in the style of Your Europe, thus improving the user-experience. Where national content is brought up-to-date by Member States, such updates automatically appear in Your Europe as well.
- The Commission can also offer templates to Member States, to be filled in by national experts. In the near future, it will be possible to offer on-line templates, which will considerably speed up the process of providing and updating content. Where national information does not yet exist (for instance in areas where new EU rights are created or existing legal regimes are substantially revised), content created 'into' Your Europe by relevant national experts can be syndicated and published on national portals. In this manner, content will be created only once – and will be re-used, in its entirety or in part, in all relevant portals.

Given the advantages offered by content syndication, the possibilities of automatically exchanging existing online information both ways between national portals and Your Europe, have therefore been studied during a pilot project.²⁵ The study confirmed the feasibility of content syndication, and demonstrated its advantages. In particular, information that is already available on-line in national portals or in Your Europe can be directly displayed on Your Europe or in national portals. The exchange of information is sustainable and resource-efficient as, once programmed, the procedure is automatic and always provides users with the most up-to-date content.

The Commission invites Member States to:	
- make user-friendly information available on their own portals, enabling individuals and businesses, including non-nationals, to make effective use of their EU rights in the single market	permanent
- actively co-operate with the Commission so as to ensure that relevant national information, such as information about residence rights and about doing business in another country, becomes accessible via Your Europe; progress will be measured on a yearly basis in the context of the Single Market Scoreboard. ²⁶	December 2014
- share good practice in their national portals with other Member States and contribute to the different models of content exchange proposed by the Commission, depending on the most appropriate approach for the country	permanent
- further develop their Points of Single Contact (PSC), in line with the criteria set out in the PSC Charter; the Commission will assess Member States' progress towards more ambitious PSCs in the course of 2014	December 2014

²⁵ Supported by the ISA programme on interoperability solutions for European public administrations

²⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/

The Commission will:	
- develop different tools for content-sharing (online forms, content syndication) and provide technical and conceptual support to Member States)	permanent
- facilitate peer learning in the context of the bi-annual meetings of the Editorial Board	March and November 2014
- call on the Member States to publish information online on all EU-related legislation laying down rights for citizens and/or businesses with a view to possible linking/exchanging with Your Europe	permanent

C. Ensuring that more people find Your Europe

With a growing number of citizens using online services, more and more people travelling around Europe and 13.6 million EU citizens living in another Member State,²⁷ the potential outreach of Your Europe is far from being achieved. Experience shows, however, that wide-scale promotion to everybody leads to unsustainable temporary peaks in the number of visitors. Targeted promotion both at EU and Member State level is therefore needed to make more people aware of what Your Europe can offer them.

User statistics²⁸ indicate that visitors find Your Europe mainly through search engines and the inter-institutional EU website (europa.eu), followed by recommendations from friends, social media and national portals.

Promotion should therefore focus on attracting potential visitors where they would naturally look for information. Your Europe needs to invest heavily in optimising its content for search engines and making sure it can be easily accessed from all relevant EU and national websites. First experiences with online promotion (banner campaign, presence in relevant expat, consumer and travel forums) as well as social media activities are promising and should be further exploited.

EU and national information awareness-raising campaigns on issues that are at least partly covered by the contents of Your Europe, such as the awareness raising campaign on consumer rights announced in the Consumer Agenda,²⁹ should promote the site.

The Commission will:	
- further bolster the visibility of Your Europe through search engine optimisation, on-line promotion and further integration of the portal into relevant social media tools as well as through its information and awareness-raising campaigns	April 2014

²⁷ Eurostat pocketbook "European social statistics ", published on 17.7.2013

²⁸ User survey, beginning of 2013

²⁹ COM(2012) 225 final of 22.5.2012

The Commission invites Member States to:	
- promote Your Europe at national level, in particular through deep-links on their national portals and in national awareness-raising campaigns on subjects covered by the portal	August 2014

IV. Timing and resources

Some actions will be implemented with a fixed deadline that might vary for the different parts of the portal, others are of permanent nature. Expenditure necessary for the actions is already taken into account under the current budget.