



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Working Party on Information
Subject:	Council's Open Sessions - Summary of Member States' replies to the Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

On 16 September 2013, the General Secretariat of the Council forwarded to delegations a questionnaire on Open Sessions of the Council (see document 13287/13). The aim of the questionnaire was to collect information on the way items dealt with in open session are prepared and announced by Member States.

The GSC received replies from 25 Member States.

Delegations will find annexed to this note a summary of the replies received and examples of best practices. These results will be presented at the meeting of the Working Party on Information scheduled for 28 October 2013.

SUMMARY OF REPLIES TO THE
QUESTIONNAIRE ON COUNCIL OPEN SESSIONS:

There was very positive feed back from delegations to this initiative and some replies made it quite clear that Member States are also examining ways in which to provide more effective communication with national audiences on European issues.

One reply pointed out that the simple exercise of having to answer the questionnaire has already led to changes in the procedures on the preparation and communication of items in open session.

A brief description of the main findings for each question are listed below, along with examples of best practices.

1. Do you prepare items in open session in a different way from non-public items? If yes, how?

In general, most Member States replied that items in open session are prepared in the same way as any other item.

Best practice: In the press releases prepared in advance of a Council meeting, information about public items is drafted for a wider audience using less technical language.

2. Do you coach your Minister in advance in respect of items discussed in open session? If yes, how?

In general, Member States replied that their Ministers were given briefs, background notes and reports on all items to be adopted or discussed in a Council meeting and that they were informed about whether the items were to be held in open session. However, most delegations stated that the Ministers did not receive any additional coaching in relation to those items.

Best practice: For items discussed in open session, briefs for Ministers were drafted in such a way as to strike a balance between the technical nature of the negotiations and the need to reach a wider public.

3. Do you contact the media in advance with regard to an open session item? If so, do you provide information about the Council's video streaming platform?

As regards what information on open sessions is communicated to the press in advance of a Council meeting, Member States replies can be categorised in 3 groups:

- Those who do not state in their contacts with the press that an item will be held in open session,
- Those who provide such information, but only through Permanent Representations to media based in Brussels,
- Those who state that the Press is, in general, well informed about the provisional agenda of a Council meeting and about which items are held in open session. However, these replies do not explain how the press receives this information.

Best practice: Inclusion of direct links to the "Council Meetings" and "Council Webcast" features of the website in the briefs given to the national Press and prepared in advance of a Council meeting.

4. Do you know if national officials follow public deliberations *LIVE* through the Council's website?

A small number of Member States confirmed that national officials, who could not travel to Brussels but were interested in following discussions on a particular item, viewed the broadcasting of that item on the website and found that the Webcast platform was very useful.

Most replies, however, pointed out that delegations have very little or no information on this matter.

The GSC will provide statistical information to delegations, including data on the viewing of the Council's Open Sessions.

5. How could publicity about open sessions and about the Council's video streaming platform be improved, both at EU and national levels?

In general, the replies stated that among the Brussels-based media the Council's Webcast was already well known.

To further promote awareness of the Council's Webcast at national level, two suggestions were often made in the replies from Member States:

- insert a link to the Council's Webcast on the different national Ministries websites,
- use of social media.

Other interesting ideas were also suggested, as listed below:

- For post-viewing purposes, the insertion of a link to the broadcast of individual items in the Council's press releases;
- Improved visibility of the Webcast platform on the Council's website,
- Improved navigation of the Council's Webcast platform,
- Communication campaign targeting national Parliaments,
- Creation of a Webcast app,
- Increased transparency of Council proceedings.

The GSC will inform delegations at a future meeting on the follow-up to the proposals highlighted in these replies or on any other initiative aiming to improve awareness of the Council's open sessions and Webcast platform.
