



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 12 November 2013**

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**OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS**

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from: General Secretariat of the Council of the Council

to: Delegations

Subject: Outcome of proceedings of the Working Party on Information on 28 October 2013

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**1. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda set out in document CM 4843/1/13 REV 1 was adopted.

**2. Communication / information policy**

**a. Draft communication budget 2014 and impact on future cooperation with Member States**

The WPI addressed this issue at its meetings of 12 July and 13 September 2013. <sup>1</sup>

The Presidency underlined the remarkable impact of Management Partnership Agreements (MPAs) on the creation of new synergies between the institutions and Member States and recalled receiving additional feedback from delegations voicing their general disappointment with the Commission's decision to discontinue MPAs.

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<sup>1</sup> see docs. 12607/13 and 13832/13

The Presidency, outlining its considerations in doc. 15350/13, stated that a joint effort is needed to:

- reaffirm the spirit of cooperation, based on core principles (i.e. strengthening partnership, cooperation at central and decentralised level and citizen's engagement) on which the representatives of the institutions meeting within the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI) on 5 November 2013 could confirm their commitment;
- "communicate more Europe with less money" by exploring all possible cross-links among communication programmes and projects and all alternative partnership options, adapting the existing models accordingly in order to safeguard the MPAs tri-partite coordination mechanisms, which ensured coherency and consistency;
- consider updating and reinforcing existing interinstitutional arrangements in order to ensure that, in the preparation of future communication plans, the results of monitoring and evaluation activities are duly taken into account.

The EP representative informed the WPI on the state of play of the negotiations on the draft budget 2014:

- the outcome of the EP's reading, which was accomplished on 23 October, has not brought any modification in the relevant communication budget lines;
- two amendments tabled to the EP Budget Committee (of which one from VPres Casini Chairman of the AFCO Committee, asking to re-establish the decreased budget figures and the other from MEP Kleva Kekuš, aiming to amend the EP Resolution text accordingly) were rejected.

The Commission's representative reiterated that the decision to discontinue MPAs does not imply that cooperation among the Institutions and between the Institutions and the Member States will stop:

- the existing alternative partnerships models ( strategic and one-off) can play a good role, and communication activities foreseen in the framework of the strategic partnership can still be implemented on the basis of joint communication plans;
- other successful initiatives such as "Share Europe on-line", "Back to School", "Europe Around the Corner" and the activities of the Europe Direct information centers are being carried out jointly without having direct connections with partnership agreements. The same goes for the "Citizens' dialogues", which will be pursued in 2014, and for a call being launched in tri-partite collaboration to award a price to the Best Project for cross-border cooperation in information and communication;
- the Commission understands that Member States may not contribute financially on equal footing, but they could do it through other forms of cooperation: such as offering free space for radio and TV broadcast;

- information activities envisaged in 2014 as a result of commitments already made this year under the existing MPA umbrella will take place regularly as planned. This is the case for a number of communication actions being organised in different Member States to raise awareness in view of the 2014 European elections.

Several delegations explained that, in general, they are open to explore with the Commission other forms of partnerships.

The Hungarian and Polish delegations informed the WPI that the Ministries of the Member States of the "Visegrad Group" (CZ, H, PL and SK) responsible for European Affairs have sent a joint letter to Vice President Reding expressing their deepest concern with the discontinuation of the MPAs, in particular in a challenging moment of increasing euro-scepticism and in the run-up of the elections, and hoping that the Commission will move forward in a spirit of partnership.

The Hungarian delegation hoped that the discussions taking place in the Working Party would lead to a positive result on alternative forms of partnerships.

The German delegation reiterated that MPAs were an excellent tool for cooperation in communication matters between national and European authorities and that such cooperation can only work if there is a good institutional basis. It also asked (supported by the Presidency) when the Commission will circulate the results of the ongoing horizontal evaluation of the MPAs in order to look thoroughly into the coming proposals. Finally, it suggested (supported by the Hungarian and Polish delegations) to freeze MPA's discontinuation for one year and use 2014 to explore other ways of cooperation.

The EP representative highlighted that it is crucial to maintain the "tri-partite" cooperation (EP-Commission-MS) and continue cooperation on an institutional basis.

In reply to delegations' interventions and questions, the Commission representative:

- reiterated the advantages of strategic partnerships (communication plan, no delegation agreement necessary since no shared financial budget, simplified administrative procedure) as a good basis for the institutional approach as suggested by delegations. He will circulate in this regard an example of a strategic partnership agreement.
- indicated that the final report of the horizontal evaluation of MPAs will be available in January 2014. A draft version of this report is expected around mid December. An interim report was prepared in September but contains only factual details and no information on the evaluation as such.  
*In reply to a question put by the Chair, the Commission explains that it will not be in a position to present the report, not even a draft version, at the WPI meeting foreseen on 13 December 2013;*
- welcomed the consideration made by the Presidency in document 15350/13 to decentralise communication activities to enhance proximity, in particular in view of the upcoming European elections;
- in reply to a question put by the Czech delegation, explained that the eighteen Member States having signed an MPA were all officially informed in July by letter from the Head of the respective Commission Representation, that the draft Communication budget 2014 could no longer provide for communication actions through management partnerships ;
- in reply to a question by the Chair, indicated that it will not be possible for the Commission to give an extensive overview of its communication actions for 2014 at the WPI meeting on 22 November since the deadline to adopt the sectorial Commission DG's communication plans is 24 January 2014. Moreover, according to the common practice, it would be appropriate to invite officials from the respective DGs from the Commission to attend the WPI meetings and inform of their specific communication strategies.

Concluding the debate, the Chair:

- reminded that all political implications are likely to be examined by the political representatives of the institutions at the next IGI meeting on 5 November 2013;
- informed the WPI that, after the IGI meeting, the debate on this issue could be pursued as follows:
  - = the agenda of the next WPI meeting on 22 November will include an update on the state of play as well as an update on partnership models and general 2014 planning;
  - = subsequently, the communication directors from institutions and governments will be invited to discuss this file respectively at the plenary meeting of the Club of Venice (Venice, 14/15 November), at the "Communicating Europe in Partnership (CEP)" meeting (Brussels, 27 November) and at the WPI meeting (Brussels, 13 December).

**b. Preparation of the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI)  
(Brussels, 5 November 2013)**

The two main items on the IGI agenda will be the European Elections 2014 and perspectives for partnership (projects/activities + instruments such as the online platform "Europe around the Corner").

With regard to the European elections, the EP representative confirmed that the EP will provide a detailed overview of the implementation of its communication strategy. The EP would like to be informed of Member States' plans to communicate on the electoral event and on the Presidency's and Member States' opinion on the Commission Recommendation of 12.3.2013 on "enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the EP"<sup>2</sup>.

The Commission representative indicated that the Commission will:

- focus on the results of the "Citizens' dialogues" and outline the variety of complementary initiatives in the pipeline to raise citizens' awareness;
- refer to a statement signed on 25 September 2013 by Vice President Reding and the EP Vice-Presidents Podimata and Karas on "stepping up inter-institutional cooperation with regard to "communication services, products and activities in the run-up to the elections";
- outline the progress made with the web platform "Europe around the Corner" which could play a pro-active role in the elections campaign. This project aims to provide a single web entry user-friendly point on the EUROPA website driving to the national portals informing about EU-funded projects (objectives, existing partners, resources, geographic distribution, how to apply for funds, etc.). The Commission services are currently working on the technical compatibility and adaptation of the interface with the national web sites concerned, hoping to have all MS linked to the portal reasonably in advance before the elections.

The Chair welcomed the progress made in the preparatory steps and encouraged delegations to pursue contacts with the Commission hoping that all MS will join the platform.

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<sup>2</sup> docs. 7650/13 and 7648/13.

### 3. Transparency / access to documents

#### a) Council Open Sessions

##### - Presentation by the General Secretariat of the Council

Doc. 14884/13

The Working Party reviewed the Summary of Member States' replies to the questionnaire on Council Open Sessions, notably to highlight the best practices identified therein.

This review was followed by a presentation, given by the General Secretariat, which identified the different types of open sessions, highlighted the main functionalities of the Council's webcast platform and provided statistics about its viewers. The presentation also identified ways to promote the videostreaming platform to national audiences.

The General Secretariat informed the Working Party that statistics on audiences could be provided to delegations at the end of each Presidency, upon request.

#### b) Recast of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 regarding public access to European parliament, Council and Commission documents

##### - Information from the Presidency on state of play and possible follow-up

The Presidency informed delegations about its informal contacts with the European Parliament regarding the proposal to proceed by limiting modifications to the Regulation exclusively to those necessary to take into account the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty (see doc. 15698/13).

On the basis of the response given by the European Parliament, the Presidency concluded that there was no realistic chance for a successful outcome of negotiations at this stage.

Several delegations (NL, FI, SU, ES and DK), while thanking the Presidency for its efforts, expressed their disappointment on the state of play. They encouraged the three institutions to find a way out of the impasse.

- **Improving access to information**

In the context of the review of Regulation 1049/2001, discussions took place in the Working Party in 2012 on possible technical measures which could be taken to optimise the user friendliness of the tools that help the public to search for and access information about the legislative process of the (European) Council.

The General Secretariat has summarised a list of measures to this effect in document 14849/2013, which it brought to the attention of delegations.

c) **Confirmatory application No 18/c/01/13**

The General Secretariat informed the Working Party about this confirmatory application which concerns a request for access to an opinion of the Legal Service. A written consultation of delegations would be launched with a view to list the application on the agenda of Coreper on 13 November and the Council on 15 November, respectively.

d) **Confirmatory application No 19/c/01/13**

The General Secretariat informed the Working Party about this application which also concerns a request for access to an opinion of the Legal Service. A written consultation of delegations would again be launched to list the application on the agenda of Coreper on 13 November and the Council on 15 November, respectively.

**4. Any Other Business**

a. **EuroPCom (Brussels, 16-17 October 2013)**

The Committee of the Regions debriefed the WPI on the main conclusions of the 4th edition of the conference, which brought together communication managers and senior experts from European, national, regional and local authorities as well as professionals from the private sectors. Lectures, debates and interactive workshops covering the main communication challenges, in particular on the upcoming European elections in 2014,

Focus was put on coordination, transparency, coherence and structured approach as well as on communication and politics and on citizens' involvement in the EU partnership.

Full on line coverage in the CoR's web site

(<http://www.cor.europa.eu/en/events/europcom/Pages/europcom-2013-conference.aspx>)

**b. "Communicating Europe in Partnership" (CEP) meeting  
(Brussels, 27 November 2013)**

The Commission representative outlined the provisional programme, which will comprise:

- an exchange of views in plenary sessions on cooperation at interinstitutional level and between institutions and Member States (next steps and concrete future perspectives);
- three thematic workshops corresponding to the interinstitutional communication priorities identified by the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI) for 2013-2014 : economic recovery, the EYC 2013 (empowering citizens) and the European elections.

The meeting will be attended by Heads of Commission's Representations and EP's Information Offices, national communication directors and WPI delegates.

The Commission will give a detailed presentation of the programme at the next WPI meeting on 22 November 2013.

**c. Judgment of the General Court in case T-331/11 (Besselink v. Council)**

The Legal Service outlined the judgment. An information note to Coreper would be issued shortly.



**d Judgment of the Court of Justice in case C-280/11 P (Council v. Access info Europe)**

The Legal Service outlined the judgment. A note would be issued to Coreper setting out the implications for future Council practice.

**e. Adoption of the draft replies to confirmatory application by the Council**

The General Secretariat issued a document on the arrangements for the written consultations on draft replies to confirmatory applications..

The Finnish delegation expressed concerns about the use of written consultations as it considered that it did not always allow delegations to express their arguments opposing or in favour of the proposed reply in sufficiently clear terms. Together with the Italian delegation, it also expressed concerns about the relatively short deadlines to reply, given the need for consultation at national level.

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