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API 152
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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Working Party on Information on 28 November 2014

1. Adoption of the agenda

Items were discussed in a rearranged order; the meeting started with Eastern neighbourhood, continued with transparency items (point 2), followed by the communication items.

2. Transparency / Access to documents

- a) **Confirmatory application No 30/c/04/14**
Docs 15034/14 INF 301 API 121
15035/14 INF 302 API 122

The General Secretariat presented the draft reply contained in document 15035/14. It was pointed out that the draft reply would be revised to indicate that full access would also be granted to document [55].

The LS representative drew the attention to this request related to concerning restrictive measures imposed on Russia. The applicant also submitted similar requests to the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS). He underlined the difficulty of handling such a request due to its wide scope, the number of documents concerned and the need to consult several services, not only in the GSC but also in the Commission and the EEAS.

NL delegation indicated its agreement to the draft reply and suggested some modifications to clarify the reasoning. Some delegations (FR, SE, BU and IT) asked for additional time to examine document [55] following the change of approach. LT delegation referred to security issues as it considered that the applicant's request revealed a thorough knowledge of the content of the requested documents. DE delegation indicated its agreement regarding all confirmatory requests. DK delegation referred to cooperation and exchange of information between all parts concerned by such requests and asked, in the case of similar requests, the GSC to share with delegations the list of documents. IT delegation asked a question about the documents to which partial access was proposed.

In reply to delegation's comments, the LS representative indicated that at the initial phase, it had been agreed between the services concerned of the three institutions that, in the case of a confirmatory request, the documents would be re-examined and partial access would be considered. He added that the GSC considers that Article 4.6 of the Regulation should be applied and partial access be granted to parts of the documents which do not reveal information covered by one of the exceptions of Regulation 1049/2001. He acknowledged the need for good coordination of the handling of requests received by the institutions and Member States.

The Chair informed that, following the revision on the draft reply, delegations were invited to confirm their position by 17.00. The draft reply will be submitted to COREPER II on 2 December 2014 and subsequently to the Council (JHA) on 4 December 2014.

NL delegation informed that RELEX gathers information on requests received by Member States.

b) Confirmatory applications No 33/c/03/14 and No 34/c/04/14

Docs 15355/14 INF 310 API 130
15356/14 INF 311 API 131
15358/14 INF 313 API 133
15359/14 INF 314 API 134

Delegations agreed with the draft replies set out in documents 15356/14 and 15359/14 and on the publication of the votes. The draft replies will be submitted to COREPER II on 2 December 2014 and subsequently to the Council (JHA) on 4 December 2014.

c) **Confirmatory application No 35/c/01/14**

Docs 15361/14 INF 316 API 136
15362/14 INF 317 API 137

Delegations agreed with the draft reply set out in document 15362/14 and on the publication of the votes. The draft reply will be submitted to COREPER II on 2 December 2014 and subsequently to the Council (JHA) on 4 December 2014.

d) **Confirmatory applications No 31/c/01/14 and No 32/c/01/14**

- **Information from the General Secretariat of the Council**
Docs 15349/14 INF 304 API 124
15352/14 INF 307 API 127

The Chair informed WPI that as the background information related to these confirmatory applications was very detailed, it would be send to delegations by email.

3. **Communication / Information Policy**

a) **Eastern neighbourhood: information challenges and implications for EU strategic communication**

The EEAS gave a comprehensive presentation to the WPI on:

- the main challenges for effectively communicating the benefits of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) to the public audiences in the partnership countries;
- the communication actions already taken;
- enhancing communication by multiplying efforts in a more integrated approach.

The Working Party exchanged views on means to develop synergies, share best practice and pool resources to make the EU's communication strategy in this field more effective. In this context, delegations' exchange of views focused on the need to:

- increase and speed up collaboration among the key players, to communicate the benefits of the association/cooperation agreements in the partnership countries as well as in the Member States and in all the neighbour countries;

- facilitate the "going-local" approach in order to take due account of local needs and reach all audiences;
- deliver factual information in the languages of all the EU's neighbour countries in order to improve communication with all layers of society.

The Chair thanked all participants for the rich and interesting discussion and concluded by indicating that:

- the communication and visibility strategy for the Eastern Partnership is a good instrument to help institutions and Member States handle a challenging task;
- there are no easy solutions, but it was important to note a significant convergence of views on the need to step up collective efforts to pursue that strategy;
- all parties involved should work to strengthen coordination mechanisms. Council, Member States, Commission and EEAS can pursue reflection on how to do more and do better, looking at the balance between re-active and pro-active elements;
- even with limited resources, communication efforts could be improved by reviewing priorities (language, etc.), exchanging information on best practice and better coordination

and inviting the EEAS to join again the WPI at one of its future meetings to inform on the follow-up and impact of the EaP's communication strategy.

b) Communicating Europe: communication priorities for 2015-2016

The Italian Presidency, recalling the main elements of its note forwarded to delegations ⁽¹⁾, indicated that, after the adoption of communication priorities by the Council, it looks forward to define, jointly with the Commission and the European Parliament, common interinstitutional communication priorities to be politically endorsed by the Inter-institutional Group on Information (IGI).

Subsequently, the Presidency deems it advisable to launch an exchange of views within the WPI on how to facilitate concrete implementation, focusing on budgetary aspects and different ways of cooperation and partnership.

⁽¹⁾ doc. 15686/14 INF 333

Some delegations (NL, FR, DE, PT), while fully supporting the Presidency's proposal, observed that:

- the priorities need to be fully in line with the agenda set by the European Council;
- communication on "Energy and climate change" will need a positive narrative;
- with regard to "Freedom, security and justice": due consideration should be given to the communication actions planned in this domain, taken into account the sensitivity of the subject.
- it is important to re-focus on the interinstitutional cooperation and resume discussions on the future of partnerships between Member States and institutions in the field of communication.

The Presidency took note of delegations' comments and reassured them about its commitment in this regard. It also reiterated that the suggested topics draw inspiration from the priorities of the current semester, the 18-month Trio Programme and the orientations emerged in the strategic agenda approved by the European Council in June 2014. Finally, it indicated that it is looking forward to a timely adoption of communication priorities by the three institutions.

The European Commission DG COMM took note of the Presidency's proposal and delegations' favourable orientation. This institution is working on guidelines for implementation of communication activities on the basis of the strategic agenda set out by the Commission President. As soon as the guidelines are adopted, the Commission will communicate them to the WPI.

The European Parliament representative indicated that the adoption of communication priorities by the Council will help speed up the adoption process within the European Parliament. The EP hopes that a meeting of the IGI can be convened for the beginning of next year.

In conclusion, the Chair explained that, once the list of communication priorities is adopted by the Council, this item will be again on the WPI agenda in order to seek convergences with the other institutions, with a view to:

- agree on inter-institutional priorities within the IGI framework;
- explore ways and means to facilitate implementation (focus on the relevant budget, cooperation models, joint plans/activities).

c) Communication strategy in the field of enterprise and industry

The Commission DG ENTR representative presented new guidelines to better inform and communicate with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and other stakeholders in the industry sector.

Special attention was drawn to COSME, the EU programme for the competitiveness of SME's, which will be launched in January 2015 for a duration of 9 months. The main objective is to raise Member States' authorities awareness as they play a key role in boosting the European industry's competitiveness and sustainable growth.

The Commission's representative also highlighted the added value of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), which provides business support services through local points in the MS, transfers good practices and helps regional and local authorities to enhance support schemes for SMEs.

d) State of play on the corporate communication pilot project

The Commission DG COMM explained the main features of this pilot project:

- background: practical use of corporate communication clauses in the legal bases of the new generation of MFF programmes to allow Commission DG's to pool resources together to fund joint communication operations;

- focus on growth and jobs and implementation, with lunching events in six countries (ES, DE, FI, PT, PL and LV), based on the following themes: ecology/bio-diversity (Madrid); consumer protection in the digital environment (Berlin); social inclusion for elderly people (Helsinki); IT technological innovation (Lisbon) and helping entrepreneurs to reach out to new markets (Warsaw) and on the Feb 2015 launch event foreseen in Latvia, at the request of the future Presidency of the Council;
- the first wave of an advertising campaign on TV, print and digital media, consisting of a series of video clips aiming to explain and foster the pilot project in the countries concerned.

4. Any Other Business

a) Club of Venice plenary meeting, Rome, 13-14 November 2014

The Italian Presidency outlined the results of that meeting, where the participants discussed:

- how to re-shape cooperation on "Communicating Europe" at inter-institutional and inter-governmental level and exchanged best practice on strategic capacity building in public communication;
- the relations between governments and civil society (with focus on information and communication trends in the framework of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the Ukrainian crisis, cooperation in the field of the European Year of Development (EYD) 2015 and "Europe for Citizens");
- challenges and possible synergies for government and institutional communication on immigration/integration matters.

Next meetings: seminar on digital communication trends, in cooperation with the Adenauer Foundation (Sofia, 27 March 2015) and plenary meeting in Vienna (11-12 June 2015).

b) Committee of the Regions' (CoR) draft Opinion on "Reconnecting Europe with its citizens - more and better communication at local level"

The Committee of the Regions' Secretary-General outlined the main elements of this draft Opinion which will be adopted at the CoR plenary session of 3-4 December 2014.

The CoR's Opinion aims at seeking higher citizens' involvement, enhancing the "Go local" connotation of EU's communication (regions, cities and local stakeholders) and suggesting better coordination of institutions' communication strategies.
