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from : Working Party on Information
to : Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 2)/Council

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Subject : Communicating Europe in Partnership
– draft Council conclusions

Delegations will find at Annex a set of draft Council conclusions on the above-mentioned subject, as agreed by the Working Party on Information at its last meeting on 15 April 2008.

The Coreper is accordingly invited to suggest that the Council approve, as an “A” point, the attached draft conclusions at one of its next meetings.

Draft
Council conclusions
on the Commission communication
“Communicating Europe in Partnership”

The Council:

- 1) **welcomes** the Commission communication of 3 October 2007 entitled “Communicating Europe in Partnership” (COM(2007) 569 final) and **takes note** of the Commission working document containing a “Proposal for an Interinstitutional Agreement” (COM(2007) 568 final);
- 2) **recalls** its conclusions dated 14 June 2004, 10 December 2002 and 10 December 2001 on the previous Commission communications on this subject (COM(2004) 196 final, COM(2002) 350 final and COM(2001) 354 final).

As general principles, the Council:

- 3) **considers** that the need to further raise citizens' awareness of the activities of the Union, laying emphasis on its added value and its common objectives and achievements, should underpin communication activities on Europe. Transparency and openness of the EU Institutions and bodies are essential elements in safeguarding the Union’s democratic legitimacy, as well as a pre-condition for public participation;
- 4) **wishes** to achieve better co-operation on communication efforts, on the principle that the EU institutions and bodies should seek synergies with the initiatives originating from Member States' central, regional and local authorities and from representatives of civil society;

- 5) **shares** the Commission's suggestion to communicate on EU issues at a level as close as possible to the citizens ("going local" approach) and to adapt methods and content to individual situations and audiences;
- 6) **shares** the Commission's stated objective of reinforcing a pragmatic partnership approach, with flexible coordination among those concerned, while insisting on the voluntary nature of the actors' involvement;
- 7) **declares** that a coherent and integrated communication strategy must take into account and duly reflect the responsibilities, competences and roles of each actor involved in the EU political decision-making process;
- 8) **recognises** that the Member States and the EU institutions and bodies may pursue different communication activities, but will be more effective when activities are co-ordinated;
- 9) **recognises** the important role of schools in helping to better communicate the activities and achievements of Europe, and supports the potential for exchanges of information and best practice between Member States, where appropriate, by cooperating with EU institutions, whilst fully respecting national autonomy in education;
- 10) **considers** that, in addition to the continuous communication activities, occasions such as direct elections to the European Parliament provide good opportunities to enhance communication with citizens on EU issues and to inform and encourage their participation in the political debate.

As regards the information and communication activities of EU institutions and bodies, the Council:

- 11) **invites** the institutions and bodies to mobilise the necessary resources, particularly by making better use of audiovisual instruments, the Internet and public fora. Administrative arrangements at the appropriate levels could facilitate cooperation among the different information and communication services of the Community's institutions and bodies, in order to increase the impact and coherence of their action and with a view to rationalization;

- 12) **calls upon** EU institutions and bodies to respect multilingualism and the promotion of cultural diversity in implementing information and communication actions, not only when those actions are undertaken at local level but also at central level;
- 13) **invites** the institutions, where appropriate, to cooperate in the editing of content and management of information and communication activities of an interinstitutional character.

Concerning the information and communication tools at the disposal of the Commission, the Council:

- 14) **welcomes** the Commission's intention to modernise and better adapt its own information and communication tools as well as its instruments for analysing public opinion;
- 15) **entrusts** the Council's Information Working Party, extended where necessary to representatives of the competent national services, with the examination and follow-up of the implementation of the different specific strategies announced by the Commission in fields judged favourably by the Council such as the Internet (the "Europa" website) and the audiovisual ("Europe by Satellite");
- 16) **asks** the Commission, as well as the other EU institutions, to preserve the interinstitutional character of the European public spaces they intend to create, and of the information networks they are currently administering;
- 17) **encourages** the Commission to implement any useful measure aimed at facilitating the work of the media in their coverage of EU activities, while respecting their full independence and pluralism.

Concerning the communication activities carried out by the various Commission departments in the implementation of specific policies (so-called “sectorial” communication activities), the Council:

- 18) **notes** that these activities constitute an essential part of communication on Europe financed from the Community budget;
- 19) **encourages** the Commission to promote actions aimed at presenting and promoting Community achievements, particularly in the context of an information policy associated with an act adopted by the legislator in a given sectorial framework. In this context, the Council appreciates any Commission effort to ensure coherence and effectiveness, as well as co-operation among the relevant actors;
- 20) **invites** the Commission to keep Member States duly informed through the Council’s Information Working Party, and through the Commission Representations in the Member States, of the planned sectorial communication activities, in particular where they result in information campaigns in Member States. The latter must also be informed in good time of any Commission initiative targeting civil society and likely to entail co-financing actions in this field.

As regards the priority topics for communication, the Council:

- 21) **recognises** the usefulness of selecting communication priorities in accordance with the Union’s political agenda and in the light of citizens’ expectations, while respecting the competences of the EU and of the Member States;
- 22) **entrusts** the Information Working Party, where appropriate with the participation of other institutions and bodies, with regularly discussing and agreeing priority communication topics with the aim of shaping a position and inspiring the action of the institutions and bodies concerned, as well as that of the Member States’ authorities involved, always on a voluntary basis;

- 23) **considers** that, with a view to facilitating the desirable synergy, a prior consultation of Member States through the Council's Information Working Party should be carried out by the Commission before the elaboration of the specific chapter of its annual policy strategy (APS) devoted to the communication priorities.

Concerning the Union's communication in third countries, the Council:

- 24) **requests** the Commission, in its communication strategy in third countries, to pay due regard to the Union's policies as a whole and to the role played by institutions and bodies within them;
- 25) **invites** the Commission to jointly reflect on alternative ways to enhance coherence when informing the public on EU issues.

With regard to the reinforcement of the partnership approach, the Council:

- 26) **takes note** of the potential added value of management partnership agreements, and, where appropriate, strategic partnership agreements between Member States and the European Commission on a voluntary basis, to promote synergy in the communication with citizens;
- 27) **mandates** the Presidency to explore the possibilities of enhancing co-operation between the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission in the fields covered by these conclusions, on the basis of guidelines agreed by the Council Working Party on Information;
- 28) **recognizes** the importance of the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI) as a body which could give guidelines at political level with regard to the communication on EU issues, while respecting the competences and autonomy of all parties concerned.

With a view to future developments, the Council:

- 29) asks** the Council's Working Party on Information to continue exploring, together with the Commission, the European Parliament and the consultative Committees, all the pragmatic and rational possibilities of organising co-operation on a voluntary basis between the parties involved in communication on Europe;
- 30) entrusts** the Working Party on Information to review the present communication strategy on Europe, if necessary.
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