

Resolution of the Committee of the Regions on 'the Europe Direct Information Centres'

(2012/C 113/02)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. considers Europe Direct Information Centres to be an important element of the European Union's communication policy. There is a growing public need for information about European Union affairs and increased demand for explanations of EU developments and action that are as up-to-date and broad-based as possible;

2. refers to the some 480 existing Europe Direct Information Centres across the EU, which are in many cases run by local or regional authorities but may also be operated by non-governmental organisations;

3. understands that the purpose of Europe Direct is not only to provide general information on the EU and deal with enquiries from the public, but also and in particular to create a positive perception of Europe;

4. thinks this should be achieved through information and awareness-raising events, websites, publications and interaction with local media;

5. underlines the decentralised approach of Europe Direct, which offers the possibility to provide information about Europe across the continent, take account of regional features and meet the resultant specific information needs in a targeted way;

6. therefore expressly welcomes the commitment of European Commission vice-president Viviane Reding who supports the continuation of Europe Direct information centres and has spoken out against any cuts to current levels of funding;

7. points out, however, that European Commission funding for Europe Direct in general covers only a small part of the real costs of Europe Direct Information Centres;

8. notes the considerable financial, staffing and administrative commitment of local and regional authorities to European public relations;

9. is concerned that the increasingly tight budgets of those who run Europe Direct Information Centres is threatening the centres' continued existence across the EU;

10. with an eye to the upcoming call for proposals to select Europe Direct host structures for the 2013-2016 period, fears that without extra EU funding a number of current local and regional partners will not be able to continue their work;

11. believes there is a risk that this may lead to significant setbacks in communicating European policy to civil society;

12. therefore expects an appropriate level of EU funding that reflects the importance of this partnership-based task;

13. stresses that providing information is a genuine task of the European institutions, because communicating basic information about the European Union's structures and policies is in their vital interest. This is clear not least from the fact that Article 49(6) of the Financial Regulation acts as the legal basis. The work of Europe Direct is thus also subject to basic European Commission criteria in terms of content and the administrative arrangements involved. The fact that those who run the centres also feel committed to the goal of communicating European policies and educating people about them and make their own significant contributions to this objective, is a key element in the success of Europe Direct Information Centres. Against that backdrop, there does appear to a good case for increasing current levels of funding;

14. calls on the European Commission to raise significantly the overall funding available for Europe Direct and to double the basic amount for each Europe Direct Information Centre (from the current figure of EUR 12 000 to EUR 24 000);

15. in the interests of freeing up capacity for substantive work, is in favour of cutting red tape, especially by simplifying the module system for managing funding earmarked for a particular purpose;

16. reiterates the clear need for Europe Direct to continue without any restriction. This requires not only the same level of funding, but rather an increase in the funding available;

17. believes that the procurement of more third-party funding is not an appropriate way to improve the situation, as this would call into question the neutrality of information provision. In addition, raising funding ties up the scarce capacity available to small bodies such as Europe Direct centres to a sizable, if not unwarranted degree;

18. is also sceptical about increased funding through public entities, since providing neutral information on EU affairs, as explained above, is essentially a task for the EU institutions;

19. finally, expressly calls on the European Commission not to jeopardise the effective and extremely successful Europe Direct tool by cutting the necessary budgetary funds or by limiting them to their current levels;

20. instructs the CoR president to submit the present resolution to the president of the European Council, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Brussels, 16 February 2012.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Mercedes BRESSO
