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25. Welcomes the increasing participation of the media in publicising the work of the Ombudsman;
26. Approves the annual report for 2005 presented by the European Ombudsman and appreciates, in particular, the detailed breakdown of complaints by procedure adopted, nature of alleged maladministration, institution concerned, etc;
27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution and the report of its Committee on Petitions to the Council, the Commission, the European Ombudsman, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and their ombudsmen or similar competent bodies.

P6_TA(2006)0500**European communication policy****European Parliament resolution on the White Paper on a European communication policy (2006/2087(INI))***The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the communication from the Commission ‘White Paper on a European communication policy’ (COM(2006)0035),
- having regard to Part II of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to Articles 195, 211 and 308 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to Articles 11, 41, 42 and 44 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the communication to the Commission entitled ‘Action Plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission’ (SEC(2005)0985),
- having regard to the communication from the Commission entitled ‘The Commission’s contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate’ (COM(2005)0494),
- having regard to its resolution of 13 March 2002 on the Commission communication on a new framework for cooperation on activities concerning the information and communication policy of the European Union ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 April 2003 on an information and communication strategy for the European Union ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 May 2005 on the implementation of the European Union’s information and communication strategy ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education and the opinions of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (A6-0365/2006),

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 145, 31.5.2001, p. 43.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 47 E, 27.2.2003, p. 400.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 64 E, 12.3.2004, p. 591.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 92 E, 20.4.2006, p. 403.

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- A. whereas communication is an important element of both representative and participatory democracy,
- B. whereas, for this reason, one of the strengths of the democratic elements of the EU is connected to communication structures at the European level which link the institutions with citizens,
- C. whereas the right to information and freedom of expression should be at the heart of democracy in Europe and underpin the political systems at European and national levels and thus, insofar as possible, information should be made available to the public,
- D. whereas the experience of European elections and referenda is that those who were aware and interested in EU issues were more likely to participate, whereas those lacking information were less likely to do so,
- E. whereas there is no consolidated European public sphere at present but very lively national public spheres; whereas those national public spheres reveal deep variations as regards the range and content of the debate on European issues,
- F. whereas it would be an important improvement if in the national public spheres European issues were more prominent,
- G. whereas in order to create a European public sphere, a first step would be to overcome the isolation of national spheres through European communicative action; whereas this is closely related to pan-European or at least transnational media structures,
- H. whereas there is clear evidence of under-information of citizens on European issues, as reflected in the results of various Eurobarometer polls,
- I. whereas communication is also linked to the issue of transparency, simplified procedures, citizenship and shared values,
- J. whereas European issues and the added value of Community legislation are rarely acknowledged during national debates, with national politicians often taking credit for European success stories while, conversely, being quick to criticise the EU, often for failures in policy that arise at national level,
- K. whereas the Brussels European Council of 16 and 17 June 2006 put the issue of institutional reform back on the agenda,
- L. whereas the aim of a 'period of reflection' is to make the Union more democratic and effective and to 'reconnect' it with its citizens,

Communication policy and the European public sphere

1. Welcomes the presentation of the White Paper and endorses the Commission's intentions to make communication policy a policy in its own right;
2. Sees the need to improve communication between the EU and its citizens; therefore supports the attempt to overhaul the way communication with citizens is organised; stresses that better communication cannot compensate for inadequate policies but can improve the understanding of the policies conducted;
3. Welcomes the Commission's recognition of the fact that communication can never be divorced from what is being communicated and that it should be a two-way process that involves listening to citizens, but regrets that these principles, asserted at the beginning of the White Paper, do not find any practical expression; calls on the Commission, therefore, to specify how it intends to take into account citizens' views and suggests, to this end, that possible initiatives launched by other institutions, such as 'Agora', a body that Parliament has decided to set up for the purpose of consultation with civil society representatives, are incorporated;

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4. Urges the Commission to support the creation of a European public sphere, primarily structured through national, local and regional media, though without losing sight of the important role played by quality national and regional newspapers and television news in dedicating sufficient coverage to European affairs; and to that end, calls on the Member States to encourage the national public audiovisual channels adequately to inform the citizens about the policies conducted at European level;
5. Notes that the aim of a European communication policy should not be the creation of a communication sphere that competes with the national public spheres, but rather a close alignment of national debates with the debates at EU level;
6. Urges the Commission to take into consideration the concrete proposals set out in its above-mentioned resolution of 12 May 2005 when designing a communication policy;

Definition of common principles

7. Supports the idea of setting up a two-way communication between the EU and its citizens, which is able and willing to listen more closely to what citizens wish to say about Europe; points out, however, that the idea of citizens becoming drivers of participation and dialogue does not seem reasonable, since it is not citizens who should seek out information, but rather information that should seek out the citizens;
8. Does not consider it appropriate to submit Parliament to a code of conduct that regulates its communication with EU citizens;
9. Asks the Commission to propose a draft interinstitutional agreement defining the common principles that could channel cooperation between the European institutions as regards communication;
10. Urges the Commission to explore the possibility of launching of a genuine Community programme, for information and communication on Europe, in order to improve existing interinstitutional partnership mechanisms in this field; states that should the Commission come forward with a corresponding proposal, Parliament will be fully involved in defining and framing the precise content and scope of the programme;
11. Is of the opinion that stronger reference be made to the principles and values enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights in order to determine the scope of a European communication policy;
12. Stresses that the Charter of Fundamental Rights already lays down citizens' rights regarding information and that any new instrument should respect the prerogatives of Parliament as an elected assembly, in particular its power to freely address citizens from across the Union; calls for its Committee on Constitutional Affairs to examine the possible form and content of an interinstitutional instrument of this kind;
13. Points to the importance of a Constitution for Europe to make the Union more political and democratic and capable of attracting citizens; points out that Parliament, the Council, and the Commission have a political responsibility to support this process;

Reinforcing the role of citizens

14. Welcomes the desire shown by the Commission to take Europe to all levels, in other words, to communicate European issues to national, regional and local level in order to decentralise the message, and insists on the need for such communication to take place on a very regular basis; welcomes the Commission's Action Plan and expects its prompt implementation;
15. Considers that the development of a local European administration, able to support the numerous existing European Union information points, would help to form strong direct links between the Union and its citizens, in particular by improving citizens' access to the European initiatives and programmes that affect

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them; believes that the Commission's and Parliament's information offices in the Member States play an important role in this connection; sees a need in this connection for a thoroughgoing review and rethink of the work carried out to date in the Member States by these information offices, since their public relations activities do not appeal to citizens and the resources earmarked for them could be used far more efficiently; feels, therefore, that they should be more political and less bureaucratic;

16. Welcomes the transparency initiative launched by the Commission in November 2005, which stresses that high standards of transparency are part of the legitimacy of any modern administration; the European public is entitled to expect efficient, accountable and service-minded public institutions;

17. Sees regions and cities as the most suitable platforms for promoting the idea of Europe among citizens and calls for the involvement of the Committee of the Regions in the implementation of a future communication policy;

18. Supports the idea of enhancing debates in national and regional parliaments;

19. Encourages the national parliaments to enhance the scrutiny role of their governments when they act at the Council, thus raising awareness and thereby the democratic accountability of the EU institutions;

20. Stresses that national parliaments should strive to pay more attention to European legislative projects much earlier in the decision-making process;

21. Draws attention to the Presidency Conclusions of the Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments (Budapest, 6 and 7 May 2005), which called upon the national parliaments to hold an annual debate, preferably in plenary session, on the Commission's annual legislative and work programme;

22. Points to the importance of convening interparliamentary forums on the future of Europe, one of which will be meeting to mark the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome; calls, as far as European communication policy is concerned, for the discussions among the representatives of the European people to be taken into account;

23. Underlines the importance of civic education on EU integration; considers that having a certain level of understanding about Europe is a prerequisite for successful interactive communication with the EU, and for contributing to a sense of European citizenship;

24. Regrets that support for sectoral programmes with a strong multiplier effect such as Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates and Erasmus has been cut, since they accentuate the European dimension and facilitate the establishment of transnational networks;

25. Is of the opinion that in order to reach the citizen, it is important to communicate better and show the relevance and impact of EU decisions for daily life through cooperation with regional and local institutions; suggests that emphasis be placed on communicating regularly to the citizens about relevant regional and local projects in which the EU has participated, with the objective of favouring a common European project;

26. Considers that the debate should take into account the specific needs and activities of disabled people and minority groups as well as national and local audiences and specific target groups; points out that more attention should be paid to channelling relevant, as well as regionalised information, to defined target audiences, thereby connecting European issues with citizens' daily lives;

27. Welcomes the initiatives taken by certain Commission representations and by national administrations so as to collaborate on EU-related information campaigns; points out that such collaboration could contribute to the creation of a more direct link between citizens and institutions;

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28. Calls on the Commission to ensure consultation with stakeholders and the public at an early stage of policy shaping; considers that key proposals could be accompanied by an additional section in the impact assessment specifying how citizens' concerns have been taken into account when drafting the proposal; points out that the impact of public consultations on the EU's decision-making process should be clarified;

29. Calls on the Commission to develop a dynamic and reactive communication policy, which, instead of mostly reporting the final consensus achieved, is more focused on reporting the evolution of decisions that are adopted at different stages in the decision-making process; considers that the aim of the Union's communication policy is to give citizens a clear understanding of how European law is made;

Working with the media and new technologies

30. Stresses the importance of the media as intermediaries, opinion formers, and carriers of messages to the citizen in the European public sphere which the Commission is aiming to develop; in that context, urges the Commission to support concrete initiatives such as discussion forums on European cultural and political issues where materials would be available in several languages so that many European citizens could interact and exchange;

31. Emphasises that the informed citizen is the basis of a functioning participatory democratic system;

32. Asks the Commission to define, with the greatest precision possible, which role it would like to assign to the media and stresses the need to find a formula that involves national, regional and local media more closely in communication policy, for which the use of alternative media as a communication channel should also be considered;

33. Takes the view that cross-border cooperation on European policy projects between regional and local media must be stepped up; believes that European cooperation between media and journalists benefits reporting on the European Union, and asks the Commission to set up, as part of the budget, a European Fund for (Investigative) Journalism that supports projects in which journalists from several Member States together explore a European subject in depth and apply it to the differences in local and regional situations;

34. Welcomes the withdrawal of the proposal on the creation of an EU news agency;

35. Recommends that the Commission use clear and concise language when communicating with the media and citizens, and that it does so systematically in the official languages of their Member State of origin or residence; believes that EU jargon increases rather than closes the gap between the EU institutions and citizens;

36. Recommends the creation of regular exchanges of views on European communication matters between the European institutions, particularly Parliament, and the media;

37. Sees it as the responsibility of the Commission in general, and the Member States in particular, to provide objective, reliable and impartial information on European policies as a basis for well-informed debate; accordingly calls on the latter to improve efforts to inform the Member States' civil servants about policies conducted at European level;

38. Welcomes the fact that with respect to the new technologies, the White Paper is in line with Parliament's last report on the EU information and communication strategy;

39. Welcomes the Commission's proposals for a better use of new communication technologies, but calls for measures to be taken to prevent the 'digital divide' making access to information about the Union even more difficult for a section of the population; underlines the need, in the interests of ensuring a coherent approach, to incorporate the means of communication peculiar to each institution, such as Parliament's planned 'Web TV', while respecting its autonomy; maintains also that the traditional mass media, such as television, must be turned to account;

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Understanding European public opinion

40. Asks the Commission to inform Parliament about the assessment of the consultation it has undertaken;

41. Sees as questionable the establishment of an Observatory for European Public Opinion in the short term and considers that before such a task is carried out, more coordinated use should be made of the data and resources already available;

42. Notes that no satisfactory communication policy is possible without exact knowledge of the gaps in the information which Union citizens have, whether relating to the substance of Community action or to the institutions and procedures that serve to implement it; calls, therefore for Eurobarometer personnel to be instructed to carry out an exhaustive specific opinion survey in order to gauge exactly how well informed Community citizens are, distinguishing them according to their country of origin, socio-professional category, and political leanings;

Collaboration

43. Asks the Commission to draw up concrete proposals for the implementation of the communication policy and to evaluate its legal and financial implications;

44. Considers that the work of the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI) should be analysed to see if improvements are possible;

45. Stresses the need for closer involvement of pan-European political parties in dialogue with their constituencies on EU matters;

46. Attaches special importance to the role of political parties in sustaining parliamentary democracy at all levels; regrets that the potential of the transnational political parties remains unfulfilled; deplores the reluctance of many national political parties to embrace the European dimension in a coherent or convincing way; urges political parties to address EU politics in their policy-making and electoral campaigning, and to promote on behalf of the citizen real political choices about the future of Europe;

47. Emphasises that a communication policy must take into account the 'pace' of European affairs, which is often far removed from that of national political agendas, and cannot really develop separately from the specific Union policies and measures, which each have their own particular timetable; considers that the Commission, the Council, and Parliament should agree on a timetable for the key issues likely to be of more direct interest to the different sections of European public opinion in order to channel their communication efforts into these subjects;

48. Calls on the institutions to examine the possibility of setting up a second-level coordination group, on which the competent DGs of the various institutions and representatives of Parliament's committees are represented, to coordinate the specific activities implementing the guidelines laid down by the IGI;

49. Reiterates that the European Union is often viewed as a single whole by citizens, who are not thought to understand the finer distinctions between the institutions, and that the respective communication policies of each institution should therefore be coordinated in a joint approach, while respecting the responsibilities and autonomy of each of them; repeats its call for a large-scale annual interinstitutional debate to be held in plenary for the purpose of adopting a joint declaration on the objectives and means of implementing this policy;

50. Endorses the strengthening of dialogue, and jointly organised public debates, among the European institutions and national and regional bodies; stresses the importance of basing communication on initiatives promoted through popular communication channels such as cultural programmes (literary or film prizes), sporting events etc.; considers that communication should not lose sight of the strategic need to be aimed at 'target audiences' such as universities, local and regional authorities, or professional associations;

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51. Supports the strengthening of the role of the European Ombudsman in giving greater credibility to transparency;
52. Points out that the Prince Programme has traditionally been based on a partnership between the Commission and the Member States; in its most recent report on the EU's communication strategy Parliament underlined the need for parliamentary involvement in establishing the Prince Programme's priorities, and therefore takes the view that its Members should be fully involved in the events organised under the programme's auspices;
53. Recommends increasing the appropriations allocated to existing funding programmes for the purpose of better communication of European integration, such as Lifelong Learning, Youth, Europe for Citizens, Media, and Culture, provided that the objectives of the individual programmes are fully respected;
54. Supports replacing the five budgetary lines for the Prince Programme that exist at present with a single programme run by the Directorate-General for Communication, as this would bring greater flexibility and a central interlocutor;
55. Maintains that the financial support granted by Union needs to be made as visible as possible and hence that every institution, association, or scheme subsidised under a Union programme should be obliged to publicise the aid received;
56. Stresses that for successful communication, the active involvement of the Member States is essential and therefore invites them to find the technical and financial means for contributing to the joint communicative efforts of the EU;
57. Urges the Member States to transpose Community legislation appropriately and promptly in order to ensure that all EU citizens enjoy the same level of rights as conferred by Community legislation; calls on the Commission to ensure more actively that provisions of Community legislation are applied; encourages the Commission to work in partnership with Member States' governments to inform citizens of their right of access to justice and redress should their rights be infringed;
58. Calls on the Commission to prioritise better its communication partnerships by pursuing special relationships with partners with a 'transnational mission', such as the organisations representing the emerging European civil society, European political parties and journalists; affirms the importance of including media aimed at young people, with a view to consolidating a European citizenship area;
59. Points to the need to adapt and further the strategies and substantive areas set out in the White Paper, taking into account the ongoing debates in European society and among the Member States;

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60. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Committee of Regions, the European Social and Economic Committee and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.
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