

Tuesday 24 March 2009

## Active dialogue with citizens on Europe

P6\_TA(2009)0154

### European Parliament resolution of 24 March 2009 on active dialogue with citizens on Europe (2008/2224(INI))

(2010/C 117 E/05)

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Joint Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission entitled 'Communicating Europe in Partnership' signed on 22 October 2008 <sup>(1)</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 2 April 2008 entitled 'Debate Europe – building on the experience of Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate' (Plan D) (COM(2008)0158),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 24 April 2008 entitled 'Communicating Europe through audiovisual media' (SEC(2008)0506),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 21 December 2007 entitled 'Communicating about Europe via the Internet – Engaging the citizens' (SEC(2007)1742),
- having regard to the Commission Working Document of 3 October 2007 entitled 'Proposal for an Inter-Institutional agreement on Communicating Europe in Partnership' (COM(2007)0569),
- having regard to Decision No 1904/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 establishing for the period 2007 to 2013 the programme 'Europe for Citizens' to promote active European citizenship <sup>(2)</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 1 February 2006 entitled 'White Paper on a European Communication Policy' (COM(2006)0035),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 13 October 2005 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 16 November 2006 on the White Paper on a European communication policy <sup>(3)</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 May 2005 on the implementation of the European Union's information and communication strategy <sup>(4)</sup>,
- 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 Constitutional Affairs, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, the Committee on Regional Development, the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality and the Committee on Petitions (A6-0107/2009),

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 13, 20.1.2009, p. 3.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ L 378, 27.12.2006, p. 32.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ C 314 E, 21.12.2006, p. 369.

<sup>(4)</sup> OJ C 92 E, 20.4.2006, p. 403.

Tuesday 24 March 2009

- A. whereas a democratic and transparent European Union will require an enhanced dialogue between citizens and the European institutions, including Parliament, but also an ongoing debate on Europe at European, national and local level,
- B. whereas after the rejection of the draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in France and the Netherlands, 53.4 % of the Irish people voted in a referendum against ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, and whereas people with an inadequate understanding of European Union policies or of the Treaties are more likely to oppose them,
- C. whereas the Eurobarometer 69 survey showed that 52 % of Union citizens believe that their home country's membership of the EU is a good thing, a mere 14 % believing the contrary,
- D. whereas knowledge of the European Union and its policies and functioning, but also of the rights enshrined in the Treaties, will be the foundation for restoring citizens' confidence in the European institutions,
- E. whereas a separate Commissioner for communication strategy was appointed for the first time in 2004, although no communication policy as such has yet been adopted due to the lack of a proper legal basis in the Treaties,

### **Public opinion**

1. Recalls that surveys show that the less educated and less affluent a Union citizen is, the more likely he or she will be to oppose further European integration, which indicates that the European idea, in spite of all previous efforts, mainly reaches the well-educated, wealthy segment of European society; regards active dialogue between the European Union and its citizens as essential so as to realise the principles and values of the EU project, but recognises that the communication has not so far been very successful;
2. Regrets the fact that, in spite of the Commission's efforts and good ideas, the success achieved in increasing Union citizens' level of knowledge and interest in European issues has been very limited, something which was, regrettably, evidenced by the Irish referendum;
3. Stresses the particular importance of creating cohesive communication links with targeted content both between the EU and the regions with particular characteristics and between the EU and particular social groups;
4. Notes that, according to recent polls, a large majority of Europeans are in favour of the European Union speaking with one voice on matters of foreign policy; highlights the fact that a statement to that effect was included at the request of Union citizens in the open letter/recommendations from the participants at the concluding conference of the six Plan D citizens' projects on 9 December 2007; emphasises that the 27 recommendations set out in that open letter also include a call on the Union to take more effective action in the area of social policy and social cohesion, in particular with a view to reducing wage disparities and fostering equality between women and men and, more generally, to pay specific attention to equality-related issues, which are often neglected; suggests that it is therefore also important to look at what is being communicated by actions and to compare how it is at variance with the message the EU wants to give to its citizens;
5. Points out that a majority of women voted 'no' in the most recent referendums on the European Union: 56 % in France (Eurobarometer Flash 171), 63 % in the Netherlands (Eurobarometer Flash 172) and 56 % in Ireland (Eurobarometer Flash 245); believes that one of the factors behind the 'no' vote was the lack of involvement on the part of European institutions in the policies which directly affect women and which underlie the ongoing lack of equal opportunities for men and women, such as policies on reconciling work and family life or dependency support;

Tuesday 24 March 2009

**Constitutional and interinstitutional aspects**

6. Stresses the need to complete the ratification process of the Treaty of Lisbon, which will further increase the transparency of the EU and the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes; recalls in this context the new opportunities for participatory democracy that the Treaty of Lisbon would provide, especially the citizens' initiative;
7. Stresses the need for coordinated efforts and joint action by all EU institutions and Member States to communicate with Union citizens on European issues; welcomes and takes note of the above-mentioned Joint Declaration of 22 October 2008, which sets out clear objectives for the improvement of EU communication on the part of Parliament, the Council, Commission and the Member States; is of the opinion that it could be more ambitious, as Parliament had asked for an Interinstitutional agreement on communication policy between all the institutions;
8. Believes that the EU institutions should initiate further discussions on Europe, and immediately put into practice the concepts laid down in the above-mentioned Joint Declaration, in the Commission Communication of 1 February 2006 and in the Commission Working Document of 3 October 2007;
9. Shares the Commission's view that participatory democracy can usefully supplement representative democracy; stresses, however, that participatory democracy means not only listening to citizens, but giving them real opportunities to influence European policy; Points out that, in order to achieve these aims, the institutions have to become much more open and adopt the approaches required to enable citizens and their organisations to participate effectively at every stage when EU issues are debated; also notes that public access to documents produced by the institutions needs to be granted on as broad a basis as possible, this being a *sine qua non* for the purposes of exerting influence;
10. Stresses the importance and value of the consultation process as an effective tool in empowering citizens by enabling them to input directly into the policy process at EU level; calls on the Commission to take further steps to disseminate information in time on future EU consultations via the media and other appropriate forums at national, regional and local levels, to widen the range of stakeholders' views heard during consultations on EC legislation and to publicise more widely the Internet consultations on EU policies and initiatives so as to ensure that all stakeholders, especially small and medium-sized enterprises and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are involved in the debate; emphasises the importance of representatives of civil society, such as networks of professionals and consumers, at all levels from transnational to local, which provide platforms for an informed exchange of views on EU policies, thus contributing to better quality EC legislation; recognises the problems in the implementation and enforcement of legislation and encourages consumers and businesses to exercise their rights and to report existing problems to the EU institutions;
11. Believes that the EU institutions and the Member States should coordinate their communication efforts and build a partnership with civil society in order to exploit the possible synergies; stresses the need for coordination among the institutions and the desirability of forging links between the Commission's and Parliament's television channels; calls on the Commission to improve cooperation and coordination between its representations in the Member States and Parliament's information offices; calls on the Commission and Parliament representations in Member States to improve cooperation when it comes to consulting citizens, sharing information, knowledge and ideas about the EU with citizens, and providing opportunities for voters to meet MEPs elected in different countries and EU officials;
12. Welcomes the fact that the Commission supports the role of Parliament and the European political parties, and recognises the need to bridge the gap between national and European politics, especially during the European election campaigns;
13. Calls on the three main institutions to consider the possibility of holding joint open debates that would supplement Parliament's open debates, addressing topics that concern consumers and their daily lives and thereby strengthening their confidence in the internal market and consumer protection; points out that Parliamentary intergroups are playing their full part as a citizens' intermediary, a role which genuinely links the political sphere and civil society;

Tuesday 24 March 2009

14. Notes with satisfaction that the Commission has taken into account many of the ideas that Parliament has previously put forward, such as citizens' forums on both a European and national level, a more prominent role for civil society organisations and innovative use of new media;

### ***Going local***

15. Calls on the Commission to extend its dialogue to all levels by adapting its message to different target groups according to their social backgrounds; therefore proposes that the dialogue between the European Union and its citizens should be strengthened by providing the same information, tailored to individual target groups, to everyone and facilitating debate with and among informed citizens; considers that the EU institutions should incorporate the conclusions of local debates organised under the aegis of Plan D into their policies and take into consideration the expectations that citizens have of the EU when deciding on new legislation;

16. Calls on the Member States to launch effective EU communication campaigns at all levels, national, regional and local; calls on the Commission to disseminate the best practices identified from such campaigns and proposes the creation of a permanent, interactive communication system between the EU institutions and citizens, with regular campaigns of a local and regional nature by the EU, the assistance of the regional media and the active participation of civil society, NGOs, chambers of commerce, trade unions and professional organisations;

17. Stresses that the EU's cohesion policy is a basis for European integration and social solidarity; considers therefore that citizens should be made aware of the endeavours and specific effects of EU policies on their daily lives, highlighting the contribution of the EU and the benefits of the common European project; calls in this context for local authorities to provide better information about aid received from the European Union; stresses also that commitment on the part of local and regional elected representatives is essential for developing information provision and training; welcomes in this regard the creation of an Erasmus programme for local and regional elected representatives;

18. Stresses that the involvement of partners in the preparation and implementation of operational programmes, according to Article 11 of the General Regulation on Structural Funds (ESF) 2007-2013, contributes significantly to promoting EU cohesion policy and bringing it closer to citizens; stresses that these partners have a unique opportunity to see at first hand the real issues that are of core concern to citizens; therefore calls on the Commission to ensure that the partnership principle is correctly implemented at national, regional and local level; highlights the importance for national and regional authorities of making use of the existing financial possibilities provided by the ESF, in order to improve the skills of these partners, especially as regards training; notes the significant role which structural funds have played in fostering cross-border co-operation through community projects and programmes, which has encouraged the development of active citizenship and participatory democracy; calls on the Commission to continue to support and work in partnership with such projects and programmes;

19. Stresses the need, in the context of the forthcoming European elections, for information at local and regional level for citizens, and particularly for young people and first-time voters; in a more general context, stresses the importance of the involvement of MEPs, in cooperation with local and regional elected officials, in the consultation process with citizens in their regions, given that they are the voice of the public in the EU; supports the efforts of the Committee of the Regions to strengthen consultation at regional level and to include regional networks and key local and regional players in that process in order to encourage debate at grass-roots level that takes into account their opinions and interests;

20. Stresses the need for its Members to be more closely involved in communication with EU citizens and for changes to be made to the organisation of Parliament's work so as to enable Members to engage in dialogue with citizens at the most local level possible; hopes that in parallel with the political party campaigns, MEPs will be closely involved on the ground in the European elections campaign;

Tuesday 24 March 2009

21. Calls on the Commission to launch local, small-scale communication campaigns with the involvement of local actors, and to promote activities enabling citizens to be better informed about immigrants' countries of origin and, equally, to better inform immigrants of the rights and duties attached to Union citizenship, as the most effective and meaningful ways of achieving these communication goals, and also to continue with the efforts made in the context of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008;

#### ***Education, media and ICT, active citizenship***

22. Stresses the importance of introducing European politics and history into the school curricula of each Member State so as to strengthen European values, and of developing the European Studies departments within university programmes; calls on the Commission to provide financial support for the promotion of such projects; calls on the Member States to promote a school course on the history of European integration and the functioning of the EU, to form the basis of a common European knowledge;

23. Emphasises the particular role of civic education as an essential driving force of active citizenship; notes the need to support an active model of civic education that provides young people with the opportunity to engage directly with public life, with their political representatives at national level, at local level as well as at European level, with representatives of NGOs and with civic initiatives; suggests that the Commission support pilot projects promoting such a model of civic education in the Member States;

24. Recommends that programmes such as Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig and Comenius be more effectively promoted, through more widespread communication, and organised so as to encourage as many people as possible to take part, to increase participation by less affluent citizens and to facilitate their mobility within the EU; draws attention to the fact that these programmes in particular are very popular with young people and make an important contribution to the success of European integration;

25. Welcomes the above-mentioned Commission Communication of 21 December 2007 which sets out clear objectives as to how the Europa website can be turned into a service-oriented web 2.0 site; urges the Commission to complete construction of the new site as early as 2009 and believes that the new website should provide a forum for citizens to share their opinions and participate in online polls, where all NGOs, public institutions and individuals may share their experiences of their EU communication projects; calls on the Commission to collect and publish on this webpage the experiences of beneficiaries of the activities funded under Plan D;

26. Welcomes the idea of EU Tube, as with almost 1,7 million viewers, it is a unique tool with which to communicate EU policies among Internet users; also calls on the Commission to prepare guidelines on efficient Internet campaigns and share them with other EU institutions;

27. Calls on the Commission to make better use of the audiovisual material available on Europe by Satellite by establishing links with local television channels and community media that are interested in obtaining such material for broadcasting, in order to reach wider audiences;

28. Considers the Europe Direct network an important tool for answering citizens' queries by mail or by free telephone call from anywhere in the EU, a tool which should be further publicised;

29. Considers the policy areas of consumer protection and the internal market to be of the utmost importance in communicating Europe to consumers and businesses; calls on Member States to increase efforts to communicate the benefits of the Single Market at national, regional and local level; calls on the Commission and Member States to promote and strengthen interactive communication and information in order to achieve effective dialogue between consumers, businesses and institutions by various electronic means of the latest technology and to contribute to the development of e-commerce;

Tuesday 24 March 2009

30. Asks the Commission to strengthen its coordination efforts in the fields of consumer education and information on consumers' rights and obligations by increasing its financial and human resources; calls on Member States to boost the financial and human resources allocated to the European Consumer Centres Network in order to raise awareness and ensure the application of EU consumer rights and urges Member States, in view of the current global financial crisis and rising levels of consumer indebtedness, to make efforts to improve the level of financial literacy of consumers, in particular concerning their rights and obligations as well as their means of redress with regard to savings and loans;

31. Calls on Member States to increase the human and financial resources allocated to the SOLVIT network that makes it possible to resolve problems arising from the misapplication or non-application of Community legislation free of charge; asks the Commission to accelerate the streamlining of the different services providing information and advice on the single market; therefore supports the concept contained in the Commission's Communication of 20 November 2007 entitled 'A single market for 21st century Europe' (COM(2007)0724) of an integrated approach to the provision of Single Market Assistance Services through the creation of a single-entry webpage; notes the Commission's initiatives on the reduction of administrative burdens and better regulation; calls in particular for improvements to support small and medium-sized enterprises, which represent an important source of jobs in Europe;

32. Notes that a European Year on Volunteering would be an ideal opportunity for the EU institutions to connect with citizens; points out that there are over 100 million volunteers across the EU, and calls on the Commission to prepare the ground for 2011 to be declared as the European Year on Volunteering by submitting an appropriate legislative proposal to that effect as soon as possible;

33. Stresses the importance of considering citizens' opinions on Europe as a global player, taking into account in particular Parliament's increasingly prominent role in this respect; therefore encourages the involvement of MEPs and members of the Council in the Plan D visits by Members of the Commission, as they play an important role in reaching out to national parliaments, civil society, business and union leaders and regional and local authorities in Member States;

34. Is pleased that the world at large is showing an ever greater interest in the European project, and that the EU and its citizens are also becoming more aware of the advantages of sharing their supranational experience with other countries and regions, especially with the EU's neighbours; therefore calls on the Commission to develop, through its delegations in third countries, ways of reaching out to those countries' citizens and informing them about opportunities in the European Union, for example with regard to media and other forms of culture, education, language learning and mobility or exchange programmes such as Erasmus Mundus;

35. Notes that, particularly in the context of the increase in the number of third-country nationals in the EU and the emergence of multicultural societies, to which they have also contributed, greater efforts should be made to provide for the integration of immigrants into the EU, giving them concrete access to information about what Union citizenship entails by, for example, strengthening partnerships between different levels of government (local, regional and national) and non-governmental players (e.g. employers, civil society and migrants' associations, the media and NGOs supporting migrants); considers that successful integration will support the further development of a multicultural European consciousness based on tolerance, dialogue and equality;

36. Calls on the Commission to promote programmes and campaigns (such as 'The world through women's eyes') for encouraging women to become more socially, politically, and culturally active, taking into account women's role in the dialogue between generations and society's sustainability and prosperity; calls therefore for girls and women to be given better information on the concept of European citizenship and the rights pertaining thereto, particularly in socially and geographically isolated regions; stresses that the aim of these information campaigns should be to improve women's participation in political life and the decision-making process; stresses the need to promote measures to overcome the gender digital divide so as to provide women with the tools to take part in the dialogue on Europe under equal conditions;

Tuesday 24 March 2009

congratulates the Commission on the choice of projects to be co-funded, under plan D, by its representations, which include many projects run by women's organisations and many projects involving women; stresses the need to encourage citizens' participation when it comes to issues such as gender violence or human trafficking, where the involvement of society is vital if progress is to be made in resolving the problem; acknowledges the problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills of women, and urges the Commission to include more women in task forces and working groups, engaged with the issues of family life, childcare, education etc.;

\*

\*      \*

37. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the European Council, the Commission, the Council, the Court of Justice of the European Communities, the Court of Auditors, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

---

## The work of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in 2008

P6\_TA(2009)0155

### European Parliament resolution of 24 March 2009 on the work of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in 2008 (2008/2303(INI))

(2010/C 117 E/06)

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the partnership agreement between the members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states (ACP), of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part, signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000 (Cotonou Agreement) <sup>(1)</sup>,
- having regard to the Rules of Procedure of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA), adopted on 3 April 2003 <sup>(2)</sup>, as most recently amended in Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea) on 28 November 2008 <sup>(3)</sup>,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1905/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 establishing a financing instrument for development cooperation <sup>(4)</sup>,
- having regard to the Kigali Declaration on development-friendly Economic Partnership Agreements <sup>(5)</sup> (EPAs), adopted by the JPA on 22 November 2007 in Kigali (Rwanda),
- having regard to the Port Moresby Declaration on the global food and financial crises <sup>(6)</sup>, adopted by the JPA on 28 November 2008 in Port Moresby,
- having regard to the resolutions adopted by the JPA in 2008:
  - on the social and environmental consequences of structural adjustment programmes <sup>(7)</sup>,

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 317, 15.12.2000, p. 3.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 231, 26.9.2003, p. 68.

<sup>(3)</sup> ACP-EU/100.291/08/fin.

<sup>(4)</sup> OJ L 378, 27.12.2006, p. 41.

<sup>(5)</sup> OJ C 58, 1.3.2008, p. 44.

<sup>(6)</sup> OJ C 61, 16.3.2009, p. 42.

<sup>(7)</sup> OJ C 271, 25.10.2008, p. 20.