

Resolution on the situation of Europe Direct information centres (EDIC)

(2017/C 017/03)

Submitted by the PES, EPP, ALDE, EA and ECR political groups

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

- having regard to its Resolution from 16 February 2012 on the Europe Direct Information Centres (EDIC) (CoR 84/2012);
- having regard to its opinion on 'Reconnecting Europe with its citizens — more and better communication at local level' from 3 December 2014 (COR-2014-04460);
- 1. notes that the EU is facing major political and economic challenges. The fact that a democratic deficit is continuing and citizens are becoming increasingly disenchanted with the EU illustrates the need for joint efforts from all actors in European politics in order to increase engagement with EU citizens in the European project and for European policies to secure their legitimacy;
- 2. underlines that local and regional authorities are well placed to help better connect citizens with the actors of European politics and to inform European leaders about the direct needs of citizens. This is why more importance should be attached to decentralised European communication process;
- 3. commits to step up the cooperation with the EDICs within the framework of its communication strategy 2015-2020;
- 4. recalls that the Europe Direct Network, with its current 518 information centres in the Member States, plays a key role in decentralised European communication strategy. It is one of the most important instruments of the European Commission to inform citizens at local and regional levels about the concrete importance of various European political topics on their daily life;
- 5. welcomes the current evaluation process of the European Commission's framework for the content and technical aspects of the EDIC with view to preparing the 2018-2023 funding period and setting of the EDIC's new framework conditions;
- 6. considers that the EDIC's networking with the European institutions and the European Commission's other information networks, and the link that they provide with the bodies and needs of regions, local institutions and civil society stakeholders are crucial;
- 7. notes that with regard to the current situation of crisis the work of the EDIC has become increasingly important and demanding. Considering the numerous challenges that the EU is facing, the aim should be to use the EDICs' full potential and to further strengthen its role regarding European communication processes. A balanced geographical distribution must be ensured, and there must be no reduction in the current number of bodies providing the service in the individual local and regional authorities;
- 8. considers that the work of the EDIC can be guaranteed in future by developing the already strong collaboration and funding from the EU;
- 9. proposes that financial resources allocated to the EDIC for the next funding period should be substantially increased within the existing multi-annual framework. In particular the lump sum allocated to the basic information offer per EDIC should be doubled and the standard lump sums for funding the different modules should be increased, while ensuring that EDICs strive to improve their efficiency and maximise the good use of their resources. Finally, putting more financial resources at the disposal of pilot modules will enable to react to crisis situations. In this way, an increase in costs like for instance for wages and rents could be absorbed;
- 10. in view of the increased demands on the EDICs, expects financing to be improved. The amount of support should therefore be significantly increased;
- 11. insists on the fact that in view of the public-service nature of the EDICs' activities, they continue to be exempt from VAT;
- 12. underlines that the administrative burden should be drastically lifted;

13. confirms that in principle the European Commission's measures regarding decentralised European communication activity reach their target groups. Nevertheless, the European Commission's priorities only partially match the needs of citizens when it comes to European policies. The more abstract a topic is, the less it will be regarded by citizens as a relevant political matter. For this reason, particular attention should be directed to tackling European political issues that touch the citizen in his daily life;
14. believes that links between the EDIC and local and regional networks of associations should be stepped up by introducing a two-way channel of communication, in order to identify different areas of interest to citizens, so that European information can be better tailored to their questions;
15. notes that the module system is generally considered as positive. However, series of modifications are necessary, like for instance making the different modules more flexible;
16. calls on the European Commission to give the EDIC the possibility to adjust planned measures according to both the Commission's communication preferences and to local needs. If they want to give the European project a future, actors of European politics have to communicate with citizens in such a way that the latter will see Europe again as a common home, as a community of values and peace, as a driving force for social and cultural progress and for justice. Thanks to an information offer close to its citizens, the EDIC can create a link between both parties and promote Europe in a positive way among citizens;
17. suggests that when the new 2018-2023 financing period begins, an information campaign should be launched highlighting the added value of the 'Europe Direct' label and raising awareness of the day-to-day work of the EDIC and their local and regional European actions, to supplement the usual information on high-level meetings that fails to convey an image of the European venture as a whole to citizens;
18. suggests that the module system should be open to regional priorities, formats and groups not so far identified as targets and in particular a flexible use of available modules. The aim is to adapt communication to local needs as much as possible. It should be possible to present regional projects so as to adapt communication to local needs as much as possible. This would serve to enhance the partnership between authorities which together guarantee regional coverage of appropriate public services, more pertinent and up-to-date communication strategies and more structured contacts with stakeholders and the other European networks. Provision should be made to have recourse to forms of partnership allowing for public-private cooperation, as in fact encouraged by the European Commission in the 2014-2020 programme for the European funds. These projects should be guaranteed suitable funding based on population density and public points of contact;
19. calls for the introduction of an option to fund cooperation between different information centres, in order both to facilitate exchange of best practice between centres in different areas, and to harness synergies, especially when they have the same target group with similar characteristics and needs;
20. emphasises in conclusion that the role of the EDIC is crucial to local and regional authorities who know best local and regional stakeholders as well as the topics of interest to citizens. They are particularly qualified to identify which kind of information and which methodology will help to reach the citizens and appeal to them. Their role regarding European communication is therefore vital and should be further strengthened in particular through closer collaboration with the European institutions;
21. supports the European Parliament's call on the Commission to provide appropriate and comprehensive guidance to the organisers of European Citizens' Initiatives ⁽¹⁾;
22. suggests that the European Commission steps up cooperation between different European networks in order to enhance information and communication to citizens, providing them with a wider range of responses to their questions.

Brussels, 16 June 2016.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Markku MARKKULA

⁽¹⁾ See European Parliament Resolution of 28 October 2015 on the European Citizens' Initiative (2014/2257(INI)).