

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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INFORMATION PROGRAMME FOR 1979

(Communication from the Commission to the Council)

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INFORMATION PROGRAMME FOR 1979

1. In the first half of 1979 the information activities of the Commission in member countries will be focussed on the first direct elections to the European Parliament. The programme which its information service is undertaking jointly with that of the Parliament will be the major priority. This programme will be supported by other activities designed to reach a wide audience : these will continue through the second half of the year.

2. In non-member countries greater emphasis will be given to work in those countries which are seeking to join the Community, with the opening of offices in Madrid and Lisbon. Special attention will also be given to the information needs of the ACP countries in view of the conclusion of a revised Lome agreement. New initiatives are also planned for south east Asia and southern Mediterranean countries.

INFORMATION IN MEMBER COUNTRIES

Preparing for direct elections

3. The Commission notes with pleasure the excellent working relations that have been established at all levels with the European Parliament and its information service in the planning and organisation of the joint information programme for direct elections. This programme, which will be distinct from the electoral campaigns of the political parties, has three objectives. It aims to interest the citizens of the Community in the election; to encourage them to take part in it, and to provide them with objective and non-partisan information about the Parliament and the Community which will help them to make an informed choice at the polls. In responding to the request of the European Parliament to assist its own information service in undertaking this programme, the Commission seeks to make a significant contribution to the success of the elections, to which it attaches great importance.

4. The planning of this programme, which will take the form of a multimedia campaign in each of the member countries, has been the responsibility of a joint body set up by the two institutions which will continue to guarantee political supervision of it. At the technical level, the main burden of work has fallen on the information offices of the Commission and the Parliament in each country, assisted in each case by a specialised agency. In the Netherlands, however, the National Committee for Direct Elections is undertaking its own information campaign, with the financial support of the two institutions, and with the support of their offices in The Hague.

5. The necessary preparations having been completed in time, the campaigns in the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, the Federal Republic and France were launched in January. It is planned to begin those in Italy and Ireland during the first half of February, as well as certain parts of the programme

in the United Kingdom. In the latter case, however, a decision on the timing of advertising in the press has yet to be made.

In Luxembourg, following a request from the political parties, the opening of the campaign will be delayed until the beginning of March.

6. The range of media used will vary from country to country, but each campaign has been designed to achieve maximum impact with the available resources, which total 8.5 million UCE, of which 5 millions come from the Parliament's budget, and 3.5 millions from the Commission.

7. At the same time both of their information services have also been cooperating closely with the national broadcasting networks of the member countries which, within the framework of the European Broadcasting Union, have been making their own plans for the covering of the elections. A central part of these plans is to provide coverage not only of the results in their own countries, but also - on a cooperative basis - a service of news and comment covering the Community as a whole. The EBU is also planning, for the weeks immediately preceding the election, a special daily exchange of visual material on the development of the electoral campaign.

8. The Commission and the Parliament have also agreed to make a financial contribution to a new cooperative venture between a number of national radio networks which are planning to exchange material in the period leading up to the elections.

9. The information service of the Commission, like that of the Parliament, has - in parallel with these joint activities - also produced a range of supporting written and audio-visual material. On the Commission side this includes a new 64 -page brochure ; a simple 16 page illustrated pamphlet entitled 'The European Community - Your Future'; two new films ; and sets of slides.

10. Both its central information units and its offices will also be undertaking other complementary activities. The monthly magazines produced by the offices will provide extensive background coverage to the elections; a competition for an election poster has been organised in cooperation with a number of women's magazines; and support is being given to a wide range of organisations which are organising their own information programmes related to the elections.

11. This complex of activities will be by far the largest single information campaign which the Community institutions have ever undertaken. The Commission hopes that it will not only make a significant contribution to ensuring a high level of participation in the elections, but also to a substantial increase of interest in, and understanding of, the Community and its activities among the public in general. It also hopes that this interest will be sustained after the elections.

Continuing activities

12. During 1979 the Commission's programme will also provide information about other aspects of the work of the Community, as well as reflecting and further developing the changes in emphasis following from the new guidelines agreed in 1977, and first put into effect last year.

Themes

13. One of the central features of these guidelines was to insist on the need to concentrate the content of information work on current aspects of the work of the Community and to show their relevance to current problems and the concerns of the citizens of the Community. While the information work related to direct elections will range over a very wide area of the Community's activities, it will also be necessary to focus attention on a range of issues related to current developments within the Community, to its relations with the rest of the world, and to its future enlargement.

14. The aim will be to show that the Community is once again on the move, particularly with regard to its internal developments - even if it is still faced with major problems. At the same time it will be necessary to demonstrate the interdependence of internal and external policies in such areas as world trade negotiations, and relations with the ACP countries.

15. Decisions on special information campaigns will be taken by the Commission in the light of its own priorities, it being recognised that such campaigns require careful and detailed preparation to ensure that they make an impact on the general public.

16. In order to facilitate this aspect of information work, the Commission intends to take a number of organisational steps to further improve cooperation between its Directorate General for information and other services.

Audiences

17. Another major aim of the Commission's new information guidelines is to reach far wider audiences than in the past. It will continue to pursue this objective beyond the elections, taking into account the lessons learned from the special information campaign.

18. At the same time the Commission recognises the importance of that part of its work directed towards opinion leaders because of the influence they exert in shaping attitudes towards the Community within - and often beyond - the organisations in which they are active.

19. Over the years the Commission has built up relations with a very wide range of organisations both at Community and national level. Some of them - the trade union movement and agricultural organisations, "womens organisations", for instance - can provide access to very wide audiences. As far as the younger generation is concerned, universities and schools have also a crucial role.

While seeking to provide information appropriate to the interests of the organisations with which it works, the Commission will also examine how the channels they offer can best be used to provide information on the widest possible scale for their members as well as those of other organisations which could extend its links with the public.

Instruments

20. In order to be able more effectively to reach a wider audience, the Commission initiated in 1978 a number of changes both with regard to the overall deployment of its information resources, and also with the aim of improving the use of the instruments of its information policy. Further measures with the same aim will be taken in 1979 : a number of these are highlighted below.

Information offices

21. The information offices are one of the most essential tools of the Commission's information work. They perform a wide range of functions in each member country, and are a vital channel of communication between the Community and the public. Steps have been taken to reinforce the unit which maintains liaison with them in Brussels, and in 1979 it is proposed to increase the proportion of funds allocated for their work.

22. In the larger member countries, however, the offices in the capitals have neither the staff or other resources to provide an effective and regular response to the increasing demands for closer attention to be paid to the information needs of the public in particular regions. The one exception to this is in the United Kingdom, where offices exist in Edinburgh and Cardiff, and where a further office is to be opened in Belfast. Experience has shown that the work of such offices is much appreciated. Subject to the resources available, the Commission will therefore consider the possibility of setting up new offices or creating mobile information teams in certain Member States of the Community.

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23. In the meantime, the Commission will continue to provide as much information as possible on the ways in which Community activities - and in particular the use of Community funds - impinge on individual regions. Such information is regularly used by regional and local media, and helps to bring home to a wide public the importance and relevance of Community activities.

The media : press, radio and television

24. The media also play a vital role in informing the public about the Community. The services offered by the Spokesman's Group in Brussels to the accredited press corps are of fundamental importance in this context : they ensure a daily flow of information and comment about the Community throughout the world.

25. The technical facilities now available in Brussels for television and radio networks have an equally vital role. In 1979 it is planned to complete the major capital equipment programme for the television facilities by the addition of an electronic news gathering unit which will provide a mobile facility linked into the studio. It is also proposed to continue the recent trend of increasing the funds available for this part of the Commission's information work.

Publications

26. As a result of the internal reorganisation carried out in 1978, the responsibility for a number of more specialised publications has been transferred from the Directorate General Information to enable it to concentrate on a range of more popular publications needed for a wider public. The first results of this switch in emphasis will be seen in 1979 with a widening of the range of issues dealt with in the fortnightly Euroforum ; a revised series of weekly features ; and a series of briefing notes on individual topics.

Visits

27. It is intended to maintain a policy of selectivity in the choice of groups and individuals invited to Brussels, with the emphasis on quality rather than quantity. In 1978 900 groups were received, totalling 23,600 visitors. The aim is to maintain the same rhythm during the current year.

INFORMATION IN NON-MEMBER COUNTRIES

28. In 1979, some 25 % of the total funds available for information work will be allocated for activities in non-member countries. The Commission is aware, however, of the growing demand - supported by most of the member states - further to expand this aspect of information activities. It proposes to give careful consideration to this issue during the preparation of its budgetary requests for 1980.
29. In the meantime, it will seek - within the limits of its existing resources, both of staff and funds - to take into account a series of new needs while maintaining current levels of activity in the major industrialised countries - the United States, Canada and Japan.
30. The opening of new offices in Madrid and Lisbon will, for instance, provide it with the instruments necessary to develop its work in these two candidate countries.
31. The current negotiations for the renewal of the Lome Convention also point to the need to build up information activities for those countries. There the resources of the Directorate General for Information can be complemented in some cases by those available to other services of the Commission, as well as by the help available through the embassies of member states.
32. The projected opening of an information office in Bangkok - as part of a new Delegation there - will offer a base from which to develop information work in south-East Asia, and in Latin America the transfer of the main information office, together with the Delegation, to Caracas will provide a new base for work in that continent. As far as the southern Mediterranean countries are concerned, where the non-ratification of the agreements concluded with the Community has held back information work in recent years, their coming into effect - and the creation of eight Delegations in those countries - will also offer a new basis for further information work.
33. In most of these countries the programme will continue to be focussed on opinion leaders. However, over 60 developing countries now show, either in cinemas or on television, a weekly film magazine - Europe Pictorial - to which both the member states and the Commission contribute. Editorial responsibility for its content lies with the Commission, but is exercised in close cooperation with member governments through the working group on information of the Council of Ministers. It is intended to keep a close watch on the content and the effectiveness of such information, in collaboration with delegates in the ACP countries and embassies of the Member States.
34. Similarly, in the field of exhibitions, the Commission also maintains a regular dialogue with the member states, with whom it discusses the possibilities of joint or grouped participations in exhibitions in non-member countries. In 1979, there will be joint participation in exhibitions in Barcelona, Zagreb and possibly New Delhi.

STAFF AND RESOURCES

35. The information services of the Commission have at present limited resources, both in staff and funds. Taking into account the new aims and plans described in the present document, as well as the development of information activities arising from the policy initiatives of the Commission and the increasing range of Community action, an increase in the staff and the information budget should be considered in the context of the preparation of the 1980 budget. This should also take into account the need to maintain a functional balance between the central services and the information offices in member and non-member countries.