

**THE COMMISSION'S INFORMATION
AND COMMUNICATION POLICY
A NEW APPROACH**

Communication from

Commissioner João de Deus PINHEIRO

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COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMISSION

The Commission has discussed the question of information and communication policy on various occasions in the recent past, notably following the oral presentation of Mr Pinheiro on 5 May 1993 and during the discussion on openness at its meeting on 2 June 1993.

The communication briefly reviews the difficulties faced in the area of information and communication policy and sets the issue in its wider political context. It makes a series of specific recommendations in order to overcome the difficulties encountered, notably by ensuring a greater presence of the information and communication dimension in Commission activities and the appropriate means for adequate coordination.

The Commission is requested to adopt the principles laid down in this communication and to take note that it will be followed by a series of more specific documents as enumerated in point 5.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The object of this paper is to present the main principles and framework for the Commission's future information and communication policy and to identify the necessary procedures and structures to ensure its implementation. It outlines the political context of the problem and in general terms, the proposed conceptual and organisational remedies. It will be followed by a series of more specific proposals as outlined in the conclusion which will be presented before the end of September so that they can be fully implemented before the end of 1993.

1.2. The recommendations take into account the internal screening of Commission services in 1991 and its follow-up as regards DG X ; the De Clercq report of March 1993, and the Oostlander report currently being discussed in the European Parliament, which have made important contributions to the debate and provided a broad consensus about the main problem areas.

2. PROBLEM AREAS

These fall into two broad categories, those external to the Commission and those related to its internal policy and procedures.

A. EXTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS

- The Commission has to operate in a transcultural and transnational environment and a complex institutional framework. Dealing with twelve different sets of public opinion makes the Commission's task considerably more difficult. At the same time it has a key rôle to play in the process of European integration.
- The institutional framework creates a multiplicity of suppliers of information often with conflicting objectives and without a clear division of tasks among them. This results in uncertainty in the mind of the citizen particularly as to what may be expected from the various actors (Community Institutions, Member States).

- The complexity of the Community's structures and policies have become more apparent in the light of the debate around the single market, the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty and the Community's political rôle in the post-cold war period.
- The current political, social and economic background has made the Community a constant matter for public debate. The people, economic operators and public authorities are increasingly tempted to make the Community, and particularly the Commission, the scapegoat for many of the ills of society.
- The public has become more vigilant, even suspicious, towards public authorities, including the European institutions. People demand more information, better explanations and a faster service. What they do not want are propaganda and platitudes.

B. INTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS

- The Commission lacks a coordinated overall strategy to communicate its political objectives which is interpreted as weakness on its part.
- This insufficient coordination leads to a quantitative surfeit of information but often of insufficient quality.
- The importance of information and communication is not generally appreciated within the Commission with the result that there is an insufficiently professional approach in this area.
- There is a lack of proper identification of the audiences to be reached and a failure to take sufficient account of the type of information demanded by the public.
- There is too much technocratic language and there is a failure to fully exploit the most up-to-date means of communication.

The Commission has attempted to address some of these problems, notably by the creation of the Priority Information Programme in 1987 but this has had only a limited impact and has tended to be descriptive of what is already being done rather than prescriptive of what should be achieved.

3 THE CHALLENGE

3.1 The Commission has not been fast enough to tackle these problems and adapt to the new environment, although it is not alone in this respect. It has to respond now. Public opinion no longer accepts the Community without question. The information deficit has become part of the democratic deficit. It is therefore necessary to justify the aims and policies of the Community.

The urgency of the challenge is further underlined by the fact that the Community is confronted by a number of important political deadlines in the near future; its development following ratification of the Maastricht Treaty; the functioning of the single market; the European elections in June 1994; future enlargement; and the new IGC in 1996.

The Commission has to be present in a visible and credible way in these rendez-vous, in line with its particular rôle in the institutional process. It has a responsibility to better inform the Community's citizens about its policies and to engage in an on-going dialogue with them. In order to inform and communicate successfully it must listen to what the public has to say.

3.2 Information and communication cannot replace policy but it is an indispensable part of any efficient policy. Without going so far as to say that policy does not exist until it is communicated, effective communication plays a supreme rôle in determining the degree of success of any particular policy.

4 THE NEW APPROACH

The information and communication policy of the Commission must take account of the political context within which it operates and recognise where its responsibility stops and that of others begins. To be efficient it has to be underpinned by a firm political mobilization throughout the institution at all levels.

The following principles must be at the heart of the Commission's approach :

- information is an integral part of the communication process and must be open, complete, simple and clear. This is openness in action;
- information and communication policy must be relevant and therefore demand-oriented taking account of clearly identified audiences;
- there must be a coherent approach which can only be ensured by coordination among the various suppliers of information;
- information must be user-friendly and available rapidly whether in response to demand or initiated by the Commission.

A. OPENNESS

The Commission must explain all aspects of its decisions, even the most difficult ones and indicate the reasons for its final position. The status of any document, any information, and any comment must be spelled out and explained so that it is clear whether the Commission is committed or not.

The language and documents used for information and communication must take account of the range of public opinion and cultural backgrounds among the Member States. Language used in Commission documents and correspondence must also be as free of jargon as possible.

Special attention must be paid to the various media as key components in the information process. The Commission must ensure that it presents its policies to the media in an open way and that it makes itself easily accessible to requests for information.

B. DEMAND-ORIENTED

The Commission has to respond to the needs of the citizen when setting its political priorities and communicating its decisions. The Commission must therefore refine existing means of evaluating attitudes and trends in opinion in the Member States and elsewhere and develop new methods to ensure an adequate exploitation of this raw material (opinion polls, etc.).

Information and communication activities must have clear targets which correspond to citizens' needs as these vary in different Member States. The success of these actions depends ultimately on the adaptation of information and communication activities to the needs and expectations of the recipients.

C. COORDINATION

a) Internal

Coherence and efficiency within the Commission can only be assured if there is a properly disciplined coordination structure. This is essential to make clear to the public what Commission policy is and what it is not.

The political priorities of the Commission as set out specifically in its Annual Work Programme must be reflected in its information and communication policy. When important policies are prepared the information and communication aspect has to be addressed from the outset and Commission services must integrate this dimension into their work as a matter of course.

b) External

The Commission has to play a leading rôle in securing the active cooperation of other European institutions, in particular the European Parliament and the Council as well as the Economic and Social Committee and Member States whilst recognising their different responsibilities. This partnership is crucial for the success of Community policy. Each partner needs to be aware of, and to fulfil, its rôle in relation to information and communication in Community affairs.

D. USER-FRIENDLY

Information and the means of dissemination must be user-friendly in order to be effective. The Commission has to ensure therefore that reliable factual information is easily available in the most appropriate form to the general public, policy-makers, opinion-formers and other specific audiences.

The European public's main information sources have shifted from the written word to the audiovisual and electronic media. The Commission must therefore seek not only to further improve its publications but also to exploit the possibilities offered by newer forms of communication.

Networks and relays also increase the efficiency, flexibility and penetration of the Commission's information and communication activities. They provide it with an additional means of involving both the public at large and special interest groups. And they bring the Community close to the citizen and provide the Commission with a further instrument for listening to citizens' concerns.

5 PROCEDURES AND STRUCTURES

Before examining which procedures and structures are most appropriate to meet these challenges, it is necessary to establish the main areas of responsibility within the Commission for information and communication. In broad terms, there are three main groups of information : political, general and specialised. These may include information before and after decisions are taken, further allowing the public to be familiarised with them and with the European Institutions.

These categories of information are respectively the responsibility of the College and the Spokesman's Service, DG X, and the DGs and Services in charge of the specialised subject in question. These will be examined in more detail below.

Firstly, however, an appropriate mechanism must be created to ensure that the information and communication dimension is integrated into all Commission policies with external implications. This will be done by means of an information plan attached to all policy proposals. This idea is explained further below (see paragraph E.3).

A. THE COLLEGE

1. The Commission has already decided that each month the Commissioner responsible for relations with Member States will present an oral report to the Commission on the social and political situation in the Community, thereby affording the opportunity for debate about any political guidelines and actions which may be required.

The College is also responsible for the definition of political priorities in information and communication policy; the principal ideas to be conveyed; the reactions to developments in the field etc. A group of Commissioners can be called upon when necessary to discuss particular issues and Commissioners can participate in the Strategy Group (see paragraph B below) as they consider appropriate.

2. The Commissioner for information and communication will, when necessary and in agreement with the President, give briefings on general Community affairs to the media. Members of the Commission will give more frequent press conferences on their specific areas of responsibility. Whenever possible they will put forward the Commission's views on the widest possible range of Community subjects throughout the Community.

3. The mission of the Spokesman's Service is to inform the accredited press in Brussels on the policy and activities of the Commission and its Members. It maintains close links with DG X whose task is essentially that of medium- and long-term information and communication policy.

B. STRATEGY GROUP

1. A "Strategy Group" will be created under the responsibility and chairmanship of the Commissioner in charge of information and communication in order to assist him in his work.

The Group will also comprise: the Secretary-General; the Spokesman; the Director-General of DG X and a member of the President's cabinet. Cabinets, DGs and Services directly concerned by particular issues will be invited as appropriate to participate in the Group's meetings. DG X will be responsible for the secretariat of this group. The group may also call upon the assistance of outside independent specialists on a temporary basis to give advice on particular aspects of its work.

2. The "Strategy Group" will meet on a regular basis. Its rôle will be to:

- give advice in broad policy terms to the Commission;
- alert the Commission to anticipated or actual shifts in public opinions and propose appropriate remedial action at all levels;
- examine periodically the effectiveness of information and communication actions.

C. STEERING COMMITTEE

A Steering Committee will be established whose main mission will be to ensure an integrated and coherent approach for all information and communication strategy. It will be chaired by DG X and composed of senior representatives of all DGs and Services.

This committee will

- ensure proper coordination of all information and communication activities;
- evaluate the efficiency of such activities and ensure that they meet the specific needs of the various audiences concerned;;
- examine proposals for staff training in information and communication skills.

The committee will, as a general rule, meet once a month and conduct an overall evaluation exercise once a quarter.

D. DG X

1. DG X has overall responsibility for the internal coordination of information and communication actions. It is also responsible for general information and communication addressed either to the general public or to specific audiences, for example, within the framework of campaigns. More specifically, DG X:

- prepares general guidelines for the Strategy Group, after consultation of the Steering Committee when necessary;
- delivers an opinion on the information plans referred to above;
- provides professional advice, assistance and technical support to other DGs and Services regarding the conception, implementation and evaluation of their information and communication activities;
- pilots the monitoring and evaluation process of information and communication activities in collaboration with the DGs and Services concerned and informs the Strategy Group of the results;
- provides a professional service to the media, especially in the audiovisual field, in cooperation with the Spokesman's Service particularly by providing adequate assistance and facilities for TV stations;
- is responsible for the Offices in the Member States and spearheads cooperation with the other institutions and with the Member States;

- is responsible for the mobilisation of Commission staff by making them aware of the importance of information and communication policy and for proposing to the Steering Committee, in collaboration with DG IX, appropriate training initiatives.

2. The future organisation of DG X will be the subject of a further communication in accordance with the principles set out in this document and along the following general lines:

- user- and audience-related;
- a "listening" function;
- a clear distinction between tasks of conception and implementation;
- flexibility and mobility to ensure a rapid response to any situation;
- the provision of professional advice;
- better exploitation of audiovisual and electronic means of communication.

E. OTHER DGS AND SERVICES

1. Other DGs and Services have the following responsibilities in the field of information and communication

- keeping DG X regularly informed of their activities in the field of information and communication;
- the provision of specialised information to both general and specialised audiences, for example to young people about the Community's educational programmes, to women in relation to equal opportunity initiatives, etc.;
- answering requests for information in their fields of activity;
- the preparation, in cooperation with DG X and the Spokesman's Service, of the information plans attached to policy proposals;
- the evaluation, in collaboration with DG X, of their activities.

2. Each DG and Service will designate a clearly identified correspondent (who will also normally be the representative on the Steering Committee) or, in appropriate cases a unit or sector, to handle information and communication in the field of its competence. This correspondent or unit will, in principle, be under the direct authority of the Director-General.

3. The information plans will spell out any information and communication actions proposed in relation to the policy initiative in question and indicate the audiences, means and cost involved. They will take into account the likely reaction among policy-

makers, opinion-formers and the public at large. Where necessary, they will be accompanied by a draft press release and background material for the Spokesman's Service. DG X will give its opinion on these plans before they are submitted to the Commission.

F. THE OFFICES IN THE COMMUNITY

In order to strengthen the decentralisation of information and communication activities, there will be a further reinforcement of the Offices in the Community.

More specifically, they will

- develop their rôle in monitoring trends in opinion in order to alert the Commission to significant developments;
- advise on specific concerns which may arise in their Member State, thereby enabling the Commission to take account of differences of feeling from one country to another;
- give advice on the necessary adaptations of the content of information material for their respective publics;
- assist in the preparation and the implementation of information and communication strategy;
- ensure adequate feedback in order to assist the evaluation and adjustment process;
- exercise a leading rôle in relation to networks and relays operating in their countries.

G. NETWORKS AND RELAYS

A more systematic and coherent approach is needed towards these important instruments of information and communication strategy. Their rights and obligations must be defined more clearly. Every effort will be made to maximise the effectiveness of existing networks and relays, and create or stimulate new ones only where appropriate - such relays must not multiply indiscriminately otherwise confusion will result.

The part played by the Publications Office particularly in this area must not be overlooked.

H. USERS' ADVISORY COUNCIL

A Users' Advisory Council will be created to enable the views of the main categories of users to be made known to the Commission. It will be composed, amongst others, of representatives of the written and audiovisual press and from the various socio-professional groups. It will meet twice a year.

The council will be chaired by the Commissioner for information and communication. DG X will be responsible for its secretariat. All interested DGs and Services will be invited to attend its meetings.

The council will give advice to the Strategy Group on the effectiveness of the Commission's information and communication strategy.

I. INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION

It is crucial that synergy and cooperation with other Community institutions, the Member States, local authorities and non-governmental organisations develop into more concrete forms of partnership. It is important to note that Member States have a shared responsibility with the Community institutions to provide information to the public, particularly in order to stress the Community's achievements and in as much as Community legislation affects people in their daily lives, to stimulate debate on the future activities of the Community. This will bring the Community much closer to its citizens, who too often tend to look at it as "something remote in Brussels".

The conclusions of the European Council in Edinburgh underlined the importance of stimulating the activities of the Member States in general and the Council Information Group in particular, in order to ensure closer cooperation in information strategy. Work is already underway in this respect. A striking example of cooperation at national level is the Arche documentation centre in Paris - other countries must be encouraged to develop similar initiatives.

A concrete example of interinstitutional cooperation are the plans being discussed with the European Parliament to organise a neutral "Use Your Vote" campaign in view of the 1994 election. In addition, the Commission and Parliament Offices in the Member States are looking at ways of developing existing cooperation still further.

Lastly, an initiative which involves both interinstitutional and Member State cooperation is the Info Point Europe. Seven of these basic information centres have been set up to facilitate the public's access to Community information and it is hoped to extend the network in the future.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The Commission is asked to approve this document and in particular

- the principles of the new approach to information and communication;
- the distribution of responsibilities among and rôles of the College, the Spokesman's Service, DG X and the Offices in the Community, other DGs and Services and networks and relays;
- the various procedures and structures, especially the introduction of the information plan and the creation of the Strategy Group, Steering Committee and Users' Advisory Council;
- the principles relating to interinstitutional cooperation.

These provisions will take effect immediately. Existing coordination mechanisms are abolished and their functions will be assumed by the Steering Committee.

The Commission is also asked to take note that further proposals will follow in respect of:

- a) The future organisation and resources of DG X.
- b) The practical implementation of the information plans.
- c) The constitution and operational rules for the Users' Advisory Council.
- d) Public Opinion Monitoring and Analysis (Eurobarometer, etc.).
- e) Audiovisual and Electronic Information Instruments.
- f) Relay and Network Policy.
- g) Rôle of Commission Offices: New Steps Ahead.
- h) Information in third countries.
- i) Staff Information as part of the Commission's information strategy.