

TOWARDS COMMUNICATION?

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*Evaluating the Activities of the European Commission
in the field of Communication*

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Executive summary

European integration has become not only a political but also a communication challenge. In order to bridge the gap in communication between European citizens and the EU, the European Commission undertakes various communication measures which add up to an emerging European communication policy. This evolving policy is currently undergoing major reforms based on Margot Wallström's 'Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe' and the 'White Paper on a European Communication Policy'.

This study examines, on behalf of the EP's Budgetary Committee, the most important measures that came under communication headings in the general budget undertaken under the Commission's prerogatives in the years 2000 to 2005 with a view to developing recommendations for future actions. The focus of the study is to establish how much 'value for money' these measures represent by looking at their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and utility. This study deals with the following areas of activity: 1) media relations and particularly the spokespersons' service and seminars for journalists, 2) the PRINCE campaigns and in detail with the measures on the Euro, EU enlargement and the debate on the future of Europe, 3) decentralisation and the work of the Commission's Representations and 4) the communication activities of DGs other than DG Comm and how they are coordinated.¹ In this summary of the study we will first present, as a general conclusion, five main challenges for future actions that apply across the board.

Overall, this evaluation has identified a great many actions that are relevant and useful for communicating with European citizens. The Commission should look at these actions as best practice and cut down on all actions that do not reach beyond those that are already knowledgeable about EU policy-making. Generally speaking, the number of activities should be reduced in order to favour strategic large scale actions that can be implemented with the human resources and budget available. This study has also identified structural constraints which prevent officials working on this issue from being able to fully concentrate on effective communication. While the objectives of most measures under review were relevant and the activities were useful, effectiveness and efficiency were often compromised. This is not an individual failure of those who managed the campaigns or actions but a systemic failure. Many shortcomings are already being tackled by the reforms undertaken since the arrival of Margot Wallström, but the following broad challenges will remain valid for future actions.

1. The challenge of strategic communication. Strategic communication describes programmes that clearly define objectives on the basis of previous research and that establish indicators enabling their effectiveness to be measured. The implementation of these programmes would normally be accompanied by continuous external evaluation. Our study reveals that the objectives of, for example the PRINCE campaigns, are currently defined in a very broad way, which makes measuring their effectiveness impossible. Policy objectives for most activities in this area also need to be formulated more modestly given the very small budget available for communication. In particular, we encountered an evaluation deficit in the field of communication, which is often due to a lack of resources. For example, media relations but also some of the PRINCE campaigns have not been evaluated during the time covered by our study. This prevents the institutions from learning from these experiences, which is vital if communication measures are to be improved.

Recommendation: Make evaluations mandatory for actions exceeding a certain amount of money. Formulate policy objectives in a realistic way giving indicators on how to measure their achievement.

2. Reaching out to the general public. The media relations work of the Commission including the spokespersons' service, the press work of the Commission Representations and journalist seminars turn out to be effective in reaching out to millions of citizens – albeit only indirectly via media coverage. Direct communication measures such as conferences and seminars, which take up a lot of human resources and which comprise many of the actions funded by calls for proposals to civil society

¹ A complementary study commissioned by the Budgetary Committee covers other important activities and tools in the field, namely audiovisual policy (APCAV, EBS, EURONEWS), Europe Direct, brochures and the EUROPA-site.

under the PRINCE campaigns are very useful for those who attend but do not reach much beyond those that are already knowledgeable about EU policies. There are positive exceptions of large-scale actions that need to be looked at as best practice.

Recommendation: Concentrate on media-related activities. Direct communication should focus on fewer actions implemented on a larger scale and accompanied by a media strategy.

3. Reconciling budgetary rules and communication capacities. While the current budgetary rules might work for major calls for proposal or partnership agreements with governments, they do not work well when it comes to spending small amounts of money flexibly, which is necessary for communication measures on topical issues. In particular, administrative work meant that part of the work of the Representations was unable to be carried out in 2003 and 2004, which also led to low implementation rates for some of the PRINCE budgets.

Recommendation: Find ways to give the Representations and DG Comm the possibility to spend the money for communication in a way that remains accountable but gives them flexibility.

4. Distribution of adequate resources. Our study of the work of the Representations as well as the budgeting of the PRINCE campaigns shows that there is a challenge to be taken up in finding the right balance between firstly the operational and the administrative budget and secondly between different sorts of human resources needed: administrators and communication specialists. Communication measures require a lot of personnel per se but communication conducted according to the current Financial Regulation of the EU demands not only the provision of communication specialists to design communication tools and campaigns but also of administration specialists to implement them according to the rules. The Representations were particularly short of both in the years 2000 until 2006 (with the exception of those pilot Representations that received additional support in 2006 under Wallström's action plan). The spokespersons' service in Brussels is understaffed as well, considering the number of journalists and the important tasks of external communication and internal coordination among cabinets. DG Comm's headquarters lack staff for its new coordinating and strategy-formulating role.

Recommendation: Communication is under-funded both on the operational and the administrative budget. Additional funds should be available for both personnel and projects. Communication and administrative tasks should be separated in a way that communication specialists should formulate the messages and define the tools while administration specialists ensure that money is spent according to the rules.

5. Coordination between DGs and between the Commission and the European Parliament. Activities of different DGs and DG Comm, as well as activities of the Commission Representations and EP offices were not always complementary during the years of the Prodi Commission. Wallström's action plan addresses the issue of internal coordination with the establishment of an external communication network to coordinate the different DGs' communication efforts and the announcement that it will create the position of one editor coordinating publications and another for EUROPA coordinating the decentralised production of web content. With the establishment of common European houses, the Representations and the offices from the EP have increased their cooperation over the years. However, having these parallel structures, which do the same kind of work at least in part, does not seem efficient. Instead, centres might join forces to inform citizens about the EU instead of primarily about the Commission or the European Parliament.

Recommendation: Mutual information and coordination as well as sticking to certain commonly agreed quality standards should be mandatory for all DGs communicating with journalists or the general public. A genuine merger of European Parliament offices and Commission Representations under joint control should be considered.

6. Genuine decentralisation. The Representations were upgraded between 2000 and 2006 as far as their tasks are concerned. The idea of adapting communication to the needs of national audiences in the Representations and not those in Brussels deserves support although attention must be given not to

send out conflicting messages. As mentioned above, the Representations were not adequately staffed for this mission under the Prodi Commission, and even today they do not have much freedom in terms of how they spend their communication budget.

Recommendation: Put the additional staff provided for the pilot Representations on a more permanent basis. Introduce more freedom on budgetary matters for the Representations.

In order to tackle these challenges, Margot Wallström's action plan provides measures to be implemented by 2009. Close attention should be paid to the full implementation of the action plan, which will contribute to enhance the Commission's capabilities to communicate. Unfortunately, the 8% reduction in Heading 3B between 2006 and 2007 foreseen in the communication budget will compromise the success of this effort. Decisions about the budget for communication should bear in mind that the challenge of communicating Europe will not become smaller any time soon.

Note de synthèse

Etude sur la Communication

L'intégration européenne ne représente plus uniquement un défi politique, mais aussi un défi de communication. Afin de rapprocher les citoyens européens et l'UE, la Commission Européenne entreprend diverses mesures favorisant la communication qui mènent graduellement vers une politique européenne de communication. Cette 'politique émergente' est momentanément sujette à des réformes majeures basées sur « Le plan d'action pour améliorer la communication en Europe » de Margot Wallström et « Le Livre blanc sur la politique européenne de communication ».

L'étude suivante analyse, au nom du comité budgétaire du Parlement Européen (PE), les mesures les plus importantes subsumées au sein des rubriques de « communication » dans le budget général, entreprises sous les prérogatives de la Commission entre 2000 et 2005 en vue de développer des recommandations pour des actions à prendre. L'intérêt principal de cette étude est d'établir la rentabilité de ces mesures en examinant leur pertinence, leur efficacité, leur efficacité et leur utilité. Cette étude aborde les domaines d'activité suivants : (1) les relations avec les médias, en particulier, le service des porte-paroles et les séminaires pour des journalistes, (2) les campagnes PRINCE – et ses mesures concernant l'Euro, l'élargissement de l'UE et le débat sur l'avenir de l'Europe, (3) la décentralisation et le travail des représentations de la Commission et (4) les activités en matière de communication des autres DGs (autre que DG COMM) et leur coordination.² Dans ce résumé de l'étude nous présenterons tout d'abord, en matière de conclusion, les cinq défis majeurs qui s'appliquent de façon générale pour les actions futures.

En somme, l'évaluation a identifié un grand nombre d'actions importantes et utiles pour communiquer avec les citoyens européens. La Commission devrait considérer ces actions en tant que procédures optimales et contenir toutes les actions qui n'impactent pas au-delà du cercle des habitués. Généralement, le nombre d'actions devrait être réduit afin d'implémenter des actions stratégiques de grande envergure plus cohérentes avec les ressources humaines et le budget disponibles. De plus, cette étude a identifié des contraintes structurelles qui empêchent les fonctionnaires de se concentrer pleinement sur le développement d'une politique de communication effective. Bien que les objectifs de la plupart des mesures analysées fussent importantes et les activités utiles, leur efficacité et leur efficacité étaient souvent compromises. Cela ne consiste pas en une défaillance individuelle de ceux qui organisaient les campagnes ou les actions, mais une défaillance systémique. Avec les réformes entreprises depuis l'arrivée de Margot Wallström, plusieurs déficits ont déjà été résolus, cependant les défis généraux qui seront présentés ci-dessous resteront valables pour les actions futures.

1. Le défi de la communication stratégique. La communication stratégique constitue des programmes qui définissent clairement des objectifs bien définis sur la base de recherches antérieures qui permettent d'en mesurer l'efficacité. L'implémentation serait accompagnée par une évaluation extérieure continue. Notre étude démontre que les objectifs de la campagne PRINCE, par exemple, sont momentanément définies de manière très large, ce qui rend la mesure de leur efficacité impossible. Etant donné le budget très restreint qui est disponible pour la Communication, les objectifs politiques de la plupart des activités dans ce domaine doivent être formulés de manière plus modeste. En particulier, on a constaté un déficit d'évaluation dans le domaine de la communication, qui est souvent imputable à un manque de ressources : à titre d'exemple, les relations avec les médias, mais aussi certaines campagnes PRINCE n'ont pas été évaluées pour la période 2000-2005. Cela gêne l'apprentissage institutionnel qui est nécessaire à l'amélioration des mesures de communication. *Recommandations* : Rendre les évaluations obligatoires pour les actions qui excèdent une certaine somme monétaire. Formuler des objectifs politiques d'une manière réaliste en donnant des indicateurs pour évaluer leur succès.

² Une étude complémentaire mandatée par le comité budgétaire traite d'autres activités et mesures importantes dans ce domaine, à savoir le secteur audiovisuel (APCAV, EBS, EURONEWS), EuropeDirect, les brochures et le site EUROPA.

2. Atteindre le grand public. Le travail de la Commission concernant les relations avec les médias et le service du porte-parole, le travail de presse des représentations et les séminaires des journalistes permettent d'atteindre de manière efficace des milliers de citoyens – bien que se soit de manière indirecte par l'intermédiaire de la couverture par les médias. Des mesures de communication directes (comme des conférences ou des séminaires) qui engagent une grande quantité de ressources humaines et qui comportent beaucoup d'actions subventionnées par des appels d'offre à la société civile dans les campagnes PRINCE sont très utiles pour ceux qui y contribuent, mais ne parviennent pas au-delà du cercle des habitués. Il y a des exceptions à ces actions de grande envergure qui doivent être considérées comme des procédures optimales. *Recommandations* : Se concentrer sur les activités qui font référence aux médias. La communication directe devrait se concentrer sur moins d'actions implémentées à une plus grande échelle et accompagnées par une stratégie médiatique.

3. Réconcilier les règles budgétaires et les capacités de communication. Alors que les règles budgétaires actuelles pourraient fonctionner pour des appels d'offre ou des accords de partenariats avec des gouvernements, elles fonctionnent mal pour dépenser de petites sommes d'argent de manière flexible. Ceci est pourtant nécessaire pour des mesures de communication concernant les affaires actuelles. En particulier, le travail des Représentations a été partiellement paralysé en 2003 et 2004 par des tâches administratives, ce qui a par ailleurs mené à des taux d'implémentation faibles de certains budgets PRINCE. *Recommandation* : Trouver des moyens pour donner aux Représentations et à DG COMM la possibilité de dépenser l'argent dédié à la communication de manière responsable, mais qui en même temps permet de remplir les besoins d'une communication flexible.

4. Distribution de ressources adéquates. L'analyse du travail des Représentations et de l'établissement du budget pour les campagnes PRINCE nécessite une balance optimale entre, premièrement, le budget opérationnel et administratif et, deuxièmement, les différentes catégories de ressources humaines nécessaires : des administrateurs et des spécialistes de la communication. Les mesures de communication requièrent beaucoup de personnel. Cependant l'implémentation d'une communication en accord avec les règlements financiers actuels de l'UE ne nécessite pas seulement l'intervention de spécialistes en matière de communication (pour créer des instruments et des campagnes de communication), mais aussi des spécialistes administratifs pour les implémenter en concordance avec ces règlements. Particulièrement entre 2000 et 2006, tant les spécialistes de communication que les spécialistes administratifs manquaient au sein des Représentations (avec l'exception des Représentations-pilote qui ont reçu des ressources supplémentaires en 2006 grâce au Plan d'Action de Wallström). Le service du porte-parole à Bruxelles est en sous-effectif étant donné le nombre de journalistes ainsi que l'importance des tâches que requièrent la communication extérieure et la coordination intérieure entre les cabinets. Le siège principal du DG COMM manque de personnel afin de remplir son nouveau rôle de coordinateur et de stratège. *Recommandations* : La communication manque de financement tant du budget opérationnel que du budget administratif : des financements supplémentaires devraient être disponibles pour le personnel tout comme pour les projets. Les tâches communicatives et administratives devraient être séparées de sorte à ce que les spécialistes en matière de communication formulent le message et définissent les instruments, alors que les spécialistes administratifs assurent que l'argent soit dépensé en accord avec les règles.

5. La coordination entre les DGs et entre la Commission et le PE. Les activités des différentes DGs et DG COMM, ainsi que les activités des Représentations de la Commission et les bureaux du PE n'ont pas toujours été complémentaires sous la Commission Prodi. Le plan d'action de Wallström aborde le problème de la coordination interne en établissant un 'réseau de communication externe' pour coordonner les différents efforts de communication par les DG. Aussi l'annonce du recrutement d'un éditeur qui coordonnera les publications et d'un autre qui coordonnera la production décentralisée des contenus du site EUROPA devrait aider à résoudre le problème de coordination interne. Avec l'établissement des maisons Européennes communes, les Représentations et les bureaux du PE ont augmentés leur coopération au fil des années. Néanmoins l'existence de ces structures parallèles qui, en partie, réalisent le même travail, ne semble cependant pas être efficace. Mieux vaudrait que les centres se réunissent pour informer les citoyens sur l'UE, au lieu de les informer principalement sur la Commission ou le PE. *Recommandations* : L'information et la coordination

mutuelle ainsi que le respect de certains standards communs devraient être obligatoires pour toutes les DGs qui communiquent avec des journalistes et le grand public. Une véritable fusion des bureaux du PE et des Représentations de la Commission sous un control commun devrait être considérée.

6. Une véritable décentralisation. Les compétences des Représentations ont été aménagées entre 2000 et 2006. L'idée d'adapter la communication aux besoins des publics nationaux dans les Représentations et non pas à Bruxelles a besoin d'appui, même si une attention particulière doit être dédiée à ne pas émettre des messages contradictoires. Comme mentionné ci-dessus, les Représentations manquaient de personnel adéquat pour cette mission sous la Commission Prodi, et même aujourd'hui ils manquent de liberté pour allouer de manière flexible le budget dédié à la communication. *Recommandations :* Donner des contrats de longue durée au personnel supplémentaire employé dans les Représentations pilotes. Accorder plus de liberté aux Représentations en matière d'affaires budgétaires.

Pour aborder ces défis, le Plan d'Action de Margot Wallström fournit des mesures qui doivent être implémentées jusqu'en 2009. Une attention particulière devra être dédiée à l'implémentation complète du Plan d'Action qui contribuera à accroître les capacités de communication de la Commission. Malheureusement, la réduction de 8% dans la rubrique budgétaire 3B entre 2006 et 2007 prévue dans le budget pour la communication compromettra le succès de cet effort. Les décisions budgétaires pour la communication devraient considérer que le défi de communication au sein de l'Europe persistera dans le futur.

1. Introduction

With the arrival of Margot Wallström, the Commission started an overhaul of the EU's activities in the area of information and communication. The reforms aim both at (1) streamlining the diverse actions in the field, (2) establishing communication as a policy in its own right and by (3) moving from one-sided top down information activities to interactive and demand-driven communication.³ In line with the specifications given by the Budgetary Committee of the European Parliament, the aim of this evaluation is to assess the different programmes and actions developed under the Commission's prerogatives in the field of communication for the years 2000-2005. The study will highlight how much 'value for money' the actions and programmes provided by evaluating their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and utility. This assessment will also lead to recommendations for the design of future communication measures.

1.1. Scope of the study

The EP's Budgetary Committee commissioned CEPS to provide two separate short studies - one on communication and one on information. Title 16 ('Information and Communication') of the budget differentiates between 'information', which is supposed to address the 'general public', and 'communication', which addresses 'target groups'. This division does not seem to be very helpful from an analytical point of view. Rather, information should be defined as the provision of factual knowledge. Communication is a process of exchange between citizens and decision-makers. Both information and communication are equally important, as sound information is the basis for meaningful communication. In view of the purpose of this study, however, the authors decided to stick to the division given the official objectives of the main budget articles of Title 16. Consequently, this study on communication will comprise (1) the PRINCE campaigns with an in-depth study of the campaigns on the Euro, enlargement and the future of Europe, (2) the communication work of the Representations of the Commission and the principle of decentralisation, (3) media relations with a focus on the spokespersons' service and seminars for journalists and (4) sectoral communication activities (other than DG Comm) and their coordination. We are therefore concentrating on the most significant activities (in terms of resources and output) that are defined as 'communication' in the budget and combine these with the major communication activities of other DGs. The reader will find an assessment of a number of other important actions of the Commission in this field in our second study on information. The table below gives an overview of what the two complementary studies cover.

Table 1. Information and communication policy of the EU

I. Study on Communication	II. Study on Information
<i>PRINCE: Euro</i>	Audiovisual sector: - Co-productions/ APCAV - Audiovisual Service (EbS, studios), - Euronews
<i>PRINCE: Enlargement</i>	
<i>PRINCE: Future of Europe</i>	Europa website
<i>Representations and Decentralisation</i>	Brochures and other written publications
<i>Media Relations (Spokespersons' service, media seminars)</i>	Europe Direct Call Centre
<i>Communication of sectoral DGs and coordination</i>	Eurobarometer
	Information outlets

³ This orientation is established in the "Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe", SEC(2005) 985 final (available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/communication/pdf/communication_com_en.pdf) and the 'White Paper on a European Communication Policy', COM (2006) 35 final (available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/communication_white_paper/doc/white_paper_en.pdf).

1.2. Developing a European communication policy

The years from 2000 until 2005 were marked by structural reforms within the European Commission. DG X was dissolved and the competences for information and communication were split up between different DGs. Commission President Romano Prodi took responsibility for the spokespersons' service. Communication to the general public became the responsibility of DG Press, set up in 2001. Commissioner Antonio Vitorino, who was primarily responsible for 'Justice and Home Affairs', took over information as an additional duty. Only in 2004 did communication once again become the portfolio of a commissioner, Margot Wallström, who strived to establish communication as a Commission priority. Under Prodi, however, a lot of energy in this field was expended in implementing several general administrative reforms, namely the introduction of decentralised budgetary management, activity-based management and the new Financial Regulation. These reforms had a major impact on the performance of the Commission's communication activities. The budget implementation rates for 2004 reflect the problems caused by the introduction of the new system. While the new Financial Regulation enhanced control over expenditure, it had a paralysing effect on many of the activities during 2004 as the communication services involved were not given adequate time and resources to implement reforms. This situation was made worse by the fact that DG Press had to enlarge its activities to the new member states without getting additional staff in the Brussels headquarters.

The development of communication policy in the Prodi years is reflected in three communications by the Commission (sometimes called 'Vitorino 1-3'). In 2001 a communication called for closer cooperation of the EP and the Commission, partnership with the member states in communicating Europe, and a more decentralised approach towards communication adapted by the Representations to the needs of national audiences (COM (2001) 354 final). In the following year an 'information and communication strategy' defined the general approach of going beyond mere provision of information with the objectives of (1) improving the perceptions of the European Union, its institutions and their legitimacy and (2) establishing a dialogue with the general public: In 2004, a report on the implementation of the communication strategy described difficulties caused by the new Financial Regulation and how it had jeopardised the conventions with the member states, the information relays and slowed down the capacities of the Representations of the Commission to develop decentralised communication strategies (COM (2004) 196 final). The measures included in Wallström's 2005 'Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe by the Commission' are intended to cure some of the difficulties identified and try to gain leverage for a more effective and efficient communication policy. One very important step in this process is the additional staff granted to 11 pilot Representations, which will test a more pro-active approach to media relations and addressing the general public. The 'White Paper on a European Communication Policy' (COM (2006) 35 final) tries to involve all stakeholders in a debate about how to proceed in communicating Europe.

The years 2000 to 2005 are difficult to compare in terms of budget as the structure of it changed to an activity-based budget (ABB) in 2004. Several items, especially the PRINCE campaigns, were shifted between different budget lines and between different titles. Overall, the budget of DG Press (now DG Comm) has continued to increase. Operational appropriations rose by 31% between 2001 and 2005. However, just as the reforms contained in Wallström's action plan may be beginning to bear fruit, the budget is supposed to be cut by 8% on Heading 3B between 2006 and 2007. While the Commission lacked the human resources to successfully implement all of the budget, especially in 2003 and 2004, DG Comm gained staff for its Representations in 2006, but they now will have less to spend if the cuts in the 2007 budget are carried out in practice.

However, the EU's budget for communication is not made up of DG Comm's budget alone. Parts of it are spent by the EP administration and its information offices, but a much more significant part is included in the PRINCE campaigns, which are mostly directed by and since 2004, also administered by the sectoral DGs that are responsible for the respective policies (DG Enlargement for the campaign on enlargement, etc.). Furthermore, information and communication measures are funded by various budget lines of the Commission's different DGs. The Commission was not able to provide us with

comprehensive data on which DG spends what on communication and how many human resources are involved.

1.3. Methodology

This study aims to assess how much the communication programmes and actions financed under the Community budget represented ‘value for money’. A detailed picture of all communication programmes and actions, however, lies beyond the scope of the study and the time allocated for its preparation (second half of July/August 2006⁴). Under the current budgetary structures, every Directorate General has its own unit for information and communication and, unfortunately, the Commission could not provide us with a document setting out the overall budget for communication.⁵

The study will focus on the activities of DG Comm (budget articles of title 16; until 2003: B3-3) and the PRINCE campaigns as these are the budgetary basis for the most important activities of the Commission in the field of communication. We will also explore the structures of cooperation between DG Comm and the sectoral DGs and provide some insight into the resources that the latter invest in communication.

1.3.1. Sources for this study

Apart from data available from reports, evaluations and other documents, the sources of information for this study were 15 interviews conducted with experts on the respective communication tools and campaigns and the insights gained from our own and other current research on this topic.⁶ When gathering the evaluations available as a basis for our study we encountered the first important finding of this study: there is a considerable evaluation deficit in the field of information and communication. For example, when looking into DG Budget’s survey of evaluations conducted between 2000 and 2005, we find 678 evaluations, but only 19 of them deal with information and communication. As far as this study is concerned, there is an absence of external evaluation of the media relations activities of the Commission despite the fact that the media were supposed to be a priority under the Prodi Commission. We also find a lack of evaluation for some of the PRINCE campaigns and much of the information actions from sectoral DGs.

We would like to thank all the individuals and officials from the various DGs who gave us interviews and provided the authors with documents and data - which made this study possible in spite of the summer break in Brussels.

Recommendations. Consequently, our first recommendation to improve and professionalise the communication policy of the EU is to introduce systematic evaluations for future programmes: Evaluations should be carried out by external evaluators. In order to guide the policy process, the evaluation would have to accompany the communication program from the outset. Consequently, the respective strategies should already be subject to an *ex ante* evaluation.

⁴ The fact that the study was to be conducted within six weeks during the summer break in Brussels made it difficult to gather information in a policy field that is distributed over a great number of budget lines and involves all the Commission’s services.

⁵ Wallström’s action plan envisages an overall assessment of all of the Commission’s communication activities, but this measure had not yet been implemented at the time this study was drafted

⁶ Literature and studies which informed this evaluation: Meyer, 1999; Mak, 2001; Brüggemann, 2005; Kurpas, Meyer & Gialoglou, 2005; Brüggemann et al., 2006; Kurpas, Brüggemann & Meyer, 2006. The study also draws on unpublished research conducted in the context of an ongoing dissertation on the EU’s information and communication policy by one of the authors of this study, Michael Brüggemann (Associate Research Fellow at CEPS and Research Associate at the Collaborative Research Center ‘Transformations of the State’, University of Bremen).

1.3.2. Analytical Framework

As requested by the EP, the evaluation establishes whether or not communication measures represented ‘value for money’ by looking at the following criteria:

- **Relevance.** To what extent were the objectives of the activity appropriate regarding 1) the funds available and 2) the needs perceived and the funds available. This implies a close look at the objectives: Are they formulated at all in ways that meeting them can be measured?
- **Effectiveness.** What effects have been obtained by the intervention and have these effects contributed to the achievement of the objectives of the intervention? This implies two further questions: Were indicators formulated to measure effectiveness and was data gathered concerning these indicators?
- **Efficiency.** Were the desired effects obtained at a reasonable cost? This means that the resources involved (human resources and operational budget) need to be looked at.
- **Utility.** Do the impacts achieved by an intervention correspond to the needs identified and the problems to be solved? This also means looking at the potentially adverse effects of communication activities.

2. Evaluating the European Commission’s communication activities

2.1 *The PRINCE Campaigns: Communicating with the citizens?*

The acronym PRINCE (Programme prioritaire d’information au citoyen européen) stands for priority information measures on EU policies. PRINCE was set up in 1995 at the initiative of the EP. It was the first time that the Commission received substantial funds to communicate with the general public. PRINCE is not a policy instrument as such but a budget line which leads to diverse information and communication activities that come under a broad theme such as the rights of European citizens in the common market, enlargement or the debate about the future of Europe. The principles of the PRINCE campaigns are 1) close cooperation with the EP and the Council, 2) partnership with the member states, 3) decentralised communication and 4) communicating with the general public.

Cooperation with the EP and the Council is organised at the level of the Inter-institutional Group on Information (IGI), which decides each year on PRINCE priorities. The respective DGs in Brussels and the Commission’s Representations and the EP offices in the member states are meant to work together to implement these decisions. Inter-institutional cooperation is advancing but still underdeveloped. The administrative rather than political nature of this cooperation and a failure to implement the IGI’s decisions has been criticised (see also COM 2004 (196, final). Margot Wallström has strived to re-establish the IGI as a forum for political decisions. Remarking on the cooperation on the ground between the EP offices and the Commission’s Representations in the member states, the EP Committee on Culture and Education states that “they may share the expenses but they do not share the most important thing, which is their work” (FINAL A6-0111/2005: 8).

Partnership with the member states has traditionally been carried out by concluding conventions on common communication measures. The old system of conventions had to be replaced since it was not compatible with the new Financial Regulation. This led to problems implementing the funds reserved for conventions with national governments. In 2004, the Commission proposed different alternatives for cooperating with the member states (COM 196 final): strategic partnership (coordinated but separately financed and administered actions under a common logo and strategy), management partnership (jointly decided and financed activities, administered by national administrations according to the EU’s rules) and one-off partnership where the member state merely acts as a beneficiary of EU funding. The first management partnership was concluded at the end of 2005 in Germany but it is still too early to judge whether this will serve as an example for other member states or not. National administrators interviewed in several member states are highly critical of the

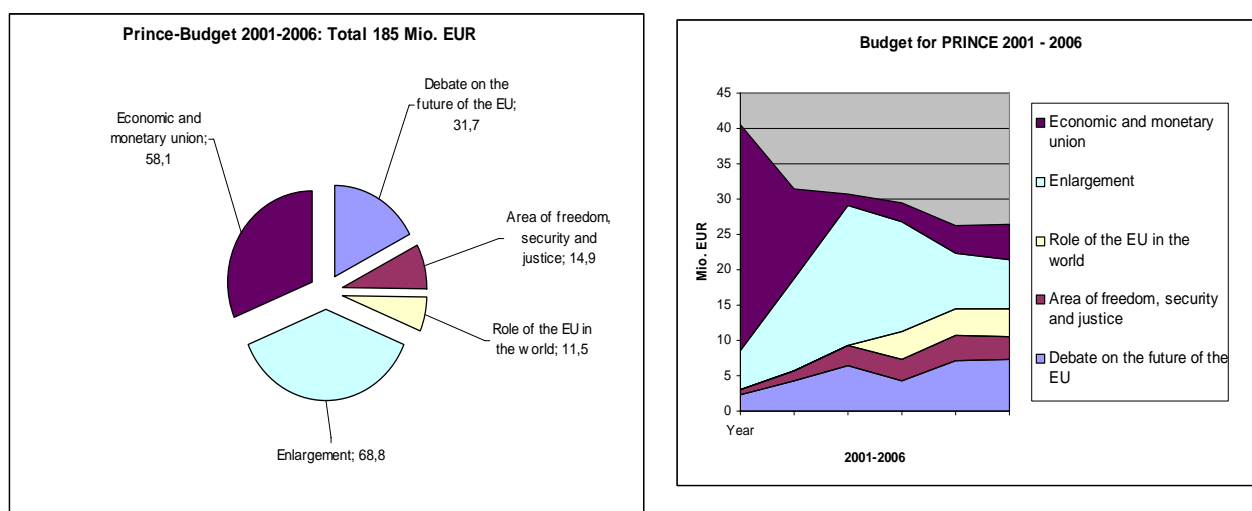
administrative burden related to managing EU funds. For the years 2003-2005, the formal partnership approach was severely constrained by these problems.

Decentralisation means adapting communication strategies and measures to the specific needs of national audiences. This was mainly done by the Commission Representations, which have implemented an important part of the PRINCE budget line. The campaigns were mostly directed centrally by the corresponding sectoral DG (e.g. DG Enlargement for the campaign on EU enlargement). Operational management was “subdelegated” to the Representations under the supervision of DG Comm. This created considerable discussion between different DGs as the Representations felt that they were not able to deal with the administrative burden related to managing the funds. DG Press retreated from subdelegation in 2004, which delayed the commitments of funds (e.g. for the enlargement campaign) considerably.

In communicating with the public, the different PRINCE campaigns had different rationales: “Some campaigns are intended to provide information only, such as the campaign on the Euro. Others, such as the campaign on the future of the European Union, are intended to stimulate debate, while others still, such as the new campaign on enlargement, are meant to serve both purposes” (COM(2001) 354 final: 21).

Five different campaigns are relevant for the years from 2000 to 2005: the campaign on enlargement, economic and monetary union, debate on the future of the EU, the role of the EU in the world and the area of freedom, security and justice. The graphs below show the total budgets for each campaign and how they have fluctuated during the years from 2001 to 2006.

Figure 1. PRINCE budget 2001-2006



In order to evaluate these quite diverse campaigns in more depth we have chosen to focus on the three bigger ones: 1) Economic and monetary union, 2) Enlargement and 3) Debate on the future of Europe. Unfortunately, we encountered (again) an evaluation deficit. Only the Euro campaign was accompanied by an in-depth professional external evaluation. For enlargement there is an evaluation document called a ‘Global assessment report’. For all other campaigns there was no evaluation available for this study.

2.1.1. Euro

Objectives of and resources for the campaign

The first PRINCE campaign on economic and monetary union dates back to 1995 and – as new countries join the eurozone – it will remain a topic on the EU’s communication agenda. The aims of the activities under the umbrella of the campaign changed when comparing the strategy in 1995 to

2004. According to the ‘Green Paper on Practical Arrangements for the Introduction of the Single Currency’ (COM 1995, 333), the objectives of the campaign were to: 1) win popular support for the single currency and 2) stimulate and encourage the necessary technical preparations. In 2004 the explicitly persuasive aim of the campaign had been dropped: 1) create public awareness for EMU, 2) provide neutral and factual information, 3) contribute to a smooth changeover and 4) inform actors in third countries.

The instruments for achieving these aims have remained roughly the same. The Commission’s aspiration is to initiate, prepare and coordinate communication activities of the member states on the Euro, complemented by the Commission’s own tools and actions such as conferences, publications, information services for citizens (see COM (2004) 552 final). Up until 2002 the focus was on the member states of the EU who were introducing the Euro. In 2003-2005 its activities did not only cover the old member states but also the new member states and external campaigns and actions in the USA and Japan. A significant share of the communication’s budget was spent financing public opinion surveys. In 2006/07 a new phase begins, in which communication activities will be organised to prepare for the introduction of the Euro in some of the new member states.

Between 1996 and 2002, the campaign was worth €200m. The amount of funds allocated under PRINCE Euro has been reduced significantly since the successful introduction of the coins and bills in most of the member states of the EU15. Up until 2005, it was a very small-scale campaign with an average annual budget of €2.8m, which will be significantly increased as the time when new countries join the eurozone draws nearer.

Table 2. PRINCE Euro – Outturn and implementation rates

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
Commitments outturn (€mil.)	33.3	12.7	1.7	2.8	3.8	54.3
Implementation rate (%)	99	45.5	56.7	46.7	95	72.9
Payments outturn (€mil.)	37.2	28.9	4.8	1.7	2.6	75.2
Implementation rate (%)	98.4	96.3	40	56.7	86.7	87.6

The rates for budget implementation⁷ reveal that the Commission has encountered difficulties in implementing the funds as planned and provided for in the general budget. The years 2003 and 2004 are disappointing both in terms of commitments and payments executed – which means that the effectiveness of the campaign was compromised, as a large proportion of the funds available were not spent as planned. The introduction of the new Financial Regulation in 2003 appears to have paralysed the Commission, according to many of our interviewees in different DGs and in the Representations. In the case of the Euro campaign, a major factor after 2001 was that member states were less enthusiastic to sign conventions on the campaign after the coins and bills had been successfully introduced. A deeper analysis of the challenges encountered during the Euro campaign will be given below by drawing on the external evaluation by Deloitte&Touch/Burson Marsteller (ECfin/R/4/2002/04), which covers the years up until 2002, which were the most significant in terms of the budget spent.

Evaluating the Euro Campaign

Relevance. Considering the evaluation criteria provided by the EP, the first thing to look at is the relevance of the objectives formulated for PRINCE Euro. While the objectives certainly are appropriate given the need to inform all European citizens about the introduction of new coins and

⁷ This data was calculated according to the figures of the general budget available online and in the Official Journal of the European Communities. For the year 2000, there is no data for single PRINCE campaigns available.

bills, the general aspirations of the Commission were too ambitious to be realistic in view of the funds available. The evaluators' conclusion on the overall impact of the campaign up until 2002 was: "The Commission's role [...] was never in practice, (nor could it realistically have been) that of a key influencer of public opinion nor a direct central provider of information to help people and organisations achieve a smooth introduction of the currency" (Deloitte&Touch/Burson Marsteller 2003: 91). One weakness of the campaign was the failure to formulate strategic objectives. The objectives (as roughly outlined above) used to be and still are much too general to be able to measure whether or not they were met. In 2004 however, the Commission announced that it was establishing a framework with objectives related to indicators and data sources to measure them (COM 2004, 552 final).

Effectiveness/Efficiency. Systematic impact measurement is a precondition for giving an account of the effectiveness of a campaign. As the desired impact was not defined in measurable terms and as there was no systematic collection of data on the output and impact of the campaign, there is no reliable answer to the question of effectiveness. Nevertheless, within the Commission, the Euro campaign is broadly heralded as a success. And it undoubtedly was, as the Commission managed to agree on conventions with all member states introducing the Euro. The €200m euro spent by the Commission between 1998 and 2002 was accompanied by a much higher amount spent by the member states. All this activity has certainly enhanced the level of information available about the Euro. Many of the Commission's activities were well received, according to interviews conducted for the evaluation of Deloitte&Touch/Burson Marsteller. The Commission sums up their report by concluding that "the Commission did its job properly" (COM 2004, 552 final: 16). A closer look into the evaluation reveals a number of challenges: The Commission is basically criticised for not having provided a strategic framework and having failed to professionally manage the campaign. This failure was not due to individual mistakes by the handful of people charged with managing the campaign but due to 1) a severe lack of human resources and 2) constant changes in the management team and institutional context of the campaign. Clearly, the operational budget was much too high as compared to the administrative budget. Between late 1999 and early 2002, five different Directors-General had responsibility for the Prince Euro programme. There were three different directors and three different heads of unit for the same period: "At no time during the 1996-2002 period did the Commission manage to combine at one and the same time: internal leadership, programme and project management, adequate staffing" (Deloitte&Touch/Burson Marsteller, 2003: 89). On the operational level, efficiency was compromised due to a lack of prior research on the qualitative and quantitative information needs for specific tools. With regard to the information products developed centrally, the evaluators criticise that – contrary to good communication practice – there was, for example, no prior research on the demand for brochures. This led to a situation in which the Commission was hesitant to market its brochures and so far fewer were printed than were needed. Effectiveness was also limited, as according to the evaluation, no media strategy accompanied the communication strategy. This reduced the potential leverage created by media coverage on actions which could alone only reach a limited number of people. This problem is rooted in the traditional institutional separation of press work and general public relations work within the Commission, which has not yet been fully overcome. The structural problems described above have prevented the campaign from providing optimal value for money.

Utility. Doubt should not, however, be cast on the overall utility of such a campaign. The measures undertaken under the umbrella of this PRINCE campaign were certainly relevant to the broadly defined objectives in that they contributed to increasing awareness and providing information on the Euro.

Recommendations. One major problem seems to have been solved, according to information from the Commission. The unit in ECFIN (Economic and Financial Affairs) responsible for managing the next generation of PRINCE Euro is better staffed today to manage a much smaller amount of money than during the times of the big Euro campaign – so the conditions for a more strategic approach to communication are much better. The €7m euro included in the Commission's budget proposal for the Euro campaign seem to be an adequate amount as, with Slovenia, only one very small country will

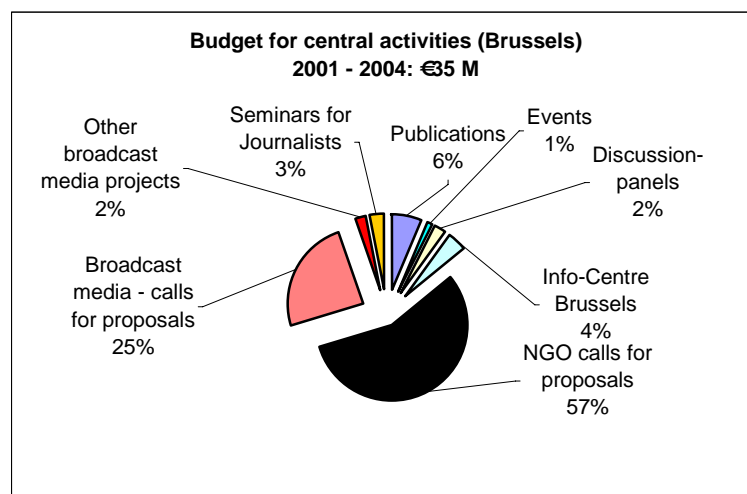
adopt the Euro next year. However, it must be borne in mind that communicative preparations need to start early for the next countries to join the eurozone. Given this limited budget, the Commission might want to concentrate on a more strategic role in providing the governments of the new member states with a tool box, drawing on the lessons learned in the past campaigns, on how to go about the transition period. The Commission should then concentrate on complementary but large scale actions that can reach millions of citizens. The actions envisaged in 2004 (COM 2004, 552 final) give the impression that, using surveys, seminars, publications and promotional material, the Commission is about to offer a little bit of everything without setting a priority on certain measures that could then be implemented on a scale and in a manner which really can be effective.

2.1.2 Enlargement

Objectives of and resources for the campaign

Information measures on enlargement started at the end of the 90s with a website on enlargement being introduced on the EUROPA server and the establishment of an ‘Enlargement Information Unit’ within DG Enlargement. In the year 2000 the document ‘Communication strategy for enlargement’ (SEC (2000) 737) provided the basis for the PRINCE campaign ‘Enlargement: a challenge for Europe’. According to this document, the objectives of the enlargement campaign were to: communicate the reasons for and impact of enlargement, promote dialogue and provide information about the candidate countries in order to ultimately improve understanding and support for enlargement. Delivering the political message was seen as the job of national institutions and opinion-leaders who were first targeted by the campaign. In a second phase starting in 2002 (see COM (2002) 281 final), the Commission turned towards communicating with the general public with the intention of putting the campaign into top gear in 2003 and 2004. Decentralisation and partnership with the member states as well as cooperation with national civil society and the media were the paramount principles of the campaign. The Commission thereby intended to “generate dialogue with a broad section of public opinion” (Sec (2000) 737: 1). In terms of concrete actions, the enlargement campaign initiated a multitude of concrete activities using all the Commission’s tools.⁸ As all Representations implemented their own national strategies, a systematic overview is only possible for the €35m of central actions between 2001 and 2004 (see graph below, established on the basis of the ‘Global Assessment Report on the Implementation of the Communication Strategy on Enlargement’ 2004).

Figure 2. PRINCE Enlargement – Division of budget 2001-2004



⁸ Individual tools are evaluated in this study as far as media relations are concerned. All other important information tools funded from the Community budget are analysed in the ‘information study’, which is complementary to this one.

For the years 2001-2006 the enlargement campaign was the biggest communication campaign funded from the PRINCE budget lines (one has to keep in mind however, that the activities in the new member states as well as the enlargement information centre in Brussels were funded from the PHARE fund). The implementation of the funds was largely subdelegated from DG Enlargement to the Representations (DG Press) and the Delegations (DG Relex). This is in line with the principle of decentralisation but apparently only the tasks were decentralised without giving the external offices of the Commission the additional human resources to administer the extra funds. The PRINCE correspondents hired by the Representations as support for implementing communication measures were communication specialists who were necessary and useful but not helpful in dealing with the extra administrative work caused by the subdelegation of funds and the introduction of the new Financial Regulation. Consequently, in 2004, DG Press refused to implement the funds for DG Enlargement, which finally led to the funds being re-centralised. In order to spend the money at all, DG Enlargement issued a €14m euro call for proposals addressed to civil society organisations and public institutions on information projects about enlargement. While the money was still committed in 2004, it did not lead to actions due to the time it took to issue this call and select projects. So, effectively, as can be seen from the payments in the table below, enlargement was communicated most intensively by projects funded by the EU in 2005 and not when enlargement actually took place.

Table 3. PRINCE Enlargement – Outturn 2002–2005

⁹	2002	2003	2004	2005
Commitments outturn (€mil.)	13	19.8	15.5	8
Payments outturn (€mil.)	6.9	12.5	8.5	15.4

Evaluating the enlargement campaign

Relevance. The objectives of the campaign as outlined above surely reflect a real need for more information about EU enlargement. This is clear from all the Eurobarometer studies on the subject, which reveal a widespread ignorance not of EU enlargement as such but of the countries which are to join the EU and the overall rationale, means and consequences of the enlargement process. As to the funds available, the ambition to “generate dialogue with a broad section of public opinion” was not realistic from the outset. As for the Euro campaign, the Commission’s strategy paper did not provide a strategic approach as the formulation of objectives was much too general to generate a strategy for which success or failure could be determined.

Effectiveness/Efficiency. It is wrong, however, to stigmatise the enlargement campaign as an outright failure as was done by some of our interview partners within the Commission. It would be just as wrong to say that the Euro campaign was a complete success. The reasons why the introduction of the Euro went comparatively smoothly while resentments against enlargement remained, thereby contributing to the rejections of the European Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands in 2005, remain beyond the reach of the relatively small information campaigns managed by the Commission. So the conclusion of the Commission’s ‘global assessment report’ is plausible in that, on the one hand, the “level of funding and human input was not enough to make a major visible impact”, and on the other, it was “fair to conclude that the CSE [communication strategy on enlargement] had a significant and useful impact”. Again, as noticed for the Euro campaign, the measurement of impact is something that needs to be done over a longer time period, so judgements will have to remain partial for now. A “noticeable lack of follow-up and evaluation tools” has already

⁹ The implementation rate is missing in this table. As we were told by experts from the Commission, implementation rates as established by looking at the general budget (appropriations vs. outturn) are not useful for judgements on actual implementation if DGs (like DG Enlargement but in contrast to e.g. DG Comm) use the system of ‘global commitments’ which sometimes leads to a very high formal annual implementation rate.

been criticised in an internal ‘intermediary report’ (2003) on the campaign. Only very few Representations that were charged with implementation had foreseen systematic external evaluation due to lack of resources. The big exception is Denmark, where the PRINCE correspondent developed a clear strategy and evaluated it against indicators which had been established beforehand. Effectiveness of the enlargement campaign was certainly lower than the Euro campaign for the following reason. The partnership approach with national governments as well as cooperation with civil society and the media were severely constrained by the introduction of the new Financial Regulation, which came just before the intended ‘peak’ of the enlargement campaign. The old conventions with the member states were found incompatible with the new rules, which caused a lot of delay in establishing cooperation with national governments. The same is true for cooperation with other partners such as the information relays but also media projects: providing even small amounts of money for projects became still more difficult and slower than before. While the environment for communicating enlargement was difficult as such (public scepticism, inertia by some governments etc.) the Commission’s assessment report concludes that “the main problems were internal – lack of human resources, bureaucracy, and most notably, the new Financial Regulation”.

In terms of the distribution of funds on different activities, as the table above shows, much less money was spent on media-related activities than on calls for proposals targeting civil society and public institutions. In order to reach millions of citizens, the media would be better placed as information relays than many NGOs. Activities identified as best practice by the Commission’s Representations themselves in a report on the implementation of the campaign in 2003 included: field trips with journalists, journalist seminars and researching ‘success stories on enlargement’ for the media. Most of these activities do not require much operational budget but human resources with communication expertise.

Utility. The conclusion on the utility of the whole exercise is two-fold. On the one hand, a lot of useful projects have contributed to creating public debate and awareness of EU enlargement. On the other hand, the implementation of the campaign has created a lot of frustration among officials within the Commission, whose hands were tied by ever stricter rules. Frustration was also felt among many of the traditional partners of the Commission in the field of communication (national public authorities, information relays, civil society). These side effects are severe as they represent the environment for future information campaigns.

Recommendations. Most of the lessons from the enlargement campaign concern the more general issues of decentralisation and distribution of resources as well as the problem of budgetary rules, which will be discussed in more detail below. For the more specific issue of future enlargement campaigns, the objectives of the campaign should be reviewed. While the current campaign was implemented when the decision about this round of enlargement, its procedures and aims was taken, future rounds of enlargement should not be sold as a ‘fait accompli’. Severe doubts about the preparedness of the European citizens as well as the EU institutions themselves for future rounds of enlargement demand that communication should not continue to stress a continuous automatic process of EU enlargement but rather an open discussion about future enlargements. In doing this, the media should be the prime partner to cooperate with as only the media have the leverage to reach the wider public.

2.1.3. Debate on the future of Europe

Objectives of and resources for the campaign

The PRINCE campaign on the Future of Europe was initially conceived in 1997 as a debate on institutions preparing a new Intergovernmental Conference (IGC). It was launched in 2001 to run alongside the Convention on the Future of Europe and the IGC that followed it. Managed until 2004 by the Secretariat General, responsibility for the ‘Debate on the Future of Europe’ was passed to DG Education and Culture (DG EAC) and subsequently to DG Communication, which has been responsible for the debate ever since. The Future of Europe debate had two main objectives: Firstly, to inform about and explain the work of the Convention and secondly, to stimulate public debate. In

order to achieve these aims, the programme was divided into three main areas of activities and respective tools: 1) the Futurum website, designed to contribute and broaden the public debate, 2) information products to help understand the issues and provide material for debate and 3) special initiatives developed to encourage the debate.¹⁰

The Futurum website provided both information and documentation on the state of play of the Convention and an overview of the debate surrounding it. Contributions from civil society organisations were therefore published and weblinks made to websites of those organisations promoting a debate on the future of Europe. Official documents about the Constitution as well as weblinks to the official institutional sites were also provided. The Futurum site also had an interactive part to it in the form of a citizens' forum, where ideas could be exchanged and internet chats could be run. In 2004 a special inter-institutional site called 'A Constitution for Europe' was set up.

In order to inform the wider public about the work of the Convention, two publications were designed. To assure a widespread reach across the population, they were prepared by a panel of different age groups and published as an inter-institutional publication together with the Council and the EP. Next to the publications, videos and slide presentations were put together for local presentations and information events on the Constitution. Four initiatives were designed to stimulate a wider debate. The Spring of Europe, which involved a debate on the EU in schools all over Europe; 1000 debates for Europe, a programme for local community discussions; seminars for journalists, designed to bring journalists from different member states together and give them an introduction to the world of EU policy-making and the work of the Convention; and citizen initiative conferences with civil society organisations.

Out of the entire PRINCE budget line for 2000-2006, the 'Debate on the Future of Europe' was allocated €1.7m (roughly 15%) out of €185m. A major challenge concerning budgetary developments in the Debate on the Future of Europe is the Commission's lack of capacity to absorb the funds it was provided by the EP. The task force responsible for handling the campaign was not able to extend the planned activities to such a degree as to be able to use the full amount of resources available. This is true in particular for the year 2003, which should have marked the high point of the debate. In 2003, the Commission was allocated almost three times as much funding as asked for. The lack of budgetary and administrative flexibility, and lack of human resources to administer them, explains the incapacity of the Commission to execute the entire budget available. Thus, additional actions could not be conceived on a short term basis to absorb the funds provided. 2003 was also the year of the introduction of the new Financial Regulation, which had an impact on the implementation of programmes across the Commission and therefore only contributed to aggravating the problems already encountered in expanding the initiatives (especially as far as reaching out to the member states was concerned). There was therefore an unfortunate overlap of administrative internal reform with political events.

Table 4. PRINCE Debate on the Future of Europe - Outturn and implementation rates

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
Commitments outturn (€mil.)	2.3	4.25	6.4	4.5	7.2	24.7
Implementation rate (%)	-	94.4	53.3	95	80	80.6
Payments outturn (€mil.)	2.3	1.8	3	5.9	7.4	20.4
Implementation rate (%)	-	62	30	59	100	62.8

¹⁰ SG, Dossier Relatif a l'Action sur l'Avenir de l'Union Européenne, Etat des lieux et initiatives 2004, avril 2004.

Evaluating the Future of Europe Debate

Relevance. Given the need to bring Europe closer to the people, as evoked in the Laeken Declaration¹¹ (2001), and Eurobarometer polls revealing that citizens do not feel informed enough about the Constitution, the relevance of starting a debate on the future of the EU is unquestioned. However, the objective set to “initiate a wide public debate” was far too broadly defined from the outset. This is also true for some of the tools envisaged to start the public debate. While the Spring Day initiative was clearly targeted at schoolchildren and could be even expected to reach out further to their parents, others designed to reach the general public, such as the website and information events, were not conceived with specific information needs or discussion themes in view, thus running the risk that the information provided would not necessarily engender wider public discussion.

Effectiveness/Efficiency. Considering the Eurobarometer poll, carried out in the immediate aftermath of the Convention’s work, which indicated that less than half of the EU population was informed about the activities and aims of the Convention, the conclusion has to be drawn that initiatives on the ‘Debate on the Future of Europe’ were not sufficiently effective in making the Treaty known to a majority of citizens¹². At the same time, the relative impact of individual initiatives is very difficult to assess.

As in the case of the Euro and the Enlargement campaigns, a clear assessment of the activities is not possible given that no clearly defined objectives were developed and that there was a lack of prior research into the qualitative and quantitative needs for each communication tool. However, the Debate on the Future of Europe took place under rather different circumstances, as the objective was to communicate and inform about a political process rather than a political decision that had already been taken. Given the evolving nature of political circumstances, a high degree of flexibility is necessary in order to be able to react to the changing political context of the debate. The difficulties encountered are due to budgetary regulations limiting the Commission in designing an adequate response to the communication needs related to the work of the Convention. A quick and flexible response to changing political circumstances would have needed more human resources and more specifically trained communications experts.

Looking at some of the individual activities carried out by the Commission can give an indication as to which activities and projects were better value for money and most efficient. Seminars for journalists and conferences were helpful but directed to those that were already knowledgeable about EU policy-making. As far as reaching out to a wider public is concerned, the website and publications were clearly a point of departure for informing citizens about the Convention. However, even in the electronic age, the reach of a website is often overestimated as it does not include those strata of society that have no easy internet access (often socially less favoured people, also likely to be protest voters) and the elderly (one of the most politically active groups of society). Moreover, a website is more appropriate in giving information to people already aware of the Convention rather than to raise general awareness. The majority of users of the website were NGOs¹³. Publications were produced strictly on demand. While this ensured that a waste of resources was avoided, it also meant that no specific effort was made to reach out to new circles of audiences and networks for communication. The lack of specifically targeted publications for different audiences further undermined their efficiency.

A real challenge lay in reaching out to a wider public and involving those who had no previous exposure to the constitutional project. Two examples, one of a success and one of a failure, will

¹¹ Retrievable at: http://europa.eu.int/constitution/futurum/documents/offtext/doc151201_en.htm

¹² According to Special Eurobarometer 214/Wave 62.1-TNS Opinion and Social, ‘The Future Constitutional Treaty’, First Results, 33% had never heard of the Constitution and 56% had heard about it but knew very little about its contents (calculations for EU average population).

¹³ SG, Dossier Relatif a l’Action sur l’Avenir de l’Union Européenne, Etat des lieux et initiatives 2004, avril 2004.

illustrate the challenges encountered in this effort. One of the major successes of the Debate on the Future of Europe was the ‘Spring Day’ initiative for schools across Europe. This example shows how a well planned activity can be effective in both informing and stimulating debate in the member states. It was an initiative conceived together with the Education Council, which had a key role in organising events supported by an inter-institutional initiative. According to an external evaluation, the first Spring Day taking place in 2003 was extremely successful in reaching out to a wide number of people (pupils, but also parent and teachers). At the same time, it was also very cost effective in that it stimulated not only debate among the participants but also media coverage, which added to multiplying the communications effort pursued. In terms of media coverage, “it covered 26 European Countries (with uneven coverage). (...) In PR terms, its value was of about 1.8 million euro, more than 3.5 times the cost of Spring Day Europe on the EC budget”¹⁴. An example of an unfruitful initiative is the ‘1000 debates for Europe’ initiative, developed to take place between May 2004 and May 2005 and envisioning debates in local and regional centres to initiate the debate on the Constitution in cooperation with regional and local political representatives. This project is an example of where cooperation with member states was largely unsuccessful as they did not use their budget to organising own initiatives. The failure of the thousand debates project to develop to its full potential highlights some of the general challenges encountered in the Commission’s communication efforts reaching beyond the Brussels level and co-ordinating member state initiatives, which had always been assigned a key role in taking the debate forward. While decentralisation is a major aspect of reaching out to the widest possible public, it also holds significant challenges. Representations are rather limited in their ability to fulfil the communication needs that would be required due to a lack of communication experts and resources in general. It is therefore necessary to rely on outside expertise to ensure an effective campaign. While this was given in the case of the Spring Day Europe initiative via the Education Council, the corresponding network of national and regional politicians and local administrations was missing for the ‘1000 debates for Europe’ initiative.

Utility. Conclusions as to the utility of the debate on the Future of Europe Campaign are necessarily somewhat ambiguous. On one hand, the initiative did not manage to reach its overall goal of stimulating a wider European debate and also struggled to provide even basic information to most European citizens¹⁵. On the other hand, despite its shortcomings, an initiative to start public debate on major reform issues and the question of a Constitution for Europe was definitely needed. The initiatives undertaken between 2002 and 2004 should therefore be seen as an important point of departure in stimulating debate. They were successful in reaching a specialised public that was already knowledgeable about EU policy-making and helped them to build networks among themselves. Since European institutions will always remain somewhat dependent on those organisations and experts to act as multipliers of the debate, this is an important beginning. While efforts to reach a wider public were much more difficult, the success of individual initiatives also shows that improving rather than doing away with the effort to stimulate a wide public debate should point the way forward.

Recommendations. As a result of the negative referendums, a major overhaul of communication policy has taken place. In the new strategy embodied in the Commission’s Action Plan and ‘Plan D’¹⁶, the emphasis has notably shifted from information to communication. However, it is crucial to bear in mind that no good communication and exchange can take place without a sufficient degree of prior reliable, factual and easy to understand information on the EU political system. The Debate on the Future of Europe reveals the challenges of communicating a political process in action. While the Commission’s Plan D seeks to draw some lessons from the debate during the Convention and proposes a wealth of new initiatives, it will also be crucial to ensure beforehand that the necessary

¹⁴ Evaluation of the initiative Spring Day in Europe (Contract TF-2003-04), Final Report, Vol.1 Main Text, Marco Lorenzoni, Bridges-Marco Lorenzoni, March 2004

¹⁵ The Future European Constitution, Flash Eurobarometer 159/2, TNS Sofres Gallup Europe, July 2004

¹⁶ Action Plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission, SEC(2005) 985 final. (available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/communication/pdf/communication_com_en.pdf)

human and budgetary resources are available to execute these activities, otherwise a failure such as that of the thousand debates risks undermining the overall strategy.

Four main recommendations concerning the further development of the Future of Europe Debate emerge: (1) More specific communications expertise is needed both in the Commission but also centrally in the Representations. This would imply resources spent on recruiting experts but might also lead to more outsourcing of specific projects. (2) In the effort to support the move towards a greater decentralisation of the PRINCE campaigns it will be crucial to extend and improve national networks for communication, build partnerships with politicians and local and regional administrations. Giving ‘a face’ to Europe, as has been done in the Spring Day Europe initiative, by involving commissioners and politicians will be a crucial aspect in making EU issues more accessible. (3) As different audiences have different information needs, better targeted information and communication initiatives are also necessary in order to ensure that a wider debate can prosper out of an initial event. In order to ensure better targeting, more use should be made of continuous evaluations as well as feedback mechanisms. (4) Greater budgetary flexibility will be essential to allow a fast and effective reaction to changing political circumstances.

2.1.4. Recommendations for the Future of PRINCE

The main conclusion is that a strategic approach to communication is needed: This should start by clearly formulating realistic objectives given the very limited resources of the Commission. It should be accompanied by research on the specific information needs of the target group. These needs should be specified with regard to specific tools: e.g. what information should there be in a brochure for the youth in France? How many brochures will be needed? Then, the performance should be measured in a continuous evaluation of the process. The aim should be to fund more activities that reach a large audience and fund fewer activities which only reach those already in the know. Conferences and seminars may be useful for those who attend, but they may be less useful in reaching a general audience. The focus of communication measures should therefore be on taking on board the media in all activities. This also means that the Commission needs to focus on less but more professionally managed projects. In terms of budget, the ratio between operational and administrative budget should be improved. As communication will always involve human resources, this ‘administrative’ expenditure should not be neglected. These human resources need to include communication specialists who know how to design communication campaigns as well as EU administration specialists who know how to deal with the Financial Regulation.

There are several problems with the principle of big multi-annual campaigns limited to one topic: (1) In the minds of citizens there is not necessarily a distinction between, for example, enlargement and the future of Europe. (2) People might be interested in various smaller topics such as consumer protection which are not covered by the big campaigns. (3) Important topics are not covered, e.g. EP elections. The campaign to draw people’s attention to the fact that they can vote for the EP in 2004 was left to the poorly resourced administration of the EP. (4) Rapid reaction to topics coming up in the course of a year is not possible. As the Commission is developing a continuously updated communication priorities agenda (as one measure of Wallström’s action plan) one might reserve a certain amount of PRINCE money for communication on these various topics of current interest. However, the EP should ensure its involvement in setting this communication agenda.

Almost all experts interviewed for this study and also all of the evaluations and reports on communication agree that the current financing rules – even taking into account the improvements made with the new implementing rules – are not very compatible with communication measures that have to be flexible and cannot be planned one year in advance: New ways will have to be found in which the Commission can handle the mostly small amounts of money for communication measures more flexibly – otherwise there will be a danger of focusing on administering funds instead of communicating with citizens.

2.2 Representations: Decentralising communication?

Objectives and resources of the Representations

Decentralisation has been established as a principle of the Commission's strategy in the field since 2001 (COM (2001) 354 final). The principle is based on the idea that communication should be adapted to the needs of national audiences. This is best achieved by the Representations of the Commission in partnership with the EP offices and national institutions than centrally in Brussels. This has led to a broader definition of the Representations' mission, which comprises (1) media relations, (2) communicating with the general public and (3) political reporting back to Brussels. This idea has been reinforced by Margot Wallström's motto of 'going local', which strengthens the role of the Representations and for the first time also gives them the human resources to actually 'go local'.

The activities of the Representations mirror much of what is done in Brussels regarding information and communication: information to the media, conferences and seminars, publications, calls for proposals for media and civil society projects on communicating European policies.

The actions of the Representations defined as 'communication' are placed in the budget under line 160302, meant to finance direct communication with the general public via publications, seminars and conferences. It also includes the Q&A service Eurojus, which responds to questions about citizen's rights with a budget rising from €5.6m in 2003 (outturn, commitment appropriations) to a proposed €8.4m in 2004. This budget line does not adequately represent the whole work of the Representations, however. The Representations accounted for about 60% of DG Comm's personnel and spent about 45% of its operational budget in 2005.

Table 5. Resources of DG Comm, 2005

	Headquarters	Representations	TOTAL
Number/share of personnel	64 (Spokesperson service) + 221 = 285	173 (officials) + 241 (contractual/local agents) = 414	699
	40.8 %	59.2 %	
Amount/share of operational budget	€3.6m	€1.4m	€5m
	55.2 %	44.8 %	

During the Prodi Commission, the Representations were given additional tasks by the sub-delegation of major funds in the context of PRINCE. For example, in 2003 the Representations administered 43% of the money from the PRINCE campaigns on enlargement and the debate on the future of Europe (€12.1m). They managed to commit 85% of the appropriations. It was only in 2006 that not only the range of tasks but also the human resources available for the Representations were increased. Eleven pilot representations have been selected on the basis of the quality of their applications (including work plans and human resources needs) to receive additional support from 25 officials and 25 contractual agents. The helpdesk in DG Comm responsible for the Representations has been reorganised to reduce the administrative workload of the Representations and provide common guidelines on calls for proposals, framework contracts and other standard procedures.

Evaluating decentralised communication actions

Relevance. The aim of adapting communication actions to different national settings is key to starting a real exchange with citizens and therefore it can be welcomed that, under Wallström, 'going local' became a priority.

Effectiveness/Efficiency. The effectiveness of decentralisation was hampered under the Prodi Commission as only the tasks of the Representations were changed and not the means. Presumably, at

first press work was their main mission, but then also communication with the general public and finally also administering PRINCE funds. However, the same small team of officials – often without experience in press work or communication – was usually responsible for doing this. Furthermore, as one of them said in an interview: “Whatever the official mission was, the same people addressed us with the same demands and expectations.” The annual reports of Representations such as Berlin and Paris reveal that they repeated a plea for more staff and listed the activities which were not being implemented due to lack of resources for years. The second part of the problem concerns the financing rules, which are an obstacle to the Representations carrying out their communication work with flexibility. Annual work plans are supposed to determine what will be done in the field of communication one year ahead. The annual reports of DG Comm had to put the activities of the Representations on a list of reservations for several years now, as the work plans are not fully implemented and instead actions take place which are not grounded in the plans. While this conflicts with the EU’s financing rules, it appears absolutely plausible if one considers that political communication cannot be determined and finalised a year in advance.¹⁷ With a view to this situation, the effectiveness and efficiency of the work of the Representations, as reflected in a reasonable implementation rate, might actually have been surprisingly high given the poor working conditions.

It is too early to judge on the improvements in terms of effectiveness and efficiency achieved by the reforms under Wallström: e.g. since 2006 the Berlin Representation has eight additional (A-grade) officials/contractual agents, who, for the first time, are able to systematically contact the regional press and public interest magazines. The number of seminars provided to journalists has been doubled. Three theme managers do general communication work targeted at specific target groups or on themes which have been identified as communication priorities – so more effective communication work can be expected. However, the rules for spending money have not significantly improved. Officials say that there is still no way to react rapidly to communication challenges if this involves spending money.

Another challenge arising from decentralisation is the increased need for coordination. A lack of central guidance in terms of a common framework for communication was criticised in different evaluations of the PRINCE campaigns. There were huge discrepancies in the ways that Representations implemented the funds and the differences did not always reflect adaptations to national communication needs.

Part of the mission of the Representations is to work with the information offices of the EP in the member states. Some success has been achieved with the establishment of common European houses and increased cooperation over the years. Nevertheless, having these parallel structures (even if they are now in the same building), which at least in part do the same kind of work (publications, seminars, websites etc.), does not seem efficient. In this respect, we fully share the criticism included in the report of the EP’s Committee on Culture and Education by Luis Francisco Herrero-Tejedor (A6-0111/2005, final). In the future centres might join forces to inform citizens about the EU instead of primarily about the Commission or the EP.

Utility. Decentralisation is the best answer to cure the problem of communication designed in Brussels, which sometimes does not address the needs of national audiences. However, its full utility can only be assessed after it has been fully implemented by giving Representations the room for manoeuvre and the resources to make decentralisation a reality.

Recommendations. The first recommendation is therefore to provide the necessary resources and tools to make decentralisation real. The project of better resourced pilot Representations should be put on a more permanent basis. Those Representations which have not been selected as pilot projects should be looked at more closely. Why were they not able to submit good strategies on how to

¹⁷ Commissioner Wallström said in an interview with euractiv.com that: “We have been listening very carefully to officers from the Commission’s national representations because they are central to this process. Either we change the way they work and their priorities or we shouldn’t have them at all. We cannot continue like this when more than half of their time and more than half of the people in this DG are working on administrative matters.”

improve their work with additional resources? One reason might be that they are sufficiently staffed but there might also be other reasons. Then, one needs to take a look at all actions in the field of communication and see if they could be better implemented and adapted to national needs at the level of the Representations. Central brochures as well as press releases and content for websites could be produced centrally in the form of a template in English (as is partly envisaged by Wallström's action plan). In the Representations, the versions in the respective languages could be finalised using only native speakers with a professional background in communication instead of the central translation service in Brussels. All additional tasks given to the Representations should be accompanied by an adequate transfer of staff and budget – not only from DG Comm but also from other DGs - if the Representations are meant to serve all DGs. Representations should be authorised to spend money more flexibly and without announcing every single action in the annual work plan. As regards working with the EP offices, a genuine merger of EP offices and Commission Representations under joint control should be considered.

2.3 Media relations: Communicating with the media?

While decentralised media work is covered by the Representations, this section deals with actions targeted at the media at EU-level. Budget article 16 02 03 ('Direct Communication – Media') includes a whole range of items (e.g. the website of the Commission President and the provision of free photo material for journalists), but for reasons of prioritisation and limited space, we concentrate on the actions of the spokespersons' service ('service des portes-paroles' – SPP)¹⁸ and – more briefly - on seminars for journalists organised by DG PRESS.

Table 6. Budget Direct Communication – Media (€ mil.)

Year	2004 ¹⁹	2005	2006
ABB 16 02 03	2.7	2.6	2.7

2.3.1. Actions of the spokespersons' service (SPP)

As the Commission's main interlocutor for accredited journalists in Brussels, the SPP has as its principal objective the provision of information on the decisions and policies of the Commission to these journalists. It is a lynchpin for contacts between accredited journalists on the one hand and commissioners and their respective cabinets and DGs on the other hand. There is a daily press briefing at noon in the Commission's press room. On very detailed questions, spokespeople refer questions from journalists to desk officers and experts within the DGs. Spokespersons are in constant contact with the commissioner (and cabinets) of their portfolio and have good contacts with the officials working in the information unit of the respective DG. Every day, all the spokespersons meet at 10am to discuss different topics on the news agenda. This meeting is combined with a video conference with the 25 Representations.

Relevance. The relevance of providing information to accredited journalists can hardly be contested given the fact that the Commission takes many decisions that directly affect peoples' lives and that need to be communicated through the media to the general public.

¹⁸ Salaries for the spokespersons are financed from another budget item (16 01 01 01 – 'Expenditure related to staff in active employment of 'Press and Communication' Directorate General/Headquarters'). This budget item is not part of the operational budget of DG Comm. The exact amount spent on the SPP could not be specified from the budget, as it covers all staff at the headquarters of DG Comm.

¹⁹ Before 2004, ABB 16 02 03 was part of B3-303 'Communication Work'. Therefore the years 2000-2003 and 2004-2006 are not comparable.

Efficiency and effectiveness. Figures from a large study project²⁰ show that – while there are considerable differences between nationalities – journalists generally rate the communication of European institutions with journalists as “no different” from national actors. Several developments have helped to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of communication actions for the media in the period between 2000 and 2005. Back in April 2001, when DG Press was created and the SPP was integrated into its structures, efforts were being made to train spokespersons specifically for their communication tasks. In 2007, the Commission plans to organise a competition for communication specialists for the first time, which is a direct consequence of Commissioner Wallström’s action plan.²¹ According to this action plan, communication and public speaking will become obligatory for management functions.

Another development that has improved the flow of information is the increased use of the internet and modern means of communication since 2000. All the spokespersons can be reached on mobile phones and latest developments are communicated to accredited journalists via the Espresso e-mail-list. The e-mail service efficiently put an end to the complaints of the past, when news that broke only after the 12 o’clock press briefing was sometimes not communicated in time. In September 2001, DG Press launched a virtual press room giving access to the news published online. In November 2001, a new version of the RAPID database was introduced, which contains all the Commission’s press releases since 1985. The press releases themselves, however, remain a source of criticism over the period covered by this study. Although improvements can be detected, wording often remains either too technical or not precise enough, quotes from commissioners are criticised as meaningless and the quality of translation (if available) is not always up to the standards that many journalists expect.

Following DG Comm’s action plan, the SPP has recently received a planning cell with six additional A-grade officials. It has helped to better plan the agenda of the SPP and to avoid clashes between major news stories. While it is appreciated as a good service, spokespersons and their assistants have to provide the planning cell with the necessary information without additional resources for this new task. The planning cell also publishes a bulletin with upcoming ‘top news’, which is especially targeted at the audiovisual media, as these have a greater need for planning ahead than the print media. In the past, the focus of activities and monitoring has often been too much on large newspapers. A certain shift can, however, be perceived towards the audiovisual sector and regional media.²²

Utility. The SPP reaches a wide public through the Brussels press corps. It also fulfils an important internal communication function as it is the only body meeting on a daily basis that is in contact with all cabinets.

Recommendations. In view of its limited resources the actions of the SPP certainly represent value for money. However, in view of the impact of EU decisions and the fact that Brussels now has one of the world’s largest press corps, resources are not appropriate. Journalists’ organisations have expressed the need for an extension of the number of press officers. Sometimes journalists’ questions cannot be answered at short notice – a problem of particular importance in the context of the deadline-oriented work of the news media. In particular, there is a lack of staff supporting the spokespersons who could help to quickly obtain information from the DGs on very specific questions. Each of the press officers/assistants and each of the secretaries on average have to support two spokespersons, as the table below illustrates:

²⁰ Statham, Paul: “Europub.com: The Transformation of Political Mobilisation and Communication in European Public Spheres – Integrated Report, Workpackage 6: Interviews with Journalists”, October 2004, p. 14, retrievable at: <http://europub.wz-berlin.de/Data/reports/WP6/D6-2%20WP6%20Integrated%20Report.pdf>

²¹ ‘Action Plan to Improve the Communicating Europe by the European Commission – Annex’, Action 11, p. 5, retrievable at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/index_en.htm

²² See the section of this study dealing with the Representations. Actions for the audiovisual sector falling under budget article 16 02 02 (‘Citizens information via the media’) and 16 02 04 (‘Operation of radio and television studios and audiovisual equipment’) are dealt with in the study on information as these budget articles cover most of the expenses linked to the audiovisual sector.

Table 7. DG PRESS/DG Comm - Allocation of Human Resources (without Representations)

DATE	SPP				Other Units			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
03/04/2001*	22	11	14	-	31	33	57	7
31/12/2001	22	12	17	1	39	38	68	10
31/12/2002	25	13	21	1	51	51	75	10
31/12/2003	25	13	20	-	59	52	75	10
01/05/2004**	25	13	19	-	63	54	72	8
31/12/2004	29	12	18	-	69	58	76	8
31/12/2005	31	15	18	-	75	64	75	7
31/12/2006	34	37		-	95	141		

* Date on which DG Press was created.

** Date of enlargement bringing in ten new member states.

2.3.2. Information seminars for journalists

Over the entire period between 2000 and 2005, DG PRESS allocated money for journalists' seminars under budget article 16.02.03:

Table 8. Seminars for journalists

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Number of seminars	-*	-*	15	40	74
Number of participants	-*	-*	"almost 200"	562	1,250
Commitments outturn	€1.12m	€0.436m	€0.192m	€0.313m	€0.476m

* Not mentioned in the Annual Activity Report of DG PRESS.

Source: Activity Reports of DG PRESS 2003 to 2005; Commitments Outturn: DG Comm.

The objectives of seminars varied according to the respective topics but were generally meant to improve journalists' knowledge of the way in which the EU works and about key issues in the Union's policies. Since 2003, seminars have been organised on the basis of a framework contract between DG PRESS and the European Journalism Centre (EJC). This framework contract is managed by DG PRESS, but – as a service – is also open to other DGs. As seminars under the framework contract aim particularly at European journalists, other DGs also have signed contracts with the EJC that cater to specific needs, e.g. a contract with DG TRADE on seminars specifically for non-European journalists. Speakers at seminars come from both inside and outside the European institutions.

The Broadening Horizons programme in 2003 is an example of a series of conferences organised by the EJC in cooperation with DG Enlargement. It was based on contracts financed from the PRINCE enlargement programme. The objective of the programme was to provide journalists from EU member states with improved information sources, better knowledge and understanding about the new member states and about key issues and EU policies to do with enlargement. Evaluation forms filled in by participants showed that these aims and journalists' expectations were largely met. Eighty eight per cent of participants gave an overall positive assessment of the seminar they attended and 75% stated that they would want to participate in another seminar of this kind.

Recommendations. Contracts for journalists' seminars are a useful action to enhance the knowledge of journalists as efficient multipliers. Seminars in Brussels that include visits to the EU institutions are a good opportunity to provide journalists with an insight that they would have difficulty gaining in another way. In particular, journalists from regional media and the audiovisual sector need to be addressed to enhance their knowledge about the EU. A major challenge continues to be the question of how to reach out to journalists that do not take an interest in European issues in the first place.

2.4 Sectoral communication: Speaking with one voice?

Communication in the Commission is distributed over many different structures. This reflects the broad range of policies covered by this institution, but it also means a challenge for coherent and efficient communication

Each Directorate General (DG) has its own unit for information and communication, which is accountable to the respective Director-General. The number of staff and resources for these units vary considerably from DG to DG. As a consequence, the financial resources for information and communication of the Commission are also very much dispersed across many budget lines. The operational budget of DG Comm (Title 16) accounts for approximately one third of the overall operational budget spent on information and communication, representing the largest share. A comprehensive overview of the expenses of all DGs could unfortunately not be provided by the Commission, but DG AGRI and DG REGIO had the largest information budgets during the period from 2000 to 2005. According to DG REGIO's information unit, the operational budget for information and communication amounted to about 6.5 million euro per year. DG BUDG, on the other hand, is an example of a DG with a small information budget, with about 300,000 euro for its information activities and publications at its disposal.²³ DG Justice, Freedom and Security, as another example, has about 3 million euro (2006) to spend on information and communication. This sum is covered entirely through the Prince programme (budget line 18 08 01).²⁴

As distinct from the cross-sector communication tasks of DG Comm, the other DGs are concerned with providing information about their specific policy areas. Often these DGs do not target the general public with their efforts so much as stakeholders and more specialised audiences that are expected to act as multipliers for a wider audience.

According to our inquiry, the information unit of DG INFSO, for example, only had "several hundred thousand euros" (2005), which were mainly spent on publications. However, the programmes managed by other departments of DG INFSO also include larger sums for information and dissemination actions related to their specific programmes. The annual IST (Information Society Technologies) event²⁵, for example, attracts between 2,000 and 4,000 people and has a budget of 3 million euros.

In terms of cooperation between the different DGs, the Commission has favoured an approach of soft coordination, which recognises the independence of each DG and refrains from imposing guidelines centrally. In its communication on information from 2002, the role of DG Press is defined as "more

²³ Comparing budgets between DGs is difficult, however, because desk officers from the DGs can also be involved 'on demand' in communication activities when their expertise is needed. This is especially the case for DGs with more technical subjects. As a consequence, a relatively higher proportion of the staff working on communication activities are 'hidden' in the general staff costs of these DGs while other DGs might have larger information units but less involvement of regular staff.

²⁴ A comprehensive overview of DG Justice, Freedom and Security information activities has been submitted by its information unit. It can be obtained from the authors of this study.

²⁵ See http://europa.eu.int/information_society/istevent/2004/index_en.htm

that of a service provider and coordinator in relation to other Directorates-General, the other institutions and the Member States than that of an all-knowing, all-powerful driving force”.²⁶

Generally, a soft coordination approach appears appropriate to the authors of this report because the different DGs often know best how to communicate their respective policies to the public and information units should rather be an integral part of their DGs instead of a centralised system where all units would be ‘satellites’ of DG Comm. However, in the period between 2000 and 2005, there have been shortcomings in the implementation of such an approach. Considerable synergies and better use of resources can be obtained if DGs know about each others efforts, exchange best practice and increase cooperation where this makes sense. This has certainly happened in the past, but according to Commission officials, on an ad hoc rather than a strategic basis.

Aiming at more efficient soft coordination, the action plan²⁷ of 2005 formulated a new mandate for the External Communication Network (ECN) and established it as a central coordination mechanism. The network brings together all the heads of the different information units. So far its members have met roughly every six weeks. ECN helps to establish the communication priorities for the Commission. DG Comm provides the ECN’s secretariat and an intranet website has been set up to centralise information. The following working groups have been set up: Communications and management, communication tools, human resources and networks. Daily coordination for coherent messages to the media is provided by the spokespersons’ service through its daily meeting in which also all Representations participate via video conference (see the section of this study on media relations). For long-term communication efforts, a Group of Commissioners for Communication and Programming²⁸ has been established. It is meant to draw up a communication agenda as a calendar of priorities on the basis of the Commission’s five-year programme with an annual rolling timetable. On this basis DG Comm prepares detailed communication plans for each item identified in cooperation with the DG concerned.

Recommendations. The ECN is based on an approach of ‘added-value for DGs’ and not on constraint. For the future it could be envisaged, however, that common standards on certain issues are jointly drafted by the working groups. These standards would then have binding force for participating DGs once agreement is reached, for example on the way brochures are produced and the way press releases are written. We welcome the idea envisaged by Margot Wallström’s action plan to create a common European Commission/European Parliament editor for publications and another for Europa. Mutual information on each other’s activities and the human and budgetary resources involved should be mandatory, especially concerning actions in the member states, which should be coordinated with the Representations. So far this has unfortunately not always been the case.

3. Conclusion²⁹

In line with the specifications of the Budgetary Committee, this evaluation covered the main programmes and actions in the field of communication undertaken under the Commission’s prerogatives. Overall, the evaluation has identified a great many actions that are relevant and useful for communicating with European citizens. The Commission should look at these actions as best practice and cut down on all actions which do not reach beyond those people that are already knowledgeable about EU policies. Generally speaking, the number of activities should be reduced in order to favour strategic large-scale actions that can be implemented with the human resources and budget available.

²⁶ ‘Communication on an information and communication strategy for the European Union’, COM (2002), 350/2 final, p. 18/19.

²⁷ Action Plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission – Annex, p. 2.

²⁸ This group is chaired by Vice-president Wallström and made up of commissioners Barrot, Kallas, Reding, Hübner, Grybauskaitė, Figel and Mandelson.

²⁹ The reader is invited to consult the executive summary at the beginning of this study for a detailed overview of the main findings and recommendations of the study.

This study has also identified structural constraints which prevent officials working on this issue from being able to fully concentrate on effective communication. Many shortcomings are already being tackled by the reforms undertaken since the arrival of Margot Wallström. Her action plan covers the period until 2009, and rightly so, since there is still a long way to go *towards communication*. We recommend that all resources necessary to pursue the action plan are provided by the budgetary authority. The cuts foreseen in the 2007 communication budget should be reconsidered given that the challenge of communicating Europe will not become any smaller any time soon. In the long term, the institutions may consider ways to establish a legal basis formulating a strong mandate for communication activities so that they can move from a range of diverse communication measures to a real communication policy in its own right.

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