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INFORMATION PROGRAMME: OBJECTIVES AND MEANS

(Communication from the Commission to the Council)

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INFORMATION PROGRAMME: OBJECTIVES AND MEANS

1. Each year the Commission has to define general information policy guidelines and take decisions on the utilization of staff and budgetary resources.
2. In formulating its information policy it must take account of :
 - a) the political context
 - b) priorities (by country, audience, and theme)
 - c) resources

General political context

3. Everyone recognizes that the Community is going through a very difficult period. The problem facing Member States are serious and are provoking conflicts which are sometimes hard to resolve. The contribution that the Community can make is frequently viewed with suspicion. In some cases the Community is even regarded as the cause of these problems. This has had a negative effect on public opinion, particularly in the Member States. A recent survey (Eurobarometer, December 1980) revealed that the percentage of those who consider the Community 'a good thing' is on the decline in every Member State. In three Member countries - Denmark, Greece and the United Kingdom - support for the Community is particularly low.
4. Public attitudes towards the Community will not change significantly unless the Community can overcome its current problems. Without credible policies, there cannot be a good information policy.
5. For the Commission, which is often presented as the scapegoat, the current situation means that it must pursue an active information policy to defend not only the Community but also its own role. It should therefore use its information services :
 - a) to convince the public of the need to continue to develop the Community ;
 - b) to stress the importance of what has been achieved ;
 - c) to show, for specific areas, that an attempt must be made to find common solutions to current problems ;
 - d) to present its own vision of the Community's future.
6. If it is to achieve these objectives the Commission will need to mobilize all those who can contribute to a better understanding of the Community. Among these, it wishes in particular to work closely with the European Parliament whose members are in direct contact with voters in the Member States and with regional and local realities in the Community. It plans to involve the Parliament as closely as possible (through the appropriate committee) in its review of information policy and implementation of its information programme, thereby responding to the wish expressed by Parliament itself during its recent debate on information policy.

Priorities

7. There are four essential requirements :
- coverage of current developments ;
 - developing certain priority themes ;
 - selecting priority countries (among member, applicant and non-member countries) ;
 - selecting priority audiences, particularly within the Community.

Current developments

8. DG X should provide back up for the Spokesman's Group daily coverage of news through its central units and information offices.

9. So that its services can work effectively, the Commission should decide on the information activities which should accompany every important decision. It is suggested that an information sheet be produced in such cases by the services concerned in cooperation with DG X and the relevant cabinets.

This would set out the immediate press coverage to be given by the Spokesman's Group and the supporting action to be taken by DG X (including the target audiences to be reached and the instruments to be used - for instance, publications, visits, seminars, etc.). The results of each operation would be assessed in due course and a report made to the Commission.

10. It is essential that cooperation with other Commission services be improved as urged by Parliament in the Schall Report which made reference to Parliament's concern that all Commission departments be made aware of the 'information dimension'. This involves, among other things, more frequent meetings with the network of information correspondents of the other Directorates-general.

11. It is also essential to guarantee close coordination with DG X's Information Offices by notifying them in good time; supplying the necessary documentation quickly ; and taking national and regional aspects into account in the presentation of Commission proposals. The Commission's regionalized information effort - with particular reference to the European funds - must be pursued and expanded so that the people of Europe can be given a better idea of the importance of the Community in their daily lives.

Themes

12. The Commission has identified eleven priority areas in its 1981 programme. One of DG X's basic tasks will be to supply as much information as possible on these using all the normal means at its disposal. However, it would be unrealistic to expect that equal attention can be

paid to all of them. For this reason it is suggested that whenever the Commission takes a decision or makes an important proposal an information sheet be produced and specific information activities be approved. These activities can be financed from DG X's budgetary reserve.

13. In parallel with these sectoral activities, the Commission - in order to provide a framework for a coherent set of information activities - will also take account of certain 'horizontal' themes such as those indicated in the detailed programme of the services of the Commission which it adopted at its meeting of April 8th, 1981.

Countries

14. Although it is true that the Commission cannot hope to have a determining influence on public opinion through its information activities it is nonetheless essential to select priority countries where an extra effort is required for political reasons.

15. Member States. Given the findings of the latest Eurobarometer and the views expressed by Information Office Heads at a recent meeting, it is suggested that priority be given to those countries where it is necessary to develop information work.

16. Applicant and non-member countries. It is suggested that budgetary resources for Spain and Portugal should be increased; that a major priority be kept for the United States; and that some adjustments be made in the allocation of resources for Information Offices in other non-member countries.

Audiences

17. In applicant and non-member countries (with the exception of the United States) available resources mean that the Commission can only reach opinion leaders (for example, press, politicians and so on). In member countries, on the other hand, a distinction has to be made between the general public and multipliers.

General public

18. As far as the general public is concerned it is impossible, without funds on a scale comparable to those made available for the direct elections campaign, to reach the general public directly (a month-long publicity campaign would absorb the entire annual budget of a large Information Office). Consequently, a mass audience can only be reached through the media. This is one of DG X's priority tasks, though this costs time and effort rather than budgetary credits. By contrast considerable funds are necessary for the technical staff and operations of the studios and production centre of the Radio, Television and Films Division in Brussels. This item represents the major share of expenditure in this area which will absorb 17.6 % of the funds available for information to Member States in 1981.

19. However, during the year consideration will have to be given to the future role of this Division, with particular reference to the production of audio-visual material for regional and local stations. The question of transferring its studios to the Berlaymont will also have to be examined.

20. Travelling exhibitions are another way of reaching a wide audience. A number of offices, notably Bonn, have been using them regularly. Last year three others - Brussels, London and Paris - mounted travelling exhibitions too. These obtained wide media coverage, guaranteed a physical presence in the regions, and served to highlight the regional impact of Community activities. It is suggested that this type of action be pursued and expanded in 1981.

21. Another way of reaching a wide audience is to undertake special projects. These should include preparations for the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome, the organisation of events around specific themes, and consideration of how best to exploit private initiatives, such as Sail for Europe.

Multipliers

22. At the same time the Commission's information effort must meet the needs of opinion leaders who are important multipliers of information.

23. The Commission's present strategy, as far as this group is concerned, comprises two main elements.

24. The first is based on the need to maintain regular and direct links with as many opinion leaders as possible. A detailed study carried out last year suggested that to meet this need a number of rejuvenated periodicals should be published by the Information Offices to include an 8-page Eurorofum supplement prepared in Brussels. At the same time it was agreed that a much larger audience has to be reached. A target readership of 500,000 was set for the end of 1982 as compared with 200,000 previously. New readers are already receiving the magazines for a trial period. This new policy has eliminated earlier duplication between publications issued from Brussels and those issued by Information Offices. In 1981 these periodicals will account for 29 % of the funds allocated to Member States. The cost of other written material (brochures, etc.) means that the publications programme as a whole will account for 40.9 % of the budget for member countries.

25. The second element of the Commission's approach to opinion leaders is to identify priority groups and supply information to them in the form of specialized publications, visits, meetings and discussions. This is done in close association with their representative organizations, to whom contributions are sometimes made for specific information activities.

26. It is suggested that priority be given in 1981, to those multipliers who are concerned with the specific problems affecting workers, women and young people.

27. The main items of expenditure under this heading are visits and seminars. These will be allocated 14.3 % and 22.2 % respectively in 1981, making a total of 36.5 %. It should be noted that information to young people is currently financed separately from general information work. The last Commission divided appropriations available for this purpose (Article 273) between DG X and DG XII (now DG V).

Ways and means

28. Staff. At present the DG has a total staff of 452 (officials and local staff), 143 of whom work in Brussels, 197 in 10 Information Offices and Suboffices in the Member States, and 112 in 11 Offices in applicant and non-member countries.

29. In recent years the headquarters staff complement has been reduced by successive Commission decisions while the network of Information Offices has steadily increased. It is essential that a balance be maintained between headquarters and local offices since local offices need to be fed information and instructions appropriate to local realities.

30. Furthermore, the planned decentralization, involving the opening of suboffices in Germany and Italy did not materialize in 1980-81, with the exception of Milan (early May 1981) which will be made possible by the redeployment of existing staff. As far as non-member countries are concerned, the delegations in Belgrade and Canberra will be opened without information offices. If this new situation were temporary, the consequences would not be very serious. But if the pattern is repeated in 1982, given the proposals to open delegations without information offices in New Delhi and Brasilia, there will have been a de facto change in policy.

31. The Commission should therefore confirm its decentralization policy setting up some further suboffices and provide information offices in its delegations in Member States and in non-member countries. The Commission should then take the appropriate steps to carry through its decisions in practice.

32. Budget. In recent years the Commission, supported by the appropriate Parliamentary committee, has sought substantial increases in appropriations for information work. For 1981 however the budgetary authorities entered a figure of 8 million ECU for post 2720 ; this is lower in real terms than the sum entered the previous year. Other information appropriations have been either cut back or held at their 1980 level.

Recommendations

33. It is proposed that the Commission :

- approve the guidelines set out in this paper ;
- adopt the principle of the use of an information sheet referred to in para 9, and to charge the General Secretariat to establish in agreement with DG X the procedural rules concerning its application and to inform the services of these ;
- approve the provisional breakdown of appropriations in the outline budget-programme (Annex II) ;
- forward this paper, for information, to the Council and Parliament.