



The Commission White Paper on Communication

Mapping a Way to a European Public Sphere

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I. Introduction

In its recent White Paper on a European Communication Policy, the European Commission has promised a “fundamentally new approach”. The policy is meant to narrow the communication gap looming between the European Union and its citizens and ultimately to map a way towards the development of a European public sphere. In contrast to the so-called ‘Action Plan’ for improving the Commission’s own communication from July 2005, the White Paper is addressed to the EU as a whole, including other central institutions, member states, European political parties and even ‘civil society’. The purpose of this Policy Brief is to critically evaluate the proposals emanating from the White Paper and to advance several suggestions aimed at helping the current initiative to have a more tangible and long-term effect than its many predecessors, authored by Messrs Tindemans, Adonnino, Oostlander, DeClerq, Pex or Pinheiro.

Looking back over the last decade, one can find numerous calls to ‘reconnect with the citizens’ – the most prominent being the Convention on the Future of Europe with its pledge to extensively consult civil society. And the result is well known: citizens have remained for the most part uninvolved, uninformed and largely unimpressed.

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However, while the White Paper lacks revolutionary and concrete policy proposals, its text is characterised by a welcome sense of realism and long-term perspective. The approach is fundamentally new indeed as the Commission is seriously asking the other institutions and the European public at large for proposals to develop better communication on EU matters. In the pre-Wallström era, the EP Committee on Culture – which also deals with communication – demanded in vain for more than a decade to debate the Commission’s annual communication priorities before their final determination. Now, the White Paper is starting a consultation process, which could improve the involvement of the major decision-making actors, most notably national and European parliamentarians.

The fact that it took the European Commission so long to present its White Paper illustrates the sensitivity of the issue in question. In many member states politicians have traditionally taken a dim view of communication efforts by EU actors, especially by representatives from the European Commission. National governments prefer to monopolise national debates about European political issues and the rise of euroscepticism in domestic politics led to ever-closer scrutiny of whether EU communication does not constitute a breach of national competencies and waste of money. The two failed referenda on the Constitutional Treaty in spring 2005 provided for a political context that further fuelled this attitude. Cool reactions from several national parliaments to the European Parliament’s initiative to engage them in joint discussion forums on the future of Europe illustrated the limited commitment among many national decision-makers to actively make the case for European integration. ‘Subsidiarity’ seems to be the word of the hour and for some the concept does not accommodate ambitious plans for European communication.

Brussels correspondents have initially responded to the White Paper with a mixture of concern that they would be made an instrument of EU policy and (somewhat

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ironically) fear of being bypassed by initial plans (since dropped) to create an EU news agency. But these critical reactions are not surprising, given that the draft of the White Paper also appeared to face a lot of criticism from within the Commission itself on a variety of grounds. Some Commissioners allegedly complained about an excessively self-critical tone in the text concerning the European institutions – an argument that had also been expressed about previous White Papers, namely the one on Governance published in June 2001. Others claimed that important proposals were politically unrealistic or legally unfeasible while yet others objected that the initial draft was too concerned with a democratic deficit – thus contesting the close link with the EU’s communication deficit. Finally, it was said that publication of the text should have taken the form of a more general Green Paper, as it hardly addressed questions of institutional implementation and financial implications.

The present paper starts from the premise that the communication gap between policy-makers and citizens in the European Union is real and that it needs to be addressed if democratic processes and governance are to work. Although we take issue with the imprecise use of some of the key concepts and the often-cloudy language, we find that the overall approach is essentially sound and realistic in light of the findings published in the academic literature on the ‘European public sphere’ (Brüggemann et al., 2006; Gerhards, 2001; Meyer, 2002; Peters et al., 2005; Trenz, 2006). The paper then goes on to assess the Commission’s proposals, but attempts to go beyond mere criticism by formulating ideas on how to substantiate the strategy advocated by the Commission.

II. Communication Policy and the European Public Sphere

The Commission introduces two new terms in its White Paper – *Communication Policy* and *European Public Sphere* – but fails to define them explicitly: Defining these terms more precisely is not only of academic interest.

The new term of a ‘Communication Policy’ encompasses the Commission’s claim for the introduction of a new field of policy as well as a new objective for the area of communication. Previously, there was no communication policy but rather a *strategy* for information and communication, there was no Commissioner for Communication and DG Communication was called DG Press.⁵ In its own words, the Commission wants to move from information to communication and it wants to establish communication as a policy in its own right with

⁵ The first Communication Commissioner was João de Deus Pinheiro, who served under the last Delors Commission. He faced the severe blow from the Danish ‘no’ vote on the Maastricht Treaty as well as resistance from Directorates-General, other Commissioners and Delors himself to thoroughly reform the European Commission’s public communication (see Gramberger, 1997).

the ultimate aim of developing a “European public sphere where the European debate can unfold” (European Commission, 2006, p. 4). If the new approach is applied in a meaningful way, it will treat the question of how to communicate with citizens as a political question where democracy is at stake and not only as an instrument of ‘selling’ policies (see Brüggemann, 2005).

The overall approach taken by the White Paper to EU communication can only be welcomed, as the issue is now put on the political agenda. It will no longer only be dealt with by administrators below the level of political decision-makers – as was the case under the Prodi Commission. At the same time, the new label of ‘communication policy’ instead of ‘information policy’ suggests a move away from one-way information towards real interaction with citizens.⁶

Indeed, ‘communication policy’ is an ambitious term as both parts of it are – so far – wishful thinking. To fully establish it as a field of EU policy, the treaties would have to be revised. According to its legal service, the Commission has the right to inform EU citizens about its own activities as part of its institutional prerogatives, but there is no clear mandate to devise a general communication policy of the EU. The competences for communication as well as the related key issues of civic education and media policy lie largely with the member states. European institutions can only act within the limited legal framework and with the scarce resources that the current conditions allow them. While no one would dispute the EU’s competence to inform citizens about policy results, the creation of a ‘European public sphere’ is a much more ambitious goal. To strengthen any concrete initiative following the White Paper, the Council and the European Parliament should give the Commission a well-defined mandate and not only a budget for communication. Under these circumstances, it is thus tactically wise that the proposals in the second part of the White Paper do not create the impression of ‘imposing’ solutions from Brussels.

Unfortunately, however, the White Paper does not provide a clear definition of the ‘European public sphere’ it envisages. While competing conceptualisations of what constitutes a public sphere exist, one can best describe it as a ‘space’ within which citizens, civil society organisations and political actors publicly debate issues of common concern. The function of a public sphere in a democracy is usually three-fold (Meyer, 2002: 68-71):

- 1) To enable citizens to form an informed opinion about how they can connect their own preferences with the political options available,

⁶ Analytically, the term ‘information policy’ is more adequate of course, as it still deals with the information activities of the EU institutions and it remains to be seen whether citizens are willing to interact.

- 2) To hold decision-makers accountable for their actions by scrutinising political personnel in-between elections, and
- 3) To contribute to overall social cohesion and trust within a society by giving a wide range of groups within the society an opportunity to make their voice heard.

In contrast to negotiations among business partners, debates are not decided by bargaining and differences of power, but by the strength of the better argument leading to an acceptable compromise. Ultimately, the main contribution of a public sphere to democracy is its ability to transform isolated individuals into a community of active, informed and mutually trusting citizens.

But what makes a public sphere ‘European’? The White Paper initially (p. 5) seems to conceive of a European public sphere as a truly transnational place, where pan-European media and parties shape public discourse and a common political culture. It then sets out that Europe must find ‘its place’ in national debates as if this was something analytically separate. This conjures up the unfortunate image of the European public sphere as the equivalent of national public sphere writ-large, something that may be appropriate to a superstate, but not a political entity, which depends heavily on political legitimacy from citizens organised within nation states. Moreover, the research in the area of European political communication shows that pan-European media lack mass-appeal and are unlikely to increase their market share beyond interested elite-circles for the foreseeable future. At the same time, the salience of EU issues and institutions has increased in national media coverage, albeit slowly and with important national variations,⁷ while genuine transnational debates⁸ are a sporadic and still rather rare phenomenon (see Gerhards, 2001; Koopmanns & Erbe, 2003; Brüggemann et al., 2006). What is needed thus is not the creation of a communication space that is detached and in competition with national public spheres, but rather a Europeanisation of national public spheres, accompanied by a closer alignment of national debates with those policy-oriented discussions that have been taking place for years in specialised European fora and media.

The national spheres are thus constitutive elements of a European public sphere and this fact is also largely reflected in the approach of the White Paper. The core idea that the Commission rightly pursues is that European issues and non-national actors need to become more visible within national public debates as the primary place for public opinion formation. To strengthen this dimension of the European public sphere is, however implicit, at the core of the European communication policy that the Commission wishes to establish in partnership with the member states.

⁷ So-called ‘vertical Europeanisation’.

⁸ So-called ‘horizontal Europeanisation’.

III. The Communication Gap and the Approach of the White Paper

In reading the White Paper, one finds an interesting difference between the rather clear – albeit still diplomatic – analysis of the existing problems on the one hand and the very cloudy language concerning concrete improvements on the other. Although a first draft was more outspoken in its criticism of the institutions for merely holding a “monologue” instead of a “dialogue” with citizens, the main symptoms of the problem are analysed quite precisely:

- Too little coordination among actors;
- Insufficient involvement from national, regional and local actors; and
- Too little focus on citizens’ concerns.

This diagnosis is not new – as several Commission Communications of recent years show – but, in contrast to earlier texts, the current structures are not presented as something that can be ‘fixed’ quite easily by some sort of administrative exercise.

Unfortunately, however, the underlying reasons why a short-term approach is insufficient are hardly addressed in the White Paper. Good communication is not simply a matter of good intentions and new coordinating mechanisms, but also of political incentives connected to the exercise of power and the selection of personnel, legal mandates and financial resources. The Commission rightly stresses that its success will largely depend on the commitment of national, regional and local actors. Without the ‘partnership approach’, the White Paper is certain to meet the same fate as the several other well-meaning initiatives of previous years.

It is also encouraging that the White Paper goes against a logic that has dominated European integration for a very long time and that is enjoying a certain revival after the ‘no’ votes to the European Constitution. An increasing number of decision-makers like to concentrate on policy output and underline the fact that the EU has always derived its legitimacy from ‘good results’. According to this view, Europe should ‘deliver’ jobs and growth and everything would be just fine. Regrettably, this view ignores the fact that successes are easily claimed by the national level, while ‘Brussels’ is conveniently made the scapegoat for failures. The White Paper therefore rightly states that ‘content’ is important, but not sufficient. Policy also needs to be communicated and those affected must be involved in the shaping of the ultimate outcome. Unfortunately this still happens too rarely and too late in the policy process.

As regards the consultation process on the White Paper, it seems the Commission is sincerely interested in soliciting stakeholders’ ideas. On the other hand, there is the clear risk that once again only the ‘usual suspects’ who are already close to the European institutions are contributing to this exercise. It remains to be seen what kind of reach the announced ‘stakeholder forums’ will actually

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develop. It is essential that the Commission ensures that the discussion attracts those citizens and representatives of media and NGOs who do not usually contribute to debates at the European level: local and regional actors who have a pivotal role in the everyday life of many citizens.

It is understandable that the Commission intends to summarise the debate and to draw its own conclusions, as that would allow it to maintain a high degree of control over the results. However, there is a clear danger that ‘unwanted’ results are going to be filtered out at some stage in the evaluation process. A better solution would therefore be to form a broad-based panel made up, for example, by Commissioner Wallström and representatives of the European Parliament, the EU presidency and a European journalist association to review all the feedback received on the White Paper and to jointly draft the final report.

IV. Assessment of the Commission’s Proposals

This section examines those elements of the Commission’s proposals that seem most relevant to a successful European Communication Policy and discusses them in greater detail.

1. A European Charter or Code of Conduct on Communication

The Commission puts forward the principles of the right to information and freedom of expression, inclusiveness, diversity and participation of the citizens as the basis of public debate about European integration and suggests that they should be further elaborated into a European Charter or Code of Conduct on Communication, which should engage not only the EU institutions but also national, regional and local governments and NGOs. The main purpose of the code as we see it would be to promote a sense of responsibility for ensuring that citizens have access to sufficient information about EU issues to form their opinions and that certain ground rules of European public discourse are followed.

While a code of conduct is certainly an appealing idea, the White Paper does not clarify a crucial question: How can one ensure that it’s being complied with? That is, is the code supposed to be voluntary or should it be legally obligatory?

The question implies a difficult balancing act, given that a code would need to bind a large number of actors to be effective. But a code that binds civil society or the media should not be designed in the context of a White Paper by the European Commission. The independence of non-state actors is at the very heart of the idea of a public sphere. Reporting about the EU in a manner that may be regarded as too one-sided or negative by the EU institutions is part of the freedom of the press and the freedom of speech; the EU should defend these principles

rather than be seen as infringing upon them. Consequently, journalists or NGOs should be asked to come up with their own code of conduct on how to cover EU affairs. European journalists’ associations could establish a European press council which could watch over such a voluntary commitment. The enforcement would take place through ‘naming and shaming’. In order to achieve sufficient take-up, one would need to think of the code less as a rule book, but more as a visible certificate of quality that different organisations and actors would aspire to be awarded, as in the case of eco-labelling.

In the context of the White Paper, however, European institutions as well as national, regional and local government actors should develop a code of conduct, which covers their own communication activities. Participation would be voluntary, but if this code is meant to be more than a mere formality, it must impose some element of obligation on the participating parties at all levels involved. The code should therefore clearly state how the respective actors commit themselves to the promotion of a European Public Sphere. One of the main purposes of a code of conduct must be to insure that communication policy is distinct from the mere ‘selling’ of the EU. It primarily has to serve the citizens and must be consistent with democratic principles. Therefore, EU institutions and national governments should sign a code that commits them to active communication about the EU, transparency and dialogue with the citizens. It should include the respect of public institutions towards the freedom of expression of the citizens and the editorial freedom of the press. The code would have to protect those organisations and media that receive financial support from the EU from editorial interference. The code could also oblige national governments to inform their citizens about which policies they were pursuing in the Council and how they have voted, thereby also ending the practice at member state level of making the Commission a scapegoat for any unpopular policies. Heads of state and government should commit themselves to publicly explain to their respective national parliaments their position on the issues of the EU presidency’s priorities and positions they have taken during the preceding presidency. Such an account should be made twice a year, *after* the presentation by each new EU presidency of its priorities to the European Parliament. Governments could also commit to set up a network of national websites giving their position on EU issues and to give up the right to veto the application of the EU transparency regime to national documents which form part of the EU’s policy-making process.⁹ Generally speaking, such a code of conduct could help to make a

⁹ The transparency rules of the EU (Regulation No. 1049/2001, Art. 4, 4-5) demand that the Commission consults the member states on access to the national documents which are held by the Commission. Consequently, the member states can effectively take these documents related to EU policy-making beyond the reach of the EU regulation on transparency.

less restrictive interpretation of the existing regulation on transparency prevail against the current use of its exceptional clauses.

Finally, the code of conduct should be given some teeth via the creation of an independent authority to which people could submit complaints. The European Ombudsman would be well suited to pursue cases of maladministration or the violation of such a code of conduct by the European institutions. S/he should be given the necessary resources to properly take up this additional responsibility. In pursuing this task, s/he might be joined by an ‘Advisory Board on European Communication’ comprised of journalists’ associations, civil society representatives as well as national and European parliamentarians.

2. Civic Education

The Maastricht Treaty created the notion of European Union citizenship, but Eurobarometer surveys reveal that most citizens have a very limited understanding of how the EU works, what it does and how they are able to influence policy. A large majority of citizens, for instance, see the Council of Ministers only as a meeting forum, not a place for law- and decision-making. The European Parliament’s powers are underestimated, and as a consequence the turn-out for its elections has declined in recent decades. Moreover, history books and teaching in some countries have been narrowly focused on the evolution of the nation states in Europe and less than half of Europe’s population are able to speak more than one foreign language fluently. The Commission is right in highlighting that civic education at all levels, but especially in schools, should ensure that citizens across the EU acquire the knowledge and the skills to fully participate in democratic processes at national and European levels. Both levels are interconnected – one cannot function without the other.

While it is true that civic education remains the responsibility of national and regional authorities, education experts and teachers from across the EU could be invited to learn from each others teaching and to work on a ‘European core curriculum’ for teaching the European dimension in the areas of politics, history and languages. This ‘core curriculum’ would comprise the absolute basics in the above-mentioned areas that *every* high school student in Europe should learn. A first step in the development of such a curriculum could be to invite a group of education experts to draft a report on what civic education should look like in contemporary Europe. As a second step, a small think-tank or institute should be established with a ‘virtual presence’ on the internet, including a growing database with teaching materials in different languages. In a third step such a think-tank could moderate and fuel a debate among national decision-makers on how to make Europe part of the national curricula.

3. Dialogue with Citizens

Unfortunately, the Commission does not convincingly demonstrate how the feedback of EU policies from millions of EU citizens can be taken into account in a systematic way by an already-overstretched administration. The suggested monitoring of public opinion and the formation of focus groups may help the College of Commissioners avoid public outcries in some member states about particular initiatives. Also, polls can be used as an incentive for political actors to become more active, if they include approval and visibility ratings. Nevertheless, the White Paper attaches too much importance to opinion monitoring and polling. While creating networks of national polling experts may be useful in fostering a European dimension in opinion polling, they cannot replace the job of European institutions to reach out and engage citizens in an interactive dialogue. Such instruments certainly cannot be substitutes for giving citizens a real stake in the decision-making process.

As a matter of principle, parliamentarians and not civil servants should bear the main responsibility for channelling citizens’ views into the political process. The proposed ‘joint open debates’ by the European institutions can be helpful, but there is a clear risk that they become just another ‘Brussels-talking-to-Brussels’ exercise. To involve a larger audience and to make it more attractive for the media, journalists must be able to publicly address questions directly to the speakers at these events.

A more ambitious approach would be to organise a European ‘deliberative poll’¹⁰ or even a ‘European deliberation day’ where debates would be held on ‘European’ topics in the EP as well as in national parliaments to allow citizens to voice their views and expectations in concrete policy areas. Participants would be invited on a random basis to avoid an over-representation of those ‘already in the know’ and they would be provided with background information from different experts before and throughout the debates. The outreach would be enhanced by inviting national television stations to broadcast the event in an attractive format. Such a debate would highlight the role of parliaments as fora of open exchange of views and have the potential to attract strong media attention.

4. The Partnership Approach: Reaching beyond ‘Planet Brussels’

The effort to implement an effective communication policy will surely fail, if local, regional and national actors cannot be sufficiently involved to ensure that not it is only the ‘usual suspects’ who participate in the debates about EU-related issues. This is probably the most

¹⁰ The concept of a ‘deliberative poll’ has been developed by Robert C. Luskin and James S. Fishkin. For a more detailed discussion, see Luskin et al. (2002).

important aspect of the entire White Paper. Accordingly, communication-related projects that receive funding must include criteria that allow an assessment not only of how many, but also of *who* is reached by the respective project. Priority should be given to those projects that aim beyond those who are already ‘in the know’. Only projects with a strong multiplier effect should be subsidised. Too often money is spent on well-intended projects where the inhabitants of ‘Planet Brussels’ end up talking to each other. Joint initiatives of member states as well as EU programmes should actively support the establishment and maintenance of cross-national networks that enable European citizens with similar interests or professional backgrounds to meet each other face-to-face. Regional and local actors are often interested, but need coordination assistance and funding to engage in the establishment of such issue-based transnational networks.

National parliaments should strive to pay more attention to European legislative projects much earlier in the decision-making process, so that national debates do not take place too late in the process, allowing national actors to present legislation as an ‘illegitimate act’ from the Brussels bureaucracy. National parliaments are better-placed than any of the European institutions to stimulate debate among a broader public and to draw media attention to a particular issue. However, the extent to which national parliaments are engaged in generating debate on European issues still varies widely from country to country. A generally more pro-active role would associate national parliaments with the European policy process beyond the necessary, but defensive role as a watchdog on subsidiarity issues (see Kurpas et al., 2005).

The ‘Advisory Board on European Communication’ (see recommendation under earlier discussion on a European Charter on Communication), consisting of journalists, representatives of civil society, national and European parliamentarians and the European Ombudsman, should monitor the efficiency of EU communication policy. In this capacity, it should not only observe whether institutions are violating the ‘code of conduct’, but also give concrete advice for improving the policy’s implementation.

5. Involving the Media

Europe by Satellite (EbS) should indeed be upgraded, as proposed by the White Paper. However, this should not lead to the creation of an EU-run news agency, which would always be vulnerable to accusations of disseminating ‘Brussels-propaganda’, which would probably cause more harm than it would solve existing problems. Therefore, EbS broadcasts should be used instead to further strengthen EU coverage in the existing media, especially in those working at the regional and local level. In order to do so more effectively, EbS should continually solicit ideas and advice from regional and local journalists through the Advisory Board (see above)

on how to serve them best. Additionally, EbS could provide the EUROPA website with audio-visual content.

6. The Role of Commissioners

In the White Paper itself, the Commission does not comment in great detail on its own role in improving European communication, as it has already made a substantial contribution in this area in the *Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe by the Commission*, which was in fact issued half a year before the White Paper. However, the unique consultation process started for the White Paper should by all means include a discussion of the Commission’s own role in ‘communicating Europe’ and therefore the measures proposed in the action plan. It comprises 50 measures which – very generally speaking – can only be welcomed. Whether implementation of these measures will actually take place, however, remains to be seen. There is reason to be cautious, given previous experiences (Gramberger, 1997; Meyer, 1999).

Not all of the 50 measures can be discussed here, but one key proposal – the one on how Commissioners can be more involved in communicating with national publics (European Commission, 2005, p. 5) – does deserve a closer look. The heads of EU representations will always lack seniority and political clout to make the same public impact as a Commissioner. Because of the way in which they are appointed and given the stage they have reached in their careers, however, Commissioners have little motivation to actively campaign for new initiatives and proposals beyond ‘the country they know best’. The recent creation of a Communication Programming Group of Commissioners to advise the College on communication priorities and activities is a first welcome step as are regular debates about communication issues within the College, but it is not enough to address the communication shortcomings of the College itself. We suggest the creation of issue- and country-specific ‘communication tandems’, comprising the relevant commissioners with portfolio and country-of-origin competences. For instance, in order to persuade public opinion in particular countries critical of enlargement, the Commissioner for Enlargement should consult with the Commissioner originating from the countries about what the key concerns are, what information is needed, and how both politicians could engage the respective national publics through a series of communication actions. These should be reinforced by an annual intra-College peer-review concerning communication activities. Commissioners should also report on their websites the number of interviews they have given and with whom – not only in their home country but also in the other member states. So far, even prominent Commissioners may be successful in catching the attention of media in their home country, but they largely fail in attracting coverage in other member states. In order to achieve this goal, the press offices of the Commission (the speakers’ service in Brussels as well as in the Representations)

would have to have more staff with professional communications backgrounds – something which the action plan foresees, but it remains to be seen whether it will be implemented.

For the action plan, the Commission has given a clear timetable, so that implementation can be checked. The same should be done when the White Paper is turned into concrete policy proposals at the end of the consultation period. Only by adopting and adhering to a very clear plan for the follow-up of the exercise can the EU prove that it takes communication policy seriously.

V. Concrete Proposals for an EU Communication Policy: An Agenda for Action

Building on our assessment of the White Paper, we put forward the following ten concrete ‘proposals for action’:

1. The **European Charter/Code of Conduct** must include **binding commitments** on the part of European, national, regional and local authorities that sign up to it. The charter/code must clearly state **what form the commitments will take for each actor** in the promotion of a European public sphere. For media and other non-public actors, we propose a voluntary, self-regulatory approach (e.g. a European Press Council founded by journalist associations), which rewards compliance with the ground rules of democratic information and communication with a quality award.
2. An **Advisory Board on European Communication** consisting of national and European parliamentarians, journalists, representatives of civil society and the European Ombudsman, should **monitor the efficiency as well as the acceptability of the EU communication policy** according to the code of conduct. As such, it could for example deal with citizens’ complaints about the institutions violating the code of conduct and give advice for concrete improvements of the policy’s implementation.
3. Education experts and teachers from across the EU should develop a **European core curriculum** that fleshes out the European dimension in the areas of politics, history and geography as well as language instruction. The ‘core curriculum’ would comprise the absolute basics that every regular high school student in Europe should know. It should be developed in the three-step process outlined above ultimately establishing an institute that promoted the presence of ‘Europe’ in national curricula.
4. **Public ‘deliberation’ events** designed to fully explore certain topics of relevance for all of Europe, such as a ‘Deliberative Poll’, should be organised in a transnational or even pan-European context, to reach beyond those who are ‘already in the know’. **Television coverage** would make these events interesting for a broader public. In a long-term perspective, even an annual **‘European deliberation day’** could be envisaged.
5. **All EU-funded programmes related to communication** must be selected on grounds of their potential to **reach beyond the ‘Brussels insiders’**. Joint initiatives of member states as well as EU-funded programmes in the area of active citizenship should actively support the establishment and maintenance of **transnational networks** that enable European citizens with similar interests or professional backgrounds to meet each other **face-to-face**. Assistance in coordination and funding should be given to regional and local actors to help them establish such issue-based transnational networks.
6. **National parliaments** in all member states should make a commitment in the code of conduct to **raise public awareness about major European legislative projects at an earlier stage** of the decision-making process. In doing so, they contribute to holding national governments accountable when they legislate in the Council.
7. **Heads of state and government** should commit themselves in the code of conduct to **publicly explain to their respective national parliament their position** on the issues of the EU presidency’s priorities and the positions they have taken during the preceding presidency. **Governments** should also commit to setting up a network of **national websites giving their position on EU issues, including their votes in all Council decisions** and to giving up the right to veto the application of the EU transparency regime to national documents which form part of the EU’s policy-making process.
8. **Media (including regional and local) should be contacted on a regular basis** to find out how the Commission’s Audiovisual Service – and especially Europe by Satellite (EbS) – as well as the press service in general can best help them to develop a European dimension in their news coverage. EbS could also provide the EUROPA website with interactive content.
9. The consultation process on the White Paper should also include the proposals concerning the Commission mentioned in its Action Plan. In this context, the **incentives for Commissioners to communicate more actively** should in particular be increased. Issue- and country-specific **‘communication tandems’** of different Commissioners should be created, comprising portfolio and country-of-origin competences. An annual intra-College peer review and documentation on Commissioners’ websites concerning their media activities should be envisaged. Public opinion polls should be used to measure the visibility and approval ratings of individual Commissioners and other European actors – as is already done with national actors. Such polls help to personalise EU politics by providing European news coverage with ‘human faces’.

VI. Conclusions: Beyond Communication...

A European Communication Policy reaching beyond the 'Brussels insiders' would certainly be a major step forward. Taking into account the experiences of the last 10 years, however, it is far from sure that this time the EU will succeed. Much will depend on the efficient implementation of the final outcome and the active support from national, regional and local actors, without which the task would be impossible. However, whatever efforts concerning European communication will be agreed, there should be no illusion that listening alone will be sufficient to trigger citizens' engagement in what the Commission hopes to be a vibrant European public sphere. Communication mostly occurs when citizens feel that they have a 'say' on different (policy) options, which means that they actually must be convinced that their opinion also makes a difference and counts for something. This is most visible in referenda on EU issues, which are generally quite effective in mobilising public communication.

The changes needed to give citizens a real 'say', however, go far beyond purely communicative measures and in many cases would require treaty reform. The citizens' right to petition the Commission for action in a certain policy field can be mentioned as one example that would actually not require such a treaty change. Similarly, the European Commission could take further steps towards formalising the processes by which the European Parliament, in its capacity as the directly elected representative of European citizens, gives impetus for new initiatives. By so doing, it would turn a de facto practice into visible reality¹¹ and boost the public's perception of the EP as a legislator with real power to influence the agenda in EU decision-making.

In any event, one thing must be clear to everyone: As important as a good communication policy will be for the future development of the EU, it cannot be a substitute for offering citizens clear choices in the European decision-making process.

So our tenth and final recommendation reads:

10. Continue the democratisation of the EU.

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¹¹ According to Commission sources about 95% of the Commission's legislative proposals are motivated by ideas presented to the Commission from outside.

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- To achieve high standards of academic excellence and maintain unqualified independence.
- To provide a forum for discussion among all stakeholders in the European policy process.
- To build collaborative networks of researchers, policy-makers and business across the whole of Europe.
- To disseminate our findings and views through a regular flow of publications and public events.

Assets and Achievements

- Complete independence to set its own priorities and freedom from any outside influence.
- Authoritative research by an international staff with a demonstrated capability to analyse policy questions and anticipate trends well before they become topics of general public discussion.
- Formation of seven different research networks, comprising some 140 research institutes from throughout Europe and beyond, to complement and consolidate our research expertise and to greatly extend our reach in a wide range of areas from agricultural and security policy to climate change, JHA and economic analysis.
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