



FINAL, 30 September 2006

SUMMARY

YELLOW PAPER ON EU COMMUNICATION

‘Decentralise radically: Empower the multipliers!’

EurActiv’s Plan D:

Diversify, Decentralise, Disseminate, Decide

Answer to the consultation on the European Commission’s ‘*White Paper on a European Communication Policy*’

In English: www.euractiv.com/en/yellowpaper

En français: www.euractiv.com/fr/yellowpaperfr

Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch: www.euractiv.com/de/yellowpaperde

The draft was released on 1 February 2006 in parallel to the European Commission’s White Paper on ‘EU Communication & democracy’, after the July 2005 Action Plan and the October 2005 ‘Plan D’.

This final version includes a **fully updated summary**, based on some of the comments received from *Fondation EurActiv* advisers, EurActiv.com’s national partners and content partners, and individual citizens.

Further comments or questions are welcome from any interested stakeholder:

Christophe Leclercq, fondateur@euractiv.com, phone: + 32 2 226 58 13 fax: +32 2 226 58 20

Outline

'DECENTRALISE RADICALLY:EMPOWER THE MULTIPLIERS!'

Decentralise radically: empower the *multipliers!*

Overall comments on the White Paper

Yellow Paper: Structure, Objectives, Your reactions?

EXPLANATIONS OF THE 12 RECOMMENDATIONS: ISSUES / RECOMMENDATION / CONTEXT & EXAMPLE

A) ON THE TARGETS OF EU COMMUNICATION: Diversify !

- 1. Choose realistic audiences and relays: not 'every citizen', also not 'just the EU specialists', but intermediaries: national sectoral audiences**
- 2. Involve multipliers early on - companies and trade unions as well as NGOs**
- 3. Coordinate lightly between institutions rather than centralise / 'streamline'**

B) ON THE METHODS AND CHANNELS: Decentralise and Disseminate !

- 4. Decentralise radically: 'nationalise' EU debates, empower Representations and enrich careers**
- 5. Include communication in all EU programmes and policies**
- 6. Train officials, journalists... and politicians!**
- 7. Complement with opinion scouts, independent moderators and debate supporters**
- 8. Provide localised multilingual internet content, not just conferences, print and TV**
- 9. Optimise and increase communication resources**

C) ON THE IMPLEMENTATION AND TIMELINE: Decide !

- 10. Decentralise the debate right way, in addition to Brussels inter-institutional negotiations**
- 11. Implement recent Commission decisions promptly, including July 2005 Action Plan**
- 12. Achieve impact well before 2009 European Parliament election**

ATTACHMENTS: TRANSPARENCY AND SOURCES

Attachment 1: Action oriented, possible roles for EurActiv and others

Attachment 2: Report: "Can EU Hear me?"

Attachment 3: Interview with Christophe Leclercq on EU Communication

Comments on the White Paper:

Decentralise radically: empower the *multipliers*!¹

Update in September 2006 based on comments received:

Since the February draft of this *Yellow Paper*, we listened to a number of comments during our own ‘consultation’, from Fondation EurActiv’s advisers, EU officials in Brussels and the capitals, communication experts and the national media. We also actively followed the debates on the *White Paper*, and understand that this paper will be updated in the beginning of 2007. The previous version was more a green paper, hopefully the next one will be a *real* white paper. All this input has not led to many changes in our assessment or in the practical recommendations. **Our main conclusions from these eight months of discussions are:**

- **Communication policy is not getting much interest outside expert circles** (except in countries like France and the Netherlands or Turkey which have an internal challenge versus the EU to overcome).

This complements the ‘first D’ of our summary: *Diversify!*

- **Obviously, no communication policy can make topics palatable to citizens that are not potentially popular in the first place.**

For example, *Lisbon* as such will not become a hit theme. Identifying and debating the right priorities is the role of politicians and parties.

- **Most comments encouraged us to make the decentralisation message *more radical*.**

Subsidiarity should apply to communication more than any other EU policy, but is not strongly implemented (except by Member states and lower levels, but experts mostly agree that EU institutions should play a communication role as well).

This supports the ‘second D’ of our overall message: *Decentralise!*

- **EU institutions and their leaders would love to be loved but will not change perceptions quickly**

Therefore they should work with *multipliers* at local sector level that are already trusted and close to diversified targets.

When addressed individually with the right topic and tools, many national journalists and associations are interested in Europe. Many officials have excellent success stories, but do not have the technology and resources to leverage them.

This shows that our third key word can be demultiplied: *Disseminate!*

- **Many points above are consensual among experts, at least in private: what is missing is determined and rapid action**

Citizens and NGOs involved in the process often say ‘*all this was mentioned already, EU institutions claim to listen but do they follow-up?*’. Unless a common sense of urgency is

¹ meaning: national sectoral intermediaries

created, as was the case after the French and Dutch ‘no’, the level of interest in Europe will not be raised before the next parliamentary elections in 2009.

- **Commission and Parliament operational initiatives on communication are slow**
They are again entangled in bureaucratic procedures, despite impetus from the political leadership, goodwill of officials involved, and support by various NGOs.

Both points about consensus but slow action stress our ‘final D’: **Decide!**

For example:

- Preparation of the 50th anniversary of the EU in 2007, a wonderful opportunity to involve citizens, politicians and media alike, seems to start late again, like communication in preparation of the previous European elections;
- there is some hope that the German Presidency will build on the historic date and add substance to the debate by re-opening institutional questions, but is this really the best angle to get citizens’ interest? Practical topics like worker’s mobility or energy prices are more relevant, and equally call for bolder EU actions;
- having suggested more content syndication online, we did a bit more market research: for example, RSS and blogs are hardly understood around EU institutions. Decisions made by multi-layered hierarchies composed of seasoned officials can be great for sound policy proposals, but they cannot bridge the communication gap. Only ‘*front line*’ communication officials with empowerment, and *independent* organisations outside the approval system can meet the needs quickly enough to make a difference before 2009.

So, the communication model emerging from our detailed tables gets clearer: **the solutions are not in Brussels, although they need support from the centre**. There is more in the following pages, also on the themes of debates, the role of politicians, training etc. But what is required in terms of **tools** now can be stated upfront:

- autonomous national agencies, replacing the present Representations (press and information offices, also called Representations, presently under-resourced satellites of DG COM, weakly connected to other bodies)²;
- re-inforced with sectoral attachés and larger budgets determined locally *localising* EU debates with national decisions and content from institutions and the civil society (not only NGOs)
- using sectoral relays, close to real information needs and trusted;
- and boosting impact and productivity thanks to modern technologies and partnerships.

² To avoid long institutional and staffing questions, they could in the short term be run *like* agencies rather than transformed immediately. One can avoid at least one typical question with agencies: their location choice. They should clearly be one in each capital, with satellites or networks in the regions where appropriate.

Overall comments on the White Paper

The renewed focus of EU institutions on communication is welcome, the political imperatives need not be recalled here. We also welcomed the Commission's Action Plan issued in July 2005, albeit with several reservations and hints, repeated here.

A great emphasis is laid in the Commission's White Paper of 1st February on the creation of a European public sphere, complemented by a number of practical ideas, some of them original. This is the logical continuation after the 2001 White Paper on governance, which rightly highlighted the role of civil society, and the October 2005 Plan D, which aimed to put the people and public opinion at the centre of policy priorities.

Overall, the analysis of issues is good, as well as the understanding of opportunities with civil society and the media. However, it does not constitute a full strategy: principles are conceptual rather than creating deep change, actions should be more specific, and the timeline is slow again. Some people could argue that this is not a *white* paper, but a *green* paper (the previous stage of consultation, outlining options and putting questions). This is why *Fondation EurActiv* decided to propose not only answers to hypotheses, but its own *Yellow Paper*, with tables of strategic proposals responding specific issues.

Following are several regrets – or suggestions:

- the **European public sphere** is certainly desirable, given what some call the federalist vocation of the EU. But **is it achievable within a reasonable time?** As a Frenchman would say: « n'est-ce pas reculer pour mieux sauter? ». Rather, are there not **multiple public spheres, fragmented by national and socio-professional centers of interest?** If so, one should privilege interconnection of national spheres / benchmarking (analogy with 'new approach': mutual recognition) rather than trying to create one European public sphere;
- it is *also* right to take a long term view, but this should not render the strategy so tentative. There is a risk of interpreting the European public sphere as a prerequisite for a future communication policy. It could even put into question the implementation of the limited Action Plan. The White Paper consultation should rather guide the way to an additional series of initiatives by the EU institutions and other actors;
- as in the White Paper on governance, **the role of companies and professional networks is again neglected.** The EU is first of all an economic reality, and most people think as workers (or managers or consumers) before thinking as EU citizens;
- the interface with mass media is rightly addressed - especially TV and the regional print press – but the **role of other media, and their editorial value added, is not fully exploited.** Are we not in the 21st century, the age of more interactive narrow-focus media? (internet, but also radio, specialized magazines, and specialised TV channels);
- **a number of ideas are of a centralised and short term nature:**

- Member States and regions' involvement is duly mentioned, but **could be more specific and differentiated by country, and not focusing on EU-level negotiations**. Ideas like national web forums and the Scottish initiative on Lisbon may be closer to people than a European Charter (or Code of Conduct) on Information and Communication, however necessary the latter might sound;
- **Communication by DGs and by sector should not be edited centrally** as suggested in the Action Plan, but rather re-inforced, deepened and furthered at national level
- Let us further this point with examples: Mrs Wallström's famous blog plays a good PR role, but is not an end in itself. We would rather position such actions as pilots for others. This Yellow Paper recommends **posting DG representatives ('sectoral attachés') in the EU Representations**, mainly for communication purposes. These attachés - not just Commissioners - should use electronic tools, **interacting with national constituencies in their languages and culture, reflecting decentralisation and practical debates on substance**;
- in the 2005 Action Plan, there was an **undertone of streamlining communication**, in a 'push' mode, *focusing on a few overall themes to all public opinions*. Let us take an analogy: a company would indeed focus on a few claims per branded product, but a government would of course not pick just a few topics per year, and rather show progress in each area via its ministries: EU institutions are closer to a government than to a company. The interest of individuals vary widely, the claimed philosophy of **'listening' should lead to 'pull' efforts: answering specific needs, on a variety of topics**. While common core messages should be re-inforced, engagement is more likely to be triggered from interest-centred debates.
- So - perhaps simplifying the analysis unfairly - there may be a paradox in the package Action Plan / Plan D / White Paper:
 - long term, ambitious call for a European **democracy** requiring radical rethinking of a near-constitutional nature (**a dream?**)
 - many short term communication ideas, and inter-institutional debates often inspired centrally and horizontally (tools & tricks?);
 - whereas what is needed are **practical changes at all levels, in every sector, making impact in the medium term** (the 2009 elections). Only strong empowerment of DGs and RRepresentations, to be transformed into agencies, cooperating at national/local level, can achieve the necessary focus on implementation (**a strategy?**).

Apart from this, a number of measures envisaged appear useful, all are worth discussing and fleshing out, and we shall not comment on each of them. Rather, this Yellow Paper focuses on what else could be done.

Yellow Paper: Structure, Objectives, Your reactions?

Structure: the complementary plan D, Diversify, Decentralise & Disseminate, Decide

The value of the paper lies in promoting the decentralisation philosophy and the practical 12 recommendations. This pragmatic approach sounds like the former Austrian EU Presidency's, which suggested a 'plan C', like focusing on Concrete benefits.

In order to facilitate recollection, we regroup these 12 points under a few headings, contrasting some catchwords with those of plan D – like Democracy, Dialog and Debate – and the White Paper. Of course, we do support these essential three principles as well.

- A) the targeted audiences with their different needs (rather than central objectives for a mass audience, not quite in line with the 'listening' principle): therefore **D**iversify
- B) the methods and channels: therefore **D**ecentralise (empower many more front line people) and **D**isseminate (leverage non-institutional actors, we could have written Delegate)
- C) the implementation and the timeline, the weakness of past EU communication plans: therefore **D**ecide (we could also have said: Doing rather than talking!)

Objectives³: practical recommendations based on experience

This document aims to be:

- **A practical list of recommendations...**
- **...based on the experience of a specialised media, led by policy and communication experts who have:**

³ What this document is NOT:

- **a polished, streamlined and consensual document (it is meant to generate ideas for a specialized audience, not avoiding jargon, unstructured lists, and also controversial ideas).**
- one of EurActiv's articles (which aims to be neutral and balanced, referring to a number of different *EU Actors* positions. EurActiv does not take position on EU policy issues, except when it concerns its baseline '*efficacité et transparence des acteurs européens*', as is the case here)
- a summary of previous EU documents and issues on EU communication (of which there has been at least one wave per Commission and Parliament)
- an exhaustive contribution to all questions raised by the White Paper on EU communication
- an academic paper providing definitions and research in each concept mentioned
- an official position or promotional material by the media EurActiv.com or its network partners (see self-transparency point at the end of this document)
- a common position by members of Fondation EurActiv's advisory council or orientation committee (see more: www.EurActiv.com/fr/fondation).

- worked with the EU institutions and other *EU Actors* (NGOs, think tanks, industry Representations and the media) since the 80's (see www.EurActiv.com/en/mission);
- contributed to a number of conferences and papers on EU communication policy, some of them listed further below under 'Sources and recommended reading';

- **...therefore explaining some concepts which seem to work**

With limited means, and 8 national media partners, we developed the EurActiv network of policy portals, now the largest media specialized on EU policies, with 320 000 direct readers in 11 languages, most of them influential professionals (see www.EurActiv.com/en/crosslingual)

- **an invitation to contribute reactions**, in parallel to the White Paper consultation.

Reactions or questions, next versions

EurActiv will publish some intermediate coverage of the White Paper consultation; well ahead of the Commission publishing a summary of the contributions received. Hence the relevance of stakeholders communicating their views pro-actively to EurActiv, as soon as they draft them, to contribute to shaping the debate.

This Yellow Paper was updated during summer 2006, after discussions within *Fondation EurActiv* of comments received, and inclusion of further localisation ideas from EurActiv's media partners at national level.

Further reactions are welcome to:

Christophe Leclercq, fondateur@euractiv.com, Tel: + 32 2 226 58 13, Fax: 226 58 20
(contributions will be considered as private and informal unless otherwise stated)

The media and other interested parties can also contact:

Willy De Backer,	editor@euractiv.com ,	Tel: + 32 2 788 36 64
Julian Oliver,	secgen@euractiv.com ,	Tel: + 32 2 226 58 25
Frédéric Simon,	editor2@euractiv.com ,	Tel: + 32 2 788 36 79

We thank you for your attention, and contributions to EurActiv's own raison d'être: *'efficacité et transparence des acteurs européens'*.

Christophe Leclercq
Fondateur,
Fondation EurActiv