

INFORMING EUROPEAN CITIZENS?

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

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Executive Summary

This cost-benefit study assesses the different programmes and actions in the area of information carried out by the European Commission and financed by the Community budget over the period 2000-05. Using the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and utility (as set out in the terms of reference provided by the European Parliament), the study shows that the overall assessment in terms of ‘value for money’ is positive. However, there is still room for improvement concerning all the actions. The study covers the following aspects: 1) The audiovisual sector, including co-productions (APCAV), the Commission’s Audiovisual Service (EbS and the running of studios) and contracts with Euronews, 2) the EUROPA website, 3) written publications, 4) the Europe Direct call centre, 5) Eurobarometer and 6) information outlets.

1. Our first finding is that there has been a **considerable evaluation deficit** in the field of information and communication policy. Out of 678 evaluations completed under the Commission’s authority during the period between 2000 and 2005, only 19 deal with actions and programmes in the area of information and communication. Some improvement can be observed since 2003, however, when a separate title for these policy areas was introduced to the ‘Annual Evaluation Review’ of DG Budget and an evaluation unit was created in DG Press and Communication.

Recommendation: Evaluations should be made mandatory for actions exceeding a certain amount of money to better allow institutions to learn from past experiences. They should be carried out by external evaluators.

2. Grants for **audiovisual co-productions (APCAV)** with television and radio stations on the basis of annual calls for proposals are one of the most cost-efficient tools at the Commission’s disposal. Very few other programmes are likely to reach a similar mass audience with comparably limited financial resources. Since 2003, the Commission has been in a position to select the best projects on the basis of EU-wide broadcasting and production cost tables for the different applicants. The take-up of the funds available is generally very good as there are always more applicants than grants available. Editorial independence is assured through an editorial charter.

Recommendation: More money should be provided for APCA V and it should be put on a more stable financial basis to ensure better planning, which is of particular importance for the audiovisual sector. Grants for *networks* of television and radio broadcasters should be encouraged to order to obtain economies of scale. Changing the system from grants to service contracts would potentially ensure greater efficiency but would inevitably mean greater financial dependency of the respective projects and might fuel public concern (founded or unfounded) about editorial freedom. Coordination among DGs should be encouraged through the External Communication Network (ECN) so as to achieve synergies and to establish the audiovisual unit’s editorial charter and databases as best practice.

3. Service contracts with the television channel **Euronews** are an efficient way to reach a daily mass audience of approximately seven million worldwide with relatively small resources. Euronews receives €5 million per year and – like the recipients of the APCA V grants – has editorial freedom regarding content. The Commission only demands that the content be provided in certain programme formats and that the standards outlined in the editorial charter are respected. In the case of Euronews, this charter is an integral part of the service contract.

Recommendation: Formats should be considered for Euronews that introduce ‘European faces’ (e.g. known personalities as moderators). Future financing should also depend on the actual economic need of Euronews for resources from the Community budget to maintain and extend its EU programming. The provision of programmes in languages from the new member states should be encouraged.

3. The Commission’s **Audiovisual Service**, and especially **Europe by Satellite (EbS)**, has proved to be a useful tool for all sorts of media, from big networks to regional broadcasters and national parliamentary channels. It provides mostly unedited ‘raw material’ that is made available to the media for free and without copyright. Only a very small minority of journalists surveyed in an external evaluation study had concerns about the material provided being biased. EbS’s broadcasting priorities

are agreed inter-institutionally between officials from the audiovisual units of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

Recommendation: Proposals to upgrade EbS into a fully-fledged European news agency that produces edited content (as mentioned in an early draft version of the White Paper on a European Communication Policy) should not be pursued. These ideas have received negative reactions from many journalists and are likely to be expensive. Instead, additional resources should be allocated to advertise existing services more pro-actively. Proposals for the audiovisual service mentioned in Commissioner Wallström's Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe by the Commission (i.e. a 'policy of cooperation' with professional associations and organising regular informal meetings between EU leaders, civil society and journalists broadcasted on EbS) deserve support. As regards the operation of radio and television studios, synergies should be explored through strengthened cooperation with the respective facilities in the other European institutions.

4. The **Europa website** has improved significantly in recent years but still does not fully live up to the ambitious standards that the Commission formulated itself in 2001. In particular, the search engine is not satisfactory and non-expert users are faced with a lack of coherence between the various websites.

Recommendation: The number of staff employed to manage the website should be increased, especially to work on the search engine. The approach of using web portals within the Europa website to make the site as a whole more user-friendly for non-experts should be pursued. Plans for an editor for Europa, to ensure better coordination, are to be welcomed. The potential of the website could be considerably increased if more funds for promotion were made available, particularly in view of target audiences (e.g. in schools for young people).

5. The **Eurobarometer** (EB) polls have proved to be a useful tool for decision-makers to better understand European public opinion. Funds have increased considerably in recent years, especially since the last wave of enlargement in 2004. With a view to a possible cut in the budget for the area of information for 2007, however, its budget appears relatively high.

Recommendation: Policy-relevant questions should be formulated in even closer cooperation with policy experts in the respective DGs to avoid vague or indirect questions. Concerning general questions, the same wording should be kept over the years to ensure comparability at all times. It should also be ensured that EB forms part of an overall information strategy in which sufficient focus is given to awareness raising, provision of information and to those activities that directly reach out to citizens. This should also be kept in mind when considering the establishment of a European Public Opinion Observatory, as is proposed by the Commission's White Paper on Communication. The establishment of networks of national experts and a system of best practice is to be welcomed.

6. The **Europe Direct** (ED) service is a valuable action for answering citizens' specific questions and giving advice on a wide range of topics. Its usage has grown considerably in recent years from about 4,000 enquiries in 2003 to almost 10,000 in 2005. An evaluation survey showed that 60% (via e-mail) to 70% of users (via telephone) considered themselves to be better informed about EU policies after having used the service.

Recommendation: Campaigns in the past have shown that the potential outreach of ED could be much greater if the service were to be promoted more widely. However, with a limited staff, the service cannot be expected to accommodate much more users without becoming less efficient. More resources both for promotion and staff should therefore be made available. More continuous evaluation should be carried out and the frequency of the types of questions asked by citizens could be used more as a feedback tool for information priorities and EU decision-makers.

7. Despite the fact that the world is in the midst of the internet age, **written publications** remain an important tool for the EU to reach a general public of all age groups. Their precise impact is very difficult to assess but rough Commission estimates based on the output of publications state that about 10 million citizens per year are exposed to publications in some way or another.

Recommendation: In terms of the distribution of *general* publications, efforts should be made to reach beyond existing networks and those readers that are already knowledgeable about EU policies. Increasing the number of information relays and a more pro-active approach could be valuable in this

respect. A publications editor responsible for the coordination of the activities of different DGs would create synergies and thus ensure a more efficient use of resources. A system of regular evaluation and feedback for the thematic prioritisation of written publications would strengthen their effectiveness and impact.

8. **Information outlets** and **Team Europe** are ways to be in direct contact with citizens – an objective of particular importance in view of the Commission plans to ‘go local’. In the past there have been a great variety of different types of outlets, but since 2005 a consolidation has taken place. This has also happened because of the new Financial Regulation, which caused a considerable slump in activity in 2003 and 2004. The switch to the new system of the ‘**Europe Direct network**’ was accompanied by a large increase in the number of information relays from 253 in 2004 to roughly 400 across all member states at present. A Commission Decision has been taken not to renew agreements with flagship information relays, so-called ‘**Grands Centres**’ (in Paris, Rome and Lisbon) because of concerns about a lack of coherence in their work due to their almost complete independence. **Team Europe** consisted of 689 voluntary conference speakers in 2004 but has been less active since then. It is relatively cost efficient but an extension of the network would imply higher costs in terms of coordination and management.

Recommendation: Given the limited human resources and funds for the information centres (co-funding of €12,000 to a maximum of €24,000 per centre), the new internet monitoring system promises to be a helpful tool for a more strategic approach. It should, however, not constrain the flexibility of centres in developing activities geared towards specific local information needs. Plans to introduce a web-based feedback mechanism collecting data about activities across all centres and establishing an informal network of best practice are welcomed. Relays should be assessed on the basis of how pro-active they are and their visibility to a broader public. The move towards giving more responsibility for relays to the Representations is a positive development as they have more local knowledge to properly assess the relays’ work than the Brussels headquarters. The new task should, however, be matched with additional human resources.

The period of time covered by this study has been marked by many **general developments** concerning European information policy – both in the field of information itself and as regards the conditions set by budgetary rules and institutional structures (a comprehensive overview of the general developments is provided in the annex to this study).

The **new Financial Regulation** introduced in 2003 has improved control over expenditure but has also posed a problem in terms of flexibility – an aspect of considerable importance in an area like information policy, where unforeseen developments and varying expectations often dictate the agenda.

As regards institutional structures, **coordination between DGs** on their large number of information activities has not been optimal in the past. However, recent measures have been introduced in the framework of Commissioner Wallström’s Action Plan. For example, there are now regular meetings of the External Communication Network consisting of the heads of the information units in the various DGs. These measures are in line with a ‘soft coordination’ approach, and deserve every support.

Unfortunately, the 8% reduction of DG Comm’s operational budget under Headline 3 B foreseen for 2007 could jeopardise the success of recent efforts to improve information policy. Considerable achievements have been made, but in many ways, European information policy still remains a ‘work in progress’.

Note de synthèse

Cette analyse coût-bénéfice évalue les différents programmes et actions dans le domaine de l'information qui ont été menés sous les prérogatives de la Commission et financés par le budget de la Communauté entre 2000 et 2005. En utilisant des critères de pertinence d'effectivité, d'efficacité et d'utilité (comme mentionné dans les termes de référence fournis par le Parlement Européen), cette étude démontre que d'une perspective de rentabilité l'évaluation globale est positive. Cependant, il existe clairement une marge d'amélioration pour toutes les actions. Cette étude couvre les aspects suivants : 1) le secteur audiovisuel qui inclut les co-productions (APCAV), les services audiovisuels de la Commission (EbS et l'exploitation des studios de radio et de télévision) et les contrats avec EuroNews, 2) le site EUROPA, 3) les publications écrites, 4) le centre d'appel Europe Direct, 5) Eurobaromètre et 6) les réseaux et les relais d'information.

1. Notre première conclusion affirme l'existence d'un **déficit d'évaluation considérable** dans les domaines de la politique d'information et de la politique de communication. Parmi les 678 évaluations effectuées entre 2000 et 2005, seulement 19 traitent des actions et des programmes du domaine de l'information et de la communication. Cependant, une certaine amélioration a pu être constatée depuis 2003 lorsqu'un titre propre à ces domaines de politique a été introduit dans le « Bilan d'Evaluation annuel » de DG Budget et une unité d'évaluation a été créée dans la DG Presse et Communication.

Recommandations : Les évaluations devraient être rendues obligatoires pour les actions qui excèdent un certain montant afin de permettre aux institutions d'apprendre des expériences passées. De plus ces évaluations devraient être effectuées par des évaluateurs externes.

2. Les subventions pour les **co-productions audiovisuelles (APCAV)** accordées aux télévisions et aux radios sur la base d'appels d'offres annuels sont les outils de la Commission les plus efficaces en termes de coûts. Très peu d'autres programmes sont susceptibles d'atteindre une telle audience avec des ressources financières de si petite ampleur. Depuis 2003, la Commission est dans la position de sélectionner les meilleurs projets en se référant à des tables précises de coûts pour les différents candidats. L'absorption des fonds est en général très bonne, compte tenu du fait qu'il y a toujours plus de candidats que de subventions disponibles. L'indépendance éditoriale est assurée grâce à une charte éditoriale.

Recommandations : Des fonds supplémentaires devraient être alloués à APCAV. Ce projet devrait avoir une assise financière plus solide afin d'assurer une meilleure capacité de planification, un aspect d'une importance particulière dans le secteur audiovisuel. Les subventions pour les réseaux de télévision et de radios devraient être encouragées afin de bénéficier d'économies d'échelle. La modification du système de subventions vers un système de contrats à prestation de services pourrait potentiellement accroître l'efficacité. Cependant cela augmenterait la dépendance financière des projets respectifs et pourrait générer des doutes (justifiés ou pas) du public sur l'indépendance éditoriale. La coordination entre les DGs devrait être encouragée par le biais du 'Réseau de Communication Externe' (ECN) afin d'obtenir des effets de synergie et d'ériger la charte audiovisuelle et les bases de données de l'unité audiovisuelle en tant que pratique optimale.

3. Les contrats de prestation de services avec la chaîne de télévision EuroNews sont un moyen efficace d'atteindre une audience journalière d'approximativement 7 millions de personnes avec relativement peu de ressources. EuroNews perçoit 5 millions d'euro par an et a une liberté éditoriale eut égard des contenus (comme tous les bénéficiaires des subventions APCAV). La Commission prescrit uniquement la provision de certains formats et le respect des standards résumés dans la charte éditoriale. Dans le cas d'EuroNews, cette charte constitue une partie inhérente des contrats de prestation.

Recommandations : Des formats qui introduisent des « visages européens » (par ex. : des personnalités connues en tant que modérateur) devraient être suggérés à EuroNews. Le financement futur devrait aussi prendre en compte les besoins économiques réels qu' EuroNews nécessite pour maintenir et étendre sa programmation. La mise à disposition de programmes dans des langues des nouveaux états membres devrait être encouragée.

4. Les **services audiovisuels** de la Commission et tout particulièrement **Europe par Satellite (EbS)** ont démontré leur utilité pour tous les médias, pour les grands réseaux tout comme pour les radiodiffusions régionales et les chaînes parlementaires nationales. Ce service audiovisuel fournit de la 'matière brute' non éditée, disponible gratuitement et sans droits de reproduction aux médias. Seulement une petite minorité des journalistes interrogés dans le cadre d'une étude d'évaluation externe avait des doutes sur l'impartialité des matériaux fournis. Les priorités de la diffusion d'EbS sont fixées inter institutionnellement entre les officiels des unités audiovisuelles du Parlement Européen, ceux du Conseil et ceux de la Commission.

Recommandations : L'idée visant à faire évoluer EbS vers une agence de presse européenne à part entière produisant des contenus édités (comme mentionné dans une version antérieure non-publiée du Papier blanc sur la politique de communication européenne) ne devrait pas être suivie. L'idée était sujette à des réactions négatives de la part de nombreux journalistes et serait probablement onéreuse à implémenter. Une meilleure alternative serait l'accroissement des ressources allouées pour promouvoir les services existants. Les propositions relatives aux services audiovisuels mentionnées au sein du plan d'action de la Commissaire Wallström (c.à.d une politique de coopération avec des associations professionnelles et l'organisation régulière de réunions informelles entre les leaders de l'UE, la société civile et les journalistes diffusés sur EbS) nécessitent plus de soutien financier. En ce qui concerne l'opération des studios de radios et de télévision, des synergies devraient être explorées par le biais d'une coopération accrue avec les installations disponibles au sein des autres institutions européennes.

5. Le site **Europa** a été considérablement amélioré au cours des dernières années, mais n'est toujours pas en accord avec les standards ambitieux déclarés par la Commission en 2001. Tout particulièrement le moteur de recherche n'est pas satisfaisant et les utilisateurs non experts sont confrontés au manque de cohérence des sites web.

Recommandations : Des employés en charge de la gestion du site web et tout particulièrement du moteur de recherche devrait être recrutés. L'utilisation de portails web au sein du site EUROPA devrait être encouragée, car cela améliorerait la convivialité du site. Toute intention visant à embaucher un éditeur pour EUROPA afin d'assurer une meilleure coordination devrait être poursuivie. Le potentiel du site web pourrait être considérablement accru si plus de fonds destinés à la promotion seraient libérés. Cette initiative est tout particulièrement pertinente compte tenu des audiences ciblées (par ex. : dans les écoles pour les jeunes).

6. Les enquêtes d'**Eurobaromètre (EB)** ont démontré être un outil utile afin d'aider les décideurs à mieux comprendre l'opinion public européen. Les financements ont sensiblement augmentés au cours des dernières années, tout particulièrement après l'élargissement. Cependant, compte tenu d'une éventuelle réduction du budget dans le domaine de l'information pour 2007 son budget semble être relativement élevé.

Recommandations : La formulation de questions devrait se faire dans le cadre d'une collaboration encore plus étroite avec les experts des DGs respectives, de sorte à éviter des questions vagues et indirectes. En ce qui concerne les questions générales, une formulation identique devrait être maintenue au cours des années, afin d'assurer la comparabilité des résultats à tout moment. Il devrait aussi être assuré qu'EB fasse partie d'une stratégie globale en matière d'information, stratégie dont le point focal est l'accroissement de la prise de conscience, la stimulation de la provision d'information et la multiplication des activités qui atteignent directement les citoyens. Ceci devrait aussi être pris en compte lorsque l'on considère l'établissement d'un observatoire de l'opinion publique européen, comme proposé dans le Papier blanc de la Commission sur la communication. L'établissement de réseaux d'experts nationaux et d'un système de meilleure pratique devrait être bienvenu.

6. Le service **Europe Direct (ED)** est une action utile car elle permet de répondre aux questions spécifiques des citoyens et de leur donner des conseils sur de nombreux sujets de nature différente. L'utilisation de ce service s'est accrue considérablement pendant ces dernières années : en 2003, 4,000 demandes ont été formulées et 10,000 en 2005. Une étude d'évaluation a démontré qu'entre 60% (par e-mail) et 70% des utilisateurs (par téléphone) ont considéré être mieux informés sur les politiques de l'UE après avoir eu recours à ce service.

Recommandations : Dans le passé, les campagnes ont démontré que la portée potentielle d'ED pourrait être accrue si le service ferait l'objet d'une campagne publicitaire plus large. Cependant avec une équipe limitée à 32 personnes, ce service ne peut pas accommoder plus d'utilisateurs sans perdre en efficacité. Des ressources additionnelles devraient donc être mis à la disposition de l'ED pour la promotion ainsi que pour l'accroissement du nombre de postes. Des évaluations continues devraient être menées et la fréquence du type de questions demandées par les citoyens pourrait être utilisée comme outil de feedback pour déterminer les informations prioritaires ainsi que pour les décideurs de l'UE.

7. Malgré le fait que le monde se situe dans l'ère Internet, les **publications écrites** restent un outil important pour que l'UE atteigne le grand public ainsi que toutes les classes d'âge. Leur impact précis est très difficile à évaluer, néanmoins des estimations de la Commission qui se réfère à la production de publications mentionne qu'approximativement 10 millions de citoyens sont confrontés, par un moyen ou un autre, aux publications.

Recommandations : En matière de distribution des publications générales, plus d'efforts devraient être dédiés pour informer sur les politiques de l'UE des réseaux existants et des lecteurs qui ne le sont pas encore. L'accroissement du nombre de relais d'information et une approche plus proactive pourraient être utile afin d'accomplir ce but. Un éditeur des publications responsable pour la coordination des activités des différentes DGs devrait créer des synergies et conséquemment assurer une utilisation plus efficace des ressources. Un système d'évaluation régulier et de feedback pour les préférences thématiques des publications écrites devrait renforcer leur effectivité et leur impact.

8. **Les réseaux et les relais d'information** ainsi que **Team Europe** sont des moyens utiles pour être en contact direct avec les citoyens, ce qui consiste en un objectif crucial qui contribuerait aux intentions de la Commission d'accroître sa portée locale. Dans le passé, il existait une grande diversité dans les réseaux et les relais d'information, mais depuis 2005 une consolidation s'est déroulée. Cette consolidation a eu lieu suite à la nouvelle régulation financière qui a engendré un effondrement des activités en 2003 et 2004. Le passage vers le nouveau système '**Europe Direct Network**' a été accompagné par une forte augmentation du nombre de relais d'information ; leur nombre est passé de 253 en 2004 à approximativement 400 aujourd'hui dans tous les états membres. La Commission a pris la décision de ne pas renouveler les contrats des relais d'information centraux, les '**Grands Centres**' (situés à Paris, Rome et Lisbonne) à cause de doutes sur le manque de cohérence de leur travail, dû à leur indépendance quasi-totale. **Team Europe** se composait en 2004 de 689 intervenants volontaires mais cette initiative a été moins active depuis lors. C'est une initiative relativement efficace en termes de coûts, mais une extension du réseau impliquerait des coûts plus élevés en terme de coordination et de gestion.

Recommandations : Etant donné les ressources humaines et les fonds limités disponibles aux centres d'information (co-financement compris entre 12,000 et 24,000 euro par centre), le nouveau système de surveillance par Internet promet d'être un outil utile envers une approche plus stratégique. L'intention d'introduire d'un mécanisme de feedback reposant sur Internet qui rassemble des données sur les activités de tous les centres et établit un réseau informel de pratiques optimales est bienvenue. Les relais devraient être évalués sur la base de la pro activité et de leur visibilité envers le grand public. La tendance à octroyer plus de responsabilité aux Représentations est un développement positif, puisque les Représentations disposent de plus de savoir local que le quartier général bruxellois et peuvent donc mieux évaluer le travail fourni par les relais. Cependant, les ressources humaines disponibles doivent être en accord avec cette nouvelle tâche qui leur a été accordée.

La période temporelle couverte par cette étude a été marquée par de nombreux **développements généraux** affectant la politique d'information européenne, dans le domaine de l'information, tout comme ce qui touche aux règles budgétaires et aux structures institutionnelles (un résumé informatif sur les développements généraux est fourni dans l'annexe de cette étude).

La **nouvelle régulation financière** introduite en 2003 a amélioré le contrôle des dépenses, mais a aussi posé des problèmes en terme de flexibilité. La flexibilité est un aspect d'une importance considérable dans un domaine où des développements non anticipés et des anticipations variables dictent souvent l'agenda.

En ce qui concerne les structures institutionnelles, **la coordination entre les vastes activités de communication de toutes les DGs** n'a pas toujours été optimale dans le passé. Cependant, des mesures ont été introduites récemment dans le cadre du Plan d'Action de la Commissaire Wallström. Par exemple, des réunions régulières du Réseau de Communication Externe (ECN), dans lesquelles les directeurs des unités d'information des certaines DGs se réunissent, sont dorénavant organisées. Ces mesures sont en ligne avec une approche de « coordination molle » et méritent tout soutien.

Malheureusement, la réduction du budget de DG Comm à hauteur de 8% dans la rubrique 3B prévue en 2007 pourrait compromettre les récents efforts d'amélioration de la politique d'information. Des acquis considérables ont été atteints, mais dans de nombreuses perspectives, des efforts considérables restent à fournir dans le domaine de la politique d'information européenne.

1. Introduction

1.1 Scope of the study

This cost-benefit study will analyse the output of the different programmes, annual actions and actions:

- carried out under the Commission's prerogatives in the area of information of the citizens about EU policies and
- financed by the Community budget over the period 2000 to 2005.

It will in particular look at how far the various programmes and related actions represented value for money. On the basis of this evaluation and the lessons learnt, it will also address the general challenges and developments in the field of information and give guidance for the new generation of programmes beyond 2006.

The European Parliament explicitly asked the authors for two different studies, one on communication and one on information. This distinction between the two was not always easy to make as in practice many programmes and actions serve both objectives. Title 16 of the budget ('Information and Communication') differentiates between 'information', which is meant to address the 'general public', and 'communication', which addresses 'target groups'. This division does not seem very helpful from an analytical point of view. Rather, information should be defined as the provision of factual knowledge, while communication should be defined as engagement in 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 distinction between 'information' and 'communication' corresponding to the official objectives of the main budget articles in Title 16. Consequently, this study on information comprises (1) actions in the audiovisual sector, namely audiovisual co-productions (APCAV), Europe by Satellite (EbS) and contracts with Euronews, (2) the Europa website, (3) brochures and other written publications, (4) the Europe Direct hotline, (5) Eurobarometer and (6) the different types of information relays. Where appropriate, we will also address the challenge of coordinating these actions with actions of other DGs.¹ Table 1 below gives an overview of what the two complementary studies cover:

Table 1. Information- and Communication Policy of the EU

I. Study on Information	II. Study on Communication
Audiovisual Sector: - Co-productions/APCAV - Audiovisual Service (EbS, studios) - Euronews	PRINCE: Euro
Europa website	PRINCE: Enlargement
Brochures and other written publications	PRINCE: Future of Europe
Europe Direct call centre	Representations and decentralisation
Eurobarometer	Media relations (spokespersons' service, seminars for journalists)
Information outlets	Communication of sectoral DGs and coordination

For an overview of the general developments during the period 2000 to 2005, both regarding the budget and the institutional developments in the field of information, please consult the annex to this study.

¹ For a special section on the coordination among DGs, see the complementary study on communication.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Sources for this study

In the framework of their research for this study, the authors have drawn on the following types of sources:

- Existing evaluation reports and research in the field
- The authors' own knowledge of the matter and their research undertaken for other projects or publications²
- Information gathered from interviews and questionnaires with persons involved in European information activities from both inside and outside the European institutions

In relation to the EU's total budget, the amount spent on general information and communication tasks is very small.³ This was unfortunately also reflected by a considerable evaluation deficit in the field of information and communication, which was a major challenge for this study. The only 'Special Report' that the European Court of Auditors ever prepared on these matters dates back to 1998. The Commission itself has put its focus on evaluations in areas where more resources are involved (e.g. agriculture or cohesion funds). The table below illustrates the deficit.

Table 2. Evaluation reports

Year	Number of completed evaluation reports (all fields)	Number of completed evaluation reports in the fields of 'Information & Communication' ^a	DGs or services responsible for the evaluated activities
2000	82	0	--
2001	88	2	EAC, SANCO
2002	77	1	EAC
2003	117	4	EAC, ECFIN, ENTR, PRESS
2004	143	6	ENLARG, TREN PRESS (3x), SG,
2005	171	6	AGRI, EAC, PRESS (3x), TREN
TOTAL	678	19	--

^aThe figures have been researched on the basis of the Annual Evaluation Reviews by DG Budget, see: http://ec.europa.eu/budget/evaluation/Key_documents/evalguide_study_en.htm

As the table shows, some improvement can be observed since 2003, when a separate title for 'information and communication' was introduced to DG Budget's Annual Evaluation Review.⁴ Also in 2003, an evaluation unit within the Press and Communication Service was set up, which is responsible for coordinating and supporting evaluation activities within the DG, including the Commission Representations in the member states. This has certainly also contributed to an improvement in the situation.⁵

At this point the authors would like to thank all those individuals, including officials from the various DGs, who gave interviews and/or provided the authors with documents and data. Particularly in view of the 'evaluation deficit', they have been of great help for this study.

² Literature and studies which informed this evaluation: Meyer, 1999; Brüggemann 2005; Kurpas, Meyer and Gialoglou, 2005; Brüggemann et al., 2006; Kurpas, Brüggemann and Meyer, 2006.

³ See annex: Budgetary developments.

⁴ See Annual Evaluation Review 2000 http://ec.europa.eu/budget/evaluation/pdf/review2000_en.pdf

Annual Evaluation Review 2001 http://ec.europa.eu/budget/evaluation/pdf/review2001_en.pdf

Annual Evaluation Review 2002 http://ec.europa.eu/budget/evaluation/pdf/sec_2003_406_main.pdf

⁵ For concrete recommendations, see the section on 'Sources' in the study on communication.

1.2.2 Analytical framework

This cost-benefit study is meant to clarify how far the various programmes and actions represented value for money. To do so, the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and utility will be applied, as determined by the European Parliament:

- **Relevance.** To what extent were the objectives of the public intervention (project, programme or policy) appropriate (1) regarding the funds available, (2) regarding the needs perceived and the problems the intervention is meant to solve? *This implies a close look at the objectives: Are they formulated at all 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** (cost-effectiveness). Were the desired effects obtained at a reasonable cost? *This demands also to look at the resources involved (human resources and operational budget).*
- **Utility.** Do the impacts achieved by an intervention correspond to the needs identified and the problems to be solved? *This means also looking at potential adverse effects of information activities.*

2. Evaluating the European Commission's information actions

2.1 Audiovisual sector

The audiovisual programmes and actions carried out under the Commission's prerogatives are based on three main areas: (1) Audiovisual co-productions (including related studies, polls and databases), (2) contracts with Euronews and (3) the Audiovisual Service, including the Europe by Satellite (EbS) service and the operation of radio and television studios both for the internal use of the Commission and for external use by radio and television broadcasters. These activities are financed from the two budget articles 16 02 02 ('Citizens information via the media') and 16 02 04 ('Operation of radio and television studios and audiovisual equipment')⁶. The table below gives an overview of how financial resources have developed between 2001 and 2006:

Table 3. Commitment appropriations in € mil.

ABB	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
16 02 02	-*	-*	-*	10.165	9	15.75
16 02 04	5.3**	5.3**	5.3**	6	5.6	5.6

*Budget article B3-300 – 'General information work' (until 2003) is not directly comparable to ABB 16 02 02

** Before 2004: Budget line A 0421

Source: European Commission, DG COMM, Directorate D (Resources)

The audiovisual unit in DG COMM has 79 staff members. As there has not been a recruitment competition for audiovisual specialists so far, 50% of the staff are external contractors. Only three A-grade officials work on prioritising content – which reflects that the focus of the audiovisual unit's work is on the provision of information rather than communication activities.

2.1.1 Audiovisual Co-productions (APCAV)

Objectives and resources

The audiovisual co-productions are based on grants through which the Commission co-finances various radio and television productions. Each year there is a call for proposals (called APCA), under which broadcasters can apply for three possible formats: 'News' (1 minute 10), 'Keys' (2 to 5

⁶ Note: ABB 16 02 04 does not fall under 'Heading 3 b) – Citizenship' of the budget.

minutes) and ‘Magazines’ (8 minutes to 1 hour). They can integrate the proposed formats into their regular programmes. In 2005, APCAV was only open for radio, while in 2006 both radio and television broadcasters could apply. Each APCAV is designed centrally by the audiovisual unit of DG COMM, but the selection procedure and the management of the specific projects is executed in a decentralised way by the representations in each member state. According to the 2006 call for proposals, the purpose of the APCAV was to provide fair and balanced information and debates on EU affairs utilising the format most likely to appeal to the audience.⁷

The commitments for audiovisual co-productions in the budget of DG PRESS/DG COMM⁸ have varied over the years, notably because funds were not always restricted to budget line 16 02 02. For example, in 2003, DG PRESS also managed the PRINCE line on enlargement, which included money for co-productions in addition to 16 02 02.

Table 4. Audiovisual Co-productions (APCAV and others) – Financial resources

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Commitments Outturn (in €mil.)	0.508	1.948	8.103	6.899	3.738

According to Commission sources, commitment appropriations for APCAV have increased from about €4 million in 2005 to about €9.2 million in 2006. However, for 2007, the budget is set to decrease again.

Table 5. APCAV 2003 to 2005 – Number of projects

Call for proposals	APCAV 2003	APCAV 2004	APCAV 2005
Number of projects	TV: 30 (in 12 MS) Radio: 15 (in 8 MS)	TV: 51 (in 8 MS) Radio: 27 (in 7 MS)	TV: 0 Radio: 81 (in 19 MS)

Evaluating APCAV

Relevance

As regards its objective, the call for proposals for APCAV 2005 states that projects are meant to provide the audience with a better knowledge and understanding of the European Union, enhance listeners’ understanding of other European countries, favour content that is specific, practical and relevant to everyday life and empathise with other Europeans by exchanging viewpoints on issues of common interest.

These objectives are clearly relevant for the challenges that the EU currently faces, as numerous polls have shown that citizens still suffer from a considerable lack of information on European affairs. In view of the aim of the White Paper on a European Communication Policy to establish a ‘European Public Sphere’, the mutual exchange of viewpoints across national and linguistic borders in Europe has even become more relevant than before.

Effectiveness and efficiency

Before mid-2003 it was very difficult to evaluate the activities of recipients in greater detail, but, since APCAV 2003 (i.e. the projects broadcasted in 2004), the audiovisual unit has been systematically gathering figures that provide it with a comprehensive picture for each project. A considerable amount is spent on studies, polls and databases (2006: €800,000) to identify the needs of the public and allocate money accordingly. This data has put the Commission in a good position to evaluate projects and to choose the most competitive projects. For example, Commission administrators now know exactly how much broadcasting costs per minute and production costs per minute. Costs can be

⁷ APCAV (2006): Call for proposals from Directorate-General Communication for the co-financing of TV programmes on EU affairs and linked interactive websites, Final Version, 3 April (http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/grants/index_en.htm).

⁸ In June 2005, DG Press and Communication (DG Press) was renamed DG Communication (DG Comm).

assessed via average cost tables for each country. Data obtained from independent bodies also show audience figures in terms of the numbers of viewers/listeners and not just their potential geographical outreach. The lists thus show the Commission exactly which broadcasters offer ‘value for money’ and which do not. Selection criteria include the financial and technical capacity of applicants. An electronic database with all the relevant figures, including data on 3,000 European television stations, is under construction and will be ready in 2007. An online ‘EU affairs calendar’, which will inform recipients about the main upcoming EU events, is also envisaged. Both innovations are being created as part of Commissioner Wallström’s Action Plan.

APCAV recipients have to produce two reports for the period that they are given grants for. Ten per cent of them have their books checked through ‘on the spot’ audits. In terms of transparency, a template shows applicants the reasons why their project was rejected in the event that they were not successful in securing a grant.

Two aspects, however, have hampered the effectiveness of APCAV in the past: Firstly, financial resources have changed quite considerably over time. As one of the bigger operational budget articles of DG COMM, 16 02 02 is among the first ones to be cut back when resources for DG COMM are reduced. Under such conditions it is difficult to plan ahead, which is especially problematic for the audiovisual media, as they make their programming usually twice a year (in March and September) and are thus less flexible than, for example, the print media.

A second problem has been the lack of coordination among DGs in the past. The impact of the lack of coordination is difficult to assess in specific numbers, but as each DG is responsible for its own information activities, it cannot be guaranteed that grants for similar co-productions have not also been given out by other DGs for the period 2000-05 without knowledge of DG PRESS. However, the so-called External Communication Network (ECN)⁹ has already improved the situation through regular meetings of the heads of the information units in the various DGs. Furthermore, the audiovisual unit in DG COMM is also increasingly consulted by other DGs for its expertise and data. For example, staff from the audiovisual unit have been involved in evaluation committees concerning tenders from DG AIDCO and DG RELEX.

Take-up of APCAV funding is very good as there have always been more applicants than grants available under budget article 16 02 02. In relation to its budget, APCAV grants are very cost-efficient. Few other programmes are likely to reach a similar mass audience with comparable financial resources. Through the different projects, millions of people have been informed about topical issues relating to Europe, the EU and other member states.

Utility

The question of utility leads on to the problem of the potentially adverse effects of providing EU information while being funded by the EU. European information activities have always been under close scrutiny from the national level and the criticism that it may be ‘propaganda’ is never far away. It is therefore all the more important for APCAV that the Commission’s involvement in the content of projects is excluded as much as possible. The Commission thus only obliges recipients to stick to the formats mentioned above (News, Keys, Magazines) but does not demand any specific content. ‘European added value’ and ‘innovation, originality and creativity’ are, however, also among the selection criteria. There is an editorial charter, which is binding for both the Commission and the recipient, and which is enforceable by law in the event that either of the partners fails to comply with it. The charter guarantees complete editorial freedom as long as information is presented “in a fair and balanced way”. More concretely, this means that the content of a project may not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, sex, religious beliefs, etc. As such the charter is based on the existing charters of German public broadcasters and the British public broadcaster the BBC.

In view of the editorial charter, the authors of this study think that only if one is against subsidies for media co-productions in general (which the authors of this report are not) could one claim that

⁹ The ECN meets on a regular basis every four to six weeks. For more information please see the complementary study on communication.

APCAV were a tool of potential propaganda. If one accepts such grants, however, as a means to help convey information and stimulate debate on EU issues, there is nothing to be said against the way the Commission ensures the editorial freedom of APCA recipients.

Recommendations

APCAV should be continued as one of the most cost-efficient information tools. Consideration should be given to increasing its resources and especially providing a stable financial basis that allows administrators and potential recipients to plan ahead. We also welcome the plan to increasingly organise calls for proposals aimed at networks of radio and television broadcasters to further increase the efficiency of grants. We do not have a conclusive opinion, however, on plans to change the current system of calls for proposals (i.e. co-financing) to a system of service contracts (i.e. full financing). Service contracts would potentially ensure greater efficiency and the editorial charter would become an integral part of these contracts to ensure editorial freedom. However, the contracts would inevitably also mean that contractors would be more financially dependent on the Commission – at least as regards the specific project that is being funded. It would also carry the risk of fuelling (founded or unfounded) accusations of ‘propaganda’.

As regards internal coordination, the activities of other DGs concerning grants for audiovisual co-productions should be coordinated through the External Communication Network (ECN) to achieve economies of scale. The APCA application procedure and the editorial charter should be introduced as best practice.

2.1.2 Euronews

Objectives and resources

Euronews was launched in January 1993 and is today a consortium of 20 European and Mediterranean television broadcasters, including the public service broadcasters of France, Spain, Russia, Ireland, Ukraine, Belgium and Switzerland. It covers international news from a European perspective in seven languages¹⁰ and can be received in 187 million households by cable, digital and terrestrial distribution in 119 countries worldwide. It also has a multilingual website (www.euronews.net) that includes an open forum for feedback and criticism from viewers. Up until February 2005, Euronews was supported by the Commission budget through conventions and co-financing (50%) of projects. Since then, support has been shifted from a system of subsidies to service contracts that cover 100% of the actions falling under the respective agreement. The current framework contract runs until 2010. The respective budget articles which covered the financial resources for Euronews throughout the period 2000-2005¹¹ state as their objective to “fund general information work on the European Union, with the aim of providing all Europeans with general information on the work of the Community institutions, on decisions taken and on the different stages of European integration, a task which falls within in the public service remit. [...] The production of information for citizens is provided via actions through the media.”

The level of support from the Community budget has increased considerably since 2005, as the table below shows.

Table 6. Euronews – Financial resources coming from the Community budget

Commitments outturn	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Euronews (€mil.)	4.128 ^a	0	2.099	2	5

^a This sum probably also covers the resources for 2002, paid already at the end of 2001.

Source: DG COMM, Directorate D (Resources).

¹⁰ English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

¹¹ B3-300 ‘General Information Work’ (until 2003) and ABB 16 02 02 ‘Citizens information via the media’ (since 2004).

Evaluating Euronews

Relevance

In view of the stated objectives of the budget line, the actions of Euronews are clearly relevant. The authors of this study thus share the conclusion of an external *ex post* evaluation by Deloitte and Touche carried out for the Commission on the ‘Conventions and co-financing of projects with Euronews in the period 1993- 2003’.¹² Just as APCAV does, Euronews contributes to informing citizens on European issues and has the additional advantage of doing so from a pan-European perspective, a particular feature that national and regional media cannot provide in the same way. It thus has a special potential to foster mutual understanding between citizens from different national and linguistic backgrounds.

Effectiveness and efficiency

Despite the very positive conclusions of the evaluation study undertaken by Deloitte and Touche in 2003, the Commission introduced major impact measurement reforms at the beginning of 2004, similar to those described for APCAV (see section above). Furthermore, the Commission shifted EU funding for Euronews from co-financing to a fully-financed set of service contracts in 2004. As before, however, the Commission continued to finance only different programme formats and not specific content.¹³ The editorial charter set out in the section on APCAV is an integral part of the service contracts with Euronews and ensures editorial freedom. There is a monthly meeting between officials from the European Parliament, the European Council and different European Commission services with journalists from Euronews to let the journalists know what will be on the institutions’ agendas so that the latter can plan ahead better. The decision on what to broadcast remains, however, with Euronews. Under the contract, it has to submit a bi-monthly report about its work and prepare a comprehensive report at the end of each year. This ensures that the return on the money invested by the Commission is monitored on an ongoing basis. The framework contract runs until 2010 and thus provides Euronews with the necessary long-term financial stability to plan ahead.

The 2003 Deloitte and Touche report gave a positive evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of Euronews, stating that “it is efficient as a partner for the Commission compared to comparable alternatives and to industry norms”. According to that report, hourly transmission costs for Euronews are “significantly lower than those of other television channels” and audience numbers have grown substantially to reach over 7.1 million people a day at the end of 2003 compared to 5.6 million in 2000. The Euronews website attracted more than 500,000 hits a month in 2003. According to information available on the Euronews website, its current potential outreach of 167 million households in Europe is larger than that of CNN International (119 million), BBC World (73 million) or CNBC (69 million). It also reaches more viewers (4.18 million via cable & satellite and 3.24 million via terrestrial windows broadcasting) than its main competitors according to these figures (CNN International: 2.03 million; BBC World: 1.02 million). By comparison with national broadcasters, however, Euronews still only reaches a very small audience.¹⁴

Utility

For Euronews the same questions concerning editorial independence as for the APCAV appear relevant. To avoid the adverse effects of being at least in part an EU-funded information outlet (i.e. the danger that large parts of the audience perceive it as Commission ‘propaganda’), it is important that Euronews provides citizens with information in a fair and balanced way through the critical eyes of independent journalists. The editorial charter in the service contracts is meant to ensure this independence and the indications are that this is what already happens in practice. For example, viewers’ comments in the forum on the Euronews website criticise Euronews coverage on numerous

¹² We were provided with a short summary of the evaluation report.

¹³ As with APCAV these are: News, Keys and Magazines. Additionally, there are also live broadcasting (e.g. press conferences) and interviews.

¹⁴ For example, according to the German daily Handelsblatt, the German audience share of Euronews in 2005 was 0.1% compared to 0.8% of German news broadcaster N24. (http://www.handelsblatt.com/news/Default.aspx?_p=201197&_t=ft&_b=983010).

issues for being partisan (e.g. on the Middle East conflict or Cypriot-Turkish relations), but mostly from diametrically opposed perspectives. The fact, for example, that one viewer criticises a programme for being too pro-Israeli, while another one criticises the same programme for being too pro-Lebanese is a strong indication that this particular programme was indeed “fair and balanced”. It is also difficult to imagine that Euronews would reach more viewers than other well-known competitors if it were to be mostly based on uncritical and imbalanced coverage.

There will always be a residual risk that a given media will tend to provide information in line with what it thinks the Commission wants when a considerable sum of EU funding is paid out to that media. The authors of this study think, however, that the benefits of the contracts with Euronews outweigh this risk.

Recommendations

In order to see Euronews audiences grow further in the future, consideration should be given to propose more formats that provide its programmes with “faces”.¹⁵ As this would significantly increase production costs, however, moderators would have to be personalities who are known by Europeans in many member states and who would thus also have the potential to attract new viewers. Furthermore, future financing of Euronews through contracts should also depend on the actual economic need of the television channel for resources from the Community to maintain and extend its programming. Providing programmes in the languages of the new EU member states should be encouraged.

2.1.3 The Audiovisual Service: EbS & operation of radio and TV studios

Means and resources

The operational costs of the European Commission’s Audiovisual Service (AS) are largely financed from budget line 16 02 04 (‘Operation of radio and television studios and audiovisual equipment’).¹⁶ This includes all the costs involved in running the Commission’s radio and television studios and other audiovisual information facilities (e.g. a library of EU-related audiovisual documents) in terms of staff and the purchase, hire, maintenance and repair of the necessary equipment and material. It also includes the satellite rental for the Europe by Satellite (EbS) service. As can be seen from Table 3 (see above), the amount of commitment appropriations under budget article 16 02 04 has tended to stabilise between 2000 (€5.2 million) and 2006 (€5.6 million). Proposed commitments in the preliminary draft budget for 2007 are also €5.6 million.

According to its website, the objective of the Audiovisual Service is to provide information for media professionals through video, photo and sound coverage of European news as well as giving assistance to journalists wishing to cover EU subjects. Material is available for free downloading via the internet and EbS. The Audiovisual Service only produces ‘raw material’ that can then be used by the media for free and without copyright, but it does not make its own reports, comments or other edited material.

EbS is an inter-institutional tool where resources (i.e. camera teams) are coordinated to achieve better efficiency. Once a week, officials from the Commission’s audiovisual unit take part in a coordination meeting with colleagues from the European Parliament and the Council to agree on broadcasting priorities. Priorities are set according to newsworthiness (e.g. ‘breaking news’ and press conferences), political priorities and protocol (first the EP, then the Council and finally the Commission).

Evaluating the Audiovisual Service

Relevance

Audiovisual Service’s work is organised in such a way as to create a multiplier effect through the media. It is thus another way of providing European citizens with independent and balanced information on EU-related affairs. As for APCAV and the service contracts with Euronews, this

¹⁵ The European Union is often perceived as “faceless”, according to the Commission’s ‘White Paper on a European Communication Policy’, COM (2006) 35 final, 1.2.2006, Brussels, page 9. (Available from http://europa.eu.int/comm/communication_white_paper/doc/white_paper_en.pdf)

¹⁶ NB: This budget article is not part of heading 3b ‘Citizenship’.

objective is clearly relevant, especially given citizens' lack of knowledge about EU issues. With a considerable part of the population believing European affairs to be complicated and boring, it is all the more important that especially those media that do not have correspondents in Brussels can be provided with interesting and up-to-date audiovisual material.

Effectiveness and efficiency

An external *ex ante* evaluation from 2005 gave a positive overall assessment of the audiovisual service's work.¹⁷ According to this study, the services offered by EbS are particularly widely used (81% of the TV journalists surveyed used them) although its schedule of programmes, the selection of the pictures on offer and the choice of events covered were not appreciated by all journalists. Infoclips and the database of images, however, were seen as complimentary products that met with unanimous approval. Material for radio was less in demand (used by 50% of radio journalists) but still more so than photos (used by less than 20% of press journalists). Almost 30% were also not satisfied with the quality of the photos. Journalists were very satisfied with the technical quality of all the services provided, but less so with the choice, the aesthetics and the time it took for the material to be provided. The Commission's radio and TV studios are the services least in demand according to this study, although the majority of those who use them find them very useful and are highly satisfied. A higher percentage of those polled were not satisfied with the Audiovisual Service's website (13%) and the access to the archives via the media centre (30%). Generally, journalists would like to have a wider choice of video, audio and photo materials, more live programmes on EbS and earlier information about upcoming events. Most of the journalists asked also regarded EbS (and not the internet) as the main way of obtaining audiovisual material for the foreseeable future. According to journalists from large news agencies, the Commission's Audiovisual Service is not yet known enough among those agencies that do not focus on European affairs due to a lack of advertisement of its services.¹⁸

According to Commission officials, a wide range of media use EbS – from big networks such as the BBC, France 2 or ARD to regional media and all the parliamentary channels in the EU member states. In the future the Audiovisual Unit of DG COMM will be able to track downloaded material through 'digital tattoos' – a technique that was too expensive in the past, but that will soon give much clearer feedback on which media use EbS and to what extent.

Utility

The impacts achieved by the Audiovisual Service make a useful contribution to informing citizens about EU-related issues. As to the potentially adverse effects of being an EU-funded service providing information on the EU, such as accusations of "propaganda", the Audiovisual Service is on safe ground as it does not provide edited comment or commentaries but makes 'raw material' available to the media. Only a very small minority of journalists surveyed in the external evaluation study had concerns about a bias of the services of the Audiovisual Unit. As mentioned above, priorities for broadcasting are agreed between the Commission and the other institutions, which should help to prevent an unbalanced selection of events.

Recommendations

An early draft version of the White Paper on a European Communication Policy pointed to Commission plans to upgrade EbS into a fully-fledged news agency producing content. These plans were met with very negative reactions from the Brussels press corps, which regarded such an agency at best as unfair competition and at worst as a potential producer of biased propaganda. The potentially adverse effects and costs of such an agency are so considerable that they should not be pursued. Additional resources should, however be allocated to advertise existing services more pro-actively among journalists and at audiovisual sector fairs and events as is proposed in the annex to Wallström's

¹⁷ JLM Conseil – Groupe Altedia: "Evaluation ex-ante des activités de l'unité 'Services et Production audiovisuels' – Rapport d'étude complet", August 2005, p. 129-133 – Results are based on questionnaires answered by 172 journalists from a broad range of media, but with a special focus on editors and journalists from large TV channels and radio stations.

¹⁸ JLM Conseil – Groupe Altedia (2005), p. 51.

Action Plan. Other measures for the audiovisual services listed in this document also deserve support, such as the ‘policy of co-operation’ with professional associations and the organising regular informal meetings between EU leaders, civil society and journalists so that they can be broadcast on EbS.

2.2 Europa website

Objectives and resources

Launched in 1995 and restructured several times, Europa is – according to the Commission – one of the largest, most popular and most referenced public websites in the world. The coordination of Europa is carried out by DG COMM, which also produces the top level pages for the Commission. The sectoral DGs are responsible for the sites below this general level.

According to its online mission statement, Europa’s aim is to act as a portal for access to all the institutions of the European Union and to the activities carried out by them. In the most relevant communication on this topic called ‘Towards the e-Commission, Europa 2nd Generation’¹⁹, the Commission formulates three aims for Europa. They are to provide:

- 1) information services (“easy access for all to updated, user-friendly and multilingual information tailored to the users’ needs”),
- 2) interactive services (“allowing citizens a real say in the shaping and implementation of policies through open, real-time, online, multilingual dialogue with the Commission administration”) and
- 3) transaction services (procurement, financial operations, recruiting etc.).

We will focus on the first two aspects in this evaluation.

Several shortcomings were identified by the communication in 2001, the first one being internal. Content provision was the task of editors, who had to collect and seek information for the websites rather than information constantly being directed to them from the different DGs. Multilingualism and interactivity were scarce and the website ran the risk of “exploding into a labyrinth of uncoordinated sites”²⁰. The counter-measures proposed were stronger coordination across the DGs, stronger central support in terms of technological and editorial coordination and the development of thematic portals on all important EU policy issues by 2004. The resources needed were calculated to come to about €10 million per year up until 2004. Table 7 below shows, however, that less than half of this budget was actually spent on the website. Also it proved impossible for the revamped version of Europa to meet its 2004 deadline. In 2003 (‘Bilan Europa II à mi-parcours’), the Commission stated that the Europa II project would be delayed by one year and even today Europa has some considerable weaknesses.

Table 7. Europa costs/outreach^a

Europa	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Commitments outturn (€mil.)	1.6	5	4.1	4.4	4.6
Page views ^a (in millions)	479	613	875	1.060	1.395
Visits (in millions)	-	-	84	112	138
Unique visitors/month (in millions)	-	-	4.3	5.6	6.3

^a Page views are not the most relevant measurement for web usage as they are mostly caused by automatic search engines and web robots. It is the only measure, however, that is available for the years before 2003. The number of visits or unique visitors is more significant.

Sources: Commission (2000), General Report on the Activities of the European Union (<http://europa.eu.int/abc/doc/off/rg/en/welcome.htm>); Commission (2004), General Report on the Activities of the European Union (<http://europa.eu.int/abc/doc/off/rg/en/welcome.htm>); Commission (2001), Towards the e-Commission, Europa 2nd Generation, advanced web services to the citizens, business and other professional users; Commission (2003), Bilan Europa II à mi-parcours: 2001-2004; Budget figures provided from DG COMM, Directorate D (Resources).

¹⁹ Commission Communication by the President to the Commission in agreement with Vice-President Neil Kinnock and Mr. Erkki Liikanen: “Towards the e-Commission – Europa 2nd Generation – Advanced Web services to citizens, business and other professional users”, Brussels, 6 July 2001.

²⁰ European Commission (2001), p. 7.

Evaluating Europa

Relevance

The objectives as outlined above address the perceived needs but they appear very ambitious. Even though the site has been considerably improved in the last five years, the current state of Europa cannot live up to these high standards. The rising usage figures above show the relevance of the website. More and more citizens are searching for information online.

Effectiveness and efficiency

Increasing usage does not necessarily imply increasing effectiveness however, as the overall usage of the internet is also going up all the time. But reaching six million users a month is evidence of the effectiveness of the site compared to many other information tools that do not manage to reach millions of citizens every month.

However, as to the aim of providing easily accessible information to citizens, two factors hamper the efficiency of the website - the delays in getting the thematic portals up and running as well as the failure to instal a powerful search engine. The current search engine does not work efficiently due to the fact that one single person within the Commission has to do the same work as a team of 20 would do for a professional search engine. Our tests showed that the engine sometimes fails to find documents, even when their exact name, number and date is known to the user. The same is true for the search engine for the 'access to documents' site on Europa. Secondly, for most of the period under analysis here, Europa had been structured according to the internal structures of the Commission, i.e. according to DGs, policies and initiatives, with names that are difficult to understand for the average citizen.²¹ More professional users such as EU information professionals and journalists, however, seem to be very satisfied with the site. In particular, the online press section is frequently used by journalists and is proving to be an effective and efficient tool. But while this section is of high quality and is frequently updated, this is unfortunately not the case across the board. Europa is still marked by a lack of coherence as some DGs provide good websites on their activities and policies and others merely provide structured depositories of documents.

As to the aim of providing interaction, online consultations are being carried out and a number of discussion forums have been set up. One of the first ones was 'Futurum', which generated 1,500 contributions for the debate on the European Constitutional Treaty.²² The growing success of these measures can be seen in the most current site, 'Debate Europe', which has received 12,000 contributions. So far, however, it is not clear how the feedback collected will be introduced into the European Commission's decision-making process.

Utility

Europa is an especially useful tool for those who know the EU, such as journalists and researchers. It could, however, be improved for the average citizen. Even for specialists on information who are searching for specific information, the website can be a source of frustration, which compromises the website's overall ability to achieve its goals.

Recommendations

With regard to better coordination, Commissioner Wallström's Action Plan foresees the establishment of an editor for Europa. So far implementation of this measure has been postponed but we recommend that this idea be put into practice. More central resources and decision-making power within DG COMM are necessary to ensure a more coherent approach for Europa. In the longer term, one option would be for DGs to focus on the sites aimed at experts in their specific field and for DG COMM to serve the general public. For this to happen, DG COMM would then need more human resources than it currently has. Furthermore, the approach of using web portals within the Europa website should be

²¹ An evaluation for Europa is due this year and will hopefully make up for a lack of research on the average user of the site.

²² See European Commission (2003): General Report on the Activities of the European Union. Brussels. (Available from <http://europa.eu.int/abc/doc/off/rg/en/welcome.htm>)

pursued as it appears to be the most efficient way to make the site as a whole more user-friendly for non-experts.

Another idea included in DG COMM's Action Plan is to establish the websites of the Representations as starting points for Europa. The current websites of the representations do not seem prepared for this.

The potential of the Europa website could be considerably increased if more funds for its promotion were to be made available. Its web address and portals are often not well enough known among target audiences (e.g. the 'European Youth Portal' should be promoted more in schools).

2.3 Eurobarometer

Objectives and resources

Eurobarometer (EB), which was launched in 1973, is designed to give an overview of public opinion on EU issues in the member states. They are conducted between two and five times per year and consist of approximately 1,000 face-to-face interviews per member state. Special Eurobarometer reports are based on in-depth thematic studies while Flash Eurobarometers are ad hoc surveys focusing on specific target groups.

The budget for Eurobarometer has increased considerably over the past years, most notably in the year 2003, when there was a particularly high number of Eurobarometer surveys (75 studies, 106 reports) and in 2005.

Table 8. Commitments/outturn for Eurobarometer (€ mil)

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Commitments	1,120	2,632	4,102	4,312	7,401
Outturn					

The large increase between 2004 and 2005 can be explained by the considerable expansion of EB after enlargement. In 2004 Eurobarometer was extended to the new member states, candidate countries and the European Free Trade Area (EFTA)²³. In 2005 the introduction of Flash Eurobarometer and Special Eurobarometer in these countries as well as northern Cyprus and the United States followed²⁴. EB was further extended to the United States. The high outturn in 2005 can also be explained by the increased activity of Eurobarometer as a result of the Dutch and French rejections of the EU Constitutional Treaty in referendums.

Evaluating Eurobarometer

Relevance

At a time when concerns about growing public scepticism to the EU is on an upward curve, Eurobarometer is extremely relevant in giving an overview of public opinion on key policy issues and public opinion trends in the EU.

Effectiveness and efficiency

The Eurobarometer service has become very popular and is increasingly cited in media and academic studies. As a consequence it has been established as an authoritative way to measure public opinion in the EU. EB has been effective as an instrument of public opinion measurement as well as in providing easily comparable information about EU issues to the European institutions, the EU Representations but also the media. In 2004, 2,000 press reports referred to Eurobarometer data (2005: 1600)²⁵. Regarding its efficiency and value for money, the considerable increase in EB's budget corresponds to the full extension of its services to the new member states, candidate countries, EFTA, northern

²³ European Commission, Annual Activity Report 2004, Directorate General Press and Communication, p. 12.

²⁴ Commission de la Communauté Européenne, Rapport Annuel d'Activité, 2005, DG Communication, p.9

²⁵ Supra, Note 23 and 24.

Cyprus and the United States²⁶. Interviews with experts indicate that, while Eurobarometer is a popular source of information on EU public opinion, it would be more effective if all of the general questions were to remain the same over the years and changes in the wording were to be avoided in order to make data as comparable as possible. Specific questions should be formulated as directly and as policy relevant as possible so as to be as useful as possible for EU policy-makers. This way EB can serve not only as an effective instrument to test policies but also as a tool to help in the development of policies. Eurobarometer is also sometimes seen as an instrument for the construction of a European public opinion, yet this point should not be exaggerated. While the dissemination of public opinion data may also raise a degree of general awareness and identification with the EU system, it cannot substitute for more direct measures reaching out to citizens and actively involving them.

Utility

Eurobarometer is very useful in assessing public opinion trends about key policy issues as well as public opinion about the development of EU integration in general. Flash Eurobarometers and Special Eurobarometers are crucial in helping policy-makers to establish a picture about particular policy areas in greater depth and in reacting to ad hoc policy events. The provision of generalised data provides additional credibility to EU policy assessments. It is particularly useful in providing information across a wide range of countries, including the EU and the US.

Nevertheless, given that it is essentially a ‘passive’ information tool that does not seek to extend or increase public awareness and information, EB should be clearly embedded in a framework for information policy that reaches out to EU citizens.

Recommendations

In order to improve Eurobarometer, several recommendations about both the design of the surveys as well as management and budgetary questions can be made. Firstly, the wording for all general questions should be kept the same over the years to increase comparability. In addition, however, more focus should be put on policy-relevant questions to assess specific developments. Questions should be formulated in close cooperation with the policy experts in the respective DGs to make sure that they are focused towards actual policy needs. Vague or indirect questions should be avoided as they might give a more positive picture, which is less relevant in terms of policy development. As an example, the questions on the European Constitutional Treaty were always worded in such a way as to ask about ‘a constitution’ rather than the specific text.

In proportion to the overall budget for the field of information and communication for 2007, the budget for Eurobarometer appears relatively high. Steps should therefore be taken to ensure that Eurobarometer forms only one part of the information strategy. Sufficient attention also needs to be paid to awareness-raising and the provision of information as well as to those activities that directly reach out to citizens. This should also be kept in mind when considering the creation of a European Public Opinion Observatory.

More inter-institutional cooperation in planning surveys and disseminating results would help to ensure the impact and relevance of EB. The establishment of networks of national experts and a system of best practices, as proposed by the Commission’s ‘White Paper on a European Communication Policy’, should also be welcomed.²⁷

2.4 Europe Direct

Objectives and resources

The Europe Direct (ED) service is geared towards answering specific questions from citizens as well as giving practical advice to citizens on a wide range of topics. Due to the dynamic development of Community competences, ED aims to provide information to the general public about the ongoing changes in policies and legislation. It is accessible to citizens in all 25 member states in the EU’s 20

²⁶ Supra Note 24.

²⁷ See European Commission (2006), p. 10-11.

working languages. The service, which can be accessed via telephone, e-mail and a web assistance service, is free of charge. It is operated by an external contractor and managed and supervised by DG COMM. In 2005 ED employed a total of 32 staff, of which 25 are telephone operators. All the operators speak English and at least one other language. There is at least one native speaker per official language. ED's last contract began in 2003 and runs for five years until 2008.

The budget for Europe Direct has continued to grow between 2003 and 2005. This growth corresponds to the expansion of the service in size (especially since enlargement in 2004) and usage (from 4,000 enquiries in 2003 to almost 10,000 in 2005).²⁸

Table 9. Europe Direct - Commitments/Outturn for 2001-2005 (€ mil)

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
1.65	1.86	2.00	2.43	3.26

Source: DG COMM, Directorate D (Resources).

Evaluating Europe Direct

Relevance

Europe Direct provides a good response to the need for information in the evolving policy context of the EU. The rising use of its service over the years demonstrates that it is relevant as an addition to other information tools. The relevance of Europe Direct was underlined by an independent evaluation study concluding that the service was relevant in so far as it provided appropriate responses to users' queries²⁹. As questions asked by ED users are monitored, ED is also a good means to measure which aspects of EU politics interest and concern citizens the most.

Effectiveness/Efficiency

Interviews with experts from outside the Commission (other EU institutions and civil society organisations) as well as the external evaluation study contracted by the Commission indicate that Europe Direct is successful in terms of its effectiveness in providing information to citizens and in terms of the efficient way in which it is run. As regards effectiveness, 70% of telephone users and 60% of e-mail enquirers consider themselves to be better informed about EU policies after having used the service. Europe Direct is also efficient in managing requests. Almost all telephone requests are dealt with immediately with waiting time usually no longer than 20 seconds. Moreover, 95% of e-mail queries are dealt with within three days (more complex ones are dealt with in DG COMM and replied to within ten days). The telephone service is the preferred method of users and is the most efficient in so far as it gives immediate feedback to them.

Use of ED has increased significantly over the years, but the service could undoubtedly increase its outreach even more if it were to be more widely promoted. A promotion campaign in nine member states in 2005 proved very useful in reaching out to new audiences, especially an Irish initiative on local radio. With its limited staff, however, the service cannot be expected to accommodate many more users without becoming less efficient at handling enquiries.

Most users find out about the ED service via the Europa website, but given that not all potential users have internet access, other ways of awareness-raising should be explored. ED is particularly effective in establishing a direct dialogue with citizens. A comparative study has further established that it operates as efficiently as comparable national services in member states³⁰. Nevertheless, the range of topics covered by ED would be difficult for member states to match.

²⁸ European Commission (2006), "Europe Direct in 2005".

²⁹ Evaluation of the Europe Direct Service, Final Report, *The European Evaluation Limited (TEP)*, November 2005.

³⁰ Ibid.

Utility

ED has proved very useful in answering citizens' requests and giving them advice on specific queries. Given that it is interactive and establishes direct human contact, it is a useful addition to other EU information tools.

Table 10. Use of Europe Direct in the period from 2003-2005

Type of enquiry	2003	2004	2005
Calls	23 945	41 070	59 953
E-mails	25 108	33 105	43 548
Web-assistance	1 438	5 772	8 582
Total	50 491	79 857	112 083

Recommendations

Given the high user satisfaction with Europe Direct, this service should remain an important part of the EU's communication strategy. In order to make the service more attractive to a wider number of users, four courses of action should be pursued:

- i. More continuous and regular evaluation and monitoring of the service should be carried out in order to establish more detailed user profiles and improve custom-made information.
- ii. ED should also be better promoted in order to reach out to potential users that do not fall into the category of well-informed EU citizens (who for now constitute the majority of Europe Direct users). Special attention should be given to new member states, where the use of ED is still much lower than in the EU-15. The Europa website is currently the most common source through which citizens learn about ED. Advertising on this site should therefore be improved. Europe Direct's own website should be updated so as to provide more detailed information in terms of the range of services provided by ED. In order to reach new users, promotion of the website should be extended to include media such as radio and possibly even TV.
- iii. Based on the steady increase in the number of Europe Direct users over the past two years, the ED service would benefit from extending its operational staff. For this purpose, more resources should be allocated to ED, given that, despite its growth, its budget has only been slightly increased over the years. If such an increase in promotional activities bears fruit, however, more staff will be necessary.
- iv. Given that Europe Direct establishes a list of the ten topics that users most frequently ask information about, ED can serve as a sounding board for which policies concern EU citizens the most. The service could thus be used increasingly to establish the topics for information priorities for publications, Eurobarometer polls and other information policies.

3.5 Written publications (including the Priority Publications Programme)

Objectives and resources

DG PRESS/COMM produces two categories of publications. One is the series called 'The EU at a Glance', which provides basic facts about the EU, while the other, called 'Europe on the Move', is a more in-depth presentation of policies, activities and institutions. The content for these publications is usually provided by external journalists working through framework contracts. Next to the publications by DG PRESS/COMM, a number of publications are also produced by individual DGs. Publications are distributed in a decentralised manner, via representations and information relays and, to a varying degree in each of the member states, to public outlets such as libraries and schools (on demand). On average about 1.1 million 'EU at a Glance' publications are printed each year in addition to 700,000 'Europe on the Move' publications. In addition, all publications are available on the Europa website. Apart from DG COMM, a considerable number of publications are produced in the

Representations and in the different DGs catering to local and more specialised information needs. These are mostly publications directed towards a more specialised audience in a particular field (in case of the DGs) or for a particular national audience (Representations). Since 1989, there has been a special budget line called the 'Priority Publications Programme' (PPP). These publications are produced by DG PRESS/COMM but in practice bring together input between the Brussels headquarters of the Commission and the Representations and between different DGs according to their content. Individual Representations also produce monthly newsletters to inform about their work. In terms of cost about 12.5% are spent centrally on editorial work and writing whereas around 40% each are spent on printing and distribution of publications. Representations together have a budget that is slightly below that of DG Comm (in 2006, €4.6 million for DG Comm and €3.9 for Representations).

Table 11. Budget 2001-05 (including Representations and PPP) (€ mil)

Commitments/ outturn 2001	Commitments/ outturn 2002)	Commitments/ outturn 2003	Commitments/ outturn 2004	Commitments/ outturn 2005
8.87	8.82	6.18	6.86	8.12

Source: DG COMM, Directorate D (Resources).

Evaluating written publications

Relevance

Even in the midst of the internet age, written publications continue to be an important way to reach a general public of all age groups. While short and more general publications are useful in order to make citizens aware how the EU works and what it does, more detailed publications are a good means of providing those already in the know with more specific and in-depth information on topics of interest to them.

Effectiveness/efficiency

Interviews with experts from civil society and other EU institutions indicated that written publications have vastly improved over the years in the sense that they have become more accessible and attractive in both content and presentation. In this context, the attempt to become more inter-institutional in the presentation of information has also been stressed. Since 2005, special attention has been given to improve the educational focus of publications in order to reach the younger generations and children. According to interviews with Commission experts, the publications are good value for money in so far as there is increasing demand. DG COMM cannot currently keep up with the demand for publications. This argument has been challenged in interviews with civil society experts, however, who pointed to the fact that the individual interest in publications is difficult to assess. Even internal Commission documents reveal that it is nearly impossible to appraise the reach of written publications. A rough estimate based on the output of publications is that about 10 million people a year are exposed in some way or another to the publications. An external evaluation on the information needs to be addressed in publications has established that citizens require more tangible information on the precise implications of their EU citizenship. The way in which the different EU institutions interrelate and the EU policy-making process is much more difficult to communicate.³¹ Current plans to cooperate with local centres so as to add local input to presentations produced by the Commission in Brussels are promising to the extent that they can make information more tangible to the public and make the EU feel less remote.

In terms of the distribution of publications, it would be beneficial to reach further beyond existing networks to cover increasingly local centres such as libraries and public administrations. The extension of the network of information relays may also be valuable in increasing the visibility of publications in the future. A wide variety of newsletters (both in terms of content and means of production) make it very difficult to assess the overall efficiency and effectiveness of this format. An external evaluation carried out in March 2006 concluded that newsletters should be better targeted

³¹ Etude Qualitative sur les Publications Centrales de la DG Presse et Communication, Note de Conclusions et Recommandations, OPTeM, Novembre 2005.

towards their specific audiences rather than aiming at a general public. They should also be combined with other tools in order to increase awareness. Newsletters for journalists might be particularly useful in this endeavour.³² The variety in the output of publications is also an issue within the Commission regarding the publications produced by DG PRESS/COMM and individual DGs. An Inter-service Group on Priority Publications as well as plans to introduce a common editor seek to address the question of internal coordination.

Utility

Despite the challenges involved in evaluating their effectiveness, written publications such as brochures and leaflets will continue to be an important way to provide tangible information to citizens³³. They are a good addition to seminars and discussions for those who want to follow up certain topics in depth. Printed publications are also complementary to other information services, such as seminars and presentations, in giving citizens the opportunity to deepen their understanding beyond a 'one-off' event.

Table 12. Production of written publications 2003-05

Year	2003	2004	2005
Number of publications	13	12 brochures 11 posters and postcards	13
Number of copies printed	15 million (6 million web publications visited)	14 million	10.3 million

Recommendations

Efforts to produce publications in more accessible language as well as to ensure better presentation and illustration should be continued. In order to ensure a lasting impact, the targeting of specific audiences should be improved. While general information should be kept short and to the point, focusing on a few publications, there should be more variety in publications in more specific fields. The network for the distribution of publications should be extended. As coordination among DGs has not proved to be optimal over the years, plans to introduce a publications editor responsible for coordinating the output of different DGs and creating synergies in their work would be a good way to improve effectiveness and efficiency. While useful mechanisms have been found and can be extended to establish guidelines for the thematic prioritisation of written publications (e.g. increasingly using feedback from Europe Direct questions and Europa website hits) a system of regular evaluation and feedback should be designed in order to better address the issues of the effectiveness and impact of written publications.

2.5 Information outlets/Europe Direct Network

Objectives

According to the Commission's Action Plan, the objective of the information outlets is to communicate as directly as possible with citizens, political and economic decision-makers as well as academic circles. This implies both a proactive and reactive element in its activities: designing activities to inform citizens on EU affairs and relaying information on local events, public opinion and news stories back to the Commission's headquarters in Brussels. In line with the Commission's communication on 'an Information and Communication Strategy for the European Union' of July 2002, the strategy of information relays was also revised to focus on 1) a more homogenous structure; 2) rationalisation and greater decentralisation of management; 3) the development of inter-institutional

³² Final Report, Subject, Evaluation of the Newsletters of the EU Representations in the Member States, *Evaluation Partnership Limited*, March 2006.

³³ See also the external evaluation conducted by OPTEM, November 2005.

cooperation and 4) greater sharing of responsibilities and a closer partnership with the member states³⁴.

Up until 2005, there were two different types of information outlets: the Europe Information Points (IPEs) and the regional ‘carrefours’, aimed specifically at rural areas. Information outlets, which have been combined under the Europe Direct network since 2005, have been given a four-year framework contract in order to avoid calls for tender every year. However, the individual agreements for each centre are made on an annual basis and are subject to the presentation of a work programme in line with the overall requirements for the Europe Direct network. Information outlets are, therefore, assessed on an annual basis. The switchover from the old system of the Europe Direct network was accompanied by a considerable increase in the number of information relays. From 253 in 2004, the number of information relays has risen to roughly 400 centres across the member states. As an addition to the general information outlets, three so-called ‘Grands Centres’ (in Paris in 1992, Lisbon in 1994 and Rome in 2000) were launched as pilot projects on how information activities can be provided and how public awareness for the EU can be considerably raised. There is also a network of (un-funded) European Documentation Centres (EDCs), which provide publications on the EU in universities. Lastly, ‘Team Europe’ represents a network of experts engaging in a wide range of activities to provide information about the Commission and its activities, including participation in conferences, media events (TV and radio) as well as the publication of books and articles. Their activities are intended to provide audiences with a more in-depth understanding of the EU and to generate greater public interest in EU affairs.

Budget

The funding structure for information outlets has been revised over the period covered by this study. Efforts were made to rationalise and bring together the conventions for IPEs and carrefours in 2003. The payment of lump sums to the centres was also stopped and replaced by an activity-based budget. This was done partly as a result of the introduction of the new Financial Regulation but also to make the running of centres more efficient. Given the changeover from IPEs and carrefours to the Europe Direct network, a special Commission Decision³⁵ established the extension of funding for IPEs and carrefours for an extra year to 2004, in order to ensure a smoother transition. Information outlets continue to be operated on the basis of co-funding, with the Commission currently providing between €12,000 and a maximum of €24,000 a year per outlet. The costs of individual outlets vary considerably according to the range of their activities but also the cost of human resources. For example, centres in the new member states are generally much cheaper to run. Consequently, the degree of co-funding also varies although Commission funds must be matched by at least 50% of funding from other sources.

Table 13. Information relays – commitment appropriations in € mil.

2000*	2001*	2002*	2003*	2004**	2005**	2006**
10 820	12 640	12 935	14 400	17 100	19 600	17 252

*2000-2003: budget article B3-301.

**2004-2006: budget article 1605-01.

Evaluating Information Relays and Team Europe

Relevance

At a time when the Commission’s wish to bring Europe ‘closer to the citizens’ has become paramount, local and regional information relays are highly relevant for the Commission’s efforts to communicate Europe on a wider scale and provide easily accessible information to a general public. Team Europe is

³⁴ Information Relays and Networks Stocktaking Evaluation General Presentation, PRESS/a.2/FdR/fcD(2002)-61025, 15.10.2002, p.3.

³⁵ Commission (2004): C (2004)2869.

also a good way to give Europe a face and bring a deeper understanding of selected issues to a wider public.

Effectiveness/Efficiency

In the period from 2000-2004, information relays have varied greatly with regard to their effectiveness in reaching a wider public as well as in the efficiency of their work. While some centres were very effective in providing information services to citizens, others went largely unnoticed. This discrepancy can be attributed to a lack of central management and strategic vision for the activities to be pursued by information outlets. The considerable slump in the activity of the centres in 2003 and 2004 can, however, be attributed to difficulties in adapting to the new Financial Regulation. A stocktaking evaluation undertaken in 2003 established that there has also been considerable variation in how information relays have been monitored, advertised and how their staff have been trained. Only 17% of Representations monitored information relays regularly while 65% rarely or never monitored information relays. Introducing a regular system of monitoring would improve efficiency. The same is true for the training of information relay staff (although about 70% of Representations offer some form of training).

The objective to reach out to a general public first and foremost is reflected in the work of the majority of relays. Fifty per cent of relays address a general public whereas 41% indicate that they cater to a more specified public³⁶. The indicators for establishing target audiences are socio-economic variables, regional distinctions and age. As far as targeting different occupations is concerned, the majority of work is channelled towards the media, then towards elected representatives and finally towards professors and farmers. This varied group implies a wide range of specific information needs.

Much has been done in the context of the Europe Direct network to improve shortcomings in the period from 2000 to 2004. Plans to introduce a feedback mechanism (i.e. an internet system to register the activities of all information outlets across the EU-25) promise to provide better assessments of the effectiveness of the different information relay activities. Generally speaking, information outlets have the potential to provide good value for money considering that the funds available for the information outlets, which form part of the Europe Direct network, are rather limited. Their management has been made more efficient, especially considering that Representations have not received additional staff to administer the greater number of Europe Direct information outlets.

The calls for proposals for the information outlets are administered in a decentralised manner. In the EU-15, the Commission Representations are responsible both for the calls for proposals and the supervision and approval of the annual work programmes. In the new member states, intermediary bodies (usually one of the ministries) are responsible for these tasks. These decentralised models of management are effective as they place management tasks in the hands of those who are more aware of local information requirements than the Brussels headquarters can be. In the old member states the model also ensures that there is a considerable degree of cross-fertilisation between information outlets and representations, thus boosting efforts to provide decentralised information to citizens.

The system of having flagship information relays, the 'Grands Centres', is currently under review. An internal evaluation of the 'Grands Centres' revealed concerns about the lack of coherence in their work due to a degree of near total independence³⁷. A Commission Decision has since been taken not to renew the agreements.

Just as in the case of information outlets, 'Team Europe', consisting of 689 voluntary conference speakers in 2004, shows a considerable degree of variation in its work from country to country, suggesting that the exchange of best practice does not always bear fruitful results equally for all member states. As regards cost efficiency, 'Team Europe' can be considered relatively good value for money as costs are low due to the independence of the participants. However, if the extension of this

³⁶ EU Information and Documentation, Relays and Networks under the Responsibility of DG PRESS, *Stocktaking Evaluation 2003*, March 2003.

³⁷ Rapport Analyse des Grands Centres d'Information sur l'Europe, DG PRESS, Cellule Evaluation, 7 January 2004.

network and regular transnational exchanges were to be considered, this would also imply additional co-ordination and management costs.

Utility

A network of information points throughout the Union is a useful way to raise awareness as well as providing a contact point for citizens seeking to inform themselves about the activities of the EU. Local information centres are also useful in making the EU more visible and tangible to its citizens. This is also true for Team Europe. It has been underlined in the Commission's recent plans to 'go local', as reflected in its 'Plan D', and by the revised structure of Title 16 in the preliminary draft budget 2007. However, the usefulness of the information outlets will depend largely on the implementation of creative work programmes.

Recommendations

Given their limited funds and human resources, a strategic approach towards the activities of the centres should be developed. Yet, this effort should not mean constraining the flexibility of centres in developing activities that are geared towards specific local information needs.

While the Commission states that information relays should be geared towards a general public rather than a specialised one, more thought should be given to adapting events and information tools to specific audiences. This way the information provided offers to be much more effective in reaching people and creating a longer lasting impact.

The plans to introduce a web-feedback mechanism collecting activities across all centres and establishing an informal network for exchanging best practices is welcomed. It could be crucial in developing a strategic information policy for all centres. Also, the move towards giving Representations more responsibility in assessing and managing the work of relays is a positive development. Regular training sessions for relay staff and Team Europe members is to be pursued. Relays should ensure that their events are noticed among the wider public as part of efforts to raise awareness of the EU. Similarly, the visibility and impact of the work of Team Europe could be increased by creating synergies with new initiatives, such as the Goodwill Ambassadors³⁸, with a more prominent public profile.

3. Conclusion

This cost-benefit study has assessed the different programmes and actions in the area of information carried out under the Commission's prerogatives and financed by the Community budget over the period 2000 to 2005. Applying the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and utility (as mentioned in the terms of reference provided by the European Parliament), it has evaluated the following aspects: (1) Audiovisual policy including co-productions (APCAV), the Commission's Audiovisual Service (EbS and the operation of studios) and contracts with Euronews, (2) the Europa website, (3) written publications, (4) the Europe Direct call centre, (5) Eurobarometer and (6) information outlets. The overall assessment in terms of value for money is positive. However, improvements for all aspects should be envisaged.³⁹ We also found a considerable evaluation deficit in the field of information policy between 2000 and 2005 with a certain improvement since 2003.

The period of time covered by this study has been marked by many general developments concerning European information policy – both in the field of information itself and as regards the conditions set by budgetary rules and institutional structures (a comprehensive overview of the general developments is provided in the annex to this study). The new Financial Regulation introduced in 2003 has improved control over expenditure but has also posed a problem in terms of flexibility – an aspect of great importance in an area where unforeseen developments and varying expectations often dictate the agenda. As regards institutional structures, coordination between DGs on their large number of

³⁸ See: Commission (2005): COM (2005) 494 final - "The Commission's Contribution for the Period of Reflection and Beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate", p. 8.

³⁹ The reader is invited to consult the executive summary at the beginning of this study for a detailed overview of the main findings and recommendation of the study.

information activities has not always been optimal in the past. However, recent measures introduced in the framework of Commissioner Wallström's Action Plan (e.g. regular meetings of the External Communication Network consisting of the heads of the information units of the various DGs) appear promising and deserve every support. To conclude, considerable achievements have already been made, but in many ways, European information policy still remains 'work in progress'.

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Annex: General Developments concerning European information policy

The area of information has seen major changes and challenges between 2000 and 2005 – both concerning the budget and the organisational structures.

Budgetary developments

As regards the structure of the community budget, there has been a change through the introduction of “activity-based management” (ABM) from 2004 onwards that very much affected the area of information. Before, the chapters in the operational budget were much more general and unclear. The present budget structure allows better allocating the different costs, as budget lines refer in more detail to the different expenditures. The original distinction between communication and information, however, has been maintained.

For 2007, the Commission proposes in its Preliminary Draft Budget revisions to the structure of Title 16, notably the introduction of a chapter called “Going Local” (16 03). This chapter regroups parts of current budget articles to comprehensively cover “the European Union’s expenditure on decentralised communication”⁴⁰ and “specific actions on priority themes” such as the PRINCE programme on the future of the Union. The proposed new budget structure appears more adapted to the aims formulated in the ‘White Paper’, ‘Action Plan’ and ‘Plan-D’ to give the EU’s communication and information efforts a more strategic approach.

After the collective resignation of the Santer Commission in 1999, the EU clearly put a prime on increased budgetary control. It found its expression in the new “financial regulation” for the budget execution which was introduced in 2003. According to Commission sources, the new rules have improved the way that public money is spent, but also created new problems. The field of information and communication was especially affected by the changes, because unforeseen events often put issues on the agenda that demand a particularly non-bureaucratic and pro-active attitude in this policy area. However, spontaneous support for information or communication activities by civil society actors has become very difficult.⁴¹

The new rules also created considerable transitional problems concerning the implementation of funds. The shift towards a decentralised management (following the rule ‘qui decide, gère’ – those officials who spend money, are also responsible for its management) was asked (too) much from many officials at the time, as they mostly did not have prior experience in budgetary matters. The implementation rate of the year 2004 was thus exceptionally low, with some interview partners using the word “paralysis” for that period. Since then the situation has, however, improved significantly – as the figures for DG COMM below show:

Table A.1. Budget Implementation DG COMM (Title 16 plus all additional credits managed by the DG)

Implementation rate	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Operational appropriations	86%	76%	82%	70%	89%

As not only the management of funds, but also the information policy of the Commission itself is organised in a decentralised way (i.e. each DG being responsible for its own information unit), this structure is also reflected in the budget. As a consequence, resources are very much dispersed across the budget. Generally speaking, they can be divided into three categories:

⁴⁰ See the Preliminary Draft Budget 2007 (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/budget/data/AP2007_VOL4/EN/nmc-titleN17942/nmc-chapterN17CB7/articles/index.html#N60591244539-5).

⁴¹ Somewhat more flexible rules can, however, be expected for 2007.

- 1) For the **resources of the information units and the various information-related activities of the sectoral DGs** an official document providing a comprehensive overview on expenditure does unfortunately not exist.⁴² The budgets for each DG are comparatively moderate, but still vary considerably.⁴³ For example, while DG Admin⁴⁴ or DG Budget⁴⁵ has an operational budget of about 300.000 euros, DG AGRI⁴⁶ disposes of about 8.5 million euros and DG REGIO of about 6.5 million euros⁴⁷.
- 2) The **priority information programmes for European citizens (PRINCE)** cover a number of issues that are agreed jointly every year with the European Parliament in the Interinstitutional Group on Information (IGI). They are managed by the DGs that are in charge of the respective policies.
- 3) The **resources under Title 16 ('Information and Communication')** form a distinct budget title and are therefore relatively easy to track. The operational part of the budget title (and a minor part of the administrative one – i.e. 16 01 04) is managed by DG COMM. It counts for roughly one third of the Commission's operational budget for information and communication and thus constitutes the biggest coherent part. The following table gives an overview of the developments of resources:

Table A.1 Commitments appropriations, 2000-06 (in euro)

	Operational budget DG PRESS / DG COMM*	Total – Title B3-3/Title 16**
2000	67 600 000	93 500 000
2001	72 534 000	86 567 500
2002	77 946 000	105 205 600
2003	83 547 000	116 847 000
2004	78 079 000	173 163 680***
2005	84 735 000	185 109 617
2006	85 005 000	200 716 817

* Figures provided by DG Comm, Directorate D (Resources).

** Until 2003: Title B3-3; from 2004: Title 16; figures taken from the respective General Budgets 2000-06.

*** *Note:* The increase in relation to 2003 is not primarily due to an increase in expenditure, but to a different structure of the old Title B3-3 compared to the new Title 16. Thus, concerning the second column of the table only the years 2000 to 2003 can be compared directly with each other as well as the years 2004 to 2006.

Institutional developments

When DG X (similar to today's DG Comm) had been abolished by the Prodi Commission, those parts of DG EAC that concerned the communication with the wider public were transferred to the spokesperson service (Service des Porte-Paroles – SPP) at the end of 2000. The SPP came under direct responsibility of the Commission president together with the representations, Europe by Satellite (EbS) and the Europa website. In April 2001 the “DG Press and Communication” was founded, an innovation actively supported by the then president of the European Parliament, Nicole Fontaine. The

⁴² According to an official from DG Budget such an overview should however exist from 2007 onwards due to the efforts in the framework of DG COMM's “Action Plan to improve Communicating Europe by the Commission”.

⁴³ Comparability of 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 subjects of higher technicality. As a consequence, a relatively larger part 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.

⁴⁴ According to an estimate from a Commission official for 2004.

⁴⁵ €300,000 for 2005 according to the head of DG Budget's information unit.

⁴⁶ According to an estimate from a Commission official for 2004.

⁴⁷ According to an official from the information unit of DG REGIO as an average for the years 2000 to 2005

aim of this reorganisation was to come to a new integrated approach of the Commission's information and communication policy, which was to be characterised by:

- a reinforced cooperation with the other institutions, the member states and civil society, and
- stronger decentralisation (“information de proximité”).⁴⁸

Media relations remained under Commission President Prodi and the other services were under the responsibility of Antonio Vitorino, Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs. During the Prodi Commission the main emphasis was put on media, but the Commission also endorsed a new strategy aiming at communicating EU political priorities to close the ‘communication gap’. In this context three Commission communications were published, sometimes also referred to as ‘Vitorino 1 – 3’.⁴⁹ The first two communications focused on how the Commission should work together with the Member States and the European Parliament and on how to elaborate and convey a message to the European citizens. It largely followed a top-down approach agreed with the EP and financed by the PRINCE programme. The third Communication gave concrete advice on the implementation of the communication strategy. It also addressed the problems posed by the new financial regulations that did not permit national governments to pay direct subsidies to subcontractors any longer when these governments had received EU money (so-called ‘subsidies en cascade’). The communication introduced the concept of ‘management partnerships’: If governments receive co-funding from the community budget, they have to apply the (strict) EU rules established by the new financial regulation. The first such management partnership has been signed with Germany recently.

In November 2004 Margot Wallström was appointed as Commissioner for ‘Interinstitutional Relations and Communication’. In June 2005, Wallström published the ‘Action Plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission’ with concrete proposals for the Commission itself. It was followed in October 2005 by ‘Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate’ intended as “the Commission’s contribution to the period of reflection and beyond”. Finally, on 1 February 2006 the ‘White Paper on a European Communication Policy’ was published aiming to establish a “European public sphere”. The consultation period for this paper is still ongoing.

⁴⁸ Rapport Annuel d’Activité 2001 de la Directions Générale Presse et Communication, p. 2.

⁴⁹COM (2001) 354 final: “Communication from the Commission on a New Framework for Co-operation on Activities Concerning the Information and Communication Policy of the European Union”, 27.06.2001.

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