



AER Position on the Commission's White Paper on a European Communication Policy

The Assembly of European Regions (AER), representing 255 regions from across Europe and 13 interregional associations,

having regard to the:

Commission's White Paper on a European Communication Policy COM(2006)35

Draft Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Commission's Contribution to the Period of Reflection and Beyond: Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate and on the White Paper on European Communication Policy (CONST IV-002)

adopted the following position at its plenary session held in Debrecen, Hajdú-Bihar (HU) on 17th May 2006:

- Welcomes the Commission's White Paper on a European Communication Policy and, in particular, the fact that it repeatedly emphasizes the important role that regional authorities can play in communicating Europe to the citizens. This demonstrates progress in the Commission's approach to regions, demonstrating that they are viewed as valued partners for the European institutions
- Reminds the European institutions that, if the European Union is to really reconnect with the citizens, it urgently needs to identify new and innovative ways to get its message not only to the lobbyists and policy communities in Brussels, but also out to the citizens in the regions
- In this respect draws attention to the fact that citizens generally do not feel that the EU is using their language to communicate with them, and therefore underlines the need for European policy messages to be expressed in simple everyday terminology that citizens can understand
- Therefore reminds the European institutions that regions can help to translate European policies into both a local context and a language that is understood on the ground
- Welcomes the concept of the creation of a 'European Public Sphere' and highlights the fact that such a sphere already exists at the regional level through the AER, which has fostered the development of a truly pan-European political culture stretching across the whole continent and reaching right to the citizens on the ground
- Welcomes the concept of the organisation of a series of 'Stakeholder Forums' with specific interest groups, in order to allow them to feed into the debate on communicating Europe to the citizen, and asks the European Commission to commit to organising a specific forum with local and regional authorities
- Stresses that, in order for regions to be able to play a full role in communicating European issues effectively, regional staff and politicians need to be provided with training in European affairs, and asks for European resources to be made available to support such training
- Welcomes, in this regard, the intention expressed in the White Paper to set up a European Programme for Training in Public Communication, under which officials from European and national institutions could receive training in communication and media technologies, but stresses the importance of extending this training programme to the regional level
- Highlights the fact that, as regions play a key role in implementing EU programmes and legislation, they can play a key role in publicising them to their citizens, providing information in their libraries, information centres and websites

- Therefore also calls upon the Commission to make financial resources available for local communication initiatives on European themes, which would give very concrete examples of how European policies affect local communities, making use of specific case studies and best practice examples from the region concerned
- Stresses that the Commission will not succeed in developing policies that really work on the ground and that gain the acceptance of the citizens without the full involvement of those people who will be responsible for the implementation of the policy, i.e. the regional and local authorities
- Welcomes, in this regard, the fact that the Commission recognises in the White Paper that there has to be a shift from 'monologue' to 'dialogue' and stresses that, in order for this to be the case, new mechanisms will need to be put into place that will allow stakeholders such as the regions to feed the results of their debates back into the European policy-making process
- And finally, underlines its willingness to work closely with the European institutions in engaging the regions in, on the one side, communicating Europe effectively to the citizens and, on the other, communicating the views of the citizens in the regions to the European institutions.

JB, April 2006

