

Foreword to the *Open Letter to European Authorities* by the European federation of public communication associations:

## "Better communication with European citizens"

*Practice of communication by public administrations all over Europe (state, regional or local governments and services), clearly and constantly demonstrates **that communication aiming at informing and associating citizens could not come down to mass propaganda. It needs communications based on data exchange and sharing, on debating of issues.***

*One cannot struggle against prejudices and false ideas about Europe, one cannot change behaviours by advertising, propaganda or mere promotion. At the opposite, is required a communication policy that makes information available on the ground, and that relays locally the people's preoccupations.*

*On account of distant European institutions, permanent local relays could take up the challenge of **speaking to the whole continent in languages understandable in every neighbourhood.***

**Communicating Europe** is a challenge.

First, the image transmitted by Europe is not positive. Above all, role and actions of the European Commission have not been relayed with proper pedagogy by the governments of member states: so that many depreciating attitudes and declarations from citizens, consumers and opinion leaders could have been avoided.

Due to that lack of accessible information, explanations and motivations, the actions of the European Commission, which are highly abstract and complex, are perceived as technocratic, unaware of the social demands and of an emerging European culture.

European civil servants and officials seem to be even less aware than their national counterparts of the fact that messages from public authorities are perceived as inauthentic as long as they are not truly and fully part of policies implementing. **Communication must be included in action.**

**The EU Commission** attempts to put forward plans of action to improve the communication of Europe. Results are rather unconvincing although intentions were good, and despite efforts of the **European Parliament** - and its representations in member states - linked to the affirmation and enforcement of its competences.

Promoting Europe does not mean "selling an idea" by using mass information, just as advertising techniques and mass medias do. The point is to put the citizens at the heart of the European public debate. The matter is not to organize intermittent propaganda or campaigns about the decisions of the EU institutions. Instead, informal debates should be set up in all part of society to discuss and emphasize the relevance and justifications of European decisions.

The media have their share of responsibility in this communication gap: responding to commercial rate-oriented agendas, they consider that the audience is "not interested", that Europe does not "sell well" or is not "spectacular" enough.

Last June, a report by Mr Herbillon, a member of the French Parliament, proposed to make up for that information gap and notably to make French people aware of Europe as soon as schooldays, to make the political scene "more European" and to render Europe more visible with symbols apt to increase a "European consciousness".

It seems crucial to implicate more widely the civil society –communities, unions and societies. Above all, **professionals in charge of corporate communication on behalf of public authorities of all levels**, are well positioned in central, regional and local administrations, assemblies and governments, as well as in various organisations promoting general interest matters. They can transmit the expectations of citizens up to European institutions and, on the other side, translate the words of Europe in everyone’s languages. By all means, they are **essential relays**.

**The feacp proposes that European authorities rely permanently on these “public communicators”** as they call themselves through their professional associations. In their hands, communication on European matters could be more direct and more adapted to the daily and local preoccupations of citizens all through Europe. This should be a true communication, that is dialoguing in both ways with reactive citizens.

In each country, communication often helps to maintain and improve dialogue between people and public authorities. To establish confidence with citizens is a key factor to share information and knowledge or to have a real social debate.

**European citizenship needs European public debate.**

Professionals in charge of information and communications for central and local authorities have come together in several countries of the EU in order **to gather their know-how** and exchange experiences **about information and relations with citizens** :

France’s “*Communication publique*”, Italy’s “*Comunicazione Pubblica*”, *Associazione Italiana della Comunicazione Pubblica e Istituzionale*, Spain’s *Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación, Dir-Com*, Belgium’s *Association Communication publique Wallonie-Bruxelles*, along with the flamish *Kortom (Vereniging voor Overheidscommunicatie)*, UK’s *LG Com (Local Government communications)* are the first members of the **European federation of public communication association**.

Awaiting UK’s *CIPR (Chartered institute for public relations)*, Germany’s *Bundesverband deutscher Pressesprecher (public affairs comitee)* and Netherland’s *VVO Dutch association for government communication* to join the federation, with other members met in our next January conference in Brussels,.

**The feacp could offer European authorities, both Commission and European Parliament communication services, operational professional groups that could relay the messages released by these authorities.**

**Communication professionals of European institutions** should consider our federation as partners and key elements of their communication strategies. Our “public communicators” are **the good link** in the communication chain.

The network of public communication professionals all around Europe is an asset for establishing close relationship with citizens. They know their motivations, aspirations, cultures and languages.

It is a duty for public communication professionals in Europe, so is for the *feacp*, to act towards European authorities so as to take part to a comprehensive communication and information strategy close to citizens’ preoccupations.

**If Europe wants to appeal to people’s hearts and minds and speak to citizens, Europe must share communication.**