Summary of discussions at the <u>informal videoconference</u>

<u>of the members of the Working Party on Information</u>

on next steps on the way to enhancing coordination of communication on EU actions in

combatting COVID-19 and ensuring a safe return to normal conditions

1.	*Working Party*	Working Party on Information (Communication)
2.	*Date of meeting*	9 June 2020
3.	*Chair*	Reijo Kemppinen, Director-General, DG COMM
4.	*Date*	18 June 2020
5.	*Summary*	The meeting was called as a follow-up to WPI meeting held on 18 May 2020 in response to the IPCR invitation to the WPI to launch a work strand on communications efforts in the context of Covid-19. The Chair presented proposals for **concrete next steps on the way to improve coordination between the Member States and the EU institutions** as set out in WK 5744/2020. They included *inter alia*: (i) ensuring that MS have a better overview of the institutions' communications plans, (ii) providing more visual EU-branded communication materials to be produced by the institutions for MS's use in their national campaigns, (iii) ensuring that the provided materials can be easily customised and localised, (iv) enhancing cooperation at local level between MS authorities and Commission representations as well EP Liaison Offices. Delegations generally **supported the operational suggestions aimed at improving coordination of cooperation.** There was also general support for the **role of the WPI** in this context**,** though several delegations called for a clearer differentiation to be made between the WPI and the role of other bodies (e.g. IPCR Crisis Communication Network (CCN) or ERCHT working party). **Early sharing of communication plans, social media templates and customisation of materials were broadly supported.** Some emphasised the need for multilingualism and availability of materials in all EU official languages. Many delegations highlighted the ongoing good cooperation at member states level with Commission Representations and European Parliament Liaison Offices. The potential role of EU delegations for communication in the neighbourhood and particularly in the Western Balkans was also put forward by several delegations. Another suggestion related to **extending this coordination of communication efforts to ensure continuity beyond the crisis.**

| | | Some concerns or questions was raised about: the best platform for sharing of information and materials; the new network of lower level practitioners; and the additional workload that quantitative data collection may require.

The EP was represented by ███████████████ ██████████████████████████████████████.
The Commission was represented by █████████ ████████████ ████████████████████.

The Chair of the IPCR CCN, █████████ was also invited but could not participate in the VTC.

Two delegations did not intervene during the meeting, but would provide their views in writing. |
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| 6. | *Details* | The **Chair** referred to the interinstitutional cooperation and preparatory work prior to this meeting. He summarised the main proposals for cooperation as discussed in the previous meeting on 18 May 2020: earlier and better overview of EU institutions communication plans; use of the existing COVID19 Europa website; social media templates; cooperation on national level with Commission Representations and European Parliament Liaison Offices. In addition, the Chair stressed the importance of regular feedback and ensuring close coordination with other Council bodies, such as the IPCR CCN, the Horizontal Working Party on Enhancing Resilience and Countering Hybrid Threats.

While delegations **broadly agreed with the role of WPI in terms of strategic coordination of communication**, a couple of delegations sought a clearer differentiation of the roles of the different fora to avoid any duplication of work.

Overall, delegations welcomed the operational suggestions presented by the Chair, which were developed together with the Commission and EP services.

Delegations universally welcomed advance **sharing of EU institutions communication plans**.

Delegations also agreed on the need for a **common website at EU level.** They could accept that it was not necessary at this stage to create a new one, but called for improvements to the Europa.eu site in terms of content and its attractiveness. In future crisis situations, it was suggested that a common website should be set up from the outset.

Delegations agreed that **social media templates** were very helpful for providing messages, but some highlighted that common messages/narratives are even more important. Given the differing situations in the member states, several mentioned the importance of customisation and availability of material in their language for **easy localisation**.

It was suggested that localisation of messages could also be facilitated by the **closer cooperation with Commission representations and EP Liaison Offices** in MS, which is already working well in many member states. |

In terms of **operational arrangements**, some concern was raised about the potential use of the Rapid Alert System as the umbrella platform to share information and communication materials, given its limited user-friendliness and its links with fighting disinformation. Several delegations queried the possible creation of a new network of lower level practitioners. A couple of delegations noted that due to national specificities, it might be necessary to have more than one contact person.

In addition, during the table round several delegations expressed support for **common messaging together with EU delegations** in third countries, particularly those in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership. Several delegations also highlighted the importance of communicating with citizens in an accurate and timely manner based on facts and in their languages to help counter disinformation.

There was a call to ensure continuity beyond the current crisis by transforming the newly suggested tools and working methods into a blueprint for future crisis communication, based on an assessment of how it works in practice. Most delegations agreed that the regular provision of qualitative feedback should be the basis for this assessment rather than quantitative data collection, which could lead to additional workload for MS.

The **EP representative** welcomed cooperation between EU institutions and MS in communicating about the pandemic and recovery. The EP is already cooperating a lot via the EPLOs by sharing of materials, joint events, inviting each other's representatives, and support for activities. As in other communication campaigns, EP communication campaign on COVID-19 is quite decentralised with EPLOs free to decide which central materials to use and adapt. The EP at central level has produced a number of multilingual products for raising awareness on COVID-19 actions. However, the EPLOs' materials may be more useful for national authorities, so cooperation on the ground is key. The EP is happy to receive feedback on what type of products work and what does not and favours measures that are not too resource intensive.

The **Commission representative** noted that citizens see the EU as a whole and, therefore, coordination of communication activities is needed in particular to show the real impact of EU actions. The Commission stressed the strong role that EU member states have to play in bringing the EU closer to citizens. The Commission briefly presented a new app, 'Re-open Europe', which would be launched on 15 June 2020 together with a website. It aims at helping EU citizens to plan their travel in Europe. All member states are invited to help in promoting it - multilingual promotional materials will be shared.

The Commission is also planning a broad communication campaign on the recovery, which would run from July 2020 until February 2021. Building on the Europe Day experience on COVID communication - testimonials and examples of how the EU actions benefit citizens - the campaign will target all MS and will be translated in 24 languages. Promotion at national level by the MS is welcome. The campaign's objectives are firstly to raise awareness about the benefits of the EU actions on the COVID19 pandemic and its role in the road to recovery, and secondly to strengthen trust in EU institutions. The Commission

		is about to adopt on 10 June, a communication on disinformation and Covid19. The **Chair** summarised the main take-aways from the interventions and invited delegations to share any further contributions in writing.
7.	*Next procedural steps*	The **Chair** undertook to: - analyse delegations' comments together with the other EU institutions and the current and the incoming presidencies; - asked delegations to nominate SPOCs to act as contact points on the operational level during the implementation phase; - report back at the **next WPI meeting**, which is likely to be held **in late June or early July**.