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DG COMM

Summary report of the <u>informal videoconference of Working Party on Information</u>

on improving coordination between member states and institutions on communication about

EU actions against Covid-19

1.	*Working Party*	Working Party on Information (Communications)
2.	*Date of meeting*	18 May 2020
3.	*Chair*	Reijo Kemppinen, Director-General for Communication and Information (COMM)
4.	*Date*	19 May 2020
5.	*- Summary*	The meeting was called in response to the IPCR invitation to the WPI to launch a work strand on communications efforts in the context of Covid-19. Delegations were invited to describe their needs and suggest the best ways in which the institutions could help improve coordination of communication actions with the aim of raising public awareness about the EU actions against the pandemic as well as the post-Covid recovery plans. Delegations almost universally **supported the need for stronger coordination of communication efforts**. At the same time, many **cautioned against duplication of work** in other fora (e.g. IPCR Crisis Communication Network (CCN) or EEAS StratCom). They also asked to **build coordination using existing tools**, instead of proliferating platforms where information is shared. There was some support for agreeing on **common narratives/messaging**, but with strong caveats that member states are in different situations and this may prove difficult. Delegations put forward a number of **operational suggestions**. The Chair of the WPI will analyse the requests brought forward by the delegations. In cooperation with the European Commission and the Parliament, the Chair will suggest specific actions to meet the member states' communication needs. They will be presented at the next WPI meeting, tentatively scheduled for 8 June.
	- Observations	The EP representative, DELETED intervened at the start of the meeting and then left. *(EUCO format)*. The Commission was represented by DELETED. The Chair of the IPCR CCN, Ave Eerma, also participated in the VTC. Two delegations did not intervene during the meeting.

6.	*Details*	The **Chair** referred to the invitation of the IPCR roundtable of 28/4 for the WPI to launch a work strand on communication efforts in the context of COVID and for the chair of the IPCR CCN to report on its activities on de-escalation measures. There are two main aspects : ensuring public visibility of what the EU is doing and preparing communication about the next stage of gradual lifting of restrictions and the recovery of the economy. Disinformation is an additional element, but requires a separate discussion. The **EP** representative stressed the need for a common messaging from the EU towards citizens, using the EU flag rather than logos from each institution. He referred to the good cooperation with the other EU institutions on Covid communication, citing the joint approach that was used on Europe Day to highlight what the EU is doing, showcase solidarity between MS and promote stories of solidarity by everyday heroes. The EP is relaying messages from the different public authorities which contributes to the fight against fake news, but wishes to strengthen cooperation between national authorities and the EP Liaison Offices. The **Chair of the IPCR CCN** explained how the capital-based informal network is working, highlighting that the aim is to align messages, coordinate in the best way possible and share best practices. It has provided a communication checklist, lines to take on the EU response, an initial communication mapping and a common platform with access to all communication products. Delegations agreed with the need **to strengthen the coordination of communication** between member states and EU institutions and to foster public visibility of EU actions and solidarity. At the same time, they stressed the need to **avoid duplicating work** that is already taking place in other fora, such as in the IPCR Crisis Communication Network (CCN) or by the EEAS StratCom, and to build on existing platforms where possible. In this context, a **mapping** of the existing fora and platforms was considered useful. Several delegations considered that such coordination of messaging should be on a voluntary basis. There was also a wish by a number of delegations to hold more regular WPI meetings devoted to coordination of communications and exchange of good practices. Delegations generally recognise the need to communicate to citizens in an accurate, clear, timely and transparent manner. Citizens see the EU as a whole and therefore, we need coordination of communication activities, in particular to show the real impact of EU actions. Many delegations saw the value of **common narratives/messaging**, but a number of delegations warned that this might prove difficult given the differing situations in the member states and several highlighted the need to respect national competencies. It was suggested that localisation of messages could be facilitated by closer cooperation with Commission representations and EP Liaison Offices in MS. Some delegations favoured common messaging towards the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries as well as other 3rd countries to show that the EU was a reliable partner in times of crisis. In terms of **operational arrangements**, there was strong support for having a

		common website at EU level to host and list all communication materials prepared by the EU institutions on Covid to enable MS to easily find ready to use and up-to-date communication products. Many delegations requested a **better overview of the institutions' communications plans**, preferably updated on a weekly basis, so that they could more easily use them in their national campaigns.

There was a clear call for **simple, clear, concrete and transparent messaging** and **common narratives** built on positive human stories showing what the MS and the EU have done together and the relevance of EU actions to citizens (such as the actions on repatriation). Delegations find that the **digital/visual materials** produced by the institutions (e.g. infographics, video clips, animations, common hashtags) **for use on social media or websites** are the most useful and they already use and share many of them. However, as national situations differ, such communications materials should allow for **easy localisation** by being available in customisable formats and preferably in 24 languages or with subtitles. Other suggestions included comprehensive statistics, aggregated data on public opinion and sentiment analysis, target group oriented messaging, and ready-made campaigns on different topics like the Single Market or the EU economic response. The positive impact of messages to national audiences from high level EU figures and national leaders speaking as one as in the video clip on Europe Day was also highlighted.

The **Commission representative** noted that the institutions have stepped up their collective efforts to respond and communicate as one union on the EU response to the Covid-19 pandemic and stressed the strong role that EU member states also have to play in this regard and in bringing the EU closer to citizens. The Commission, including its representations in the MS, was ready to work with the Council and the EP to support MS in their communications actions on Covid, in full complementarity with the work of the IPCR crisis communication network. Although a joint EU website already exists, it needs work to make it more user-friendly. The Commission plans to adopt, possibly on 10 June, a communication on disinformation and Covid.

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 the requests shared by delegations to see which of the specific requests could be met;
- identify, in cooperation with other institutions, the communication work strands that would bring added-value;
- propose measures and products designed to meet MS communication needs;
- report back at the **next WPI meeting, scheduled tentatively for 8 June**. |