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WORKING PAPER

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WORKING DOCUMENT

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Working Party on Information (Communication - Information Policy) Working Party on Information (Communication - Titulaires)
Subject:	Next steps on the way to improve coordination between Member States and institutions on communication about EU actions against Covid-19

Delegations will find attached a note on next steps on the way to improve coordination between Member States and institutions on communication about EU actions against Covid-19

NOTE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE WORKING PARTY TO DELEGATIONS

Subject: Next steps on the way to improve coordination between Member States and institutions on communication about EU actions against Covid-19

The last meeting of the Working Party on Information (WPI) was called on 18 May in response to the IPCR's invitation to the WPI to launch a work strand on communications efforts in the context of Covid-19.

During the meeting, delegations were invited to describe their communication needs and suggest the best ways in which the EU 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. The IPCR, the Horizontal Working Party on Enhancing Resilience and Countering Hybrid Threats (ERCHT) as well as the Antici network were informed about the results of the discussions.

I. Key conclusions following WPI meeting on 18 May

The delegations strongly 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 improve coordination using existing tools, instead of proliferating platforms where information is shared. Delegations expressed some support for agreeing on common narratives and messaging, but with strong caveats that Member States are in different situations and they need to have an ability to localise communication content to a sufficient degree.

The delegations also put forward a number of operational suggestions which can be grouped under the following **five action headings**:

- earlier and better **overview of the institutions' communications plans** including campaigns
- a **common website at EU level** for COVID19-related content
- more **visual EU-branded communication materials** (e.g. infographics, video clips, animations) for use on social media or websites
- **easy localisation** of the provided materials, including through translation and/or subtitling
- better **cooperation with Commission representations and European Parliament Liaison Offices (EPLOs)**

II. Role of WPI and internal coordination within the Council

The Working Party on Information is a preparatory body of the Council. Its role is to discuss and prepare decisions, where necessary, of the Council in the field of communication and information policy, transparency and the access to documents. Supported by the Council Secretariat, the WPI works together with networks such as the IPCR Crisis Communication Network (IPCR CCN) and other relevant working parties of the Council (e.g. ERCHT). The WPI meets as often as the needs of the Presidency of the Council and the governments of the Member States require.

In the context of COVID-related communication, the WPI discusses more general questions concerning coordination of communication efforts, in particular its scope and workflow. As a working party, it does not itself enter into operational work, for which other networks, like the IPCR CCN, are better suited due to their composition and frequency of meetings. Issues linked with fighting disinformation, should normally be handed by the responsible working party (ERCHT) and if they are discussed by the WPI, this is done in close cooperation with ERCHT. When deemed necessary, both the HWP ERCHT and the WPI can debrief the other group on their work, to make sure all delegates are well informed. In case delegates find it useful, there is a distribution code for documents on disinformation (DISINFO) that delegates can subscribe to.

The Chairs and of the relevant working parties and networks (WPI, ERCHT, IPCR CCN, etc.) as well as the services supporting them will ensure correct circulation of information to avoid the risk of duplication.

III. Suggested measures to improve coordination of communication between MS and institutions

Each of the five actions headings raised by Member States during the WPI meeting on 18 May (see point I) have been analysed by the General Secretariat of the Council in close collaboration with the Commission and the Parliament communication services. As a result, the Chair suggests the following specific activities under each heading that are designed to meet the delegation's communication needs:

A. Earlier and better overview of the institutions' communications plans

Action 1: EU institutions will provide better access for MS authorities to their most relevant communication plans.

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The GSC can provide the Member States with an overview of the planned products for the following week by the preceding Friday.

The Commission can share its relevant audiovisual and social media planning related to the crisis response and recovery as well as its planning for a recovery communication campaign as far as interinstitutional aspects are concerned.

EP's specific communication strategy varies from MS to MS, based on the national context and requirements. For this reason, the central communication strategy is of less value to the individual MS than the national ones. Bilateral cooperation between MS authorities and the EPLOs would therefore be of greatest operational benefit to all parties involved.

B. Common EU website concerning COVID response

Action 2: The already existing, inter-institutional [europa.eu website on Covid response](#) offers an overview of EU actions and acts as a gateway to individual websites of the institutions with more detailed information. At this stage, it would be inefficient to redirect traffic to a different, new website.

EU institutions have well-established web presences with comprehensive information highlighting the EU's overall response to the outbreak and elements of messaging specific for each institution, featuring country-specific examples and stories. The common, interinstitutional content created jointly by all the institutions, which is available on the common website [custom.eu](#)¹, offers an overview of the EU actions against the pandemic and links to individual websites of the institutions, where richer content can be found.

The common Europa page receives significantly less traffic than pages hosted by each institution and in the common view of the GSC, the Commission and the Parliament, it is too late and would be inefficient to redirect traffic to a new website at this stage. At the same time, the Commission, which manages the [custom.eu](#) portal, will work to improve the structure and attractiveness of the existing content.

Delegations are asked to consider including a link to the COVID-response [custom.eu](#) website¹ on their national websites concerning COVID measures and recovery plans.

¹ https://europa.eu/european-union/coronavirus-response_en

C. Social media templates and sharing of other communication materials

Action 3: EU institutions will provide MS with social media templates, which would be easy to customise and adapt to local needs. The materials could be made accessible through the Rapid Alert System (RAS) platform. In addition, the already produced communication will be shared, in an editable format whenever possible. Using common hashtags on all materials when communicating about EU recovery (e.g. #StrongerTogether) should be encouraged.

New social media templates

Bite-sized visual content, which spreads quickly on social media, is how political communication happens today. Content must engage citizens where they are, on devices they use, in formats and languages they like and can relate to, while competing against everything else.

We propose the creation of social media templates, which would be provided by the institutions. The templates would be easily adaptable and useable by communicators such as social media officers or press officers in their Member States.

The templates would come with a number of fixed elements:

- a banner featuring the EU flag alongside the flag of a member state and a common hashtag #StrongerTogether
- a consistent colour palette using the blue from the EU flag, thus making a connection with the EU stronger
- consistent background imagery and icons

Member States would retain complete editorial freedom to localise the templates by providing their own messaging. The templates would be made available in an easy-to-use format in which:

- all the text elements would be editable
- photos would be editable

The empty templates with a common banner could also be used by Member States to publish and promote snippets of infographics produced by EU institutions on social media.

We propose starting with Twitter vignette templates. Below are a few examples:



EU institutions are ready to work together to expand the library of templates to include other social media channels such as Instagram or Facebook.

Sharing of existing communication materials

Apart from the new social media templates, the institutions are also willing to share with Member States other assets which have already been or will be produced. For example, the Commission's social media team is willing to share the source files and templates of its EU-branded social media assets on the EU's crisis response and recovery. In addition, top line messages on the EU's crisis response and recovery could be shared by the EU institutions and easily customized by Member States to national contexts. The European Parliament has produced a number of multi-lingual products aimed at raising awareness about EU action in relation to Covid-19, civic messages and messages about EU solidarity on the topic.

Delegations will be provided with a list of available materials after the meeting.

Storage and sharing of the templates

The templates (and other communication material) could be made available on the Rapid Alert System (RAS) platform, which was developed by the EEAS as part of the Action Plan against Disinformation. A specific area within RAS can be created to allow for upload/download of communication material but also as a place for exchange of information and cooperation.

A dedicated, distinct group of users, appointed by the Member States, would be created and equipped with two-factor authentication control. A platform would be given a new name that would reflect its purpose of more strategic, coordinated communication effort.

The governance of the platform would be ensured jointly by the EU institutions. Strong but simple governance rules would be established to ensure the orderly functioning of the platform and sustainable content management.

D. Easy localisation of the provided messages and materials

Action 4: Social media templates will be editable, allowing Member States to localise and adapt them further. Other communication materials and messages that will be shared with MS will usually be provided in all EU languages.

A majority of infographics that are available on the Consilium website are available in all the languages. They could be made available in editable formats, thus allowing Member States to localize and adapt them further to maximize their reach, impact and engagement potential.

A majority of social media visuals produced by the GSC, which are often short-lived, are currently published in English only or in a limited number of languages (depending on distribution objectives). However, for more strategic campaigns considered as such by the WPI, the GSC would look into the possibility of providing social media visuals in all the EU languages.

Commission videos in original versions and the transcripts for the Commission representations to add subtitles in national languages are already available. Commission representations stand ready to help with the customization of the content. Sign language interpretations for the most important videos dealing with the coronavirus emergency are also available.

Almost all content developed by the European Parliament is available in all languages. Should additional specific content be required by individual MS, this can be discussed with the EPLOs in the Member States and possible development of additional material in specific languages can be considered.

E. Local cooperation with the Commission representations and EPLOs in Member States

Action 5: Commission representations and EPLOs in the Member States stand ready to expand their local cooperation with national authorities. To stimulate such cooperation, the WPI can periodically review the state of play whereby delegations could share examples of best practice at local level.

During the WPI meeting, many delegations stated that one size does not fit all. The staff of the Commission and the Parliament on the ground have the best overview on which products could be the most useful and relevant. In some Member States, there is already informal or formal cooperation ongoing between Commission representations, EPLOs and national authorities, which would be a good basis to build on and expand when communicating on the EU's crisis response and recovery.

- The GSC will ensure that regular contacts at the WPI level facilitate **coherent flow of information** between EU institutions based in Brussels, their representations/offices in Member States, communication experts in capitals and permanent representations. It should also give to MS an opportunity to express their needs and expectations concerning concrete products to be offered via local cooperation.
- The GSC will coordinate via WPI contacts and support Member States in receiving **up to date information about new communication products and campaigns** involving Commission representations and EPLOs.
- The GSC will ensure that the WPI will serve as a platform where communication practitioners from Member States have **direct access (via presentations) to data and surveys** commissioned by the Commission and the Parliament.
- The GSC can also facilitate **circulation of lists of the Commission and Parliament's contact points** in Member States who could be helpful in the identification of relevant products.

The Commission and the Parliament support a proposal of a network of lower level practitioners. Thus, the WPI level could serve for exchanges of strategic information and to keep communication channels open with capitals and working level could serve to provide directly information about accessible products and direct links to national officials.

IV. Implementation - operational team and delegations' SPOCs

Provided the suggested actions are supported by delegations, the Chair will coordinate their implementation. **Together with other institutions, the GSC will form an operational team responsible for the implementation of the actions.** Delegations will be informed about the detailed working methods, including ways of sharing the institutions' communication plans and the functioning of the RAS platform.

To ensure efficient flow of information, **delegations will be asked to nominate a person who will act as a single point of contact** for the operational team set-up by the institutions. Such person will receive all the information regarding implementation of the actions. He or she will be given access to the RAS platform and will also be asked to inform the GSC operational team about evolving communication needs as well as share on-the-spot feedback concerning prepared materials.

V. Feedback and evaluation by WPI

Regular feedback and monitoring of usage data are key to allow all parties to evaluate the results of the improved cooperation between Member States and the institutions as well as the relevance and value of communication products

There will be **two main ways in which the WPI will be able to assess the efficiency of the suggested actions** and decide on any changes needed:

- **Qualitative feedback:** during every upcoming meetings of the WPI where communication items will be discussed, delegations will be given an opportunity to share their feedback and best practices on how the suggested actions met their expectation and if they should be adjusted in any way. This may be done through a short, structured questionnaire sent out to delegations ahead of the meeting. The Commission would also provide functional mailboxes to which Member States could feed examples of their action in the context of the EU's crisis response and recovery;
- **Quantitative assessment:** the GSC will be monitoring and sharing data on: (i) the usage of the visual materials provided (the number of downloads of each product) and (ii) the number of visits to the site containing the overview of the GSC communication plans.

VI. Questions for delegations

- *Do delegations agree with the way the role of the WPI has been described in point II?*
 - *Do delegations support the implementation of the measures as explained in point III (letters A-E)? What suggestions or comments do delegations have in order to make the measures more useful and adjusted to their communication needs?*
 - *Do delegations agree with the suggested ways to implement the actions, as described in point IV, as well as share feedback and best practices and monitor the use of the provided assets as outlined in point V?*
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