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

At the informal videoconference of the Working Party on Information (WPI) on 9 June, the Chair presented proposals for concrete next steps on the way to improve coordination between the member states and the EU institutions in the context of Covid-19, based on the presentation of needs by delegations.

During the meeting, delegations were invited to react to the proposed actions and the description of the role of the WPI in this context.

I.   Key conclusions following WPI meeting on 9 June

Delegations supported the five operational suggestions aimed at improving coordination of cooperation:
- early sharing of corporate communication plans of Commission, Council and Parliament
- common EU website concerning COVID-19 response - europa.eu (to be upgraded)
- sharing of communication materials and social media templates (infographics, video clips, animations) via a common platform
- easy localisation of the provided materials, in customisable formats
- strengthened cooperation with Commission representations and EPLOs.

Several delegations asked about the practicalities for using the EEAS rapid alert system (RAS) as the common platform for sharing of information and materials.

There was general support for the role of the WPI in communication about EU actions against COVID-19, as set out by the Chair in the note to delegations (WK 5744/20), 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).

II.   Actions to improve coordination of communication between MS and institutions - update

Following the meeting on 9 June, the General Secretariat of the Council (GSC) has been working in close cooperation with the Commission and the Parliament communication services to implement the five actions discussed by the WPI. The following steps have been taken:

1.   Earlier and better overview of the institutions' communications plans (weekly update)

The GSC has started providing an update every Friday, via its WhatsApp group for visual and audiovisual products, containing an overview of the products planned for the following week as well as links to the visual materials and names of responsible persons. Since 26 June, the weekly update also includes the Commission's planning related to the crisis response and recovery. In July, information from the EP will be included.

Member States can designate up to three persons to receive these weekly updates. At present, all 27 WPI delegates (SPOCs) and 5 persons from capitals have signed up. Requests for joining should be sent to: newsdesk@consilium.europa.eu.

2. **Common EU website concerning COVID-19 response**

The common website europa.eu, which contains interinstitutional content agreed by all the institutions, offers an overview of EU actions against the pandemic.

Delegations have acknowledged that EU institutions have each created and maintained comprehensive digital content that receives a substantial amount of traffic and it is too late and would be inefficient to set up a new website and redirect traffic to it.

Having consulted the GSC and the EP services, the Commission, which is in charge of europa.eu, is in the process of revamping the interinstitutional COVID19 response web page. It should go live soon and be available in 24 EU languages.

The idea is to have less text and for the page to be more of a 'hub'. It follows the following principles:

- give high visibility to inter-institutional content
- give high prominence to the coronavirus crisis response related content of the EU institutions and the member states
- promote the actions in the area of EU solidarity, the fight against disinformation and the recovery plan.

3. **Sharing of communication materials and social media templates**

Social media templates.

Social media templates that are created as part of various communications campaigns will be shared regularly with member states. By way of example, the Commission shared a set of social media templates prior to the launch of the website reopen.europa.eu on 15 June.

The GSC will shortly circulate new editable templates on the recovery phase for use by member states. The templates have several fixed elements:

- a banner featuring the EU flag alongside the flag of a member state
- a common hashtag #StrongerTogether
- a consistent colour palette and iconography.

Member states retain complete editorial freedom to fill the templates with content and localise them by providing their own messaging. The templates will be available in a horizontal and vertical format.

Sharing and storage of the templates on a common platform

The GSC is liaising with the EEAS to develop a specific area within its Rapid Alert System (RAS) platform as a common platform for sharing information and content on Covid-19 communications materials. The EEAS has offered to provide a basic level

platform in September where upload/download of communication material will be possible.

In response to the questions raised by several delegates, the EEAS will customise the space to ensure a separation between the two elements - RAS dealing with disinformation and RAS devoted to a coordinated communication related to COVID-19. The choice of the EEAS platform had been based on two elements: quality of the platform and the short time needed to make the platform available. The three institutions agreed that this is the only option available in a medium-term perspective.

The basic platform will allow:

- the uploading of documents in different formats (including pictures, videos, design files)
- management of such documents organised by tags and folders
  - the user will be able to assign tags to a document
  - folders are created automatically based on the tags
- a search functionality (based again on the tags).

Other aspects:

- the file size is limited to 100mb - this size limit should be respected to avoid slowing down the system (videos can be embedded)
- no more than 200 people can be invited to join the group
- the GSC has nominated a platform administrator to oversee invitations and membership management
- the space would be called the "COMM Communication Portal" and can be changed at any time
- governance of the platform would be ensured jointly by the EU institutions.

Delegations will receive further information on the proposed set-up and timing at the WPI on 7 July.

4. **Easy localisation** of the provided materials

A majority of infographics provided on the Consilium website are available in all the languages. They can be made available in editable formats on request, thus allowing member states to localize and adapt them further to maximize their reach, impact and engagement potential.

For campaigns with a long shelf-life, such as strategic campaigns, the GSC would endeavor to provide social media visuals in all the EU languages. However, the majority of social media visuals produced by the GSC are often short-lived and are currently published in English only or in a limited number of languages (depending on distribution objectives).

Audiovisual material produced by the GSC is primarily available in English. If member states find some of the products useful, they can request a version in their language via the WhatsApp group.

5. **Strengthened cooperation with the Commission Representations and EP Liaison Offices in Member States**

The European Commission and the European Parliament have offices in all the Member States. One of their tasks is to cooperate with national governments and other stakeholders at national and regional level in order to enhance the impact of EU related communication on the ground.

The two institutions have signed 'Strategic partnership' with seven EU governments (Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg and Spain).

In addition, there are other formal and informal partnerships in most Member States, both with national governments and other stakeholders (NGOs, municipalities, academia, industry, EIB, agencies implementing EU programmes). So far, the cooperation has focused mainly on Europe Day, Citizens dialogues, EU-related educational projects, promotion of EU funding and disinformation.

According to the Commission, Partnership formats and possibilities for cooperation or joint action are conditioned by local circumstances. Therefore, the Commission and the Parliament believe that a targeted approach, based on a joint assessment of the communication environment in each Member State is the best way forward.

Instead of signing formal agreements the two institutions would prefer to focus on cultivating the spirit of working in partnership.

The Chair of the WPI proposes that the working party would regularly exchange views on the functioning of the cooperation with the EU institutions at local level, including on best practices. Such critical review would aim to give the Commission and the Parliament actionable feedback and share views of the Council in this area.

6. **Communicating the EU's Coronavirus Response - What Member States can do**

Answering to the needs expressed by delegates to be informed about larger campaigns planned by EU institutions, the Commission has provided a document, circulated to the WPI on 29 June, which is aimed at contributing to improving the coordination of communication between the EU institutions and Member States. Delegations are invited to use the information to complement and reinforce communication at national or local level on the EU's Coronavirus response and recovery.

The document contains relevant links to online resources and communication assets, stories and examples that delegations are free to use.

III. Feedback and evaluation

The aim is to have regular feedback from delegations so as to evaluate if the actions taken and communication products provided meet the needs of member states.

At every meeting of the WPI (Communications), delegations will be given an opportunity to share their feedback on how the suggested actions met their expectation and if they should be adjusted in any way. In future, this may be done through a short, structured questionnaire sent out to delegations ahead of the meeting.

To avoid any additional burden for member states, the GSC will provide an assessment of how the visual materials have been used (e.g. number of visits to the site containing the overview of the GSC communication plans and number of downloads of each product). In the longer term, if it is considered necessary, a more detailed analysis of usage data may be set up.

IV. Questions for delegations

- Do delegations support the implementation of the measures as explained in point II?
- What suggestions or comments do delegations have to make the measures more useful and adjusted to their communication needs?
- What is the current state of play as regards cooperation with the EU institutions at local level, and how could it be improved? Do the delegations support the Chair's suggestion for the WPI to regularly exchange views on the functioning of such cooperation in order to provide feedback and share views of the Council in this area?

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