

Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2008/2224(INI)	Procedure completed
Active dialogue with citizens on Europe		
Subject 4.45 Common cultural area, cultural diversity 8 State and evolution of the Union		

Key players				
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed	
	CULT Culture and Education		17/06/2008	
		PSE HEGYI Gyula		
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed	
	AFET Foreign Affairs		15/07/2008	
		PSE BADIA I CUTCHET Maria		
	BUDG Budgets	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
	CONT Budgetary Control	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
	ECON Economic and Monetary Affairs	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
	EMPL Employment and Social Affairs	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
	ENVI Environment, Public Health and Food Safety	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
	ITRE Industry, Research and Energy	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
	IMCO Internal Market and Consumer Protection		07/07/2008	
		ALDE CSIBI Magor Imre		
	REGI Regional Development		05/11/2008	
		PPE-DE ANGELAKAS Emmanouil		
	AGRI Agriculture and Rural Development	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
	PECH Fisheries	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
	JURI Legal Affairs	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
	LIBE Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
AFCO Constitutional Affairs (Associated committee)				
FEMM Women's Rights and Gender Equality		21/10/2008		

PETI Petitions

06/11/2008

IND/DEM [SINNOTT Kathy](#)

European Commission

Commission DG

Commissioner

[Communication](#)

WALLSTRÖM Margot

Key events

02/04/2008	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2008)0158	Summary
23/09/2008	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
23/09/2008	Referral to associated committees announced in Parliament		
17/02/2009	Vote in committee		Summary
26/02/2009	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0107/2009	
23/03/2009	Debate in Parliament		
24/03/2009	Results of vote in Parliament		
24/03/2009	Decision by Parliament	T6-0154/2009	Summary
24/03/2009	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2008/2224(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54-p4; Rules of Procedure EP 54
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	CULT/6/66758

Documentation gateway

Non-legislative basic document		COM(2008)0158	02/04/2008	EC	Summary
Committee draft report		PE415.281	12/11/2008	EP	
Committee opinion	FEMM	PE415.021	20/01/2009	EP	
Committee opinion	IMCO	PE414.358	23/01/2009	EP	
Committee opinion	AFCO	PE415.177	26/01/2009	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE418.318	26/01/2009	EP	
Committee opinion	PETI	PE416.356	11/02/2009	EP	
Committee opinion	AFET	PE412.271	12/02/2009	EP	

Committee opinion	REGI	PE416.667	13/02/2009	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0107/2009	26/02/2009	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0154/2009	24/03/2009	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2009)3245	08/10/2009	EC	

Active dialogue with citizens on Europe

PURPOSE: to propose a new strategy called "Debate Europe" building on the experience of the Commission's 2005 Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate.

BACKGROUND: in June 2005, the European Council called for a period of reflection on how to take the institutional reform forward. In response to this call, the European Commission adopted "[Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate](#)" which aimed to encourage Member States to organise a broad public debate on the future of the European Union involving citizens, civil society, social partners, national parliaments and political parties, with the support of the EU institutions.

In June 2006, the European Council acknowledged the Commission's contribution to the period of reflection and recommended that the period of reflection should be prolonged into 2007. The period of reflection came to an end in June 2007, when the European Council agreed on a mandate for a new intergovernmental conference (IGC) to reform the institutional framework of the Union. The IGC was concluded in October and the "Reform Treaty" was signed in December 2007 in Lisbon. These events opened a new phase, with ratification of the new treaty to be followed by the European elections in June 2009. The European Council underlined the crucial importance of communicating more and better with the citizens by providing them with comprehensive information on the European Union and involving them in a permanent dialogue.

The present Communication addresses the future of the Plan D approach of "listening better, explaining better and going local" which lasted from 2005 to 2007. This approach will continue with certain adaptations in 2008 and 2009, during the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty and with due regard to the next European elections.

CONTENT: the Communication aims to contribute to one of the central objectives of the Commission's communication policy - empowering citizens by giving them access to information so that they may be in a position to hold an informed debate on EU affairs.

In assessing the results and the experience gained from the Plan D, the Commission states that the development of participatory democracy on EU-related issues at local, regional, national and cross-border level is possible and that participatory democracy can usefully supplement representative democracy. In terms of substance, they showed that there was sometimes a gap between citizens'

expectations and the actual domains of EU competence, for example in the field of social affairs, education and diplomacy/defence. The aim now is to set out a strategy to respond to these expectations and to develop a framework for communication between the EU and its citizens.

"DEBATE EUROPE": against this background, the Commission proposes a new phase of dialogue which will be named "Debate Europe", and will focus on "D for Democracy". Its aim will be to:

1) Articulate citizens' consultations held by civil society with political decision-makers: the conclusions reached by citizens will be synthesised by the citizens themselves and sent to elected politicians, political parties and foundations. A high point will be a debate between citizens and politicians on the proposals contained in the citizens' platforms.

2) Involve close cooperation and, wherever possible, joint action between EU institutions and bodies in order to maximise the impact of their endeavour to promote active European citizenship (citizens' forums; the European Parliament's communication strategies ahead of the 2009 elections and Agora debates with civil society organisations).

3) Add leverage to existing EU initiatives, including Commission programmes promoting active citizenship ? e.g. the "Europe for Citizens" programme, the European Fund for Integration of Third-Country Nationals, social cohesion and antipoverty programmes, other one-off initiatives to mark the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008)? In so doing, Debate Europe will reinforce the Commission's efforts to explain the added value of EU policies to citizens (e.g. internal market related success stories ? roaming mobile charges, low cost flights, environmental protection and the fight against climate change).

4) Pursue other successful Plan D actions (internet debates, bringing EU officials and citizens closer together; cooperation between Commission and European Parliament information offices).

A series of initiatives are proposed (described in detail in the Communication). These are as follows:

- Connecting citizens' debates to representative political bodies Debate Europe will co-fund a pan-European citizens' consultations project managed by civil society organisations in partnership with think-tanks, research organisations and universities, political parties and foundations.
- Enhancing cooperation with the European Parliament: the Commission stands ready to work with incoming EU presidencies that wish to organise citizens' summits involving the different EU institutions and bodies, thus providing a platform for giving a citizens' perspective on concrete issues to European decision-makers.
- Creating synergies between Commission programmes: the terms of reference of the Debate Europe calls for proposals will ensure that the projects selected take into account the Commission's overall political effort to promote active European citizenship. Other initiatives could be taken research (in the context of the 7th Research Framework Programme in the fields of governance and citizenship).
- Further developing other Plan D initiatives: Debate Europe will act in conjunction with ongoing initiatives in the Member States, many of which have valuable potential for inter-institutional cooperation. These include: Pilot Information Networks (PINs); European Public

Spaces as exist in Madrid, Tallinn and Dublin; Citizens' fora; the Europe Direct centres; Refining the Eurobarometer opinion polls and Internet debates.

On the technical and financial front, the Commission intends to put in place a twin-track strategy, backed by a EUR 7.2 million budget: i) a centralised call for proposals to co-finance a global trans-national project with a budget of EUR 2 million; ii) decentralised calls and actions supporting local projects with a budget of EUR 5.2 million.

Conclusion and follow-up: the EU needs more political debate and awareness if it is to achieve its objectives and deliver the right policies. Political parties and their elected representatives are in a privileged position to raise European issues in national debate and to spark cross-border public debate across Europe. The challenge is to ensure that their output feeds into the political decision-making process. In the next phase, covering 2008 and 2009, and in the wake of the European elections, 'Debate Europe' will provide an operational framework for reaching out, connecting, and acting in partnership. But it must also be viewed in the long term: 'Debate Europe' seeks to change the perception that EU matters are too abstract and disconnected from the national public sphere to be of interest to citizens, and it gives an opportunity to break the often artificial divide between national and European issues.

Active dialogue with citizens on Europe

The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Gyula HEGYI (PES, HU) on active dialogue with citizens on Europe.

The report recalls that a democratic and transparent European Union will require an enhanced dialogue between citizens and the European institutions. It notes that people with an inadequate understanding of European Union policies or of the Treaties are more likely to oppose them.

MEPs recall that surveys show that the less educated and less affluent a Union citizen is, the more likely he or she will be to oppose further European integration. In this context, they regret the fact that the success achieved in increasing the European citizens' level of knowledge and interest in European issues has been very limited, something which was, regrettably, evidenced by the Irish referendum. They therefore stress the importance of creating cohesive communication links with targeted content both between the EU and the regions with particular characteristics and between the EU and particular social groups.

MEPs stress the need to complete the ratification process of the Treaty of Lisbon, which will further increase the transparency of the EU and the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. They recall, in this context, the new opportunities for participatory democracy that the Treaty of Lisbon would provide, especially the citizens' initiative. They stress, however, that participatory democracy means not only listening to the citizens, but giving them real opportunities to influence European policy.

The report also stresses the importance of the consultation process as an effective tool in empowering citizens by enabling them to input directly into the policy process at EU level. It therefore calls on the Commission to take further steps to disseminate information in time on future EU consultations via the media and other appropriate forums at national, regional and local levels.

The Commission is called upon to improve the cooperation and coordination between its representations in the Member States and the Parliament's information offices. Moreover, the Commission and Parliament representations in Member States should improve cooperation when it comes to consulting citizens, sharing information, knowledge and ideas about the EU with citizens. MEPs also call on the three main institutions to consider the possibility of holding joint open debates that would supplement the Parliament's open debates, addressing topics that concern consumers and their daily lives.

The report also calls on the Commission to extend its dialogue to all levels by adapting its message to different target groups according to their social backgrounds. Moreover, Member States should launch effective EU communication campaigns at national, regional and local level and the Commission should disseminate the best practices identified from such campaigns.

At the same time, the report calls on the Commission to launch local, small-scale communication campaigns with the involvement of local actors, and to promote activities enabling citizens to be better informed about immigrants' countries of origin and, equally, to better inform immigrants of the rights and duties attached to EU citizenship.

MEPs stress the importance of introducing European politics and history into the school curricula of each Member State so as to strengthen European values, and of developing the European Studies departments within university programmes. They call on the Commission to provide financial support for the promotion of these projects.

The report welcomes the Commission Communication entitled 'Communicating about Europe via the Internet - Engaging the citizens', which sets out clear objectives as to how the Europa website can be turned into a service-oriented web 2.0 site. It urges the Commission to complete construction of the new site as early as 2009. In particular, the report calls on the Commission to collect and publish on this webpage the experiences of beneficiaries of the activities funded under Plan D. Moreover, the Commission should make better use of the audiovisual material available on Europe by Satellite by establishing links with local television channels and community media.

MEPs also ask the Commission to strengthen its coordination efforts in the fields of consumer education and information on consumers' rights and obligations by increasing its financial and human resources. At the same time, Member States are called upon to boost the financial and human resources allocated to the European Consumer Centres Network in order to raise awareness and ensure the application of EU consumer rights. Member States should also increase the human and financial resources allocated to the SOLVIT network.

Lastly, MEPs call on the Commission to promote programmes and campaigns for encouraging women's social, political, and cultural activeness, taking into account women's role in the dialogue between generations and society's sustainability and prosperity. Girls and women should be given better information on the concept of European citizenship and the rights pertaining thereto and the Commission should include more women in task forces and working groups, engaged with the issues of family life, childcare and education.

Active dialogue with citizens on Europe

The European Parliament adopted by 529 votes to 90, with 46 abstentions, a resolution on active dialogue with citizens on Europe, in response to the Commission Communication entitled 'Debate Europe - building on the experience of Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate' (Plan D).

The resolution recalls that a democratic and transparent European Union will require an enhanced dialogue between citizens and the European institutions, including the Parliament, but also an ongoing debate on Europe at European, national and local level.

Increasing interest in European issues: the Parliament recalls that surveys show that the less educated and less affluent a Union citizen is, the more likely he or she will be to oppose further European integration, which indicates that the European idea, in spite of all previous efforts, mainly reaches the well-educated, wealthy segment of European society. It regrets the fact that, in spite of the Commission's efforts and good ideas, the success achieved in increasing Union citizens' level of knowledge and interest in European issues has been very limited, something which was, regrettably, evidenced by the Irish referendum. The Parliament therefore stresses the importance of creating cohesive communication links with targeted content both between the EU and the regions with particular characteristics and between the EU and particular social groups.

Institutional aspects: the resolution stresses the need to complete the ratification process of the Treaty of Lisbon, which will further increase the transparency of the EU and the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. It recalls, in this context, the new opportunities for participatory democracy that the Treaty of Lisbon would provide, especially the citizens' initiative.

Consulting citizens: MEPs stress the importance and value of the consultation process as an effective tool in empowering citizens by enabling them to input directly into the policy process at EU level. The Commission is called upon to take further steps to disseminate information in time on future EU consultations via the media and other appropriate forums at national, regional and local levels.

MEPs call on the Commission and Parliament representations in Member States to improve cooperation when it comes to consulting citizens by providing opportunities for voters to meet MEPs elected in different countries and EU officials. The three main institutions are invited to consider the possibility of holding joint open debates that would supplement Parliament's open debates, addressing topics that concern consumers and their daily lives and thereby strengthening their confidence in the internal market and consumer protection.

Going local: the Parliament calls on the Commission to extend its dialogue to all levels by adapting its message to different target groups according to their social backgrounds. It proposes the creation of a permanent, interactive communication system between the EU institutions and citizens, with regular campaigns of a local and regional nature by the EU, the assistance of the regional media and the active participation of civil society, NGOs, chambers of commerce, trade unions and professional organisations.

At the same time, the Commission is called upon to launch local, small-scale communication campaigns with the involvement of local actors, and to promote activities enabling citizens to be better informed about immigrants' countries of origin and, equally, to better inform immigrants of the rights and duties attached to EU citizenship.

Education, media and ICT: the Parliament stresses the importance of introducing European politics and history into the school curricula of each Member State so as to strengthen European values, and of developing the European Studies departments within university programmes. It calls on the Commission to provide financial support for the promotion of these projects.

The resolution welcomes the Commission Communication of 21 December 2007 which sets out clear objectives as to how the Europa website can be turned into a service-oriented web 2.0 site. It urges the Commission to complete construction of the new site as early as 2009. The new website should provide a forum for citizens to share their opinions and participate in online polls, where all NGOs, public institutions and individuals may share their experiences of their EU communication projects. The Commission should make better use of the audiovisual material available on Europe by Satellite by establishing links with local television channels and community media. The Europe Direct network should also be further publicised.

MEPs call on the Commission to strengthen its coordination efforts in the fields of consumer education and information by increasing its financial and human resources. In this regard, the financial and human resources allocated to the European Consumer Centres Network should be increased. MEPs also call for measures to improve the level of financial literacy of consumers, in particular concerning their rights and obligations as well as their means of redress with regard to savings and loans.

The role of women: lastly, the Commission is called upon to promote programmes and campaigns for encouraging women's social, political, and cultural activeness, taking into account women's role in the dialogue between generations and society's sustainability and prosperity. Girls and women should be given better information on the concept of European citizenship and the rights pertaining thereto and the Commission should include more women in task forces and working groups, engaged with the issues of family life, childcare and education.