European Public Sphere and Citizens' Participation

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1. Introduction: Being Europeans, Feeling Europeans...

European citizens are generally in favour of the European Union (EU) integration project and of the principles inspiring it, namely peace, respect for human rights, the rule of law, economic development and, last but not least, social cohesion. According to Eurobarometer 62, at the end of 2004, EU citizens from the 25 member states were convinced that membership of the EU was a positive rather than a negative fact (56% vs. 13%). In the same study, 50% of EU citizens had a positive image of the EU against 15% who had a negative image, some 47% nurtured a feeling of hope towards the Union, and respectively 57% and 52% had confidence in the European Commission and the European Parliament. What surprised many, at the time of the study, was that citizens of the EU were in favour of projects which were subject to controversy among the EU institutions. This indicated that EU citizens were, most probably, asking the EU to do more, rather than less.

In the same Eurobarometer it appears that most citizens ignore the main achievements of the EU history as some three fourth of them declare not to be well informed about the institutions and the policies of the EU. These figures become interesting when we consider that two thirds of the citizens that declared to be well informed had, at the same time, a positive image of what the EU had achieved so far, while only one out of three citizens had a positive image amongst those who admit not to be well informed. In other words, to know what the EU is and what it does has a direct correlation with a positive feeling about it. Unfortunately, the majority of EU citizens, also those that show to be in favour of EU integration and that regard the EU integration process under a positive light, tend to ignore or

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are misinformed about the many rights they acquired thanks to EU integration.

The negative side of what is reported above is that those who regard themselves as being ill-informed were the majority (55%) in the 25 countries scrutinised during the study. In response to this lack of information, 75% of EU citizens would have liked to be better informed and up to 85% were in favour of the idea to better inform children at school about the EU and the way it works. They were asking Member States and governments as well as the EU to introduce and reinforce civic education about the EU and its institutions.

The conclusions reached at the time of the survey were that the citizens were aware that something important was happening in Europe in which they could not participate or they were not able to participate for a lack of general knowledge and updated information. What the EU citizens requested was better access to European affairs not only for themselves but also for their children.

A few years later, in Autumn 2010, a period of international socio-political uncertainties and economic crisis, in which, usually, the public opinion swings towards conservatism and cultural protectionism, the Eurobarometer 74's figures demonstrate that European citizens clearly see a stronger European coordination and joint action as part of the solution for the EU and its member states to emerge from the difficulties related to the international conjuncture. Also Eurobarometer 73, while showing a decline in citizens' support to the European project, reports however that, in such a critical period for the economy and society worldwide, still 53% of Europeans think that their country has on balance profited from membership. It is also reported that more Europeans trust the EU more than their own government, in spite of the fact that this trust has declined lately.

In short, European citizens are still in favour of the EU integration process. But they are asking the European and National institutions to stimulate more participation through informed dialogue and a clearer communication policy enabling them to being properly informed about and to take part in the debate whether directly or through the representatives they chose.

2. The EU Information and Democratic Deficits

«EU information deficit» is the framing given to the above-described phenomenon. Many tend to couple this information deficit with a more difficult to solve «EU democratic deficit». It is largely recognised that the ignorance about the EU, its achievements and the benefits it brings to European citizens reported above, is mostly due to insufficient information to the general public. Where should we look in order to find an explanation for this information deficit in spite of the efforts the EU institutions, and especially the European Commission, is doing to bridge the gap?

Historically, the information deficit probably originates from the early days of the European Communities when the issues of European integration and the processes to implement them were too technical and difficult for the average citizen to follow its developments. This citizen did not find European policy neither interesting nor appealing and left it to the consideration and responsibility of bureaucrats living in Brussels or travelling to Brussels. While this situation could be acceptable at the beginning, today the EU integration process generates continuously new common policies and laws affecting all sectors of economy and society, hence it has become clear that citizens should understand and participate in what is going on in the European institutions. So, in order to assess the opportunities and difficulties of the integration process, they need to have factual and critical information on its benefits and drawbacks: the existing and the new ones. A proper framework to participate in critical transnational European debates needs to be developed.

Talking about a EU information deficit implies to turn our attention to the media landscape and its offer of EU-related issues. Classical examples of pan-European media are the «European Voice» and Euronews. The «European Voice», published since 1995 has reached today a distribution of some 15,000 weekly copies. The «European Voice» is certainly more read in Brussels, with its microcosm of consultants and EU civil servants, than in the rest of the European Union. Euronews, the most important and successful pan-European broadcasting project started its activities in 1993 and has continuously expanded in terms of audience and audience

reach[1]. In Europe, it has some 2.7 million cable and satellite viewers every day and more than 3.3 million viewers through broadcast windows in other national public television stations.

As to the public impact, Euronews reaches 15.7% or 7.6 million viewers every week (CNN scores a share of 15.6%), but its audience remains an elite, with more than 50% of it belonging to the top 10% wealthiest households (Euronews, 2011). The same can be said about the «European Voice». Arte, another successful broadcasting project, has started as a Franco-German cultural channel in 1991 and has expanded its collaboration to other national channels[2]. In 2007 it had an audience of 9.4 million in France and of 4.2 million in Germany the year before (Arte, 2007). Moreover, it addresses a specific audience not representative of the average European and most of its broadcasting concerns the cultural sector. Last but not least, websites such as EurActive.com, EUpolitix.com or Europa-digital.de, whose primary aim is to explain the EU and its policies, are more directed towards EU experts, consultants, researchers and students, and certainly do not involve mass audiences. Also transnational European media (i.e. media that address audiences across national borders), which have emerged in the last twenty years or so, do not reach yet, in spite of their growth, a broad audience and remain rare (Brüggemann, Hagen Schulz-Forberg, 2008, p. 78).

The issue illustrated in the previous paragraphs is common in the literature dealing with the EPS. It refers to the fact that we practically do not find media that address a wide European audience with specific European content. In spite of the success in terms of audience growth of pan-European media such as the ones outlined earlier, the figures show that there is not a genuinely pan-European media presence on the continent. While the European media sector is converging for what concerns regulation and ownership following the European competition and audio-visual policy rules, it is not Europeanising when it comes to content and audience (Bale, 2008). The main audience of the few pan-European media is mostly «top-people in the Brussels micro-polity» (Bale, 2008, p. 231). The result is that, apart form the «Financial Times» and a few upmarket satellite news broadcasters, there is no media space in which European citizenship can fully develop (Meehan, 1993).

[1] It can today be received by more than 120 countries and 189 million households.

[2] Arte is today distributed to roughly 190 millions viewers in 80 millions households (Arte, 2010).

Confronted with an important information deficit, the Commission, after years of debates on a EU information and communication policy, publically admitted in the White Paper on a European Communication Policy (2006), that the communication with the citizens had not kept pace with the ongoing important political and administrative developments: «The gap between the European Union and its citizens is widely recognised [...]. Communication is essential to a healthy democracy. It is a two-way street. Democracy can flourish only if citizens know what is going on, and are able to participate fully». This was a public acknowledgment that the information deficit was causing or, more correctly, is correlated to a democratic deficit.

In a vicious circle, the democratic deficit is often used by EU sceptics to explain the indifference and the lack of participation of EU citizens to European politics, which, *de facto*, becomes undemocratic because people do not take part in it. This, of course, is far from being true. National citizens can influence the choices of their national political parties, indirectly influencing European politics and policy making. On the other hand, they can, directly, influence European politics by electing members of the European Parliament. As today most decisions are taken jointly by the European Parliament and European Council, simply by taking part in the national election systems, EU citizens can have an important say on the European stage.

Furthermore, the points of view of European citizens about common policies are also expressed by the national parliaments which, through the COSAC[3], may examine legislative proposals or initiatives that might have a direct impact on the rights and freedoms of individuals. Not to say that the COSAC may also address to the EU institutions any contributions that it deems appropriate on the legislative activities of the Union. Later, the Lisbon Treaty opened the possibility for national parliaments to question directly the Commission proposals in relation to the respect of the subsidiarity principle and the possibility to express their opinions about them. It implies that national parliaments and the national political parties dominating them, are instrumental in launching, developing and monitoring the EU integration process and that the real reason for a democratic

[3] Conference of European Affairs Committees established in 1989 in Madrid and formally recognised in a protocol to the Amsterdam Treaty in June 1997. See http://www.cosac.eu (site accessed on 1 December 2010).

deficit should not only be found in poor participation in European Parliament elections. Moussis describes the democratic deficit as «another myth propagated by Eurosceptic circles» that, paradoxically, are amongst the «most vehement detractors of the extension of the co-decision procedure to the common foreign and security policy which would practically eliminate the remnants of the democratic deficit» (2009, pp. 145-146).

It is suggested here that the real issue behind the information and democratic EU deficits lays not entirely in the current possibility the EU citizens have to directly influence EU policy making, but also in the absence of pan-European media that are able to reach a wide audience of real, not of potential, followers whose palimpsests are mainly driven by EU related news, and probably also in the way news are reported and diffused by European institutions themselves.

Instrumental in the information and democratic deficit is a lack of political structure where citizens can find the appropriate way of participation and the lack of proper content easily reachable and understandable by EU citizens. The paradox here is that, while the Publications Office of the European Union can be regarded as one of the biggest publishing houses in the world in terms of quantity of documents printed and produced, and while the Server Europa is as well one of the biggest portal of public information, the average European citizen seems not to be able to find the information he/she is looking for or not in the right easy-to-understand format. The available political instruments and technical tools constitute the major challenge for the EPS.

3. Political Framework and Instruments of the EPS[4]

The information and communication policy is not governed by specific provisions in the treaties. It is generally recognised that it flows naturally from the EU's obligation and commitment to explain its citizens its functioning and policies. To be precise, the treaties do not contain, as of today, any specific chapter or article that could constitute the legal basis for a EU information and communication policy. The immediate implication is that this important policy is based on

[4] The concept of PS used in the paper is based on the Habermasian idea of public sphere. A public sphere is a space of free, informed and critical debate about topics and matters related to public political (European) life.

Articles 11, 41, 42 and 44 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. They are dedicated, respectively, to the right of information and freedom of expression, as well as freedom and diversity of media, the right to be heard and the right of access to documents relating to oneself, the right of access to the documents of the European institutions, and the right of petition. Furthermore, as in other cases, reference to Article 308 can and should be made for actions for which there are no separate legal basis in the EC Treaty.

The EU information and communication policy has been always present in the European agenda, but it received renewed importance in the aftermath of the non-immediate and straightforward adoption of the Maastricht Treaty. Since 2005, after the negative referenda in France and the Netherlands on the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, it became an institutional priority (Valentini, Nesti, 2010, pp. 1-2).

To go more in details, since the shock of 1992, when the Danish had to vote twice to approve the Maastricht Treaty and France had it passed on a thin majority (probably the very first time «Brussels» realised there was a huge gap between the European integration project and the way it was finally perceived by its citizens), the European institutions, and notably the European Commission, have started a conspicuous process of inter-institutional reflection about a better and more efficient information and communication policy. The first resolution, in October 1993, took the form of an inter-institutional Declaration on Democracy, Transparency and Subsidiarity[5].

In the following years, many documents and debates were produced in order to find the best EU approach to inform and communicate Europe to its citizens. The next milestone was certainly the adoption by the European Commission of a Communication on a New Framework for Co-operation on Activities Concerning the Information and Communication Policy of the European Union in 2001. This called on the other institutions and on the member states to join in their efforts to overhaul the Union's information and communication policy. For the first time, the importance of the role of the member states in the dissemination of information on EU issues was recognised. One year later, in March 2002, the European Parliament adopted a report calling for improved

[5] Bulletin of the European Communities, 1993, pp. 118-120.

EU information policies and the development of a comprehensive communication strategy. Soon after, in July 2002, the Commission produced a Communication on a new strategy for its information and communication policy. Other initiatives on access to documents, transparency and the opening up of the Council of Ministers' meetings followed.

If one red line is to be found in all the documents produced in the last decade, it is certainly that of the necessity of a better coordination of efforts amongst the institutional triangle (Parliament, Commission and Council) and the conceptual-isation and deployment of a common information and communication policy that involves other European insti-tutions like the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, and also and especially the member states, and the regional and local governments.

All the efforts listed before, unfortunately were not enough to change the tide of decreasing public support and citizen participation in EU political life. The European Parliament elections of 2004 underlined the citizens' growing lack of interest in direct participation in EU politics. As a response, the new Barroso Commission reacted by creating a new Commissioner for Communication and nominated former Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström for the job. Mrs Wallström started with a long phase of consultation internally as well as externally. In July 2005, she presented her first Action Plan to modernise the communication practices of the institution. This was also known as «Plan-D for Demo-cracy, Dialogue and Debate».

In 2006, after a(nother) period of reflection started with the failure of the Constitutional Treaty, the Commission published a much-waited White Paper on a European Communication Policy. The Commission recognised that in order to have a successful European information and communication policy it is important to have the involvement of all the three main players together with the other EU institutions and bodies, the national, regional and local authorities in the member states, European political parties and civil society[6]. In spite of recognising the problem, the Commission did not (dare to?) propose any legal instrument involving the member states and the institutions in the European communication policy. Instead of proposing a more binding solution, an inter-

[6] See also Nesti, 2010, for an historical account on the emergence of a European information and communication policy.

institutional agreement between the institutional triangle on communicating Europe in partnership was suggested.

The result of this loose approach, is that today, each of the three European institutions has its own mean and instruments to inform the public and to carry out its own information and communication policy. The Parliament and the Commission, while preserving their full autonomy, have established an Inter-institutional Group on Information (IGI) to coordinate their policies. The Commission and the Parliament can carry out jointly some priority information campaigns on subjects of topical interests, while the Commission representations and the European Parliament External Offices in the member states cooperate locally on an *ad hoc* basis. The Council has a separate information and communication policy from the other two institutions. Some instruments, such as the Server Europa and the Europe by Satellite, are shared amongst the three institutions. So, with the exception of a limited cooperation between the Parliament and the Commission and contrary to what suggested many times in institutional documents, the three main European institutions have independent and heterogeneous information services.

It is widely recognised that today, the European Commission is the main and most important provider of information about the EU. Its Europa Server provides free and user-friendly access to more than 60 databases, thousands of documents including a main portal page, European legislation, common policies, books and publications, information for citizens and for businesses. Again, the Server Europa is not perceived as the easiest portal to navigate and use, most probably for the simple fact that it keeps on changing, probably reflecting changes in the DGs management. This further reinforces the idea that EU related info is made by specialists for specialists.

While the information deficit is partly due to disagreement among the European institutions on a common communi-cation policy (and hence indirectly augments the discontent-ment of citizens towards institutionally produced information) and partly to the disinterest of member states in setting up a proper, common and sound EU information and communi-cation policy. Most probably, their reticence can be explained by the fact that member states find more politically rewarding to retain control over what is said, when and to whom.

The issue to tackle, then, remains why mainstream media do not dedicate to Europe enough time in qualitative and quantitative terms. They could of course have a leading role in forming an informed EPS instead of assuming a rather detached role. Again, the reason might be the difficulty in finding an economic return in broadcasting news coming from «Brussels», which, at the end, remains rather technical and difficult in nature. Another reason, probably more close to reality, is that national or regional news is much more interesting for the average citizen as it can be related to faces, facts, places and contexts they know. The result is that, while Eurosceptic media, on a systematic way provide disinformation rather than information about the EU and its progresses, unbiased and mainstream media rarely report EU decisions. It is also easy to see national media taking the side of their government instead of engaging in a more articulated and critical debate (Moussis, 2009, p. 152).

At the end, the EPS is confronted with a vicious circle in which governments do not have interest to mandate the European institutions to set up a proper and well-articulated EU information and communication policy: the institutions do not provide interesting information to the media, the media themselves are not interested in EU related information, and hence do not take the effort to seek information themselves. The result is that they do not report to the citizens the activities of the institutions which might be interesting for them and give them the occasion to talk about the EU. It goes by itself that low level and poor quality coverage of EU issues within the EU member states has a direct relation to a decrease and a low level or European identification and produces negative implications for citizens' participation in European polity.

4. Between Theory and Reality: EPS, Active Citizenship and Citizens Participation

Within democratic societies, communication plays a fundamental role: it improves citizens' knowledge about politics and hence allows for motivated and critical electoral participation (Campus, 2008); it enables the participation of

citizens in policy making by giving and spreading information about important issues at stake (i.e. the relative policy options, the process and procedures, and the actors involved); it promotes the accountability of elected representatives towards citizens; and finally it promotes the responsiveness of political actors because it helps improving their knowledge about citizens' preferences (Valentini 2008; Valentine, Nesti, 2010).

The «Plan-D» proposed by the Commission, referring to the White Paper on Communication and Information states that «[...] these initiatives set out a long-term plan to reinvigorate European democracy and help the emergence of a European public sphere, where citizens are given the information and the tools to actively participate in the decision making process and gain ownership of the European project». Without informed citizens and structures to enable public critical discussion, there cannot be an EPS.

Is it reasonable to ask from citizens the effort to inform themselves about EU issues? Probably not. Citizens expect to be rightly and timely informed about the EU, European affairs and decisions important and relevant to them, through their familiar, mainstream national media. Languages and culture play also an important role here.

As of today, EU information suffers from two main diseases. Firstly, it is (still) addressed to specialists and this in spite of the efforts done by the European Commission to vulgarise its language. Secondly, it mainly reflects the proposals of the Commission itself, rather than the policies and laws decided by the government of the member states (personified within the Council) and the Parliament (representing the Union citizens).

The result is indifference and dissatisfaction of EU citizens not really towards the EU integration process but towards its daily achievements, its daily dialogues that make a democracy alive, towards participating in a rather technical and complex reality. This mismatch between high expectations and false perception of the public is, probably, the most serious danger towards the path of a more important political union, active citizenship and citizen's participation.

It is clear that the information and communication policy of the EU, and its evolution over time, is strictly connected with the legitimacy issues or the democratic deficit reported about above. In this respect, the EU information and communication

policy mingles with actions and policy directed towards the establishment of common cultural actions through an apparently separated instrument such as the Television without Frontiers Directive approved in 1989. It proposed for the first time the European media policy as an instrument to serve the political aim of supranational nation building (Collins, 1994).

The EU information and communication policy is also interconnected with European cultural-identity building initiatives which started with the Adonnino Committee (1985) in the middle of the 1980s. They aimed at using cultural actions to raise the visibility of the European integration project through cultural actions and projects as well as creating European symbols such as the European flag, anthem, logo, and, of course, passport. It is clear that the policies and actions directed towards information and communication cannot be separated but form a unique and complementary ensemble with policies and actions directed towards the establishment of cross border culture, active citizenship, identity building and a stronger Union based on citizens participation and under-standing.

The issue of active citizenship is not an easy one to tackle, at social as well as at political level. As Wallace et al. clearly indicate, policy making in the EU is shaped by rules and procedures which are in a permanent state of evolution since the inception of the European integration project, they went through successive and incremental modification and extensions during the last years. In the last twenty years the policy-making procedures and processes have known a boost in relation not only to internal and external challenges, but also to a remarkable expansion of the EU constituencies (its member states) (2005, p. 483). In a situation in which there is not one clear and easy pattern of policy making, and in which EU policy making is a process of «mutual learning and accommodation» (*ibidem*) amongst member states themselves and amongst civil servants working for national governments and European institutions, it is understandable that, also with the much needed backup of the political will to explain Europe to Europeans, this is not an easy task.

As was already said earlier in reference to the Eurobarometer and other surveys, more than asking for a direct participation in the EU decision-making process, EU citizens are asking for

clear information concerning why and how decisions are taken, and in what sense and how they are important for their daily life. Why not give citizens what they ask for and see if active European citizenship and dialogue will follow?

Wessler et al. believe that the public sphere at European level needs first of all to be more Europeanised. What is needed is «more monitoring of EU governance in the news media, the convergence of nationally confined public discourses, the integration of media and speakers from various European countries into a common discourse, and the mergence of elements of European identity in public debates» (2008, p. XI). The issues of the EPS cannot be separated from that of European identity building and active citizenship. Is this so far from what Article 6 of the TEU states that the Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law?

It is clear that, in its latest proposals, from the «Plan-D» to the White Book on Information and Communication, the European Commission could have been more determined, maybe provocative, and certainly more courageous. Instead of proposing an inter-institutional agreement it could have dared to suggest a program for common civic European education for young Europeans; or, instead of having encouraged the nomination by each member state of a high level contact person as national communication director, it could have asked each Minister participating in a Council session to comment the common press release or to come up with common press releases.

Neither a loose cooperation nor a loose development of synergies can replace a specific communication policy. What the Commission failed to suggest is a sound and proper common information and communication strategy, common to all European institutions and involving the member states, and, of course, an infrastructure headed by a sort of impartial institution or international agency. Of course, the Commission cannot act alone and it is just an actor within the European Union settings. However, in some past occasions it has showed a proactive and more determined role, which is today most probably missing in relation to the creation of a fully-fledged EPS.

At the end, responsible for the information deficit are the

institutions (which do not agree on a common information and communication policy), the governments of the member states (which prefer to present the accomplishments of the EU as their own) and the media (which find more interesting to criticise the problems of the Union than present its achievements). Without a serious political commitment, the EPS will not shape itself and active European citizenship will only remain a topic for academic speculations. In a situation in which European citizens do not have similar political rights as those they enjoy in their home countries, and without a common transnational political will to support the formation of a truly EPS, active participation will never result in concrete implementation.

Rightly, already in 2001, Gerhards has stated that a EPS is very unlikely to emerge as long as citizens have no right, a substantial right, of political participation similar to that that they enjoy within national polities like the one of electing representatives with real executive powers. He argues that, in spite of the stronger role that the European Parliament has been acquiring over time, citizens have and will keep on having little interest in seeking information related to EU matters because, at the end, this information is only secondary to their effective political participation. This interpretation also, metaphorically, reinforces the vicious circle discussed above as news media do not have direct interest in providing such information and collective actors do not need to address citizens via the news media because they do not depend directly from their support in the way that national government do. The lack of interest, on the other side, does not motivate news media to discuss Europe on a large scale.

5. Conclusions: Suggestions for the Way Forward Towards a Fully Fledged EPS

The debate about the EPS has already lasted for more that a decade and an half. Many arguments have been made and many positions put on the agenda but, as Wessler et al. state, «no consensus has emerged», neither, we would like to add, a common political shared commitment has been developing. It really remains to be seen to what extent the communication

behaviour of the EU institutions and its communicative structure and practices will actually change beyond a simple and sterile restyling (which creates for the user more problems than what it is supposed to solve) of the Server Europa.

The analysis presented so far tells us not only that the EPS needs information circulating within but also, and especially, that it still needs to be implemented. Playing with words, we might say that it needs formation before information. It lacks the proper political commitment; it lacks a proper structure in terms of pan-European media; it lacks a European content; and finally it lacks an Europeanisation of national mainstream media. The existing situation is perceived as elitist and is mostly confined to a restricted technical and bureaucratic circle.

Therefore, it is necessary to work in parallel on all these levels to create an EPS able to nurture itself by the interest it generates in the public it addresses. Once it has the interest of the public, it will also have the space on the palimpsest of national mainstream media.

The first suggestion that the author puts forward is a very simple one. After some fifteen years of debates and research around the EPS and its importance for citizen participation in the European *res publica*, policy makers should in the first place listen to the citizens and provide easier to understand information (starting from news releases). They should offer civic education about the EU, grant more funding for pan-European media and stimulate national mainstream media to broadcast more and better about the EU. This implies a restructuring of the press releases and conferences mechanisms in which not only the Commission point of view but also that of member states and other European institutions should be (re)presented. This would stimulate the debate at national, regional and local level on European politics and avoid the feeling of being marginalised by Eurocrats in Brussels. It would create a feeling that European policies are decided not only in Brussels but in connection with national Parliament and government. This might result in a commonality of problems and interests amongst regions and territories in Europe. The links amongst Europeans would then be evident to those participating and listening to the debate.

Secondly, the EU institutions should come up with a sound

communication strategy probably coordinated by, as suggested by Moussis (2009), a European Press Agency with the necessary means and resources. This idea is not new on the European stage. The creation of a sort of centralised Office of Communication is an idea circulating in Brussels since at least 1993 when the Committee of Experts Report on the EU's Information and Communication Policy chaired by De Clercq suggested it (1993). The Office of Communication's mission was to ensure that the community spoke with one voice, and communicated the right message to the right audience. Such an approach would also require the obedience for the European institutions to a common set of guidelines, decisions, rules, measures and codes of conduct which should be adopted by the European institutions and implemented by them in first instance, and by the governments of the member states in second. The main task of the European Press Agency, conceived by Moussis as an inter-institutional body, would be that of coordinating information and communication services between all European institutions and European governments as well as regional and local authorities.

Thirdly, more substantial investments in pan-European and cross border media should be made. It is surprising that, in an era in which new business models related to information and communication appear everyday, neither the media sector nor European institutions have been able to find the way to exploit cross border and nomadic public and the use of mobile devices to inform about the EU. In the current era, a portal is the middle age of communication, not the rocket future. Talking about the Server Europa, European citizens have witnessed already too many changes in its structure and look. It should be clear that this continuous changing, even if animated by the best intentions, only disorient the users and pushes them away from using it. This again reinforces, within public opinion, the idea that the EU is communicated by experts to experts for their privileged use. It is clear that the most important element needed here is the intention of member states, Heads of State and Governments to commit to a joint, European, information and communication policy.

Fourthly, if the use of the traditional legal instruments to create a EPS would result to be too daring for the current status of EU development, the use of alternative methods of policy

making should be seriously considered to build a sound European information and communication policy. One is referring here to the Open Method of Coordination or to the exploitation of the possibility for those countries that wish to further integrate to proceed by themselves through enhanced co-operation, as introduced by the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 and used for the first time in the EU in 2010. Maybe, at a first stage, a task force of communication and political experts should be put in place to see the practical feasibility of these instruments for the EU information and communication policy. The very history of the EU is built on the history of daring personalities and visionaries; the current political framework should not prevent us to look forward into the future of an even more integrated Europe.

Fifthly, if the policy makers will show to be reluctant, then why not to start using a new instrument at the disposal of European citizens since the Lisbon Treaty? One is referring here to the European Citizens Initiative, which could be used to oblige the institutions to consider the implementation of a legal act to enforce the creation of a serious European information and communication policy. Such an attempt would let the citizens use a very new European political participation tool. Moreover it would favour a debate at European level, increase citizens' knowledge of the EU and their rights within, launch cross border debates and oblige policy makers to act on a topic where they prefer to safeguard the *status quo*.

Finally, as in all processes involving the spread of ideas and the creation of debates, it is necessary to find multipliers and catalysts of European information and interests so to nurse the curiosity and interests of the youngest generations of Europeans to the European venture. Pop and rock-stars are already port-parole of many international agencies and campaigns: why not use them to launch debates at European level? Renowned journalists and reporters should not be neglected here as multipliers and catalysts of EU news. Again, partly, this solution was also suggested by the De Clercq Report according to which newscasters and reporters had to become target of EU information and communication efforts so to became supporters of the cause and hence multipliers in the communication chain. This would probably create the feeling that European news is not managed in a top-down fashion but

is cause for everyday talk, and would not only democratise the European communication and information process but humanise it.

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