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GALLUP
EUROPE



“Can EU Hear Me?”

“Can EU Hear Me?” is an unusual report. It takes a very original approach to the familiar problem of how the EU and its institutions can better connect with Europe’s citizens. It is part opinion poll, part survey of political leaders and opinion makers, and part study group findings.

The ideas that have emerged from this year-long project have been distilled into 10 overall recommendations, each of which is backed by three sub-recommendations. These 30 practical ideas are presented in the form of an Open Letter to Margot Wallström that you will find attached.

These recommendations have been drawn from four principal sources:

1. The input into a working group that has met regularly at the Brussels’ offices of *Friends of Europe* and Gallup Europe as a forum for senior EU information officials, MEPs, national governments’ communications specialists, consultants and journalists.
2. The results of an extensive Gallup Europe opinion poll in the spring of 2004. Over 2,000 people replied to 25 questions that had in large part been shaped by the Working Group.
3. The frank opinions expressed by the 20 top politicians, journalists and opinion formers who were extensively interviewed by *Friends of Europe* during the summer of 2004. Their views offer anecdotal evidence that complements the more scientific findings of the opinion polls.
4. As well as the Spring 2004 Survey by Gallup Europe, working in partnership with the EurActiv.com EU web portal, a further poll was conducted in early Autumn. This on-line survey put forward 30 questions arising from the Working Group’s discussion, and was answered by 1,500 people.

We hope that this report will prove useful to all those whose concern is that the EU should be heard, and better understood, by its 450m citizens from the Arctic Circle to the Eastern Mediterranean.

Giles Merritt and Geert Cami, *Friends of Europe*

Christophe Leclercq, EurActiv.com

Robert Manchin, Gallup Europe

Open letter to Margot Wallström

Dear Commissioner,

We want to congratulate you on your appointment as Commissioner for Communications Strategy from 1 November 2004. You have a huge task ahead of you.

Friends of Europe, Gallup Europe and EurActiv.com have carried out extensive consultations with people in business, the media and civil society as well as in the European Institutions to find out their views on how the EU communicates with its citizens. We would like to contribute the following suggestions based on their insights.

Getting going

1) During your first six months visit each EU Member State

- In each country, hold public forums to hear what people have to say about the EU.
- Use local third party endorsers – groups of beneficiaries or supporters – to describe how the EU has helped them.
- Meet the most important national media editors and the leading politicians.

The message

2) Promote the benefits of EU Membership

- Carry out a survey in each Member State to find out the impact of the EU on people's lives and the losses they would suffer if their country withdrew from the EU.
- Publicise the results widely by engaging a multinational communications agency to devise a tailor-made strategy in each country.
- Employ 'good-will ambassadors' (i.e. well-known people from all fields – culture, sports, films, celebrities) to talk about the benefits of Europe.

3) Make the EU news message more interesting

- Don't turn people off with too much detail – keep the message down to three key points at most.
- Adapt your message to your audience. Always give specific examples of how new policies affect 'the person in the street'. If you can, have such a person on hand to talk about their experience.
- Be open about the political disagreements and encourage journalists to report them. Do not be afraid to discuss openly the tensions in the discussions and to present news with some kind of risks.

4) React faster to news

- Set up a 'rapid response' unit to react quickly to events – have press releases out within 4 hours after something important happens in a Member State.
- Speed up the approval procedure for press releases.
- Set up an EU newsroom to feed the world and European media with up-to-date, high standard footage of what happens in the EU.

Tools for conveying the message

5) Adapt the media channels to the story or the Member State

- Carry out a media survey in each Member State to find out the relative size, popularity and penetration of each national and regional media channel (TV, radio, press or internet) for the different audiences you may need to reach.
- Set-up "Reporting the EU" scholarships to bring young journalists to Brussels for intensive training courses on how the Union's political machinery works, and on the major issues confronting the EU.

- Before you release a story, decide which medium in each country is the most appropriate – TV, radio, press or internet, or a combination thereof.

6) Change the prevailing culture towards communications in the EU institutions

- Force through more integration of the EU media operations.
- Get rid of the administrative hurdles between different EU Institutions that prevent them from collaborating on media campaigns and cut down on the bureaucracy that stifles the freedom of press departments to do their job.
- Bring in more professionally trained staff to the EU press offices, both journalists and other media specialists and give proper media and communications training to Commissioners and EU officials.

7) Use business and events media to reach specialised audiences

- Motivate business and events media to get involved in promoting EU ideas, policies and benefits.
- Use independent audiovisual and internet companies to strengthen news distribution and increase the number of co-productions with TV stations.
- Set up a database of specialist and national media in each country, that may be called upon to publicise EU events.

Reaching the audience

8) Get the message out to people in Member Countries, using Member State media

- Give Member States more responsibility for publicising new policies, which have an effect in their country. Evaluate and compare countries' communications performance annually.
- Make EU officials and Commissioners more responsible for telling their own country nationals about the benefits of the EU. As Commissioner for Communications Strategy, you should visit each EU Member State as often as possible – this will greatly help to increase Europe's visibility in each country
- Set up a 'Communications Task Force' in each Member State to bring together EU officials, politicians and journalists to discuss how to get the EU message out nationally. This Task Force should report regularly with concrete recommendations.

9) Use 'CCC' – Citizens Convince Citizens – to transmit the EU message

- Use people who have benefited from EU policies as EU ambassadors, and provide them with the relevant communications tools to do this.
- Oblige organisations and people who have benefited from EU support, for example Erasmus scholars or researchers, to spread the word in their own countries.
- Use local business and civil society organisations to promote the benefits of EU Membership. Provide them with EU materials in their national language or encourage them to adapt the texts themselves.

10) Make a special effort to reach young people

- Push for every country to include EU-related material in the secondary school curricula.
- Use new technologies (MMS, SMS, etc) and young people's media like the internet or TV stations like MTV or MCM to pass on the message.
- Concentrate on reaching young people when a new programme that particularly affects them is set up.

Finally, Commissioner Wallström, we hope that these suggestions will stimulate a debate about communicating the European dream. This is a dream we all passionately share.

We wish you every success.