

Structured Dialogue with Commissioner Margot Wallström

EU Communication Policy and Plan D



Committee of the Regions



EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Photo: City of Arnsberg

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Citizens' concern for freedom and equality began to speed up communications, meaning the exchange of ideas and opinions. That, together with solidarity - a concept which today we have to redefine completely - was a precondition for the increasing willingness of more and more people to work together. Ever more ambitious and difficult undertakings became possible, which would have been beyond the reach of individuals or even small groups.

The situation today:

Many people are afraid - of globalisation and unemployment.

Many people do not have a sufficient understanding of political and economic change. People's everyday situations, the lives they lead, their plans are becoming ever more diverse. Within the same country, the same town there are people living with different languages and cultures. People are also better educated than in the past. And people with knowledge have a better idea of what they want.

What must we do? - I should like to list five points:

1. We must not restrict ourselves to technical or instrumental subjects. The papers submitted must focus more on content. Therapy without diagnosis will not help.
2. We have to do everything possible to enable people in the regions to have their say. And their views must be listened to: their feelings and opinions, fears and aspirations have to be taken much more thoroughly into account before communication can begin. Let us look at the "no" votes in the referendums more carefully and in a different way: as a sign that the people take an interest in, and want to influence, the future of Europe. In the final analysis it was not a "no" to Europe.
3. We need qualitative market research, and by "market" I mean a political forum. We have to investigate the conditions for successful communication before launching large-scale campaigns. At the Universities of Innsbruck, Nijmegen, Bonn and Heidelberg a "European communication culture" network is taking shape.
4. We need communication as a way of promoting understanding rather than top-down pronouncements. But the language of the draft Constitutional Treaty tends to be of the latter type. Simply putting out information and announcements will not help. Ideas, opinions and knowledge have to flow in both directions: from the top down and from the bottom up. A structured dialogue has to be developed between the EU and the regions.

5. We need transparency: in those areas falling within its remit Europe should exercise its responsibilities. By the same token, it should keep out of areas which are not within its remit. European resources must not become national resources overnight. And national bureaucracy must not become European bureaucracy from one day to the next. But we also need transparency so that local authorities are no longer obliged to search high and low for EU funding for their European activities.

Is there scope for action? I think so.

The Citizens' Europe of the 1990s was both an objective and a *leitmotiv* of communication. Nowadays it has been rather pushed into the background. Let us give it a new lease of life in the opening decades of the 21st century.

The concept of "EU citizenship", which embraces the local, national and European levels and also has a huge impact in terms of communications. This concept has unfortunately fallen into abeyance.

The European networks: existing and new partnerships between cities, municipalities, local areas and regions. Dialogue takes place here. And these are not even people who live next door to each other. Ordinary citizens are pressing ahead with Europe.

Only if Europe looks to its own strengths and goes back to its roots can individual fears be allayed and ordinary people be strengthened, encouraged and enabled to cooperate.

Free, motivated people inspired by solidarity are Europe's most valuable resource!

Seeing Europe as an undertaking involving people is perhaps the most important step towards a new approach to European communication.

Old City in Arnberg
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