

Executive Summary

This is the Executive Summary of the Final Report on the evaluation of information and communication towards the EU Member States in the area of enlargement by the European Commission Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). Coffey International Development (Coffey) was contracted by DG NEAR to conduct this evaluation. The purpose of this evaluation is to provide findings and recommendations **to help DG NEAR to improve the planning and implementation of future information and communication activities**, based on past experience and lessons learned by:

- Generating knowledge about what works and what does not and under what conditions
- Facilitating evidence-based decision making
- Improving information and communication activities, from design to implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Since 2011, DG NEAR has organised communication activities via a series of **8 communication contracts for a total amount of EUR 10 million**. The communication contracts served different purposes. Two contracts were focussed on developing channels and tools, one was for the information campaign Welcome Croatia, and the others focussed on different target audiences. The **main goals** were to raise public awareness and exposure to the shared values and interests of EU Member States and enlargement countries, and to promote informed debate, dialogue and reporting on enlargement issues.

Communication activities were implemented in collaboration with partner organisations in enlargement critical Member States and in liaison with EU Delegations in pre-accession countries. For the most part, communication was organised by different external contractor firms. Where feasible and practical there was close monitoring of actual implementation on the ground by DG NEAR.

The evaluation combined ex-post and on-going elements. Most of the communication activities were completed prior to evaluation, but three contracts are still on-going, as follows:

- Audiovisual campaign (completed)
- On-line and social media campaign (completed)
- Welcome Croatia campaign (completed)
- Campaign on IPA visibility (1st edition completed – 2nd edition on-going)
- Awareness-raising campaign on enlargement (1st edition completed – 2nd edition on-going)
- Stakeholder campaign (on-going)

The **evaluation methodology** focussed on analysis of existing evidence of communication performance against objectives set, as described in terms of references and communication contractors' proposals and final reports. It also gathered primary research data through interviews with partners, observation and participation in press trips in Albania and Kosovo, five visibility events in Brussels, Edinburgh, London, Odense and Stuttgart, and 8 focus groups with members of public in four Member States (France, the Netherlands, Finland, and Austria). The below sections describe the evaluation key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

○ Key findings

- During the timeframe of this evaluation 2011 – 2015, DG NEAR has implemented a very extensive programme of varying activities and numerous different types of materials, for a wide range of target groups across a wide range of Member States, with an emphasis on the most enlargement-sceptic Member States and pre-candidate countries.
- The communication environment is extremely challenging. Enlargement is not currently a hot topic and the general public are often hostile, and appear to be poorly informed about the benefits of enlargement. There is, nevertheless, a latent interest for information on enlargement topics among specific groups of individuals who are difficult to reach and define, and it seems likely that there are unexploited target groups.

Evaluation of information and communication activities conducted by Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations

- DG NEAR has attempted innovative approaches and is trying to keep abreast with new communication channels.
- Events for informed professionals and press trips are highly professional with quality speakers, creating opportunities for dialogue that would otherwise be unavailable. DG participation at events organised by others is less effective, as it is not possible to target materials to the very diverse audiences that attend these events.
- Among the materials developed there are some that stand out for their high quality production and formats. One of the video clips produced 'Hidden Treasures' was recognised for its high quality by the 2012 Cannes Corporate Media and TV awards¹ and our research also confirmed the quality of other clips, as well as print materials: the brochure, leaflets and infographics. However, questions arise with regard to how to disseminate these materials effectively and efficiently, and how to develop synergies between them and continuity in communication.
- Messages and activities (events and exhibitions, competitions, websites, press trips, cinema and airline advertising campaigns, etc.) seem to fit broadly with the main objectives set. Focus group research suggests that intended messages, such as 'So Similar, So Different, so European' to suggest similarities between EU Member States and accession countries' are broadly understood. However, our research also suggests that there is a general desire for a presentation of the pros and cons of enlargement, and a perception that the content of materials produced does not sufficiently present the 'cons'.
- Budget programming has required the use of different campaigns implemented by different communication agencies, which have implemented different levels and types of monitoring to capture evidence of the effectiveness of activities carried out. As a result, is it not possible to make direct comparisons of performance in terms of the effectiveness and efficiency of different communication channels and tools, which were used across different communication contracts.

○ Conclusions

This section starts with main conclusions on communication on enlargement. This is then followed by conclusions on the specific channels and tools that were assessed as part of this evaluation.

Main conclusions

1. **As enlargement is not currently a hot topic it is very difficult to reach wider publics**, who tend to be poorly informed and even hostile, in an effective manner. Very large budgets would be required to reach publics and measure the success of this reach. In addition, there is a significant communication challenge for the European Commission to present information on the pros and cons of enlargement, requested by the public, in a balanced and accurate way that still meets internal policy goals.
2. At this point in time, communication **activities which focus on informed professionals and relevant multipliers are more effective** because from the outset these groups are both interested and receptive to information, and they can play a role in transmitting information to interested publics, who are too difficult and would be too costly for DG NEAR to reach on an on-going basis.
3. As broad public support is essential to sustain enlargement **there is a need for a continuous dialogue and discussion within the Member States to lay the foundations for effective accession communication** campaigning, when this is needed. As DG NEAR manages the process whereby

¹ Hidden Treasures was awarded silver in the category for Films, TV and Informational Film

countries join the European Union, it falls to the DG to provide a reference point for information on EU enlargement topics and the policies and programmes established to support this.

4. The wide range of communication activities, channels and tools implemented by DG NEAR were **relevant to the broad objectives set** for enlargement communication. However, it is not possible to define to what extent these activities have contributed to reaching objectives as there were **no SMART objectives and indicators** set to measure performance. The lack of performance measurement system limits the extent that comparisons can be made and lessons learned. However, the evaluation provides insights, which help to understand, which types of activities have been most effective.

Conclusions on specific channels and tools

Communication materials

- Focus groups confirm the **high quality formats and professional presentation of communication materials**.
- DG NEAR **communication messages for wider publics are clear**, but the evaluation research confirmed **scepticism about enlargement information, and a desire to know more about the challenges**, as well as the benefits.
- **Audiovisual clips are considered to be the most effective format for communicating to the public**, although there is also a desire for more open public debate. To allow clips to be shared on-line, they need to be short; ideally less than one minute and this is not always the case. However, for each clip produced there needs to be significant budget available to support promotion. Making the clips available on-line / posting on social media, without some form of paid promotion does not ensure sufficient visibility to generate expected levels of awareness among wider publics.

Visibility events organised by DG NEAR

- Events co-hosted by DG NEAR, and partner organisations, **targeted at informed professionals** (for example representatives of think tanks, academia and civil society) have proved to be **effective and provide good opportunities for direct interactions with target groups in different Member States**.
- There is scope to **enhance specific aspects, by:**
 - **increasing the visibility / participation to individuals who are not physically present.**
 - **better targeting / selection of co-host organisations.**

DG NEAR participation in visibility events

- **The efficiency of DG NEAR's participation with an exhibition stand and / or showing a film at events organised by others is lower than when the DG organises its own events.** This reflects the fact that it is not viable to tailor materials for exhibition stands and clips for wider presentation to each individual event, as well as sometimes to the very diverse audiences that attend.

Press trips

- Press trips are **DG NEAR's flagship activities**. The current format, which provides access to high level speakers, a varied programme and some time to pursue own interests works well. The trips provide high quality content and valuable opportunities to increase knowledge levels among multipliers with the power to disseminate key messages to wider publics.
- **Press trips are well organised, provide useful information, contacts, and opportunities that would not otherwise be available.** Journalists are very **satisfied**.

- There is **scope to improve the consistency of gathering journalists' feedback, for example by using a uniform feedback form for all press trips, and the monitoring** of media and social media coverage so that both quantitative and qualitative outputs are measured in the same way.
- Nonetheless, there **may be ways to encourage greater take up of DG NEAR messages** in any resulting coverage, as described in the full recommendations on page 76.

○ Recommendations

Taking into account the key findings and conclusions of the evaluation, the following actions are recommended:

- We recommend that DG NEAR redefine, simplify and focus² the scope and ambitions of future communication activities on two different approaches and two different types of target audience, depending on the immediacy of any future accessions:
 1. **An on-going communication approach focussed on interaction with informed / specialists and potential specialists. This group includes journalists, academics, think tanks, civil society, government, as well as potential specialists (students and 'engageables'), people with potential to engage with the subject.**
 2. **Accession communication approach**, possibly similar to Welcome Croatia, with a focus on direct reach of the un / less concerned public, particularly but not necessarily limited to young people, using mass channels, for example digital and, where relevant, advertorials via other mass media.
- We recommend **re-defining the intervention logic**. In each case, there is a need for a vision statement to confirm desirable outcomes, SMART objectives and a clear feedback monitoring loop that is built into the system at the design stage to allow quantitative and qualitative measurement of a pre-defined number of indicators.

This implies **a standard approach to monitoring the different communication activities**, which must be implemented consistently by contractors across different channels and tools, with targets set to facilitate process, output and outcome improvements year-on-year. The need for a consistent process and what types of indicators to be included must be explicit in communication Terms of Reference and contractors' proposals. Types of indicators are provided in section 5.4.

1. On-going communications

- **We recommend maintaining a strong focus on the media and press trips**, but suggest that consideration is given to tweaking the current approach by mapping the work of relevant journalists to identify those most likely to report on issues important to the Commission's objectives; as well as the most relevant media outlets (in terms of readership among decision-makers).
- In periods **when accession is not imminent, preference should be given to journalists whose channels have space for long-form journalism**. This will help to ensure that the DG continues to make information available to feed the latent interest among educated publics in the EU.
- We recommend continuing the focus on stimulating and strengthening debate **between informed professionals and specialists / potential specialists** on technical accession related topics. The focus on involving high profile speakers from accession countries, senior and effective EC speakers, is to be continued.

² It is understood that this decision has already been taken by DG NEAR.

- Consideration could also be given to **strengthening the profile and promotion of these events**, for example by developing a simple name for the series of informed discussions and to explore opportunities to significantly increase access to the discussions, among others.
- If the DG wishes to continue to take these informed debates to different Member States, then it is vital to **ensure that co-host organisations** (universities and think tanks are natural partners for these types of sessions) **will add significant value** to the session in terms of maximising visibility.
- To further professionalise the approach the DG could consider **allocating funds to support co-hosts work** / a competition / call for proposals to encourage higher levels of commitment and professionalism from co-hosts who aim to make debates as visible as possible.
- For university students, we **recommend creating targeted learning and debating opportunities**, which are much sharper in their political and intellectual focus than the Youth Conference supported under Welcome Croatia³ because this will increase the level of interest of the best students.
- We recommend that consideration be given to **continuing to run an essay / short story competition**, but that sufficient resource is awarded for its promotion and to gain traction.
- On an on-going basis, we recommend **discontinuing the focus on exhibiting and participating in events** organised by **others with goals that are not directly linked** to DG NEAR communication goals, given the cost of participation and the limited and difficult-to-measure impacts that can be achieved.

2. Accession communications

A different approach will be required when plans are agreed for a new country to join the European Union. This requires a more **classic PR, awareness-raising campaign, with a focus on helping the wider public both in the accession country and in the Member States**, to learn about the accession process and its rigour and to learn about the new Member State.

A **multichannel approach will be required, with a focus on channels to reach mass audiences** (digital, social, print and other mass media channels). The approach will need a strategy to define the right combination of activities tailored to the circumstances and the specific audience profiles targeted, for example by age range or life style segment, who can then be reached with a range of highly targeted information products / activities, which resonate with the target groups.

- We recommend that the DG invests in **both quantitative and qualitative surveying of representative samples of target groups before, during and after mass media** initiatives to confirm reach, recall, resonance and usefulness of the information put into the public domain. In addition, we recommend that targets are set for reach and frequency of views / exposure, as critical key performance indicators.
- We recommend developing **new audiovisual products to complement those already available** that are more focussed on the relevant accession. This should follow the DG's usual approach of be supported by research to test audiovisual concepts.
- We recommend placing a focus on **identifying new opportunities for engaging and partnering with networks**, who may also be communicating on the accession, including social partners and civil society. The Europe Direct Information Centres represent an extensive network that is already available in the Member States.
- In terms of **other EC resources, consideration should also be given to ensuring visibility** on the YourEurope website, and the EC Representations, as would usually be the case for this type of campaign.

³ We do, however, recognise that this event maybe have been used as an opportunity for publicity.

Evaluation of information and communication activities conducted by Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations

There will also be **opportunities to partner with national organisations**, for example accession country embassies and national governments, in line with the example set by the Welcome Croatia campaign to co-host events specifically related to accession involving high profile individuals with newsworthy information to relay.