

## EIN TF 7

### COMMUNICATING EUROPE

#### Think tank influence on Institutions and Public

##### 1. General Context

Think tanks are much closer to politics and public policy, as they search to influence decisions, than universities from which they borrow the academic qualities of research; but at the same time and in parallel, they aim at influencing civil society. The difficulty, regarding the acceptance of both politicians and citizens, is the double nature of think tanks which prevents them from giving their allegiance, and thus transparency, to one spectrum of the policy making process. They are desirous of appearing at the cross-roads between the academic and intellectual world, the different levels policy making, and civil society.

The influence of think tanks on politicians in Europe can be seen as limited, compared to the United States, simply because they can be considered as not credible enough because of their structural nature. They are not yet recognised as a normal function in society, and with a few exceptions, are still marginal and sometimes little structures. One main reason for this phenomenon in Europe is the absence of mobility from think tanks to politics, and then to academics. As think tanks stress a process oriented towards transforming the way politicians think, they strongly differ from the American think tanks where society is at the centre of discussions. The difficulty is thus to produce the resources needed to orientate the debate toward a deeper level, without simplifying it so that it becomes too simplistic, and in the aim of bringing change to both the politics and the citizens. The goal of think tanks is not intellectual production in seclusion, and sometimes the quest for a new idea may be less relevant than a thorough rethinking of an existing idea, because politics are not expecting to be said what to do, but how to do it.

The main various deficits of European think tanks in Europe include:

- Lack of financial sustainability (difficulty of obtaining private funding that would guarantee their independence, especially given the increasing competition between think tanks) ;
- National approach ;

- Lack of media visibility in a context where intellectual life receives less attention and coverage
- Difficulty of matching short term demands of governments with longer term perspective of think tanks;
- Difficulty to involve the public opinion ;

What are the ways to reinforce the influence and recognition of think tanks in Europe?

## **2. Possible paths to reinforce think tanks' influence**

The increasing number of think tanks created the past years has made their influence strategy a crucial point, in terms of specificity, collaboration and enforcement of consultation culture of public institutions. More and more, the “expertise” of think tanks, both in terms of level of analysis and knowledge of the implementing processes, is asked for by politics, especially at the European level. Furthermore, with the deep reforms needed in European welfare states, crisis of representation and new forms of political mobilisation emerging from the civil society, the requirement of innovation is stronger than ever.

The visibility of the think tanks' works, at the national and European levels, strongly relies on the development of a media strategy to ensure a larger communication and a better recognition. To work more efficiently with medias and use them as a mobilisation leverage of political actors, they should be treated as partners with whom discussion process, regular exchange of analysis and invitation to attend public events are permanently institutionalised.

The consolidation of the EIN network shows that compromise is reachable through the affirmation of a pragmatic research approach to political challenges. The conclusions of Task Forces and Working Groups could be addressed at a larger scale to the EPP-ED family, as to:

- The European deputies belonging to EPP-ED Group;
- The EPP Party, the President and Vice-presidents, as the Commissioners;
- The International Secretaries of the brother parties belonging to the EPP;
- The civil society close to the EPP (EDS, YEPP, NGOs, UNICE etc....).

To go even further, another way to influence politics would be to focus on the national scene. The conclusions of the EIN Task Forces and Working Groups could also be sent, thanks to the foundations' network, to the policy makers in each member country represented in the network, but furthermore to their public from the civil society, which includes academics, industries and enterprises, intellectuals, NGO etc....The concept of bench

marking, and the results reached through it, as it applies in EIN, could find a greater echo and a better reputation in the different member states thanks to a stronger national communication.

European think tanks convey the European values, acting as their ambassadors, both in the European neighbourhood countries and on a larger scale, to the rest of the world. By their permanent action on the field, as through their international networking, they have a direct impact and influence on the perception of EU in these countries. How could think tanks act as a diplomatic tool of European soft power? Think tanks' influence is based on networking. How can networking and collaboration be developed between think tanks (information sharing) and with governments as well as academic institutions or civil society actors, in order to offer a better efficiency?

Think tanks often concentrate themselves on influencing political ideas at the level of public institutions; however they should also ensure the development of those ideas in the civil society. To develop public opinion awareness strategies, the multiplication of conferences, colloquiums and publications addressed to specific networks of diffusion are essentials. This activity should be held in parallel to a more specific approach to cores of policy decisions.

### **3. Communicating Europe**

The victory of the "NO" vote in the referenda on the European Constitution in France and the Netherlands revealed serious inadequacies with regard to political communication between the EU and its citizens: a great number of people do not know the main policies of the European community, and are ignorant of their effect and of the policy-making. The Commission particularly is seen as a technocratic institution which is totally disconnected from citizens' concerns. The national political parties place Europe too rarely at the heart of their debates and very often use it as a scapegoat. The media are focused on topics of national interest and turn their attention very little towards Europe.

Hence organisations from the civil society remain one of the rare vehicle for information and means of communication on Europe enabling citizens to understand it and thereby draw closer to it. We need, now more than ever, to explain the European project and to rally the widest possible public. This draft aims at analysing how think-tanks that are elements of the developing European civil society can improve communication between the European institutions and its citizens individually and/or collectively via the European Ideas Network?

As vehicles for influence in the European institutions think-tanks of the EIN could:

- 1- Be the source of proposals for institutions to develop a true communication strategy on Europe for its citizens; rethink the means of communication in the wake of the French and Dutch "NO".
- 2- Identify the themes on which it would be appropriate to communicate in order to "sell" Europe in a better manner.

### **A – Enhance the "traditional" vehicles for information**

#### 1. Specially tailored brochures and publications

Think-tanks and foundations generally publish a great deal for a varied public: decision makers, mediators (journalists, teachers, unions, and political parties) and even for the general public. We have to think about how we should continue this activity (who is our audience?), the model we choose (simple, educational), the way we give information and possibly the need to find partners in order to publish for the general public for example.

Generally speaking it is easier to communicate on an event. To quote just a few past examples, many publications on the EU were distributed during the referendum campaign on the Constitutional Treaty or before the 2004 enlargement. Future Europe-wide events are notably the anniversary of the Rome Treaty (March 2007), the European Elections in 2009. We should think about the way we communicate on these events and/or take advantage of these dates to address other subjects linked to European integration.

We might also consider the opportunity of communicating on Europe within the framework of national debates (electoral campaigns notably), by “Europeanising” some campaign subjects and by encouraging candidates to place their lines of thought and argument within a European context.

#### 2. The Audiovisual Media

Television remains the most effective means to reach the greatest number of Member States. It is imperative for Europe to break away from its cold, technocratic, elitist image which seems not to take account of the true concerns of its citizens.

Amongst other things this means involving the institutions more actively in the production, funding and organisation of TV programmes for the public at large. The EU must not hesitate in employing less "noble" means of conveying its message and has to learn to adapt this to suit the audience it is addressing.

It serves no purpose to limit any communication to a simple explanation (even if it is precise and clear) of the various European policies; European values must also be promoted thanks to extremely simple messages and above all popular artists must be chosen to convey these messages effectively efficiently to the greatest possible number of people. Europe has to be approached not only in an informative manner but communication has to be established also.

We might imagine the host or a guest on a TV reality show revealing that he/she considers himself/herself first and foremost as a European; this could have a significant impact amongst a specifically targeted audience. It is therefore vital for the person selected to "represent" Europe to be truly "popular". Agreements must be planned between Member States and European institutions in order to enable the latter to communicate more freely via the channels of the various EU States.

It is also possible to envisage Europe undertaking a more "aggressive" policy with regard to the film industry. A number of European films are funded by the EU: in order to develop Europe's image in the minds of the widest possible audience this funding could be made conditional. For example there should be a clause stipulating that a European flag must appear on the screen during the production even as a backdrop. Greater funding would be granted to films that deal with a truly "European" subject: i.e. films that highlight the exchange between cultures enabled by Europe and the results from this, as well as films that show the dangers of a return to time before European integration. Finally the EU might produce and facilitate the distribution of documentaries on European construction and on the major personalities that have made of Europe what it is today.

### 3. The written press

With regard to the press the European Union might, like commercial companies, communicate by using dedicated advertising space. The regional daily press and increasingly the free daily newspapers are the vehicle for information that cannot be ignored because they are developing continuously. These newspapers, contrary to the major national dailies, are read by many citizens and might help the EU to launch the necessary explanation process. Indeed these newspapers, which think they are in no way elitist, present subjects in a simple, concrete, concise manner that can be understood by everyone. The EU must employ such means of communication in order to reach the majority of citizens who feel they are poorly or even not at all informed.

#### 4. Training MPs and elected representatives

During the referendum campaign on the Constitutional Treaty the low level of knowledge of many national and local representatives on European issues was observed. However they are still above all others the mediators of the European debate on a national level. Citizens expect their representatives to take part and even initiate debate locally on European issues (Eurobarometer March 2006). Think-tanks and foundations often entertain privileged relations in the political sphere. It might be the time to use this channel to spread knowledge about Europe via papers addressed to representatives (on a topical theme, on a subject involving regional or local issues), and even training seminars that the EU might subsidise.

#### **B – Make greater use of new IT technologies**

Internet is THE new media that has been developing over the last five years. At present 20% of the exchange of information is accomplished via this means and the EU must imperatively understand that this information relay is the best adapted to our modern society. It is now possible to reach out to a greater number of citizens. The Internet is one of the new information and communication technologies that enable the democratisation of the debate and complete the lack of information which European citizens often complain about.

Can we not argue in favour of the Internet as a means of communication adapted to the EU, established in the general approach of the Lisbon Strategy? The society of knowledge is achieved by the circulation of information. It is up to Europe to show the way...

According to the Eurobarometer Flash of June 2005 entitled "European Constitution: post referendum survey in France" we observe the highest abstention rate amongst the citizens living in the major urban areas (31%) versus 26% in the rural zones. Abstentionists justified their choice mainly by the complexity of the text (60%) and the lack of information (49%). The typical profile of the abstentionist in the European Elections of 2004 was aged 18-40, which is also the typical profile of the Internet user ...

It is vital for the EU to use the Internet more efficiently but it will not be enough simply to modify the "Europa.eu" and "Europe by Satellite" sites. The recent emergence of "blogs" on the net is an interesting development which the Union might be able to take advantage of. This would involve launching and supporting a series of pro-European blogs maintained by young, enthusiastic pro-Europeans thereby reversing the communication logic: we should not be content answering those who are looking for information but we should also anticipate their needs (push rather than pull).

In a simple, didactic way the EU must communicate with the majority of the citizens by employing the new information relays in the best possible manner, to be read and seen by precisely those who remain sceptical with regard to the European project.

Finally the think-tanks' Internet sites, the showcase of their activities as well as the EIN's might enable direct communication with the citizen. How can we improve these sites? And develop discussion forum? And improve the simple top to bottom relationship (from the think-tank to the citizen) by making it an interactive relationship? All types of interactivity could be a source of improving the debates and mutual understanding between institutions and citizens.

## **C – What should we communicate about?**

1 – Give value to the advantages provided by the European Union

Every day concrete action is undertaken in the field by the European Union without the media ever referring to it. It would be appropriate to do some monitoring in order to select a few activities which are topical European issues (healthcare, unemployment, ecology, the fight against terrorism ...) and present them to the public in an "active" manner whilst respecting the objective of transparency.

The idea is to attract attention towards certain activities by systematically bringing them up. This would be a 'megaphone' type of approach, in other words we would no longer allow certain major European events to pass through the media net thereby raising citizens' awareness of the beneficial effects of the Union by exploiting to the full the (present and future) media available to the institutions. We would show that the major steps forward and the major technological, ecological, defence projects are European above all and that these projects really do affect European lives. The EU is present in the citizens' lives on a daily basis but does not know how to promote itself. It must now rid itself of all its scruples in order to quite clearly inform its citizens systematically of its presence and of its advantages.

The recent popular enthusiasm on the part of the public about the launch of the A380 (and this shortly after the failure of the referendum) clearly shows that citizens can be charmed by a European enterprise, especially when the latter is presented with powerful language that passes well via the media: "the biggest airplane in the world," "an unequalled technical achievement." etc.

## 2 – Fighting "received ideas"

It seems appropriate also to communicate on the facts that are often ignored and the ignorance of which can feed the anti-European stance. Two complementary approaches could be developed to advantage:

a) the first comprises the quoting of key figures. For example: recall what the running costs of Europe are and relate this figure with the budget of Member States (even with the budget of EU capitals); also point out the cost of enlargement; etc. This would make it possible to counter misconceptions about these issues;

b) the second comprises highlighting the situation of the EU and its Member States if such and such a common policy did not exist; for example the regional policy, the competition policy etc; from this point of view the launch of another communication campaign on the euro and its effects in terms of being an obstacle to competitive devaluation and to inflation might be drawn up.