

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

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ITEM 11

A DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR THE COR 2016-2020

Submitted by the secretary-general

FOR INFORMATION / DEBATE

SUMMARY	
Bureau meeting: 170th	Date: 10/10/2016
Item 11	
A digital communication strategy for the CoR	
Type:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Document for information / debate <input type="checkbox"/> Document for decision <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation to the Assembly	
Short description:	
<p>This Digital Communication Strategy sets out the CoR's vision to become a leading digital innovator among EU institutions in communicating Europe through digital channels. We set out six principles, which will serve as the foundations for a digital community. Members can expect improved content, co-created between policy directorates and political groups. This should in turn encourage members to communicate in greater numbers and with increased effectiveness on digital and social media channels.</p>	
The bureau is invited to:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes note of this strategic document; • Monitor its implementation through the CoR's annual communication reports. 	
Remarks:	
None.	

1. Introduction

The Bureau decision in April 2015 on the new organigram acknowledges that the CoR must "go digital" in its communication outreach and "better exploit the huge networking opportunity, offered by the web and social media, by better connecting its on-line institutional presence."

The ambition for a Digital Communication Strategy was set out in the Institution's Communication Strategy 2015-2020 adopted by the Bureau in October 2015. And the commitment to develop and start implementing that Strategy during 2016 was taken by the Bureau in the Annual Communication Plan for this year, adopted in December 2016.

To achieve this in a rapidly changing digital environment, the CoR has built a digital communication strategy that will provide guidelines for a coordinated approach:

- Within the Directorate for Communication, reaching across the areas of web, social media, audiovisual, publications, email marketing and digital events;
- Between the Policy Directorates and the Political Groups to co-create content which better serves the digital communication needs of members
- Between the Committee of the Regions and the other EU institutions.

This digital strategy accompanies the 5-year Communication Strategy established for 2015-2020. Implementation of specific actions will be detailed in the annual Communication Plan of the CoR. For example, "digital" actions for implementation in 2017 will be presented as part of the Communication Plan due for adoption by the Bureau in December. However, there are a number of specific digital actions which cannot wait until the end of the year and need to be started immediately. These are listed in the Appendix (Operational plan for the remainder of 2016).

2. CoR digital communication: state of play

Evidence suggests that both attractiveness of content and user-friendliness of CoR digital communication can be improved.

First, *in the social media*, the local anchorage of members is not used enough for telling interesting stories. Recent surveys confirm that the CoR has only around 40 members who engage on EU/CoR-related issues on Twitter, out of 208 who have a Twitter account. Some 260 members have a Facebook account. There is potential to improve the situation, when one considers the increase of the number of followers of the CoR's social media platforms: Twitter account (currently 20 000, launched in 2012), Facebook (8 000, 2014), LinkedIn (4 500, 2015), YouTube (1 300, 2007) and FlickrR (100 followers, 2012, 1.2 million views per year).

Second, *on the internet*, the CoR currently has 17 different websites in a complex architecture which requires serious streamlining. The main communication website www.cor.europa.eu was launched in 2012 and currently has 1.8 million page views by 300 000 different persons per year.

All *publications* exist in electronic format and, for some, in interactive online formats since 2013. We are working towards more easier-to-consume formats such as infographics, which can also be used

across multiple channels. The CoR monthly sends 16 versions of its eNewsletter to a total of 10 000 people across Europe. The average open rate in 2015 is 20% and the click rate 10%, which are good rates, with the Dutch and Belgian-NL editions leading.

Last but not least, in relation to *digital events*, the CoR became the first EU body to develop and deliver a massive open online course (MOOC) on Europe's regions, the EU institutions and policy-making. Building on positive feedback received from participants, this pilot edition is already being followed by further courses which provide insights into EU policies relevant for regions and cities.

3. Vision

The strategy aims to establish the CoR as a digital innovator in communicating about the EU. The digital communication strategy should be organised to create a virtuous circle where new and existing users are converted into loyal users and then into multipliers. This shall enable the CoR to reach out to new members of its target audience groups, as they were defined in the Communication Strategy 2015-2020 (regional and local authorities and EU institutions). The digital communication strategy therefore puts more emphasis on offering communication products for multipliers, namely the members, the other EU institutions and the media.

Our ideal vision for the future of digital communication at the CoR is as follows:

- Outreach and impact drive the development of content on the political and thematic priorities;
- The Political Groups and the administration co-create snappy, attractive content for members;
- Best use is made of the multi-linguistic environment the CoR and its members operate in, while the multilingualism policy is adapted to the CoR limited means;
- Feed-back from members and users drive the way in which digital communication is developed.

4. Principles

The CoR's digital communication strategy will be pursued over the coming years based on a number of key principles. These will guide the establishment of a genuine digital community among members and their staff, Political Groups and officials from key directorates of the administration. The 700 politicians from regions and cities across the EU are uniquely placed to reach out – everywhere where elected politicians in Europe take the floor. These principles are designed to put members in the best position to stimulate debate about the future of the EU on digital and social media channels:

- **Principle 1:** Put CoR members at the centre - The political groups and the administration will play a key role to further empower them to pass on CoR political messages digitally, by providing them with adequate narrative and social media coaching.
- **Principle 2:** Focus on the CoR's political and thematic priorities as well as inter-institutional communication campaigns.
- **Principle 3:** Measure the impact – we need quantitative measures ("How many people in the specific target audience did we reach?") but we also need to develop qualitative measures ("What was the impact?"). Content which is not used or has no impact should be discarded.
- **Principle 4:** Foster stronger inter-institutional cooperation in the area of digital communication.
- **Principle 5:** Work together across traditional silos: content needs to be co-created with input from policy units, the translation service, Political Groups and even members themselves, where they

become social media ambassadors. This also means using common tools (such as KIKLOS) and basic IT principles (such as single entry of data) to avoid creating new "digital" silos;

- **Principle 6:** Reach out to the target audience groups in their own language as far as possible, making best use of CoR members' local staff as well as central linguistic resources. Information translated into all official languages needs to be kept to a minimum, whilst still respecting basic Institutional and legal requirements.

5. Next steps:

Implementation of the digital communication strategy will begin immediately through the actions listed in the attached "Operational plan for the remainder of 2016" (Internal document in Appendix).

These specific actions can all be undertaken within budget ceilings already agreed by the CFAA.

Further digital actions for implementation in 2017 will be presented as part of the annual Communication Plan due for adoption by the Bureau in December. Moreover, the Bureau will receive annual reports on the implementation of the digital communication strategy within the overall communication reporting each year.

PROPOSAL:

Members of the Bureau are invited to take note of the document and to monitor its implementation through the European Committee of the Regions' annual communication reports.

APPENDIX

Draft Operational Plan for implementation in the remainder of 2016

The present document describes the actions that will be undertaken by the end of the year as a result of the adoption of the CoR's Digital Communication Strategy. It therefore updates the paragraph "online communication, social media and publications" of the Communication Plan 2016¹.

Content:

The Communication Strategy 2015-2020² envisaged an approach based on story-telling and real examples that address the CoR's political and thematic priorities. Opinions and resolutions of the European Committee of the Regions should include at least one real-life example, preferably those that CoR members themselves propose. This will be implemented along with the new visual identity in the opinions adopted in the December plenary.

Social Media Code of Conduct and Guidelines:

The CoR Code of Conduct and Guidelines will cover the social media activities of members to the extent they are supported by the staff, the social media activities of the Political Groups, and the Institution's accounts, as well as the activities of the staff as individuals.

This is a major opportunity to codify the interactions and interventions of the different actors among staff and members, building a climate of trust in an area in which the human factor is so important.

The European Committee of the Regions is among the last to adopt such guidelines. We can therefore make use of the best practice of the other Institutions. Moreover, the CoR now has the only comparative study of the different Institutions' guidelines, which we can share with our counterparts before the end of the year.

Website:

A new, greatly simplified, homepage will be implemented by the end of the year on cor.europa.eu. Member-centric communication on this website will be achieved by featuring members' profiles in the middle of the new homepage. Members' profiles will be displayed in turn, allowing sufficient time for viewers to read about their activities both as part of the legislative process (e.g. work as rapporteur) as well as contributing to communication (e.g. events). The profiles will be updated to include new details such as the member's social media account(s) and websites, number of voters (where applicable) and activities carried out in these areas on behalf of the Institution.

A document summarising the practical implications of the move to the new web content management system will be agreed by the end of the year.

¹ COR-2015-05320-14-01-NB-TRA

² COR-2015-04495-04-01-NB-TRA

Language policy:

For member-centric communication, we will propose content in the language of the member as far as possible, with English as a lingua franca (for example for use in social media).

For Institutional communication, key information about the Institution and major events on the website will continue to be available in 24 languages.

Our cooperation with the translators will be extended to cover all communication content, not just web. The translation document types will be discussed with Directorate T to allow priority translation for web/digital/social media content.

Publication policy:

The European Committee of the Regions participates in the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS). By the end of 2016, all print products will be prepared via the inter-institutional printshop (shared with the EESC) only. All external print, storage and pulping contracts within Directorate D for paper publications will be closed.

Measurement:

To emphasise its focus on measurement and to enable comparison among Institutions, the European Committee of the Regions will have both Google Analytics and the inter-institutional web analytical tools in place by the end of the year. For social media it will make use of both listening tools and social-media platforms' built-in monitoring systems - these will be in place by the end of the year.

Innovation:

Given the high investment and relatively low take-up so far, the experiment of e-Newsletters will be reviewed in the light of the annual evaluation at the end of 2016. The European Committee of the Regions wishes to establish a reputation as a "digital innovator" in communicating with the EU. We should have the honesty and courage to abandon projects that do not provide a sufficient return on investment.

For the future:

Any further actions to implement the Digital Communication Strategy will be proposed in the annual plans, starting with the Communication Plan for 2017, due for adoption in the December Bureau meeting.
