



# Campaigning for Europe

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## (20) Celebrating the local in pan-European campaigns 9 November, JDE52

**Speaker:** Tina Zournatzi (Head of strategic communication, DG Communication, European Commission), Julien Clerckx (Strategic director, Wide - The Strategic Societal Institute, Belgium), Simone Rudigier (Public relations officer, European Parliament liaison office, Austria)

**Moderator:** Brett Kobie (SVP and director, EMEA Digital Public Affairs Lead, FleishmanHillard, Belgium)

To kick off the discussion on how proximity drives interest in campaigns, the moderator, **Brett Kobie**, opened the session by introducing the speakers and recalling the importance of taking the heterogeneity of EU Member States into account when developing a campaign.

Before presenting the current communication strategies of DG COMM, **Tina Zournatzi** explained how communication is organised in the European Commission. DG COMM is in charge of broad campaigns and relations with the media, each DG takes care of communication with its stakeholders. The new strategy of the institutions is to engage in corporate communication, meaning to bring the EU as a whole (different DGs, institutions and Member State delegations) together with one message, one voice and one logo to “*show what Europe does, what it stands for and why*”. In this collaborative way, the European Commission aims to better target audiences and reduce the information gap between institutions and the public. Three campaigns, based on the “appealing to hearts and minds” approach, are being tested:

Name	What does it promote?	Who does it target?	What tools does it use?
InvestEU	The impact of EU funding on jobs, growth and local investment.	Ambivalent and neutral members of the public.	Multichannel campaign showcasing real stories instead of numbers.
#EUandME	The life-changing opportunities the EU offers.	Reconnect young people (18-35) with the EU’s core values.	A digital campaign based on 135 testimonies from all around Europe.
EU Together We Protect	The role of the EU in bringing ordinary heroes together to protect and help citizens.	Reassure adults (35-55) that the EU is dealing with their concerns.	Video campaign focusing on 40 crossborder stories.

These three campaigns try to strike a more emotional chord, linking national pride to pro-EU sentiment, since the two are not mutually exclusive. People tend to care more about what part their country played in a wider EU project. It is difficult to evaluate the campaigns' impact on awareness-raising, but the first evaluation of



InvestEU registered an increase of 5 percentage points in the positive opinion of the impact of EU funding one year into the campaign.

The moderator then zoomed in on the need to scale down European Commission campaigns in order to reach more targeted groups, based on demographic patterns. This change has been possible thanks to in-depth research into the public's expectations and perceptions, as **Julien Clerckx** showed in his presentation. Looking more at the research side of communication campaigns, he started by underlining that efficient communication depends on how well we understand what works and what does not work. That is why it's important to acknowledge that people see the world in very different ways. To identify these different world views, his company uses two qualitative methods: one-on-one interviews and discussion groups; both in Brussels (with people of various nationalities) and across the EU. Their analytical framework distinguishes between megatrends (changing global forces) and master-trends (how people react to these changing global forces). Based on the collected qualitative input, three different phases in the evolution of societal trends have been identified:

- 2001-2008: People think through paradoxes
- 2008-2015: People think through paradigms
- Currently: People think through utopias. This is the result of the financial crisis, which dented trust in institutions and increased the need for hope. Consequently, the process of building a relationship between institutions and the public is much slower.

According to the three-level structure "me, peers and society", Julien insisted on the importance of the "me" aspect to give strong global trends credibility in people's minds. In other words, the question "what's in it for Europe?" goes hand in hand with "what's in it for me?" These results can be used to identify what motivates people, develop more targeted scenarios, create stronger relationships and transcend the local.

The workshop ended with **Simone Rudigier's** presentation on her experience on the ground of implementing the "This time I'm voting" campaign with the Austrian liaison office. This broad EU campaign has been implemented very differently in each Member State, because "going local" also means that specific territorial habits have to be taken into account. She suggested three communication practices based on her day-to-day work:

- Organising the event to involve as many people as possible (i.e. the Austrian liaison office organised a summer event in a rural mountain area with students, for an exchange of views on the EU).
- Finding partners to gather as much information on local specificities as possible, by working with locals. It is important to stay in contact and create opportunities for face-to-face interactions. For instance, civil society is very active and organised in Austria, with 63% of people involved in a local association.
- Work with local heroes, leaving an opening for spontaneous actions (i.e. a mayor who brought a big inflatable balloon to an event).

She concluded her presentation with some key lessons learned during her campaign: prepare for questions outside the bubble, take location differences into account, know your target audience, make your event stand out, inform important stakeholders, organise crossborder activities. Mr Kobie said that her presentation was inspirational, showing that there is a need to adapt constantly and give up the idea of control.

#### **Q&A discussion – key messages:**

- How to start a conversation on the EU with local actors? It is important to try not to force ideas on people, by not only talking but also listening, starting on neutral ground and using the existing networks built up over time by the liaison offices.
- How to avoid a perception of "Brussels propaganda" being too self-promotional and positive? DG COMM tries to work in partnership with national EU promoters to co-create flexible campaigns that take into account national cultural limits. Although this is a step-by-step process, DG COMM is also redeveloping its strategy, moving away from unilateral broad campaigns towards more bilateral dialogues; in other words, being a facilitator rather than an informer. It is about putting subsidiarity into practice!

- Does the use of emotion in communication work? The “appealing to minds and hearts” strategy of EU communication does not mean using emotion, rather moving away from bare numbers, to use real life stories.

The final recommendation of the session was: **"Campaigning for Europe locally only works when it is focused on what drives individuals, when it is 'glocal' and when you involve everybody!"**

