



EuroPCom session report

Closing Session

Friday, 8 November, 11h15 – 12h45

Speaker: **Jaume Duch Guillot**, Spokesperson and Director-General of Communication, European Parliament; **Pia Ahrenkilde-Hansen**, Director-General for Communication, European Commission; **Paul Reiderman**, Director for Media and Communication, General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union; **Markku Markkula**, First Vice President of the European Committee of the Regions

Moderator: **Jennifer Baker**, journalist

The closing session concluded this year's EuroPCom with inspiring thoughts leaving the participants with many intriguing concepts to consider concerning public communication across Europe following the most recent European elections back in May 2019.

Jaume Duch Guillot's introductory remarks - touched on this year's European elections, analysing key figures with regard to voter turnout and participation. Mr Duch Guillot revealed how good communication was central to the increased number of voters in the last elections, particularly among younger people, thanks to communication platforms such as social media and other innovative means. This year's European elections ultimately reflected the success of the EU election campaigns. With a voter turnout of 50.6%, more people had gone out to vote in 2019 than since 1994. Mr Duch Guillot emphasised that we must understand that institutional communication has evolved and that today there are two main lessons to be understood when it comes to communication. Firstly, the need for a clear narrative. It is essential to remind the public and the electorate that the EU stands for something. In this way, "we are defending democracy", Mr Duch Guillot said, and "defending democracy is essential to avoid growing Euroscepticism". Secondly, there is a need to reach out to other stakeholders, forming partnerships and expanding networks with NGOs, the media, the public etc. We were reminded that there is no democratic legitimacy without accountability and that there is no accountability without knowing completely, transparently and plainly what the EU does and above all, what it is doing for its citizens.

"Looking forward" was the headline of this year's EuroPCom conference. **Paul Reiderman** emphasised that this cannot be done alone. There is a shared and collective responsibility across all institutions to communicate the EU and what the EU does for its citizens. More importantly, there must be an emphasis on an overarching positive message, which not only attracts the public's interest but also has legitimacy and accountability from the public's perspective. Communication is therefore the responsibility of all

institutions and especially reaching out to local and regional players, thus encouraging a more direct engagement with citizens.

Mr Reiderman also spoke in depth about diversity of opinion, encouraging the acceptance and embracing of difference of opinion across all platforms and across all institutions. "Looking forward" together is by no means supposed to mean in a unified fashion, whereby everyone agrees with a common consensus, without even the challenge of mild opposition to an idea. Instead, we must collaborate and allow for debates, diversity of opinion and controversy. "Do not fear being innovative, nor the repercussion of proposing new ideas", he said. There must be creativity, innovation and risk-taking for there to be good and direct communication with citizens. Controversy should have a more significant place within discussions, and differences should ultimately be embraced across institutions and not shut down. We must strive for a less transactional union where institutions as well as sovereign states work better together in collaboration, sharing new ideas and creative communication strategies.

Pia Ahrenkilde-Hansen stressed that public communication was the responsibility of all institutions, and especially local and regional players, as we are all stakeholders in Europe's future. She concurred with previous speakers in saying that the institutions bear the responsibility of encouraging the direct engagement with citizens because the EU belongs to every European citizen. After the success of the past elections, new targets have been set to increase participation even further, but for this, there is a lot of work to be done prior to the 2024 campaigns.

One of the main challenges we face is misinformation. Allowing for debates, controversy, more emotion in communication, and having more transparency and clarity are all key facets that will play an important part in fighting misinformation, and the collection of diverse ideas will only strengthen policy-making as a whole. The threat of bureaucracy is one also often associated with the EU's sustainability. The committees must work together to produce more effective policy consideration and opinions, which at the same time reaches out to citizens at the local and regional level. Lastly, simpler vocabulary must be used to communicate to all young people. We must not dissociate ourselves from the public; on the contrary, we must reach out to all members of society in a more appealing and communicative way.

First Vice-President Markku Markkula concluded the conference speaking of the future for communications going forward. He summed up the crucial messages of the two-day conference, mentioning issues of misinformation, innovation and technology, and that it is crucial that we streamline communication across institutions if we really wish to reach the citizens, placing utmost importance upon dialogue with citizens. "Young people are the future of communication", he said, when addressing the need for new partnerships with national and international education institutions for the sharing of resources and tools. Lastly, he suggests to transform the nature of the dialogue the EU has with its citizens, by offering new vocabulary, more frequently used everyday language and modifying its narrative, as 40% of voters are below 35 years old, and the time has come to present a narrative to them that relates to them as much as possible. "Let this not be one off occasion, but the start for more consolidated communication for institutions to further share tools and knowledge for more prosperous results in the future".