NOTE FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BUREAU

Subject: Proposal for the European Parliament’s institutional communication strategy for European Elections 2019

SUMMARY

European Elections are the full articulation of European democracy. Each new political make-up of the European Parliament is a microcosm of European society and a reflection of the mood of the moment among Europe’s citizens. The European Parliament’s institutional communication efforts are there to lay the groundwork for the political campaigns; to support and complement them; and to ensure that as many people as possible see the sense in voting at the European Parliament elections in the first place.

This institutional communication strategy for European Elections 2019, as detailed in this note, stems from the discussion held in the Bureau Away Days on 9 October 2017.

The communication efforts will take place in several stages. First, in 2018 the "laying the groundwork" stage will aim to ensure citizens have a clear idea of the work, relevance and power of the European Parliament in the areas that are of greatest concern to them. Second, the Spitzenkandidaten process will serve as a key media communication moment in late 2018 and early 2019. In 2014 Parliament proved itself as being the only player capable of framing, explaining and accompanying the Spitzenkandidaten process from an institutional, non-partisan and pan-European point of view, an approach that will be built upon for the next elections. And third, the “go-to-vote” phase (in the run up to voter registration deadlines and elections) to inform voters of all the practicalities related to voting: when do the elections take place? Where can they vote? When is the deadline for voter registration?

Throughout this period, the European Parliament will look towards mobilising and activating a wide network of multipliers to spread an inspiring and mobilising get-out-the-vote message on its behalf. This will be an extremely important factor in scaling up the campaign, ensuring that it reaches a critical mass and speaks to audiences that go beyond the "usual suspects". To this end, the European Parliament should seek to involve different networks, organisations and citizens in an open exchange with the institution via a series of engaging events on topical policy matters. At national and local level, it should be ensured that the European Parliament Information Offices in Member States are at the forefront of mapping out the right audiences for the right messages and finding the optimal multipliers and distribution channels to reach them.
In terms of messaging, close cooperation with the Commission will be a priority, in order to ensure synergies and to make sure the messages are fully aligned. The Commission will focus on pro-European messages relating to how the EU protects, empowers and delivers to citizens. The European Parliament will complement this narrative with the specific goal of ensuring voters understand why it is important to vote at the European Elections and how their vote counts. From that perspective, the European elections campaign should not just aim to bring voters to the polls, but also provide them with a better understanding of the European project and the sense of the European Parliament itself.

The members of the Bureau are therefore invited to:


I. INTRODUCTION

Every five years, the European Elections represent a key moment in the life of the European Parliament and the European Union as a whole. This holds true today more than ever. For this reason it is of particular importance for the European Parliament to keep in mind the meaning of the European Elections in their wider context: they are the full articulation of European democracy. They are the moment when people can choose where they want the EU to head in the five years to come, each new political make-up of the European Parliament is a microcosm of European society and a reflection of the mood of the moment among Europe's citizens. The next elections will also have important consequences on the European Commission and indeed the post-Brexit EU, Europe's future will be shaped by the results of the 2019 elections. As an institution, Parliaments duty is to make people aware of the elections and their meaning and to help them make informed choices. In other words, the institutional communication efforts are there to lay the groundwork for the political campaigns; to support and complement them, and to ensure that as many people as possible see the sense in voting in the European Parliament elections in the first place.

The present document thus provides a first basis of the 2019 election institutional campaign strategy. It is the result of robust analysis of the lessons learned from the European Parliament's past election experiences, as well as key insights from other related European and global events. This context analysis then led into the strategic and operational conclusions on the design and implementation of the European Parliament’s communication strategy for the 2019 European Elections, as set out in the following.

II. EE19 STRATEGIES

The European Elections are a three-tier communication process.

The primary and most visible level of communication is with the campaigns run by the national and European political parties and the candidates. These campaigns have a clear political message and are fully personified by the candidates.

The second element has given the Elections a further fundamental European and democratic dimension as of 2014: the "Spitzenkandidaten" process which was a major success for Parliament. In 2014, the European Parliament's institutional communication on this process helped facilitate the work and goals of the political parties by explaining the process and laying the groundwork.
However, whereas the political campaigns exist to help the electorate decide who to vote for, voters often have less clarity on why they should vote in European elections in the first place - a question that is much less present in national, regional or local elections.

It is in this context that the third campaign tier comes into play. The institutional campaign is there to remind people what the European Parliament is, what it does, how it affects their lives and why engaging in European Elections is important as a result - that is to say, to bridge the gap between the European Parliament and the citizens. It has to demonstrate that the result of the elections is not only the composition of a new Parliament, but also determining who is at the helm of the executive, as citizens are used to in most Member States. It lays the groundwork for the political campaign (raising awareness about the work and impact of the European Parliament in their lives, the Spitzenkandidaten process, etc.) and steps in to remind voters of practicalities at key moments (registration deadline, date of voting, where to vote, etc.) in order to ensure widespread turnout. The institutional campaign thus serves as a background "service provider" to the political campaigns. Its role is to mobilise voters to engage in the democratic process in the first place, but it is up to the political parties to convince them of their vision as to how this should look.

2.1 The underpinning principles of the EE19 campaign

a) A European campaign. In view of the current political atmosphere, it is no exaggeration to say that the EU is at stake. The rise in nationalist and protectionist discourse in many Member States thus has not just affected disenfranchised voters, but all sectors and classes of society. From that perspective, the European elections campaign should not just aim to bring voters to the polls, but also convince them to support the European project, which provides sense to the European Parliament itself. In its communication strategy, the European Parliament should take a clear and unambiguous stance in favour of the European Union, its importance for all citizens and their future.

b) A decentralised and localised campaign. Whereas the overarching approach and messaging strategy can only be developed centrally, it should be fully fleshed out and adapted in order to meet the contextual needs within each Member State. This applies both to fine-tuning the target audiences and the specific types of networks, allies and media channels that can reach them, adapting the messages and choosing the communication priorities that most resonate in the local environment. Instruments such as "La Leistungsbilanz" will serve as useful tools to communicate fully localised messages on the role of Europe in the daily life of citizens and what it brings to specific target groups according to their areas of interest.

c) A networked ground game effort. A networked approach to spreading messages in a cost-effective way, activating get-out-the-vote volunteers and voters themselves is a key component of any modern election campaign. To succeed, a campaign must be scaled up via a wide network of multipliers who help advocate for its cause, for example through citizens and stakeholders conferences and events to be organised by the European Parliament in the course of 2018, in Brussels and Strasbourg, involving different networks and organisations in an open exchange with the institution. To this end, the European Parliament must ensure it mobilises all its internal and external networks; that it works in close cooperation with institutional partners and national governments to tap into their multiplier capacities and networks; and ensures it develops the right tools to help its allies carry out these efforts on its behalf. As the first and most effective multipliers of political messages, media should also be considered as key partners in this

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1 An application (currently being developed by DG EPRS and DG ITEC) allowing users to see how the EU has benefitted them personally, based on their interests and regional provenance.
respect and cost-free media coverage considered as a key component of scaling up the campaign.

d) A clear focus on key campaign moments. When resources are limited, they should be placed on areas and moments where they matter most. Based on DG COMM's internal and external analysis of EE14, the election campaign should be developed on two distinct levels: the first level relates to laying the political groundwork, thus ensuring a constant stream of communication and awareness raising about the European Parliament's purpose, work and impact. The second level refers to concrete points in time, where the get-out-the-vote effort is considered most crucial in order to mobilise voters to go to the polls. This includes the Spitzendkandidaten process (including the internal elections of the candidates by their political families), the run up to voter registration deadlines in Member States (where applicable) and the go-to-vote phase (specifically the crucial two weeks prior to the elections). A clear campaign focus also requires a simple messaging strategy, via a one message - all channel approach.

e) Focused and data driven targeting. A centralised one-way campaign that targets an intangible "general audience" cannot succeed; a campaign that's tailored to every taste necessarily fails to truly resonate with anyone. Clear choices must thus be made as regards key target audiences for the European Parliament's more centralised campaign efforts and based on performance data of the effectiveness of the different channels and products through the measuring of hours of attention.

2.2 Target audiences

The overall campaign strategy of the European Parliament will seek to reach out to as wide and diverse a public as possible. However, in order to maximise return-on-investment and ensure the greatest impact in terms of translating potential voters into actual voters, some more specific choices in terms of target audiences will need to be made. For this reason, the EE19 campaign must place particular effort into convincing those segments of the population who look favourably upon the EU and EP, but nonetheless don't turn up for voting day.

Following an analysis of data available from a range of related Eurobarometer surveys, three target groups who have maintained a pro-EU attitude throughout the years can be identified: opinion makers,

2 Young people, as traditionally seen in all types of elections (regional, national), did not participate in the election in highly significant numbers (72% abstention rate).
- Students voted somewhat more but most still did not participate in the ballot (63%).
- The majority of opinion makers did vote, but this still implied a 47% abstention rate.

Furthermore, for all these three categories, 'technical and personal reasons' had an important impact on their abstention. The moment in which a majority of them decided to abstain was very late in time: either a few days before or on the exact day of the elections. Based on this, the following operational conclusions can be drawn with regard to the targeting strategy for the 2019 election campaign:

2 The category of "opinion makers" includes:

- Employed professional (employed doctor, lawyer, accountant, architect).
- General management, director or top management (managing directors, director general, other director).
- Middle management, other management (department head, junior manager, teacher, technician).
Opinion makers, youth (15-24) and students specifically are key pro-European target groups.

Despite their European sentiments, their abstention rates at European Elections remain high, meaning that they represent a clear and logical target group for the campaign's get-out-the-vote effort.

Citizens who (traditionally) do not vote for reasons other than technical ones (e.g. opposed to the EU, not interested in politics) are more difficult - if not impossible - to approach. Conversely those who abstained for technical reasons can be seen as voters who simply were not motivated enough to vote in face of certain technical difficulties. It may be considered that they could still be pushed to go to the polls provided they are convinced of the importance of voting and informed about all available options to overcome their specific 'technical difficulties'.

The timing when these groups decided to abstain is a key factor; in view of the fact that this primarily took place a few days before or on the election date, the main campaign focus on these target groups should therefore take place at this crucial point in time.

This overarching analysis will need to be developed further for each Member State, in order to determine whether the identified target audiences apply in every Member State; if so, are the reasons for abstention and the timing of the decision for abstention also applicable; if not, who are the correct target audiences in that specific country and at what point in time should they be targeted.

2.3 Messaging strategy

The term "message" pertains to the overarching story or narrative that the campaign should like to tell. This story should be consistent no matter who is addressed, where and through which medium. It should be strong, yet clear, simple and continuously reinforced over a prolonged period of time. The campaign message should not be confused with the campaign slogan: the first provides the overarching story, whereas the second aims to embody it in a simple, catchy sound-bite that serves as the campaign's rally cry. The Macron, Corbyn and Trump campaign slogans ("La France en marche!"; "Let's go, let's go, let's fucking go!" and "Make America Great Again") all incarnate the political story they wanted to tell and the type of audience they attempted to engage (centrist liberal progressive; young leftist; rust belt conservative).

In the case of the European Parliament, the objective is to make the European project relevant for the decisions to be taken to reach a better future, thereby giving people a clear reason to vote. From this point of view, the following two (possibly, but not necessarily, compatible) messaging strategies should be considered. These will need to be fleshed out further by internal and external experts and translated into concrete creative solutions.

a) "Choose your future"

In political campaigning, creating a movement is the holy grail of engagement. Building a movement with a real mobilising potential, requires the audience to feel that they are part of a bigger picture. It should provide them with a sense of empowerment and control. From this point of view, the "choose your future" messaging strategy ticks all the boxes: it is a strong message of empowerment and control; it is forward looking and subliminally plants the idea that there is a prospect for change, should the appropriate action be taken (i.e. vote); it provides a higher purpose and considers the bigger picture.

b) It should be noted that movements require action and many aspiring ones miss the mark by either asking too much or making the action so generic it becomes meaningless. For
this reason, the key idea of this message will need to be developed and consolidated further for various target audiences and linked back to the European Parliament and its work.

c) "For a Europe that protects and empowers"

Analyses of European Parliament media coverage demonstrate that protection is a key driver of positive coverage. Indeed, positive coverage of the EP plenary sessions is much higher on issues that are seen as having a strong protective aspect. This pattern has been a constant since DG COMM started conducting systematic media analysis of the plenary in 2012.

This positioning has the advantage of being both functional (what can Europe do) and emotional (how Europe can make you feel). At the same time, the "for a" clearly acknowledges that Europe is not perfect, it is not always protecting you and implies the idea of evolution as opposed to status quo. It is aspirational in the sense that it provides a forward looking vision. Combining these three elements (function, emotion, vision) will be key to ensuring a communication that resonates among audiences.

A Europe that empowers all citizens gives them the means to participate fully in society and European democracy. The dynamic of a Europe that protects and empowers (more) must be pointing at a world of infinite possibilities that would not exist without the EU.

2.4 Media strategy

The media strategy is built around a two-phased approach, both of which are aimed at maximising cost-free media coverage. In the first phase (from 2017 to autumn 2018) the daily work to accompany EP activities should be focused on the main themes and messages (building on the "protection" narrative) aligning toward the Elections message. In parallel, proactive actions to strengthen Parliament’s links with media partners in the Member States should be prioritised. Media work will always be aligned with the political and legislative activity of the House, including key topics as the Brexit negotiations or other topics of interest to most European citizens.

In the second phase, the Spitzenkandidaten that already proved successful in 2014, is the principal campaign story for the media. Parliament has a strong competitive advantage on this, as it is the only one capable of framing, explaining and accompanying the Spitzenkandidaten process from an institutional, non-partisan and pan-European point of view.

It is safe to conclude that the link between the election of the Parliament and the subsequent election of the president of the Commission was one of the main stories of the 2014 campaign. The more flexibility Parliament offers the media in helping cover this story, the greater the chances that it will be taken up. Media do not need ready-made material, but they do require good stories and guidance. Press officers in the Member States should define their offer in a dialogue with media and come up with tailor-made solutions, especially for television. TV debates are the strongest medium for any political campaign: in 2014, the Presidential debate organised in cooperation with Eurovision was transmitted by 55 television stations across Europe and generated extensive coverage in the press over the following days. In 2019, Parliament’s effort should be focused on convincing the main TV outlets in each country to transmit it.

Media are key allies in building a positive narrative about the EU. In order to maximize their reach and impact, special emphasis should be placed on television and digital media, as well
as regional media where applicable. Based on the country specific data mentioned earlier, press officers in the Member States, together with their Brussels counterparts will develop a national and regional media strategy for their country (to be completed in 2017). Such a strategy should include:

- An alliance building roadshow. The objective is to target Editors-in-Chief and Directors of main media, to raise awareness about EE19 and their historical importance. The roadshow should start at the beginning of 2018 and conclude in the summer of 2018.
- A reinforcement of the European Parliament’s “selling force” in the Member States. The EP Information Offices are the best placed and key distribution force of the European Parliament. For this reason, medium and large member states should be equipped with at least three media relation officers, namely: head of press, TV & radio account officer and a digital account officer.
- Press seminars will serve as an additional proactive awareness raising tool, with a target of approximately 3000 journalists from Member States coming to Brussels to get better acquainted with the importance of the next elections and all useful tools provided to follow them. The Seminars will be made as attractive and productive as possible for journalists, to enable them to report on EE19 related news, develop programs from Parliaments studios or make interviews.

It should be noted that this work will be fully coordinated with the political parties and geared at providing them with maximum access to media coverage. DG COMM will be at their disposal to help organise TV debates, provide visibility via the European Election website, etc.

Following the elections, the election night, commissioner hearings and inauguration ceremony will, of course, also be subject to their respective communication actions, as has been the case in the past.

Another essential role for traditional media is helping the Parliament (and other EU institutions) to fight fake news that might arise when getting closer to the elections. A specific fake news action plan is being prepared by DG COMM following the adoption of a note on this issue.

2.5 Social media strategy

The key target audiences identified for EE19 are highly active on social media. A significant amount of them are digital natives, who can barely remember a world without Google or Facebook, who cannot go through the day without Snapchat, Instagram or Twitter.

Today, the European Parliament’s central Facebook page has 2.2 million fans, has an active central presence on ten social-media platforms, a full multimedia editorial mix, expertise in adopting the right tone for each audience and platform and a strong experience in running paid digital campaigns. In addition, the European Parliament Information Offices in Member States have a combined Facebook following of 450 500, and an additional 221 600 followers on Twitter. These figures continue to grow by approximately 30% yearly.

Modern ground game efforts take place online or are heavily assisted by online tools. In view of this, specific modern digital campaigning tools should be analysed and possibly acquired in order to animate and feed multipliers and supporters with messages, calls to action and editorial products. These tools should also help us tap into various social media groups on different channels, which are powerful and influential multipliers.

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3 This pertains first and foremost to TV, but it should be determined on a case-by-case basis for each country depending on the specific media landscape and user habits.
Parliament maintains close relationships with representatives of major social media platforms. In the context of the EE19, such high-level partners will be asked to embrace Parliament's message and aims and join the effort: Facebook's "I voted" button, Twitter's election banner and an election related Google doodle were among the free online tools that were developed by partners in 2014 and merit being repeated in 2019.

The European Parliament will need to adapt to the evolving social media landscape and develop new social media communication tools that will be useful for the elections. One such example are chat-bots, automated identities in messaging apps, capable of answering a wide range of practical queries (i.e. "where is my closest polling station?").

2.6 Ground game strategy

All ground games rely heavily on multipliers and partner networks for support with certain tasks via their own resources. The potential contributions vary from partner to partner depending on their interest, their own resources and their experience in working with the European Parliament/European Union. The European Parliament alone lacks the human and financial resources for an extensive ground game reaching out to 400 million eligible voters in the European Union and must therefore make good use of its own multiplier networks to this end. This will provide it with additional and highly targeted distribution channels that also act as trustworthy conveyors of its campaign message. In combination with the messages and tools developed such as "La Leistungsbilanz", Parliament will thus ensure that highly targeted messages reach highly targeted audiences. In developing the European Parliament's institutional ground game strategy, it should be kept in mind that such a technique will have limitations that do not apply to political campaigns, which are more personalised and clearly embodied in the political candidates.

The EP's ground game will first require extensive mapping of possible partners. This should encompass existing partners (with an evaluation of the type of target audiences they reach and the modes of possible EE19 related cooperation) as well as a mapping of strategically important partners who could be solicited to provide support in the campaign effort.

Once the mapping has been carried out, Parliament can focus on those partner networks that are likely to create the best possible impact and ideally sign a cooperation agreement with them. Partners can be approached at the European level, the national level and the local level. At European level, under the leadership of the President and with the involvement of the relevant EP governing bodies, a series of citizens and stakeholders conferences should be organised in the course of 2018. These events should aim at shedding light on topical policy matters, particularly relevant to the targeted audiences, and provide opportunities to gather information about the concerns and attitudes of electorates across the EU. The practical organisation and logistics of the citizens and stakeholders conferences will be based on the tried and tested model of an inter-service task force coordinated by DG COMM, as it has been the case for the high-level conferences successfully organised in 2017 in cooperation with external partners. Where appropriate, and with a view to optimising internal resources, the European Parliament should continue to organise citizens and stakeholders events in cooperation with outside bodies such as European institutions, civil society organisations, NGOs and any other relevant stakeholder organisations. The role of the European Parliament's Information Offices in Member States will therefore be crucial in order to tap into their extensive network of stakeholders and civil society multipliers as well as to explore new partnerships that will help them reach key audiences.
The final, and most crucial stage of the ground game takes place during the "get out the vote phase" (GOTV), starting from approximately 30 days before the election. A specific strategy for this period should be developed with an external expert in the field. As this last phase is very intensive in terms of human resources, the European Parliament will need to rely heavily on partners willing to contribute to that effort.

The exact actions and tools used for the GOTV effort remain to be determined and as with all aspects of the campaign, adapted to the local context in each member state, as is the (re)distribution of tasks between the EP and its partners. For example, the production of a leaflet\(^4\) with personalized information about Election Day and the closest polling station for each household could be produced by the Ministry or authority in charge of the elections.

2.7 Paid media strategy

All contemporary campaigns are composed of a mixture of own, paid and earned media efforts. In 2019 the European election campaign will place greater emphasis than ever on the earned media aspect of its work, primarily through its network activation and ground game efforts. Own media platforms - both online and offline - will also be used to maximum effect and are already being streamlined via the "one message all channels" approach to communicate on the established priority topics.

However, paid advertising will remain an important part of the media mix, particularly in the final "go-to-vote" phase and in the voter registration phase in the countries where this applies. Again, the paid media strategy needs to be fully decentralised in order to cater for the requirements of each national context and their respective target groups. The appropriate balance between print, AV, digital and outdoor media/publicity will thus need to be established for each Member State in order to maximise return-on-investment.

In line with DG COMM's principle of favouring distribution above production, no product will be developed without a clear distribution roadmap, which should in most cases include paid advertising, particularly online.

2.8 Campaign timeline & organisation

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It should be noted that in preparing for the 2019 elections, Parliament is building on past experience and moving towards greater internalisation of strategic conception, development, production and implementation of all its activities, rather than relying on external advertising agencies, who have poor understanding of the specific challenges and constraints of institutional communication. This will require partial transformation of the budget that was

\(^4\) Research shows that voter turnout of non-partisan voters increased by 7% after receiving such a leaflet - see http://faps.yale.edu/research/publications/faps00-002.
previously allocated to external agencies to specific internal expert human resource reinforcement. This approach will ensure both greater flexibility and return on investment. It should be noted that the EP Information Offices will nonetheless still be able to rely on external support, when and if required.

III. CONCLUSIONS

In developing and implementing the European Election strategy, Parliament must bear in mind that 2019 will be a far cry from 2014. The political, social, economic and digital environment Europeans are faced with today has undergone radical changes in a very short period of time and continues to evolve on an almost daily basis.

International terrorism, increasingly unpredictable international relations with important powers such as Russia, the United States and China, the impending shadow of Brexit negotiations, the phenomenon of “fake news” and the influx of refugees barely figured in most Europeans’ minds when they went to the polls in 2014. As a reflection of European society, the European Parliament is - and should acknowledge itself as being - fully embedded in these rapidly shifting parameters. In tackling the 2019 EU elections, Parliament must therefore take into account the current reality and not shy away from a courageous and innovative approach to this strategy.

The members of the Bureau are therefore invited to:

- Approve the proposal for the European Parliament’s institutional communication strategy for European Elections 2019.

Klaus WELLE