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COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMISSION

concerning the opening of an Antenna of the Commission Representation in Poland

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Presented by Vice-President V. Reding, in agreement with President J.M. Barroso

Introduction

In the framework of the political declaration "Communicating Europe in Partnership" signed on 22 October 2008 by the Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament, the Commission has reinforced its communication activities by providing information and engaging in debate and discussion with citizens in national, regional and local contexts, thus promoting active European citizenship and contributing to the development of a European public sphere. Therefore communicating at regional and local level is essential for involving citizens in this European debate. In this context the Commission Representations in Member States are playing a key role in the communication efforts of the Commission. They are a prime outlet for information and communication with general public at large and media, especially at regional and local level. They are – together with the Europe Direct Network - the main interlocutors for citizens on EU affairs "on the ground" in the Commission efforts to tailor messages to local needs ("going local"). And they are providing first hand information for the Commission on political developments and sensitivities via political reporting.

1. The current situation

The Commission's Representations and antennas in the 27 Member States are the "eyes, ears and public face" of the Commission. In the Member States representations play a pivotal role in:

- Helping EU policy makers grasp the concerns of citizens, the media and decision makers
- Delivering high quality information and advice about the EU, notably the College's communication priorities

The Commission's Representations are anchored in DG COMM, but serve the entire Commission. Five different areas constitute the core of each Representation's mandate:

- (1) Representation and strategy development
- (2) Communication: engagement and dialogue
- (3) Political reporting and policy analysis
- (4) Press and media
- (5) Management and administration

Member States with a population in excess of 25 million (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, The United Kingdom) are also supported by one or more regional offices. Since the establishment of the Representation in Poland in 2004, it has operated without an Antenna. Given that

Poland has a population of over 38 million, this situation needs to be rectified to serve better Poland's needs.

Opening an Antenna in Poland will fulfil the need for a more open debate at local level, where citizens express their opinions in order to influence the decision-making at EU level. Furthermore, this will help the Commission to analyse public expectations in various policy fields, to assess the impact of policies and to identify public concerns and perceptions in order to improve both policy-making and communication.

2. Decisions

In line with approved practice the Commission is invited to take the decision to open an Antenna of its Representation in Poland at the earliest possible date with a view to be fully operational at the beginning of the Council Presidency of Poland in II/2011.

2.1 Location

Technical assessment of potential locations of a regional office in Poland has established the cities of Krakow on rank one, and Wroclaw and Gdansk on rank two out of eleven cities analysed according to the following criteria agreed between the services of the Commission and the EP:

- Size of the town;
- Regional importance of the town;
- Accessibility (level of the available infrastructure);
- Geographical coverage and number of citizens, which could be reached in the surrounding area (radius of 100 km from the town);
- Distance from Warsaw and difficulty of accessibility of the surrounding area of the location from Warsaw;
- Degree of awareness about the European Union in the region;
- Presence of academic institutions and organisations of the civil society.

Wroclaw is the capital of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. According to official population figures for June 2009, its population is 632,240, making it the fourth largest city in Poland.

Following the decision by the EP to locate its Antenna in Wroclaw¹, it is proposed that the Commission follows this line and will locate its Antenna in the same premises in Wroclaw. It is agreed practice to co-jointly establish offices of the Commission and the European Parliament in Member State capitals and regional locations where applicable.

2.2 Agreement with EP and the city of Wroclaw

¹ The EP by vote in its Bureau on 24 February 2010 has already taken its decision to establish a regional office in Poland to be located in Wroclaw (PV BUR 24.02.2010, PE-7/BUR/PV/2010-03)

The Commission will undertake the necessary steps in order to establish the Antenna in Wroclaw before the start of Polish Presidency in July 2011 in close cooperation with the EP and the city authorities. In this respect, the Commission and the European Parliament have shared premises called "European Union Houses", accommodating their Representations and external offices in almost all the capital cities of the Member States². In fact, the Inter-institutional Group on Information was very supportive at the occasion of the launching of the European public spaces in joint premises.

The Commission will also undertake a building prospection jointly with the EP in order to host the Antenna. The Commission is aware of the importance of the selected location for the success of this exercise. However, due to time, political and financial constraints, i.e. the foreseen opening of the regional office in II/2011, at least a temporary solution should be sought. A possibility is that the Antenna is hosted in offices provided by the local or regional government as soon as possible in 2010. This solution still has to be negotiated with the Polish authorities.

Based on the experience of the regional Representation in Barcelona, the Commission estimates that the required office space for the time being is 700 m² approximately. This includes office space, storage area and the European Public Space. In addition to this, parking space should be also envisaged.

2.3 Resources implications

The Commission estimates that the financial implications of this communication are subject to the available amounts depending on the framework of the budgetary procedure. In principle, as of the beginning of 2011 the Commission should be able to provide budget for operating and staffing the regional office.

The financial impact of the opening of the antenna on the budget will be limited to part of the administrative appropriations (additional AD post) because the other part of the administrative appropriations and the operational appropriations will be provided by internal redeployments, where necessary.

Additional personnel:

1 AD (New post)

4 Contract Agents: (financial impact covered by redeployment)

3. Conclusions

The Commission is invited to:

- approve the Communication and its transmission in DE/EN/FR to the European Parliament for information purposes;

² The two institutions have not yet brought their services together under one roof in the following cities: Athens and Bucharest. At regional level, out of the cities where the two institutions are present, only Edinburgh does not have shared premises. See for the joint housing also C(2008) 3721 final, amending Communication C(2005) 4010 of 19 October 2005 on "An interinstitutional policy for offices of the Representations in the European Union".

- authorise the Director-General of DG COMM to undertake the necessary steps in order to establish the Antenna of the Commission Representation in Poland in Wroclaw ahead of July 2011 in close cooperation with the EP and the city authorities;

- instruct the Director-General of DG COMM to liaise with the EP in an effort to achieve an agreement with the city of Wroclaw on providing at least temporary premises for the Antenna in Wroclaw, if possible free of charge for the EU institutions for 2010 and to launch in parallel a market prospection for a suitable location in case that the municipality of Wroclaw would not be able to provide offices;

- authorise the Director-General of DG COMM to sign for this purpose agreements with the EP and the competent authorities of the city of Wroclaw.