

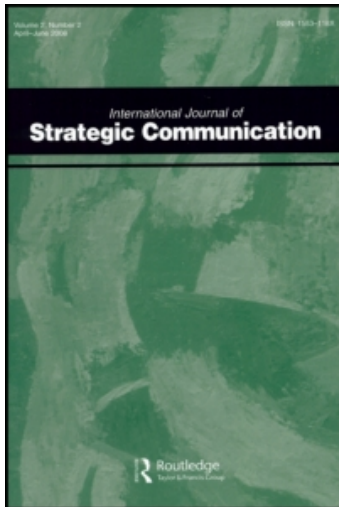
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### EU Communication in the Member States: Comparative Analysis of Finnish and Italian Communication Strategies

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# EU Communication in the Member States: Comparative Analysis of Finnish and Italian Communication Strategies

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The aim of this paper is to analyze the information and communication policies and strategies developed by the European Union between 2001 and 2006 and their implementation in two member states, namely, Finland and Italy, from a public relations perspective. Six EU information and communication policies are presented, and it is discussed whether or not these policies affect the communication actions of the two selected member states and how these states have implemented them. The results indicate that EU communication strategies during this period were very similar in both countries and not sufficiently tailored to their individual needs. The study is based on a content analysis of EU documents on information and communication policies, on interviews with Finnish and Italian officers in charge of EU information campaigns in the respective countries, and on some statistical data provided by different Eurobarometer surveys.

## INTRODUCTION

From most of the lifetime of the European Union project, information and communication actions have played a secondary role compared to other sociopolitical and economical aspects of the integration process. Only in the last 10 years there has been some interest in and effort to understand different aspects of communication. EU information and communication policies have started to be seen as a solution to persistent complaints about EU democratic/

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communication deficits<sup>1</sup> as well as the lack of legitimacy of the EU and the participation of citizens in EU processes.

The importance of communication has been acknowledged within the European institutions. Specifically the European Union has started to accord more significance to its communication activities in the integration process and has changed its approach to information and communication actions from an event plan to a continuous and stable practice. European institutions need support from their citizens in order for the EU to become a supranational democracy (Upson, 2003). The support of Europeans requires knowledge on EU activities and policies and public participation. Citizens should know how EU policies affect their everyday lives and they should also understand the importance of the integration process. This knowledge depends in part on the information available in the member states and in part on public interest in seeking such information. The EU has stated that its aim is to provide enough and coherent information on what the European institutions do and how they work and to reduce apathy and increase Europeans' interest in EU affairs (CEC, 2002). Given that these two goals are the pillars of EU information and communication policies, it is important to analyse how they have been conceived, what actions have been undertaken in order to attain them, and what role member states and other players have in this respect.

There are several studies in the fields of communication and of the European Union<sup>2</sup>, but not many that have approached EU communication strategies from a public relations perspective. This study analyzes the information and communication policies and strategies that the European Union has developed between

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<sup>1</sup>Democratic deficit is a concept principally invoked to show that the European Union suffers from a lack of democracy and seems inaccessible to the ordinary citizen because its ways of operating are so complex. The view is that the Community institutional setup is dominated by an institution combining legislative and government powers (the Council) and an institution that lacks democratic legitimacy (the Commission — even though its members are appointed by the member states and are collectively accountable to Parliament). Communication deficit is a more recent concept, which also refers to the idea of a democratic deficit, but its basic assumption is that the European Union is unable to communicate with its different publics. Public opinion surveys, not least the Eurobarometer series but also qualitative studies based on focus groups, indicate that the majority of citizens lack fundamental knowledge about how the EU works, the issues being decided and how these influence their daily lives. For more information see <http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/cig/g4000d.htm#d3>.

<sup>2</sup>The majority of previous studies on communication and the European Union have dealt with issues of legitimacy, that is, whether public legitimation of EU policies through communication is necessary or not (Abromeit, 1998; Meyer, 1999; Moravcsik, 2002) and whether it is possible to build a European policy by means of statutory communication efforts (Baetens and Bursens, 2005; Glotz, 1995; Habermas, 1993; Schlesinger, 1999). Another focus deals with societal issues. This relates to the creation of a European public sphere either as a pan-European public sphere independent of the individual member states or as a European public sphere following the Europeanization of the public spheres of the member states (Brüggemann et al., 2006; Eriksen, 2004; Gerhards, 2000; Sievert, 1998; Tresch and de Miguel, 2003; Valentini, 2006) and with the idea of the European identity (García, 1993; Jansen, 1999; Schöpfln, 2000; Valentini, 2005; van der Veen, 2002).

2001 and 2006 and how they have been implemented in two member states, namely Finland and Italy, from a communication practice perspective. In this study the term *information and communication policy* is used to denote the aims and means of the information and communication practiced by a political institution. According to Brüggemann (2005) information and communication policy comprises three elements. The first one concern rights and practical questions of access to information and documents and is basically discussed in the EU under the label of transparency. The second element is professional communication practice, that is, strategic communication efforts on behalf of, i.e., the Commission, and the third is political rhetoric, i.e., the communication activity of the political management floor of the Commission (ibid: 15). Since the aim of this study is to investigate EU communication strategies and their implementation in two member states, it focuses mostly on the second element.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to determine which EU communication strategies have been implemented during the period 2001–2006, this study looks at EU guidelines concerning information and communication policies. The specific aim is to determine the goals of policies, and whether or in what ways they affected the communication actions of the two member states, Finland and Italy, and how they have been implemented by these states. The main research questions are thus the following:

- RQ1: What do EU policies on information and communication tell us about EU communication strategies?
- RQ2: Who are the key players in making these policies? What responsibilities and functions do they have?
- RQ3: What kinds of communication actions have been implemented in Finland and Italy as member states?

This paper aims to answer to these questions with respect to Finland and Italy, two EU member states which can be thought of as representing northern and southern cultures. The reasons for this choice lay in the substantial differences between the two countries in several respects including their historical relations with the EU. In fact, Finland is one of the more recent western European states to join the EU, while Italy, a founding member state, is one of the oldest.

## METHODOLOGY

Three types of data were regarded as important in seeking answers to these three research questions. The data sources are EU documents on information and communication policies, interviews with Finnish and Italian officers, and Eurobarometer surveys. The method applied to study the EU documents on information and communication policies was content analysis. Six documents (see Table 1) were selected and analysed in an attempt to reveal their underlying meanings.

This approach involves study of the network of interrelationships among concepts. Several scholars (Carley, 1993, 1997a, 1997b; Litkowski, 1999; Neuendorf, 2002) believe that it is more reliable in the analysis of documents not to extract concepts from the texts but to focus simultaneously on both concepts and the relationships among them. Specifically, here the content analysis concerned four areas. The analysis sought to identify: (1) the main theme (s) presented and discussed in these documents, (2) the key players in EU information and communication policies, (3) the responsibilities and functions the key players had and (4) whether or not the role of the key players affected the

TABLE 1  
Source of Data: EU Documents

<i>Author</i>	<i>Year of Publication</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>No. of pages</i>
Commission of European Communities (CEC)	2001a	New framework for cooperation on activities concerning the information and communication policy of the European Union	COM 354 final	43
Commission of European Communities (CEC)	2001b	European Governance - White paper	COM 428 final	35
Commission of European Communities (CEC)	2002	Information and communication strategy for the European Union.	COM 350 final/02	44
Commission of European Communities (CEC)	2004	Implementing the information and communication strategy for the European Union	COM 196 final	35
Commission of European Communities (CEC)	2005	The Commission's contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate	COM 494 final	12
Commission of European Communities (CEC)	2006	White paper on a European Communication Policy	COM 35 final	13

implementation of EU policies at the national level. In this study “key players” are considered to be those institutions, groups of people and organizations that have an important role in formulating EU information and communication policies.

The six EU documents selected were produced from 2001 to 2006. The choice of this time-frame coincides with specific EU acknowledgement of the importance of communication for the integration process (Brüggemann, 2005). The 2001 White Paper of the European Commission represents the first structural attempt to invest in information and communication actions through specific policies to be implemented at the national level. These six documents are considered EU guidelines on information and communication actions for the member states. They clarify the position of the European Commission with respect to communication activities towards its citizens, civil societies, and other organizations. These guidelines are very important for all institutions working on EU activities, as they determine the duties and responsibilities of and types of relationships between the EU, national, regional, and local levels. The analysis of these documents provides information on how member states and other EU partners have incorporated EU regulations into their national strategies for informing their citizens about EU policies and affairs.

Concerning the national implementation of EU policies, the present analysis is based on data collected through qualitative interviews with the main officers working for the national representations of the European Commission and in other EU local offices in Finland and Italy. Previous studies have shown the advantage of qualitative methods in collecting information about public-organization relationships, especially when interviewees are leaders of activist groups, government officials, or journalists, since they can provide deeper information (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). The method used here was the “Single Respondent Organizational Survey” (SROS) method, which has proved effective when the organizations under study are neither complex nor heterogeneous (Yun, 2005, 2006). The SROS method consists of interviewing a key informant from each organization about global and configural constructs—mainly the objective properties of the organizational process and structure (Kozłowski & Klein, 2000). It is believed that in organizations that are small and homogeneous in size and structure the key informant, in this case the EU officer in charge of public information, has accurate knowledge on the topic of the inquiry. During the period October–December 2004, six EU officers, three in Finland and three in Italy, were interviewed (see Table 2).

These interviews aimed at finding out about national planning regarding the adoption of EU guidelines in communication activities. The focused specifically on the following:

TABLE 2  
Source of Data: Interviews

#	Date	Gender	Country	Type of center	Function	Type of relationship with citizens
1	4/11/2004	Female	Finland	Info Point	Manager	Local
2	8/11/2004	Male	Finland	Carrefour	Manager	Local
3	12/11/2004	Female	Finland	Finnish Representation of the European Commission	Press officer	National/institutional
4	8/10/2004	Male	Italy	European Documentation Centre	Director	Local/regional
5	18/11/2004	Male	Italy	Department for Community Policies, Section communication, media and publication	Director	National/institutional
6	20/12/2004	Male	Italy	Italian Representation of the European Commission	Press officer	National/institutional

- the types of activities developed,
- the quantity/type of printed material available at the national level and at the European level,
- the financial sources of local offices,
- their partnership with other civic groups in implementing such activities,
- their educational activities and
- the types of contacts they had with the general public.

The choice of informant was guided by the type of information required.

A second source of information was quantitative data provided by Eurobarometer surveys from spring 2001 to autumn 2006 (see Table 3). Twelve reports produced by Eurobarometer surveys were selected, since they matched the selection criteria. Each Eurobarometer survey comprises 15,000 face-to-face interviews with a random sample of respondents, representative of the population in each country. The interview method used and the large size of the sample, which was characterised by individuals from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, enabled a good deal of reliance to be placed on the results. In addition, each Eurobarometer survey contained some questions that were repeated on a regular basis in order to provide systematic data on changes in attitudes to various aspects of the EU.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION POLICIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FROM 2001 TO 2006

For this study the documents produced from 2001 onwards by the European Commission are considered structural attempts by the EU to implement more

TABLE 3  
Source of Data—Public Opinions

<i>Title</i>	<i>Fieldwork</i>	<i>Published on</i>	<i>URL</i>	<i># of pages</i>
EB 55	April–May 2001	October 2001	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb55/eb55_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb55/eb55_en.pdf</a>	101
EB 56	Oct. –Nov. 2001	April 2002	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb56/eb56_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb56/eb56_en.pdf</a>	107
EB 57	29 March–1 May 2002	21 Oct. 2002	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb57/eb57_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb57/eb57_en.pdf</a>	256
EB 58	Oct.–Nov. 2002	March 2003	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb58/eb58_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb58/eb58_en.pdf</a>	301
EB 59	March–April 2003	July 2003	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb59/eb59_rapport_final_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb59/eb59_rapport_final_en.pdf</a>	264
EB 60	Oct. –Nov. 2003	Feb. 2004	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb60/eb60_rapport_standard_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb60/eb60_rapport_standard_en.pdf</a>	282
EB 61	Feb. –March 2004	July 2004	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb61/eb61_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb61/eb61_en.pdf</a>	310
EB 62	Oct. –Nov. 2004	May 2005	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb_62_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb_62_en.pdf</a>	166
EB 63	May–June 2005	Sept. 2005	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb63/eb63_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb63/eb63_en.pdf</a>	440
EB 64	Oct. –Nov. 2005	December 2005	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb64/eb64_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb64/eb64_en.pdf</a>	415
EB 65	March–May 2006	January 2007	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb65/eb65_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb65/eb65_en.pdf</a>	373
EB 66	Sept. –Oct. 2006	December 2006 (first results)	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66_highlights_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66_highlights_en.pdf</a>	84

citizen-oriented communication actions. Hence only the documents produced from 2001 to 2006 were considered relevant for this study. First, it was necessary to understand and analyse the main theme in these documents and their meaning. The documents were examined holistically and it was seen as important to take into account the network of interrelationships among the different concepts identified in order to grasp the profound meaning of these documents.

The first EU document was about *A new framework for co-operation on activities concerning the information and communication policy of the European Union* (CEC, 2001a), which was followed by the *White Paper on European Governance* (CEC, 2001b). In both documents the European Commission acknowledged that a genuine information and communications policy was the main prerequisite for the development of better governance in Europe, although there was no specification as to what a “genuine” information and communications policy was meant to be. Both also underlined the importance of communication and collaboration between the EU and the member states at the national, regional, and local levels together with civil society and NGOs.

However, these documents do not explain what the responsibilities and functions of those groups were apart from providing information at the local level.

The *White Paper on European Governance* added some important principles for good governance, such as openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence, but without clarifying how they should be developed at each level (CEC, 2001b). For the first time the word *dialogue* was mentioned as a prerequisite for cooperation and synergy between the different key players in EU communication actions.

The next *Information and communication strategy for the European Union*, released in 2002, sought to even more formalize the responsibilities and functions of each key player and each European institution involved. The aim was to create a more coherent image among the different EU publics (CEC, 2002). In this document, the European Commission devoted special attention to the memorandum of understanding and to the different agreements on information topics which were considered priorities by the Inter-Institutional Group on Information (IGI)<sup>3</sup>. The memorandum of understanding was mainly addressed to the member states and other national institutions with the intention of identifying EU priorities on information to be targeted at EU citizens. The agreements section was mostly a definition of how responsibilities and duties were to be shared among the different players in EU information campaigns.

In 2004 a new document *on implementing the information and communication strategy for the European Union* appeared, affirming once more that the principal aim of the EU information and communication strategy was “to improve perception of the European Union and its institutions and their legitimacy by deepening knowledge and understanding of its tasks, structure and achievements and by establishing a dialogue with its citizens” (CEC, 2004a, p. 3). This included raising the quality of the European public debate, involving the public in the European decision-making process, listening to the public and their concerns more attentively, and the methodical, consistent rebuilding of the public image of the EU. This document, compared to the previous one, has more features of a practical and promotional nature. Here the European Commission stated clearly who should do what and how, and it outlined the new and more unified structure of the EU information centers, which became operational at the beginning of 2005 under the name “Europe Direct” (CEC, 2004b).

One of the most important points consistently underlined in almost all these EU documents is the necessity and readiness to take a more local approach to EU communication activities, a point reinforced by a statement about the

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<sup>3</sup>The Inter-Institutional Group on Information (IGI) is a joint working group, which has members from the Commission and from the European Parliament and is co-chaired by the two institutions. Its initial remit was restricted to priority information measures (PRINCE campaigns). Since 2002 it has been extended to cover all information and communication activities.

intended collaboration between European, national, regional, and local officers. EU information and communication policies also stressed the necessity to present a coherent message across Europe, a message which has no national orientation. The aim of EU information and communication policies in these documents is a unique type of information based on a central thread, which acts as constant point of reference for all EU information activities (CEC, 2002, p. 12). This central thread should be “coherent” and “translated into concrete audible messages for the citizens” and part of a “well-controlled information strategy” (pp. 11–12). The strategy applied reflects the general idea that EU communication policies should be communicated to all EU citizens in terms that gets as close as possible to the original version, that is, in a word-to-word translation in all their own languages (Pollendri, 2003). Additionally these documents and their implementation were found to be lacking in relation to organization (i.e., inadequate implementation and continuous fragmentation of communication activities) and to the message delivered, which mostly reflected the EU’s policy priorities and not the interests of citizens (CEC, 2005, p. 3).

In autumn 2005 the Vice-President of Commission designed a new action plan (Plan D). The outcome was a new policy paper, which was released in February 2006 (*White paper on a European Communication Policy*), and had the purpose of improving EU communications towards its citizens and different stakeholders. This action plan mentioned different activities and changes to be implemented inside the European institutions with the purpose of facilitating the communication process and creating a stronger image among Europeans (CEC, 2006). However, it failed to recognize the importance of the interrelations between policy-making and the media. The EU communication strategy should have taken into consideration the fact that specialist policy topics only gain attention when they are linked to personalities (Gröber & Riedel, 2005). In this respect Plan D lacked a proposal on how EU would publicize its policies and on how it would give a public face to the EU.

## IMPLEMENTING EU INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION POLICIES IN THE MEMBER STATES

The second part of the content analysis sought to find out who the key players were, what functions and responsibilities they had and whether or not their role affected the national implementation of EU policies. The first and most important key players were the member states. Member states play a pivotal role in the EU communication strategy directed towards citizens and businesses. This stems directly from the subsidiary principle. In order to be successful, EU communication strategies should be based on cooperation with the member states and should

operate at three levels, namely interinstitutionally, in the various levels of decentralization, and in partnership with civil society (CEC, 2004). The key players mentioned in the EU documents are:

- *EU Institutions*: European Commission, European Parliament, and European Council;
- *Governments/authorities*: member states, EU representations, national, regional, and local authorities;
- *Civil societies*: citizens, NGOs, employers' organizations, and trade unions;
- *Political parties*: national and European parties;
- *Media*: public and private broadcasting and press companies, new media (mainly Internet providers), European media, and professional groups.

These categories of players can be divided into three subcategories according to their functions and responsibilities in relation to aspects such as the proposal, creation, implementation, and evaluation of information and communication policies. These subcategories are termed *active*, *semi-active* and *passive players*. Active players are those who are fully involved in the EU's communication actions, including the proposal, creation, implementation, and evaluation of these actions. Semi-active players are those who do not participate in the proposal and creation of communication policies, but merely implement them, i.e., adapt the actions to the local context and evaluate them. Passive players are those who have no specific task relating to EU information and communication policies and thus are either considered as a vehicle for the diffusion of EU information or simply as a target group of such EU policies. In all six EU documents the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Council, and the EU representations in the member states all have the characteristics of active players. The semi-active players are generally the national, regional, and local authorities and civil societies, excluding citizens.

In the majority of these documents there is no specific clarification on what functions civil society should have apart from promoting EU policies among the general public. The passive players are considered to be the citizens, media and political parties in all six documents. Citizens are frequently called "publics"—a term that implies conscious and aware people who are affected by the public consequences of organizational decisions or objectives in which they did not take part (Dewey, 1927). Thus this term describes only some EU citizens, namely, those who are aware of the effects of the EU on their lives-, while the media as a whole are generally described either as an important and essential "audience" to address for the EU (CEC, 2001, p. 6). *Audience* is frequently a synonym for *public*, or as a *multiplier*, that is, as a device for amplifying EU information. The category of political parties remains at the stage of an instrument for discussing and presenting EU policies and issues at the national level.

According to this subdivision only active players are essentially part of a two-way communication process, since they are the only group that has some power

of decision over the proposal, creation, implementation, and evaluation of communication policies and thus can negotiate and develop mutual and beneficial dialogues between themselves. The others players are totally or partly excluded. For their part, semipassive players have the possibility to localise EU information and communication actions and implement them, but they do not have any relevant decision-making power. Passive players do not gain any advantage from this partnership with the EU since they merely receive input and, when they are allowed, to give feedback at the European level. This feedback is not necessarily taken fully into account by the EU because passive players may send too much feedback, not all of which is necessarily applicable to the issue in question, and thus much of it cannot be included in the EU strategic plan.

Some of these considerations are in conflict with the notion asserted in these six EU documents that relationships between EU institutions and key players are based on mutual “collaboration,” “partnership,” and “synergy actions” aimed at getting closer to citizens’ needs for information and that the European Union is willing to establish “dialogue(s)” with all its publics (CEC, 2001a; CEC, 2002; CEC, 2004a; CEC, 2005; CEC, 2006). In fact there is a collaboration, but it is of the hierarchical or top-down type, represents a one-way communication flow and thus not mutually beneficial. A dialogue is possible only if all parties participating in the process have or perceive that they have enough power to be listened by other participants to be able to generate a two-way communication flow and a horizontal or bottom-up type of communication. According to these EU documents, a dialogue is possible only between active players.

Moreover, EU communication strategies, although claimed to laying the decentralisation of responsibilities and decision making in each member state, were principally based on a homogeneous and centralised model of communication—decided between the active players—that did not take into enough consideration the cultural, historical, and social differences of each member state. EU documents on information and communication policies assert the importance of diversity and of tailoring actions towards citizens and other relevant publics. However, if the decisions are made between EU institutions and EU representations in the member states, local diversity cannot be fully included in the strategic plan. It is said that the “representations will rework the message to meet national, regional or local requirements adapting the content of the information campaigns to the various target groups, the media selected, and people’s everyday concerns” (CEC, 2002, p. 23).

But then it also says “the Union must organise its information policy in such a way as to encompass a more comprehensive range of subjects, with the member states agreeing not to communicate on European affairs from a strictly national viewpoint, the filtering effect of which is often reductive” (p. 8). It is exactly this national viewpoint that characterizes decentralised and localised communication actions. In fact, the most successful communication activities described by some

general principles are always valid, but dependent on other specific applications valid at the precise time and place of their implementation. The specific application should bear in mind five main factors, i.e., the culture of publics, the political system, the level of activism, the level of development, and the media system (Muzi Falconi, 2006). These factors have only in part been pondered at the European strategic level.

### The Finnish Communication Strategy

In Finland low citizen involvement in EU affairs and a low level of support for the EU (Pesonen, 2002) determined the Finnish communication strategy. The Finnish communication strategy has relied on extensive use of the mass media to bring the EU closer to its citizens and to produce positive feedback from the general public. According to different scholars (Kivikuru, 1996; Martikainen, 1998; Pesonen & Särkiah, 2002) the mobilization of the mass media is essential to create, improve and increase knowledge about and create stronger support for the EU. This strategy has been implemented since the beginning of the Finnish membership in a variety of ways, for example in the referendum campaign over membership, in the campaign for the introduction of the euro, in the campaign for enlargement, and in the latest campaign for the new Constitutional Treaty.

These actions were carried out increasingly in strategic partnership with the government of Finland, the European Parliament, and other players. Until the beginning of 2005 the main players involved in EU information activities were Info Points Europe for the urban areas, Carrefours for the rural areas, and the European Documentation Centers located in the main universities (Interview no. 1, 4/11/2004). These key players were in most cases financed and supported by local and regional authorities and to a lesser extent by the national government and the European Union (Interview no. 2, 8/11/2004). Other important key players were the national and regional mass media, which, according to the statistics, played an important role in opinion formation.

Because of the intensive involvement of mass media in EU information and communication actions EU information began to be viewed in some quarters as a type of propaganda. For example, Helsinki Sanomat, the main national newspaper, published some 38 articles between January 2001 and December 2005 on the theme of EU, propaganda and Finland<sup>4</sup>. Propagandistic messages also worry those who work for EU information centers, since they affect the effectiveness of their activities in informing local communities about EU policies.

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<sup>4</sup>Information about these articles is available at the Web site of the newspaper "Helsinki Sanomat" under the archive link. To consult these articles free registration is required. All the articles are in the Finnish language. URL: <http://www.hs.fi/arkisto/>.

In general citizens don't like information which is considered propaganda. The people from the Nordic countries really look for facts and concrete topics, more than those from the Southern countries. [ . . . ] Citizens' opinions about the information given by our center vary. For some of them it's too little information, for others it's too much. Also regarding the brochures and leaflets, many criticisms come from citizens. There is some material that it is seen very positively and as objective, other instead as very propagandistic. In general political matters are seen as propaganda, such as the Constitution, whereas specific matters, such as environment regulations, are not (Interview no.2, 8/11/2004, trans. from Finnish).

Regarding the use of persuasive communication strategies, the Finnish Representation of the European Commission has indirectly refuted the use of persuasive methods in the diffusion of EU information and affirmed its neutral stance in EU communication activities. These should

. . . always be seen as good-quality service and be sensitive to the needs of the citizens [ . . . ] they should also be based on coherent messages in clear and understandable language, emphasising the substance rather than the institutions, and they should focus on priority information themes and issues directly relevant to the citizens" (*CEC, Representation in Finland 2004a*).

Furthermore the Finnish Representation of the European Commission has stated that the campaigns on topical EU themes implemented in partnership with the government of Finland and the European Parliament have been designed and realized in such a way that the Finnish media climate and circumstances were fully taken into account. In practice, this meant putting an emphasis on open and objective public debate on various issues, mobilising stakeholders, and allowing critical and dissenting views. The accent, as the Representation affirmed, will always be on the facts (*CEC, Representation in Finland, 2004a*).

However, the government of Finland signed the memorandum of understanding and thus agreed to reiterate its political will to develop a concerted information strategy on the main issues affecting the European Union. It also agreed to avoid communicating on European affairs from a strictly national viewpoint (*CEC, 2002, p. 8*). This agreement, in reality, gives EU institutions more power to organize EU communication activities. How, then, can the Finnish Representation declare that the Finnish media climate and circumstances are fully taken into account? How can it state that its information activities are based on clear messages emphasising the substance rather than the institutions and allow critical and dissenting views, if Finland has relinquished some of its decision-making power on EU information policies? How can citizens' voices be heard by the European Union if the communication strategies adopted do not take into consideration citizens' needs of information and their level of interest?

Before the 2005 reorganization of the EU information centers, regional and local information centers tried to get closer to the needs of citizens for information

on EU policies and institutions by monitoring their questions and concerns and planning activities and publications more targeted at them (Interview no. 1, 4/11/2004). However, the Europe Direct network brought with it more limitations at the regional and local levels concerning decision making.

The fact that the EU supplies part of the budget of this center means that it has also some effects on the quality of information. There is one statement in the agreement with the EU that says that we are not allowed to distribute information which is anti-EU, but we can offer some criticism, if it is constructive . . . In the new call for Europe Direct it is clearly stated that we are not allowed to give out anti-EU information. The new agreement will be more binding than the previous one. Even if we are not the voice of Commission, we can decide how to inform, but we must adjust our information in order that the content of the information should make the image of the EU better in the eyes of citizens (Interview no. 2, 8/11/2004, trans. from Finnish).

This statement supports the view that the information and communication activities local centers engage in were strongly influenced by the EU. The Finnish communication strategy has rather strictly adhered to these guidelines so that today, even more than in the past, it resembles a marketing campaign in which all Finns are seen as having the same information needs (Ruottinen, 2000). This practice has intensified since 2005, when the national, regional, and local centers of information distributed around the country had to change their status in line with a unified system of networks and relays, called Europe Direct. Europe Direct made Finnish EU information centers and activities more closely resemble those in Italy and in the other member states, since all the networks and relays are part of a centralized, strategic communication framework. The new system has also required regional information officers to become more active “ambassadors of EU information” in their respective regions (Interview no.1, 4/11/2004). These ambassadors in fact establish and maintain contacts with nongovernmental organizations, educational institutions, local media, and institutions as well as other relevant parties.

## EU Campaigning and the Opinion of Finnish Citizens on the EU

The main goals of the Finnish communication strategy were the creation of EU awareness, the struggle against ignorance and apathy, and the establishment of a firm foundation for the management of public life. This was the basis for a clearly understood form of governance between the European Union and its citizens. Because the aims of EU communication strategies in Finland were increasing Finnish public opinion and involvement in EU matters, the data of Eurobarometer can provide some insights into past five-year changes in the attitudes, knowledge of citizens and support for the European Union. It should be noticed that the five-year frame is a short period for discovering some behavioural changes and that

these are the results of complex and multiple variables which are not necessarily related to EU communication activities. Consequently Eurobarometer data should be seen more as statistics on public opinions rather than figures providing information on direct effects of EU campaigning on citizens' perceptions.

During 2001–2006 Finns felt the necessity to acquire more detailed information about EU and its policies, most likely as a consequence of the increase in media coverage of EU affairs and, in general, of rising EU influence in Finland. This growth of interest is shown in part by the increasing number of contacts between Finns and the local EU officers.

Two years ago it was more difficult to distribute information about EU institutions and regulations than it is now. I think that people now are more interested in politics and the common market than before and that's why they are asking for more information and this has a direct effect on the numbers of people, who are coming here, calling or sending emails to us. (Interview no. 2, 8/11/2004, trans. from Finnish).

Despite the general positive trend in seeking for information on the EU, public opinion and EU perceptions have not necessarily changed to any noticeable extent.

... People who contact us, need information, and this is not related to their support for the EU. Regardless of whether they like EU regulation or not, they need and want information. (Interview no. 2, 8/11/2004, trans. from Finnish).

and

It's difficult to know how many people have positive feelings about EU institutions, I think most of the Finns have a neutral feeling, while some are very positive and some very negative. (Interview no. 1-, 4/11/2004, trans. from Finnish).

Then if we look at the statistical data, we can see that public opinion and involvement in EU matters in Finland has not changed very much between 2001 and 2006. In autumn 2006 only 39% of Finns reported that their country's membership of the European Union is a good thing (EB 66, 2006a, p. 10), whereas in the autumn of 2004, 48% held this opinion (EB 63, 2005b, p. 4). Some scholars (Aula & Rosenblad, 2002; Martikainen, 1998; Ruottinen, 2000) believe this change is in part related to the current situation regarding the EU constitutional treaty and the emergence of the fight against terrorism.

Despite some increase in positive perceptions of the EU in the last year, Finland remains one of the countries with the lowest support for the EU. In summer 2005, opinion polls showed that Finns would no longer even say *yes* to membership of the Union in a referendum. One poll showed figures of 46% versus 43% against the EU. Finnish attitudes towards the Constitutional Treaty, the euro and the development of EU defense capabilities were also more negative than before (Mörttinen, 2006). The possible reasons why Finns do not trust EU institutions

are related to the loss of national power, the EU voting system, the EU regulations governing agriculture, and the EU constitutional treaty (Hakalehto, 2004).

### The Italian Communication Strategy

Following the EU document *Implementing the information and communication strategy for the European Union*, the Italian communication strategy was based on the re-enforcement of interinstitutional cooperation and on the development of a coordinated partnership, which implies active and attentive collaboration on all the different levels: institutional, European, national, regional, and local (Department for the Community Policies, 2004). The idea is to use all the possible tools of communication available in order to inform citizens about the EU, its institutions, and its policies.

The Italian communication strategy is based on strengthening of interinstitutional cooperation and on the development of a structured partnership that allows active and aware collaboration on different levels (institutional, European, national, regional and local): so to speak, we want to utilise as best we can the best the communication tools and the “antennae of information” distributed in the territory. These act in depth, covering specific groups of publics with differentiated initiatives (conventions, seminars, conferences, manifestations, etc. for categories: for example, youth, entrepreneurs, farmers, etc.) and the capillary spread of which favors the promotion of dialogue with the citizens, which is based on broad, complete, targeted and comprehensible information (Interview no. 5, 18/11/2004, trans. from Italian).

In Italy the structured partnerships for EU information consisted mainly of three types of centers plus different external collaborations with other key players. These centers operated until the beginning of 2005 when the new reorganized network of EU information centers, Europe Direct, was established. The main key players before Europe Direct for EU information targeted at citizens were Info Points Europe, which were located in urban areas, Carrefours, which were located mostly in rural areas, and European Documentation Centers (CDE), which were located close to universities, colleges, and other educational institutions<sup>5</sup>. These three local key players were part of a larger national plan for the dissemination of information, also involving the Italian Representation of the European Commission, the government and the national mass media.

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<sup>5</sup>More information about the functions of these information centers is given in the EU document “Communication from the Commission to the Council, European Parliament, Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions on a *New Framework for Co-operation on Activities Concerning the Information and Communication Policy of the European Union*, COM(2001) 354 final, Brussels, 27.06.2001, pp. 21–25. Available at URL: [http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2001/com2001\\_0354en01.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2001/com2001_0354en01.pdf) (accessed on 27 June 2006).

For important themes such as the introduction of the euro, the enlargement and the constitution, television played an especially pivotal role in communicating to Italians (Interview no. 6-, 20/12/2004). EU information on television, either as general news reporting or as a special commercial feature, became an important element in the communication strategies used in Italy. This media choice rests on the Italian method of information gathering. In Italy newspaper readership figures are relatively low, only 104 copies sold for every 1,000 citizens, and given the size of the population the number of dailies, around 90 in 2006, is not very large (BBC News, October 31, 2006). A striking statistic about Italy is the extent to which Italians are said to rely on television, rather than newspapers, for their daily news. Research has shown that some 80% of the population depends solely on television for news, the highest percentage in the EU. TV news also has the capacity to change public opinion through unconscious emotional appeals (Sproule, 1997). Consequently the Italian communication officers have focused their attention on this media type as a means of diffusing their messages.

Like the Finnish communication strategy, the Italian one was based on the massive use of the mass media to bring the EU closer to produce positive feedback from the general public. Unlike its Finnish counterpart Italian television has direct links with politics and government. First, because from 2001 to the beginning of 2006 the Italian Prime Minister was Silvio Berlusconi, who is also Italy's richest man. He directly or indirectly controls around 90% of Italian television, either through his family's ownership of commercial channels or through his supporters on the board of the state broadcaster RAI (Parliamentary Assembly, 2004; Zolo, 1999). Second, the Italian Government coordinates information and communication activities on European topics.

The bureau, which has the specific task of formulating information policies, is the Department for Community Policies. This Department is also part of the Prime Minister's Office and is at the same time the administrative bureau for the Minister without Portfolio. The Prime Minister delegates some power to the Department for Community Policies in Community matters, in the implementation of EU-related actions and in coordination of actions relating to the European norms<sup>6</sup>. The main activities of the Department during the period 2001–2006 concerned the establishment of partnerships with local players and the promotion and the dissemination of information either through direct national channels or through regional and local offices (Interview no. 4-, 8/10/2004). Finally, it should be noted that, before Europe Direct, the Italian EU information centers, and the direct connections between the political elite and media ownership during the period 2001–2006 point to a level of dependence of EU information on the interests of the Italian government and the control of the Italian government over the

<sup>6</sup>DM 10 February 2004, published in Official Gazette n. 99.

type and quality of information, not only about the EU, produced and reported in the national mass media.

### EU Campaigning and the Opinion of Italian Citizens on the EU

Although Italians used to be numbered among the citizens of the EU, who had the highest support for the EU project, it was not possible to establish a direct correlation between EU campaigning and its influence on the general positive perceptions of Italians. Being a member of the European Union was assessed as positive by 52% of the Italian sample (EB 66, 2006a, p. 10). Furthermore, the majority of Italians (74%) supported a common security and defence policy. The European Constitution was also widely supported (69%) as well as a common EU foreign policy (70%) (EB 66, 2006b, pp. 5–7). The reasons for this high level of support cannot necessarily be attributed to EU communication strategies, but is most likely due to the perceived quality of the governance of European institutions compared with the domestic situation.

The trust in EU institutions expressed by Italians depends, as Sánchez-Cuenca (2000) stated, on the political system at the national level and its quality; the worse it works, the more support citizens give to the supranational level. Positive opinions on EU integration increase as citizens' opinions of European institutions improve and their opinions of the performance of their national political system worsen. When individuals perceive benefits at the European level, are satisfied with the way in which the EU-level institutions function, but have a low opinion of their own national political institutions, they are likely to show a high degree of support for integration.

Another explanation is the relation between positive perceptions of EU institutions and membership and the reporting practices of the media. In Italy the media do not limit themselves to presenting the economic and practical aspects of a specific policy, but also anchor the event in a set of representations of the EU, Europe and the nation, and the relationship between them, thus assigning specific, potentially contradictory meanings to it (Triandafyllidou, 2003, p. 256). The Italian media create the conditions for putting the audience into a certain frame of mind. This meaning-making function of the media is political in character. Not only does it include, implicitly or explicitly, a set of values but it is also influenced by the links between newspapers or television channels and the political and economic elites. This discourse was found to emphasize the European nature of Italian identity and society while at the same time pointing to the specific national contribution of Italy to European integration (p. 260).

Thus, the two entities, Italy and the EU, were defined in relation to each other. Italian national identity and sovereignty were represented as compatible with the emergence of an autonomous EU sovereignty and identity. The historical role and national consciousness of Italy and Italians was constructed as inseparable from the project of a United Europe. Moreover, in this discourse we can see how the

media link, in different combinations, national and European elements in representing the nation, the EU, and the relationship between them (Olivi, 2001). This process has been happening for a long time although unconsciously. However, it is not enough to enhance the cause of European integration. Recently the number of sceptics has increased as well as the number of people who would like more information and more objectivity.

Although Italians continue to manifest great interest in Europe and Italy remains the country with the greater number of convinced European supporters, Italians have begun to manifest a greater scepticism towards the European institutions, (Interview no. 5, 18/11/2004, trans. from Italian).

and

From Eurobarometer surveys we can see a strong need (by citizens) for information on European topics. The qualitative level of the information is considered good, but there is a demand for greater objectivity. (Interview no. 5, 18/11/2004, trans. from Italian).

The need for objective information is hardly surprising since the Italian EU information centers depend on the decisions taken by the national authorities. These in turn have been and continue to be binding agreements with EU institutions. In fact, the Italian government agreed—as did Finland and many other countries—not to present the EU from a national perspective but to promote the EU cause according to the general EU guidelines on information and communication actions. Hence, EU information in Italy is not very different from that in Finland or in the other EU member states.

### Comparison of Finnish and Italian Communication Strategies

When Finland and Italy are compared in terms of the information activities undertaken, the structures, functions and responsibilities of the key players, and citizens' knowledge of the EU, the similarities are many. First, the Finnish and Italian information structures were already very alike before the organizational change in 2005 with Europe Direct. Subsequently, in Finland and Italy analogous centers with comparable responsibilities, functions and activities sprang up in both countries. The Europe Direct centers also further restrict local decisions because each center must seek the approval of its national representation and, consequently, to the EU with respect to the implementation of any type of action. Second, in both countries the main reasons for EU information activities were to enhance public participation in and increase support for EU institutions.

This plan was realized through a set of activities, including printed materials produced either at the European level, by the European Commission or by

national centers, the organization of conferences and debates on similar EU themes, training courses for journalists and press conferences, and the preparation of radio and television programmes, etc. (Interview no. 1- 4/11/2004; no. 2- 8/11/2004; no. 3- 12/11/2004; no. 4- 8/10/2004; no. 5- 18/11/2004; no. 6- 20/12/2004). The differences between the Finnish and Italian communication strategies resulted from the initial freedom of local centers in decision-making, decisions that dealt with publications and other local activities.

These centers, especially in 2001, 2002, and 2003, were able to maintain a local perspective when presenting EU policies. The differences mostly concerned on how the centers described EU policies and how these policies would affect citizens' lives. However, the messages were generally positive and supportive of the EU cause in both countries. This aspect disappeared during the last two years, rendering national activities even more similar between the two countries. Third, the funding for national publications changed after the reform of the structure of networks and relays at the beginning of 2005 (CEC, 2004b). The EU and its representations provide new resources to EU renewed networks. Above all, this has led to some changes in the quality of printed publications.

The new agreement imposes more limitations on our activities. Everything that we do it has to be reported directly to the Representation of the European Commission. We have to justify our costs and we should not disappoint those who finance us. We are not totally free anymore to decide what we do. If in the past we could present both sides of the coin, meaning presenting the positive and negative aspects of a new regulation or policy, now we cannot anymore [emphasis mine]. [. . .] we don't lie; we simply tell only one side. (Interview no. 2,- 8/11/2004, trans. from Finnish).

Finally, the knowledge of the EU of Italian and Finnish citizens are comparable, as evidence shown in the data of the Eurobarometer surveys from 2001 to 2006. As Figure 1 shows the two countries show similar trends during the period. In only two periods, spring 2002 and spring 2004, were the two trends different. In spring 2002 Italians' perceptions of their knowledge of the EU continued to be the same as in autumn 2001. Finns perceived less knowledge of the EU from autumn 2001 to spring 2002, after which their perceptions rose again. In spring 2004 the two trends converged. Finns' scores decreased and Italians' scores increased between autumn 2003 and spring 2004.

In autumn 2005 the perceived knowledge of the EU in both countries decreased again, especially in Italy. The Italians' scores were substantially lower in autumn 2002 than autumn 2001, the time when the euro was introduced (EB 63, 2005c, p. 4). The situation has changed again since autumn 2002. In spring 2006 both countries experienced a consistent increase in terms of perceived knowledge. Finland scored higher on average over the five-year period (5.1), positioning itself as the EU country with the most knowledge of the EU. The

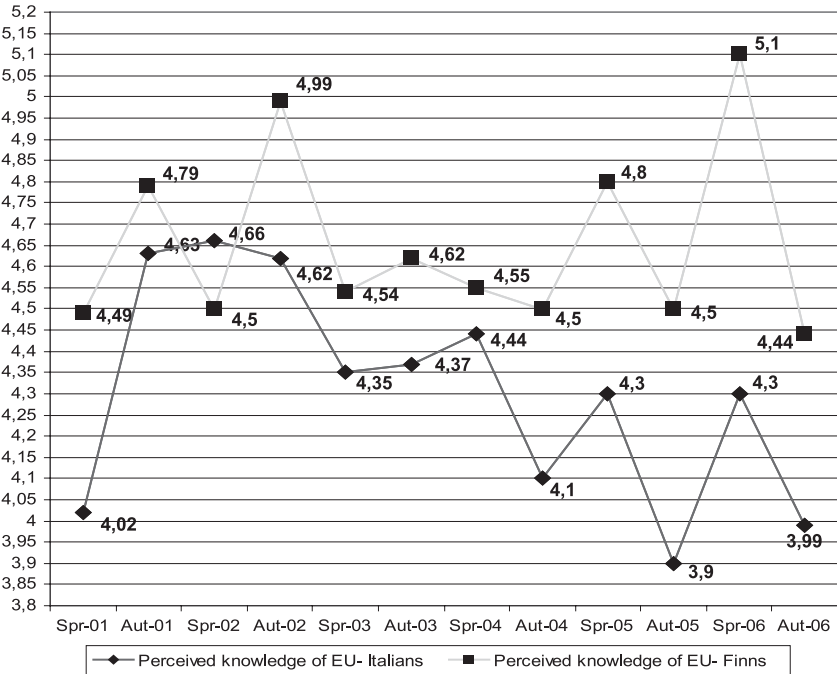


FIGURE 1 Perceived knowledge of EU - Finns vs. Italians from Spring 2001 to Autumn 2006.  
*Source:* Eurobarometer 66, 65, 64, 63, 62, 61, 60, 59, 58, 57, 56 and 55.

Italian score rose in spring 2006, but was still lower than in the preceding years. In autumn 2006 the situation changed again, falling once more, to 4.44 for Finland and 3.99 for Italy.

Although there is a desire in Italy to know more about the EU because its policies are affecting Italians' daily lives even more now than before (Interview no. 6, 20/12/2004), Italians' perceptions of their knowledge of the EU remains below an adequate level (EB 66, 2006a). In Finland, the fall in the score for the perceived knowledge of the EU that characterized the period autumn 2002 to autumn 2004, and also the recent drop in autumn 2006, may be an effect of a loss of interest in EU issues on the part of the general public and, consequently, a tendency to seek less for such information (Interview no. 3, 12/11/2004). Some scholars (Baetens & Bursens, 2005; Mak, 2002) believe that a lack of motivation reinforces this knowledge deficit, since unmotivated people are not inclined to gather information to build up their knowledge. Nevertheless, if the Finnish results are compared with those of the other member states, it can be seen that Finns have a sense of being well informed to a degree that is not shared by citizens elsewhere in the EU (EB 65 2006).

## CONCLUSIONS

The European Union is facing an important moment in its history as its power and image in the world grows. It is trying to find its place among the already established superpowers and on the other hand to be a new peacekeeper. As part of this process, communicating with its public, the citizens of Europe, is very important. Support and trust in EU institutions legitimize EU functions and allow for the implementation of more and new policies. Support and trust depend on what its citizens know about the EU and their involvement in it. Thus informing citizens about what the EU does has become an important issue for its constituent institutions. Only in recent times the European Union has devoted attention to communication activities through important information and communication policy actions. This study aimed at investigating what the policies produced in 2001–2006 tell us about how the EU saw communication towards its different publics what effects these policies have had at the national level on the organization of information activities and citizens' perceived knowledge of the EU.

The study of these six EU documents together with the qualitative interviews with EU officers working in Finland and in Italy identified two major problems relating to EU communication: one is organizational and the other is strategic. The organizational problem is already conceptualized in these documents on the EU's information and communication policies and was confirmed through the interviews with national players who have to base their daily work on these policies. First, five out of six EU documents (excluding the last white paper) studied reveal a general EU tendency to propose ideas but not concrete actions.

Typically, these documents affirm the importance of communication for the process of integration and willingness to improve communication with EU citizens through open and transparent dialogue. However, they do not suggest or propose how this should happen and neither do they present or explain what concrete actions have been or are planned to be undertaken. These documents are rather general regarding the actions to be taken and more specific in describing the responsibilities and functions of the EU institutions to the detriment of the national ones.

Second, there proposals are confusing. On one hand, they propose the decentralization of information activities and messages towards EU's different publics, while on the other hand, they establish a common organization of networks and relays (Europe Direct) with similar responsibilities and functions for implementing such actions. But they leave little decision-making power for local key players regarding the proposal and creation of local actions. In fact, the 2002 EU document concerning collaboration over information and communication actions signed between the European Union and the member states, has limited the freedom of the other players to make decisions. This contradicts the EU's interest in

decentralizing its information activities, while it expresses the need felt by the EU for controlling a complex structure composed by national, regional, and local players.

The second problem that emerged from this study is strategic and it derives in part from the idea of controlling all the information networks and in part from the requirement of homogeneity. The European Union believes that any communication towards its citizens should be targeted to the characteristics of each national public but at the same time it should address these publics in a similar way. However, journalism in Finland, for example, is not the same as in Italy nor are the practices in news reporting. With 27 member states it is difficult to be communicatively effective with all publics if the information and communication actions are prepared at the European level and then accommodated to national standards with the aim of making them fit into the local perspective. Communicating to so many different people is not an easy matter. There are questions of cost and efficiency which may oblige EU commissioners to find a more practical and simpler way of informing citizens. However, simpler ways of informing citizens do not necessarily guarantee successful results. Applying a common communication strategy in all the member states may save some costs and be more practical to implement, but it does not consider the differences between Europeans in perceiving EU messages.

Although in all six documents on information and communication policies presented in this paper there is a clear statement of the importance of mutual collaboration and synergy between the EU, national, regional, and local levels, in practice, the centralized approach to deal with communication towards citizens was the preferred choice in the majority of situations. With respect to the two countries featured in this study and the differences between them, Finland and Italy have been treated as similar countries, with comparable strategies for EU information and communication policies.

In order to convince the citizens of Finland or Italy of the merits of the EU, the communication strategies applied in these countries need to be more considerate of people's general attitude to and knowledge of the topic under discussion, the type of discourses on EU created by national politicians, media and relevant experts, and the effects of EU messages in relation to cultural differences. Understood thus, EU information actions in the member states need to be more local and tailored to the different constituent publics. The best communication strategy is considered to be a composition of both vertical (each public needs a strategy) and horizontal (each member state needs to have more than one strategy depending on the regional and ethnic differences between its citizens) substrategies. By crossing the vertical with horizontal substrategies a matrix structure for communicating EU to different publics can be created.

This matrix structure allows for more locally tailored and thus effective strategies vis-à-vis the European publics. However, this matrix structure is a complex one if implemented at the centralized level. It is thus recommended that the European Union further decentralizes its organizational and strategic processes for information and communication actions towards national players in order to benefit from this matrix system. Moreover, the European Union should accord the local centers more power over the proposal and creation of activities. In doing this it will recognize the national, regional and local players as having the status of active players and thus create a “dialogue” with its different publics. In addition, the national, regional, and local players will be far the best group to understand the needs of citizens and how better to involve them in the process of integration.

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