



**Department für
Wissens- und Kommunikationsmanagement
Internationales Journalismus Zentrum**

Dr.-Karl-Dorrek-Straße 30, A-3500 Krems

Telefon: +43 (0)2732 893-2701; Fax +43 (0)2732 893-4700

Homepage: www.donau-uni.ac.at/ijz

Projektinfos: www.donau-uni.ac.at/KnowComm

Zusammenfassung/Summary

Kommunikationspotenziale zur Steigerung der EU-Akzeptanz

Studie für das Projekt „Forum für EUropa“

Birgit WOLF / Silvia Ettl-HUBER

Leitung:

Mag.^a Birgit Wolf

Dr.ⁱⁿ Silvia Ettl-Huber

Mitarbeit:

DIⁱⁿ (FH) Julia Juster

Dr.ⁱⁿ Caroline Wörgötter

Mag.^a Christine Lechner



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SUMMARY

This study was conducted by the International Journalism Centre (IJZ) at the Danube University Krems in co-operation with the project owner, the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM), from July 2006 until June 2007.

The study aims at exploring communication potential, which could be used to enhance the EU acceptance among the EU citizens. Communication strategies are examined to be applied in the area of communication policy at the EU level, the national and the regional level. The study hereby focuses on the central EU institutions as well as the member state Austria as a case study. Moreover, the project has a transnational and regional dimension, comparing the Austrian case to the Slovakian, and particularly taking into account the co-operation between the border regions. The study starts from the assumption of a growing EU scepticism among EU citizens. Eurobarometer surveys of recent years show this trend. Austria is outstanding for its particular high EU scepticism in comparison to the EU25/EU27.

The study follows an explorative approach, combining analysis of literature and EU documents with data interpretation of standard Eurobarometer studies covering the period between the years 2004 and 2006, with a case study on press work of EU and Austrian institutions and communicators. Additionally, the study takes into account the results of an expert round-table "Communicating EU – EU Campaigning, Success and Failure" at the Danube University Krems in context of the project. Moreover, a round table, conducted in context of the project with experts in the field of EU communication and campaigns, was analysed.

Literature highlights the lacking of a coherent EU communication policy. This study shows that awareness raising has taken place at the EU level, most prominently on behalf of the European Commission who launched several initiatives such as the "Whitebook on a European Communications Policy", the re-structuring of communication tasks within the Commission as well as projects such as the online platform "Your Voice in Europe". However, there is still need for action, most evidently in closing the "communication gap" between the EU level and communicators within the member states. This fact contradicts the existence of a coherent strategic communication approach. Communication approaches, techniques and methods elaborated in theory have been to a large extent neglected by EU communicators. EU "news management", a classical PR strategic approach, aiming at influencing the agenda setting through adaptation to media logistics and media formats, has been applied by EU institutions only selectively. EU campaigning, using campaigns for public relations, has already developed well at the EU level. However, EU campaigning hasn't reacted adequately to bridge the communication gap between EU and member state level.

Two selected case studies conducted on the press work of EU and member state communicators in the field of “cohesion policy” and on the negotiations of the “roaming directive” confirm the lacking of communication structures linking the EU to the member state level. The selected topics proved to be well-suited for the promotion of successful national performance and for the strengthening of EU information and acceptance. The empirical study shows that both issues were communicated actively by EU institutions, but they were not at all or only marginally taken up by communicators at the member state and regional level.

The examination of selected items of the Eurobarometer surveys from 2004 to 2006 highlighted several topics of high relevance to EU citizens, and to the Austrian population in particular. Topics were identified which show up a high communication potential to be used by communicators at different levels in order to foster EU information and acceptance. On the one hand, communication on EU politics with regard to topics with a positive connotation, such as tourism, environmental protection and neighbourhood, could be fostered. On the other hand, topics of negative connotation reflecting the fears of EU citizens, such as unemployment and social insecurity, should be taken seriously more actively addressed by communicators via information campaigns. The analysis also shows that there is a general communication potential with respect to strengthening EU citizenship.

When building up a coherent EU communication framework, one also has to explore the underlying motives of EU communicators. The method of “Brussels-Blaming”, the per se attributing of unpopular policy measures to the EU level, for example has a high impact on the EU acceptance.

In conclusion, the study confirms the need for a coherent communication framework and approach of the European Union. Following the argumentation of the strategic news management, this study recommends a “communication mainstreaming”, which shall establish EU information and acceptance in order to foster EU citizenship as horizontal objective, having an influence on all EU policies and communication processes. Thereby, the need to bridge the communication gap between the EU and the member state level requires particular attention.