



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR COMMUNICATION

Representation in Portugal

## Back to School - EU Project Day

Portugal, 9 October 2007



## Final Report

### Table of Contents:

1. Background, Objectives and Organisation of the Event
2. Some Hard Facts
3. Preparation of the Visits
4. At the School
5. Press Coverage
6. Overall Evaluation and Conclusions

### Annexes:

Annex 1: Recommendations and practical tips

Annex 2: Results of the Evaluation Survey

Annex 3: Breakdown of participation

Annex 4: The EU Project Day in images

Annex 5: Press Clipping, Advertisements

## Introduction

The 'EU Project Day – Back to School' initiative took place in Portugal, covering all regions, on 9 October 2007, the week before the Lisbon Informal European Council and the IGC which led to the approval of the Treaty of Lisbon.

Under this initiative, 228 members and officials of the European institutions, as well as 14 members of the Portuguese Government, organised 272 visits to a total of 206 schools, in the whole country. Prime Minister José Sócrates and President of the European Commission José Barroso visited the secondary schools they attended.

This initiative was one of the Communication priority actions planned by the European Commission Representation in Portugal for the Portuguese Presidency (the other being '*Commissioners Go Local*', that took place in July at the launching of the Presidency).

The initiative fits well into the objectives of the Plan D of the European Commission and the new approach to communication which puts citizens at the heart of European policies. It was an effective 'outreach' event aiming at young people, with the involvement of members and officials of all the European institutions, giving a very human image of the European Union. The fact that the whole country received visits from colleagues also made it a very effective 'go local' initiative – with a special impact due to the fact that the regional and local press responded positively and covered the visits extensively.

The survey that we organised for the involved officials and schools to evaluate the initiative pointed to a very positive evaluation of the overall results, both regarding the impact in the schools and their pupils and in what regards the motivation of the participants. All of them, unanimously, declared that this initiative should be repeated during the future Presidencies.

I therefore enthusiastically suggest and strongly expect that the European Commission and the other EU institutions continue to have the will and the resources to make it possible that the European officials 'go back to their schools' on the occasion of the rotating Presidencies of the Council.

Finally, I want to thank everybody who contributed to the success of the initiative. Before anything, to all our colleagues who went to their schools, preparing their visits with care and making them possible with their enthusiasm. I also thank the colleagues in the headquarters of DG Communication who were fully involved in the preparation and to those who ensured that publications were available to all schools, both in DG COMM and OPOCE. Last but not least, a word to the Representation colleagues: Alexandra Sá Carvalho (for the coordination tasks), Manuel Romano and Ana Cabo (media contacts and media monitoring), Ana Rita Moura (contacts with participants and schools), Paulo Martins (documentation and publications) and Cristina Silva (support).

Margarida Marques  
Head of Representation

## 1. Background, Objectives and Organisation of the Event:

On 9 October 2007 the initiative 'EU Project Day – Back to School' took place in Portugal. The overall idea of the initiative was to give a friendlier and more familiar face to “*Brussels*” and give young citizens the opportunity to debate Europe and its future with those working everyday for the European project. A special focus was given to the working activities and personal experience of the participants.

The initiative in Portugal followed the organisation of the 1<sup>st</sup> EU Project Day by the German Presidency in January 2007, an initiative of Chancellor Merkel which counted with the full support of the European Commission. Chancellor Merkel and Vice-President Verheugen, as well as 480 EC officials, participated.

The organisation of the 'EU Project Day – Back to School' in Portugal was suggested by Vice-President Wallström to the Portuguese Prime Minister José Sócrates on 8 December 2006, as an important communication initiative aimed at the general public during the Portuguese Presidency of the Council.

For preparation, there were meetings with the Cabinet of the Prime Minister in February and with the Minister for Education in May, which ensured the full support of the Portuguese authorities to the initiative. These were followed by a series of contacts with the central and regional services of the Ministry for Education.

In early July, Vice President Wallström invited the Presidents of the other institutions to participate in the event, while Director-General Sorensen invited the Directors-General to ask for their support to the officials that had studied in Portugal to be able to go back to their schools as 'Ambassadors of the EU'. Europe Direct Relays were also invited to support the initiative in their region.

On 7 August the first list of participants was transmitted to the Ministry for Education, and meeting of the Head of Representation with the Regional Directors for Education was held on early September, to inform them on details and to request their full support to the schools.

On 18 September DG Communication organised a training session in Brussels for participants, focusing on the objectives and organisation of the event, with the participation of Director-General Sorensen, Head of Presidents' Cabinet João Vale de Almeida, Head of Representation Margarida Marques and Spokesperson Johannes Leitenberger. This was followed by a short professional training session on techniques of public speaking to young audiences.

Finally, on 9 October, the EU Project Day took place, with the organisation of **272 visits** by **228 officials** of the European institutions (and 14 members of the Portuguese Government). In total, **206 schools** in the whole country were involved.

The Portuguese Government fully participated in the initiative, with Prime Minister José Sócrates visiting his school in Covilhã, and a dozen other members of Government visiting their schools, also in different parts of the country.



The European Commission, again, had a very strong participation, with 180 participants (excluding the agencies). Notably, President José Barroso visited his school in Lisbon. Other institutions and a few agencies also participated (breakdown in Annex 3).

In fact, the participating officials travelled from workplaces in the four corners of Europe – a vast majority from Brussels and Luxembourg, but also from agencies and delegations in different points of Europe.



## 2. Some Hard Facts:

<b>Visits that took place</b>	<b>272</b>
<b>Number of schools visited</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>European officials effectively participating</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>Total of officials that volunteered for the visits</b>	<b>282</b>
<b><i>Drop-out percentage</i></b>	<b><i>19%</i></b>
<b>Percentage of officials that participated in the survey (144)</b>	<b>63.2%</b>
<b>Students reached (conservative estimate on the basis of the survey)</b>	<b>18 600</b>
<b>Articles covering the event (estimate based on the research by the REP and on articles sent by visiting officials)</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>European Commission DGs, offices and services participating</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Other institutions and committees participating</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Agencies participating</b>	<b>13</b>

## 3. Preparation of the visits:

The preparation of the visits, as in the German case, happened in a relatively short period, given the summer break. The invitation for participation of officials was sent in early July to the DGs and other institutions. The first lists of officials and schools that they proposed to visit was sent to the Ministry for Education in early August, and contacts with schools developed mostly in September, coinciding with the launching of the school year.

This was considered by some officials as too short. However, the experience showed that schools only mobilised for preparation in the last two or three weeks before the event, and a much earlier notice may had not changed this. Moreover, DG COMM and the schools accepted all late registrations, until just one week before the event.

The bulk of preparations fell to the visiting officials, as it has been the case in Germany. They contacted the school and teachers, proposed the themes, organised the visits and prepared the presentations and, in some case, additional materials to be distributed in the school.

Given the general objective of giving a friendlier and more familiar face to 'Brussels', DG COMM suggested that the presentation focused on the officials' working activities at the European institutions and personal experience and perception of Europe. DG COMM also suggested that officials should be prepared to reply to questions related to work and careers in the European institutions and also to answer general questions and discuss the challenges of the European project. Given the priority themes of interest in Portugal, it was suggested that colleagues would focus their preparation on four themes:

- Future of Europe (new Treaty);
- External dimension of the Union and the enlargement;

- Lisbon Strategy, including its economic, social and environment dimensions, and European action on climate change;
- Issues related to education and training, with focus on mobility.

Officials were also requested to keep trace of their visit – e.g. by keeping photos and school works of the children or taking notes of the issues raising more debate. These elements, completed with elements sent by the schools, were essential for evaluation and report on the initiative.

Preparations also included the involvement of DG COMM, notably the Representation of the EC in Portugal, as well as OPOCE and ECFIN, regarding publications. The main aspects of the involvement of DG COMM were:

- **General support** - the Representation in Lisbon and COMM B1 were the contact points for the initiative. The REP ensured the collection and treatment of data on the visits. In some cases, when schools received more than four colleagues, the REP also coordinated the organisation of the visit.
- The REP was also in charge of **contacts with the authorities** and with the facilitation of contacts with schools when needed/requested.
- **Training:** DG COMM organised a training session in Brussels on 18 September.
- **Publications:** DG COMM and OPOCE sent standard packages of publication to the schools for diffusion among teachers and students.
- **Preparation of reference material:** the REP made available, on its site ([http://ec.europa.eu/portugal/temas/presidencyue/regresso\\_escola\\_material\\_pt.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/portugal/temas/presidencyue/regresso_escola_material_pt.htm)), a series of reference materials for the preparations and, following a request during the training session, a few *powerpoint* presentations on the 'priority subjects'.
- **Contacts with the press:** the REP Lisbon prepared the press releases and ensured contacts with national and regional press.
- **Evaluation and follow-up:** DG COMM prepared the Survey and made it available to participants (as in Germany) and schools.

The DGs, institutions and agencies also actively supported, in different ways, their officials' participation in the initiative – and supported the follow up. For example, some DGs and institutions prepared specific presentations and packages of publications for their officials, the colleagues in Luxembourg organised a breakfast to present the results of the initiative to their (non-Portuguese) colleagues, and some DGs and agencies interviewed their participants for the internal communication tools.

#### **Highlights from the Evaluation Survey to officials:**

The support by DG COMM was well appreciated:

- 99% of officials considered the assistance provided by DG COMM either very good (61.2%) or good (30.2%);
- 90% found the training session either very useful (31%) or useful (60%);
- 96% considered that the links and reference materials provided either very useful (61.2%) or useful (35.7%);
- 85% considered that the gadgets offered to the pupils were either very useful (61.2%) or useful (24%);
- and 89% considered that the publications offered to the schools were either very useful (57.4%) or useful (31.8%).

The support by their own DGs/institutions/agencies was also highly appreciated. 90% of officials considered the assistance provided by their service either very good (48.8%) or good (41.1%)

Contacts with the schools appeared to be excellent, even with the short time for preparation and counting with some difficulties reported in the contacts with schools. In fact, over 98% of officials considered the assistance provided by the schools either very good (68.2%) or good (30.2%).

#### 4. At the School:

For the great majority of the participants, going 'back to the school' was highly appreciated. Even considering the hard work of preparation, nearly all visits were reported as a very good experience, very motivating and deserving a repetition. Among the 129 officials that filled the survey, only one reported the visits as 'not motivating' and 'not worth the effort'.

On the side of the schools, too, there was great enthusiasm with the initiative, with some schools asking colleagues to visit other (non-planned) schools in the region, to speak to classes that were not initially planned and, in a lot of cases, asking colleagues to go back again to their schools.

A lot of schools and a lot of participants asked the Commission to repeat the initiative.

The survey proposed to the teachers was also successful. 131 teachers replied to the survey, a number almost equivalent to the number of European officials that replied to the respective survey (144).

**Prior coordination with teachers** and the school management was important for the success of the visits, and even colleagues that had trouble in getting in contact with the school in the weeks prior to the event, in the end informed us that in fact the school had been preparing their visits and that everything went very well .

There was a significant rate of officials renounced to participate (19%), but, among those filling the survey, in a majority of cases this was explained by work or personal reasons (73%), and not so much because of the lack of interest of the school (13%). This results contrast with the German experience, where the lack of interest of the school was noted as the main reason why some of the volunteers did not made the visit (63% of cancellations).

The vast majority of colleagues addressed **audiences** of 100 to 200 pupils, with a few addressing more than 500 pupils. Also a majority of colleagues visited one school, but quite a few organised at least two **visits** – with one colleague organising visits to four schools in two days. The vast majority **visited their own schools**, which was underlined by the teachers – giving the participants as examples of old pupils with a good career path – and the participants themselves, who underlined their satisfaction for this 'return' to his/her school. The example of President Barroso, who recalled the differences he found in his school and some moments of his life there, was echoed in the press. This satisfaction was shared by the members of Government that participated, a majority of which visited their own schools.

There was a **lot of interest of the pupils**, even in 'difficult areas' in the outskirts of Lisbon, on the EU themes, and debates were lively and with very relevant, sometimes difficult, questions (notably, questions with the approach '*what is in there for me?*'). The commitment and interest of teachers involved was noted as very high.

On the other hand, **the knowledge of the pupils** about EU themes varied greatly, but in more than half of the cases this knowledge was noted as low or very low. This level of knowledge on EU subjects was not necessarily related to the age or level of studies of the pupils, with some primary pupils showing a good knowledge of some of the issues, such as the members or the purposes of the EU.

**Highlights from the Evaluation Survey to participants:**

- officials referred that 91% of pupils showed high (57%) or very high (34%) interest in the EU themes...
- but that 53% of pupils showed low (49%) or very low (4%) knowledge on the EU themes, while 47% showed high (40%) or very high (7%) knowledge.

**Highlights from the Evaluation Survey to teachers:**

- 99% of teachers referred that the interest of their pupils for the presentation was high (58%) or very high (41%).
- 98% of teachers considered the presentations very adequate (51%) or adequate (47%) to the age and knowledge of the pupils.
- and the teachers considered that the speaker (86%) and the theme (63%) were the elements that raised the interest of the pupils.

Regarding the **themes** debated, the pupils showed interest mostly on practical issues related to the participation of Portugal in the EU, notably the opportunities related to mobility – of students and workers. There was also a lot of interest on the future of Europe, the way forward and difficulties to work together with 27 Member States. The enlargement and its limits were also issues discussed in a lot of schools. Finally, the careers in the institutions also raised interest.

As a **follow-up**, a few schools included information on the initiative in their blogs, some invited pupils to prepare papers or drawings (depending on the ages) on the subjects debated during the EU Project Day.

A vast majority of teachers (95%) declared that they would continue to study the European project with the pupils.

## **5. Press Coverage**

The EC Representation in Portugal developed a communication strategy with the press that included:

- A press conference of the Head of Representation in June that covered both initiatives of generic communication during the presidency – the visits of the Commissioners at the moment of the launching of the Presidency, and the 'Back to School' initiative;
- In the week before the event, the REP published a general press release, as well as specific press releases, more detailed, aimed at each of the regions in Portugal (in this case including the names of officials and schools visited during the event)
- Closer to the event, the REP developed specific contacts with journalists, giving special attention to the regional press;
- Finally, the REP published two advertisements on the event in daily papers of large distribution in the country, in the days prior to the event.

As was the case with the German initiative, the press coverage was decidedly positive. However, the national press concentrated their attention more on the visits made by prominent Portuguese politicians, including the Portuguese Prime-Minister José Sócrates and the President of the European Commission Barroso. This was also the case for TV, which only transmitted images of these two visits.

The fact that almost half of the visits were concentrated in the Lisbon area, which is covered by national media and has no relevant regional newspapers, led to a vast majority of visits not having any contact at all with the press.

Moreover, in what refers to the national press, the coverage of the initiative, and most notably the visits of Prime Minister Sócrates, was contaminated by the national political agenda, notably the dispute on the Government's education policy. The fact that this was a more ample initiative, with an European nature, was just given as a background information.

This was not the case of the visit of President Barroso, which was covered in a more positive way, and clearly noted as an initiative of the European institutions in the framework of the Presidency.

The situation was quite different in what regards the visits to other regions of Portugal and to local and regional press.

In fact, the Representation invested seriously in the contacts with the local media, providing tailored information to each one, containing the schools being visited in the region, the participants' name and arranging contacts between the journalists and the participants when necessary. This led to a very good coverage, with a high number of local media covering the visits made by officials and members of Government to schools in different points of the country. In fact, it was the local press that gave more space and time to this initiative, because of their close relations with the school/region.

The tone of articles on the visits made by participants from European institutions was mostly very positive, occasionally neutral and in no case outrightly hostile or critical. The only two reported unfriendly articles criticised the initiative for being late... that it should have been done before. Again, as it had happened before in Germany, a few colleagues were '*promoted*' by the local press to higher ranks such as Director, Commissioner or MEP.

A substantial press clipping is annexed to this report.

**Highlights from the Evaluation Survey to participants:**

- 33% of officials referred that press was present to cover the visit
- 31% of officials referred that they were interviewed.

**'Blogosphere':**

The initiative also led to diverse postings in the 'blogosphere', showing how much this '*going local*' initiative has worked well in the local community. School blogs posted photos, videos and texts about their visits and visitors; and several citizens and journalists expressed their opinion about the initiative in their private blogs. These posts also generated multiple comments about Europe and education from their usual readers.

A (non-exhaustive) blog clipping is annexed to this report.

### ***Internal communication:***

The initiative was also used, in some cases, as a good practice of 'outreaching' within the DGs and other institutions and services.

There was a general article in the EC's newspaper 'Commission en Direct' and several DGs, agencies and services reported to have interviewed their participating officials or referred to the initiative. EUROSTAT, in Luxembourg, used the initiative to promote a breakfast with all DG's officials, including an audio-visual presentation of the initiative.

Several officials reported internally to their hierarchies their positive evaluation about the initiative.

A (again non exhaustive) set of examples of internal communication in the European institutions regarding the 'Back to School' initiative is annexed to this report.

## **6. Overall Evaluation and Conclusions**

The 'Back to School' initiative created an important wave of enthusiasm among the Portuguese (and other) officials participating. This enthusiasm was, in a very large measure, shared by the schools that were involved, that in a great majority of cases declared they would pursue their work, within the school, on European issues.

As an 'outreach' event of the institutions, one can hardly think of a more effective initiative aiming at young people.

*This day changed a little the way I look at Europe because I learned more things about Europe and the importance that the European Union has in the world,  
Ana Rita Isidoro*

*I thought that the people who work in Europe were very serious and now I know that the people who work in the European Union are normal people,  
Inês Lourenço*

The fact that the whole country received visits from colleagues also makes it a very effective 'go local' initiative – with a special impact due to the fact that the regional and local press responded positively and covered the visits extensively.

This enthusiasm led to several officials stating that they would keep the links with their schools and, in the future, be available to visit them by their own initiative. A lot of schools requested other events of this kind to be organised.

The visits boosted the personal motivation of colleagues, led them to work together to officials from other DGs and institutions to prepare common visits and established renewed links with their original communities. They also referred that this initiative led them to look to the European project in a wider perspective, and at the same time gave them an opportunity to explain their specific work and the work and responsibilities of their services to the citizens of their country.

The lessons learned in the German initiative led to some changes in the preparation of the initiative in Portugal, with mitigated effect. For example, preparations started early, but in the end the coincidence with the Summer break led to a short time for concrete preparation; there was extensive investment in the preparation of support materials for colleagues, and this was welcomed by a series of them; and the option to make available a set of publications to the schools was welcomed by some, criticised by others for not

being enough. From the two experiences, a set of recommendations is proposed in Annex 1 (*Recommendations and practical tips*).

All officials that replied to the survey – those who participated in the initiative and those that, having volunteered, had to cancel their visit – unanimously declared that this initiative should be repeated during the future Presidencies.

**Highlights from the Evaluation Surveys:**

- 99% of officials considered that the visit was very motivating (77.5%) or motivating (21.7%);
- 99% of officials considered the initiative a great success (59.7%) or a good initiative (39.5%). One official considered it was not worth the effort.
- 100% of teachers considered the initiative good initiative (80.9%) or a great success (19.1%).
- 99% of teachers considered the initiative relevant (50%) or a very relevant (49%) for the pedagogic project of their schools.
- 100% of officials considered that the initiative should be repeated in the future Presidencies.

*Contacts:*

*Margarida Marques, Head of Representation  
Alexandra Sá Carvalho, communication officer  
Ana Rita Moura, support to the Presidency*