

## **Summary of the joint conference of INIO/INFORM networks La Plaine Saint Denis, France, 3-4 December 2012<sup>1</sup>**

**3 December 2012**

### **Meeting of the INFORM Core Group with the INIO network (restricted meeting)**

The restricted meeting brought together around 60 persons representing the INFORM Core group, the INIO group and the Commission. Its objective was to have an efficient discussion, before the assembly of the full networks, on a number of points of common interest.

The group started with a debate on the organisation and coordination of communication networks in the different countries. From numerous examples it appeared that many Member States are running such networks, often at national, but also at regional level and that these networks are either dedicated to a specific Fund or address both ESF and ERDF communication issues. In some instances, networks even cover all four CSF. Mostly these networks help to define a common communication strategy which is then often implemented through individual communication plans. The benefit, in particular of physical meetings, is mostly seen in significant added value from mutual support and learning as well as joint problem solving. The agreement of common approaches to visual identities was cited as another advantage: several Member States have agreed to use a common logo for all ERDF or/and ESF programmes.

The discussion then focused on key communication actions for 2013. Member States plan a broad range of activities and two particular types of communication activity emerged. On the one hand, more and more Managing authorities create opportunities for citizens to experience actual projects first-hand, in the context of open days, through organised bus tours, or even in the form of stations at cycling paths. On the other hand, increasing emphasis is put on story-telling to explain the concrete impact of EU-funded initiatives on the life of citizens. This is done through a range of channels such as audio-visual productions, exhibitions, publications and also competitions that gather original testimonials. It was highlighted that such products fit very well in the context of the upcoming European Year of Citizenship.

Mariel Sacco from the Office of the Prime Minister of Malta then presented the results of a survey on annual information activities across the EU. Agencies from 24 member States responded to this survey, which found that most of the annual information activities are carried out in the second or fourth quarter of the year, with 54% of them having a national dimension. The targets of these are in the first place adults, young people, older citizens, or stakeholders. The ensuing debate showed that there is a widely diverging perception of what can constitute a "major annual information activity". The Commission recalled that such an activity is supposed to inform the public, rather than the stakeholders, about the achievement of the operational programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> All presentations are available on:

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/informing/events/201212/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/informing/events/201212/index_en.cfm)

The session was concluded with a presentation by Pierdavid Pizzochero of the Italian Ministry for Territorial Cohesion. Talking about the trend towards centralising information about EU funds and its beneficiaries, he presented the "Open Cohesion data portal" (<http://www.OpenCoesione.gov.it>) that is providing access to comprehensive data sets on all 2007-2013 Structural Funds projects, representing 16.9 billion of EU financing. The Portal puts an emphasis on citizens' involvement by letting users upload testimonials, reports and associated media. It also has a well-developed policy on the re-use of all data including for commercial purposes. The main objective of the portal can be summarized as "Towards better spending" through allowing informed decisions by policy makers as well as increased involvement of civil society, empowered by information.

### Opening plenary

The participants were welcomed by Paula Laissy, Head of the Communication Unit of the European Commission's DG Regional and Urban Policy, and Ognian Zlatev, Head of the Communication Unit in DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion as well as by the French hosts, Dominique Jérémiasz, Head of Communication Unit, Ministry of Employment and Labour, and Bertrand Millet, National Coordinator of EU Funds Communication, Interministerial Agency in charge of Spatial planning and regional development (DATAR).

Paula Laissy, recently appointed Head of Unit for Communication in DG REGIO introduced herself. She was very pleased to attend this first joint meeting of the Cohesion policy communication networks and underlined the main topic of the event: exploring ways for further co-operation and better co-operation within each country, but also across borders and programmes.

She also presented several key communication activities of DG REGIO in 2013:

- **Eurobarometer 2013:** Follow-up to the 2008&2010 Eurobarometer survey on "Citizens' awareness and perceptions of EU Regional policy"
- Joint **Cohesion policy Communication Conference** (REGIO/EMPL) on 9-10 December 2013 to take stock of the achievements since 2007 and highlight good practices
- **Evaluation study:** Identifying good communication practices in the Member States. The findings will feed into the conference mentioned above.
- **Regiostars 2014:** deadline for submitting applications is 19 April 2013.
- **[www.Regionetwork2020.eu](http://www.Regionetwork2020.eu) moves to [www.yammer.com/regionetwork](http://www.yammer.com/regionetwork)** - join the INFORM group

Further to Boris Kandziora's (DG EMPL) report from the restricted meeting in the morning, Peter Fischer (DG REGIO) presented the state of play regarding the new information and communication rules. Draft Article 107 (1) raised questions from participants:

"Each Member State shall designate **an information and communication officer** to coordinate information and communication actions **in relation to one or several Funds**, including relevant European Territorial Cooperation programmes, and shall inform the Commission accordingly."

Further to clarification with DG REGIO's legal unit, the wording allows the nomination of one or several information officers, for each fund (ERDF and ESF) or just one for both funds.

The plenary session ended with a surprise sketch about the challenges Cohesion policy communication officers face in their daily work. This entertaining and light-hearted sketch set the tone for productive afternoon workshops.

### Parallel workshops: Preparing for 2014+

#### Group A - Communication networks – more than the sum of their parts?

EU fund communication networks – identifying the best "fit" for each Member State. Similarities and differences of the INFORM and INIO networks. Which organisational structures of national Cohesion policy networks have proven to work? Exploring the scope for closer collaboration between the INFORM & INIO network. Could the communication activities of other EU funds (Agriculture, Fisheries) be coordinated with EU Cohesion policy?

*Speakers: Mathilde Blaya, Midi-Pyrénées, France: "Develop flexible networks beyond structural funds to improve the coherence of European communication at the regional level - Case studies of 3 networks based on joint projects in Midi-Pyrénées"*

*Cláudia Costa, Communication department, NSRF Observatory, Portugal; "Keeping 16 autonomous parts together – the Portuguese national communication network"*

*Facilitator: Bertrand Millet, DATAR, France*

First, Cláudia Costa, presented **the Portuguese national communication network**, which covers 16 autonomous parts, operational programmes from both ERDF & ESF. Cláudia works fulltime on keeping this network animated and active. The network:

- meets 4x/year
- defines and implements the NSRF communication strategies and their annual communication plans
- has as key objectives: to raise the number and quality of project proposals and to keep the public informed and "good willed" (i.e. convinced about added value of EU regional policy)
- is all about teamwork; despite a seemingly complex decision-making structure, the network members work together informally and in partnership.
- centralises external contracts which benefit all 16 network members, and co-ordinates activities: e.g. how to avoid 3 roadshows at the same time;
- shares concrete communication tools (campaigns, websites, etc.) -> Main advantages: the network saves its members and its programmes time and money; it makes the Regional policy communication in Portugal stronger and more efficient.

Second, Mathilde Blaya, presented case studies of **3 different communication networks in Midi-Pyrénées**, France, which all have different target groups and distinct objectives.

#### 1. European Funds communication committee (ERDF, ESF and EAFRD)

- Aim: co-ordinate communication activities across the 3 different funds
- Composed of 3 Managing Authorities (MA), plus the regional assembly (with at least one communication officer and one fund manager from each MA).

- One strategic meeting per year; plus frequent exchanges and technical meetings
- Selected results: Joint monthly e-newsletter and press releases

## 2. European contact points network

- Aim: improve coherence of European communication for citizens, potential beneficiaries and the press
- Composed of more than 60 members: Europe Direct Information Centres and others Information networks for specific audiences (Enterprise Europe Network ,EURES (employment) Euroguidance (orientation and mobility) Eurodesk (youth mobility) with information on FP7 national contact points, (the Commission Representation in France is also associated)
- Selected results: Inquirers are directed to the relevant network contact, e.g. for help on the different EU programmes in the region (applications etc.); joint communication projects are carried out and a new website with search function and contact information for the relevant EU fund is under development.

## 3. The European Month – a virtual network for real events

- Aim: organisation of “The beautiful month of Europe” in Midi-Pyrénées in May of each year
- Composed of some members of the above-mentioned two networks plus beneficiaries, municipalities, etc. on a voluntary basis
- Results: 79 events organised in 2012 (and website with activities)

**Debate:** In the discussion that followed both presentations, participants also addressed the question of co-ordinating the communication activities with other EU funds. The co-ordination between ERDF and ESF seems to be common in most Member States. Co-operating with the colleagues from the rural development (or fisheries) fund is an option that some countries are open to explore in the next funding period, but involving more partners enhances the complexity and requires the good will of all partners and ministries involved.

**Conclusions:** Communication networks have real added value: via good co-ordination they contribute to better communication and often also real savings. To function well, there has to be added value in it for all network members; e.g. preparing concrete joint communication activities. It takes dedicated personnel to run a communication network in a productive manner.

## Group B - However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results<sup>2</sup>

Evaluating communication activities 2007-2014. Learning from past mistakes and successes is crucial when drafting the new communication strategies for 2014-2020. The workshop addresses the importance of having the evaluation results in time **before** preparing the 2014+ communication strategy, and presents the experience of some programmes/countries, which already carried out an evaluation of their communication activities. The workshop participants shall also debate if the results of one country are transferable to other

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<sup>2</sup> Winston Churchill

countries. Moreover, an expert's view "from the outside" will provide hints and tips for an effective evaluation of communication activities.

*Speakers:*

*Akvile Zirculeviciute, Ministry of Finance, Lithuania: "Lessons learnt from EU Structural Funds communication in Lithuania"*

*Orsola Fornara, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Italy: "Selected evaluation results for ESF communication in Italy"*

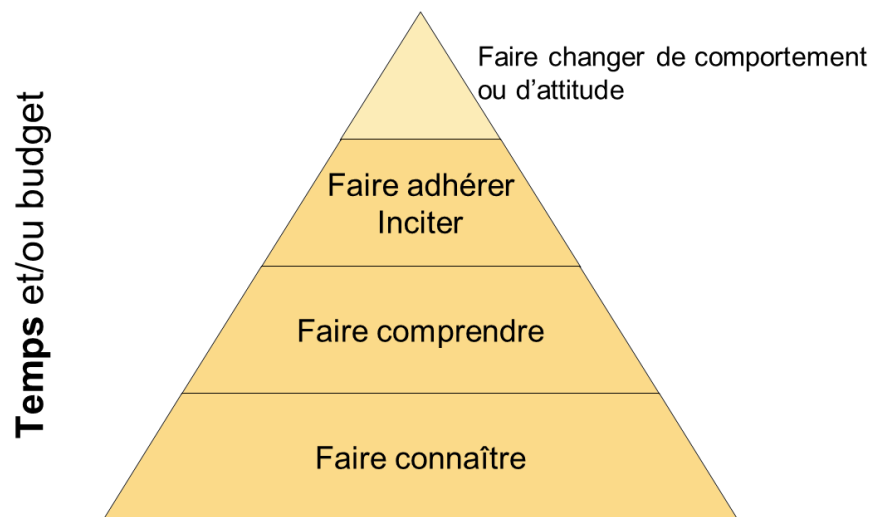
*Assaël Adary, Co-président de la société Occurence, cabinet de conseil en évaluation de la communication: Evaluation de l'efficacité de la communication : indicateurs, méthodes et astuces*

*Facilitator: Judit Szücs, National Fund, Hungary*

*Rapporteur: Tony Lockett, DG REGIO*

Some key principles of evaluating communication activities:

- "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it."
- Defining objectives (cf. pyramid below)



- Don't confuse the means (e.g. number of participants at an event) with the results (e.g. increase in levels of awareness)
- Indicators should reflect intended impact on individuals and target group.
- Measurement techniques include face-to-face interviews, online surveys, exit questionnaire for website visitors, media coverage.

Lessons learned from evaluations (Lithuanian and Italian experiences):

- Define target audiences as specifically as possible (e.g. not "the general public") and choose channels/tools accordingly (e.g. not digital media for disadvantaged groups, less educated, older people ...)
- Choose simple messages, tell stories, and provide facts and figures.

- Work with partners and multipliers (social partners, beneficiaries, schools, social services ...)

### **Group C - The early bird catches the worm**

Drafting Cohesion policy communication strategies 2014+

When should the preparations begin? What is the appropriate number of communication strategies? Is it worthwhile to pay consultants to draft the communication strategy? How to convince all stakeholders in the programme administration of the importance of communication? Which organisational structures have proven to work? How to coordinate the different communication strategies? How can results achieved in regional programmes be communicated at national level?

*Speakers:*

*Matthias Vorhauer, ESF Saxony, Germany; "The ESF/ERDF communications preparations 2014-2020 in Saxony"*

*Paula Ascenção, Ministry of Economy and Employment, Portugal: "Communication and Management – a crucial relationship"*

*Facilitator: Martin Müller, ILB, Brandenburg, Germany*

*Rapporteur: Dominique Bé, DG EMPL*

Saxony has launched the preparation of the joint 2014-2020 ERDF/ESF communication strategy as early as spring 2012 with the aim of a formal adoption by end 2013. The preparation process of the strategy has involved staff from the managing authorities, communication agencies as well as stakeholders. Matthias Vorhauer, ESF Saxony, insisted on the need to conceive the preparation of the communication strategy as a process that take time and that has to involve communication experts as well as ERDF/ESF stakeholders.

During the debate it was highlighted that drafting future communication strategies before the adoption of Structural Funds Regulations, Operational programmes, etc. and the confirmation of the institutional framework, managing authorities as well as monitoring committees, is a challenge that is easier to address in regions where stability in the institutional structures as well as the political priorities for the sue of structural funds can be expected.

Paula Ascenção, Ministry of Economy and Employment, Portugal, highlighted the crucial relationship between structural funds communication and management. She insisted on the contribution of communication and communicators to management and managers. Communication plays several roles supporting management, in particular as a motivation tool, as an input to control systems and as an interface between managers and beneficiaries.

The discussion went on about the appropriate number of communication strategies, the adequate time to start drafting strategies, how to communicate results achieved in regional programmes at national level and how to involve stakeholders as communicators.

A consensus emerged to say that the drafting of communication strategies can start when the institutional framework is perceived as being stable enough to ensure relevance of the communication plans. It was also agreed that opportunities to communicate results vertically, from regions to the national level and horizontally by inviting stakeholders to become "communication ambassadors" were dependant on the local environment.

## **Group D - On the campaign trail**

Experiences with Cohesion policy communication campaigns in Member States: which lessons for joint EU-wide campaigns? In which areas could the INFORM and INIO network, supported by the European Commission, carry out joint communication activities/campaigns? What can be learnt from campaigns carried out at regional, national or European level? The elections to the European Parliament in 2014 coincide with the launch of a new programming period. This would be a good time to raise the profile of EU Cohesion policy. What are the campaign plans of the European Parliament?

### *Speakers:*

*Dorothee Fischer, Elise Lindner, INTERACT Points Valencia and Vienna: "European Cooperation Day 2012"*

*Andrzej Bańka, Deputy Director of European Funds Department, Marshal's Office of the Małopolska Region: "Małopolska Region 3D promotional movie"*

*Maria Luz Picado, Junta de Andalucía / Juan Carlos Marín, CAFFA 4, Andalusia, Spain: "25 years of EU funds in Andalusia"*

*Facilitator: Anne-Claire Jucobin, France*

*Rapporteur: Iolanda Fernandes, DG REGIO*

1) "2012 Europe Cooperation Day": a joint campaign bringing together 70 programmes out of 93, on a voluntary basis and thus involving almost all EU countries.

Aim: to celebrate the achievement of European Territorial Cooperation.

Results: 110.000 participants, based on an evaluation of 60% of the projects so far.

Budget: 100.000€ from INTERACT, other OPs amount not included

2) "Małopolska Region promotion movie" (PL) with EU projects, a DVD using video in an innovative way

Aim: to promote projects of the region in an innovative way

Results: not yet available

Budget: 10.000€

3) "A mobile campaign on 25 years of EU Funds in Andalusia" (ES). A two buses campaign which included a photo exhibition and activity area, both dedicated to 25 years of Cohesion Policy improvements in the area. A two month-campaign throughout 100 cities of the region; the buses used as a bridge between the EU and the citizen.

Aim: to tackle a lack of information on the benefits achieved in the region thanks to EU cohesion policy

Results: 10.000 visitors. Survey feedback - 76% respondents feel greater improvement in the last years, 66% associate this improvement to the EU funds.

Budget: 140.000€

### *Similarities:*

- same target group: general public

- challenging campaigns as quite innovative and very professional

- visual entity

- media support: advertisement on regional and local press, radio, TV, a special website

- use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube)

- excellent results

*Differences:*

- European Day covered almost all EU countries, good results and should be repeated next year. Same day kept as easier for the organisational point of view, also easier to be kept in the memory (such as Open Days, same period of the year)
- ES and PL: focus on a specific region
- ES: direct testimonies (the participants in the bus exhibition)
- PL not yet implemented. The 3D video is intended to be projected in cinemas next year

*Lessons learned:*

- try new challenges; dare to put them into practice
- good results shown, should be repeated in the following year
- regional media coverage easier than at national level

Some views from Alain Barrau (European Parliament Representation office Paris), who attended this workshop, on the forthcoming EP elections:

- a more political campaign, 1 topic for the 28 Member States, same visual entity;
- would be useful to have the support of the Structural Funds networks
- could be started already next year, together with the European Year of the Citizen

The day ended with a networking dinner.

## **4 December 2012**

### **Parallel workshops: sharing experience**

#### **Group E - Exploiting social media: using it wisely**

Making effective use of social media requires good planning (incl. defining the target audience and ensuring the Human Resources to continue a dialogue with the audience). Online competitions can be an effective way to attract new audiences and keep old target groups entertained. Which other possibilities offer social media (to Cohesion policy programmes)? The workshop presents examples from Poland, Portugal and DG REGIO.

*Speakers:*

*Helder Gonçalves, Social Media expert, Matosinhos, Portugal: "The Social Media strategy of Matosinhos, Portugal"*

*Tony Lockett, DG REGIO: "Europe in my region photo competition on Facebook"*

*Piotr Zdziechowski, Inspector in the Information and Promotion Unit, Department of Regional Policy,*

*Marshal's Office of the Lodz Voivodship: "EU funds promotion 2.0"*

*Facilitator: Tony Lockett, DG REGIO*

*Rapporteur: Sophie Falier, DG EMPL*

#### Helder Gonçalves:

- Primary aim of integrating social media in communication policies of the municipality of Matosinhos: to better integrate citizens in the social local life. The municipality had already a strong associative spirit, social media are seen as a help. And also, social media help attract and inform tourists.



- The basis has been the updating of the website and from it, the development of several Facebook profiles and automatic updates of twitter, Flickr, YouTube, etc. accounts.
- The number of fans, likes, comments and answers and the recognition from national authorities and journalists indicate the high level of achievement of the project

Piotr Zdziechowski:

- From a static website, on-site trainings and TV and press information, communication has dramatically changed within two last years.
- For the second year, a contest of EU funded projects' pictures has been launched. Those pictures are geo-localised on Google maps, Google earth and Panoramico. A vote has been organised on Facebook for best pictures.
- E-Learning courses have been implemented for beneficiaries and promotion of the competition and projects has been made on web portals.

Tony Lockett:

- A double competition (for beneficiaries and for citizens) has been organised on Facebook to vote for best EU funded projects' pictures.
- Results have been very positive in terms of collaboration with INFORM network, number of participants, and better image for Europe.

**Conclusions:**

- Difficulties: access to social media, not always considered as serious tools, rules to know on behalf of who writers are speaking, need of immediate answers and thus according human resources
- Necessities: quick internal communication, care for answers and feed-backs, convince authorities of their interest to commit, clearly identify different target groups
- Advantages: low cost, access to younger target groups
- Great success: photo competitions

**Group F - Transition time**

Communication priorities at the beginning of a new (and end of an old) programme period

How to strike the right balance between communicating the results of the 2007-2013 period and promoting the investment opportunities of the 2014-2020 programmes? For how long should the websites of the 2007-2013 programmes be updated? Does the distinction of the programme period matter to the wider public?

*Speakers:*

*Isabelle Meersseman, Nord-Pas de Calais (ESF): "Communication Do's and Don'ts during transition time"*

*Frank Schneider, Head of Communication, Central Europe programme: "From communicating priorities to communicating thematic messages"*

*Facilitator: María José Cueto Faus, Deputy Head of Unit Communication, DG EMPL*  
*Rapporteur: Boris Kandziora, DG EMPL*

Isabelle Meersseman presented "Communication Do's and Don'ts during transition time", based on experience from the beginning of the current programme period. Four areas of specific attention were recommended to the audience. Firstly, communication managers should as much as possible **anticipate** the upcoming period and the related changes. Even when only limited information would yet be available, and early information helps to re-assure programme managers and potential beneficiaries and put them on an equal footing. Secondly, communication activities should clearly **valorise** the achievement of the old period, ideally in a way that underpins the probable objectives and themes of the upcoming period.

Then, it is important to **kick off** and clearly mark the start of the new period. Dedicated seminars and conferences usually generate huge interest by stakeholders. This would also be the occasion to develop or confirm common issues such as a visual identity. Finally, it is of course important to **accompany** – providing information and practical advice to project managers and potential beneficiaries. The audience noted with interest that in the Nord-Pas de Calais region, workshops on the application process and on project management have been made obligatory, with good results both as regards participants' feedback and also improved management found in controls.

In conclusion: already today, a year from the start of the next period, all actions, choices and communication topics should be oriented on the probable new objectives and investment priorities.

In the debate that followed, it became clear that many actors hesitate to take any action yet because of the unclear future distribution of responsibilities and set-up for governance. They were however encouraged to go ahead with activities according to the presented scheme. In this context, it was recalled that the Europe Direct Centres can provide valuable support.

Frank Schneider's presentation put the focus on a different "transition time" between a "start-up and implementation" period, corresponding to about the first four years of a programming period, and an ensuing 'capitalisation' period. While in the former phase, the priority of the programme has been to activate the available funds through starting the corresponding projects, the transition to the latter phase required Central Europe to adapt the way of communication to become results-based, thematically re-clustered and re-branded.

An evaluation of Central Europe's communication activities found that while the objective of informing and engaging the stakeholders had been reached satisfactorily, they had failed to reach the public. In conclusion, it was found that this was an unrealistic target that was subsequently dropped altogether. The communication of Central Europe was transformed from a "one fits all" approach to a more specific targeting of key audiences.

In the debate that followed, many participants pointed out that the general public remained an important target for explaining the role and benefit of European intervention. It was however acknowledged that often, beneficiaries that highlight EU support can have a bigger impact locally. There was agreement that empowerment of project managers is a crucial element for the leverage of a multiplication effect. Likewise, the professionalization of the communication practise remains important. In most cases, local targeting of an audience is more effective than a broad approach.

Finally, the current moment in the programme cycle offers opportunities to adapt how and what is communicated.

### **Group G - Simplifying the life of communication officers 2014-2020**

Communication Wiki 2014-2020 – finalisation of chapters

The negotiation of the information and communication chapter in the General regulation on EU Cohesion policy was expected to be completed by December - work on the Communication Wiki on [www.Regionetwork2020.eu](http://www.Regionetwork2020.eu) can now be finalised. The Communication Wiki includes good communication practices identified by the network members and provides concrete examples which Cohesion policy communication officers can take inspiration from in the period 2014-2020. The hands-on editorial work will be organised in small groups of 3-7 persons per chapter.

*Editors: Cecilia Werner, Sweden; Richard Holmes, United Kingdom; Paulo Emerenciano, Portugal; Julie Bécél, Mission Europe, Préfecture de région Centre, France,*

*Facilitator: Peter Fischer, DG REGIO*

*Rapporteur: Peter Fischer, DG REGIO*

The workshop participants were divided into small groups to work on different chapters of the communication Wiki. All groups came to (at least preliminary) conclusions on their respective chapters which had to be uploaded on the Communication Wiki chapter on Regionetwork2020. As Regionetwork 2020 is moving to a new platform, the work on the Communication Wiki will continue in the INFORM network group on [www.yammer.com](http://www.yammer.com) – to access the Wiki, you need to request to join the INFORM group on [Yammer's Regionetwork](#).

### **Group H - Major conference on communicating Cohesion policy**

The end of 2013 is a good moment to take stock of the progress made in the area of communicating EU Cohesion policy. With the 2007-2013 programme period, information and communication, including transparency, gained more importance. Many good communication activities were carried out. This conference will highlight some of the most interesting good practices from ERDF/CF and ESF programmes and its beneficiaries, and will help participants prepare for the next period. The target audience of this conference are not only programme communication officers and project managers, but also the Heads of Managing Authorities, representatives of regional development and economic ministries, Europe Direct Information networks, representatives of EU Institutions and the media.

The workshop participants will brainstorm to identify key elements for the agenda. In 2007, the first [conference](#) of this type was organised in Brussels.

*Facilitator: Dominique Bé, DG EMPL*

*Rapporteur: Iolanda Fernandes, DG REGIO*

Some workshop proposals for conference content:

- how to deal with the financial restrictions we are facing now?
- how to communicate objectives?
- which strategic elements for communication?
- coaching on communication
- professional know-how on communication made by communication's experts
- how to prepare a strategic communication plan, key elements to foresee when no technical assistance facilities?

- practical workshop on audit issues, focus on communication rules
- how to work with journalists, how to “sell” a story, how to convert it to attract the media

All participants agreed on the importance of involving politicians in order to show them what is being done in terms of communication.

### **Closing Plenary**

In concluding the meeting, Paula Laissy and Ognian Zlatev underlined that the 2-day conference proved there was widespread agreement on the added value of at least co-ordinating the communication activities of the ERDF and ESF programmes. This conference showed there were many topics of common interest. Judit Szücs invited the INFORM network members to the next conference in Budapest on 30-31 May 2013.

Dominique Jérémiasz and Bertrand Millet thanked all participants for their participation and closed the conference with practical information about the project visits which took place in the afternoon.