

Group Report on the EU Top-up Summer Programme 2013

Topic: Social media

1.

I know that the European Union puts effort in preserving heritages and helping students gain broader horizons by the Europa Nostra Awards and the Erasmus Programme respectively. Most of the member states of the EU have a grand history such as the Great Britain and France, in them are numerous cultural heritages, precious to global humanity. EU's vast area also added many natural heritages to its management and preservation. The Europa Nostra Awards picks outstanding preservations of heritages from its members annually, and gives them financial subsidies. Since 2007 the EU has financed its members a sum of €26m. Through this the EU encourages its member states to raise awareness of keeping and promoting the priority of European heritages.

I also knew the Erasmus Programme (EuRopean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) before the summer programme. The Erasmus Programme has been promoting and helping international academic and cultural exchanges among students and scholars to Europe. It has 927 partner universities and institutions in 37 countries. By joining the Erasmus Programme students can choose the period and the place of their exchange study in various fields. More than 2million students have been on an Erasmus exchange for the past 20 years.

2. During preparing the topic, we found the definition, the platforms, the purposes, the targets and the core principles of Social Media.

What is social media?

It is online technologies and practices that are used to share opinions and information, promote discussion, and build relationships. They use a variety of different formats, including text, pictures, audio and video. More and more EU citizens are active on social networks.

The European Commission therefore uses these platforms to reach out and connect with citizens and stakeholders in addition to the communication which takes place via more traditional channels such as written press, broadcasters and EU publications and websites.

The Platforms

One recent development is that social media such as Twitter, Facebook or professional networks like Linked'in and Yammer are growing more popular for people-to-people communication. Social media are becoming one of the busiest media platforms where citizens are spending more and more time.

Based on user participation and user-generated content, social media provide a means of gathering and sharing information, knowledge and opinions in an easy, conversational manner

The Commission distinguishes social media use for the following purposes:

1. communication on political priorities
2. stakeholder and campaign communication
3. use of social media in staff members' own capacity

Who can take part in this new form of communication?

Everyone can participate in social media, in their own personal capacity.

However, your statements and opinions will remain personal and cannot be regarded as representing the Commission's official position. You do not speak on behalf of the Commission and you should point this out in the appropriate manner.

As a general rule, only Commissioners, Spokespersons, Heads of Representations and Press Officers in Representations are entitled to speak on behalf of the European Commission and to relay political messages.

In response to the growing interest in social media, 'mandated staff' in every DG, working in close cooperation with the Spokespersons, have now been added to this group. Their role is to relay political messages and to provide support and assistance on social media. What follows are a few principles and guidelines to ensure the appropriate use of social media

Core principles

- Objectivity – which means presenting any situation in a reasoned and unprejudiced manner
- Impartiality – which means weighing opinions in a balanced manner and

without taking a position

- Loyalty to the Institution – which means presenting the Commission’s views within your field to the best of your ability and clearly in line with the views previously expressed by the Commission and the Commissioner responsible
- Discretion – which essentially means non-divulgence of any information that has not yet been made public
- Circumspection – which means exercising caution, carefulness, moderation and a due sense of proportion and propriety.

3.

I have certain questions on the EU 2020 strategy. The 28 members of the EU are of different development level, as developed as Germany and Sweden, and the less developed ones like Croatia and Slovenia, how can the EU make sure that each member is taking up the proper portion of responsibility in this plan? The presentation slides of Mr Hennon showed that the Great Britain is behind the promised schedule of reducing greenhouse gases. Another thing is that some smaller member states have fewer natural resources and they lack technology to utilize or build plants for renewable power resources. These problems would certainly cause unfairness when it comes to the shared responsibility of the 28 member states in the EU 2020 plan. A few questions related were asked during the session, and the presenter briefly replied that the EU would take legal actions should a member betrays its promise. It was the difficult point to strike a balance among all the countries involved. Obviously the EU needs the cooperation of the more developed members, but at the same time it has to make sure the smaller ones are capable to make a sensible level of effort. This was the major question in my mind during the meetings.

4.

Mr. David Tunney, New and Social Media Network, Strategic Communication Division, EEAS, was the speaker for the topic of social media. He gave us a short but to-the-point presentation on how EU utilizes social media to disseminate information and alongside raising awareness of the public, especially thousands of millions of netizens living outside Europe.

Mr. Tunney started off his discussion by highlighting the power as well as the unpredictability of social media. Undoubtedly it is now much easier, much faster and much cheaper to spread key messages using social media platforms such as Facebook/ Twitter than that in the past where people were still heavily relied on

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newspapers or even telegrams. However, Mr. Tunney also recognized that the convenience and efficiency brought by social media might also come with unprecedented challenges as no one knows how this fast growing community will evolve thus what they have to do is to maximize the effectiveness of their social media efforts and proceed with extreme care. And the primary purpose of setting up these Facebook/ twitter accounts for every department, division or sub-group is not only about arousing public's attention to their works and missions, but also let people know that the EU, an enormous organization that may sound distant to non-Europeans, has specific teams of professionals to handle various issues which may be of interest to every non-European individual. Mr. Tunney then concluded his presentation by several tactics and strategies they employed to keep the number of subscribers going up such as advertisements.

In our opinion, it is absolutely that much more effort must be paid to advocate and promote the works of EU. Nevertheless, we are impressed that a number of EU officials are quite active on the social media platform and some of them even have their own Facebook accounts to share news with their followers. We believe it is a good practice that other officials may wish to learn as their followers may gain a lot more knowledge on EU's works and at the same time, the officials can listen to or even exchange views with them.