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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL COMMUNICATION
REPRESENTATIONS AND NETWORKS
Communication Relays and Networks

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WORKING PAPER – ECN WORKING GROUP IV

**EUROPEAN INFORMATION NETWORKS AND OUTLETS FOR
CITIZENS OVERSEEN BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

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NETWORKS AND RELAYS

1. OVERSEEN BY DG COMM

1.1. EUROPE *DIRECT* Networks

1.1.1. *Relays*

EUROPE *DIRECT* information network was created in 2005 and it has information outlets in all the Member States. Information relays act as an interface between EU and its citizens at local level. The mission of the relays is to distribute information and advice about the European Union's policies, actively promote local and regional debate about the European Union, allow the European institutions to disseminate local and regional information and give the public the opportunity to send feedback to the European Union institutions.

http://ec.europa.eu/europedirect/index_en.htm

1.1.2. *European Documentation Centres (EDCs)*

The EDCs were set up in the Member States, in other European countries and third countries as from 1963. From the January 2007 onwards the EDC network will operate only in the Member States as DG RELEX and DG ELARG will set up their own network in the Universities outside the EU territory. The European Documentation Centres (EDC) help the higher educational and research institutions to promote and develop education and research on European integration, encourage these institutions to take part in the debate on European integration and help ordinary citizens to learn about the Union's policies. Most of the European Communities' official publications can be consulted at any EDC. The Commission provides the EDCs with training, information and documentary support.

http://ec.europa.eu/europedirect/index_en.htm

1.2. Team Europe

Created in 1989, Team Europe is a network of roughly 700 conference speakers specialised in European affairs. The Commission Representations in the Member States are in charge of the organisation of national Teams. Team Members come from a variety of backgrounds, including academic, consulting, legal, business or public administration. Due to the decentralised structure of Team Europe, experts on EU matters are available for conferences and similar events in almost all member states of the Union. The network covers every EU policy area and most of the Union's working languages. The Representations provide the Team Europes with information and training support.

http://ec.europa.eu/europedirect/index_en.htm

1.3. EURO-JUS

EURO-JUS, the advisory service on legal matters attached to the European Commission Representations is available free of charge to all citizens, who need information on their EU rights. EURO-JUS offers rapid (replies within no more than fifteen days) and free information on Community law to individual citizens, general information on the citizens' rights and obligations and legal assistance with problems related to Community law and its application in domestic law. EURO-JUS contact can be found via the Representations of the European Commission.

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/represent_en.htm

1.4. EUROPE DIRECT Contact Centre

EUROPE DIRECT offers information on all sorts of subjects related to the EU including your rights and opportunities as an EU citizen and how to take advantage of them. It can provide direct responses to general enquiries and, if you have more detailed questions, signpost you to the best source of information and advice at EU, national, regional and local levels. EUROPE DIRECT is a single Freephone number from anywhere in the 25 Member States, a normal telephone number from anywhere in the world, a direct response service via e-mail as well as an interactive, real-time Web-Assistance service for visitors of the EUROPA web site.

http://ec.europa.eu/europedirect/index_en.htm

2. OVERSEEN BY OTHER SERVICES OF THE COMMISSION

2.1. EURES (EMPL)

European Employment Services brings together the European Commission and the public employment services of the countries belonging to the European Economic Area and Switzerland. Other regional and national bodies concerned with employment issues are also included, such as trade unions, employers' organisations, as well as local and regional authorities. The purpose of the EURES network is to provide services for the benefit of workers and employers as well as any citizen wishing to benefit from the principle of the free movement of persons. This involves three types of service provision: information, advice and recruitment/placement (job-matching). The EURES network comprises over 700 EURES members (the national public employment services and the European Commission) and, within the framework of the EURES cross-border partnerships, EURES partners such as trade unions and employers' organisations, and local and regional authorities. Overseen by the Employment and Social Affairs Directorate-General of the Commission.

<http://ec.europa.eu/eures/home.jsp?lang=en>

2.2. National Contact Points for the Sixth Framework Programme (RTD)

At the Lisbon summit in March 2000, EU governments called for a better use of European research efforts through the creation of an internal market for science and technology - a 'European Research Area' (ERA). FP6 is the financial instrument to help make ERA a reality. FP6 is the European Community Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration. It is a collection of the actions at EU level to fund and promote research. FP6 projects have to be trans-national.

Activities that can better be carried out at national or regional level, i.e. without co-operation across borders will not be eligible under the Framework Programme. There are over 1000 FP6 contact points all over the world. Overseen by the Research Directorate-General of the Commission.

<http://www.cordis.lu/contacts/national.htm>

2.3. Business and Innovation Centres (BICs) (REGIO)

The European Community Business and Innovation Centres (EC BICs) are support organisations for innovative small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) and entrepreneurs. They are recognised by the European Commission through a quality certification scheme, which enables them to obtain the European “EC BIC” label. Operating in the public interest, they are set up by the principal economic operators in an area or region, in order to offer a range of integrated guidance and support services for projects carried out by innovative SMEs, thereby contributing to regional and local development. The BICs are grouped together within the European BIC Network (EBN). EBN full membership is reserved to European Commission recognised BICs and there are over 160 full members in 21 countries. Overseen by the Regional Policy Directorate-General of the Commission.

<http://www.ebn.be/>

2.4. Innovating Regions in Europe network (IRE) (ENTR)

The Innovating Regions in Europe (IRE) network is the joint platform for collaboration and exchange of experience for regions that are developing or implementing regional innovation strategies and schemes. The aim of the network is to give member regions access to new tools, schemes and inter-regional learning opportunities on innovation promotion, in order to improve their ability to boost innovation and competitiveness among regional companies. The IRE network is open to all European regions that are committed to developing their regional innovation systems. The majority of the IRE member regions have undertaken Regional Innovation Strategy projects with support from the European Commission. The IRE network was originally established to support these regions in their work to enhance regional innovation. The IRE network currently brings together around 235 member regions from the EU countries, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Israel. Overseen by the Enterprise Directorate-General of the Commission.

<http://www.innovating-regions.org>

2.5. Structural Funds Information Team (SFIT) (REGIO)

The Structural Funds Information Team (SFIT) is an informal network of communication officers responsible for information and publicity on Structural Funds in the Member States. Established in 2002, the SFIT groups around 100 communication experts from national, regional and local authorities. It is open to all working in this field. The main task of the network is experience sharing and exchange of best practice on the subject. For the Commission, the network serves as a first hand source of information about the projects and the results of the Cohesion Policy on the ground. The group meets twice a year in Brussels. In the last years DG REGIO has put much effort into increasing transparency, developing information and communication activities and improving cooperation in those fields with the Managing Authorities and the Member States. For 2007-2013 period, the emphasis on the proper information and communication at all

levels of the Structural Funds management process is strengthened. In that context, it is planned to expand the network to the communication officers from all Managing Authorities (potentially around 300 members) and to link it more closely with the national networks dealing with information and publicity requirements.

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/commu/index_en.htm

2.6. Innovation Relay Centres (IRCs) (ENTR)

IRCs have been created in order to facilitate the transfer of innovative technologies to and from European companies or research departments. As a mover and shaker in innovation, the IRC network has become a leading European network for the promotion of technology partnerships and transfer mainly between small and medium-sized companies (SMEs). The IRCs are innovation support service providers mainly hosted by public organisations such as university technology centres, chambers of commerce, regional development agencies or national innovation agencies. Most IRCs are set up as consortia. Each centre is staffed by personnel who have extensive knowledge of the technological and economic profile of the companies and regions they serve. IRCs span 33 countries – (EU Member States, Bulgaria, Romania, Iceland, Israel, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and Chile). Overseen by the Enterprise Directorate-General of the Commission.

<http://irc.cordis.lu>

2.7. Euro Info Centres (ENTR)

EICs operate in partnership with local, regional and national organisations. These organisations, which include chambers of commerce, banks, national and regional institutions, business federations, craft chambers and scientific centres are selected according to the quality of their contact with businesses in their region. They enjoy a privileged partnership with the European Commission who, through independent auditors, ensures that the quality of the service provided is consistently high. The host organisations provide significant financial and logistical support, as well as access to their databases and information sources. DG Enterprise and Industry co-finances the network, provides training, and defines its strategy and mode of operation. This partnership means SMEs benefit from a full and complementary range of services. The network comprises of more than 300 centres across more than 45 countries (Euro Info Correspondence Centres –EICCs- in third countries). Overseen by the Enterprise Directorate-General of the Commission.

<http://ec.europa.eu/comm/enterprise/networks/eic/eic.html>

On 1.1.2008 the IRC and EIC networks will be merged together.

2.8. Euro Team (ECFIN)

Upon accession, the new Member States committed themselves to adopting the euro as soon as they fulfil all the convergence criteria. With more and more countries preparing for the introduction of the euro, communication and dissemination of practical information on the single currency and Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) becomes increasingly important for the citizens of the New Member States. Latest opinion polls show that citizens in the New Member States would like to get information as soon as possible on the single currency. The Euro Team network was launched in 2006 and is there to respond to the growing public interest in this topic. Euro Team members are

specialists in economic and financial affairs and can communicate with the citizens of the 10 countries in their own language. Overseen by Economic and Financial Affairs Directorate-General of the Commission.

http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/euroteam/euroteam_en.htm

2.9. European Consumer Centres (ECC) (SANCO)

The European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net) is an EU-wide network to promote consumer confidence by advising citizens on their rights as consumers and providing easy access to redress, particularly in cases where the consumer has purchased something in another country to his/her own (cross-border). The network has been created by merging two previously existing networks: the European Consumer Centres or 'Euroguichets', which provided information and assistance on cross-border issues; and the European Extra-Judicial Network or "EEJ-Net" which helped consumers to resolve their disputes through alternative dispute resolution schemes (ADRs) such as mediators or arbitrators. The aim of the European Consumer Centres is to provide consumers with a wide range of services, from providing information on their rights to giving advice and assistance with their complaints and the resolution of disputes. There are 27 ECCs in 27 countries (all EU Member States + Iceland + Norway). Overseen by the Health and Consumer Protection Directorate-General of the Commission.

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/redress/ecc_network/index_en.htm

2.10. The Green Spider Network of Environmental Communicators / European Environmental Communication Networks (ENV)

The Green Spider Network is overseen by the Environment Directorate-General of the European Commission. It consists of around 50 information and communication professionals from European environment ministries and agencies/institutes, DG Environment, the European Environment Agency and the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme, acting as permanent observer).

The aim of the network is to ensure a continuous exchange of good environmental communication practices between the member organisations and to keep all parties informed of on-going and up-coming environmental communication initiatives in Europe. It also promotes coordination of activities and active participation of the members in EU communication initiatives and campaigns.

DG Environment provides secretariat support to the network under the heading "European Environmental Communication Networks" (EECN). The secretariat is also in charge of wider news and best practice dissemination and liaising with other networks active in the field of environmental communication.

EECN website: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/networks/index_en.htm

GSN website: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/networks/greenspider/index_en.htm

2.11. Media Desks and Antennae (INFOS)

The MEDIA Programme entered into force in January 2001 and aims at strengthening the competitiveness of the European audiovisual industry with a series support measures dealing with the training of professionals; the development of production projects and companies; the distribution of cinematographic works and audiovisual programmes; the promotion of cinematographic works and audiovisual programmes; the support for cinematographic festivals. There are media desks in all the Member States and Iceland,

Norway, Switzerland and Bulgaria. Overseen by the Information Society and Media Directorate-General of the Commission.

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/avpolicy/media/desk_en.html

2.12. National Agencies for the Lifelong Learning Programme (EAC)

The Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) is the successor of the Socrates II and Leonardo da Vinci II programmes and supports European cooperation in all areas of education and training. This cooperation takes different forms: mobility in view of spending a period in another participating country for the purpose of learning, studying, teaching, undertaking a practical placement, organising transnational cooperation projects (small or large scale projects aimed at collaborative learning and teaching experiences, developing or transferring innovative approaches in all areas of education and training etc.), setting up European networks (disseminating experience and good practice on a large scale), and conducting studies and comparative analyses. There are National Agencies in all the participating countries, that is the 27 EU Members States, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as in the candidate country Turkey. A large number of the National Agencies for the Lifelong Learning Programme are successors of the current Socrates and/or Leonardo da Vinci National Agencies in the participating countries.

At EU level, the work of the National Agencies is coordinated and overseen by the Education and Culture Directorate-General of the Commission.

[Weblink to be added once operational website for LLP ready on EAC site]

2.13. Cultural Contact Points (EAC)

Cultural contact points have been established in the Member States and in most of the other countries taking part in the Culture 2000 programme. They are responsible for promoting the programme, facilitating the participation of as many cultural professionals as possible, ensuring an exchange of information with national cultural institutions, maintaining contact between the participants in the various Community programmes and a link with the other sources of information on the various Community programmes. The network covers all the EU Members States, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. Overseen by the Education and Culture Directorate-General of the Commission.

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/culture/eac/culture2000/contacts/national_pts_en.html

2.14. EURODESK Network (EAC)

Eurodesk is an effective information network designed to provide easy access to European Union training and youth programmes and other possibilities for international cooperation to young people and the people who work with youth. The Eurodesk National Partners include 24 Member States, Bulgaria, Romania, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

At regional or local level relays are mainly organisations, which are already working actively with young people and information and wish to participate in the Eurodesk network to benefit from the information, tools and training provided by the network and the national partner. Overseen by the Education and Culture Directorate-General.

<http://www.eurodesk.org/edesk/Welcome.do>

2.15. Youth Programme National Agencies (EAC)

The YOUTH programme is the EU's mobility and non-formal education programme targeting young people aged between 15 and 25 years. The Programme is open to youth in 31 European countries. The YOUTH programme started in spring 2000 but incorporates, and is based on, the experiences faced by the former Youth for Europe and European Voluntary Service programmes. There are National Agencies for the YOUTH programme established in all 31 Programme Countries (EU Members States, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein). The Agencies assist with the promotion and implementation of the Programme at national level. Overseen by the Education and Culture Directorate-General.

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/program/index_en.html

2.16. Citizens Signpost Service (MARKT)

Citizens Signpost Service is available from anywhere in the EU, via the free phone number of EUROPE DIRECT or via the e-form on the Dialogue with Citizens website. It operates in all European Union languages. Citizens enter their personal details and explain their problems on the electronic form. Also, EUROPE DIRECT contact centre transfers to the Citizens Signpost Service (CSS) database any complex enquiries concerning citizens' Internal Market rights. The questions are sent to the contractor: European Citizen Action Service (ECAS). The database entries are checked for eligibility according to the clear criteria. For instance, questions from consultancies or legal practices are automatically rejected. ECAS transmits the eligible questions to one of its legal experts and the expert has to reply to the citizen in the requested language, within the contractual deadline. In this reply, the citizen will be advised on different ways of solving his/her problem and signposted to relevant institutions or services (national or European, such as SOLVIT or FIN-NET). Overseen by the Internal Market Directorate-General of the Commission.

http://ec.europa.eu/citizensrights/signpost/about/index_en.htm

2.17. SOLVIT (MARKT)

SOLVIT is an on-line problem solving network in which EU Member States work together to solve without legal proceedings problems caused by the misapplication of Internal Market law by public authorities. There is a SOLVIT centre in every European Union Member State (as well as in Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein). SOLVIT Centres can help with handling complaints from both citizens and businesses. They are part of the national administration and are committed to providing real solutions to problems within ten weeks. Using SOLVIT is free of charge. Overseen by the Internal Market Directorate-General of the Commission.

http://ec.europa.eu/solvit/site/index_en.htm

2.18. FIN-NET (MARKT)

FIN-NET is a network for settling cross-border financial disputes out of Court. In case of a financial dispute between the consumer and the financial service provider, the consumer can contact the out-of-court complaints body in his own country of residence.

This body will give him all the necessary and appropriate information about the complaints network and about the competent scheme in the country of the financial service provider. If the consumer decides to file the complaint with the foreign scheme, he can leave it with the nearest scheme which will transfer the complaint to the competent scheme. Once the competent scheme has received the complaint, it will try to resolve the dispute according to its rules and taking into account Commission recommendations. Overseen by the Internal Market Directorate-General of the Commission.

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/internal_market/finservices-retail/finnet/index_en.htm

2.19. The OLAF Anti-Fraud Communicators Network (OLAF)

The information and communication link for the major players involved in the fight against fraud and irregularities affecting the Community financial interests. The members are ministries, customs and police organisations. Overseen by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).

http://europa.eu.int/comm/anti_fraud/olaf-oafcn/en.html