REVES POSITION ON THE COMMISSION'S WHITE PAPER ON A EUROPEAN COMMUNICATION POLICY

REVES welcomes the proposal for a White Paper on a European Communication Policy. It appreciates the efforts made by the Commission to consult the public on this subject.

Recommendations:

1. Target group: REVES believes *a communication strategy should not address citizens only, but inhabitants in general*.
A large part of EU member states clearly are countries of immigration. This adds to Europe's diversity in cultures and mentalities as well as to its manifold relations to other regions of the world. Integrated the right way, immigrants are an important, enriching part of Europe's population, in economic and social terms. This, however, is not always acknowledged. Most countries, regions and cities as well as Europe as a whole still lack adequate integration strategies.
A European communication strategy should therefore also address those groups (who might also be future citizens of Europe). Otherwise, it would also run the risk to be implemented separately from other EU policies.

2. Civil society and partnership: As rightly recognised by the Commission, civil society significantly contributes to the European debate. It may therefore deliver a precious contribution to a European communication strategy not only with its expertise in diverse policy fields, but also through its proximity to inhabitants/citizens in general.
In this respect, one should mention in particular *local* and *regional* civil society organisations that often enjoy a great deal of confidence among local inhabitants.
Local and regional governments should be encouraged to join forces with those actors so as to strengthen their impact as well as to ensure dialogue between inhabitants, the national and the European level.

3. **Civic education:** The idea of upgrading or creating structures/institutions for civic education with teachers from all over Europe is certainly an interesting one. Yet, it might not be necessary to found new structures. Existing institutions such as universities or foundations could serve this purpose.
However, the cities and regions for social economy do not think this should be a major objective of a European Communication Policy. One should keep in

mind that access to institutions such as the College of Europe, foundation programmes or other structures is still fairly limited. Moreover, these institutions often fail to address disadvantaged groups, certain generations

and inhabitants that meet the EU rather with distrust. Large supplementary budgets for such structures risk strengthening the image of the European Union as a 'doubtful construction serving an 'elite' only'.

REVES believes it is of vital importance to invest in civic education above all at *local* and *regional* level so as to reach a large part of the European population and different groups. Moreover, education policies are conceived above all by regional and local authorities. They shape European citizens and inhabitants from childhood on.

As already mentioned beforehand, there is not necessarily a need to create new structures. A variety of specific syllabus linked to EU policies has been developed and is currently being "tested" in a number of regions and cities. Local authorities, schools and universities, but also civil society and social economy organisations working in the field of education and vocational training have already proven their ability to organize courses, summer schools, vocational training and other events. Local partnerships between those actors as well as partnerships between these local networks and the national and European level are a key factor of success for a European Communication Strategy. It is within such networks that a largest possible number of inhabitants can be addressed.

Specific programmes and projects to launch and support the aforementioned activities are indispensable. Nevertheless, *in order to ensure the sustainability and success of the communication strategy, the Commission should also promote stable local partnerships, structures of co-operation* **that are not limited to single projects only***.*

In this context partnerships between local networks of different countries (exchange of teachers, speakers, experiences in general etc.) should be fostered as well.

4. **Public and parliamentary discussions:** REVES welcomes the Commission's proposal for public and parliamentary discussions and "a more co-ordinated and citizens-oriented approach of the EU institutions". This might counteract the wide-spread image of numerous "Commissions and Parliaments" acting without any coordination and hidden from the public. Transparency and coherence are **crucial in gaining trust** of citizens and inhabitants in the European Union and its institutions.

Citizens and inhabitants can only be reached through a stronger decentralisation and dialogue with local and regional entities. They represent the level being the closest to the population. In this regard the Structured Dialogue established between the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission, for instance, already led to improvements such as enhanced dialogue, more transparency and a better exchange of information. However, a better follow-up and visibility of the outcome of the Structured Dialogue (not only in terms of documents, but also regarding concrete proposals for legislation, improved services etc.) has to be ensured so as to increase its credibility in the eyes of the European population. Otherwise, the dialogue might be considered as being only a possibility for European institutions to pay mere lip service to their relations with the local level.

Moreover, specific structured dialogue meetings should involve more strongly other local and regional actors such as civil society. This might be done directly by inviting those organisations to the respective meetings. Another possibility would be to ask local authorities wishing to take the floor to consult their local networks/civil society organisations. Documents proving this consultation could be requested.

Following the example of the Committee of the Regions, hearings aiming at an exchange with the local and regional level should be held between the Council, the European Parliament and local networks.
National Council representatives should be open to engage into a more intensive discussion on EU policies in their own country, involving local and regional authorities and their networks. A greater willingness to engage in such inter-territorial dialogue might also more strongly encourage local authorities and local networks to organise, for instance, open council meetings on subjects related to the EU.

5. **European Round Table for Democracy**: The Cities and Regions for Social Economy very much support the idea of a European Round Table for Democracy provided that participants be chosen on an inclusive basis. A special system (rotation?) has to be found to allow for different European, national, regional and local actors – including civil society and social economy - to raise their voice.
Furthermore, clear criteria of success and basic requirements regarding follow-up and implementation of results should be adopted so as to enhance the recognition of the Round Table among the European population.

6. **Code of conduct:** REVES supports the draft of a code of conduct regarding a European communication policy. However, in the framework of specific EU programmes, the respect of some of its principles should be rendered compulsory. Dialogue *with* and information *of* the European population at national and local level is vital for an effective implementation of other EU policies and European Democracy in general. Its realisation should not have to depend on specific circumstances such as favourable governments and rather temporary priorities of policy-making at national and local level.
Subscribing to the code of conduct or a part of it, public authorities and other organisations should make its principles part of their statutes. Otherwise alike commitments risk to be taken serious neither by those signing them nor by the public.