Going local

The communication potential of local and regional authorities

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More information on the European Union and the Committee of the Regions is available on the internet at http://www.europa.eu and http://www.cor.europa.eu, respectively.

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1 Introduction

The present study on the communication potential of local and regional authorities (LRA) focuses on the willingness, ability, resources, and potential need for support of LRAs in the context of communicating the EU and more specifically the 2014 European elections. As such, the study looks back into previous efforts of LRAs to communicate the EU; it observes the current communication channels and their effectiveness, and it also reports on the willingness of LRA to support an EU information campaign in the context of the 2014 European elections. In this introduction, we first focus on the background and the structure of the study. Finally, we pay acknowledgements to all those who contributed to the development and findings of this study.

1.1 Background

Between the 22 and the 25 May, the European Parliament (EP) will hold its elections for the 8th time. The elections will take place in all 28 Member States. Given the institutional changes of the Lisbon Treaty, (for example, the fact that the European Commission President will be elected by the EP based on the results of the European elections) election results have a large impact and European voters do have a crucial role to play. At the same time, since the first European elections in 1979, the voter turnout has continuously dropped. In 2009, the overall voter turnout has reached 43% (see also Table 1). The EU Institutions are committed to increasing the awareness of the importance of the elections and with the EP in the lead, they are preparing an election information campaign for the 2014 European elections. In this context, as it will also be explained in this study further below (see part 2), the Committee of the Regions (CoR) is a crucial actor in the framework of an inter-institutional communication. "Communicating Europe in Partnership" is not only an important credo that links the different EU institutions horizontally to coordinate common communication on the EU; it also links the EU level vertically with the various other levels of EU communication governance. In this context, the CoR can serve as a link to the local and regional levels to strengthen communication on the decentralised level. Building upon the efforts to establish networks of local, regional, national, and European publics in the European Conference on Public Communication (EuroPCom) and various tools to decentralise communication, the CoR has an interest to involve LRA in the upcoming information campaign in the context of the 2014 European elections. These efforts fall in line with the overall political guidelines of the EP for the European Elections 2014, which build, amongst others, on decentralization and inter-institutional cooperation. In other words, the EP foresees an important role for the CoR and LRA in communicating the content of the campaign, which focuses

on values and policies, by the CoR's, local and regional authorities' own means of communication. In this respect, it is important to know more about the LRAs' actual willingness, their abilities, resources, and potential need for additional support. The findings of this study will enable the CoR to have better knowledge about the local and regional commitments and to shape its plans to support LRAs in the local and regional communication efforts. However, such plans need to build upon the present local and regional willingness, abilities, and resources mentioned above. In this context, the study aims to contribute to the CoR's understanding of how well-prepared LRAs are currently in contributing to the overarching EU Institutions' attempt to decentralise the European information campaign on the 2014 European elections.

Focusing on the above context, this study gives an overview of the communication potential of LRAs. To this end, it becomes essentially important to answer the following question by means of the present study:

- Are regional and local administrations **willing** to support the EU communication strategy in view of the 2014 elections?
- Are regional and local administrations **able** to support the EU communication strategy in view of the 2014 elections?
- What are the **resources** available at the local and regional levels that are at the disposal of the EU communication?
- What **additional support** is expected by the local and regional administrations from the EU institutions, which could lead to more engagement?

The study follows a specific methodology to give an overview of the communication potential of LRAs by answering the above mentioned questions. Tailor-made recommendations will be drawn based on the analysis. The overview and the recommendations will enable the CoR to further specify its tools to support the communication efforts of LRAs in the context of the information campaign on the 2014 European elections.

1.2 Structure of the study

The present study has been conducted by Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies in close consultation with the Committee of the Regions. A kick-off meeting on 26 April 2013 between the Committee of the Regions (Mr. Tom De Smedt, Mr. Laurent Thieule) and the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies (Mr. Axel Marx, Mr. Kolja Raube) defined the order of the Committee of the Regions (Order 3-4672), a study on 'Going Local – The communication potential of local and regional authorities - 1 report (100pages)', in more concrete terms. After the deliberation, a preliminary draft report was written by

the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies and submitted on 3 May 2013. This included a draft of a survey to be sent to local and regional authorities. The Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies received further comments by the Committee of the Regions on this draft report and submitted its finalized report on the 16 May 2013. In June, the Centre presented a progress report which was discussed with the Committee of the Regions—especially Mr. Tom De Smedt and Mr. Laurent Thieule.

This report consists out of three parts: a literature review, an empirical part (based on a survey that was conducted in the framework of this study), and a third confidential part which contains additional interviews and detailed information on the responses of local and regional authorities and European Union officials in the survey.

The **first part of the report** maps various questions linked to how to communicate Europe and why it matters. To this end, a literature review focuses on the public awareness and participation in EU affairs and the role of European public spheres and communication strategies. The literature review is based on existing research concerning the challenges and opportunities that local and regional authorities face when communicating the European Union in general and more specifically in light of the European Elections. The literature review is complemented with recent opinion polls (Eurobarometer results) and the European Election voter turnouts in 2009. Finally, the first part of the report describes and analyses EU institutions' initiatives for communication on the European Elections of 2014. Initiatives by European institutions are analyzed, with a special attention to those which focus on the collaboration between the European institutions and local and regional authorities. The role of the Committee of the Regions in "communicating Europe" by networking with and by mobilizing cities and regions is seen as a major effort in linking different levels of European governance (Committee of the Region's Communication Plan 2013) and is discussed in depth. More specifically, attention is devoted to the fact that the Communication Strategy of the Committee of the Region emphasizes the development of a "decentralised communication with and within the EU's regions" (Committee of the Regions 2013).

The **second empirical part of the study** ('The support of local and regional authorities for the EU communication strategy 2014') answers the 4 questions set out by the Committee of the Regions in its Order form CoR 3-4672 primarily via a **survey** complemented with **interviews**. In brief, the questions included in the survey exercise the aim of gathering knowledge, the LRAs *willingness and ability* to communicate the EU communication strategy in view of the European Elections in 2014, *what type of resources* they have at their disposal to do so, and whether they express *the need for additional support* from

EU institutions. This chapter of the report will analyze what LRAs have done and are planning to do for the 2014 elections and whether or not LRAs are supportive (and if so, why) of the EU communication strategy in view of the European Elections in 2014.

The **third confidential part** of the Study contains **factsheets** which bring together the findings from the second part on the level of specific regions and cities. For each analyzed LRA, one factsheet will be provided giving the Committee of the Regions a concise overview of the responses to the survey, identifying their willingness, ability, (lack of) resources, and need for additional support. Two types of factsheets are presented. A first set of more elaborate factsheets present the results for a selected number of regions and cities. A second set of concise factsheets presents the results of all regions and cities which responded to the survey. In addition, more information from the interviews with the EP and EC are presented

The report ends with **conclusions** and **tailor-made recommendations.** These conclusions are based on the empirical findings which are directly related to the analysis of part 2. They will be backed by the descriptive, yet confidential part 3 of the study (factsheets and interview summaries). Based on the conclusions and the overall analysis, the study aims to provide policy-makers in Brussels and local and regional authorities with a set of recommendations. This recommendation will be based on the current willingness, ability, resources, and need for additional support of local and regional authorities to communicate on the European Union in general, and more particularly on the European Elections 2014.

1.3 Acknowledgements

2 Communicating on Europe: Literature Review and Context

2.1 Introduction: The need to communicate the European Union in light of the European Elections 2014

This first part of the report focuses on the need to communicate the European Union in light of the European Elections 2014. Its major objective is to lay groundwork for the basis of our understanding in relation to why informing citizens about the general functioning of the EU, its governance structures and processes, and communicating the need for participating in the European Elections matters, and which role LRA can potentially exercise in this regard.

In a first step, academic literature focusing on the links between **communication** and **information policies** on the functioning of the European Union and – in particular – European Elections, European and national identities, European public spheres, and Euroscepticism in light of communicating European elections will be analysed. In other words, this overview of existing research contextualises and highlights the opportunities and challenges of communicating Europe. In addition, this overview will highlight communication strategies in view of European elections and will extrapolate the potential role of local and regional authorities.

In a second step, the general findings of the academic review on both the need and challenge to communicate the EU will be further highlighted by an overview of recent **public opinion polls**—conducted by Eurobarometer. These recent Eurobarometer polls allow us to show the current state of citizen perception of the European Union, with a focus on citizens' perceptions of the Union's function and institutional performance. These polls have been conducted on a cross-national and cross-regional level. This implies that not only differences amongst different Member States and their perceptions on the European Union can be highlighted, but also differences of perceptions between regions of the European Union. The overall findings on both the national and regional level suggest that there is a need to strengthen efforts to communicate and inform citizens on both what the European Union is doing and how it is functioning. Informing citizens about the Union's functioning is likely to impact their perceptions on the European Union and their active participation in the EU politics, for example, by making use of the right to vote in European Union elections. By the same token, communicating European Elections to citizens can impact how citizens understand their right to participate in European elections as an opportunity to actively engage in the functioning and make-up of EU

institutions and in the determination of EU politics. After all, elections to the European Parliament do not only affect the composition of the European Parliament itself. The Lisbon Treaty also foresees that the European Commission President will be elected based on the results of European Parliament elections and the composition of the European Parliament. Again, local and regional authorities, being the level of EU governance that is closest to EU citizens and, at the same time, directly affected by implementing EU law, will have an interest in communicating the need and opportunity of citizens to actively engage in European Elections.

In a third step, **voter turnouts at European Elections in 2009** will be examined on the level of European Member States, cities, and regions. Hence, our previous contextualization of the need to communicate the EU and the more precise active participation in EU Election is contrasted with the relatively low voter turnouts in 2009. This overview obviously bears in mind that European Elections are compulsory in some EU Member States for EU citizens. A larger voter turnout will impact the "social legitimacy" of the European Union (Weiler 1993). In other words, information and communication about the European Union could foster the understanding that active citizen engagement in EU politics, for example (but not exclusively) by participating in EU elections, is an active contribution to the strengthening of what has been termed the "input-legitimacy" of the European Union (Scharpf 1999). In representative democratic systems, the legitimacy of political decisions and decision-makers increases if the representative institutions, for example, the European Parliament, are able to represent citizens' interests on the decision-making level. If institutions in the European Union cannot guarantee such a representation of citizen interests, one possible consequence is what some analysts have termed an "acceptance crisis" (Zürn 2005). In other words, public participation is an important component of strengthening input legitimacy. By the same token, input legitimacy of the European Union is not an objective in itself. The effectiveness of EU decisions and policies, in other words, output-legitimacy, is likely to increase if citizens have increased their participation in EU politics. This is due to the fact that increased participation will increase their acceptance of EU decisions which have been made after their interests were represented in the EU decision-making process by various political actors.

In a fourth step, the current **efforts of EU institutional bodies**—the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Committee of the Regions—**in communicating the EU** and EU Elections will be observed. On the one hand, and against the background of the previous analytical steps, it can be shown why and how the multiple bodies have already strategised their efforts in the communication of the European Union. On the other hand, the analysis of the various bodies will allow us to show how the European Commission, the

European Parliament, and the Committee of the Regions have interlinked their efforts. "Communicating the EU in partnership", as the European Commission has termed the potential collective efforts of various EU actors to inform and communicate the European Union, is potentially able to develop a comprehensive strategy in light of the European Elections 2014. The role of local and regional authorities in communicating the EU can be linked to these efforts by acknowledging the fact that they are one of many levels of EU governance. This is made especially clear by these authorities playing an important role in implementing EU law and by being close to the EU citizens. Strengthening the information and communication of the EU on local and regional levels of EU governance can make a difference in fostering a bottom-up engagement of EU citizens in EU politics, specifically with citizens' participation in European Elections. An increase of voter turnouts, by means of actively communicating the functioning of the EU and the opportunity of EU citizens to participate in it, is likely to increase the input and output legitimacy of the EU.

2.2 Current Findings – Why does communicating the EU matter?

In order to contextualise and highlight the need to spread information concerning the EU and communicating its functioning, this section (mainly based on an academic literature review) will examine the link between communication and information policies on the functioning of the European Union and – in particular – European Elections, European and national identities, European public spheres, and growing Euroscepticism. This overview of existing research contextualises and highlights the **opportunities and challenges of communicating Europe** and communication strategies in view of European Elections. These findings will be used to draw conclusions based on the potential role of local and regional authorities in communicating the European Union and European Elections in 2014.

The following literature review is linked to the wider question of how to communicate Europe and, in particular, European elections. Hence, by screening existing links in academic literature between political communication and information policies on the functioning of the European Union, European public spheres and Euroscepticism come to the fore. As mentioned above, this overview contextualises and highlights the opportunities and challenges of communicating Europe and communication strategies in light of the European elections and will **extrapolate the potential role of LRAs.**

The current literature provides us with an overview of the need to inform citizens about the European Union and to communicate the European Union governance in conjunction with the self-perception and identities of EU citizens and how European public spheres can feed into this (Castliogne 2009; Holmes 2009; Medrano 2009). The overview also discusses the attitudes of EU citizens on the EU, including growing Euroscepticism (LeConte 2010; Usherwood/ Natin 2013); the impact of political communication on the legitimation of EU governance (Michailidou 2008); and, finally, current opportunities and challenges in communicating Europe, including communication strategies (Boucher 2008; de Vreese 2003; Michailidou 2008; Monnaghan 2008; Meyer 2009; Schneeberger/Sarikakis 2008; Thiel 2008).

These issues are not simply individual problems that the EU faces, but they can be seen as interlinked with each other. In fact, while the literature has looked at Europeanised public spheres as a way to create stronger European identity ties for a long time, recent literature has pointed to Euroscepticism as a "pertinent issue" of European integration (Usherwood/ Natin 2013). In other words, the coverage of European topics in national public spheres can also feed into the creation of more Eurosceptic moods amongst EU citizens. This phenomenon needs to be seen as a specific challenge when strategizing communication and communicating about the EU. In that regard, existing research on challenges and opportunities can be utilized to explore not only the need for communicating European Union governance, but also the role for LRA to communicate the European Union, and more specifically, in light of the European Elections.

Amongst others, an understanding of the variations of multiple identities of EU citizens in addition to their attitudes and participation in EU affairs is an important starting point to see if Europeans are willing to engage with the EU. At the same time, the overview concentrates on **possible avenues for LRAs and their support for communication on EU affairs**. Furthermore, the need to make use of new and social media, cooperation between the public and civil society actors, as well as two-way communication is highlighted.

The EU does not have one public sphere (see Kaelble 2011: 308). In fact, identities and senses of belonging are seen as being nationally-bound amongst citizens. Citizens are affected by their territorial boundaries and, relatedly, national public spheres often focus on national issues and not on Europe-wide topics out of a lack of cross-European consciousness (Paasi 2001: 21). However, the EU is said to have multiple national public spheres. There is quite some variation amongst research results in regards to the degree of Europeanization amongst national public spheres. In other words, while we are lacking one pan-European public sphere with Europe-wide media coverage, such as newspapers, radio stations and television channels, some scholars have pointed out the fact

that national public spheres are covering European issues and that such coverage leads to Europeanised public spheres (Trenz 2007; Michailidou/Trenz 2013). Similarly, de Vrees has defined European public spheres as follows: "A European public sphere then emerges or is visible whenever and wherever we can identify public communication that takes place between particular communicators." (2007:7) Following the latter definition, **public communication on Europe takes centre stage**. Studies like Olausson's (2010) show that "European identity is discursively constructed in the news reporting" on issues such as climate change. In these processes of news reporting and communication concerning the EU, "a sense of European 'togetherness' is naturalized, and the political relevance and power of the EU becomes legitimized" (Olausson 2010: 149). However, as mentioned above and elaborated below, growing Euroscepticism across the EU makes it harder to envision that European identity is constructed only because news reporting on the EU is increasing and taken as a given. Rather, studies of politicization on the EU show that the EU becomes increasingly contested in the public debate (Zürn/ De Wilde 2012). This implies that citizens do not necessarily identify with the EU only because it is visible and communicated in the public sphere. Rather, citizens need to be convinced that the European project is of added value.

Moreover, despite seeds of "togetherness" and a "European identity", the current academic literature highlights **the lack of an overarching European public sphere** and the need to communicate Europe via national, if not local and regional media (Thiel 2008). Here, the importance lies with actually informing citizens about the highly complex EU governance processes – agenda-setting, decision-making and implementation across different levels – and to foster, if only indirectly, citizens' engagement in these processes. As Markus Thiel has observed appropriately: "*An issue often brought up in reference to the EU's deficits is the complexity of the Union's institutions and processes. Communication efforts by the EU institutions, delivering a plurality of information in varying degrees of complexity to the national audiences could at least partially remedy such problems. In particular, citizens of the new member states have to be informed about the importance of EU accession and the impact that the policies and institutions of the Unions exert on their lives. The role of civil society, NGOs and other associational actors is to supply additive support in the interactive information relay between the citizens and the political institutions.*" (Thiel 2008: 346)

In view of the current study, it should be mentioned that political communication can go well beyond De Vreese's and others' (see above) above-mentioned definition, implying that we also have to look at political communication beyond the interaction in a public sphere. In this regard, political communication should also be understood as communication activities by public

authorities and directed towards the public. These public authorities are not only situated on a national level, but they are also related to local and regional levels. Their objective is to **communicate by giving information** to citizens, fostering participation of citizens, and entering into dialogues with citizens. More concretely, an extended definition of public communication, which foresees a role for local and regional authorities to communicate on Europe, helps us to focus on the potential of such authorities to create an awareness of the EU amongst citizens.

Thiel emphasizes the contribution of various actors, including NGOs (see also Monnaghan 2008) and EU Institutions in informing citizens of the EU about *"the impact that the policies and institutions of the Unions exert on their lives"*. Underlining the importance of this finding, one high-level EU official expressed in an interview for this study that the **EU needs to communicate its added value** and has to show how it has impacted the improvement of the daily lives of EU citizens.

In this regard, there is obviously also a role to play for LRAs as information senders, e.g. via press releases and communication via their various media channels (e.g. social media). This means LRAs can contribute to the overall efforts of the EU to communicate the EU. After all, EU governance is multi-level and local and regional authorities have important roles to play in regards to **communicating about the implementation of EU policies**. These features of European public spheres in national contexts might be an avenue to communicate Europe even more than before via regional and local media. Moreover, the literature also identifies the potential of involving civil society as facilitators in order to communicate Europe. Regional and local authorities might be able to link with these actors and "team-up," fostering local and regional networks of communicating Europe.

Next to the lack of an overarching European public sphere, the current academic literature also identifies a growing Euroscepticism (De Wilde/ Trenz 2012; Usherwood/Natin 2013) and a questioning of the need for European integration at large. "Euroscepticism as an increasingly embedded and persistent phenomenon within the integration process. Voices of dissent and opposition are to be found throughout national and European political systems and debates." (Usherwood/Natin 2013: 12) According to de Wilde and Trenz, Euroscepticism can be seen "as a discursive practice of political opposition to the EU polity. This definition stresses that Euroscepticism does not oppose particular policies, i.e. the contents of actions taken by the EU, but the polity, i.e. the competencies and constitutional settlement of the EU." (de Wilde/Trenz 2012: 540) In other words, features of Euroscepticism will oppose the EU, its system of governance,

decision-making, and political structures, as they have emerged in the course of European integration.

However, as Michael Bruter explains, there is **no reason to look at "Euroscepticism" and "European integration" as a matter of black and white**: *"While not questioning the fact that European integration is indeed facing a crisis of legitimacy in the sense of a mismatch between public preferences in terms of European integration and what is actually proposed to them by their elites, the assumption that this must mean a rise in anti-EU sentiment and a lack of European identity of citizens is less than obvious. In fact, there are as many signs pointing out to a rise in general support for the European project, civic engagement, and European identity alike as there are signs of dissatisfaction with specific aspects of integration."* (Bruter 2008: 275)

Against this backdrop, communicating Europe might run the risk of being politicized rather than informing citizens about the basics of European integration and the simple need to vote in the first place. In other words, communication strategies like the European Commission's, the European Parliament's, and Committee of the Regions' (see below) might actually face a situation where information on the EU is not perceived in a neutral light and this might backfire in terms of **the perception of communication on Europe** and the need to enhance larger voter awareness. In view of this potential tension in an information campaign for the 2014 European Elections, the EU has to focus on the policy outcomes and success of the EU. As one high-level EU official explains in an interview in the context of this study, there is a need to focus on the role of the EP and the need for citizens to go to vote, and, to this end, it is important that the policy outcomes and the success of the Union is communicated. As another official explained with regards to the upcoming elections in 2014, it is **important to make citizens aware of the EP**, including the work related to the legislature, the importance of the EP after Lisbon, and the impact which is related to EU legislation and the daily life of the EU citizens.

Moreover, as Michailidou has pointed out (2008), if the European Union wants to legitimize its decision-making processes – in other words if it wants to overcome its acceptance crisis (Zürn 2005) – then it is in need of communicating the EU to the citizens: "[…] for the EU institutions a first step towards democratic legitimation is to establish public dialogue between the EU decision-makers and the public, with the latter's feedback incorporated in the decision-making process. This is the role that public communication strategies by definition fulfil." (Michailidou 2008: 348) Expanding on Michailidou's original thought, there is an obvious **need for EU institutions to work on such public communication together with other public institutions** and non-governmental organizations that reach out to other public arenas on the various

levels of European governance. On the one hand, it can be foreseen that national governmental actors, on both national and subnational levels, become important interlocutors to communicate the EU. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations, such as interest groups of various kinds, are also important "bridges" to reach out to citizens. While public authorities are likely to reach out to a wider public, interest groups can stimulate communication for more specialized publics. Hence, communicating the EU also reflects the importance of additional efforts to look not only into Europe-wide campaigns and to foster exchanges with national institutions and partnerships, but to **facilitate exchanges and partnerships with LRAs** and non-governmental actors in view of audiences who are not only Eurosceptic, but are even becoming disinterested. In this respect, Brüggemann observes: "In response to the challenge of communicating Europe to largely disinterested audiences, the European Commission has reformed its communications in order to foster a European public sphere through enhancing the transparency of European governance and starting a dialogue with the citizens." (2010: 5) Triggering citizens' interest in EU governance – and **winning back trust in the EU** – can be a tool to foster their participation in EU governance. Such participation adds to the input-legitimacy of EU Institutions and EU decision-making by and large.

Given the above-mentioned, it should be stressed, however, that disinterest or "indifference" (Rose 2013: 107ff.; Schneider 2011) and Euroscepticim are not the same, but rather two sides of the same coin. Both Eurosceptic and indifferent voters may share a lack of trust in EU institutions, but their reasoning is different. While both do not feed into an active support of the EU project, Euroscepticism can build upon, to various degrees, the actual dislike of the European project (Usherwood/Natin 2012). Hence, citizens do articulate their scepticism vis-à-vis the EU project, focusing on various subjects and asking for a set of reforms in this regard. In other words, the times of the EU's permissive consensus are over (Hix/Hoyland 2012) and the parts of the public are actively articulating alternatives to the existing EU project. After all, Eurosceptics are concerned about the EU project. On the contrary, political indifference is not about the active dislike of the EU project. It is a general phenomenon that implies a growing lack of trust in political institutions in general – be it on the national or European level. Rather than opting for alternative, opposing or contesting views, indifferent citizens rather do not engage actively in the political process – neither on the national, nor the European level. Their political participation, e.g. in democratic elections, is decreasing.

Despite critiques that the EU could have made more use of new media and communication tools (Michailidou 2008), it has been pointed out that the EU tries to involve citizens through various ways. The EU's communication approach has in fact become more tailormade and dialogic (Valentini 2008).

Overall, academics have observed an approach to communicating the EU which is at least one that is two-track: on the one track, **informing citizens about on-going affairs**, for example via the "europa.eu" website, the various linked websites of institutional bodies, or the media is seen as a tool to create Europeanised national public spheres (Michailidou 2008). Such Europeanisation will enable publics to hold EU governance accountable and contribute to the legitimatisation of EU politics (Trenz 2007). Or, as Brüggemann has observed: "Providing access to information and documents promotes the thriving of a public sphere as it provides an important resource for public discussions: information that is needed to make useful political arguments and come to enlightened conclusions." (Brüggemann 2010: 19) Overall, the effort to have more transparency and information on EU governance is acknowledged (Brüggemann 2010). However, a second track is the active **fostering of citizen dialogues** with the European institutions and a direct feeding of citizens' opinions into the decision-making processes via citizen forums and e-platforms (Michilaidou 2008). As Brüggemann shows: "The concept of a political dialogue with the citizens goes far beyond the demand for transparency. In fact, transparency is only one of the preconditions for a dialogue to work out. The central feature of dialogue is the exchange of ideas, opinions and arguments. A dialogue becomes political not only by dealing with political topics but also because there is some kind of connection to political decision-making." (Brüggemann 2010: 14) In this regard, the so-called citizen dialogue, initiated by the European Commission (see also below), is a one-way communication channel to reach out to citizens, engage with them in dialogues, answer their questions, and explain the functions of the EU. At the same time, it is a forum that serves as input for EU decision makers while they are exposed to daily problems of EU citizens.

However, the Commission, but also other EU Institutions, face structural problems as it can hardly communicate directly with millions of citizens (Brüggemann 2010). This brings, according to Brüggemann, the role of media to the fore: "The only way to enhance the effectiveness of the PR of the EU seems to be to focus on media relations. Only the media can take micro-dialogues with a few dozens of citizens to the wider public." (Brüggemann 2010: 18)

At the same time, as Meyer has observed, institutions such as the Commission are already on their way to becoming more communicative and mediatized by using, for example, e-tools: "Video-clips have also been posted on EU Tube – a channel on the popular video-sharing website YouTube. At the same time, the Commission is much more ambivalent and cautious about modern public relations techniques than national administrations are. There is substantial uncertainty among communication professionals within the Commission about which methods and goals are 'permissible', given that the institution itself does

not say clearly whether it aims to change opinions or attitudes or whether it merely 'listens' and 'informs'." (Meyer 2009: 1058) While interviews with EU officials in the context of this study show that the EU Institutions, like the Commission, have become more acquainted with what is now called a "mixed approach", focusing on a wider set of media tools, it indeed remains important to ask whether the Commission and other EU Institutions could make even more use of exposing themselves through media tools and by interacting with European citizens. In addition, one might assume that also **LRA may contribute to the mediatization of EU governance** by providing information, be it via press releases, website information and newsletters, by organizing EU related events in order to provide information to local and regional media, and to citizens on European projects or European decision-making that affect the regional and local levels of governance.

To conclude, communication strategies that want to foster communicating the EU in general and European Elections in particular, need to take two major challenges seriously: transparency of information and active dialogues with citizens. Such communication can take place by informing citizens via different media (newspapers, radio, television), new media (websites and social media), and citizen dialogues (via real-time discussions, digital blogs, etc.) on the various levels of EU governance (European level, national level, regional and local level). If information and dialogues are supposed to foster the creation of European public spheres, **the empowerment and participation of citizens** and the legitimization of EU governance, then EU institutions and bodies need to constantly invest in such efforts, but also work together with other levels of EU governance—including the local and regional levels. Such constant efforts may be all the more necessary when we look at the context of the European Elections 2014. The low voter turn outs in 2009 and the current European financial crisis and its impact on EU perceptions amongst citizens may contribute to another round of low citizen engagement and participation in European governance, more specifically, the 2014 Elections. Such a trend may be fostered by relatively critical perceptions of citizens on the EU.

2.3 Communicating Europe in times of crisis

Recent opinion polls and the European Election voter turnouts in 2009 are going to shed some light on the need to communicate the European Union against the backdrop of low voter turn outs in 2009 and a decrease of EU perceptions in latest opinion polls.

2.4 Perceptions of EU citizens in times of crisis

The general findings of the academic review on both the need and challenge to communicate the EU are underlined by an overview of recent public opinion polls, conducted by Eurobarometer. These recent Eurobarometer polls allow us to show the **current state of citizen perception** of the European Union, especially citizens' perceptions of the Union's functioning and institutional performance. Not only can differences amongst different Member States and their perceptions on the European Union be seen, but also differences of perceptions between regions of the European Union. The overall findings on both the national and regional levels suggest that there is a need to strengthen efforts to communicate and inform citizens on what the European Union is doing and how it is functioning. Hence, informing citizens about the Union's functioning is likely to impact citizens' perceptions on the European Union and may impact on their active participation in the EU politics, for example, by making use of the right to vote in European Union elections. In times of growing Euroscepticism, communicating the EU may also feed further opposition reflexes and anti-EU resentments. At the same time, communicating the role and function of European Elections in the context of the functioning of the EU may **impact on how citizens make use of their right to participate** in European elections. After all, elections to the European Parliament do not only imply the composition of the European Parliament itself. Local and regional authorities, being the level of EU governance that is closest to EU citizens, and, at the same time, directly affected by implementing EU law, will have an interest in communicating the need and opportunity of citizens to actively engage in European Elections.

Recent opinion polls data is based on a first selection of Eurobarometers which have focused on the "regional" level and allow us to carve out variations of opinions on the EU on a local and regional level. Special attention is given to "Flash Eurobarometer 356 – Public Opinion in EU Regions (2012)", the "Standard Eurobarometer 79" (2012), the European Parliament's own Eurobarometer survey ("Two years before the election"), and the "Standard Eurobarometer 78 (2012)",),including the "European Citizenship" report (2012). The Flash-Eurobarometer 356 focuses on the perception of EU citizens in EU regions regarding their "current situation". Findings reveal various information regarding regions in the EU across the EU, but also within the EU Member States. Moreover, recent Eurobarometer data (EB 78, EB 79, 2012) focuses on the main concerns of EU citizens on a personal and national level and their perceptions of identity and reveals important findings regarding the EU citizens' trust in EU institutions—including the European Parliaments. Again, we can observe variation across different Member States.

Regarding the **question if respondents in the EU feel overall like a citizen** of the EU, most of them answer "Yes to some extent" by 40%, while 22% answered "Yes definitely" and 24% answered with "No, definitely not". 13% answered with "Don't know" (see Figure 1). These findings correspond to earlier Eurobarometer results and show that overall EU citizens tend to agree that they are citizens "to some extent".

Figure 1: Perceptions of EU Citizenship

QD2.1 For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your own opinion.
You feel you are a citizen of the EU

	Yes, definitely	Yes, to some extent	No, not really	No, definitely not	Don't know
EB 79 Sp.2013	22%	40%	24%	13%	1%
EB 78 Aut.2012	22%	41%	23%	13%	1%
EB 77 Sp.2012	19%	42%	26%	12%	1%
EB 75 Sp.2011	23%	39%	24%	12%	2%
EB 73 Sp.2010	21%	41%	25%	12%	1%
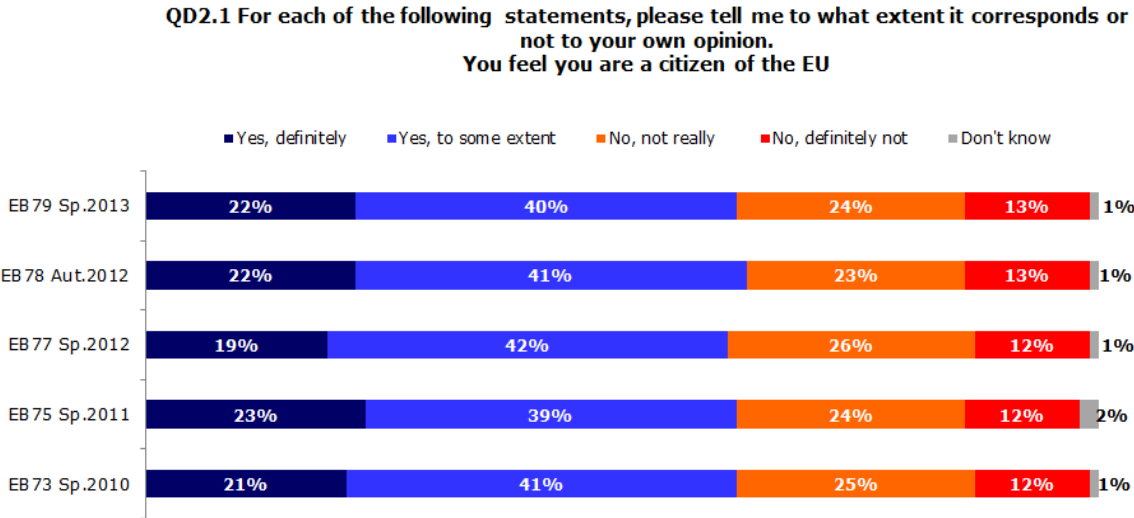
Source: Eurobarometer 79, p. 5

At the same time, answers across member states reveal that there is a **great amount of variation across populations** of respondents from one member state to another. While, for example, 88% of the respondents in Luxembourg mention that they feel as an EU citizen, 56% of Greeks citizens decline to feel like EU citizens (Eurobarometer 79, 5). By comparison, Bulgarians and UK citizens decline by 51% that they feel like a European citizens; Italians, Romanians, and Czechs decline this by 47%, 43% and 45%, respectively (Eurobarometer 79, 5). At the same time, respondents across the EU show by 53% that they do not know "really" or "definitely" what their rights as EU citizens are. 46% answer that they do know about their rights and only 1% answers with "Don't know" (Eurobarometer 79, 5). While these results express a partial lack of information about citizens' rights as EU citizens, 59% of the citizens express that they would like to know more about their rights as EU citizens (Eurobarometer 79, 6). EU citizens on average would like to know most about EU citizenship rights that are related, amongst others, to "working in another EU country" (37%), "receiving medical assistance in another country", (32%) and "living in another EU country" (31%). Only 9% would like to know about "voting in elections in another EU country" (Eubarometer 78, 29). When it comes to other participatory political rights as EU citizens, such as participating in the EU's Citizens

Initiative, 32% answer in September 2012 that it is "not very likely" and 35% answer that it is "not at all likely" that they would "use the European Citizens' Initiative". Only 17% say it is "fairly likely" and 4% say it is "very likely" (Eurobarometer 78). These results indicate that only a smaller amount of EU citizens would actually be willing to use the EU citizen initiative. Whether they actually do take part in it is yet another matter and is potentially dependent upon the issues at stake and the publicity of the campaign in the relevant Member State.

The current **financial crisis impacts** the situations of EU citizens. Regarding recent opinion polls, Eurobarometer findings show that indeed the perception of the economic situation by citizens and the personal problems that citizens face differs according to countries of origin.

Diversities of perceptions of the current situation in the EU are currently quite large across Member States. Take , for example, German and Greek perceptions: Germans and Swedish citizens still see the economic situation as "in total good" by 77% and 80%, respectively while 98% of the Greeks and Cypriots and 99% of the Spanish respondents state that the situation is "in total bad" (Eurobarometer 79, 18). While Germans see that government debt is the most important thing that they face currently by 29%, Greek people see by 65% that the unemployment is the most important issue. To take another example: While 51% of the Estonians indicate that high prices/inflation is the most important thing, 79% of the Spanish people point to unemployment as the most important (Eurobarometer 79, 20).

While a look at the national level and diversities across nations is a first starting point to detect the perception of EU citizens, further analysis can be devoted to the understanding of **citizens' perceptions in various regions** in the various member states. In fact, as the findings of the Flash Eurobarometer 356 on the "Public Opinion in the European Union Regions" makes clear, the degree of how the current situation is perceived not only depends upon your national belonging, but also on which region you belong to. For example, the question "How would you judge the current situation in each of the following?" is very differently answered across regions in nearly all Member States. For example, while most regions in Germany tend to see their economic situation as "rather good", some – like Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Bremen, and Berlin – see it overly as "rather bad" (Flash Eurobarometer 356).

Eurobarometer findings of 2012 show that in times of crisis, European **citizens do not see themselves overly connected to other citizens** in Europe (see Eurobarometer 79, 27). 52% of the overall respondents disagree with the statement that, as a consequence of the crisis, they "feel closer to the citizens in

other EU countries". 42% of the citizens they agree that they feel "closer" to the citizens (see Eurobarometer 79, 27). 6% say they do not know. Hence, diversity in Europe is not only represented by the question of how much citizens feel attached to the EU and the "European" concept in times of crisis, but also by how different they feel from others and whether they are willing to cooperate with others in the future. It is, in other words, not clear that there is an increased feeling of mutual belonging in the crisis.

At the same time, EU citizens overwhelmingly see by 84% that, as a consequence of the crisis, "EU countries will have to work more closely together" (see Eurobarometer 79, 27). Hence, although the sense of belonging amongst EU citizens has not increased, the current crisis situation is powerful enough to trigger **the idea that the only way forward is more cooperation**. However, and this may be worrisome in the context of the upcoming European Elections in 2014, the trust in the existing EU polity, more specifically, the EU institutions, has steadily declined over the last years. In 2007, the EU saw a peak at 57% of respondents stating that on average, they trusted the EU. In 2012, five years later, only 33% tend to trust it. Likewise the "positive image" of the European Union has lost support. In 2006, the EU was said to have an overall positive image (50%), while it came down to an all-time low of 30% in 2012. In other words, there is evidence that, if not scepticism in integration, it is a less positive and increasingly **negative image that the EU has to face** amongst its EU citizens. However, the trust in European Union institutions is still higher than the trust that EU citizens invest in either national parliaments or national governments (see also Rose 2013: 108-109). National governments are trusted only by 25% of the respondents and national parliaments by 26% (Eurobarometer 79, 9). Moreover, we should also bear in mind that regional differences exist with regards to how respondents tend to trust the EU (see Flash Eurobarometer 356). In other words, overall national trust can differ from particular regional attitudes and perceptions of the EU.

Figure 2: The image of the European Union

QA13 In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?
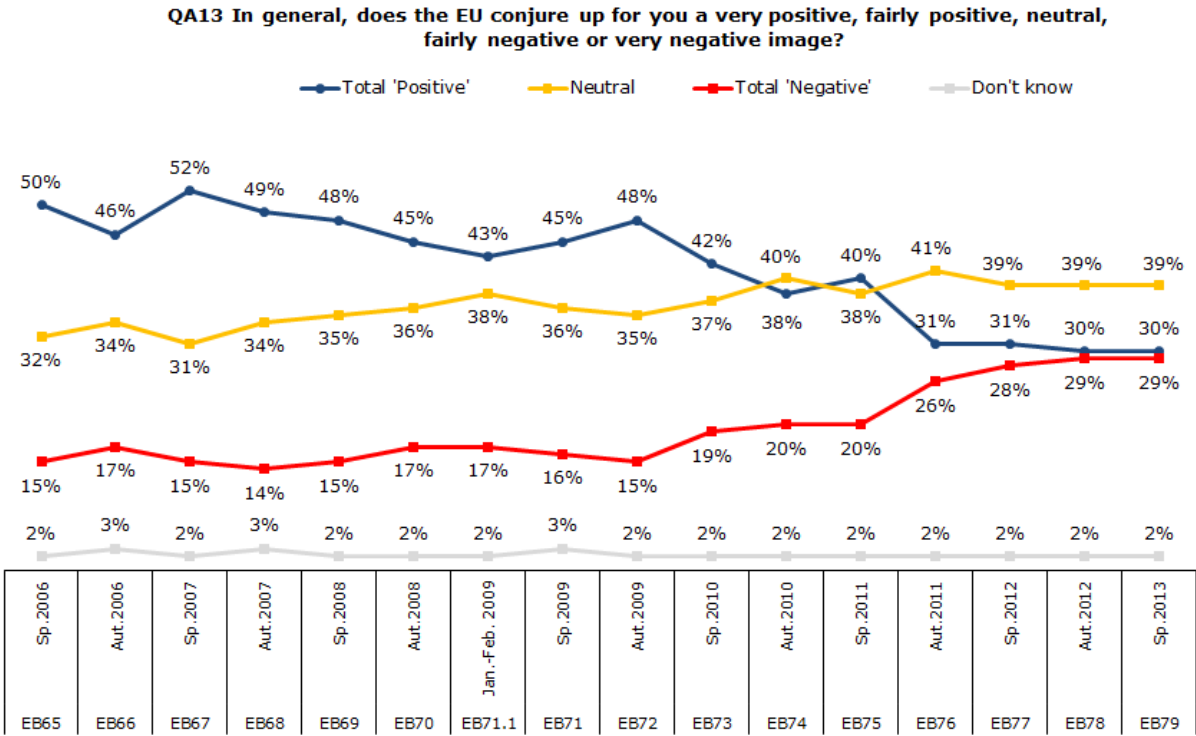
Source: Eurobarometer 79, p. 10

The decline in trust in political institutions is resembled in a more general decline of the image that EU citizens have of the EU. In general, respondents see the EU less positive than before. For only 30% of the respondents does the EU conjure a positive image. 29% say that they have a negative image of the EU, while 39% say that they have a neutral image of the EU (Eubarometer 79, 10). In other words, over the last six years the positive image of the EU has dropped from 50% down to 30%. Taken together with the steady decline of a trust in national and European institutions, it remains to be seen whether citizens will be more favorable of participating in European Elections than five years ago in the European Elections 2009 (for the voter turnout, see below). The results underline the so-called **acceptance crisis of EU and national institutions** (see Zürn 2005).On the one hand, we can see a distrust of European and national institutions with slightly more negative findings for the national level. This might imply that European citizens do project their trust of national institutions to the European level. It could also imply that citizens equally distrust political institutions on the national and European level without distinguishing between them.

At the same time, the record-low in terms of trust and in terms of a negative image of the EU may signal the need for additional communication of the need for citizens to actively participate in the EU. Otherwise, the EU may face further

disinterest, indifference and political disenchantment, or even non-voter turn outs as a form of protest and opposition against the EU.

Figure 3: Perceptions of "Voice" of EU citizens
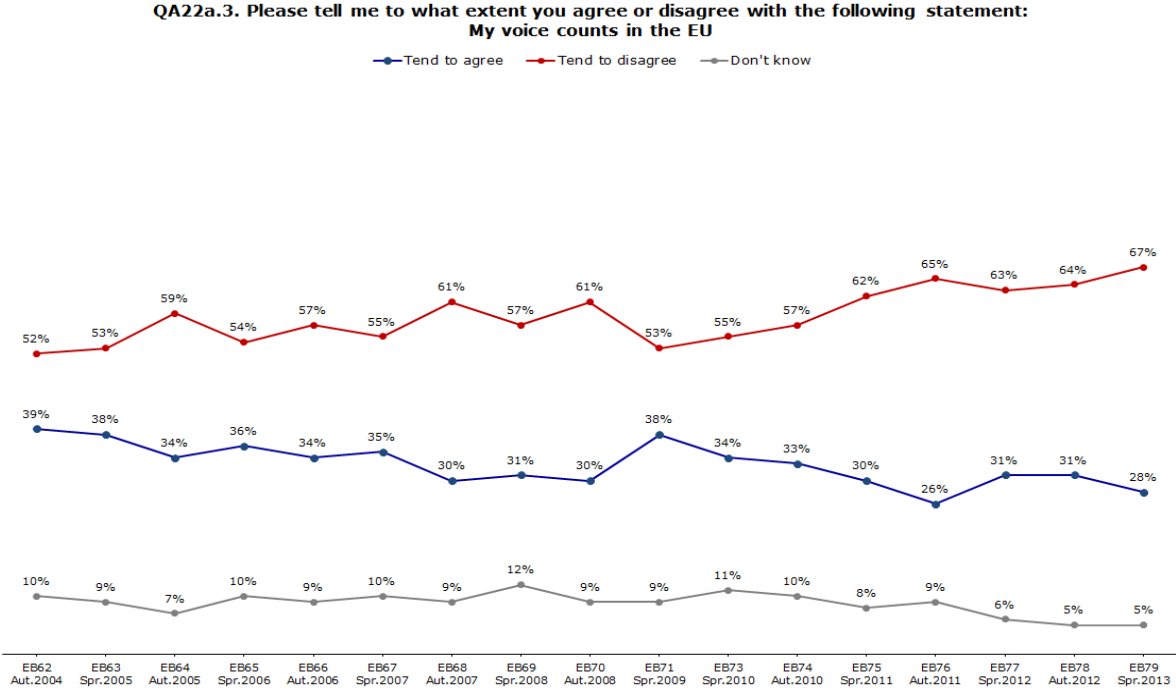
Source: Eurobarometer 79, Spring Wave, p. 11

The results of the Eurobarometer 79 indicate that EU citizens increasingly tend to seem more skeptical whether their voice counts in the EU or not. In 2013, 67% of the EU citizens tend to disagree with the statement. 28% do think their voice counts while 5% do not know (Eurobarometer 79, 11). In a European Parliament Eurobaormeter of 2013 (Eurobarometer 79.5), the finding is that 39% of European citizens indicated that their voice does count in the EU. This is however a slight fall compared to June 2012.

In comparison, in 2009, as the Eurobarometer findings showed, 53% of the EU citizens believed that their voices did not matter, while 38% believed they did. These findings point to a growing gap between **those who think their voices do matter and those who believe they do not**. Over the last four years, the number of citizens who do not believe that their voices matter increased by 14%. Looking at these results on a country level, we see that in certain Member States—like Cyprus and Greece—89% believe that their voices do not count. Moreover, in 11 other countries, the belief that the voice of an individual EU citizen does not count is 67% or more. Only in Malta, Belgium, and Denmark, does the belief that the voice does not count is below 50%. The belief that the voice does matter is above 50% (56%) in Denmark only. In Croatia, the EU's

latest Member State, the results are pointing to the belief that the voice counts by 48% while 45% said that it did not count. Overall, these findings suggest that the EU Institutions, its Member States, and possibly LRAs need to persuade most of the EU citizens that their voices matter. If these findings of the Eurobarometer are representing a motivation to go to vote, then these findings do indeed represent **the need to explain to EU citizens why their vote matters** and why the European elections are essentially about making the individual voice heard through participation. The institutional changes in the Lisbon Treaty, the further empowerment of the European Parliament in terms of co-legislation through the ordinary legislative procedure, and its vote for the Commission President could be but two starting points to argue why the individual voices and votes of EU citizens matter in the EU.

Figure 4: Perceptions of "Voice" of EU citizens (country level)
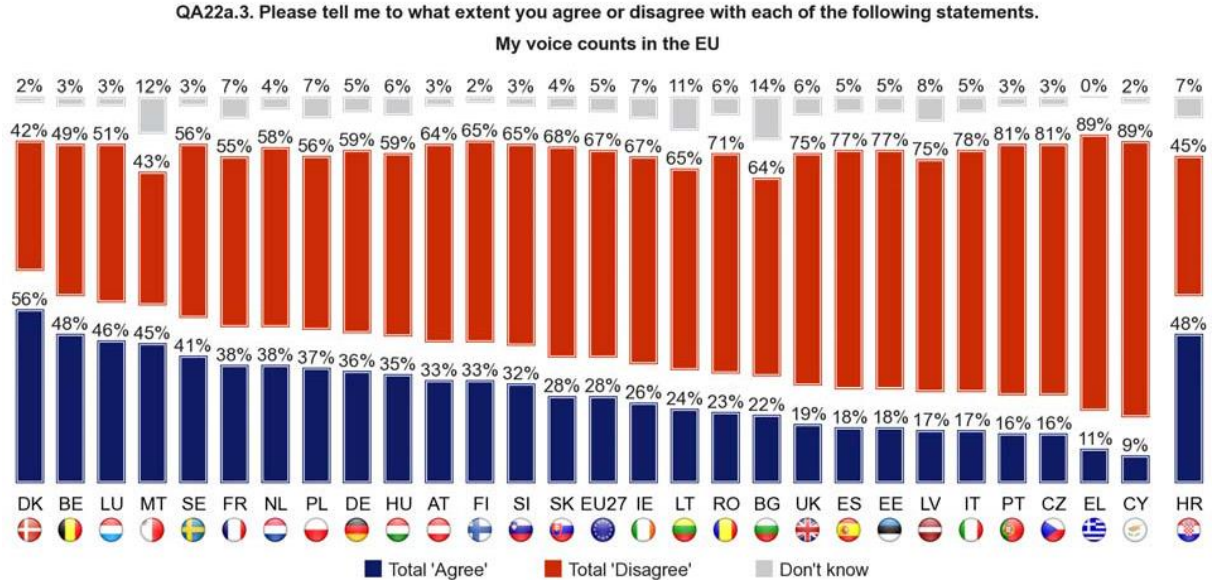
Source: Eurobarometer 79, Spring Wave, p. 12

The findings cannot be directly linked to a period over the last four years during which the European public debt crisis has emerged. Findings like the ones in Figures 3 and 4 seem to underline that the crisis worked as a catalyst that disfranchised the European electorate. In some countries, where the crisis has impacted very negatively upon the daily life of EU citizens, a disbelief in the value of the individual voices of citizens is recognizable. But the question of whether citizens do not also see democratic processes and voting as means to make their voices heard, especially in times of crisis, remains to be answered. As such, citizens might see the European Elections as a chance to make their voices heard. In this respect, the European Elections might well be perceived as being different than previous elections as they can offer European citizens the chance to articulate their voices.

2.4.1 *Towards low-voter turnouts in 2014? Why bother?*

Low voter turnouts at European Elections in 2009, examined on the level of European Member States, cities, and regions, underline the need to convince citizens to see their voting in European Elections as an opportunity to participate in EU governance. Our previous analysis of the sceptical citizens' perception of the EU in current polls further underlines **a need to promote participation in EU Elections**. As mentioned above, only an increased voter turnout can impact on the "social legitimacy" of the European Union (Weiler 1992) and contribute to the strengthening of what has been termed the "input-legitimacy" of the European Union (Scharpf 1999) and even overcome the "acceptance crisis" of the EU (Zürn 2005). In the case of input legitimacy, legitimacy can be "judged in terms of the EU's responsiveness to citizen concerns as a result of participation by the people" (Schmidt 2013: 2). In other words, **communicating, informing, and engaging in dialogues** with citizens on EU matters can foster public participation and strengthen the legitimation of the EU. By the same token, as mentioned above, input legitimacy of the European Union is not an objective in itself. The effectiveness of EU decisions and policies is likely to increase if citizens have increased their participation in EU politics, as they will accept EU decisions which have been made after their interests were represented in the EU decision-making process by the various political actors. In other words, a larger representation of citizens at the polls can increase the acceptance of the representation of EU decisions.

Regarding voter turnouts, research shows variations not only from Member State to Member State, but also amongst cities and regions in Member States. The voter turnout of the European Elections 2009 was low on average. On average, 43% of EU citizens participated in the European Elections (see Table 1). Table 1 shows **variations amongst Member States in terms of voter turnout**. The data that can be seen in Table 1 is based on the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) and own research in the context of this study. Despite the overall low voter-turnout, Table 1 shows large variations of voter-turnout amongst Member States.

However, voter turnout should also be seen in the context of larger European developments and structural challenges, as Michael Bruter reminds us: "*For instance, the turnout in European Parliament elections between 1999 and 2004 among EU member states that voted on both occasions went up, with the overall decline in turnout being fully explained by the enlargement of the EU to a number of countries where turnout was extremely low.*" And he continues that research by Franklin (2001) "*has shown that the decline in overall turnout in European Parliament elections since the 1970s is caused almost solely by*

structural factors, suggesting that it is not in any way sharper or more worrying than for national level elections in the same countries." (Bruter 2008: 276)

Table 1: Voter Turnout European Elections 2009: Member States

		Voter Turnout (percent)
Country	Austria	45.97
	Belgium	90.39
	Bulgaria	38.99
	Cyprus	59.40
	Czech Republic	28.20
	Denmark	59.54
	Estonia	43.90
	Finland	40.30
	France	40.63
	Germany	43.30
	Greece	52.61
	Hungary	36.31
	Ireland	58.64
	Italy	65.05
	Latvia	53.70
	Lithuania	20.98
	Luxembourg	90.75
	Malta	78.79
	Netherlands	36.75
	Poland	24.53
	Portugal	36.78
	Romania	27.67
	Slovakia	19.64
	Slovenia	28.33
	Spain	44.90
	Sweden	45.53
	United Kingdom	34.70
	Total EU	43.00

Source: Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD)

Table 2 shows **variations amongst and within Member States in terms of voter turn-outs**. Again, the data that can be seen in Table 2 is based on the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) and own research in the context of this study. The findings show the mean voter turnout, but also the minimum and maximum voter turnout in each of the Member States. While in some Member States the average voter turnout was high and, at the same time they were not too different from the lowest and highest voter -turnouts due to the obligation to go to vote (see, for example, Belgium). However, we see especially in the new Member States especially that the average voter turnout is smaller than in other Member States. For example, in Slovakia the mean voter turnout was 19,68% and in Lithuania 20,15%. Also, the Czech Republic and Slovenia

are situated towards the lower end of voter turnouts (27,7% and 28,45%). There are also large variations of voter turnout within Member States. The Romanian example shows a maximum of 49,41% in one of the observed units, while another observed unit only showed a voter turnout of 16,31%. The same holds true for other Member States, including the so-called "old" Member States, where differences between the highest voter turnout and lowest voter turnout are quite evident (see, for example, Finland, France, Germany and Italy). Next to these variations, the overall low voter turnout remains detrimental to the European Union's efforts to legitimize its polity and to overcome its acceptance crisis.

Next to the above-mentioned variations of Member State voter turnout, **European cities and regions also show variations** beyond national differences. As the unit of observation is not only the national level but also on the local and regional levels, further efforts were spent to acquire the necessary data. Of particular importance were the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) and the European Election Database. In the case that these databases did not provide us with sufficient information, we looked for additional data. In some cases, data was only available on the aggregate regional and city level. In other cases, it was possible to look into city and regional variations in terms of turnouts during the European Elections 2009. Overall, for most we can show variations in voter turnout on the regional and/or city level in most of the EU Member States (see Table 2).

Table 2 presents not only mean, minimum, and maximum voter turnout, but also shows differences between cities and regions in one Member State in most of the observed cases. The findings are interesting as they do show that sometimes regions have better voter turnout than cities (see for example the case of Austria and Bulgaria). At the same time, the variations of voter turnout amongst cities and regions can be quite large, even within one country. In other words, Table 2 even stresses that the voter turnout is not only varying across Member States, but that **variations within Member States are contributing to the overall diversity of voter turnout results**.

Overall, the findings in Table 1 and Table 2 are related to national turnout. The turnout at European Elections has been consistently lower than at national elections (see Hix/Hoyland 2012). In fact, the European Parliament elections have been coined as "second order" elections, implying that compared to national elections, the outcomes had (so far) no direct implications for government formations. Hence, voters do not pay as much attention to participating in the elections. There is a certain "indifference towards what the European Parliament does" (Rose 2013: 110). However, according to an additional explanation, European Election turnouts are even lower than in

national elections because the alienation of voters from the EU political parties is larger than in the national context (Grand/Tiemann 2012).

At the same time, variations in voter turnout and low/high voter turnout in the European Elections 2004 (see Table 1) can be explained by linking it to the **national political context** (Rose 2013: 108). For example, as it was shown above, compulsory voting matters in the national context; moreover, the overall satisfaction of voters with the quality of national governance matters, too (Rose 2013:108). The latter can also clearly vary within Member States and between cities and regions.

Table 2 : Voter Turnout European Elections: Cities and Regions

			EP Voter Turnout				
			Count	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
EP 2009 Election	Austria	City	3	41.86	5.83	35.59	47.11
		Region	8	42.25	7.70	33.48	52.96
		Total	11	42.15	6.95	33.48	52.96
	Belgium	City	5	90.67	1.80	88.13	92.49
		Region	3	89.19	2.79	86.44	92.01
		Total	8	90.12	2.16	86.44	92.49
	Bulgaria	City	2	37.17	1.91	35.82	38.52
		Region	26	39.64	5.45	32.90	53.43
		Total	28	39.47	5.30	32.90	53.43
	Czech Rep.	City	1	35.73	.	35.73	35.73
		Region	13	27.09	2.45	21.75	29.35
		Total	14	27.71	3.30	21.75	35.73
	Denmark	City	4	58.81	3.50	54.04	61.80
		Region	5	58.84	2.85	54.04	61.10
		Total	9	58.83	2.94	54.04	61.80
	Estonia	Region	14	39.14	4.55	36.56	52.52
		Total	14	39.14	4.55	36.56	52.52
	Germany	City	8	47.67	7.40	38.96	58.70
		Region	15	43.63	8.29	29.88	58.60
		Total	23	45.03	8.06	29.88	58.70
	Greece	Region	13	52.08	4.63	43.37	59.05
		Total	13	52.08	4.63	43.37	59.05
	Hungary	Region	20	34.92	3.14	30.94	44.91
		Total	20	34.92	3.14	30.94	44.91
	Ireland	Region	1	50.79	.	50.79	50.79
		Total	1	50.79		50.79	50.79
	Italy	City	32	63.60	11.95	41.89	78.83
		Total	32	63.60	11.95	41.89	78.83
	Latvia	Region	6	40.90	2.53	38.30	44.06
		Total	6	40.90	2.53	38.30	44.06
	Lithuania	Region	10	20.16	1.93	18.21	24.67
		Total	10	20.16	1.93	18.21	24.67
	Luxembourg	City	1	90.76	.	90.76	90.76
		Region	1	90.76	.	90.76	90.76
		Total	2	90.76	0.00	90.76	90.76

			EP Voter Turnout				
			Count	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
	Netherlands	Region	11	36.62	2.55	33.24	42.34
		Total	11	36.62	2.55	33.24	42.34
	Poland	City	10	35.32	4.44	28.64	43.44
		Region	16	23.31	3.15	18.96	29.65
		Total	26	27.93	6.96	18.96	43.44
	Portugal	City	7	37.63	2.94	32.61	40.79
		Region	2	31.06	12.42	22.27	39.84
		Total	9	36.17	5.85	22.27	40.79
	Romania	Region	42	29.52	6.95	16.32	49.41
		Total	42	29.52	6.95	16.32	49.41
	Slovakia	Region	8	19.68	1.79	17.33	23.08
		Total	8	19.68	1.79	17.33	23.08
	Slovenia	City	2	28.48	5.43	24.64	32.32
		Total	2	28.48	5.43	24.64	32.32
	Spain	City	12	44.76	5.70	37.50	53.83
		Region	19	44.43	6.88	31.65	54.84
		Total	31	44.56	6.35	31.65	54.84
	Sweden	City	4	48.06	3.34	43.14	50.54
		Region	20	43.70	3.19	37.76	51.10
		Total	24	44.43	3.55	37.76	51.10
EP 2004 Election	Finland	Region	19	36.63	4.26	29.21	46.49
		Total	19	36.63	4.26	29.21	46.49
	France	City	1	51.18	.	51.18	51.18
		Region	22	42.75	4.30	27.66	49.13
		Total	23	43.12	4.56	27.66	51.18
	United Kingdom	City	1	37.86	.	37.86	37.86
		Region	11	39.33	4.12	30.81	44.70
		Total	12	39.21	3.95	30.81	44.70

2.5 The Communication Potential in Europe – Fostering Communication Partnerships in view of the European Elections 2014

The current efforts of EU institutional bodies in communicating the EU and EU Elections – the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Committee of the Regions – are essential to foster information, communication, and dialogue between the EU and its citizens. An overview of the efforts of the various EU bodies can show why and how they have already strategised their efforts in communicating about the European Union. The exploration of the various bodies also allows us to show especially how the European Commission,

the European Parliament, and the Committee of the Regions have started to interlink their individual efforts.

European Parliament

The European Parliament has already started preparing its information campaign for the European Elections in 2014. The European Parliament, however, has not yet officially published its information campaign. In a so-called creative concept of the "Institutional communication campaign EE2014", which is feeding into the EP's information campaign, the EP emphasizes in its perspective on the European Election campaign that "the EE 2014 is a matter for all institutions and bodies", that "limited resources require efficient working methods and support by multipliers – we are all ambassadors of the EU", that "the EP considers the Committee of Regions and its elected Members an essential communication partner in the EE2014 institutional campaign", and that the election "outcome will shape the policies that MS and regional and local authorities will have to implement." With this perspective, the European Parliament sees the **Committee of the Regions as an essential communication facilitator** in the context of the 2014 campaign. The European Parliament will use various communication materials in view of the upcoming election, such as visuals, posters, brochures, webpages, video clips, etc. European Parliament information offices will organise communication activities locally. In other words, the campaign might also include the decentralized actions of the local and regional actors, including local and regional authorities.

More specifically, an interview with a high level EU official underlined the objective of the EP: "The main objective of pure institutional communication for us is to communicate the date of the European Parliamentary elections and make EU citizens aware that something is happening." The information campaign of the EP is structured in three phases. In the first phase, the **European Parliament focuses on the importance of the EP in respect to EU legislation** especially after the Lisbon Treaty and the impact of EU legislation for the life of the EU citizens. The phase is supposed to start in September 2013 and will approximately last until February 2014. In the second phase, political parties will build upon the information phase. In the third phase, the EP plans the "go to road" phase in which the EP wants to alert people about "now is the date, now you have to go to vote". This campaign builds on the belief, as the EU official further explains, "that there is a need to communicate and this is related to **a lack of knowledge** as people do not know. In general, there is a lack of knowledge on the European Union".

As the interview with a high level EU official further showed, the EP builds its **campaign on various communication channels**: On the one hand the

campaign is supposed to be centered on actual events; on the other hand, the campaign is centered on online media tools, like Youtube, advertisements, and Facebook. Also, TV spots will be produced on a decentralised level.

The topics that are supposed to be underlined be the EP focus on larger issues, like "jobs", "economy", "money", "Europe in the world, etc.". While the topics are very broad in nature, the idea is that the EP information offices at the local level can choose which aspect of these topics they want to underline.

It has also been confirmed that the EP is preparing a lot of informational material around the campaign topics. As the EU official explained: *"Already in the last elections (2009) there was a very good press kit, which was very much appreciated. The information offices said it really worked well. There will be additional kits for the 2014 on the new topics."*

In order to distribute the information, the **EP encourages its information offices to work closely together with regional and local partners**. As the interviewee responded: "If the information offices go to the regions, the regions can provide premises and other means of support. We encourage more and more co-operation, especially in federal countries with regional authorities (regional parliaments) but also in other countries where regions and cities can closely collaboration with the information offices." The overall objective is that regions and cities take the five above mentioned topics and the toolkit into account and use it for their support of the overall campaign: *"We hope that they will subsequently see that these issues are part of their agenda and that the material is really important to them so that they pass on the message [...] On that basis they take one or more topics which are of importance in their region and that they communicate the topics."*

With regards to the various communication channels that are to be used, the EP builds on a variety of tools that are linked to different audiences. While **younger people can be reached via social media**, elderly people are to be reached by radio and TV. TV communication is, however, seen as being budget-intensive. This is why the EP tries to encourage TV stations to produce programs.

The overall benefit seen by the EU official is in the fact that citizens are rather interested in those issues that are happening close to them on the local or regional level: *"They are much more close to the regional authorities than to the national. The regional authority can explain that everything is related and that it is also very important for them what is happening on European level. Multipliers are very credible messengers. We hope that we would have this partnership of joint interest and that we communicate from the different perspectives but in the same direction."*

European Commission

The European Commission has launched the communication strategy "**Communicating Europe in Partnership**" in 2007 (Brüggemann 2010; Michailidou 2008). In an attempt to look for more citizens' engagement after the public rejections of the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands in 2005, the Commission set up this communication strategy to reach out to the "local" and "active citizenship" (Michailidou 2008). According to Michailidou, "this is understood as a series of actions, such as public-dialogue forums open to all citizens and more possibilities for citizens to give feedback in all stages of the policy-making process, which have as primary aim the strengthening of the European Union's democratic processes." (2008: 351) To put it differently, by engaging citizens and **informing and communicating EU governance**, the interest of citizens in EU decision-making processes is supposed to be fostered and this empowerment will feed back by enhancing citizens' participation in EU decision-making.

The Commission wants to increase "exchanges, debates, and understanding between European institutions, the general public, organised civil society and specialised audiences at European, national, regional, and local levels". (Commission of the European Communities 2007:6) At least two conclusions can be drawn from the strategy: first, the overarching strategy "is rooted in the association of citizens' disinterest and disengagement from politics with the lack of information and understanding of how the EU works." (Michailidou 2008: 251) Second, the strategy aims to foster dialogues with citizens in partnership, that is, in close cooperation with audiences not only on the European and national, but also on the regional and local level.

Citizens' dialogues, as one EU official explains in the context of this study, are essential to re-establish trust in the Institutions—which is currently decreasing (see also below). The European Commission has launched the so-called **"Citizens-Dialogues"** and it is reported to contribute to give a political face to the EU while EU Commissioners and politicians, including MEPs, are engaging with citizens in local dialogues in almost all Member States (see also http://ec.europa.eu/debate-future-europe/citizens-dialogues/). The idea is, as the same EU official points out, to give the opportunity to have a dialogue with citizens and to respond to all the citizens questions and to explain what the EU is doing, and why. However, the Commission does also invest in other communication channels, such as digital, social media, or via TV (for example, 'Euronews'). The Commission is said to be very cautious in using TV as a major tool. An interviewed EU high official explained that this reluctance had to do with the high cost of TV spots at primetime. At the same time, the Commission sees that **social media is very effective** in transporting information. But,

according to the interviewed high official, focusing on single communication channels "is not enough." At the same time, it is understood that when institutions want to reach out to young people, they will need to use a lot of social media. As the high EU official explained: *"You need to have a cocktail of different tools",* while at the same time you have to realize that audience and means need to go together.

The European Commission sees the European Parliament in the lead with regards to the information campaign on the 2014 European Elections. The European Commission is pleased with the campaign put forward by the European Parliament (see above), of which they have seen a first presentation. But the European Commission has not yet started to develop its own communication tools and implementation strategy in view of the European Parliament's overarching campaign. However, there is a clear idea in the Commission of what needs to be communicated in order to mobilize citizens to vote: *"If you look at the legislative work at the national level, it is 80% legislation coming from the EU. The legislation is made on the EU and people should understand this. There is a part of education to be done when you do communication. We have a big amount of pedagogy to do if we want to speak to the citizens."* Overall, as the official points out: *"What works, however, is to be very humble in your communication approach, pedagogical, practical, concrete and to link examples of the EU to the daily life of the citizens. And if you apply that to the upcoming campaign for the European Parliament, if you want to mobilize the people to go to vote, they should understand how important in the decision making process this European Parliament is today, and what impact it has on their daily life. Then you close the circle."*

At the same time, the **European Commission also believes that the LRAs have an important role to play** in the campaign for the 2014 elections. As one high official explains: "At the regional level, the European level is better integrated. They are the beneficiaries of the EU." In other words, it is on the regional and local levels where you can focus on the added value of the EU. However, the high official also admits that LRAs need to be involved even more: they need to be more active themselves in communication the EU, while at the same time they need to be better linked to the communication efforts on the European level. The latter underlines that **LRAs have become prominent facilitators** in the implementation of the Commission strategy. To this end, "Communicating the EU in partnership", is not only a strategy "to go local" and connect to citizens across Europe, but also to create collective efforts of various EU actors to inform and communicate about the EU. The role of LRAs in communicating the EU can be linked to these efforts by acknowledging the fact that they are one of many levels of EU governance, especially by playing an important role in implementing EU law and by being close to the EU citizens.

Committee of the Regions

The European Commission's "reinforcing partnership" approach aims to coherently develop a European public sphere by a close cooperation between the EU institutions.

As an observer to the Inter-institutional Group on Information (IGI), which is currently the overarching framework for agreeing on EU communication priorities between EU institutions, the Committee of the Regions is directly linked to the efforts of the Commission in developing a European public sphere —including the fostering of information of citizens' awareness and their participation in EU affairs. As such, emphasis is given to the strategy of the Committee of the Regions to function as a "**catalyst for networks and coordinator of EU local and regional authority positions**", using, amongst others, its own website and social media to disseminate information on the European Union (Committee of the Regions 2013). It is of particular importance that the Committee of the Regions positions itself as follows: *"On the one hand, the CoR has yet to endeavour to win the support of local and regional representatives and to target them with information campaigns regarding its role and place – now stronger by virtue of the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty – and its new role in subsidiarity monitoring. On the other hand, it must constantly live up to its responsibility to represent local and regional authorities and convey their views to the European institutions"* (Committee of the Region 2013: 2).

More specifically, the Communication Strategy of the Committee of the Region emphasizes the development of a "decentralised communication with and within the EU's regions" (Committee of the Regions 2013). The Communication sets out objectives, actions, and target audiences which become important building blocks of a decentralised communication (Committee of the Regions 2013).

The Communication of the Committee of the Regions also emphasizes the need to engage in the European Elections 2014: "…a tight cooperation with the EP's Directorate-General for Communication (EP DG COMM) will allow CoR members and Political Groups to prepare the involvement of local and regional authorities in the information campaign preparing the European elections in 2014" (Committee of the Regions 2013). The Communication shows overall the **preparations of the Committee of the Regions to involve LRAs** in a decentralized communication of the EU in general and the European Elections 2014 specifically. For example, the Committee of the Regions sets out as objectives:

- "[…]**engaging with citizens and debating on Europe:** the CoR plans to help the EU restore public confidence, with the aid of the European Year of Citizens and European citizens' initiatives launched with a view to the 2014 European elections;
- **developing the territorial dimension of EU external relations:** The CoR intends to reinforce the territorial dimension in EU external relations, particularly in neighbourhood countries;
- **a strong CoR in a new Europe:** lastly, the CoR intends, in this new Europe which is taking shape, to strengthen its institutional and political role with regard to the other European institutions and its legitimacy to coordinate regional and local authorities, promoting the concept of multi-level governance (MLG)." (Committee of the Regions 2013)

To this end, the Committee of the Regions plans to use, amongst others, **various forms of media channels** to strengthen the communication with its members. This includes communication via various audio-visual channels to foster the use of the CoR-website as a platform for decentralised communication information on the European Union and its own activities with partners. Additionally, the CoR promotes the use of social media, the image of the institution and the work of its members, and fosters the decentralised communication with and within the EU's regions. Regarding the latter, it becomes especially obvious how important local and regional authorities are for the communication of the European Union, including the communication on the European Elections. As one EU official explained in an interview: "The Committee of the Regions on central level is extremely active and very much supportive to the EU elections."

Overall, in times of growing Euroscepticism and a lack of trust in European institutions such **facilitation can become essential**, as it was also pointed out by the European Parliament, implying that the Committee of the Regions takes on an important role as a catalyst vis-à-vis regional and local authorities. In that respect, a general awareness for the EU could be fostered in general on the level of local and regional authorities. This might lead to an increase of voter turnout during the European Elections in 2014.

2.6 Preliminary Findings

This overview of the current literature on political communication of the European Union, the current public opinions, voter turnout in the European Elections 2009, and the European Union bodies' strategic positioning vis-à-vis the European Elections 2014, have highlighted at least six different aspects which are highly relevant in the context of the further analysis of this report:

- The communication of the European Union, more specifically, the European Elections, needs to take into account **active and transparent information policies and citizen dialogues** on all levels of EU governance;
- Communicating the European Union generates **European(-ised) public spheres**;
- Developing European(-ised) **public spheres can facilitate active participation and accountability** – hence: legitimacy – of the EU polity;
- Communicating the European Union should be in the **interest of LRAs** as they belong to the overall system of EU governance;
- LRAs should also have an interest in active participation as they strengthen the democratic basis of EU legislation with local/regional impacts;
- European **citizens are becoming increasing sceptical** and even negative in their perception of the EU integration processes and the functioning of European institutions. At the same time, we see clear signs of alienation and indifference amongst European voters;
- EU **voter turnout was low in 2009** and may even be out lower in 2014, if disinterest, political disenchantment, or non-voting as a protest form against the EU are increasing.

European Union bodies and institutions have to invest in efforts in communicating the European Union in times of crisis and link up with other non-public and public institutions such as NGOs or local and regional authorities. Especially, the Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament show the **effort of inter-institutional cooperation and of a decentralized communication strategy**, which include the local and regional authorities.

Based on these preliminary findings, the question remains whether local and regional authorities are able and willing to support the communication on the European Union. Do they see the need to communicate and inform citizens on the upcoming European Elections in 2014? If they have already communicated on the European Union, the question is how and with what success. How and what can those local and regional authorities that have not yet been able to communicate on the European Union learn from others?

3 The support of local and regional authorities for the EU communication strategy 2014 – An Empirical Assessment

3.1 Introduction

This third part of the study presents the empirical findings of the survey that has been conducted in the framework of this study. Based on the background findings in Part 2 of this study which showed a need to involve LRAs in communicating the European Union overall and, more specifically, European Elections, the pending question is if local, regional, and European officials see LRAs suited, willing, able, and capable of engaging in the EU's communication efforts. More precisely, on the one hand, the survey prepared by the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies in close coordination with the Committee of the Regions, was supposed to identify **the potential willingness, ability, resources, and need for support on the side of LRAs**. On the other hand, the survey was supposed to bring already established best practices of LRAs to the fore. Such best practices are important findings as they can generate mutual learning processes amongst LRAs. In other words, a practice which is established in one city or region might be taken on by another city or region. These two outcomes of the survey contribute to our understanding of the **readiness of LRAs** to communicate the EU and the EU Elections 2014. In certain cases (see below), the survey was complemented with interviews which generated a more in-depth understanding of local and regional challenges and opportunities in the light of communication of Europe.

Parallel to the findings of the survey and interviews with regional and local authorities, the empirical part of the study also contains interviews with high-level officials from the European Commission and the European Parliament. These interviews have been undertaken and analysed to focus on the European perspective on why the involvement of LRAs in communicating the EU matters and what suggestions public officials have to improve the impact of LRAs in this regard.

First, we will concentrate on the **set up, process, and response rates of the survey**. We will also highlight which interview partners have been selected, and why. Second, we will present the main survey and interview results. The analysis will be structured by four subchapters in this second part of the study: the willingness of LRAs to communicate, the ability of LRAs to communicate, the resources LRAs have to communicate, and the need for additional support

that LRAs require to communicate on the EU. Not only will this lead to a mapping exercise of LRAs overall engagement, but also to an overview of best practices amongst LRAs. Third, the results of survey and interviews with LRAs will be contextualized by an analysis of how public officials in the European Commission and the European Parliament regard regional and local efforts to communicate on the EU and the European Elections 2014. Fourth, the chapter will close with main conclusions and recommendations which can be drawn from the overall study.

3.2 Survey and interviews: Set up, Process and Response Rates

3.2.1 *Survey*

The research team prepared a survey in close cooperation with the Committee of the Regions. In brief, the questions included in the survey aimed to gather knowledge on (1) the LRAs willingness and ability to communicate the EU communication strategy in view of the European Elections in 2014; (2) what type of resources they have at their disposal to do so; and (3) whether they express the need for additional support from EU institutions. Overall, the survey contains 50 questions. The survey was conducted via the online tool Survey Monkey, a regularly used survey system. The survey was placed online and was accessible from the 2nd of June 2013, onward. Answering the questionnaire takes approximately 20 minutes. **The survey is included as an annex to this report**. A more elaborate introduction to the different sections of the survey and the questions are presented below in the results section.

The potential respondents were addressed via email by the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies on the 2nd of June 2013 for the first time. A link to the survey was inserted in the email. The email was signed by Dr. Kolja Raube, Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, and Mr. Tom De Smedt, Committee of the Regions.

In order to have variation in the sample of contacted local and regional authorities, the team at the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies decided to make a population of respondents based on a combination of cities and regions. For the population of cities we took a certain number of inhabitants. Cities larger than 100,000 inhabitants were selected for each country. Here the relevant source was Eurostat Urban Audit - Larger Urban Zones (LUZ). In regards to the population of regions, we used the "criterium" of Blatter et al. (2008). In their study, Blatter et al. define all "sub-national governments on the first level below the national level" as criteria for the definition of a regional and

local authority for each country in the EU Member States. We used this definition for our selection of contacts on the regional level. The data was provided by the relevant countries' statistical offices. Thirdly, we made a listing of all members of the Committee of the Regions. On the basis of these three inventories we constructed the research population. Doubles were excluded from the research population/contact list. In the case of duplicates of regions and cities which have distinct governments, the research population includes both the region and the city. On the basis of this list, the Committee of the Regions provided the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies with a complete set of contact details.

In total, **510 LRAs were contacted** on Monday, the 3rd of June 2013. The email was sent from a special email address created at the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies for project with the Committee of the Regions (COR@ggs.kuleuven.be). In the email, the deadline for responses was set for the 12th of June 2013. After a low response rate by the 12th of June which generated only 12 answers, a second email was sent to all potential respondents. After close coordination with the Committee of the Regions, it was decided not only to send a second email from the account of director Mr. Laurent Thieule at the Committee of the Regions, but also to shorten the survey. A shortened survey was created at surveymonkey.com and a second email was sent on the 14th of June asking respondents to reply until the 20th of June. The new attempt generated additional answers. In a third attempt, a final email was sent to all potential respondents by the Committee of the Regions on the 25th of June. Taking the suggestions of the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies into account, the Committee of the Regions addressed all potential respondents in their native language in the email requesting completion of the survey. Finally, in the process of conducting the in-depth interviews, additional survey results were obtained.

In total, **69 responses were received** out of which 47 responses included information that could be used for the analysis of the local and regional support to communicate the EU (Table 3). It should be mentioned that the findings documented here are based on the information that LRAs were giving in their best attempt to report on their respective situations. Table 4 presents the response rate split up by member state.

Table 3: Response Rate of the Survey

Cities and Regions invited to participate	510
Total answers	69
Invalid Answers	22
Valid answers	47
Overall response rate	13.5%
Response rate valid survey	9.2%

Table 4: Response Rate by Country

Country	Invited	Answers	Response rate	Valid answers	% valid answers
Austria	12	3	25.0%	3	25.0%
Belgium	9	5	55.6%	4	44.4%
Bulgaria	28	6	21.4%	5	17.9%
Cyprus	2	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Czech Republic	26	1	3.8%	1	3.8%
Denmark	7	1	14.3%	1	14.3%
Estonia	16	3	18.8%	1	6.3%
France	44	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Germany	46	8	17.4%	6	13.0%
Greece	20	3	15.0%	3	15.0%
Hungary	28	4	14.3%	3	10.7%
Italy	52	5	9.6%	4	7.7%
Latvia	6	2	33.3%	2	33.3%
Lithuania	9	1	11.1%	1	11.1%
Luxembourg	2	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Malta	1	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Netherlands	23	4	17.4%	3	13.0%
Poland	40	1	2.5%	1	2.5%
Romania	45	3	6.7%	2	4.4%
Spain	40	4	10.0%	3	7.5%
Sweden	25	3	12.0%	3	12.0%
United Kingdom	29	1	3,4%	1	3%
Total	510	69	13.5%	47	9.2%

The relatively low overall response rate (9,2%) can be explained by several interrelated factors. First, the low response rate is not a unique problem for this survey as often occurs with email and post surveys. Response rates in such

surveys are generally very low. Given the information that is required for this survey, the survey was still quite long (even after dropping some of the initial questions) and officers need to take their time to fill out the survey. Another reason might be the language barrier, as we only address the respondents in English. Not all respondents might feel confident enough to fill out the survey in English. Thirdly, the survey was largely conducted in a period leading up to the summer break which might be a period in which respondents have relatively little time to complete surveys. Finally, there was no incentive to fill out the survey. This implies that "non-compliance" can remain relatively high. Notwithstanding, the low response rate the information gathered via the surveys can generate relevant information of the study and factsheets. Hence, by contacting a sampled list of local and regional authorities, it will be possible to receive enough information to make a qualitative assessment of the potential support of the concerned authorities to communicate on the EU.

After all, it should be mentioned, however, that the survey does only contain information of those who were committed enough to fill out the survey and participate in the overall study.

At the same time we should also keep in mind that the response rate for local and regional authorities of some Member States was considerably higher than for others (see Table 4). While the overall response rate of valid answers was 9,2%, the response rate for valid answers was well beyond this margin. Belgium, Latvia and Austria, for example, arrived respectively at a response rate of 44%, 33% and 25% (see Table 4).

3.2.2 *Interviews*

In addition to the survey, interviews were conducted to complement it. The function of the interviews was to find out **more detail about the need, support, and capacities of LRAs** in communicating the EU and specifically the European Elections 2014. They are an additional qualitative source of information and will complement the information gathered. The interviews were conducted in order to find out about "best practices" in local and regional contexts with regards to the communication of the EU. In total, the study has conducted 13 interviews with communicators at the EU, regional, and local levels based on the original order form of the Committee of the Regions.

In line with the original order form of the Committee of the Regions, the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies sampled communicators on the EU level as well as communicators of cities and regions in order to identify them as potential interview partners. The selection was made in consultation with the Committee of the Regions. On the EU level, communicators were selected in

order to provide additional information on the need to involve regional and local authorities and the potential instruments and support that the EU institutions can offer to facilitate the engagement of the authorities. To this end, communication officials working for the Commission and the European Parliament were interviewed. Furthermore, **interviews with LRAs** were used to complement the information in the surveys in light of the cities' and regions' willingness and capacities to support communication on the EU. This implied that the interviews gathered information that is only partially indicated or that has not yet been communicated in the surveys. To this end, some interview partners were identical with survey respondents. In addition, interviewees who did not respond to the survey were approached. Annex 7.2 provides a complete overview of all the interviewees who were approached for the purpose of the study.

3.3 Communicating the EU: Willingness, Ability, Resources and the Need for Support – The Case of Local and Regional Authorities

This section reports on the main results. The survey is linked to four topics as explained in the introduction: willingness, ability, resources, and additional support. The first section, entitled "General Background Information", focused on general background information of the LRS and contained 5 questions. The second section, entitled "Do regional and local administrations support communication on EU issues?" aimed to capture the willingness and ability of cities and regions to support the EU communication strategy in view of the 2014 elections and contained questions. The second section, ability, aimed to capture the ability of cities and regions to support EU communication and the information campaign for the 2014 European Election, and contained 23 questions. The third section, entitled "Did you communicate on the role of the European Parliament Elections in 2009?", focused on the LRAs past efforts to communicate on European elections and contained 2 questions. The fourth part, entitled "What are the resources available which can be put at disposal for EU communication?", aimed to gather information on the available resources (media, staff, budget) of local and regional administrations (own resources as well as coming from the EU institutions) to support communication efforts and contained 6 questions. The final section on additional support aimed to capture the additional support local and regional authorities need to increase their engagement, and contained 4 questions.

3.3.1 *Willingness of LRAs to Communicate on the EU*

The **willingness of LRAs** is at the heart of their efforts to communicate on Europe. It is also at the heart of the overarching strategies by the European

Commission and the European Parliament and the related efforts of the Committee of the Regions (see Part 2 of this study).

In this regard, the survey provides findings that point to the current **actions and motivation of cities and regions** to inform their citizens about the EU. The survey identifies current ways of how cities and regions communicate which can be used as indicators of the LRAs willingness to communicate on the EU.

The survey explored if LRAs are already undertaking communication efforts to inform citizens about the EU. The survey question "Are you already communicating on the role of the EU in your city/region?" asks whether there are current actions and efforts undertaken of regions and cities. In total, all 47 cities and regions participating in the survey answered the question. Out of these, 39 (83%) answered that that they were already communicating on the role of the EU in their city/region (Table 5). Only 8 cities or regions (17%) answered that they were not communicating on the role of the EU in their city/ region (Table 5). These findings already present that regions and cities actually do communicate the EU at times.

Table 5: Existing LRA communication on the EU

	#	%
No	8	17%
Yes	39	83%
Answered	47	100%

In fact, one might suppose that if there are actions undertaken to inform European citizens about the EU on the local and regional level, then **there is an implied willingness** to do so on the side of the LRAs.

Cities and regions can communicate on the European Union, but also on other issues, such as local and regional policies, in various ways. In addition, authorities might take the initiative or work together with other public authorities to communicate. Hence, the follow-up question is: in which context do the cities and regions actually communicate? In other words, do local and regional authorities communicate alone or in collaboration with other authorities on the role of the EU? Bringing together the responses of LRAs, Table 6 presents the findings of the context of communication on the EU. While respondents were able to give multiple answers, most of them responded that **they communicated on the role of the EU** in collaboration with the EU institutions (53%) or with other cities in their own Member State (47%). However, 32% also answered that they communicated on the role of the EU on their own or in collaboration with other cities and regions in third Member

States (29%). Overall, the picture is a clear one. Cities and regions indicate that the context of communication on the EU is one of collaborative action, either with other regions in or outside their own Member State or in combination with EU institutions. These collaborative efforts are quite clearly to be differentiated from those 12 cities and regions which indicated that they communicating on their own. However, the relatively high percentage of 32% also shows that communicating alone can be a relevant option if LRAs are in a position to do so.

Table 6: Context of LRA communication on the EU

	#	%
Alone	12	32%
In collaboration with other cities and regions in your member state	18	47%
In collaboration with other cities and regions in other member states	11	29%
In collaboration with the EU institutions (European Parliament Information Office, European Commission representation, Europe Direct, etc.)	20	53%
No information available	0	0%
Don't know	0	0%
Total	38	

Communication on Europe can be linked to a broader context of European networking and project-implementation. Hence, the question is whether local and regional authorities do communicate on the EU on their own initiative or in coordination with other authorities; or whether their commitment to communication on the EU is linked to a wider context of European project implementation. Such projects can be implemented by local and regional authorities in the framework of the Social Fund or the Europe and Regional Development Fund, etc. In this respect, LRAs were asked whether their local/ regional communication was linked to EU financed project (Table 7). Of course, it cannot be ruled out that communication on the EU is either partly, mainly, or not at all undertaken in the context of EU financed projects. However, 16 (42%) of the **LRAs answered they only partly communicated on the EU due to EU-financed projects**. 37% of the respondents or 14 local and regional authorities reported they would mainly communicate on the EU in the context of EU financed projects. And only 6 (16%) said they would not all communicate in the context of the EU. 2 LRAs answered that there was no information available. Hence, the overall findings show that local and regional authorities either partly or mainly communicate on the EU in the context of EU financed projects. This adds to the understanding that local and regional authorities do not only have to be willing to communicate on the EU, but they also have to be connected to a

network of information exchanges on the EU through which they are enabled to communicate on how the EU effects their local and regional policies. As such, citizen awareness of what the EU stands for and how it impacts on local and regional policies and structures can be increased.

Table 7: Communication of LRAs on the EU in the context of EU financed projects

	#	%
No, not at all.	6	16%
We partly communicate because of an obligation connected with such projects.	16	42%
We mainly communicate on the EU due to obligations connected with such projects.	14	37%
No information available	2	5%
Total	38	100%

In order to reach out to the citizens as the audience of information on the EU in EU financed projects, local and regional authorities use various communication tools. In order to identify which tools LRAs use, one needs to map the various channels of communication which are used in relation to communication on EU financed projects (Table 7). This overview does present an additional aspect on how LRAs communicate when they are embedded in EU networks, i.e. project implementation. Several different options were presented to the respondents. Respondents could also indicate additional channels if they were not listed in the survey. The result is that 32 LRAs indicated that **information is presented to citizens via information on the official website** of the relevant city/region (84%). This is by far the largest amount of respondents. However, the respondents also indicated by 66% that press communication were used as a channel to communicate the EU. 50% answered that special events to citizens or specific stakeholders (culture, sports, social events, etc.) are used to communicate the EU. And 17 (45%) of the local and regional authorities indicated that digital newsletters are sent to citizens to communicate on the EU. These channels were followed by advertisements in local newspapers (39%), information flyers for citizens at administrative buildings (e.g. city halls) (37%), social media (Twitter and Facebook) (both 33%), information days and information sessions with MEPs, local and regional politicians and administrative experts (34%), posters in the streets (21%), other social media and information that citizens receive by postal mail (both 16%).

Table 8: LRA Communication on the EU in the context of EU financed projects

	#	%
Information on the official website of the city/region.	32	84%
Information flyers for citizens at administrative buildings (e.g. city halls).	14	37%
Information citizens receive via digital newsletters (email).	17	45%
Press communication.	25	66%
Twitter.	13	34%
Facebook.	13	34%
Other social media.	6	16%
Information citizens receive by post.	6	16%
Posters in the streets.	8	21%
Advertisements in local newspapers.	15	39%
Special events to citizens or specific stakeholders (culture, sports, social events, etc.).	19	50%
Information days and Information sessions with MEPs, local and regional politicians and administrative experts.	13	34%
Other.	1	3%
Total	38	

These results point to **a large diversity of communication channels** that are used by LRAs to communicate and inform about the EU. However, certain channels stick out and should be emphasised. For example, it was interesting to see that the use of local and regional websites has established itself as the most relevant communication channel when it comes to communicating about Europe. This channel is far more advanced than other digital channels, such as digital newsletters or social media tools (Table 8). However, taken together, the digital communication channels are pointed out as tools that are widely used by local and regional authorities. Still, press communication is another highly relevant tool and used as such by many local and regional authorities to communicate on the EU. Informing the local and regional press about EU projects in order to stimulate public coverage remains a frequently used tool of communication (66%). Moreover, **special events for citizens or stakeholders and information days, including MEPs, are still widely used and obviously seen as important for messaging information on the EU**. Last but not least, it should be pointed out that traditional tools of information, such as flyers in public buildings or advertisement in newspapers, are still considered as relevant tools. After all, citizens still like to take information home on "a piece of paper".

To summarize, rather than an overarching trend towards digital communication channels, the survey points to a mix of different communication tools, digital or print, which are parts of the overall toolkit that LRAs use to communicate on the EU.

Table 9: LRA willingness for communicating the EU in the 2014 elections

	#	%
Yes	14	36%
No	6	15%
Don't know	10	26%
No information available.	9	23%
Total	39	100%

The results so far point to an overall picture on LRAs in the context of communication on the EU. Currently, LRAs are involved in communicating Europe, many of them either partly or mainly via EU financed projects. Their toolkit reaches from traditional information channels to the digital and social media. This puts regional and local authorities in the position to act as information givers on Europe and to add to the European Parliament communication strategies in the context of the 2014 elections (see Part 2 of this study). However, would they also be willing to use the regional and city administrations also support the information campaign for the 2014 European elections? (Table 9) The answers that respondents have given are mixed. While 36% or 14 local and regional authorities indicated that they would do so and support the information campaign for the 2014 elections, 26% indicated that they would not know whether they support it and 23% said that no information was available. Moreover, 15% (6) of the local and regional respondents indicated they would not support the campaign.

The **results are to be seen in relation to LRAs willingness (and ability) to communicate the European Elections in 2009**. 46% (18) LRAs reported that they did not communicate on the EU elections either, while 36% (14) LRAs said they did (18% did not know). Given the fact that today 38% of the LRAs would support, there is a slight increase to be noticed. However, the question is whether or not those who have not decided yet or do not know, will finally support an election information campaign or will they eventually not support communication initiatives. The latter was the case in 2009 (Table 10).

Table 10: LRA Communication Initiatives in 2009

	#	%
Yes	14	36%
No	18	46%
Don't Know	7	18%
Answered	40	100%

Both findings (Table 9 and 10) are, in a way, a contradiction to the 83% of the respondents who stated that they are communicating on the EU. This **divergence between the current communication on the EU and the more specific communication on the 2014 Elections** could have to do with the fact that LRAs are not able to invest more than they do at this moment into communicating on Europe.

Lastly, the LRAs were also asked whether they thought that their communication on the EU has increased or decreased since 2009 (Table 11).

Table 11: Increase and Decrease of LRA Communication Efforts since 2009

	#	%
Decreased	1	3%
Remained at the same level	11	28%
Increased	21	54%
Don't Know	2	5%
No information available.	4	10%
Answered	39	100%

54% of the LRAs indicated that their efforts to communicate on the EU have increased, while 28% mentioned it remained at the same level. Only 3% mentioned that it decreased. Moreover, 10% indicated that no information was available and 5% answered they did not know (Table 11). In the context of an upcoming communication campaign during the 2014 European Elections and the indications that a majority of LRAs did not know or had no information on whether they would support such an information campaign, **the question might be whether LRAs could also increase their efforts to inform EU citizens about the upcoming elections**.

In this context, it is important to look into the LRAs abilities, their actual resources, and the potential supportive role that EU Institutions have to take on in order to enable local and regional authorities to support the 2014 election campaign.

3.3.2 *Ability of LRAs to Communicate on the EU*

The ability of local and regional authorities to communicate the European Union is an essential precondition to their engagement in an even larger contribution to communicate the EU and inform the citizens about the EU's functions and added value—including the role of the European Parliament and the upcoming European Elections in 2014.

A first indicator of local and regional abilities to communicate the European Union is the **regularity or frequency that authorities communicate the EU**. Table 12 shows how regularly local and regional authorities communicate on the Union and through which channels. The results show that there is quite some variation amongst cities and regions with regards to the frequency by which they communicate on the EU. Across different channels of communication, most communication is issued between "every week" and "a few times a year" (Table 12). It also becomes evident that certain local and regional authorities rarely communicate every day, while others do indeed communicate on the EU every day. Overall, the results show that LRA mostly communicate a few times and that by Information days and Information sessions with MEPs, local and regional politicians and administrative experts (66%), special events to citizens or specific stakeholders (culture, sports, social events, etc.) (60%), posters in the streets (58%), information flyers (57%), press communication (47%) and information on the website. It is also interesting to point out that some media or communication channels are never used: for, example 47% of the respondents indicated that they have never used Twitter and 38% have indicated that they never used Facebook. At the same time, other authorities indicate that they use social media frequently.

The findings do show that **certain channels of communication are widely used**, but only a few times a year. The findings show thereby that special events and information session are less often organised throughout the year, while, for example information on the website is one of those tools which are frequently used throughout the year and the same holds true for information that citizens receive via digital newspapers and social media. However, the findings also show that some local and regional authorities still do not make extensive use of digital and social media.

Table 12: Frequency of LRA communication on the European Union

	Every day		Every week		Every month		A few times a year		Never		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Information on the official website of the city/region	5	15	8	24	6	18	13	40	1	3	33
Information flyers for citizens receive at administrative buildings (e.g. city halls)	4	13	1	3	2	7	17	57	6	20	30
Information citizens receive via digital newsletters (email)	2	7	3	10	10	33	7	23	8	27	30
Press communication	2	6	4	12	9	26	16	47	3	9	34
Twitter	1	4	6	21	2	7	6	21	13	47	28
Facebook	3	10	5	17	4	14	6	21	11	38	29
Other social media	2	6	4	13	4	13	9	29	12	39	31
Information citizens receive via postal newsletters		0		0	2	9	5	23	15	68	22
Posters in the streets		0		0	1	4	14	58	9	38	24
Advertisements in local newspapers	1	4		0	3	11	13	48	10	37	27
Special events to citizens, specific stakeholders (culture, sports, social events)		0	1	4	7	25	17	60	3	11	28
Information days and Information sessions with MEPs, local and regional politicians and administrative experts		0		0	1	4	18	66	8	30	27
Other		0	2	20		0		0	8	80	10
Total											**38**

The ability of local and regional authorities is not only linked to their frequency in communicating but, moreover, linked to their scope or how many citizens will be reached via different communication channels.

LRA reported that they reached out to different amounts of people via **information on their website**. In general some cities reported that they had between 1 M and 3 M visitors every month on their website. In one case, the city website was reported to be visited by 1.853.811 visitors per month, while the website of the Europe Direct Information Centre (EDIC) had 21.706 per month. In other cases, authorities reported to have between 3.000, 3.500, or 15.000 to 20.000 visitors per day. Finally, one city reported to have around 10.000 unique visitors and 20.000 visits per month, but that each EU project had its "own mini-site" and that the views often depend on the themes which are posted.

In the case of information flyers which citizens receive at administrative buildings (e.g. city halls) local and regional authorities reported different practices. While one respondent reported to distribute some 100 flyers per month with information on Europe, others reported to distributed between 10.000 and 15.000 per year.

Digital newsletters that are more frequently distributed throughout the year (see Table 12), are reported to reach out to 250 up to 3.000 people, depending on the size of the region or city. Equally, press communication can reach out to different sizes of audiences, depending on the size of the city and region and the media involved. In two cases, LRAs report that their press communication on the EU can reach a press corps of 40 and 240 journalists. These journalists would then use the information in the media they work for. Other LRAs report that their press communication reaches out to respectively 5.000, 10.000, 12.000-15.000, 18.000 and 30.000 readers. Often, these are local newspapers. In the one case, it is reported that in a city of 600.000, 30% of the citizens read the local newspaper. One official remarked in his comments that via local media (radio, TV, newspaper) his county can reach "thousands of people". At the same time, cities and regions have indicated that also by means of advertisement campaigns can reach out to the respective citizen audience. Depending on the size of the region or the city, the scope of a campaign can be larger. In three cases, LRAs reported to reach out to 4.000 to 10.000 citizens via the advertisement campaigns. Another respondent indicated they would reach about 30% of their citizens via such advertisements.

Social Media channels, like Twitter and Facebook, are also used by local and regional authorities and LRAs reach out to the citizens via these channels. LRAs reported that they by distributing information on Twitter they reached out several thousand "followers". In the one case, a respondent indicated that they

had 6.000 followers on Twitter. Another one reported 5.205 followers for the city and 338 followers for the Europe Direct Information Centre. The same city reports to have 14.394 fans while the EDIC has 1.165 fans. Finally, the same city also reported to use another social network (Instagram) where it had 579 followers. In the case of a third region, 165 followers were reported on Twitter. The same region however has reported to have 1.267 friends on Facebook with 2.500 to 3.000 views per week. Another region explained in its comments that the scope of communication via Facebook was very much dependent on the type of information that is communicated. Hence, the reach of information could span "from 100 to thousands". Regarding the more traditional ways of communication, like postal newsletters and posters in the streets, it was mentioned by one city that its newsletter reached out to 78.000.

The LRAs also shared information on how much they reached out to citizens via special events for citizens or specific stakeholders (culture, sports, social events, etc.). **Depending on the size of the city or region, events can reach a hundred or even thousands of people**. For example, one respondent reports that it organises special events of around 100 people, while approximately 40 people attend the actual meeting in the room while 60 other follow the event via a live-stream in the internet. Another city reported that some 1.428 students took part in the info-days which were organised for them as a target group by the EDIC in 2012. Other authorities reported they are reaching out to 2.000, more than 10.000 and even 20.000 to 150.000 people when they organise these special events.

Similarly, the LRAs report how many people they approximately reach when they organise information days and information sessions with MEPs, local and regional politicians and administrative experts. Here, it was reported by several authorities – cities and regions – that often such events attracted between 20-200 citizens. One city reported that it organised such an event and reached out to 4.428 people while another city reports it can reach out to some 50.000 to 80.000 citizens.

Regarding other information, it was shown that, for example, information was also provided to citizens by their visits to the local EDIC. Here, one city reported 5.209 desk visits in the year 2012.

What becomes evident from the findings is that **LRAs do reach out to citizens and are able to communicate via various communication channels**. The scope of channels depends on the nature of the communication channel and also the size of the city or region which is involved in the communication. It also showed that the general websites of local and regional authorities might be more

effective than the more specialised websites of EDIC. However, the overall perception of effectiveness is covered in another part of the survey.

The **effectiveness of local and regional communication tools is indeed an essential complementary part** in the assessment whether local and regional authorities are in the end able to reach out to citizens. In other words, it is essential 'to get the message across'. To this end, we have asked LRAs which communication tools, from their experience, they would see as most effective to communicate with the EU (Table 13).

Table 13: The Effectiveness of communication tools to communicate the EU

From your experience, what are the most effective tools used to communicate with the EU?	Effective		Not effective		No information available		Don't know		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Information on the official website of the city/region	25	81		0	2	6	4	13	31
Information flyers for citizens receive at administrative buildings (e.g. city halls)	9	35	5	19	7	27	5	19	26
Information citizens receive via digital newsletters (email)	14	52	3	11	4	15	6	22	27
Press communication	20	69	3	10	1	4	5	17	29
Twitter	7	29	1	4	5	21	11	46	24
Facebook	12	52		0	3	13	8	35	23
Other social media.	5	21		0	8	33	11	46	24
Information citizens receive via postal newsletters	7	28	7	28	4	16	7	28	25
Posters in the streets	4	17	8	33	5	21	7	29	24
Advertisements in local newspapers	11	46	4	17	1	4	8	33	24
Special events to citizens or specific stakeholders (culture, sports, social events, etc.)	15	66	1	4	1	4	6	26	23
Information days and Information sessions with MEPs, local and regional politicians and administrative experts	14	59	2	8	2	8	6	25	24
Other		0	1	9	2	18	8	73	11
Total									**31**

81% (25) respondents amongst the LRAs agreed that communicating via the website was an effective tool. Only 2 respondents mentioned that they had no information, and 6 said they did not know. At the same time, 69% (20) respondents said that press communication was effective. Both special events

for citizens and info-sessions with MEPs and EU specialists are seen as effective by 66% (15 of 23 respondents) and 59% (14 of 24 respondents) respectively. 52% of the LRAs answered that Facebook was effective, while none of the respondents mentioned that it was not effective at all. However, 8 (35%) of the respondents answered that they did not know whether it was effective, or not (Table 13). Similarly, respondents agreed by 52% that information communicated to citizens via digital newsletters (and emails) was effective (only 11% said it was ineffective, 15% said no information was available and 22% said that did not know). It should be added in this regard that other social media is only seen as effective by 21% (5 of 21 respondents), while most respondents either do not know or have no information available. However, these **tools which are largely perceived as being effective stand in contrast to those which are rather seen as being less effective**. Here, it should be pointed out that information that citizens receive via postal newsletters and posters in the streets are seen as relatively ineffective (see Table 13).

In total, the findings show that by and large respondents already use those communication tools in the context of communicating the EU that they think are effective (see Table 8). At the same time, the findings also show that especially with regards to the use of social media and the case of e-newsletters, many local and regional authorities seem not to know their effects or they have no information ready. This might point to the fact that while a number of local and regional authorities have already adapted to the use of social media and advanced e-communication, others might still be in the process of catching up (or simply refuse to use these tools for other reasons).

It was stated above that LRAs are actually communicating on the EU and they are indeed using various information channels (see Table 8). A more qualified look offers us not only to map if, why, and how effectively LRAs communicate on the EU, it also enables to ask what exactly LRAs are able to communicate. To this end, respondents were asked to state from their perspective what the subjects of their communication actually are when they communicate on the role of the EU. While Table 6 clarified that LRAs are willing to communicate on the EU, for example in the context of EU-funding, the following statements of LRAs might point to **communication beyond EU projects**. Mostly, however, LRAs indicate indeed that they present EU funded projects, EU funding opportunities, cohesion policies and Structural Funds, City and Regional Development Programs, etc. In addition to this tailor-made information, LRAs also generate and communicate information on more topics regarding the relationship between the local and the regional level, regional cooperation, and current EU-topics and EU-issues. In addition, the LRAs also communicate opportunities for young citizens and mobility in the EU. Furthermore, LRAs do focus on European issues which have a special regional dimension, such as visa-

regimes in Eastern Europe and issues related to enlargement in the Western Balkans. One respondent tried to summarize the tasks of communicating the EU beyond EU funded projects like this: *"Very important is the contact with young people to communicate how the EU works. Then you have to communicate the benefits for the economy, the possibilities of education, studying and jobs in Europe. We have every year a special topic concerning enlargement and the Balkans. Last year, we focused on Croatia with discussions, culture events and also a trip to Zagreb. This year we focus on Serbia."*

Despite attempts to communicate "how the EU works", it becomes evident from our **findings that LRAs are primarily concentrating on EU Project funding and the reporting thereof**. However, there are LRAs which communicate on EU issues which go beyond those which are directly linked to the EU. These LRAs can serve as positive examples in presenting the added value of the EU on a local and regional level and the (related) opportunity and need to participate in European elections.

In order to communicate on the EU, special actors need to be featured next to these findings that LRAs have given when they were asked who is given voice (represented, featured, quoted, cited, etc.) when they communicate in relation to the EU (politicians, administration, local MEPs, project leaders, citizens, etc.). LRAs report that they are mainly focusing on politicians, including MEPs administrative personnel and project leaders, when they feature EU topics. Sometimes, EU Institutions and Commissioners are also focused on. However, it becomes evident that citizens are missing in the list of enumerations that LRAs presented. As such, **communication tends to focus on decision-makers and policy implementers, rather than those who are affected by EU governance**. If, however, the added-value of the EU is supposed to be presented, it might be necessary to also focus on the positive experiences EU citizens have made due to EU governance (see also Part 2 of this study).

3.3.3 *Resources of LRAs to Communicate on the EU*

The willingness and ability of local and regional authorities needs to be accompanied with necessary resources if local and regional authorities want to communicate on the EU in general and the European Election 2014 specifically. As a starting point, local and regional authorities might have an annual budget that they can use for the purpose of communicating the role of the EU (Table 14).

Table 14: Existence of Annual LRA Budgets assigned to communicating the role of the EU

	#	%
Yes	9	23%
No	27	69%
No information available	3	8%
Total	39	100%

Out of the 39 local and regional authorities that responded to this question, 27 indicated that they do not have an annual budget line for the purpose of communicating the role of the EU. 3 authorities answered they had no information available. However, 9 LRAs responded that there was an annual budget line for the purpose of communicating the role of the EU. In some of these cases it was specified that annual budget were ranged between 149.533,05 Euro, 200.000 Euro, 237,000 and 300.000 Euro. In the one case, the 149.533, 05 Euro included the co-financing of the local Europe Direct Centre (EDIC). Moreover, another city explained that 30% of its overall communication budget relates to a communication budget line assigned to communicating Structural Funds of the EU. Next to the finding that most of the LRAs do not have an extra-budget line assigned to communication on the EU, it seems however interesting some have considerable budget which they can rely on in order to communicate the role of the EU.

The LRAs responded in 47% of the cases that parts of the existing budget can be used for the purpose of communicating the role of the EU. 23% of the respondents answered this was not possible. While 15% answered either that they did not know or that no information was available (Table 15)

Table 15: Parts of Annual LRA Budgets used to communicate the role of the EU

	#	%
Yes	18	47%
No	9	23%
Don't Know	6	15%
No information available.	6	15%
Total	39	100%

Overall, the results imply that there is, to a large extent, the **possibility to use parts of the budget for communication on Europe**. On the other hand, it does imply how financial means are available in the local and regional authorities. In

this respect, local and regional authorities were asked whether they agreed that they saw the need to increase the budget for EU communication purposes (Table 16).

Table 16: The need to increase the LRA budgets to communicate on the EU

	#	%
Yes	22	63%
No	13	37%
Total	35	100%

The results in Table 16 show that 63% (22) local and regional authorities agree that the budget for EU communication purposes should be increased for 2013. 13(37%) local and regional authorities do not see that necessity. Hence, while we have seen before a large activity of local and regional authorities to communicate on the EU (83%), 63% mention that the budgets to finance such actions should be increased. We should, in this respect, keep the earlier findings in mind that state that a lot of local and regional authorities are linking partly or mainly their communication on the EU to EU projects that they implement. They are, in other words, **required to communicate on the EU if they receive EU funding**. And the question is whether they have enough capacities, financially and with regards to manpower, to go beyond such commitments. While on the one hand, we saw the necessity for the local and regional authorities to become an active part in the overall communication strategy of the EU (see also Part 2 of this study), but they also have to have the means to exercise such communication efforts. In this respect, it becomes important to focus on the suggestions of local and regional authorities why there would be a need to increase the budget for EU communication purposes in 2013.   When local and regional authorities see a need to increase the current budget, they reported that the *"EU authorities and its purposes are long from the citizens even our days – people need to have clear information on the work and aim of the main European organizations."* Another respondent points out: *"It is necessary to know more information about EU."* In this regard, budgets should be increased in order to inform citizens more about the functions of the EU. This is complemented by another official who mentions: *"I am aware that communication is always in need."* It becomes obvious from another respondent's answer that additional financial support is important as the budget on communicating the EU is not increased by local financial means: *"We do not need to increase it ourselves. But if we get more money, why not. The EU is seen very negatively at this moment. It is even often forgotten amongst citizens. It would be useful to communicate more if we get additional financial means."* Another respondent echoes this statement as being due to the current "difficult

situation" which led to "public spending cuts" that the need for external funding increases. Still, as one other respondent points out, an increase of funding is always welcome, but not always necessary*: "We do not have the resources to develop communication means ourselves and would need additional support in this area. [However] We would not need additional support if the EU provides ready-made communication material of good quality."* Looking for local and regional solutions to combine low budgets and high communication outputs, one other respondent believes that *"social media and internet provide an efficient low-cost way of communicating."* At the same time, the same respondent sees the limits of social and digital media communication: "Perhaps a budget for organizing special events could be foreseen." Looking at the need to increase budgets and limited resources at the same time, another respondent argues that "the experience of other countries" should be looked at. Despite the belief that an increased budget is welcome, some LRAs were more **skeptical about the need to inform the citizens about the EU** on the local and regional level. In this regard, one public official commented: "I think it is not the main task of cities and villages to inform about EU Institutions. The main efforts have to be done by EU Institutions and their Representatives. We all have to make our decision-making processes and responsibilities more transparent. Also EU Institutions have to get closer to European citizens and show better the benefits to be a European. In this respect national states and EU have a lot of communication work to do." Considering these skeptical notions on the role of local and regional authorities, it is worth remembering that in the system of EU multi-level governance responsibilities of different level of governance are hard to disentangle (see also Part 2 of this study). As such, the role of local and regional authorities adds to the one on the national and European level in a complementary way. Looking at communication on the EU like this, increasing local and regional budgets on EU communication could be one way to enable local and regional authorities to inform their citizens even more than they already do, and especially in addition to current communication in the context of EU programmes (see Table 7).

Enabling local and regional authorities to play a complementary role in communicating the EU also depends on the actual manpower at hand (see Table 17).

Table 17: FTEs working on communication

How many people in your administration approximately work in units dedicated to communication? Please provide a number in Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) on a yearly basis.	
Minimum	0
Maximum	200
Average	18.5
Answered	33

Table 17 shows that there is a **large variety of people working and dedicated to communication** on a Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) basis. While some cities and regions reported that there are no FTEs working on communication, others reported that 200 FTEs are working on these issues. This result can be primarily linked to the variation of legislative and executive tasks and functions of LRAs in the Member States. However, this difference is balanced by the finding that on average, 18,5 FTE are working on communication in the LRAs which responded to the survey. This result is, however, even slightly corrected once LRAs respond to how many FTEs are actually working on communication related to the EU. Table 18 shows that **on average 2,5 FTEs are working on the EU**.

Table 18: FTEs working on communication on the EU

How many people do mainly work on communicating in relation to the EU? Please provide a number in Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) on a yearly basis.	
Minimum	0
Maximum	10
Average	2.5
Answered	33

Compared to the findings presented in Table 17 on the FTEs who are concerned with communication at large, less FTEs are working solely on EU communication (17%). Interestingly, however, there is also considerable variation amongst the results: In one case, 10 LRAs work permanently on EU communication, whereas in several other cases it is reported that there is no special FTE assigned to work on EU communication (Table 18). The findings show that FTEs working on EU communication is considerably lower than the number of FTEs who are concerned with communication in general. However, as the earlier findings show, this does not imply that those local and regional authorities that do not have FTEs especially assigned to, rather, is that

communication officers often also take on communication on the EU in addition to their other communication tasks.

Table 19 shows how local and regional authorities responded when asked about whether LRAs think it will be possible or not possible for them to support the information campaign for the 2014 European Elections. Multiple answers were possible and LRAs responded most often (by 42%) that the campaign is not a priority in their local/ regional strategy, while 21% reported that the campaign was a priority in their strategy. 27% answered that they have not yet started preparing a campaign as opposed to 12% which have already started doing it. In relation to early questions on financial and personnel capacities, LRAs answered by 27% that they have not the necessary amount of people doing it, while 24% indicate they actually did have the necessary amount of people. 15% mentioned they did not have the necessary amount of financial means, while 15% mentioned they did have the necessary financial means (Table 19). The results show that **LRAs do not have a consensual perspective regarding the 2014 European elections campaign**. It sticks out that many of them indicated that the campaign was not a priority, which can be related to other communication priorities during the same time period. At the same time, the picture presented in Table 19 also shows that a number of LRAs also indicate they were not yet prepared for the campaign. In terms of financial and personnel capacities, the findings again show variation across LRAs: some feel better equipped than others in relation to financial and human resources to take on the task of communicating the EU during the 2014 European elections information campaign (Table 19).

Table 19: LRA support for the European elections information campaign in 2014

	#	%
We have the financial means	5	15%
We not have the financial means	5	15%
We have the necessary amount of people doing it	8	24%
We do not have the necessary amount of people doing it	9	27%
We already know what to communicate	5	15%
We do not know what to communicate	7	21%
We have already started preparing a campaign	4	12%
We have not yet started preparing a campaign	9	27%
It is a priority in our local/regional strategy	7	21%
It is not a priority in our local/ regional strategy	14	42%
Other	6	18%
Total	33	

In addition to these findings, some LRAs commented on why they think it was or was not possible for them to support the information campaign regarding the 2014 European Elections. For example, one respondent of those who stated that it was not a priority explained: *"It is not a priority at this moment. We lack communication and communication resources regarding our own issues on the local level (such as urban-planning, etc.). European decisions and regulations appear too far away from the citizens and this perception should be tackled by EU institutions. Every institution has to look for its own priority."* In the same vein, another respondent answered: *"The priority are the local elections next year. But we can perhaps find additional room to communicate it."* Another commented that they preferred that they are "politically neutral", implying that informing citizens about the European Union was a political statement. Yet, another respondent reported: *"The election campaign of MEPs is done directly by themselves and there is no candidate among our regional representatives (Council Members). This remains irrelevant for me as a spokes-person of the region."* While some of these more detailed comments point to the **non-prioritisation of the campaign as a question of additional work** on the local level, other answers indicate that an information campaign can be mistaken for political campaigning. However, other **LRAs also answered that they are very much aware of the upcoming elections** and indicate that they would support an information campaign under certain conditions. For example, one official commented: *"We would like to have more support from the EU on what to communicate."* And another respondent reported: *"We have limited financial and human resources but we are starting planning a campaign."* Others pointed out that local or regional information offices would be engaged in communicating the information provided by the information campaign for the 2014 European Elections. In this regard, officials commented*: "The Europe Direct office in our Region will definitely support the dissemination policy concerning the EP elections."* And another one added: *"It is part of our work as a Europe Direct network."*

Overall, the findings present that LRAs are either not convinced that the information campaign for the 2014 European Elections should become part of their overall communication, or they do integrate it despite scarce financial and human resources. Others build on already existing institutions, such as Europe Direct offices and networks, to disseminate the information of the campaign. It was also indicated that more i**nformation on what was to be communicated should be highlighted** by EU institutional bodies. Hence, the findings point out that further efforts need to be undertaken to convince LRAs of the need to communicate the EU and more specifically to inform about the need to go to vote during the European elections in 2014 (see also Part 2 of this study), and to identify which additional means local and regional authorities required to act as

communicators and information givers in the context of the 2014 European Elections.

3.3.4 *Additional support of LRAs to Communicate on the EU*

The previous chapters of this study have shown that local and regional authorities do either already communicate on the EU or they are willing to do, but see, amongst others, their current financial or human resources situations as being detrimental in that regard. Others pointed out that they would need more detailed information on what they had to communicate in the context of an information campaign on the 2014 European Elections. Yet, another group of LRAs still needs to be persuaded to incorporate the campaign as belonging to their local or regional strategy.

Overall, it is interesting to see what LRAs actually expect from the EU Institutions in terms of additional support. When asked what support LRAs expected from EU Institutions that could lead to more engagement, they answered the following, however, multiple answers were possible (Table 20): On the one hand, 74% of the LRAs asked for more collaboration and exchange of views how we can link the communication of the EU institutions to those efforts on the local and regional level. One respondent specified that *"it would be very important to get support to make partnerships with the newspapers."* Secondly, 68% of the LRAs asked for more financial means. Thirdly, 59% asked for more knowledge on what exactly needs to be communicated. For example, one respondent specified in his comments that, if possible, experts from Brussels could take part at local events. Finally, and relatedly, they asked for more information materials (47%). One local official clarified in this regard: *"We can communicate the message, but we cannot develop the communication material. Moreover, the communication material needs to be good because as a local authority we share the identification with the material and seen as responsible."* And another official added: *"Most of the information we receive is too abstract for the citizen; the EU needs to translate a general message to the everyday life of an EU citizen."*

Table 20: Support from the EU Institutions that could lead to more LRA engagement

	#	%
More financial means	23	68%
More knowledge on what exactly needs to be communicated	21	59%
More collaboration and exchange of views how we can link the communication of the EU institutions to those efforts on the local and regional level	25	74%
More information materials	16	47%
Other	2	6%
Total		**34**

The findings show that the LRAs are actually expecting additional support in all different categories: in terms of more coordination, in terms of more financial and knowledge support and in terms of information materials (Table 20). This also implies that the **communication on the information campaign needs to be fostered by EU Institutions**: in terms of concrete actions, knowledge supply and potential financial support. In addition, LRAs that have already started were asked to express which media they plan to use to disseminate information in the context of a campaign on the 2014 European Elections (Table 21). Similar to earlier findings (see Table 8), the findings highlight the use of communication of information on the official website (46%) and via digital newsletters (29%), Facebook (21%), and Twitter (13%). However, LRAs also plan to make use of more traditional ways of communications: Information days and Information sessions with MEPs, local and regional politicians and administrative experts (33%), press communication (29%) and advertisements in newspapers (21%). Also, 17% indicated they did not know and even 29% indicated that there was no information available. The latter results correspond with the finding that **many LRAs have not yet started with developing a campaign**. The other results point to findings presented earlier in this study (Table7). Similar to the findings related to communication on the EU in the context of EU projects, we can see that LRAs plan to use several tools – digital, social, and more traditional print media – to communicate information. While websites becomes increasingly important, they are not the only communication channel which LRAs consider using in their campaign. Moreover, dialogues with citizens, (as they are taking place during information days and information sessions with MEPs, local, and regional politicians and administrative experts) are considered an important tool.

Table 21: LRA use of media in the campaign about the European Elections 2014

	#	%
Information on the official website of the city/region	11	46%
Information flyers which citizens receive in the administration (e.g. city halls)	5	21%
Information citizens received via digital newsletters (email)	7	29%
Twitter	3	13%
Facebook	5	21%
Other social media	1	4%
Information citizens received via postal newsletters	0	0%
Press communication	7	29%
Posters in the streets	3	13%
Advertisement campaigns in local newspapers	5	21%
Information days and Information sessions with MEPs, local and regional politicians and administrative experts	8	33%
No information available	7	29%
Don't know	4	17%
Other	1	4%
Total		**24**

In total, the latter findings indicate that LRAs that are planning to have a campaign, show ideas on how to inform the citizens. Ideally, the support of the EU is rather needed in guaranteeing that local and regional capacities are not overburdened by an EU campaign on the 2014 elections (i.e. financial and human resources). Moreover, the support of the EU is also needed in **filling the channels of communication with substance** and to coordinate with and inform communication officials on the local and regional level about the need to communicate and what to communicate. In this respect, stimulating MEP and experts dialogues and a good distribution of clear information materials that point to the added value of the EU and the need for citizens to vote for the European Parliament becomes an essential building block in convincing and enabling local and regional authorities.

3.4 Findings

This above overview on the communication potential of LRAs points to some key preliminary findings:

- Based on the LRAs' current practice to communication on the EU, there is a large **willingness to communicate on the EU**;
- LRAs' communication on the EU is largely related **collaboration with other cities and regions** in their own Member State, or with the EU Institutions;
- LRA communication on the EU is mostly **related to EU funded projects**;
- LRAs use a **variety of communication channels** in their effort to communicate on EU financed projects, Communication via their websites, but also press communication stand out as most often used tools. However, their communication tool-kits go beyond these;
- LRAs make frequently use of various communication tools. These range **from information on their websites, to press communication, social media to special events and information days**;
- **LRAs evaluate most of their communication tools as effective**, while certain tools are seen as more effective than others (i.e. website, press communication, special events and information days);
- LRAs overall present themselves as being in the **position to act as information givers on Europe** and to add to the European Parliament communication strategies in the context of the 2014 European elections. This corresponds to earlier findings that show that local and regional representatives are seen as being "best placed" to explain the EU (Flash Eurobarometer 356);
- LRAs indicate that their l**evel of communication on the EU has increased** since 2009;
- LRAs show **some reluctance and indifference to commit** to supporting the information campaign for the 2014 European Elections. These findings correspond with the largely absent communication of LRAs during the 2009 elections;
- LRAs report that they can often use parts of their communication budgets, but in general the **budgets for communicating on the EU should be increased**;
- Many LRAs indicate that the 2014 information campaign is not a priority for the local or regional strategy, that they have **not yet started preparing a campaign** or that they have not the right amount of people working on such a campaign.

In general, the summarised results mentioned above point to a mixed picture concerning the communication potential of LRAs. On the one hand, a vast majority of LRAs are already communicating on the EU. They indicate that they do so mainly in the context of EU funded projects and in collaboration with other cities, regions or EU Institutions. However, when it comes to communicating the European elections there is either a reported lack of willingness or indecisiveness involved. In this respect, there is the finding that, on the one hand, the LRAs did increase their efforts to communicate on the EU from 2009 onwards and see the need to increase communication budgets on the EU, while, on the other hand, they express **a lack of prioritisation and resources**. At the same time, it should also be taken into account that LRAs largely expressed the view that there should be more financial means, **more collaboration and exchange of views how one can link the communication of the EU institutions to those efforts on the local and regional level,** and more knowledge on what exactly needs to be communicated. As a conclusion, this part of the study shows that in order to communicate on the 2014 European Elections, LRAs highlight there need of more support by the EU Institutions; the kind of support expected is not only linked to more financial means, it also implies **a better understanding of how LRAs coordinate the communication** in general and what they need to communicate more specifically.

4 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study analysed the willingness, ability, resources and potential need for additional support of LRAs in the context of communicating the EU, and more specifically in the context of the information campaign for the 2014 European elections.

The study shows that in times of crisis citizens have become more and more disfranchised from the EU and many **EU citizens doubt whether their individual voice actually matters** in the EU. At the same time, the EU needs the active participation of EU citizens in EU elections in order to strengthen its legitimacy. While the voter turnouts have continuously declined in European Elections over the last decades, the EU has an interest in fostering greater voter participation than in the previous elections. The Institutions should regard the upcoming information campaign on **the 2014 European elections to mobilize European citizens** to vote. To this end, European Institutions like the European Parliament and the European Commission will communicate the need for individual EU citizens to go and vote.

The study has shown that the European Parliament and the European Commission do want to **communicate the need to for EU citizens to be aware of the Elections by focusing on the value added of the EU** in specific topical areas. At the same time, in an information campaign the empowerment of the EP since the Lisbon Treaty should be accentuated to **convince voters that their active participation can have an important impact** on EU politics. While the EP has already prepared a campaign, the European Commission has not yet prepared its own actions. The European Commission sees the **EP in the lead of preparing the overall campaign;** it is expected that the Commission will start developing its tools and actions once the EP strategy has been published. The European Parliament, European Commission and CoR need to **work closely together to coordinate messages** and concrete examples that focus on the valued added of the EU and the important and influential role of the EP in order to mobilize EU citizens.

The European Parliament and the European Commission have pointed out that **a diverse toolkit of communication channels are necessary** to reach out to as many voters as possible. While social media gets more and more important, more traditional ways of communication are equally important. **Different communication tools reach out to different audiences** and this needs to be taken into account during the campaign. In order to choose the right communication tools, it is essential to focus on which audiences are to be targeted and which message is supposed to be sent.

The CoR has declared its commitment to contribute to the campaign with its own communication tools and to **facilitate all possible links to LRAs** in the context of the upcoming elections. The study highlights that a decentralized communication strategy can be most effective when reaching out to EU citizens. LRAs are seen as especially relevant partners in communicating on Europe. Hence, the overarching strategy on the EU level is to **foster decentralized communication** and to use it as a tool for a more effective communication campaign in the context of the 2014 elections. The decentralization aspect of the campaign needs to be emphasized. This message should be communicated to all possible LRAs throughout the campaign.

Against this background, the question was if local and regional authorities are able and willing to support the communication on the European Union. Do they see the need to communicate and inform citizens on the upcoming European Elections in 2014?

Based on the LRAs' current practice to communicate the EU the study shows that we can identify **a significant willingness to communicate** on the EU in general. LRAs' communication on the EU is largely related to the EU funded projects they are currently conducting. In other words, **LRAs need to be convinced why it is important for them to contribute to the EU election information campaign**.

The latter seems is an essential task because currently **many LRAs indicate that the 2014 information campaign is not a priority** for the local or regional strategy. They have not yet started preparing a campaign or do not have the necessary amount of people working on such a campaign. In this regard, the study found that LRAs show **some reluctance and indifference** to commit themselves to support the information campaign for the 2014 European elections. These findings correspond with the largely absent communication of LRAs during the 2009 elections. In order to truly decentralize the campaign on the 2014 European elections, **more efforts need to be spent not only to convince voters on the local level to go to vote, but also to convince LRAs to become facilitators** of such communication. The CoR and CoR members should focus on establishing an ad-hoc dialogue in order to win LRAs as messengers and facilitators of information in the upcoming information campaign.

The study pointed to the fact that LRAs do indeed use a variety of communication channels in their effort to communicate on EU financed projects. Communication via their websites and also press communication are the most often used tools. The variety of tools LRAs use is very much mirroring the idea of the EP and the European Commission that a good and effective

campaign needs to be based on a variety of communication tools. What is more, LRAs evaluate most of their communication tools as effective, while certain tools are seen as more effective than others (i.e. website, press communication, special events and information days). As such the LRAs do present themselves as being in the position to act as information givers on Europe and to add to the European Parliament communication strategies in the context of the 2014 European elections. Building on the existing expertise is an asset in reaching out to citizens during the upcoming campaign. The EU institutions could use this expertise to their advantage.

The previous findings correspond to the overall finding that LRAs have increased their communication on the EU since 2009. The question is whether they are willing to **increase the level of communication on the European elections in 2014** too. LRAs do report that they can often use parts of their communication budgets for Communication on the EU. However, LRAs think that budgets for communicating on the EU need to be increased. More precisely, many LRAs indicate that while the 2014 information campaign is not a priority for the local or regional strategy, they also do not have the necessary amount of people working on such a campaign.

The mentioned results point to a mixed picture of the communication potential of LRAs. On the one hand, a vast majority of LRAs are already communicating on the EU. They indicate that they do communicate on the EU mainly in the context of EU funded projects and in collaboration with other cities, regions or EU Institutions. However, when it comes to communicating the European elections there is either **a reported lack of willingness or indecisiveness** involved. In this respect, the report points to the fact that, on the one hand, LRAs did increase their efforts to communicate on the EU from 2009 onwards and see the need to increase communication budgets on the EU. On the other hand, they express a lack of prioritisation and resources in the context of the 2014 European elections. This current **lack of commitment needs to be overcome** if the decentralized communication campaign is supposed to be effective.

It should also be taken into account that LRAs expressed largely the view that there should be **more financial means**, **more collaboration and exchange of views** how one can link the communication of the EU institutions to those efforts on the local and regional level and more **knowledge on what exactly needs to be communicated**. The study shows that in order to communicate on the 2014 European elections, LRAs highlight their need of more support from the EU institutions. The kind of support expected is not only linked to more financial means, it also implies a better understanding of LRAs on how to coordinate the communication in general and what they need to communicate

more specifically.   Actors on the European level should take these concerns into account and think about how LRAs can actually be part of increased communication flows and information.

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