



Report of the Communications Network Meeting, 17-18 September 2015

“Building a network to bring about impact”

This meeting, which took place in Eurodiaconia offices (rue Joseph II, 166 – 1000 Brussels, Belgium) gathered 13 participants, mostly communication officers of Eurodiaconia member organisations. This was the first time that a face-to-face meeting of the communications network was organised. The aim of this gathering was to build a network of national and regional communications and press correspondents in diaconal organisations. The expected outcomes of this network are a stronger impact on decision-making; enhanced mobilization of the wider audience and increased visibility of diaconal organisations in the media.

On the first day, Eurodiaconia’s approach to communication as a membership organisation working at EU level as well as flagship communication initiatives run by members were presented. Also, the group divided into small groups to work on their identity and the ways they think that they are seen by the wider audience. This intensive day was followed by a nice dinner at a restaurant. On the second day, in order to look at what is being done outside of our network in terms of communication, two external speakers were invited and took the floor, from Solidar and the EU office of the Red Cross, who both presented communication campaigns involving the EU office and the national members to address social justice in Europe. Then, the group split into small groups to brainstorm new ideas to ease the information flow bottom-up and top-down, which local subjects are relevant to be shared at the European level and which European policy developments are pertinent to be shared at the national level.

The meeting started with a meditation made by Victoria Munsey, focusing on the happiness provided by helping people need to the social worker, to the volunteer as well as emphasising the concerning gap between what is needed to restore people’s dignity and our weak resources. This gap can be filled in through communication activities aiming to raise awareness, change policies or brand its organisation.





This meditation was followed by a Tour de table, where each participant presented his/her organisation and its communications' stakes and challenges. The participants, all communication officers were the following:

Mr	Derobert	Nicolas	Eurodiaconia	Belgium
Ms	Baciu	Lavinia	EU Red Cross	Belgium
Ms	Broniarczyk	Emilia	Ecumenical EU Office	Sweden
Ms	Burbach-Tasso	Ute	Diakonie Deutschland	Germany
Ms	Jenner	Suzanne	Ecumenical EU Office	Sweden
Ms	Lassen	Anna	Ersta diakoni	Sweden
Ms	Munsey	Victoria	Diaconia Valdese	Italy
Ms	Oyon	Eva	The Red Cross EU Office	Belgium
Ms	Rastl-Kircher	Roberta	Diakonie Österreich	Austria
Ms	Terzikyan	Anahit	WCC Armenia Round Table Foundation	Armenia
Mr	Zaar	Erik	Bräcke diakoni	Sweden
Ms	Epinat	Nellie	EAPN	Belgium
Ms	Graus	Ischi	Solidar	Belgium

Among Eurodiaconia members, the organisations have a different size and do not relate to public authorities and to mainstream media in the same way. However, they all face the same challenges of struggling to reach out to the mainstream media and overcome some of the prejudices cast on Churches in a secularising Europe. In order to be heard, they underline the need to hook to the wider public's momentous interests and demonstrate their added value for the society.



Presentation: Eurodiaconia: presentation of the network, its communication approach and tools

Nicolas Derobert, Communications officer of Eurodiaconia, started by giving a presentation of Eurodiaconia's office activities, its policy priorities, its activities to network its members and the diversity of its membership. Then, Nicolas Derobert presented his communication approach for Eurodiaconia as a European membership organisation in order to reinforce the information flow between the European level and the national levels.

This information loop consists of two parallel processes, he explained.

Firstly, from the members to their EU office (bottom up), Eurodiaconia intends to communicate more on national and local actions to support marginalized people, people with disabilities or older people, in order to value grass-roots initiatives and avoid disseminating solely EU institutional information. The first objective for Eurodiaconia is to attract a wider audience and “reconnect global” decisions and local impacts, to reconcile European policy and concrete developments on the ground. The second objective to ensure feedback loop between the promotion of EU norms and concrete actions taking place because of these norms.

Secondly, from the EU office to the members (top-down), Eurodiaconia wishes that its members could further commit to disseminating EU level policy developments related to social and health care policies as well as the policy statements of Eurodiaconia on these developments in their national and local communication channels. Nicolas depicts two advantages to this: show at the national level that members are not isolated, that their opinions are supported by a wider network (as far as the office's and member's messages match) and implement what he called a “sandwich strategy” in terms of lobbying.

About this “sandwich strategy”, Nicolas explained that because of the principle of subsidiarity and that the decision-making by unanimity in the EU council with 28 different member states, national governments remain the key decision makers in the field of social policy. It is therefore important that national NGOs address them directly, and in that way, support the lobbying efforts made at the EU level. The sandwich strategy is a process of building bridges between top-down lobbying and bottom-up lobbying. For example, Eurodiaconia statements sent to the EU presidency could be also sent by the member located in the country where the presidency is from (or the other way round), and one statement signed jointly by Eurodiaconia secretariat and one member could be envisaged...

Beyond advocacy, Nicolas stressed that an important actor must not be overlooked: the media. In the field of migration in particular, it is clear that public opinion impacts national policy-making on the matter. It is therefore critical to raise awareness in the mainstream media at the same time as we send messages to policy-makers, in order to pressure them.



To summarise the information loop and sandwich strategy approaches, Nicolas proposed the following matrix:



Finally, Nicolas reminded the participants of the existing Eurodiaconia communication tools. The internal communication tools are: mailing for members, briefing for members, weekly and monthly e-news (general and special interest ones), the network meetings and the AGM. The external communication tools are: website, policy papers and social media (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn).



Identity: who are we and what do we think others think of us?

Participants divided into working groups featuring who they are (Values, history, organisation, social commitments...), what they think others think of them (Our competitors, our funders, our users, the wider audience) and how they can fill the gap between their identity and the way they are seen and considered by other groups.

Concerning their identity, participants have identified the following elements.

The reason why they engage with society is their Christian values as well as their conviction of the universality of human rights, of the equality and dignity of all human beings. Likewise, participants pointed out the fact that they are also committed through diaconia to ecumenical understanding. In historical terms, they emphasised that identity can vary depending on whether the Church they are related to is a minority Church (which often have endured persecutions in the past) or a majority Church (which has enjoyed more security and protection). In structural terms, participants argue that identity is different if the organisation is an entity that directly runs services or an umbrella organisation that represents its members at an upper level. According to the participants, the purpose of their action is to support people in need, particularly the most vulnerable, regardless of their origins, beliefs or absence of beliefs.

Regarding the perceptions of external groups, discussions focused mainly on the prejudices that member organisations can face in their national contexts. In Austria, many young people do not know the existence nor the activities of Diaconia Austria and in Armenia, NGOs have a bad reputation, deplored the concerned attendees. In Sweden, diaconal actors are well-known, have a good brand, but the Swedish participants regret that their professionalism is insufficiently seen and considered. Many are worried that the wider public can see them as religious actors, more than proper solidarity stakeholders. They also indicated that without visibility and a serious reputation, it is more and more difficult to benefit from secure funding nowadays.

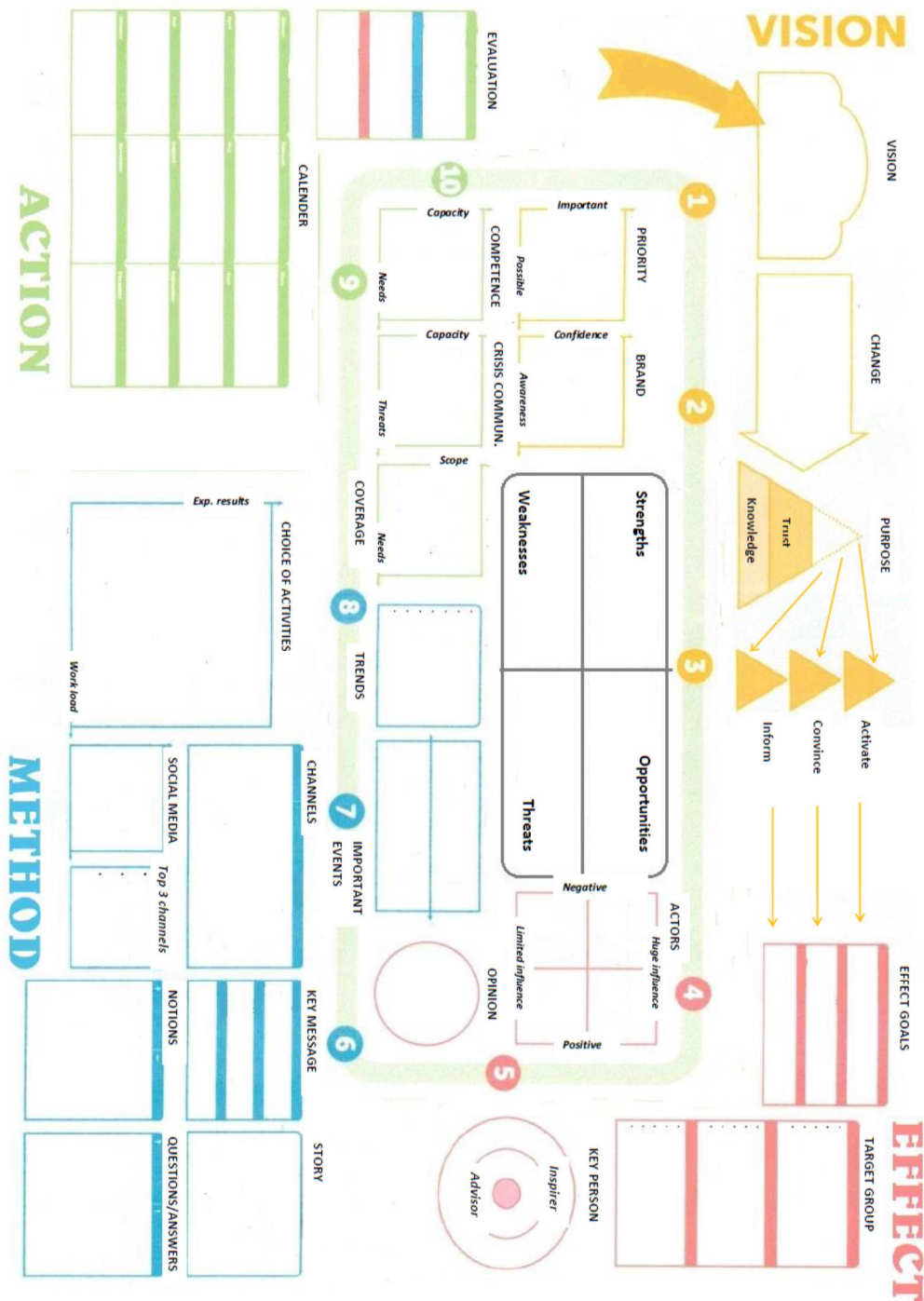
Regarding solutions to fill in the gap between their identity and the ways others perceive them, it was agreed that a brand communication strategy is required to raise public's awareness of their positive contributions to social cohesion, by improving media relations, by sticking to the themes that the media are looking for timely and by using social media like Facebook to convey photos and touching stories (testimonies of users or professionals on the ground). It was also suggested that each member communication officer could become an EU ambassador. Furthermore, they said that their profile could be raised should they get their audience to acknowledge them as experts, constructive public authorities' partners and effective agents when it comes to managing social or humanitarian crisis.



Roundtable: showcasing members' communication initiatives

Some participants prepared a short presentation on one or several initiatives: in terms of public relations (press relations, social media and support of advocacy work) or internal communications (publications to the staff or members).

The floor was firstly given to Suzanne Jenner, from the Ecumenical EU office of Sweden, who gave a theoretical presentation on good practices in managing a communications strategy. In the presented communication strategy matrix that you can find below, the communication project cycle starts with a vision and ends with the action implementation, through the analysis of expected outcomes and the setting of a method (mobilised communication channels and tools).





In summary, here are some of the most important questions that a communications officer has to ask him/herself before launching a communication campaign:

- Which group do I target? Policy makers, wider public, sympathisers, advisors, people that need to be convinced...?
- Try not to address more than 3 messages in one communication initiative. And what concepts to attach to these messages?
- Q&A to myself: Why do I do this? Who decided we should do this? When is the appropriate time to do this? How does it relate to other campaigns?
- Storytelling: what is the good narrative?
- Channels: Do I use my own channels? Or do I use other channels (bought ones vs. deserved ones)?

The second speaker was Roberta Rastl-Kircher, communications and press officer at Diaconia Austria, who presented two campaigns that her organisation has recently run. The first campaign called “Diaconia brings hope to the people”, run from November 2014 until February 2015, aimed to raise awareness to the Austrian citizens of the positive initiatives run by Diaconia Austria in supporting people in need during Christmas times. It consisted of displaying huge posters (2000 in total) in the streets of Austrian cities, showing the faces of different types of user groups: older persons, refugees, etc. A 36-second TV spot was also created and broadcast on the main Austrian TV channels, in cinemas, on the screens of gas stops, of the Vienna University and of train stations. A 30-second Radio spot was also broadcast on the main national radio stations. Also, advertisements were bought in the newspaper. A separate website focusing only on this campaign was also set up. Roberta explained that she also used the social media channels like Facebook to reach out the public. On 12 November 2014, a press conference was organised to reach the journalists and obtain some press coverage of the campaign, which proved very effective.

Throughout this campaign, Diaconia Austria did an advocacy work by addressing statements to the Austrian authorities. The messages addressed to policy-makers were more focused than the ones conveyed in the media campaign. Synergies between these two parallel initiatives – awareness raising and advocacy – proved successful. Moreover, Roberta stressed how important it is to link advertising and campaigning, transforming mere publicity or self-promotion into concrete engagements.

The second campaign titled “Finding a New Home for Refugees” is currently taking place as the refugee crisis in Europe is worsening. It consists of media relations to convince the journalists to portray refugees who found support and accommodation thanks to Diaconia Austria. Also, political messages accessible to the widest public possible have been disseminated through the mainstream media.

Roberta explained that this activity of providing refugees with social support and search of accommodation among Austrian citizens is not new, but she seized the media opportunity of the so-called “refugee crisis” to communicate about this type of activity that Diaconia Austria has delivered since a long time, since unfortunately the shortage of housing for refugees in destitution



is a long lasting issue in Austria. Last but not least, by launching this campaign, Diaconia Austria could find additional households to host more refugees.

The third speaker was Ute Burbach-Tasso, press officer at Diaconia Germany, and she portrayed a communication campaign that Diakonie Deutschland ran in 2014 to raise the wider public's awareness of the fact that older people are increasingly at risk of poverty and therefore require special attention both socially and in terms of quality care delivery. This campaign consisted of making and disseminating blue boxes – that recall the shape and colour of the Diakonie Deutschland's logo - containing postcards, posters and letters to engage with the wider public (with the possibility for the public to send them to their local or national authorities). This campaign both raised the profile of Diakonie among the German population and further engaged the public to support older people and advocate for quality social services. This campaign also featured on Diakonie's website and Ute stressed that it is becoming extremely important to use infographics nowadays rather than long texts in order to catch the attention of the recipients. She also insisted that two years of preparation were required before the launch of this national campaign.

The last speaker was Erik Zaar from Brücke diakoni in Sweden, who featured original public campaigns on minority groups supported by the organisation, such as Roma people and migrants. To get the message through, Erik explains that our messages have to relate to current events, provoke the target audience and reinforce our identity. Here is below an example of provocative communications.



Brücke diakoni

They can stay where they are

We need new solutions to solve old problems. And we like to think differently. Like when we saw asylum seekers having trouble getting to their health center, to get the care they are entitled to. Said and done. Our new mobile health care team finds the asylum seekers instead – to provide care that reaches many more.

Fresh thinking – that's diacony to us

On this flier, the headline is voluntarily provocative in the sense that it uses a xenophobic message which later in the text is being broken down and opposed. This communication aims to reach out for adverse people in order to convince them of the added value of people being stereotyped by media, politics and the mainstream society.



Presentation: “Advocating social justice in the EU with national members”

Ischi Grauss, communication and events coordinator at a partner organisation called Solidar, started her presentation by introducing the participants to this European network of 60 national NGOs which works in three main areas: social affairs, international cooperation and education and lifelong learning. The overall objective of Solidar is to voice the concerns of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions by carrying out active lobbying, project management and coordination, policy monitoring and awareness-raising across its different policy areas. Ischi then went on presenting the communication tools they use: website, weekly roundups, a mobile application, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube), emails (press releases, statements and targeted emails) and events.

Here are the communication challenges for a membership organisation that she stressed:

- Make a correct selection of which tools to use for which purposes
- Wanting to communicate too much
- Remaining too descriptive
- Different opinions among member organisations
- Too much focus on one specific phase (awareness, influence, action, impact)
- Evaluate regularly communication results

Solidar uses policy briefings, publications and electronic messages to address its various audiences: members, media and policy-makers. To reach out to journalists in particular, Ischi recommended us to choose the right topic and determine the moment when we can push our messages. The messages should remain simple, concise and focussed. The targeted audience should be narrowed down to a few very interested people. One message should not contain more than one information. She explained that her communication activities are integrated to the advocacy work of her organisation towards EU institutions and liberal Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). To maximise chances of being read, she advised us to send personalised emails. The objective of political communication is to get a written reply from the policy makers aimed at. Once the reply is received, she said she tries to come back to them. She also pointed out that oftentimes internally policy officers would be keen on her to send up several recommendations at once to targeted MEPs, and that she has to persuade them that it is more effective to send them one by one at different moments. Also, she has to reach a compromise to make the message less institutional or technical and more attractive to political actors. She considers herself as a “translator of policy officers to the public”.



Presentation: “Communicating with members to the external world”

Eva Oyón, Communications officer at the EU Office of the Red Cross, depicted her NGO’s strategy to communicate with the member organisations (28 National Red Cross Societies in Europe and IFRC). EU Red Cross works in the areas of social inclusion, migration and asylum, disaster management as well as international development. The mission of the office is to heighten the Red Cross influence, increase EU resources and serve their members.

Eva first introduced us to the communication tools available in her organisation: website, Facebook, Twitter, publications (position papers, event summaries, recommendations to the EU, EU consultations and external collaborations), events (internal events, external events), and media relations (press releases, interviews, press conferences, RCEU statements and joint opinion pieces). Policy papers are always built collectively with the members (sent for amendments and then approved by the board). Joint opinion pieces are also co-written by the EU office and the members.

Then Eva presented two types of campaigns: a global campaign at EU level (EU office mobilized only) and a pan-European campaign (with the members).

The first campaign “Protect humanity, Stop difference” consisted of a social media strategy mainly. #ProtectHumanity was tagged to every message related to this campaign and circulated through Twitter. Regarding the content, each tweet emphasized concrete flagship initiatives run by member organisations.

Then Eva allocated the rest of her speech time to describing a pan-European campaign run by the EU office of the Red Cross in cooperation with its member organisations. A campaign “Disaster Resilience” was declined in 12 countries and translated into 11 languages. Funded by the European Commission, this project received considerable resources. An interactive web-documentary was made. Social media were used and the comments of the internet users were moderated. The campaign was advertised on the web (Google ads, etc.). Events were broadcast by web streaming and Eva and her peers in the member organisations also contacted the European and national media respectively. She stressed it is equally important to evaluate the outreach of the campaign, using the media statistics as well as information monitoring services. Adding up the total visitors of the website, social media, online news media and events can give a picture of the overall number of people reached through the campaign (more than 1, 25 million people). However, quantitative data are not enough to evaluate properly.

To involve the members throughout the campaign, Eva explained that she organized telephone conferences on a regular basis (once a fortnight) and tagged the messages to the members’ accounts on Twitter (in their language).



15 conferences were organised in various European cities to raise awareness to the populations. In this campaign, 10 member organisations actively worked together.

Here were the successes of this pan-European campaign:

- Collaborating with other member organisations
- Social media was a good platform
- Strong and active coordination
- High-quality and impactful visual materials
- Significant impact/impressions of the campaign

Here were the weaknesses of this pan-European campaign:

- Translations: quality problems and hard to get done
- Lack of financial and human resources
- Timing
- Staff turnaround/changes in personnel
- Lack of organisational support of the member organisations
- Relatability of topic: resilience is very abstract for many people

Eva came to the conclusion that in spite of the limited impact of the campaign, it nevertheless achieved to remarkably increase the member organisations feeling of belonging.

Workshop: “Building one network of national and regional communications correspondents”

Participants split into working groups to discuss, in a bottom-up approach, ideas to provide European communications with local content and, in a top-down approach, ideas to provide National/Regional communications with European content. Opportunities and challenges were identified in both dynamics. In the end, participants discussed themes and possible ways to implement “Glocal” campaigns.

In a bottom-up approach, the participants insisted that the information that should be passed on to the EU level is the one that can meet the other members’ interests or needs. They added that shared national communication resources also have to be congruent with momentous EU policy developments or media interests. For example, Germany is currently campaigning on welcoming the Syrian refugees and could ask the EU office to disseminate it as this subject is also central in EU current policy developments. Offline communication tools like websites, social media and emails should be privileged. In terms of contents, these should reflect on the concrete activities implemented on the ground.



However, two challenges have been underlined: coordination and translation. Passing the information on to an upper level suggests that there is a coordination mechanism at the national level: indeed member organisations are very often national offices that manage local social services, and sometimes some of these social services can be directly members of Eurodiaconia. Also, some members can be umbrella organisations. Should the members of umbrella organisations or of managed social services get in touch with the EU office directly to propose articles? Should the information flow be centralised? Participants said they would ask their members or social services on the ground to send them more information, which shall be selected by the national representations and transmitted to the EU office. The other issue pointed out was the language problem, except for those members who already communicate in English like in the Republic of Armenia for example. Participants generally admitted it was tricky to find translation resources for every text they wish to circulate through European channels.

In a top-down approach, participants said they found it very useful to receive information on grants and funds that are relevant to them. Participants also made a case for not receiving any news from the Eurodiaconia office on Friday afternoons, since most of them leave their office between noon and 2pm on that day. They argued instead that they would prefer to receive them on Tuesday or Wednesday morning. Regarding emails, they insisted that the subject of the email was what mattered the most: therefore choosing the right subject line is key to get the message across to the membership. Ticking the button “priority” is an asset to draw the recipient’s attention, they added. Concerning the weekly e-newsletter, participants argued that its content was not always relevant for communication officers. They find it more useful to receive one topic emails, as well as an editorial dealing with one topic only. These emails have to illustrate concrete topics and the political stakes. Also, participants said they would appreciate to continue to have face-to-face meetings and that they approve having one communications network meeting a year. Beyond this annual meeting, they said that it would be appreciated to have a virtual conference in autumn so that the EU office could share with the members’ communication officers what the EU priorities are for the following year, and then allow members to anticipate what the communications’ needs will be at the European level.

When asked about campaigns or projects the EU office and the members could do together, participants identified two main subjects: refugees/migrants, and Roma/EU mobile citizens coming from Central/Eastern countries. All refugees and Roma-related actions (projects, declarations, press releases, statements) in the network could be further monitored at the national level and transmitted to the EU level and, the other way around, Eurodiaconia statements and press releases related to this momentous topic could be further disseminated at the national and local level. All agreed that pursuing such parallel initiatives are likely to reinforce both the EU office’s and members’ visibility and brand in Europe. Besides campaigns and in terms of advocacy work, participants thought it would be a good idea to send joint letters to national governments (signed by Eurodiaconia and member(s)) concerning EU presidency or any other EU policy processes, in order to increase our impact on national as well as European policy-making.