

*Brussels, 15 June 2010
D(2010)0942-A/1243*

Dear Ms Ebner,

Thank you for your letter of 24 March 2010 to President Barroso, Vice-President Šefčovič, Commissioner Vassiliou and me, which has received my fullest attention.

I agree with you on the need to continue to develop and strengthen dialogue with citizens at the EU level. This is why the Commission proposed a Regulation on the Citizens' initiative, on 31 March.

In addition, the Commission is committed to an open and inclusive policy-making approach and to fully implement the principle of participatory democracy set out in the Lisbon Treaty.

The following dialogue and consultation mechanisms have been put in place progressively by the Commission over the past few years:

- A large number of structured and regular dialogue processes with stakeholders' organisations are managed by the Commission's Directorates-General across all EU policy areas.*
- As early as 2001, the quality, as well as the open and inclusive dimension of the Commission's consultation processes was enshrined in a set of standards stipulating clear rules on conducting public consultations.*
- These standards were subject to a wide public debate in 2006, following the Green paper on the European transparency initiative. Since then, the Commission has reinforced the quality check of its consultation processes and the Commission's impact assessment board has regularly scrutinized this aspect.*
- The Commission, open and transparent in close cooperation with stakeholders, will continue to improve the quality of its dialogue and consultation mechanisms as these provide an essential contribution to evidence-based policy-making.*

*Ms Gina Ebner
President
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Your request to re-launch the process for adopting a statute for a European Association, will deserve thorough examination. As you are aware, following years of deadlock in the European Parliament and Council any future proposal in this area will require a further study and preparation.

Regarding your call for a strong Lifelong Learning Programme, I should stress that the idea of added value for Europe and the European dimension constitutes one of the basic pillars of the Programme. The need to create a sense of European citizenship based on human rights and democracy, and to encourage tolerance and respect for other peoples and cultures are specific objectives of the Programme.

I agree that there continues to be a relatively low interest in participating in European Parliament elections. Further effort is needed to better involve EU citizens in the democratic life of the Union. The Commission is committed to making it easier for the citizens to exercise their political rights, to ensure they are adequately informed and to encourage participation in democratic life.

The move of the "Citizenship Policy Unit" from DG Education and Culture to DG Communication should be viewed together with the creation of the new portfolio "Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship". This move reinforces coordination and increases synergies between work carried out by DG Justice, Freedom and Security, in accordance with Articles 20 to 25 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and by DG Communication.

To feel part of the political project, citizens must be provided with relevant information on how the EU works and which issues are at stake. Civil society representatives play an essential role in channelling citizens' views into the decision-making process ensuring that policies better fit citizens' needs. The Europe for Citizens programme will focus increasingly on policy priorities providing essential input about what is relevant for citizens and encouraging public debate on European Union policies. The preparatory work regarding the Europe for Citizens programme has started. As part of this work, the Commission is organising a consultation meeting on 22 June to which your organisation has been invited. Following on from this meeting, a public online consultation will be launched. I look forward to receiving your contribution.

I attach great importance to developing European Citizenship and am keen to raise awareness of tangible benefits for the EU's citizens. It is important to reinforce citizens' rights and to encourage them to make full use of their democratic rights. Later this year the European Commission will present a Citizenship Report identifying obstacles citizens face when exercising their rights and propose concrete solutions to remove such obstacles. We have recently launched a public consultation inviting all relevant stakeholders to contribute their views and expertise on how to achieve tangible benefits for all Europeans. I would also be most interested in reading your views on this.

Yours sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a long horizontal stroke that loops back and ends with a sharp hook.