

Statement by Mr. Alexander Marschik, Deputy Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations, on Behalf of the European Union (24 April 2006)

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Croatia, Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro and the EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area as well as Ukraine and Moldova align themselves with this statement.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank USG Tharoor and the Department of Public Information (DPI) for the timely presentation of concise and detailed reports requested by the Committee in its 27th session. These reports provide member states with a good overview of the work of the DPI and will be of practical use in our deliberations.

The European Union expresses its appreciation for the constructive interaction between the DPI and the members of the COI. DPI plays an essential role towards our shared objective of providing a focused information service of high quality to the UN family, media outlets all over the world and interested citizens.

The public outreach activity for the United Nations is a task of great importance. Without informing the world on the UN's activities and publicising the UN's achievements globally we cannot expect to have the support of all peoples for its mission. This is also the case when the UN is seeking to improve its effectiveness, redress shortcomings and pursue ambitious reforms.

Reorientation and Rationalisation of DPI's Activities

Mr. Chairman,

We are pleased to note that the process of the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communication has been continued since last year's session of the Committee on Information, as described in the Report of the Secretary-General. This reorientation process undertaken over the last years should make it possible to further rationalise and optimise the activities of DPI, to maximise the efficient use of its resources, and to enhance the visibility and impact of its operations.

The European Union commends DPI for its efforts to develop a more strategic approach to promoting global awareness and greater understanding of the work of the UN in priority areas. In this regard we welcome the identification of three strategic goals by DPI to maximize the effectiveness of the communications work by pursuing well defined and targeted delivery

of information; to exploit ongoing advances in information and communication technologies; and to build partnerships with civil society.

The EU acknowledges and encourages the Department's efforts to meet the complex demands of today's information society. DPI's mission statement rightly echoes the Millennium Declaration and focuses on key priorities such as poverty, conflict prevention, sustainable development, human rights, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the fight against international terrorism and the needs of the African continent. These objectives can be achieved only if the public is aware of the inter-linkages between development, security, human rights, justice and rule of law. The EU praises the efforts of DPI to preserve the photo and audiovisual archives of the UN, as they constitute a unique patrimony. We encourage the Department to continue its good work in that field.

We are convinced that successful communication rests on ever deeper knowledge of audiences and their expectations. Systematic impact reviews as conducted by DPI since 2002 are an important instrument to find out whether UN information meets the demands of the users. The EU commends DPI for its effort to target its products, services and activities, even better at interested audiences, both in terms of relevance and quality. We encourage the Department to persevere in its efforts towards deepening the culture of evaluation in every aspect of its activities. In this context, the EU is pleased to see that systematic evaluation in the DPI has been reinforced through cooperation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). We encourage DPI to pursue and intensify this cooperation.

United Nations Website

Mr. Chairman,

The UN website is a primary source of information for the UN family, numerous stakeholders and the interested public and is growing in popularity as illustrated by an increasing number of hits. We welcome efforts by DPI to attract further users through a redesign of the top level pages as well as a new search function implemented only recently. We can only encourage all efforts aimed at improving visual and functional coherence among the numerous websites of the UN. We particularly welcome the increasing compliance with the requirements for persons with disabilities. The European Union also supports the approach taken by DPI to make use of all facets of the internet's growing multimedia-capability by including more webcasts and radio files in numerous languages in its online offer.

Such innovations make the website more relevant, as does the fact that the newly created Registry of Mandates, as well as the Official Document System (ODS) as a multilingual repository of United Nations documentation, are freely available to internet-users on a global scale. Reaching a global audience also implies making full use of the UN's linguistic diversity. We commend DPI for the efforts to accelerate the pace of moving towards parity among official languages on the website and to enhance the language capacity of the web site section. We urge the department to continue its concrete work in favour of multilingualism on the website, as well as in all its activities.

United Nations Information Centres

Mr. Chairman,

The EU thanks Under-Secretary-General Shashi Tharoor for the latest report on the continued rationalisation of the network of UNICs.

The pursuit of regionalisation should take into account the circumstances in each region. In this regard the Western European model may not be applicable to all regions and, indeed, we understand from the report that DPI is envisaging alternative ways of rationalisation that do not primarily involve consolidation of existing UNICs but rather improvements in the coordination among the existing centres and with the local UN offices. We welcome and highlight DPI's commitment to pursuing genuine further reform.

As we have pointed out on numerous occasions, the European Union lent its full support to the Secretary-General's proposals for regional hubs in 2002 hoping for real medium to long-term benefits to the UN and to the peoples of the world. This decision forced a number of European countries to take the tough decision to close offices in their capitals.

We expected the plan for regionalisation to be advanced more vigorously than we have seen. We also expected other member states and regional groups to take equally tough decisions on UNICs in their own countries if circumstances warranted it.

We recall that the EU, along with many other like-minded member states, was willing to do so provided that the resources were devoted to those UN information centres around the world which were to be part of the regionalisation process. Regrettably, this did not meet the consensus of the membership.

We wish to restate our commitment to the pursuit of this initiative and to create a network that more effectively addresses the needs of customers. We strongly encourage the Secretariat to make all efforts in this regard.

The pursuit of the rationalisation and improvement process of the UNIC network could and should include improving the UNICs' work through common terms of reference and in-depth evaluation and transparent budget planning. We encourage the Secretariat to elaborate common terms of reference and mission statements for UNICs. DPI should thoroughly evaluate, in cooperation with OIOS, UNICs and report to all member states in a detailed way. We expect that the culture of evaluation successfully implemented within DPI Headquarters be expanded to cover the performance of all UNICs. This evaluation could highlight in particular how the resources reallocated after the consolidation in Western Europe are making a difference in those UNICs which benefited from the transfers.

The European Union welcomes the recent appointment of Ms. Afsané Bassir-Pour as the Director of the UNRIC in Brussels. We wish her success in her endeavours and assure her of our support. Under her competent leadership, the UNRIC will be able to make use of the structural advantages of its location next to the EU-Institutions in Brussels.

To ensure that the quality of the UN's presence in the states under UNRIC's responsibility remains as high as possible, we encourage DPI and UNRIC to further enhance coverage through the development of a distinctive communication strategy including publications and activities targeting these states in all the relevant languages. In particular, visible positioning of the UNRIC website is a key element to success. We look forward to regular and detailed reports to the member states on the activities and results of the UNRIC.

UN-Libraries

Mr. Chairman,

The European Union welcomes the SG's Report on modernisation and integrated management of United Nations libraries. We commend the Department for seeking "significant progress" in implementing new activities and fostering a culture of management and sharing of knowledge while streamlining traditional library processes. As the Secretary-General rightly points out, the key to effective change lies in the training of staff and in the improvement of internal communications, notably thanks to enhanced use of information technology. This includes intensifying cooperation and improving coordination among UN-libraries to enhance overall effectiveness. We encourage the Secretariat and the Directors of UN-Libraries to persevere in this approach.

World Press Freedom Day

Mr. Chairman,

As we prepare for World Press Freedom day on 3 May, the European Union reiterates its strong commitment to a free press and the important role it has to play in a free society. It is a cause of profound concern that in many countries freedom of the press and dissemination of information are limited or inexistent. Freedom of opinion and expression is a right set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This right includes the "freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".

We strongly condemn the use of violence to hinder the activities of journalists, and also condemn attempts to control or influence the media by distorting or suppressing information or opinions. We believe that freedom of the press is essential for democratic and open societies. The establishment of a free press is also one of the indicators of a successful transition from conflict to a post-conflict society and a crucial tool in preventing the resurgence of conflict.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to underscore the commitment of the European Union to conducting our deliberations during this 28th session of the Committee on Information in a constructive and co-operative manner, aimed at seeking solutions by consensus.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

