

Dear Mr. Otte,

I write to you as you asked at the end of Monday's meeting on "The Rise and Changes of Populism and Euroscepticism in the EU".

First, I wish to let you know that I thoroughly enjoyed the meeting, which raised many interesting points. I found the contribution by Mme. Sylvie Goulard was particularly interesting.

There are two points I wish to make:

1. We must not be surprised by the increasing number of Eurosceptics because of the total failure of the European Commission and of pro-EU politicians and officials to publicise the EU's many positive achievements. Having worked at the European Commission for over 30 years I must draw attention to the Commission's total failure to paint a positive picture of what the EU is doing and has done.

The EU's public relations is limited to an information policy whose objective is to explain EU policy and laws. Effective PR would require the European Union to draw attention to its successes and to the many good and positive things that it does. Explaining EU laws and policies is of course vitally important, but it is not enough. It allows critics to ridicule European laws and activities, which gives the general public the feeling that the EU is failing to help member states and European citizens.

Drawing attention to EU success stories is not only to highlight major developments but also to find acceptable ways of drawing attention to positive activities and results. For example hundreds of students are enabled to spend a year at a university in another EU country every year under the Erasmus scholarship. An appropriate event should be held in each EU country each year to announce how many students from that country will go the next year to study in another EU country, with details of the students and of the universities to which they will go. Local events should be held in the home town of each student selected for an Erasmus scholarship, with full information sent to the local media. This would certainly receive publicity in the local media, perhaps even on the local TV. Similarly, local events should be held when the students come home at the end of their Erasmus year, to draw the local media's attention to their return and to highlights of the student's exchange year.

Many local papers or TV or radio stations would no doubt take the initiative to interview the returning students and to hear of their experience.

This would very likely result in both national and local publicity, all of it reflecting well on the European Union that is behind the Erasmus scheme.

The positive results of other EU policies and activities should also be announced, particularly at a human level, either at a European level, or nationally or locally, depending on the event.

This should include the positive results of energy policy, agriculture policy, international aid, etc. It should also include the results of EU scientific research, and of EU-financed projects throughout the European Union.

This way there would be a constant stream of positive news and positive stories about what the European Union has achieved for its citizens. This would enable people throughout the EU to read, hear or see on television many positive achievements of the EU and help to shape the public's impression of the European Union, counterbalancing and correcting the negative impression of the EU that critics of the EU circulate to create Eurosceptics.

Eurosceptics are not all bad people. But they have become Eurosceptics because most of what they hear about the European Union is negative and bad. Give them positive information, and many will become supporters and even fans of the European Union.

2. Eurosceptics are mostly sceptics not only about the European Union but about their own country, which they think is not capable of holding its own in, or getting a good deal from, the EU. We should not hesitate, therefore, to attack them for being Francosceptics, Anglosceptics, Nederlandsceptics, etc.

Eurosceptics, like most people, want their country and its citizens to benefit from membership of the European Union. They are Eurosceptics because they think their country does not benefit, or is not capable of benefiting, from membership.

If we can ensure that there is a constant stream of positive information about what the EU is doing and how each member country is benefiting, Eurosceptics will be among the first to welcome and encourage EU membership.

Hope these comments are of some interest to you. If you wish to put them on the Egmont Institute's website, please feel free to do so.

With kind regards,
John Szemerey