

Example of refraction:

In his essay for week 1, Matthew explained that he would soon be working with the (Brussels) PR firm Pleon on a tender offer to the EU for communication in Europe to bolster public support for the EU. His second assignment (via email from me) suggested three scholarly articles on European media systems and public campaigns, and asked him to address more specifically the challenges of communicating a common European identity. Matthew's second week essay contained the following excerpt which includes an understanding of his work within the context of scholarship and knowledge of Europe and media structures.

“One such organization that is struggling when it comes to communicating to over 450 million people<sup>i</sup> is the European Union. After the negative votes in France and the Netherlands on the European Constitution, it became clearer to several people that the EU was not successfully communicating with Europeans, especially with regard to the benefits and basic operations of the European institutions. One person in particular who realized the communication failures of the EU was Margot Wallstrom, Vice President of the European Commission. After releasing the “Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe by the Commission” this past summer, Wallstrom initiated a strategy to revamp the European Union's communication activities, particularly with key publics in the original 15 countries; the 10 new member states; and, more recently, the acceding countries, candidate countries and potential candidate countries. Speaking at a seminar last week, Wallstrom said; “Communicating on Europe had been a largely ‘Brussels’ affair which had failed to properly involve national democratic institutions...or to take account of the complexity and diversity of European public opinion.”<sup>ii</sup>

The EU is beginning to realize that its most important stakeholders are the citizens of the member states. However, they have not effectively communicated with them. In an effort to mitigate what Indiana University professor Robert Rohrschneider describes as the “democracy deficit of the European Union,”<sup>iii</sup> Wallstrom has proposed “Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate.” The directive focuses on five priority areas: defining common principles; working in partnership; empowering citizens;

working with media and technologies; and understanding public opinion. The overall objective is to communicate the mission of the EU, from enlargement issues to anti-terrorism policies. The goal of Plan D is simple – promote democracy in Europe. This will be done through effective communication. The EU is hoping to use several tactics to communicate: debates, workshops for citizens and journalists, private contracting with communication agencies, more dialogue and transparency among institutions, events, an enhanced website ([www.Europa.eu.int](http://www.Europa.eu.int)) and monthly visits to member states by EU officials.<sup>iv</sup> In his article, “The Democracy Deficit and Mass Support for an EU-wide Government,” Rohrschneider rejects the suggestion that citizens will continue to support the EU because it is a system in-progress, even if they believe the EU is unresponsive to their preferences. This, as Rohrschneider asserts, is not the case: “Support for the EU depends on the EU’s current representational performance.”<sup>v</sup>

At Pleon, we are interested in one particular aspect of the current representational performance – the media. The new communications plan, which is being debated today by the Commission, is expected to be adopted on February 1<sup>st</sup>. As a public relations and public affairs agency, Pleon believes that it is in an excellent position to assist the Commission with its communication initiatives. Moreover, given the fact that Pleon is Europe’s largest communications agency with 31 offices, six of which were recently acquired and are located in Eastern Europe, it is well positioned to provide services throughout Europe.

In Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin and Düsseldorf, Pleon has been busy preparing for the February 1 adoption. This past week, I have been working on gathering information for our proposal to the European Commission, specifically the DG Enlargement. Pleon has created a project team and advisory board and is competing against other Brussels-based communications firms to win a contract to provide services regarding EU enlargement. I have been responsible for writing background information on Pleon’s key European offices involved with the Enlargement tender, as well as articles on Pleon’s experience working with government ministries. The competition is intense and other ‘corporate-owned giants’ like Hill and Knowlton Brussels have been the most successful winning EU business thus far. This, however, is just one of the projects that will take place. There are several other European tenders to develop and submit to the

Commission; including one due by January 30<sup>th</sup> regarding PR events for debating radio frequency identification (RFID) technology use in the EU.”

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<sup>i</sup> Total Population. October 21, 2006 EU Statistical Office (Eurostat). January 15, 2006 <[http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?\\_pageid=1090,1&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?_pageid=1090,1&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)>.

<sup>ii</sup> European Report, "European Commission: Wallstrom Calls for Shared Values to Underpin New Communications Strategy." Europe Information Service 14 01 2006. 2. Elon University. January 15, 2006 <<http://www.lexisnexis.com>>.

<sup>iii</sup> Rohrschneider, Robert. "The Democracy Deficit and Mass Support for an EU-wide Government." American Journal of Political Science April 2002. 463-475. EBSCO Host. Elon University. January 15, 2006 <[www.elon.edu](http://www.elon.edu) (VPN)>.

<sup>iv</sup> Plan D. October 13, 2006 European Commission - DG Press and Communication. January 6, 2006 <[www.europa.eu.int/comms/dgs/press\\_communication/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comms/dgs/press_communication/index_en.htm)>.

<sup>v</sup> Rohrschneider, Robert. "The Democracy Deficit and Mass Support for an EU-wide Government." American Journal of Political Science April 2002. 463-475. EBSCO Host. Elon University. January 15, 2006 <[www.elon.edu](http://www.elon.edu) (VPN)>.