

EU institutions are increasingly present on the “web 2.0.” You can “like” the European parliament President Buzek’s on Facebook, watch the European Commission’s President Barosso on his dedicated channel YouTube, ask a question to European Council President van Rompuy or follow the twits and blogs of a number of EU officials.

**Stephen CLARK, Head of Web Communications Unit, European Parliament**

*They are a very interesting and valuable way to communicate, not only because they have a great reach in Europe, particularly to a young audience, but also because they allow for something completely different which is this immediate interaction between citizens users of social media platforms and EU institutions.*

Today, the European Parliament Facebook page reaches over 165.000 fans and is by far the most successful initiative led by a European institution on a social network, with regular live chat with MEPs and daily lively inputs. 70% of the members of Parliament have profiles, a potential network of 1, 5 million fans or friends interested in European politics. But beyond numbers, is this new way of communicating reaching beyond the EU “in-crowd”?

**Stephen CLARK**

*The platform of the moment is Facebook and that one really puts us in touch with people who are outside the “Brussels Bubble” as we call it. We know that 95 % of the fans are not in Belgium, it's a fair deduction to make out that they are not specialist or people in the business. We're very happy about that, that's something new.*

If the EP has managed to speak a language that is engaging to a broader audience, its success is also to be explained by its nature. Parliamentarians are national elected politicians so citizens across Europe may be more drawn to engage with people who represent them. Indeed, for the other institutions such as the Commission or the Council, the “social media” revolution does not prove as impactful.

**Steffen Thejll-Moller, Digital strategist at Fleishman-Hillard**

*The EU overall could be doing a better job but as with a lot of large organizations, it is a little tricky to have them communicate by one voice or with one message. The key to success online is to not expect this one voice but rather that the voices from within the organization at an individual level or a smaller group level become more competent at communication.*

Presenting themselves as “real people” rather than faceless bureaucrats is one of the key challenges institutions address through social media. Twitter is aimed at a more specialized audience as it is more technical but some EU key figures managed to turn it into a real dialogue platform.

**Steffen Thejll-Moller, Digital strategist at Fleishman-Hillard**

*My own personal super star of the web 2.0 is the Commissioner for the digital agenda Neelie Kroes. She's been fantastic at using twitter in particular to gain a large following and really engage with people at their level. The key to her success has been she's really realized that the value doesn't lie in telling people what you want them to hear but really in asking questions and engaging with them and having them provide value to you.*

So the key to online success lies in providing interesting interactive content that escapes Brussels terminology and acronyms while showcasing real people rather than stories told by faceless

institutions. But to blogger Joe Litobarski, it is firstly the burning issues on the news that open a gateway for citizens to get interested.

**Joe Litobarski, EU Blogger**

*National interest is being triggered because things are going wrong with the euro zone crisis. It is really when things go wrong that people get interested in it. Finally Europe becomes exciting. This is not an effect of social media rather than what is happening.*

48% of people aged between 15-24 and 44% of those between 25-39 use the Internet as their main source of information about the EU. These figures, coupled with the attention the Arab spring bought to the power of new media and the Europe-wide critical issue of the Eurozone crisis explain the momentum.

**Stephen CLARK**

*It's a networking and snow bowling effect that's very interesting if you are in an idealistic state of mind, this is the embryo, the beginning of this European public space that everyone talks about.*

So will social media bring people closer to the EU? Will it make them understand it? Certainly it is not the cure-all panacea that will bridge the gap between the “bureaucratic EU” and 500 Million citizens but it is a young powerful tool that could help write a new European story over the “elite feel” perceived by increasingly distant and distrustful populations.

**END**