

# Clear Writing for Europe conference – 5 December

**Giles Goodall: Head of Unit, Communication and legal coordination unit of DG Justice and Consumers, European Commission**

***How does the EU communicate its legislation to the general public? What has worked and what is less successful?***

- Thank you very much for the introduction Cathy, and thank you very much to my colleagues from the Commission translation service for the opportunity to be here today.
- Clear writing is something which is very **close to my heart**, both as a communicator but also as a pro-European.
- You've probably heard of stories about the EU **banning bendy bananas**, but we've also been accused of laws forcing people to call fish by their Latin names, and banning children from sending Christmas lists to Santa Claus under the GDPR (SLIDE WITH BANANAS).
- Most of these 'Euromyths' have their origins in unclear writing and communication. So for me, clear writing is an **essential tool in explaining but also demystifying the EU**, what we do, and how we work.

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- As a non-lawyer working in the justice department, I spend a lot of my time trying to **translate 'legalese' to normal language**. But how do we do that?
- **My first point** is that we try to communicate the **rights and impacts** of legislation rather than the legislation itself.
- Take Regulation 2019/1111: or the 'Brussels IIa Recast' in shorthand: what this actually does is provide a set of rules to help international couples resolve disputes involving divorce and custody of their children across different jurisdictions (SLIDE WITH EXAMPLE).
- **My second point** is that we try to understand our audience and make our messages relevant to them – **what does this mean for me?**

- There is another piece of legislation called the victims directive, which actually provides a set of rights to everyone in the EU, whether at home or abroad, to things like information, support, and additional help for the most serious crimes, like a case of rape (SLIDE WITH EXAMPLE).
- **My third point** is that we need to speak to people in their own language – not just the language itself, but in **style and format they can understand**.
- GDPR? Consular protection? (SLIDE WITH EXAMPLE).
- I would also like to show you an example of where we failed, and this one was actually picked up by Politico, but for the wrong reasons. In this case we were trying to explain new EU rules **to XXX**, but this came out like this (SLIDE WITH [IP RULES ON REMUNERATION](#))

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- How do we do this in practice? We have a set of **golden rules in my department**:
  1. Communicating in **normal everyday language**, not as it is written in the legal text.
  2. We think of explaining it to our **grandmother**, or to a **person we would bump into on the street**. Would they understand?
  3. We have a principle of a “**second pair of eyes**” for all communication materials. This ensures that a fresh pair of eyes checks it for clarity.

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Let me tell you more about the **JUST write clearly! pilot project** (SLIDE WITH LOGO)

#### **What did the project consist of?**

- **Hands-on clear writing training** offered physically on our premises to make it easy for staff to attend.
- **A weekly clear writing tip on the intranet**: A short and easy way for staff to reflect on clear writing.
- **Making greater use of IT tools to check readability**: The aim was to extend use of readability statistics via Word spellcheck and/or StyleWriter. We created a [clear writing checklist](#) for staff to use before they submit their documents.

- **A network of clear writing ambassadors in the DG:** We appointed clear writing ambassadors who also have the responsibility of spreading the message on clear writing.
- Collaboration with the editing service of DG Translation.
- It was very important that we had **full endorsement and involvement from management**. This created a momentum that allowed many staff from the DG to get involved.
- **One quarter of staff in our Directorate-Generate** attended one of the training sessions organised on our premises. (110 staff members)
- The results of this work were significant. We took a poll among colleagues at the beginning and end of the project. At the beginning, **we had 68% of colleagues saying that writing clearly was very important. At the end, this had risen to 74%**. Although this increase was not so large, what was noticeable was that it was caused by colleagues shifting from saying it was 'important' to 'very important'.
- In a DG where half the staff are lawyers, this is no mean feat! I'm not complaining of course; like all good lawyers, my colleagues never lose their appeal...

## **FOLLOW UP QUESTION**

DG JUST produces a lot of consumer-oriented legislation, which appeals to the public since it impacts them directly. Can you tell us about some of your success stories? How could the lessons from that be applied to communicating less accessible legislation?

**Your EURight campaign** (SLIDE WITH VISUALS EXAMPLES: caravan, drier, toaster, dress)

- **We launched a 5 million EUR campaign this year, which was the biggest communication campaign in DG Justice and Consumer history.**
- Consumer rights is a very broad file, which touches many different rights (**can we add number of legal acts?**). It includes financial rights, product safety, package travel, rights to return a product in 14 days.

- We specifically targeted the elements that had a direct impact on citizens' lives, **limiting the number of rights** we were advertising and built **7 relatable stories around 7 key messages**.
- An important aspect of the success of this campaign regarding clear writing is that the 7 messages were tested in **10 focus groups**. We then could alter the messages because they were not as clear as we thought they were. Therefore, a lesson from that campaign is that testing, or at least getting an external point of view on your writing and messages, **can reveal issues with the clarity of what you are trying to say**.
- Of course, focus groups are not always possible especially for smaller communication projects. But even asking a colleague to look at your message can be helpful in making sure you are being clear, or using the 4-eyes principle can help a great deal.
- Another lesson we can draw from successful and less successful campaigns is that a good communication plan, clear writing and good visuals do not suffice. In addition to clear communication you need **clear and simple messages**.