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To: EO-TriloguesConsultation
Subject: [EOWEB] Trilogues consultation

Sender

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To Trilogues Consultation
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Part 2 - Data

To Trilogues Consultation
Subject Trilogues consultation

As a journalist following EU affairs, the negotiations and outcome of trilogues are of great interest to me. However, I find the process is not sufficiently transparent.

It is very difficult to find documents in a structured and accessible way via the institutions' websites. While the institutions list all their public meetings, conferences etc. on their respective websites, it does not have such a calendar for trilogues, which would allow me to know when a next meeting occurs or how many have occurred.

Content

Instead, a journalist has to rely on informal sources, for example contacts he or she has with people in the institutions. These may not always be available. Often the best sources for hearing about the status of a trilogue are Twitter messages by negotiators.

The greatest beef I have with the trilogue process however, is that as a journalist you are always one step behind the institutions' PR machine. This is what happens when a trilogue ends:

Depending on the social media savviness of the involved negotiators, there may be a Twitter message from a Commissioner, MEP or council representative, announcing that they are preparing for an all-night round of talks; or at least a tweet to announce the end of the talks. Then, there could be press releases by the country holding the 6-month presidency, the Commission, and/or the European Parliament.

However, these press releases usually only speak about the successful outcome of the trilogue negotiations, not of the content. In EU legislation, as with most things in life, the devils are in the detail. But these details are often omitted in the jubilant press releases announcing a compromise. It can take days before the compromise text is made public. Therefore it is often very difficult to make an independent judgement of what exactly has been agreed.

But since journalists work with deadlines and are urged to file stories as soon as possible, more often than not would you publish a story based on what is then known – i.e. the jubilant we-have-a-deal-messages – instead of waiting for the release (or informal acquisition) of the agreed compromise text. Also, there may be inconsistencies that arise from different interpretations from the three institutions.

Take for example the trilogues on the roaming and net neutrality file. On 30 June 2015 in the early morning, the institutions announced there was a deal. But as you can gather from the article I wrote that morning (published at 9:28, timed to coincide with the publication of EUobserver's daily newsletter), there was still a lot unknown: <https://euobserver.com/connected/129380>

Only after having accessed the compromise text later that day, I was able to write a story in which I argue that the text appeared to have some loopholes and loose ends. This article was published 19:32 (<https://euobserver.com/connected/129393>), which means that for ten hours the only article about the deal was the one based on press releases.

In today's fast-moving media environment, news stories that are published first often get more attention than those more nuanced background articles published later. And indeed, the 9:28 news article was read almost 1.5 times more often than the background article.

Transparency would be greatly improved if institutions accompanied their press releases with a scan of the actually agreed text the press release is so exuberant about.