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Communicating Europe in a New Regional Security Context

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Communicating Europe in a New Regional Security Environment

Case Studies

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Table of Contents

List of Contributors	4
Analysis of Communication Strategies for Ukraine on Association Agreement and DCFTA ... <i>by Olena Betlii</i>	6
Communicating European vector in the context of new developments in Moldova's domestic and foreign policy	16
<i>by Victoria Bucataru</i>	
Czech Communication of European Affairs: From a Persuasive to an Explanatory Approach	21
<i>by Vít Dostál</i>	
Communicating EU in Slovakia during the pre-accession period	27
<i>by Samuel Goda</i>	
Communicating Europe in Georgia during the AA and DCFTA Implementation Process	32
<i>by Nino Kheladze, Mariam Paposhvili</i>	
V4 Supporting Communication Strategy of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine on implementing AA and DCFT	39
<i>by Marek Marszalek</i>	
Communicating the European Union in Hungary Experiences from the pre- and post-accession periods	43
<i>by Zsuzsanna Végh</i>	

List of Contributors

Olena Betlii has been an Associate Professor at the History Department of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy since 2006. Additionally, she was the Director of the Center for Polish and European Studies at NaUKMA in 2008—2013 and an Assistant Professor at the European and Euro-Atlantic Policy Department and Secretary of the Academic Board at the Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine in 2006—2007. She was a research fellow at Institute of world policy in 2016. Her major teaching and research interests include: urban studies, discursive creation of historical and mental regions in Europe; regional identity of Ukraine; international history and European integration history.

Victoria Bucataru is Executive Director at the Foreign Policy Association of Moldova. She holds a BA and MA degree in international relations, political and administrative sciences from the Moldova State University. In 2005-2010, Victoria worked as a lecturer at the International Relations Department, Moldova State University as well as was involved in the activity of several non-governmental organizations such as the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives, the Information and Documentation Centre on NATO, and the European Institute for Political Studies. In 2010-2012, she was involved in the joint research consortium “Security and Development Research within the Wider Europe Initiative Security Cluster” supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. Victoria has been working for the Foreign Policy Association since 2009. She is the author of several publications on foreign and security policies, and Moldova’s relation with the European Union, and she has provided expertise in the field of foreign and security policies to national and international organizations in the framework of various thematic programs.

Vít Dostál is Research Director of AMO. He specializes in Central Europe, in particular Poland. He also covers Czech foreign and European policy. He has worked for AMO since 2006 and has been the research director since 2013. He is responsible for the strategic development and fundraising activities of the AMO Research Centre, coordinates the research team and supervises AMO’s research projects and publications. He is the chief editor of the annual book on Czech foreign policy “Agenda for Czech Foreign Policy”. He has published on Czech foreign policy, Central Europe and the European Union for various Czech and international papers. Vít graduated in European Studies from Masaryk University Brno.

Samuel Goda is the Head of International Security Program at SFPA. Besides his participation in numerous other projects, he manages program’s flagship project “International Crisis Management and is a representative to the “OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions.” Moreover, he works as Assistant Professor at the University of Economics in Bratislava, where he teaches several courses and serves as Managing Editor of Journal of International Relations. He conducted professional research and study in Germany, Austria, USA, Czech Republic and Moldova. His research includes OSCE related issues, conflict transformation, EU CFSP/CSDP, as well as a regional scope of Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America. He holds a PhD in International Relations from Matej Bel University.

Nino Kheladze holds a master’s degree in European Interdisciplinary Studies from College of Europe (Natolin, Warsaw). Her main research interests cover European affairs including EU approximation processes in the countries of Eastern Partnership. Her background includes working experience at the European Parliament (EP), the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) and OSCE Election Observation Mission to Georgia. Currently she works as a project coordinator at the Georgian Institute for Strategic Studies (GISS). Prior joining to GISS, she has interned at the Parliament of Georgia and CARE International in Georgia.

Marek Marszalek is a Programme Manager for Republic of Moldova and Romania within the Institute for Eastern Studies, a Warsaw based foundation active in the field of co-operation

among European countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. He has been involved in organising annual international conferences such as: the Economic Forum in Krynica, European Congress for Local Governments in Krakow, Forum Europe-Ukraine, Forum EU-Moldova. He elaborates analyses and reports on current situation in Romania and Republic of Moldova. Mr. Marszalek has coordinated several international projects and seminars that took place in Romania and participated in debates on Polish-Romanian relations. Previously he worked as an expert on macroeconomic issues in the Polish Embassy in Bucharesty. During his stay in Romania, he acted as a correspondent to the Polish National Radio.

Mariam Paposhvili serves as a project coordinator at the Georgian Institute for Strategic Studies (GISS). In this capacity she is responsible for managing projects that strengthens public support and commitment to the process of European approximation in Georgia; she is equally involved in content development/production of papers and publications. Prior to joining GISS she has worked at the office of OSCE Election Observation Mission to Georgia, Georgia's Reforms Associates, Department of International Law at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. Mariam holds MA degree in European Interdisciplinary Studies from College of Europe, Natolin (Warsaw) and MA degree in Diplomacy and International Politics from Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

Zsuzsanna Végh is a researcher at the CEU Center for European Neighborhood Studies since 2012. Her research focuses on the Visegrad cooperation, the Visegrad countries' foreign, security and international development policy, as well as the European Union's relations with its Eastern neighborhood (Eastern Partnership). At CENS, she has been engaged, among others, in research projects focusing on the Europeanization/transition experience of the Visegrad countries and its relevance for countries in the Eastern neighborhood. She holds a Master's degree in international relations and European studies from the Central European University (2012) and one in international studies from the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest (2011). She also studied at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland.



Analysis of Communication Strategies for Ukraine on Association Agreement and DCFTA

Olena Betlii
Research fellow, Institute of World Policy (IWP),
Ukraine

This publication is dedicated to analysis of the communication strategies used in Ukraine in order to increase public awareness on the Association Agreement and DCFTA. The special focus was made on the information campaigns initiated by government institutions, NGOs, and media. The text is based on interviews with representatives of the government, non-governmental organizations, embassies, business, academia and media and on other sources and literature. It also reflects the results of the workshop organized in May 2016 during which the preliminary results of the ongoing research were discussed. The publication ends with defined steps that the government and other stakeholders should take in order to develop effective communication strategies and conduct an efficient information campaign on the implementation of the Association Agreement and DCFTA.

EU-Ukraine partnership in the framework of the Association Agreement

The Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine (hereinafter, the AA) has been signed in two stages: the political part on March 21 and economic part on June 27, 2014. Since the beginning, implementation of the AA in Ukraine, unlike Moldova or Georgia, has been significantly influenced by Russian factor in terms of practical implementation of Section IV regarding the deep and comprehensive free trade area (hereinafter, the DCFTA). On September 16, 2014, only political part of the AA has entered into force in November 2014 with delay in the temporary implementation of the DCFTA until January 1, 2016.

Therefore, since the beginning of signing of the AA, the process of its implementation has become indirectly and often directly dependent on external factors, such as Russian aggression (occupation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine) and powerful information campaign launched by Russia back in 2013 to discredit Kyiv's European integration policies. This led to the fact that information campaigns on the content of the AA, launched in 2013-2014, were often affected by Russian campaign and, consequently, their messages had to refute the myths about European integration spread by Moscow.

The process of implementation of the AA takes into account the various policy documents; among the most noteworthy is the Association Agenda, approved by the Association Council between Ukraine and the EU. Specifically, the Association Agenda (approved on March 16, 2015) defines the short-term priority actions within the framework of the Agreement^[1].

In December 2015, the Government Office for European Integration of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has published a detailed report on implementation of the Association Agenda and the AA. The text of this report reflects the results of activities of nearly 60 government institutions involved into the implementation of the Association Agenda and the AA. It mainly contains information on adopted or proposed initiatives. Therefore, in this way the government has reported on the

^[1] That include the following reforms: constitutional reform; electoral reform; preventing and combating corruption; judicial reform; reform in public administration; deregulation; reform in public procurement; tax reform (including VAT refunds); external audit; reform of the energy sector.

part of the Agreement related to harmonization of Ukrainian legislation with that of the EU and implementation of the *acquis* part, required for the implementation of the Agreement. On the other hand, such method of presentation does not reflect the complex state of the implementation of the AA itself, the progress of the implementation of the Association Agenda, and the level of Ukraine's proximity to European standards at least at the legislative level. Furthermore, the vague plan of further measures, included into the final section of the report and illustrating intentions rather than concrete steps and deadlines of their implementation, does not hold up at all. Therefore, the part of the document, which should have provided all stakeholders of European integration with information on the "European road map" for Kyiv, does not contain any useful information, e.g. such as detailed and concrete agenda of AA implementation, description of the reform purposes, explanation of influence of implied changes on the quality of everyday life etc.

All the aforesaid means that the analysis of the implementation of the AA should not take into account only the part related to the harmonization of legislation, reported by the Government and mainly brought to the attention of European institutions. Attention should be paid not only to adoption of laws required to promote the AA (e.g., at the stage of implementation of the action plan on visa regime liberalization), but also to monitoring of their practical implementation. The complexity of effective performance of this task is associated with current political weakness of Brussels. Without political will to proceed to considering at least illusory prospects of Ukraine's membership in the EU, European bureaucrats deprive themselves of the opportunity to apply the approaches that shaped successful Europeanization of the Visegrad Group states. The main issue in this context is the lack of active leverage of influence on domestic policy that provided credit for successfully completed "homework" in the form of the Treaty of Accession to the EU. According to the experience of the Visegrad Group states, at the stage when the so-called passive leverage of influence (the illusive promises of deeper European integration) has been used, up to 1994, those states did not have sufficient incentives to switch to European standards in terms of both market economy and the rule of law (protection of minorities, in particular).

The current situation, however, indicates the area able to provide Brussels with unique experience in relations between the EU and Ukraine during the implementation of the Association Agreement. Namely, it is closer cooperation with civil society and the transformation of civil society into the driving force of implementation of the AA. After all, civil society, not the government, is the true ally and initiator of Europeanization of Ukraine, despite all the statements of political leaders. Furthermore, the global trends that indicate that governments are increasingly unable to cope with modern challenges due to various reasons, e.g. the inertia of bureaucratic state machine, should be taken into account. Instead, through successful and timely use of new technologies and better education, the civil society often performs the tasks in a more efficient way. Both the Maidan and the volunteer movement that emerged in Ukraine in 2014-2016 are vivid examples.

Communication strategies

At the government level, the implementation process has been guided by the Government Office for European Integration within the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, established in August 2014. But it seems some changes will be applied soon by authorities. In April 2016, Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze was appointed a Vice-Minister on European Integration in the government. Since then, she has become a key person in EU and Euroatlantic integration processes in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, among the objectives of the Government Office there is still "the coordination and monitoring of measures to inform the public on the issues related to European integration."^[2] In fact, the aforesaid report may be regarded as an example of such measure. The Government Office

^[2] "Положення про Урядовий офіс з питань європейської інтеграції Секретаріату Кабінету Міністрів України", accessed June 28, 2016, <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/346-2014-%D0%BF#n22>

(the Office) is also responsible^[3] for the implementation of article 470 of the action plan for the implementation of the AA adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers in September 2014. The major tool to convey information to the public is defined as “maintenance and regular update of relevant sections on the official websites of central and local authorities, other government bodies involved in the formation and implementation of state policy on European integration.”^[4] Last year, the Office elaborated the first draft of “A proposal how to enrich effectiveness of information campaign on European integration.” It stated that AA implementation is a top-priority for Ukraine and that its success directly depends on society’s involvement in its realization. Communication of AA was defined as a pivotal task for government.

Internews-Ukraine (NGO) has used this document as a base for more elaborated Communication Strategy on European Integration in Ukraine, which has to become the main government communication strategy. Their project is funded by Solidarity Fund (PL) and USAID. The first draft of this Strategy, in which Poland’s experience of communicating EU is included, was presented by Internews-Ukraine on June 21, 2016. It was expected that the document would be finalized by September 2016. However, it took more time and another draft of the strategy project was presented in December 2016. It consists of two parts: 1) communication strategy of European integration of Ukraine; 2) implementation plan of the strategy. It explains both how to inform and how to communicate EU-related topics in Ukraine. Regarding the implementation plan of this strategy one may notice well developed list of tasks and concrete steps of further activities. Some of them, however, can be already undertaken as a part of everyday communication practices of respective authorities. There is no necessity to wait for agreed Communication strategy or for the National Target Program for Informing the Public on the Issues of European Integration of Ukraine in order to “hold regular off-record briefings concerning the progress of European integration for representatives of target media and NGOs by key Government officials (in particular, line Vice Prime Minister)” (p. 5) or to improve “reports on European integration progress” (p. 7). Besides, these activities do not need additional funding, because everything what is needed here is a better planning, time management and cooperation within the mentioned “collaboration quadrangle”. At the same time there is one crucial thing in this implementation plan: the state is becoming the customer and metacontroller, not a creator of the content; it shapes the strategic objectives, but the professionals from NGOs and media are those who will achieve them. It is an important step forward in communication planning if one keeps in mind a huge distrust in government which is demonstrated by Ukrainian society in sociologic surveys.

To sum up, this draft is a first serious step for a new Concept for State Programme for communicating European and Euro-Atlantic integration and based on this Concept a new State Programme for communicating European and Euro-Atlantic integration in Ukraine. One can only guess when both of them will be agreed and signed. Meanwhile, Vice Premier Minister’s office elaborates another State Programme for communicating Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine in 2017-2020. This document is a high priority for the authorities.

At the same time, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine, together with some NGOs and experts, is elaborating its own version of Ukraine’s National Export Strategy. Besides, a new EU project “Association4U” (Association for Ukraine and for You (“Support to the implementation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union’)) was

[3] Among other administrators are Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National State Service, other central and local executive bodies, other administrative bodies (if agreed)

[4] “Про імплементацію Угоди про асоціацію між Україною, з однієї сторони, та Європейським Союзом, Європейським Співтовариством з атомної енергії і їхніми державами-членами, з іншої сторони”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://zakon5.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/847-2014-%D1%80/page>

launched in May 2016.^[5]

While these projects are still in the first stage of their development, we have to consider earlier approved documents. The main document governing the provision of information on European integration to the public is still the “Concept of implementation of state policy in the field of information and public communication on European integration of Ukraine until 2017” adopted by the government of Mykola Azarov in March 2013^[6]. Accordingly, the authorities are guided by the action plan approved in September 2013. This plan includes a number of activities, including: sociological surveys; creation of television products; organization of public events and international conferences; children contests; organization of visits to Brussels and contests for journalists; establishment of regional and national information and contact points for EU programs in different fields; publishing guides for students; activities within the framework of the EU program “Creative Europe.”^[7] The plan is not supported with necessary budget and, thus, demonstrates good intentions, but no deals.

An analysis of government documents and activities points out another aspect, the excessive dependence on the external donor funding. For instance, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, the launch of an effective information campaign actually depends on the EU’s financial aid. This aid is supposed to be directed into “implementation of effective mechanisms for establishing communications between various social groups, development and implementation of information campaign on the benefits and challenges of European integration (development of information materials and a website, grant program to distribute information materials and organize public information activities).”^[8] Cooperation with the relevant EU institutions in this area should be covered by the Government Office. This approach does not hold up, since adequate funding for such information campaign should be budgeted by Ukraine.

A peculiar result of the efforts aimed at public awareness on the DCFTA is a book by Oleg Myroshnychenko “Internationalization of Business and Access to Markets of the European Union” published in late 2015 with the support of the EU Delegation to Ukraine and containing a dedicated section on “Assistance of Ukrainian and International Institutions, and Use of Specialized Web Resources for Business Development.”^[9] Whether this publication will raise the level of awareness of Ukrainian businessmen on the DCFTA, is a matter of time. The next open question is whether another guide that became a response to the questions, frequently asked by the businessmen, “How to Enter the EU Markets?”^[10] finds its reader. At the moment of its presentation in late December 2015, experts noted that successful entry of Ukrainian goods to the EU market is hindered by inability and unwillingness to learn the new rules of business, lack of skills of cooperation with

^[5] See, “Association4U”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://association4u.com.ua/index.php/en/about-us/public-communication>

^[6] “Інформування громадськості”, accessed June 28, 2016, http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/uk/publish/article%3fart_id=224150622&cat_id=223561076; “Інформування громадськості”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://mfa.gov.ua/ua/about-ukraine/european-integration/ukraine-eu-inform>

^[7] “План заходів щодо виконання Концепції реалізації державної політики у сфері інформування та налагодження комунікації з громадськістю з актуальних питань європейської інтеграції України на період до 2017 року”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://zakon1.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/754-2013-%D1%80#n9>

^[8] “Щодо інформаційно-роз’яснювальної роботи з питань європейської інтеграції”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://mfa.gov.ua/ua/about-ukraine/european-integration/ukraine-eu-inform>

^[9] See, Олег Мирошніченко, *Базовий посібник з інтернаціоналізації бізнесу і виходу на ринки Європейського Союзу* (Київ: 2015).

^[10] Олег Мирошніченко et al., *Як вийти на ринки ЄС. Відповіді на питання бізнесу: Практичний посібник*, (Київ: 2015), accessed June 28, 2016, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzrPOGW9YJwSLTBqSjRRMXNVWTQ/view>

[10] European partners, fear of change, stereotypes about the EU, etc.^[11]

This situation may indicate that comprehensive public awareness campaign on the implementation of AA and DCFTA has not yet been conducted, and this statement is supported by sociological data. In particular, according to the data^[12], despite the fact that 79% of Ukrainian SME owners have heard of the Agreement, and 70% would like to trade in the EU, only 34% of them understand the relevant provisions of the AA that regulate the issues related to trade. Furthermore, only 20% of SME owners know where to find information on the Agreement. And the most eloquent evidence of poor awareness of the essence of the AA is that 61% of SME owners believe that the Agreement will only affect the exporters^[13]. According to the new data, published in December 2016 by Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting, more than 28% of interviewed exporters and importers felt positive influence of AA on their business, 60% - neutral, and 6% - negative^[14].

In practice, this means that the main target group of the part of the Agreement related to the DCFTA, which is small and medium business, remains uncovered by the information campaigns initiated by the EU Delegation to Ukraine, Government Office, MEDT, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, the civil society “Stronger together” campaign, supported by the British Embassy and the EU Delegation to Ukraine, “Yevropeyska Pravda,” “Radio ES” etc. However, we often hear complaints towards Ukrainian government and parliament making insufficient efforts to help entrepreneurs prepare to enter the EU market. In particular, this problem has been discussed among other issues related to exports to the EU during the “Capturing New Markets” conference, organized by Kyivpost in late March 2016 and attended by Head of the EU Delegation to Ukraine Jan Tombinski, Managing Director of the EBRD in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus Francis Malige, and Natalia Mykolska, Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine^[15].

The state of public information at the regional level is also unsatisfactory, according to monitoring of the websites of regional administrations in terms of their coverage of the European integration process conducted by the Institute of World Policy in September, 2015^[16]. This research shows that only the web pages of Lviv, Zakarpattia, Kyrovohrad, Odesa and Chernihiv Regional State Administrations contain information about their activities, as well as information on the status of implementation of the AA. Other RSAs often provide outdated or irrelevant information. Moreover, the fact that the annual Europe Day is communicated as one the major accomplishments in terms of public awareness campaign about the EU is noted. The relatively inefficient activity of the European Information Centers Network is built around this event. Such attention to the Europe Day is not surprising; even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website’s “Public information” section contains only two subsections: “Information and advocacy campaign on the issues related to European Integration” (based on the aforementioned Concept of March 2013) and “Europe Day.” Furthermore, it is strongly emphasized that “in recent years, the practice of large-scale celebrations

[11] Володимир Єрмоленко, “Як вийти на ринки Європейського Союзу?”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://www.euointegration.com.ua/experts/2015/02/24/7031198/> <http://uacrisis.org/ua/39116-prezentuvati-posibnik>

[12] They were gathered by the British expert group headed by Mark Hellyer and published in their research “EU Support to the Private Sector in the Context of Association Agreements/DCFTAs” in October 2015.

[13] “EU Support to the Private Sector in the context of Association Agreements including DCFTAs (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) Final Report”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://www.east-invest.eu/uploads/Modules/Documents/final-report-dcfta.pdf>

[14] Вероніка Мовчан, «Малий вперед. Що дав Україні перший рік вільної торгівлі з ЄС», accessed December 28, 2016, <http://www.euointegration.com.ua/articles/2016/12/28/7059528/>

[15] See, “Capturing new markets”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://markets.kyivpost.com/>

[16] Daria Gaidai, “European Integration and the Regional State Administrations. How is the EU Promoted on the Regional Level?”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://iwp.org.ua/eng/public/1748.html>

of Europe Day in regions of Ukraine involving leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the EU Delegation to Ukraine, and embassies of the EU member states has been successfully tested.”^[17]

As for the contribution of non-governmental organizations into the process of informing the public on the European integration agenda, the situation looks more positive when it comes to the objective-based activities. However, in assessing the effectiveness of non-governmental organizations we should take into account the fact that according to GFK opinion poll of February 2016, less than 10% of respondents are aware of the NGOs’ activities (for instance, the volunteer groups are known to 48%)^[18]. Therefore, the major challenge for these organizations is to develop their own effective communication strategies that would allow them expand their recipient audiences.

Positive experience of previously implemented communication campaigns

Despite the fact that preliminary analysis shows relative inefficiency of communication campaigns implemented in Ukraine, which results in the insufficient awareness of the target audience on the AA-related issues, the positive experience of certain campaigns is noteworthy and should be taken into account in the future. However, it should be noted that the detailed content analysis of those campaigns requires a separate thorough research.

As of today, the most successful information campaigns are the projects initiated by the EU Delegation to Ukraine and the British Embassy to Ukraine. The most notable among them are, in particular, “EU Study Days in Ukraine” and “Stronger together” respectively. Another important project funded by the governments of the UK and the Netherlands is assistance to the Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UCCI) in developing advisory services to promote exports. Numerous activities have been implemented within this project from September 2015 to March 2016, resulting in training the new certified professionals on DCFTA-related issues, launch of the consulting service, which included live hotlines/helpdesks, and a number of seminars attended by more than thousand participants and publication of the detailed guide “Encyclopaedia on Exporting to the EU Under the DCFTA.” Furthermore, the national and regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry organised series of seminars dedicated to different issues, such as women exporters to the EU, exporting clothing to EU, selling cereals to EU, exporting agricultural products to EU etc. On top of that, they involved top specialists in the respectful fields from the EU into their events and strengthened contacts between the UCCI and its members. In addition, a training program for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been developed^[19].

On the other hand, the approach to communication campaigns proposed by the British Embassy should be noted. Earlier in 2013, the British experts from the CTA Economics & Export Analysts Ltd consulting company have analyzed the level of public awareness on the AA and developed a communication campaign strategy. Later, that strategy has become the basis of the “Stronger Together” project. Meanwhile, Mark Hellyer’s group, representing CTA, has proposed detailed recommendations on building a communication strategy to inform small and medium-sized enterprises (hereinafter, the SMEs) on the benefits and the essence of the DCFTA in the aforementioned research. As far as we know, these recommendations have not yet been taken into account; moreover, they have not even got adequate attention of experts and the government officials. It seems that the same fate has befallen the recommendations developed by the Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership, “EU-Related Communication in Eastern Partnership

^[17] “Щодо відзначення дня Європи”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://mfa.gov.ua/ua/about-ukraine/european-integration/ukraine-eu-inform>

^[18] “Public opinion survey to assess the changes in citizen’s awareness of civil society and their activities. Prepared for UNITER project on order of Pact Inc.”, (Kyiv: GFK, February, 2016), 6

^[19] See, “Success in Ukraine”, accessed June 28, 2016, http://ctaeconomic.com/news_29.html

Countries.”^[20] The specificity of this review is its focus on practical tools able to actually improve the communication skills.

Moreover, such media as “Yevropeyska Pravda”^[21], “Radio ES”^[22] and “Hromadske TV”^[23] have become important media platforms covering the issues related to the implementation of AA and DCFTA. Consequently, on the one hand, the public has received a reliable source of information on the EU-related issues, while on the other hand, non-governmental organizations implementing different European integration projects in most cases have gained a platform to communicate with their target audiences. In May’2016, “Yevropeyska Pravda” and “Radio ES” covered BeEuropean action, initiated by the MFA of Ukraine and the Delegation of the EU to Ukraine^[24].

What needs to be emphasized here as well, is that both media have changed the perception of the EU related information in Ukraine. They demonstrated that the public in general is eager to learn more about Europe. The best way to provide people with this information is to tell them success stories of those Ukrainians who entered European market and benefited from that. Actually, “Yevropeyska Pravda” established this kind of genre in Ukrainian mass media. Its editor Serhii Sydorenko also has become not only a great promoter of this genre, but also one of the main communicators of the EU related topics in Ukraine.

Some media-oriented projects were supported by Solidarity Fund (PL). Partially, they were implemented by Internews-Ukraine. Participants of these projects (local journalists, experts, and editors of local press) have learnt how to write about Europe, how to find interesting topics and how to develop appropriate information strategy about Europe in their own media.

The next step initiated by the donors is encouragement of regional NGOs or mass media to establish their own projects related to the EU problematic and to apply for small grants in order to implement them. In this case, some think tanks would become coordinators, responsible for competition and application selection processes. Internews-Ukraine has started this kind of activities already, sending calls for proposals to mentioned target groups. “Yevropeyska Pravda” with the Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting launched similar project, funded by the EU, in September 2016. Their project aims at supporting local NGOs’ and media engagement into AA implementation process within framework of two initiatives: “Media for pro-European changes in Ukraine” and “Society for pro-European changes in Ukraine”.

Another project which is worth mentioning was launched in 2015: Understanding the EU’s Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. In November 2016 the booklet “Ukraine and Europe – a short guide” (Ukrainian and English versions) was presented in Kyiv. It focuses on AA and DCFTA content explanations and is a short version of a handbook “Deepening Ukraine-EU Relations – What, why and how?” It can be freely downloaded from the project web-page^[25].

The contribution by the European Business Association (hereinafter, the EBA) to the

^[20] See, Anneli Kimber, Ehtel Halliste, “EU-related communication in Eastern Partnership countries”, *The Eastern Partnership Review* 22 (2015), accessed June 28, 2016, <http://eceap.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/EPR-22-final.pdf>

^[21] See, “Yevropeyska pravda”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://www.eurointegration.com.ua/>

^[22] This Fm-radio focuses on European and Ukrainian music; news podcast covers events in the EU mostly. See, “Radio ES”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://radioec.com.ua/>

^[23] See, “Hromadske”, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://hromadske.ua/>

^[24] See, all the sent stories following the link: #BeEuropean, accessed June 28, 2016, https://storify.com/MFA_Ukraine/beeuropean-dopisi-koristuvachiv-socmerezh

^[25] Michael Emerson, Veronika Movchan, *Ukraine and Europe – A short guide*, accessed December 28, 2016, <http://www.3dcftas.eu/publications/other/ukraine-and-europe-%E2%80%93-short-guide>

dissemination of information about AA and implementation of DCFTA is also vital. It includes providing practical assistance to the entrepreneurs willing to export their goods to the EU markets. For instance, the EBA provides information on permits and approvals, and assists in finding partners in the EU member states.

Thus, all the stakeholders use network management approach while communicating the AA and DCFTA in Ukraine. Their activities sometimes overlap, but in some cases complete each other. That is why coordination between all of them is vital.

Recommendations

Public opinion polls. Both Ukrainian government and NGOs lack relevant information about people' understanding of what the both Agreements are about, and what kind of information regarding cooperation with the EU different target audiences really need. This kind of knowledge is vital when developing a communication strategy. Thus, before even starting any serious discussion on a strategy for communicating Europe, relevant opinion polls are required. Besides, relevant opinion polls have to be conducted regularly afterwards. Otherwise, all the discussions appear to be too theoretical and speculative, as previous thematic events have demonstrated. Moreover, any new communication strategy, which is not based on actual data, will have no chance to be successfully implemented. Therefore, appropriate sociology is a starting point for strategy development.

Complete engagement of the Government. Effective communication campaign requires a long-term communication strategy developed primarily by the Government of Ukraine. This strategy should include clear goal and objectives, target groups, communication messages, information tools and communication methodology, risks, and strategy efficiency analysis. Further dispersion of information concerning AA and DCFTA between vice-minister of European integration, the Government Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mission of Ukraine to the EU, MEDT, Council of Export Promotion, Ukraine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and other agents does not facilitate timely informing of the target audience on the benefits of the Agreement, and also exposes the government to accusations of inactivity and actual holding back of Ukrainian goods entry into European markets. Furthermore, development of a program of measures for different target audiences should become an important component of this strategy. The Association Agreement is not only implementation of the DCFTA. First and foremost, it means establishment of a new political, social, and business culture, which is why informing on the essence of the Agreement, the meaning of the rule of law, and the stages of its development should cover various population categories, not only the businessmen. Moreover, taking into account that implementation of the Agreement is closely connected with the reforms, EU communication strategy developed for and by the Government should be a part of a general communication strategy. And the most important point, adequate funding for such information campaign should be budgeted by Ukraine.

Close cooperation within the civil society. Non-governmental organizations should strengthen their communication campaign in Ukraine, turning the "Stronger together" platform into a real coalition of all stakeholders involved in cooperation with the EU and thus implementing the initial initiative of this project. Otherwise, the team will not be able to go beyond its niche and reach more citizens by its projects, and develop a long-term communication strategy to cover various target audiences. On the other hand, joint efforts and better communication between the NGOs would help avoid duplication of activities and promote diversification. At the same time, NGOs should strengthen their cooperation with the Government. As the Government does not and will not have budget for communication campaigns in the near future, both agents should share their tasks. The Office has started to gather information regarding the implementation process already and to publish reports based on that data. NGOs, in turn, should discuss with the Office the way how these reports could be improved in order to provide the NGOs with necessary and useful information for further analytic reports prepared by respective experts. The necessity of

this kind of cooperation has been discussed during the meetings. Besides, NGOs should focus on “communication products” development, which may be used and shared by mass media later on.

Responsibility of Ukrainian business. The business sector Ukraine cannot remain uninvolved in the communication campaign. Expecting that NGOs funded by Western donors have to fill all the information gaps is futile. Therefore, financial support of non-governmental organizations involved in public awareness campaigns, including the SMEs, on the benefits of the AA by Ukrainian business should become an essential part of social entrepreneurship, a concept that is gradually spreading in Ukraine. Moreover, involvement of Ukrainian business into raising funds for the NGOs may facilitate independence of the civil sector from foreign donors. At the same time, SMEs have to think of their own business associations, which would be able to make contacts with appropriate business associations in the EU. Cooperation between them could become the best platform for Ukrainian exports to the EU.

Extensive involvement of Ukrainian media. Given the fact that television remains the main source of information for the vast majority of Ukrainians (79%^[26]), effective communication campaign requires television platform. However, this is not about amateur videos informing about life in the EU, but professionally developed programs. The most successful format could be the one already tested by “Yevropeyska Pravda,” and “Radio-ES,” a story about a successful entry of Ukrainian product/brand into an individual EU market. Besides, the media should focus not only on storytelling, but also on explanation what is the purpose of certain changes associated with the implementation process. It is recommended as well to look how similar campaigns were organized by the media in Central European countries.

Improving communication skills. Given the fact that web resources are the main sources of information on the AA and the EU, governmental and non-governmental institutions should pay attention to developing their own strategies on communicating their activities to broader audience. In particular, activities in the social networks require great improvement, as presence of major Ukrainian participants of communication campaigns could be hardly considered satisfactory^[27].

Distinction between the activities which need funding and which do not need it. As far as implementation of the communication strategy always demands huge budgets which Ukraine definitely lacks, it is crucial to divide all the activities in two groups: those, which need financing; those, which do not need additional financing and may be implemented thanks to improved communication skills. For instance, improved communication between governmental and non-governmental organizations, agreed format of the governmental reports etc. will surely help experts and media to deliver much better content of the European integration issues to the audiences.

Pilot project for a chosen target group. Keeping in mind lack of the state budgeting and dependence on international funding, it might be reasonable to elaborate a pilot communication strategy for one target group. It could be recommended to focus on youth (16-23 years old) as on the main beneficiary of EU-orientated projects and AA. If this project succeeds and communication is effective, young people will share their knowledge and awareness of the EU within their own families and among their friends. Implementation of EU-related subjects into school curricula and elaboration of university EU study programs should be regarded as a significant part of eventual

^[26] “Public opinion survey to assess the changes in citizen’s awareness of civil society and their activities. Prepared for UNITER project on order of Pact Inc.”, (Kyiv: GFK, February, 2016), 20

^[27] For instance, as of April 12, 2016, Ukrainian Civil Society Platform Facebook page has 250 likes; the Government Office page has 486 likes; the Council of Exporters and Investors at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine page has 490 likes; Stronger Together – Doing Business page has 1130 likes; UopenEU page has 1871 likes; EuProstir page has 3126 likes; Internews Ukraine page has 4908 likes; Mission of Ukraine to the EU page has 4117 likes (for reference, the EU Delegation to Ukraine page has been liked by 16,576 users); EU study days in EU page has 5056 likes; Stronger Together page has 5664 likes; the Renaissance Foundation page has 12232 likes.

pilot project.

Finally, communication strategy should have a detailed budget and implementation plan. Its agenda has to include precisely elaborated tasks and timing for all the stakeholders involved in the process of communicating EU in Ukraine. Besides, it has to be also decided in advance whether a new communication strategy will have a part on how Ukraine has to be communicated in the EU. The results of the Dutch referendum signaled that this question should be properly addressed in Ukraine as well.

Communicating European vector in the context of new developments in Moldova's domestic and foreign policy

Victoria Bucataru

Executive Director, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova (APE)

European integration^[28], subsequently transposed in terms of association, is officially one of the basic vectors of Republic of Moldova's domestic and foreign policy. Originally declared as a foreign policy objective by the Communist Party in 2005, the development of relations with the European Union (EU) was later possible due to the accession of new pro-European parties to power. While during the times when the Communists were the ruling party in Moldova the idea of European integration was only declaratory, since 2009 all fields of activity have been subject to approximation and compliance with the "acquis communautaire". Considered a "success story" of the EU due to the quick pace of initiation of reforms in good governance, justice, human rights and freedom of speech, Moldova received major support, both political and financial, from the development partners, particularly the EU. Thus, in April 2014 the Moldovan citizens are granted visa-free regime in the Schengen area, and in June signed an Association Agreement with the EU, including the Free and Comprehensive Trade Zone Agreement.

Despite the promising start, the so-called "pro-European" parties compromised the integration model, one beneficial to the development and modernization of Moldova in a medium and long-term perspective through involvement in the bank fraud and the many corruption cases, exposed to the public. The phenomenon of state capturing and concentration of power, as well as the political influence, have all resulted in the collapse of the "success story" and stagnation of the reform process. Ineffective, sometimes non-existent or ad-hoc communication about the European vector by Moldovan authorities resulted in considerable decrease of its popularity. Widely associated with the ruling parties, the European development model cannot be capitalized at its fair value and is exposed to the propaganda of Eurosceptic forces.

After the presidential elections in November 2016, a new integration model has been promoted in the society and at the level of public speeches. Even if, at Government level, integration eastwards is not a priority, there is a clear affinity of a part of society to this option. According to the Public Opinion Barometer conducted in November 2014, if they had to choose between joining the EU and the Russia - Belarus - Kazakhstan Customs Union, 39% of respondents would prefer integration into the EU and 43% integration into the Russia - Belarus - Kazakhstan Customs Union. The number of undecided, who in 2012 accounted for more than half of those interviewed - 58.4% in 2014, has surprisingly decreased to 12%. In October 2016^[29] the European integration project was preferred by 30.9% of respondents, while 44% opted for the Eurasian Union. Carefully analyzing the trends in respondents' preferences regarding the two integration models – West vs East, the first representing a wide reform process and aiming at full European integration, and the second comprising the process of integration into the Russia - Belarus - Kazakhstan Customs Union / and the Eurasian Union respectively, a vaguely defined framework without any clear purpose, we see will see the disparities are relatively average (13%).

Why do people still prefer integration into the East while the European integration is the basic

^[28] Translation provided by Berlizzo Group

^[29] Public Opinion Barometer, Institute of Public Policy, (October 2016):82, accessed on November 14, 2016, http://www.ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/BOP_10.2016.pdf

vector of domestic and foreign policy? How can the fall in the preference polls for EU integration option can be interpreted? What new informational trends are used to shape and manipulate public opinion at the national and international level? These issues will be analyzed taking into account Moldova's experience and the Eastern European regional context.

Deficiencies in communication aimed at promoting the European vector of the Republic of Moldova

A more active promotion of the European vector of Moldova beyond its borders and the progress achieved at the national level in the period 2009 - 2014 have helped build a positive image of the Republic of Moldova, a so-called "Success Story", generating increased attention from the European development partners. For over 3 years Moldova enjoyed the goodwill and the both political and financial support of European officials. Moldova receives most development assistance per capita among the Eastern Neighborhood countries, with bilateral assistance amounting to 131 million Euros in 2014.^[30] New programmes launched during 2014 to 2016 amounted to € 310 million.^[31] The fraud in the banking sector, the fragility of state institutions and the lack of confidence in political elites in Chisinau have led to a deep credibility crisis and a cooling of relations between Moldova and the Euro-Atlantic partners. Both the EU and other development partners suspended the financial support for Moldova in 2015 - 2016 until a partnership program is signed with the International Monetary Fund.^[32]

Despite the considerable deepening of EU-Moldova relations, in particular at the legislative level, and the numerous infrastructural development projects, an obvious shortcoming is the lack of citizen involvement in the modernization of Moldova through proximity to European standards. Both the Parliament and the Government talk about obvious successes in the foreign and domestic policy of the State as a result of reforms, but these are only understandable to a limited number of people, usually officials, experts, people involved in the institutional processes. But even among these groups there is a vague understanding of the overall reform process, taking account the political interference, the staff turnover determined by the small wages and the lack of professional development opportunities.

The progress on paper is not felt by those directly involved in the process and not fully understood by the citizens of Moldova. While some time ago, in order to preserve a positive image of the country outside, Chisinau authorities used to perceive communication on European affairs only at the level of communication with development partners, today, after the idea of "success story" has been compromised, efforts to highlight the perspective of EU membership also create confusion among ordinary citizens. Lack of methodological and in-depth analysis of the public perceptions about foreign policy preferences that determine the internal affairs result in some ad-hoc communication processes. Another issue that diminishes the citizens' trust is the duplicate message of politicians and state institutions. While the Ruling Coalition promotes the European development vector, the president of the country, Igor Dodon, denies the benefits of current reform processes and economic contracts, thus discrediting Moldova's commitments assumed by signing of the Association Agreement and the Free and Comprehensive Trade Zone Agreement.^[33]

^[30] Website of the EU Delegation in Moldova, accessed on January 17, 2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/moldova/1538/republic-moldova-and-eu_en

^[31] Website of the EU Delegation in Moldova, accessed on January 17, 2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/moldova/4011/eu-moldova-relations_en

^[32] EU Budget Support for the Republic of Moldova – pending the fulfilment of several conditions, 8 July, 2015, <http://eeas.europa.eu>

^[33] Igor Dodon, after the meeting with Putin: Moldova may abandon the agreement with the EU, Agerpres, January 17, 2017, accessed January 20, 2017, <https://www.agerpres.ro/externe/2017/01/17/igor-dodon-dupa-intalnirea-cu-putin-republica-moldova-poate-abandona-acordul-cu-ue-17-49-53>

Why does the perspective of enhanced cooperation with the East continue to prevail in the polls while European integration is the basic vector of domestic and foreign policy? How can the fall in the preference polls for European development vector can be interpreted? If we analyze these questions we can see a contradiction between the politics of the government, the leading political elites actively promoted at the level of institutions and the perceptions existing in the society. The process of harmonization with European standards does not entail a process of communication with the society, ordinary people from the onset. Moldovan citizens do not feel a change in the quality of life, and sometimes the information provided by the media is confusing, creating stereotypes harder to be tackled later (the Law on Equal Opportunities is an example of this). The battles among political elites, the lack of cohesion and the Machiavellian messages generate a lack of people's confidence. On the other hand, trying to explain why Moldovans prefer integration with the East, we still operate with terms and phenomena such as nostalgia, ideology, existence of an information space mainly influenced the Russian media. The opinion polls also suggest the existence of myths that Russia is the country that provides financial support, cheap gas and ensures the security of the country and of the Orthodox Christian space. These arguments have been used in the campaign led by the presidential candidate Igor Dodon, a militant of the paradigm of integration in the eastern area.

Lack of a coherent, consistent and continuous information and communication with the citizens of Moldova on the European Association process and the development of relations between Moldova and the EU influences the misperception of both the benefits and disadvantages. According to the same Barometer of Public Opinion of October 2016, 33.4% of respondents tend to believe that the eventual integration into the EU would be advantageous compared with 37.2% who think the Eurasian Union would bring more benefits. The European integration model would bring more disadvantages compared to the Eurasian model, with a share of 30.2% - 20.7%^[34]. Although there have been several attempts to implement a communication strategy on European affairs at the Government level, it has not been completed.

Factors contributing to miscommunication on Moldova's European progress

One of the most important determinants is the lack of a national consensus on European integration. The fact that European integration is not a priority for all political stakeholders in Chisinau has led to distortion of information on the essence of reforms and Moldova's European progress. Communication is sometimes carried out for the purpose of attracting political capital and does not take into account the damage caused to the relationship between the EU and Moldova. The recent statements by President Igor Dodon, which not only cast doubt on the benefits of the European vector but also distorts the importance and complexity of the reform process, are a proof of this.

So far, there is no country level strategy for communication on European affairs for the overall society. A communication strategy on European integration of Moldova was developed in 2007 and subsequently repealed in 2012 without being replaced by a new document^[35]. The Government has no clear strategy of communication on Moldova's European course. Communication is performed sporadically through press conferences, presentation of assessment reports, press releases of the ministries, media interviews given by officials institutions, and government web pages. Each institution decides on its own about how to carry out the communication process, taking its personal experience or best practices gained from cooperation with other partners, and the

^[34] Barometer of Public Opinion, Institute for Public Policy (October 2016):79, 81, accessed on November 14, 2016, http://www.ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/BOP_10.2016.pdf

^[35] DECISION no. 1524 of 29.12.2007 approving the Strategy for Communication on European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, accessed on November 14, 2016, <http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=326654&l>

visual identity manuals in case of implementation of European projects^[36] as an example. Lack of institutional capacity, heavy workload and low wages are another impediment in the dissemination of information and effective communication with the general public in Moldova.

Enhancing the dialogue with the civil society is another essential element in the process of communication on European affairs. The civil society is the main link providing a direct connection between the society and the central and local institutions. Creating a stable and effective partnership with the civil society, based on a constant dialogue, would contribute to a better distribution of information, and increasing the number of agents promoting Moldova's European course. The existing platforms, such as the National Participation Council, the National Platform of Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership are not made proper use of. In addition to communication platforms provided for by the Association Agreement, there is a need for a wider opening of state institutions in providing current information on the reform processes.

The relationship between central and local authorities is also of major importance considering the fact that the association requires not only adoption of laws but also their implementation. Communication should be carried on throughout the country and not just in Chisinau. The role of local public authorities is crucial, and lack of awareness of this goal entails serious consequences such as the failure to recognize the benefits of implementation of large projects supported by European partners and lack of knowledge of newly adopted procedures and regulations. Local public authorities are the bodies which should ensure effective communication between central and local institutions and between local institutions and communities.

The rising Euroscepticism may also be the result of emergence of a new phenomenon, awareness of which increased in 2014, when Crimea was annexed by the Russian Federation. Although already present in the Russian media space, Moldova found itself in the middle of a hybrid war, invaded by continuously disseminated propaganda. The existence of Russian media sources, promoting anti-European propaganda, has become a threat not only to the information space of the Republic of Moldova but also a national security threat overall. According to the Barometer of Public Opinion carried out in October 2016, the top three TV stations viewed by respondents for information purposes are Prime (broadcasting the Russian station ORT) 64.7%, Moldova 1 43.5% and Jurnal TV with 29.3%. As for the level of confidence, some confidence is given by respondents to Russian media, with 37.4%, Moldovan media, with 36.5% and EU media, 28.2%^[37]. The accessibility, familiarity and simplicity of Russian media messages favor an easier absorption of information. The inability of the authorities to deal with this phenomenon is not just a problem of communication, but also an imminent danger to the independence, sovereignty and integrity of Moldovan state.

Conclusions and recommendations

The European vector of Moldova's foreign policy is currently at risk not only because of internal factors, but also the external ones. The antagonism existing among the population based on geopolitical preferences is more and more frequently used as a weapon by external forces thus favoring the division of society into camps and minimizing the benefits of European association. The duplicity of high-level messages, lack of national consensus and well defined national interests, ad hoc communication on the European model of development help ease penetration of propaganda and increase the Euroscepticism.

The bank fraud and other processes that led to the EU's association with the ruling elites have contributed to sharp decline in the popularity of the first, ignoring the advantages Moldova has

^[36] VISUAL IDENTITY MANUAL Specifications for the Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova Joint Operational Programme 2007-2013, accessed on November 15, 2016, <http://ro-ua-md.net/images/stories/MIV/Manual%20identitate%20vizuala%20prelucrat%20v12.pdf>

^[37] Barometer of Public Opinion, Public Policy Institute (October 2016):32, 34, accessed on November 14, 2016, http://www.ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/BOP_10.2016.pdf

from signing the Association Agreement. The paradigm of communication must be changed through a deeper research of the new circumstances both internally and in terms of the trends in world politics. Such phenomena as Brexit, the refugee crisis in the EU, open conflict in Ukraine, contribute to shaping public opinion, while the lack of comprehensive information stimulates the anti-European rhetoric.

Recommendations:

- Creating a department of communication on Moldova's European integration within public institutions involved in the reform processes, in charge of managing the communication process in the country and beyond its borders.
- Developing effective and multidimensional communication strategies to take into account the existing social groups, their needs and interests as a result of in-depth quantitative and qualitative research.
- Diversifying information by providing more independent sources, both TV and radio.
- Developing viable instruments to counteract the media propaganda at the state level and cooperation with the non-governmental sector in order to reduce the danger of misinformation.
- Increasing institutional capacities in view of enhancing the process of communication with citizens. Increasing the number of staff responsible for communication, training them and strengthening inter-institutional communication networks.
- Continuously informing the citizens on the essence of reforms, the progress achieved, legislative changes, their implementation in practice by:
 - Using media space (launching radio and TV programs for different categories of persons, taking into account the time of broadcast and the broadcasted messages, establishing a partnership with the press: constantly organizing press briefings to help them train and inform the representatives of media on the European integration process).
 - Organizing thematic public debates in university centers and schools with participation of representatives of governmental institutions and civil society, the diplomatic corps.
- Training the citizens of Moldova about the functioning of the EU, about what European community means, what are the rights and obligations of EU citizens, the benefits and any disadvantages of the European integration process by:
 - introducing more mandatory courses in the university and school curriculum;
 - developing materials that would contain information on the benefits of EU integration for every social category and social groups (TV programs: successful short stories, interactive games for children, interactive activities);
- Actively promoting the results of social, infrastructural, economic and environmental projects carried out with the EU support;
- Facilitating access to information on the activity of the EU and EU member states in Moldova by organizing fairs, festivals and public events with the participation of European partners accredited in Moldova.
- Communicating, promoting and explaining the benefits and drawbacks of the European integration process and other integration models through public debate.



Czech Communication of European Affairs: From a Persuasive to an Explanatory Approach

Vít Dostál

*Research Director, Association for International Affairs (AMO),
Czech Republic*

The aim of this paper is to introduce, explain and evaluate the communication of European affairs in the Czech Republic. It will first provide an overview of this policy from its early stages in the late 1990's and lead on to today's approach. It will describe primarily the tools of governmental communication of European affairs. Then, two cases will be discussed in detail. First, the Czech EU Council Presidency experience is analyzed. Secondly, the paper will deal specifically with communication which is aimed at consumer protection.

Several concluding points summing up the Czech experience are provided. The Czech experience shows that large-scale communication campaigns could be useful if the aim is to persuade citizens. Proper communication needs to be provided through campaigns focusing on explanation and working with specific target groups. Moreover, to reach the target groups, regional information centres could be a useful tool. The explanatory campaigns have to follow current trends in communication and public affairs. Last but not least, the governmental EU affairs' communication will never be the only or even the main source of information for citizens. They will listen to media and opinion leaders, including politicians, so even a well prepared European affairs' communication could be discredited if spoiled by key political actors' statements and deeds.

Czech EU affairs communication 1997-2005

The first communication strategy regarding European affairs in the Czech Republic was adopted in June 1997. Its aim was to provide the public with information about the accession negotiations, which were commenced in 1998, and possible membership of the Czech Republic in the European Union. At the beginning, the goal was to explain the nature of the European Union and therefore the pros and cons of Czech membership.^[38] However, as the general referendum on EU membership was approaching, the nature of the communication strategy turned from informative to persuasive. This change of the main message was a logical step, as the interest of the government was to draw attention to the referendum, and to get as many pro-membership votes as possible. The overall strategy which anticipated a positive decision from the very beginning could be portrayed by the motto of the first phase of the pre-referendum campaign, which was "Welcome into the Community". "Given the fact that the referendum was still about to take place, the motto suggested that just one option was possible."^[39] The tools used before the referendum were as general as was the message. They included eye-catchers, TV and radio broadcasting adverts, leaflets, brochures or adverts in printed media.

After the successful referendum in 2003 and accession to the EU in 2004, the communication of European affairs remained part of governmental policies. Initially, it focused on providing information regarding the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. Since the so called

^[38] Kozlová, Michaela. 2008. "Komparace strategií komunikace evropských záležitostí v zemích střední a východní Evropy." MA diss., Masaryk University. Accessed January 13, 2017. http://is.muni.cz/th/102835/fss_m/Diplomova_prace.pdf.

^[39] Petřík, Jaroslav. 2003. "Mediální kampaň vlády před referendem o vstupu do EU." Accessed January 13, 2017. <http://www.globalpolitics.cz/clanky/medialni-kampan-eu>.

European Constitution was rejected in the referenda in the Netherlands and in France in 2005, the communication on European affairs has re-focused and differentiated.

The Current EU Affairs Communication Approach

Starting with the Communication Strategy for 2008, the Government gave up large scale campaigns and decided to work with specific target groups. This meant the abandonment of horizontal, universal and general messaging aimed at persuasion, which was the main approach until 2005/06, and its replacement by vertical, structured, targeted provision of information aimed at explanation of European affairs. Such a way of communication has been kept until now.

The first and necessary step in this approach was the delimitation of several target groups and identification of their specific needs. The Concept Note on Information on European Affairs for the Year 2008 lists ten target groups which include e.g. media, students, civil service, NGOs etc.^[40]. In order to find out what the expectations were regarding the communication of European Affairs, targeted surveys were conducted. They focused mainly on the kinds of sources the general public as well as specific target groups use for acquiring information on the EU.

The communication strategies – or concept notes on information as they used to be called – are annually approved by the governmental European Committee (the body in which all relevant ministries and other actors are represented). The document always includes goals, target groups, priorities and lists the tools which should be used.

Priorities usually reflect three issues. Firstly, they are bound up by ongoing events on the European level. That is why for several years the communication priority was the Lisbon Treaty and its implementation. Furthermore, the priorities are interconnected with the policies and goals of the government which always wants to single out certain positive patterns of the European integration. For instance, the government led by the soft Eurosceptic Civic Democratic Party underlined the EU Single Market. Last but not least, the selection of priorities also follows the needs of target groups.

For example the communication strategy for the year 2016 aimed, apart from the general public, at six specific target groups: media, public administration, youth and teachers, NGOs, entrepreneurs and SMEs and pensioners. Moreover, it listed six priorities: migration to the EU and internal security, the single market and its deepening, effective use of EU funds, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, consumer protection and the single currency.^[41]

Which Tools are used for EU Affairs Communication?

The Office of the Government uses several tools for information on European affairs. They comprise together the Integrated Information System. Individual tools have developed over time; some have ceased to exist and some new have emerged. The tools have included the Eurocentres – regional points of communication, Eurofon 800 200 200 – a free-of-charge telephone line, the information web-portal Euroskop.cz, the grant scheme and the National Convention on the EU.

Eurocentres were intended to be the major contact points for the public seeking information on European affairs. They were opened in 12 Czech regions' capitals and in Prague. The network had at the beginning two employees in each Eurocentre who were able to provide information at the desk. Moreover, they organised lectures in schools, public debates or workshops for specific target groups.

^[40] Office of the Government. 2008. *"Konceptce informování o evropských záležitostech v ČR na rok 2008."* Accessed January 13, 2017. http://www.vlada.cz/assets/evropske-zalezitosti/organizace-utvaru/odbor-informovani-o-ez/III_material_do_vlady-konceptce_2008.doc.

^[41] Office of the Government. 2015. *"Otevřeně o Evropě: Komunikační strategie o evropských záležitostech."* Accessed January 13, 2017. https://www.euroskop.cz/gallery/84/25455-otevrene_o_evrope_komunikacni_strategie_o_evropskych_zalezitostech.pdf.

However, the Office of the Government gradually gave up the model of nine-to-five opened offices with desks. There were two principle reasons for this step. Firstly, the budgetary cuts in 2010 caused a staff limitation and there was only one employee per region. Secondly, the public was less hungry for information than it had been so the desks did not make much sense anymore. As a result, the heads of the Eurocentres started to work as EU communications officers for the particular region. They had to be more active in the field. They were pushed to form close contacts with specific target groups, created regional networks for particular policy areas and had to identify the stakeholders who could benefit from better information on European affairs. In other words, as people stopped seeking information, the information had to seek the people. The heads of the Eurocentres still had to undertake some tasks as previously. They were organizing public events, lecturing at high schools and providing information if anyone asked for it (e.g. via e-mail). Additionally, they were given the opportunity to undertake their own mini-projects, which would catch the specifics of individual regions and their needs. For example the head of the Eurocentre in a rural region focused on farmers and the EU funding options for them, etc..^[42]

In brief, the role of Eurocentres has developed very much since they were introduced and they are still perceived as an indispensable element of direct communication of European affairs in all regions. They provide information instantly, are the access point for specific regional target groups and organize public events like discussions, workshops and competitions.

The Eurofon 800 200 200 number, a free-of-charge phone line, was part of the communication on European affairs from the outset. Initially, it was expected to provide mainly general information on the Accession Treaty and EU integration as such. It still offers this kind of service. However, the highest volume of inquiries it receives are aimed at options for EU funding. Therefore, its main focus is to inform grant-seekers and potential beneficiaries of EU funding and to navigate them to the right answers in that specific field.

Euroskop.cz is a website providing all information on EU affairs and governmental policy vis-à-vis the EU. It comprises a catalogue of information on the EU including its history, the institutional framework, policies and the story of Czech membership in the EU. Last but not least, it provides information on practical issues, e.g. on insurance, studying and working within the EU etc. Moreover, Euroskop.cz serves as a news portal on the EU. It not only republishes related news from the Czech News Agency, but also produces its own analyses and interviews. A very useful source of information for a variety of state and non-state actors is the monthly published Monitoring of EU Legislation which analyses the development of the EU legislative process in various fields (e.g. Internal Market, Environment, Regional Policy, etc.).

Euroskop.cz is aimed only at members of the public who are already seeking certain information and therefore have some basic knowledge of the EU. Therefore, it has to bring some added value. However, it also runs Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts, where it tries to transmit its messages through less formal means.

The grant scheme was abandoned in 2009 following the budgetary cuts. It used to be part of the Integrated Information System and funded projects proposed by civil society actors. The support was assigned to projects which had to correspond to communication priorities. The budget of the grant programme was around 375,000 EUR in its last year, i.e. 2009. It focused on four thematic priorities: Czech EU Council Presidency, European institutions, EU legislation impact on the Czech Republic and European traditions.^[43]

^[42] Interview with a communication officer of the Office of the Government, June 9, 2017.

^[43] Office of the Government. 2009. *Koncepce informování o evropských záležitostech v ČR na rok 2009.* Accessed January 13, 2017. <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/evropske-zalezitosti/organizace-utvaru/odbor-informovani-o-ez/koncepce-informovani-o-evropskych-zalezitostech-v-cr-na-rok-2009-.pdf>.

There is no need to renew the grant scheme, according to the representatives of the Office of the Government. Its *raison d'être* was that the state administration lacked a certain capacity and expertise which it had to outsource. Now, after more than 10 years in the EU, it is capable of undertaking all major tasks on its own. This does not mean that civil society is not part of governmental communication. Experts participate in conferences and public events organized by the Office of the Government or regional Eurocentres. The aforementioned Monitoring of the EU Legislation is provided by one of the think-tanks and civil society takes part in the National Convention on the EU. However, the logic is different. The services are rather in-sourced into the events and projects undertaken by the Office of the Government than out-sourced to the non-state sector.

The National Convention on the EU was introduced in 2014 and it facilitates the stakeholders' debate on various EU-related issues. It usually follows the development of EU legislation and tries to bring in all relevant actors. The discussions are closed for the public, yet Euroskop.cz always provides interviews from the debate. General recommendations are prepared, noted by the governmental European Committee and then published on the website of the National Convention on the EU. The civil society, the social partners as well as Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament also take part in the discussions of the National Convention. There is one unique aspect of this discussion platform: the topics that are discussed during the expert round tables are proposed by non-state actors (NGOs, academia, trade unions and entrepreneurs' representatives) and it is always a non-state actor who prepares the agenda of each expert round table, proposes the discussion issues and writes the recommendations that arise from the discussion.

Communication beyond the Governmental Bodies

There are also other actors active in the field of the communication of European affairs apart from the Government: primarily the European Commission Representation in the Czech Republic and the European Parliament Information Office. The European Commission also runs its own network of regional information offices called Europe Direct. These geographically overlap in some cases with the Eurocentres. However their spheres of work differ, Europe Direct having offices available for the public to drop in and working according to the European Commission's own communication priorities.^[44]

There are, of course, other sources of communication on European affairs. NGOs and think-tanks get grants from various Community programmes and from other donors (Open Society Fund, German political foundations) for projects, in which the communication of EU affairs constitutes a significant element. They usually follow a particular political approach. For example the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation affiliated to the German Green Party deals with European environmental protection, whereas the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation affiliated to the Christian Democratic Union focuses on European values. They even sometimes challenge governmental communication for example by emphasizing some aspects of European integration, which are not a governmental priority or which the government wants to substantially change.

Still, it is primarily governmental communication which is (perhaps together with the European Commission Representation) the most visible, stable and relevant.

Case studies

The first case study deals with the Czech EU Council Presidency, which took place in January – June 2009. The Czech Republic was the second country at the helm of the EU from the Eastern enlargement wave. (The first was Slovenia in the first half 2008). Moreover, it held the EU Council Presidency in the pre-Lisbon Treaty institutional set-up, which meant a greater role for the Prime

^[44] Interview with a communication officer of the Office of the Government, June 9, 2017.

Minister, and in the EU foreign-policy coordination.

The EU Council Presidency constituted a unique opportunity whereby the EU actually came to the Czech Republic. Therefore, the Czech EU Council Presidency became one of the communication priorities. The scale of the communication was bigger. A proportion of the meetings of the Presidency's calendar took place in the regions. They were usually accompanied by festivals, concerts and exhibitions. Another asset of the Council Presidency was that media were focused on what the Czech Republic does. Therefore, the government had to explain (sometimes with mixed success), the role of individual institutions or EU competences in various fields. Though it is not clear, whether the sole fact that a country holds the Council Presidency leads to a better informed population, it is definitely an opportunity for enrichment of the standard communication menu.

The second case study deals with consumer protection policy. This is a policy area which developed thanks to the transposition of EU legislation and it remains one of the fields, where the European Commission is very active. However, the implementation of that policy was sometimes difficult, as consumers were not aware of their rights. An especially vulnerable group were the elderly and pensioners, for whom it was hard to adjust to new conditions. At the same time, the phenomenon of unscrupulous sales' pitches proliferated across the Czech Republic. The logic of this scam was that the organizers offered free-of-charge trips. These attracted mostly pensioners. The trip usually included a visit to a cultural site, refreshment and – most importantly – the presentation of some products, mainly household equipment. Skilled presenters made a show out of it and persuaded the audience to buy the products. They were pressured into buying products, which were often over-priced and of a poor quality. The point was that the customers did not know their rights. They were not aware of the fact that they could get their money back.

One regional Eurocentre decided to tackle the issue. It linked up with a documentarist who shot a film on the practices of such companies also using a hidden camera at the shows. The documentary was then presented during seminars where the audience was comprised mainly of people aged 55+. It also cooperated with an NGO focusing on consumer protection so an experienced lawyer could sum up what customers' rights were and answer questions from the public.^[45]

This case study perfectly shows three things. Firstly, that it is necessary to draw a link between EU affairs and the particular issues of a specific target group. Secondly, that there is a need to come out of the capital city and be active in the regions, so that even the groups with limited access to information are on the radar of EU communication. It also shows the usefulness of regional communication centres. Thirdly, this case study is a perfect example of how the governmental communication could interlink with the NGOs (consumer protection centre) and other actors (documentarist).

General recommendations:

- Large-scale campaigns aimed at the general public are useful for substantial topics when the government needs to persuade the population. However, they can scarcely deepen the general population's knowledge of European affairs since such an approach is too horizontal, general and sketchy. Therefore, proper communication needs to be provided through campaigns aiming at explanation and working with specific target groups.
- Various communication tools need to be developed. They have to focus on specific target groups and they need to follow up current trends in communication and public relations.
- Those seeking to communicate European affairs have to face the fact, that if people are not seeking information, the information has to seek the people. Thus, well-established networks in regions could help in the provision of information to all groups of the society. Functional partnerships with various stakeholders are necessary.

^[45] Interview with a communication officer of the Office of the Government, June 9, 2017.

- It is important to task the government to conduct the communication of EU-related issues. It is primarily the government which deals with the EU, so it has to provide the information to the public. Other actors should supplement it or even challenge it if needed. Nevertheless, persistent, well-sourced and non-biased communication of EU affairs is the government's duty.
- Last but not least, the communication of EU affairs is not the only channel through which the public acquires its image of the EU. Public opinion is formed by national and international events and listens to strong opinion leaders. EU affairs' communication is only part of a more general political communication. If, for example, pro-European politicians fail in their domestic tasks, it can spoil the image of the EU as well.

Samuel Goda, PhD

Project Coordinator and Researcher, Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA)

Slovakia joined the EU 13 years ago, in 2004 after a long process which started very soon after the independence of the Slovak republic. The following pages aim to offer an overview of the communication and information campaign in Slovakia. In fact, both communication and information campaigns are parts of one “overall strategy” designed to bring the EU closer to all segments of Slovak society. The communication campaign was about several aspects of European integration and the information campaign focused on pre-accession instruments of the EU in form of foreign aid and financial instruments for Slovakia. The 13 years’ retrospective shows that the business is not done yet at all and communication about EU is still on the table with basically the same idea as before – to offer true information and re-boost the confidence of European integration.

Communication campaign

The communication campaign in the period 1999 - 2004 had an important mission to promote *the EU among the people of Slovak Republic and to inform them about aspects of European integration. This campaign was led by the Slovak Government on the basis of the strategic document “Communication strategy for the preparation of the population for EU membership”*.^[46]

The main body of the Government that directly coordinated the campaign was the “Department of institution-building and population preparation (DIBPP)” (since 2002 Department of Communication Strategy and Education Office of the Government). European integration departments have been established in all ministries of the Government and PR agencies implementing advertising and promotional activities for the purpose of the communication campaign – all were subordinated to DIBPP. Campaign management in hands of DIBPP had a centralized character. Activities in the communication campaign were first consulted and guided by the DIBPP. The obligation to consult the individual steps in the campaign had not only authorities directly subordinated to the department, but also all civil society organizations, NGOs, professional educational organizations, European Information Centers (EIC), Youth Information Centers (YIC) and even the media presenting information about the EU. DIBPP thus controlled all components of the communication campaign.

This centralization was convenient for a harmonized approach in the communication campaign. DIBPP thus avoided unnecessary duplication of activities or occurrence of instruments having a contradictory effect. On the other hand, excessive centralization prevented the entry of new tools in communication campaign. The time-phases of the campaign were as follows:

1. Informative (1999 – 2000)
2. Strengthening of positive and modification of negative attitudes (2001 – 2003)
3. Mobilization (2004 - integration)

The first shortcoming of the communication phase was fragmentation in dissemination of

^[46] „Správa o plnení Koncepcie komunikačnej stratégie vlády Slovenskej republiky pre prípravu obyvateľstva na členstvo Slovenskej republiky v Európskej únii v roku 2000.“ Report on Implementation by Slovak Government, 2000. www.rokovanie.sk/File.aspx/Index/Mater-Dokum-44093.

information, especially those to the public. Employees of government got rather quickly familiar with the principles of functioning of the EU through seminars, conferences, twinning schemes, provided by DIBPP and also through everyday contact with these matters. The structures, institutions and policies equally quickly raised awareness of journalists. However, a problem arose in the case of the general public. Inadequacy and fragmentation of information has resulted in deepening doubts about the correctness of accession to the EU, increasing the share of opponents of accession to the EU and a decline in interest in further acquisition of information about the EU.

Another problem was the actual collection of information about the EU. Given that only a relatively small group of people had an active knowledge of English, translating English materials into the Slovak language was time-consuming and technically challenging. It has often been translated only the essence of materials and details remained not translated. Problematic was also the then limited access to the Internet, which reduced the possibilities for citizens to get information about the EU.

It may also be noted that “one-way routing” of information only to civil servants and journalists was not entirely appropriate. In result, the residents could get the impression that the integration process runs out of them and thus lose interest in European affairs. It may subsequently be reflected in the results of the referendum on accession to the EU.

In the second phase of the communication campaign the initial shortcomings were removed. Therefore the persuasive phase of communication campaign had relatively smooth running. All competent Slovak authorities got - with foreign assistance - the practice in EU-related public campaign management. This was evident in the results of public pool in 2002 when 69% of voters were in favor of EU integration and 24% against, while it makes a 7% rise of pro-EU votes, compared to the same pool in 2001. The percentage increase was due to the conviction of citizens who in June 2001 did not have a clear opinion on Slovakia’s accession to the EU.^[47]

Among the most effective tools of the “persuasive phase” were mainly billboard campaign, TV and radio sessions about the EU, personal presentations of Vice Prime Minister for European integration, activities of YICs and EICs, regional consulting and information centers, regional development agencies and the Internet. Those instruments directly operated on all target groups and thus guaranteed a wide scope and complexity of the overall campaign.

A very positive effect on the course of agitation phase of the campaign had the participation of many civil society organizations and professional training organizations. One of the civil society organizations that took indispensable place in the campaign was the public association “Ciel: Integrovaná Európa (Aim: Integrated Europe))” and MEMO’98 which was processing information about the EU and minority issues through local and regional media. Moreover, on expert level, the Slovak Foreign Policy Association SFPA conducted a multi-year project called “National Convention on EU” which provided and expert feedback from civil society, academia and business sector to MFA and Government on all pre-accession negotiating chapters.

To more effective second phase helped a considerable foreign assistance. Thanks to a financial subsidy from Denmark, France, Germany and Austria it was possible to carry out projects, which would otherwise have remained without practical implementation. Of great importance for campaign coordinators in Slovakia were the experience of the governments of those aforementioned countries from of the information campaign on the EC / EU for its own citizens. For instance, with financial support from and based on bilateral cooperation with Denmark, two projects have been elaborated. First target media employees and raised awareness about the EU institutions, EU policies and the role of media during the integration process. Second targeted the public officials and it dealt with the environment protection issues, regional policy and EU public procurement

^[47] „Návrh Stratégie predreferendovej kampane o vstupe SR do EÚ.” *Draft Strategy for the pre-referendum campaign on accession to the EU, 2003.* hsr.rokovania.sk/data/att/131712_subor.rtf.

procedure. Another example is the twinning initiatives with Danish, German or Spanish partners.^[48] With their help it was possible to avoid many shortcomings and thus to proceed easier in the preparatory process of the Slovak Republic to join the EU.

In the third phase, on 16th and 17th of May 2003 a referendum on EU accession took place. The poll reached 52,15% and to the question “Do you agree Slovak republic to become an EU Member State?”, 92,46% marked “YES” and 6,20% marked “NO” while 1,33% of votes were not valid.^[49] The main objective of this period - to ensure a high turnout in the referendum with a positive result - was met only in part. However, it is important to consider the fact that participation in the referendum could affect many other factors independent of the communication strategy of the Government.

Other very important components of the communication campaign were the YICs and EICs which assured a direct contact with public. The main difference between them was in the organizational structure and financing. While the YICs were more connected to and directly financed by the Government, the EICs were supported by the grants of the European Commission. As a result, the employees of the EICs gained direct experience from working with the EU. On the other hand, as all EICs had to apply for projects individually, the information provided about the EU were not uniformed in the beginning. Compared these two broader structures, the EICs were more visible and more engaged. Both structures disseminated bulletins, information materials, organized competitions, personal consultations and public events. However, organization of expert seminars, conferences and discussions was in the sole competence of EIC. This was due to main of the YIC was to provide consultancy to young people and EU propagation was a secondary role. Therefore they did not pay that much attention to EU information campaign and EICs, which were created with the aim to provide broader public with information about the EU. Many of these still exist which proves their rationale.

In the pre-accession period, an amount of state administrative bodies were involved in the organizational structure: the NAC, Director General for European Affairs of the Government Office, the Director of Foreign Assistance of the Government Office, sectoral NAC, Department of Regional Development and Coordination of Structural Instruments and also the DIBPP and other departments of European integration. A method for controlling these components of the information campaign was relatively of decentralized nature. Although NAC was officially on top of that organizational structure, it did not have full control over all of its parts. As we have already said these components could have overlapped each other in their activities, which could have led to unnecessary duplication of activities or initiatives to individual bodies counterproductive. The occurrence of this danger, however, was minimized thanks to solid connections between the components of the campaign and their cooperation.

Information campaign

The process of information campaign on the EU pre-accession instruments had, regarding to its objective and focus to only a part of the Slovak population, more “softer” character. Since the communication campaign of the EU brought in the initial information about the pre-accession EU instruments for residents, the specific information campaign could focus on detailed information and introduction of target groups into the issue of foreign aid. To this plan served mainly RAICs (Regional Assistance and Information Centre) – more business-clients oriented and the RDAs (Regional Development Agency) – more NGO and public oriented.

^[48] Šramová, M, „Slovenské inštitúcie: Predstavujeme OBIPO – jeden z odborov Úradu vlády SR, Ciel: Európa.“ In Pilarčíková, Eva. „Slovensko pred vstupom do EÚ Slovenská informačná kampaň o EÚ a o predvstupových nástrojoch EÚ.“ Bc. Thesis, MasarykUniversityinBrno, 2007.

^[49] Velšič, Marián, „Nízka účasť na referende o vstupe SR do EÚ. Príčiny a súvislosti,“ Euractiv, October 2, 2003, accessed on January 21, 2017, <https://euractiv.sk/analyzy/uncategorized/nizka-ucast-na-referende-o-vstupe-sr-do-eu-priciny-a-suvis/>.

These organizations contributed substantially to the ability of interested stakeholders for funding from the EU pre-accession funds. Their importance derived from direct contact with target groups through which RAICs and RDAs were able to gain information about the specific needs of these groups and assist them in solving problems. RAICs and the RDAs had a common goal - to contribute to economic and social development of regions. Gaining that objective, however, had many different forms and aspects.

The main aim was to motivate target groups to apply for projects, teach them how to prepare such projects and gain help assistance from pre-accession instruments in the most effective way. Nevertheless it discouraged potential beneficiaries due to complex and complicated procedures throughout project preparation and also the fact that the EU contribution to the various initiatives were paid ex post. The overall conduct of information campaign about the pre-accession instruments, however, can be described as successful, because the campaign used for the presentation of EU funds all available instruments and provided not only information, but also advice and practical assistance to all target groups.

Evaluation and recommendations

Communication campaign on EU and information campaign on EU pre-accession instruments had many common and different features. Both campaigns were held between the years 1999 and 2004 – in one single period of time. Mutual overlap of campaigns allowed providing the citizens with comprehensive information on the various aspects of European integration. Another advantage of this situation was the ability to combine the tools of both campaigns, which would otherwise require parallel design. On the other hand, there was a risk that their contents would be confusing and too complicated for some target populations.

A significant difference between the two campaigns laid in their aims and target groups on which focused. The aim of general communication campaign was to promote the EU among broad levels of Slovak society. In contrast, an information campaign on the EU pre-accession instruments is focused on practical issues of obtaining foreign aid from EU funds. Information was channeled mainly to businesses, civic associations, professional interest organizations and local governments.

However, these aspects did not exclude each other and therefore could be interconnected at certain points. Again may be highlighted the overlapping of both campaigns. For example, entrepreneurs who were interested mainly in financial assistance from the EU were also the voters in the referendum on accession to the EU. Therefore they needed to obtain general information about the EU - to which the communication campaign served. In fact, it could not be separated one part of European issues from the other, as the EU as it works is a comprehensive actor with all parts. Therefore, the information campaign on pre-accession instruments was not isolated from the general communication campaign, but rather acted as a “subpart”.

We may conclude that mutual penetration of both campaigns had positive impact on residents as they received a broader overview on European affairs. Both campaigns thus fulfilled the main objective – to introduce the citizens into European issues, gaining support for accession of the Slovak republic to the EU and build an institutional platform to receive financial support from the EU funds. Nonetheless, the whole process included also several shortcomings in effective financial distribution, communication among ministries and other relevant actors, in general insufficient campaign in schools, media, political parties and experts, absence of pros and cons comparison in media for general public, etc.^[50]

However, this project is not finished yet. After 13 years we may see serious problems on communication about the EU, especially from newly emerged anti-EU media which use social

^[50] More detailed evaluation: “Správa o vyhodnotení predreferendovej kampane o vstupe Slovenskej republiky do Európskej únie,” Government of the Slovak Republic, June 2003, http://www.rokovania.sk/File.aspx/ViewDocumentHtml/Mater-Dokum-29312?prefixFile=m_

networks to spread their very often false news as well as from the side of politicians who rather follow populism and are short of strategic decisions. Whole European integration project is in danger and what we should focus on is the re-boost of confidence in the EU. In many cases it seems that the analyzed communication and information strategy could be recycled and updated in order to reach this goal.

Some of the most important points on the communication on EU are as follows:

- A consensus on communicating the basic principles on EU (peace project, four freedoms as principles of integration, transparency, human rights and freedoms...) among the political parties which promote closer relations with EU is needed as a minimum prerequisite.
- Elaboration of basic communication strategy is a must. In this process the lessons learned from other countries – already EU members but also candidate countries would be highly beneficial.
- At the same time, there is a need to develop instruments to counter disinformation and false news about the EU, processes in the EU institutions as well as developments in EU Member States.
- Slovak instance shows that to some extent centralized management on certain issues is beneficial. At the same, crucial role was played by civil society and media.

Communicating Europe in Georgia during the AA and DCFTA Implementation Process

*Nino Kheladze, Project Coordinator,
Mariami Paposhvili, Project Coordinator,
Georgian Institute for Strategic Studies (GISS)*

This paper examines the role of strategic communication in the process of implementation of the Association Agreement (AA) including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) between Georgia and the EU. It assesses overall process of Georgia's approximation with the EU and makes a particular focus on analyzing the communication strategy employed by the Government of Georgia (GoG) as an essential tool in ensuring a public support necessary for the effective implementation of AA/DCFTA. The paper also identifies the challenges and the gaps observed in the implementation process of the communication strategy. The findings of the paper contribute to identifying and sharing the lessons learned.

The paper starts with the brief overview of the current status of affairs related to AA/DCFTA implementation followed by the brief description of the communication strategy along with an analysis of positive developments and challenges of communication efforts in this process. Later in the text authors provide set of recommendations designed to improve overall efficacy and value of communication strategy in the context of EU-Georgia association dynamics.^[51]

EU-Georgia Association Agreement Implementation Dynamics

Since the ratification of the AA Georgia took various steps to meet the requirements of AA/DCFTA.^[52] The National Action Plan, adopted by the GoG in January 2015, set a timeframe for the implementation of the AA agenda.^[53] The GoG met most of Action Plan benchmarks promoting a range of reforms; however, the shortcomings were detected throughout the implementation.

Namely, Georgia made progress in meeting prerequisites under the Visa Liberalization Action Plan (VLAP). On December 18, 2015 the European Commission in its fourth progress report issued positive assessment on Georgia's visa liberalization efforts. After completion of vetting process in the European Parliament and approval by the European Council Georgian citizens will enjoy the visa free regime with the Schengen area states as well as 4 Schengen area candidate states, most likely by the end of the first quarter of 2017.

Additionally Georgia took steps to approximate the national legislation to the EU requirements.

^[51] The methodology used for analyzing the deficiencies and achievements of communication efforts is the following: semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and desk research (analysis of the official documents and open source information). The interviews took place at the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European & Euro-Atlantic Integration, the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Media Development Foundation.

^[52] On June 27, 2014 Georgia signed the AA with the European Union. Since the ratification of the AA by the Georgian Parliament on July 17, 2014 about 80% of the agreement entered into force (provisional application), including DCFTA on September 2014. AA with Georgia had fully entered into force after the Belgian Parliament (last EU member) ratified the document on December 24, 2015.

^[53] Association Agenda between the European Union and Georgia, Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European & Euro-Atlantic Integration, Official Documents; Available at:
http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/documents/eap_aa/associationagenda_2014_en.pdf
<http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/ge/strategic-communications/documents> (Consulted on: 02.02.2016)

It also made attempts to increase awareness and capacity of businesses and the farmers in reaping benefits offered by the Agreement. Georgia's AA/DCFTA implementation efforts received a positive assessment from the EU at the second EU-Georgia Association Council meeting which took place on November 16, 2015. It is promising that by the end of 2015 the EU was the largest trading partner of Georgia. According to data, Georgia exports to the EU equaled 646.42 million USD and imports 2,518.76 million USD^[54]. Both sides identified Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms as the top priority in EU- Georgia relations in terms of implementation of AA. Georgia adopted the new anti-discrimination law and strategy with the purpose to eliminate all forms of discrimination, cruel, humiliating treatment and punishment. Parliament also initiated number of legislative amendments and protocols to counter domestic violence, as well as to improve the living conditions in the prisons.^[55]

However, GoG drew criticism from the international community and domestic NGOs alike in relation to the serious problems and shortcomings in the process of ensuring rule of law, media independence (Rustavi 2 case) and administering justice.^[56]

Communication related Positive Developments and Challenges of AA/DCFTA Implementation

The Communication Strategy of the GoG on European Integration contains key components, such as the goals, the target audience and the implementation mechanisms^[57]. It also outlines concrete awareness raising activities on the benefits of the EU approximation.^[58] However, the document lacks adequate evaluation criteria and, thereof, fails to measure impact of activities proposed.

Over the course of past few years awareness in relation to the scale of Russian propaganda and broader soft power tools aimed at sabotaging Georgia's approximation with Europe has been significantly increasing. This in turn helped to join strategic communication efforts of public institutions with that of international community and civil society. Decreasing public support towards EU identified by public opinions polls in 2015^[59] served as a wakeup call identifying need for more robust public awareness campaigns.

In July 2015 Department of Strategic Communication was established at the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. The main goal of the department is to develop as well as coordinate implementation of strategic communications policies of GOG.^[60]

^[54] External Trade of Georgia, National Statistics office of Georgia, Available at: http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=137&lang=eng (Consulted on: 15.02.2016)

^[55] *Ibid.*

^[56] Evaluation of the Implementation of the Political Part of the Association Agenda – Implementation of the First Year, Open Society Georgia Foundation, November 2015, Available at: https://www.osgf.ge/files/2015/2015/publication/Book_GEO_WEB.pdf (Consulted on: 20.02.2016)

^[57] Georgia adopted “The Information and Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on European Integration for 2014-2017.

^[58] The strategy sets the following goals: to inform the public about the benefits of the EU approximation and increase the awareness of the European values among various societal groups. The office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration developed an Annual Action Plan for the implementation of the Communication Strategy. Final reports on the status of the implementation of the Action Plan 2014 and the Action Plan 2015 have already been released. The final reports for 2014 and 2015 summarize all the events and activities that contributed to the raising awareness of EU integration processes as well as popularizing this topic.

^[59] The 2015 NDI survey has revealed that the support of the Georgian population for the EU integration has decreased from 78% to 62% since 2013; The National Democratic Institute; The document is available at: https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202016%20poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_vf.pdf (consulted on 10.05.2016)

^[60] ‘A newly established Department on Strategic Communication was presented at the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration’, July 8, 2015. Available at: <http://eu-nato.gov.ge/en/news/6318> (consulted on 10.05.2016)

It serves as the main contact point of the State Minister's Office on communications related issues for International Community as well as civil society organizations.

Office of the State Ministry on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration coordinates work of the interagency working group on implementation of Communication Strategy which meets regularly twice a month at the level of heads of departments of relevant ministries.

In addition, Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration supervises the work of the Information Center on NATO and EU, which carries out various activities aimed at informing the general public about EU and NATO integration processes.^[61] It currently operates 8 regional centers and implements diverse set of activities such as organization of public events including town hall meetings with local communities, conferences, public lectures, as well as cultural events and publication of public awareness materials. The Information Center on NATO and EU cooperates with civil society and academia.

Additionally, civil society plays an important role in raising public awareness and support towards implementation of AA/DCFTA. Over the last years greater attention of the international community towards the need for robust strategic communication resulted in broadened possibilities for civil society organizations to fundraise for awareness raising projects concerning the EU-Georgia approximation process. In an effort to increase their effectiveness civil society organizations started to develop broader alliances and thematic networks. "Defend Liberty" is an example of a platform coordinating efforts of diverse spectrum of stakeholders aimed at promoting values and principles of liberal democracy while specifically focusing on neutralizing effects of Russian propaganda.^[62]

Good example of a successful thematic program supported by the EU is the European Neighborhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) launched in 2013. Among other goals the program strengthens co-operation with and amongst small farmers as well as helps to increase their awareness through district level consultations and information centers. One of the elements ensuring success of the program from strategic communications point of view is high visibility of success stories enabled by the program.^[63]

The communication strategy faces various challenges in terms of fighting stereotypes, myths and expectation gap rising from the lack of awareness regarding AA/DCFTA benefits and the influence of Russian propaganda.

Georgian population has high expectations when it comes to AA/DCFTA benefits. Many believe in an immediate trickle-down effect of economic growth stemming from the DCFTA-related opportunities. Others remain hopeful of prospects associated with freedom of movement resulting from the introduction of visa free travel.

Nevertheless, there is a camp of skeptics who question these forecasts. Given skepticism is another challenging issue for the policy makers. Namely there is a belief that Georgian farmers and producers will not meet the mandatory standards and therefore will not benefit from free trade arrangement with EU.^[64] Some also doubt the tangible benefits that visa liberalization will bring to the Georgians. Skeptics claim that visa liberalization will not benefit majority of the Georgians due to considerable costs necessary to travel abroad. The situation is further complicated by the misconception that visa liberalization regime will allow Georgians to legally work in EU, which is

^[61] Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. Available at: <http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/en/structure/history> (consulted on 11.05.2016)

^[62] Platform includes 17 organizations; *Defend Liberty* home page, Available at: <http://georgiaforliberty.org/?lang=en>

^[63] ENPARD. Available at: <http://enpard.ge/en/about-us/> (consulted on 10.05.2016)

^[64] "10 Myths – about EU-Georgia Association Agreement", Information Centre on NATO and EU

not true.^[65]

Short-term inflated expectations are still another challenge that begs attention. Public expects the benefits from the approximation process to materialize as soon as possible, while specialists expect tangible results to follow from medium to long-term.^[66]

Georgian public is generally highly supportive of Georgia's approximation with EU. According to the public opinion poll released in 2016 by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) 77% of population support the EU integration process.^[67] This trend has already been present in Georgia for some years, though fluctuations of support level have also been there. False stereotypes, misconceptions combined with aggressive Russian propaganda are among factors that negatively affect public support level.

The lack of awareness about provisions of AA/DCFTA as well as distorted perception of what the EU stands for contributes to this process. For instance, parts of the Georgian public have fears that implementation of substantive elements of AA goes against core Georgian traditions and values. Russian propaganda is particularly active in this direction aiming to strengthen these fears by portraying Europe as embodiment of moral decay. The fears also arose in relation to the adoption of the Anti-Discrimination bill by falsely claiming that it could legalize the same sex marriage. Politicians across the political spectrum along with certain factions of the Orthodox Church contributed to this. The GoG's response was rather misleading as it associated the bill with the obligations under the AA rather than dissipating false stereotypes linked with the anti-discrimination law itself. There was also a lack of communication from the senior politicians from the ruling coalition in addressing this issue and explaining to the public the essence of proposed legislation.

Additional myth concerns the claim that DCFTA negatively affects Georgia-Russia trade relations. Confusion was exacerbated after an adviser to the Ministry of Agriculture in a recent interview favored the benefits of the Russian market over that of the EU.^[68] Moreover, there are fears that opening the market to the EU goods will cause inflow of cheap foreign products that local producers cannot compete with. Given fears and misconceptions reduce trust in the AA/DCFTA implementation process and breed confusion and hesitation among smaller producers and farmers.

Conflicting and Incoherent Political Messages and Actions

On the one hand GoG pursues declared goal of EU approximation, but on the other hand it lacks coherent, clear and concerted stance on issues identified as key in the association process vis-a-vis the EU. In particular ruling coalition due to its eclectic and non-aligned political platform has tendency to send mixed messages as it was the case with the adoption of the anti-discrimination legislation. Members of the parliamentary majority expressed their support for the bill, example of which is Levan Berdzenishvili^[69] who considered adoption of the anti-discrimination law crucial

^[65] "10 Myths – about EU-Georgia Association Agreement", Information Centre on NATO and EU.

^[66] Myths about the EU-Georgia Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA); Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, Available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/documents/eap_aa/mythbuster_2_2014_en.pdf; (Consulted on: 23.03.2016)

^[67] Results of Public Opinion Poll in Georgia, The National Democratic Institute, 04.11.2016. Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/March-2016-Public-Opinion-Poll-Georgia>; (Consulted on: 20.03.2016)

^[68] Rustavi 2, 'Advisor to Minister of Agriculture calls Russian Market Historic,' March 17, 2016. Available at: <http://rustavi2.com/en/news/42120> (consulted on 10.05.2016)

^[69] Member of the Republican Party. Republican Party left the Georgian Dream coalition in March 2016 to run independently for the 2016 parliamentary elections.

for the Georgian society.^[70] Nevertheless, Soso Jachviani^[71], another member of the ruling coalition openly expressed his negative attitude towards the anti-discrimination bill because, as he explains, it legalizes and promotes homosexuality.^[72] He even initiated an amendment to the law to remove the words: “sexual orientation, gender identity and expression”.^[73]

Furthermore, in July 2015, the Media Development Foundation published a report – “Public Funds for Media Promoting Hate Speech and Anti-Western Sentiments” which aimed at assessing the communication strategy on European integration including the implementation of the objectives of the strategy focusing on the international context and media environment. The report reveals that certain Ministries cooperate with media outlets having outright anti-western attitudes by providing public funds for advertisement in these outlets.^[74] This approach has an impact on strengthening the anti-western tools of spreading the stereotypes and misconceptions about European integration.

Given ambiguity and inconsistency in messages and actions weakens efficiency of communication efforts and encourages mixed attitudes in the public towards association agenda. This trend deliberately or unintentionally hurts the EU-Georgia approximation process and empowers anti-western groups who are eager to exploit haziness and non-uniformity of stances and views of ruling political leadership.

AA/DCFTA Commitments as a Smoke Screen for Domestic Policy Decisions

Using AA/DCFTA implementation process as a smoke screen for unpopular decisions aimed at achieving political goals by the GoG negatively affects popular perceptions and results in deviation from the core aims of the communication strategy. For that reason misconception, which link the government’s unpopular decisions to the requirements of the AA/DCFTA take root.

For instance, amendments to the Tax Code of Georgia, which increased the excise tax rate on tobacco and alcohol is a vivid example of a policy decision that intentionally puts at risk support for AA/DCFTA implementation process. The sole justification offered by the Ministry of Finance for raising the rates tobacco was the necessity to approximate Georgian legislation with that of the EU. However, independent research conducted by the civil society as well as tobacco and alcohol businesses revealed that neither the scale nor the pace of implementation of proposed amendments were required under the relevant EU regulation(s)/AA provisions^[75]. As a result common opinion was formed that the real reason behind the proposed amendments was the goal of increasing budgetary revenues.^[76]

^[70] News portal; Available at: <http://reportiori.ge/old/?menuid=3&id=24812>, (Consulted on: 20.06.2016)

^[71] Member of the Parliament representing Georgian Dream coalition from October 2012 until October 2016

^[72] News portal; Available at: <http://reportiori.ge/old/aww.ge/geworld.ge.?menuid=68&id=77200&lang=1;> (Consulted on:24.06.2016)

^[73] Democracy&Freedom Watch, Available at: <http://dfwatch.net/mp-wants-sexual-orientation-deleted-from-anti-discrimination-law-38333>, (Consulted on: 24.06.2016)

^[74] Tamar Kintsurashvili, Gela Gochikashvili, “Public Funds for Media Promoting Hate Speech and Anti-Western Sentiments”, Media Development Foundation -MDF, Report 2015, Available at: <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads//Report%20on%20Obiektivi%20&%20others.%20Eng.pdf>

^[75] Article 283 of the Association Agreement refers to the issue of taxation on tobacco, however document introduces the obligation for gradual harmonization throughout five years and does not entail the tax growth every year

^[76] GRASS FactCheck; Available at: <http://factcheck.ge/en/article/according-to-giorgi-kakauridze-the-yearly-increase-of-the-excise-tax-on-tobacco-is-due-to-the-association-agreement-between-georgia-and-the-eu-and-the-state-strategy-on-tobacco-control/> (consulted on 11.05.2016)

Similarly, unpopular amendments to the Law on Broadcasting introduced restrictive regulations on media advertisement. GoG's sole argument for introducing amendments that considerably reduced the media advertisement market and undermined financial sustainability of independent media outlets were commitments under AA. In this case as well, AA required neither restrictive regulations nor the proposed timeline of their introduction. It is believed that the real motivation for expedited introduction of new regulations was to curtail financial independence of private broadcasters and in particular to undercut financial sustainability of the most popular, pro-opposition TV- Rustavi2.

Recommendations

AA/DCFTA implementation process requires holistic, comprehensive and inclusive approach of the government enabling consolidation of efforts of all relevant public agencies as well as that of the international community and civil society. Growing understanding of the need for the robust communication strategy has led to the increased frequency and scale of public awareness campaigns. However, there is need to undertake further steps in order to fill the gaps and establish institutional framework ensuring systemic approach towards strategic communication.

The recommendations are the following:

- To align AA/DCFTA implementation decisions with communication strategy priorities - avoid making political decisions that undermine approximation process with the EU (using association process as a smoke screen for unpopular domestic policies).
- Ensure consistent and coherent messaging from political leadership on EU-Georgia Association process - avoid misleading, incoherent and contradictory narratives so that the overall process is not jeopardized by inconsistencies related either to policy decisions of the government or statements of political leadership which contribute to negative perceptions on EU-Georgia approximation process or fit into the narratives promoted by Russian propaganda.
- Develop specific measures within communication strategy in relation to the residents of occupied regions to increase awareness and attractiveness of Georgia's approximation with the EU.
- Increase visibility and knowledge about success stories linked with AA/DCFTA implementation process.
- Expand activities directed at vulnerable groups (ethnic minorities, economically disadvantaged) for developing inclusive, shared vision of the benefits of EU-Georgia integration process.
- Enlarge efforts and coverage of AA/DCFTA related awareness raising activities across regions by applying targeted approach to individual administrative units (take into consideration their peculiarities, needs and interests).
- On an operational level further steps are needed for the enhancement of established institutional framework aimed at coordination of efforts among various stakeholders as well as streamlining of the process of implementation of communication strategy. - Increase common ownership of strategic communication process among all relevant public institutions (ministries, individual agencies).
- Ensure engagement of civil society organizations on a systematic basis by organizing meetings dedicated to strategic communication in the process of AA/DCFTA implementation. Currently it takes place on an *ad hoc* basis, which limits potential for closer and effective coordination.
- Enlarge efforts involving business community by increasing their awareness about opportunities arising from AA/DCFTA implementation process as well as by taking into

consideration their concerns and needs in this process.

- Intensify efforts involving universities and schools to fully utilize their potential as a social multiplier in raising awareness about EU-Georgia approximation process. .
- Align activities envisaged under the Action Plan with goals identified in the Communication Strategy.
- Monitoring and Evaluation mechanisms should be defined in order to assess the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of the activities planned.
- To develop a separate strategy on how to counter Russian propaganda.



V4 Supporting Communication Strategy of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine on implementing AA and DCFT

Marek Marszalek
Programme Manager for Romania and Moldova,
Institute for Eastern Studies (IES),
Poland

Communicating the European Union in Poland

Communication strategies before and after accession to the European Union – Polish perspective

Polish accession to the European Union in 2004 restored Polish sense of belonging to the Western civilization and was considered by majority of Poles a natural way of development. In the pre-accession period, there was a broad political consensus as for the road that had to be followed. Almost all major political forces agreed that there is no alternative to the EU. According to Igor Ostachowicz, Secretary of State in the Cabinet of Prime Minister Tusk, responsible for PR, the influence of campaigns promoting EU was very little. Poles had such a positive opinion on EU, that both pro- and anti-European campaigns couldn't change much. Poland's aspirations have been always focused on West. Poles are very rational. European Union gives money, security, and the EU regulations are good, because they help solving concrete problems.^[77]

In the late 90's there was a broad debate on how to formulate Poland's European aspirations. Should state authority remain objective and limits itself only to inform citizens (in order to educate the society), or should it be determined to convince the public in Poland to support its European concept. In another way, should the communication be educational or persuasive? In consecutive years (1998-2003; from the start of accession negotiations to the date of the accession referendum) governments conducted a variety of communication activities ranging from policy oriented (Jerzy Buzek's government and its Public Information Programme) - to a purely promotional campaign implemented by Leszek Miller's team.^[78]

For several years after accession in the official communications dominated messages that highlighted benefits of UE membership. Poles did notice the stream of European money coming to their country. However, the general knowledge about the EU and its mechanisms wasn't too high. In 2012, more than 60% of Poles responded that they are not sufficiently informed on EU^[79]. At the same time, the level of turnout in EU elections was each time very low. That didn't change the fact that in 2015, 75% of Polish respondents stated that they feel they understand how the EU works – and that was the highest score in the whole EU^[80]. The survey was about subjective knowledge of the EU, but the result speaks for itself.

^[77] Interview, Igor Ostachowicz, Secretary of State in the Cabinet of Prime Minister Tusk, responsible for PR

^[78] Rafał Riedel, *Kampania informacyjna w reżyserii rządu... czyli „państwowy marketing polityczny”?* Studia Medioznawcze 1 (32) 2008

^[79] Eurobarometr nr. 78, 2012 – information after the comprehensive study by Elzbieta Kaca, Melchior Szczepanik, *Jak mówić o Unii? Wpływ komunikacji na zaangażowanie Polaków w sprawy europejskiej*, PISM, Nr 13 (61), June 2013

^[80] Eurobarometer nr. 83, 2015

Current situation on the communication policy on EU affairs in Poland

The government and individual ministries carry out communication and information policies on European issues on the basis of their annual communication strategies, and in some cases on an *ad hoc* basis.

The main tool for informing citizens on current EU issues are ministerial web pages, where one can find current announcements and messages, but also more detailed information about actions and decisions taken. Communication strategies of individual ministries differ among each other by specific objectives and proposed themes, for example, the Ministry responsible for European Funds has emphasized in recent years the promotion of concrete benefits resulting from the absorption of European Funds. The Ministry of Finance has been focusing on an informational campaign about adoption of the euro in Poland (the subject that has been continuing to come back on the agenda for many years).

Few years ago, the Ministry of Economy started an informational campaign on the European Unitary Patent System and published on its website a well-structured, complete set of information on this subject containing the full history of the negotiations, active links, FAQ's. This informational campaign may serve as a good example to follow.^[81]

The institution responsible for coordination of European affairs is, according to the law from 2009, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The MFA has also the most extensive web page and it is the main source of the information^[82] on the EU agenda. Ministerial page contains a various sets of information on the EU agenda, European law, reports on Polish membership in the EU, but also some practical information on i.a.: current vacancies in the EU institutions. In comparison to the extensive Polish version, the English version of this page is relatively small and contains only general information.

The second important governmental source is the Ministry of Economic Development (that took over prerogatives of the Ministry of Regional Development, responsible for European funds and the Ministry of Economy)^[83]. The ministerial web page contains extensive information on the EU funds, specific EU programmes and all institutional framework.

Information campaigns, social media, web pages, traditional and unorthodox communication

Polish authorities take into account the opinions of the Poles about the EU and their feedback is adapted to social needs and expectations. Their strategies and *ad hoc* communication are based on both public polls and specially commissioned public opinion researches. They use all available communication channels. As it has been already mentioned, the primary tools are ministerial web pages containing most important and current news, but the new, unorthodox channels of communication are becoming more popular.

Social media are used more often and in a more effective manner – the official pages on Facebook

[81] Compare: Elzbieta Kaca, Melchior Szczepanik, *Jak mówić o Unii? Wpływ komunikacji na zaangażowanie Polaków w sprawy europejskiej*, PISM, Nr 13 (61), June 2013

[82] Compare: http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/p/msz_pl/polityka_zagraniczna/unia_europejska/

[83] The ministerial web page contains an extensive information on the EU funds, specific EU programmes and all institutional framework. Polish version of the page is much more developed, but there services are also available in English: <https://www.mr.gov.pl/en/site/what-we-do/european-funds/> Ministry of Development runs also an internet web page dedicated to EU fund: <http://www.funduszeuropejskie.gov.pl/en/> where both public and private sector can find an extensive information oh how to use the EU funds in a very clear and well organized manner. The ministry gives a precise instruction on how to use different programs and to whom they are addressed. One can download all necessary application forms, find out about information points in different parts of Poland, current seminars and trainings, read about success stories. The page is accessible both in Polish and English language.

are becoming more attractive and more professional communication tool serving to distribute a various content – traditional communicates and announcements, photos, videos, live broadcasts, hyperlinks, links, invitations to conferences, trainings, seminars, information about announced competitions. In recent years, Twitter has become an appreciated information channel and the number of its users is growing. Ministries have their own profiles on twitter, linked to profiles of ministers, deputy ministers and leading institution's figures.

Another important element of communication about the EU are campaigns. Organized by the ministries, they are directed to specific audiences, with specific, customized type of information. Before and after each campaign opinion polls are conducted. The language of the messages is tailored to a specific target group. Usually, ministries use TV and radio channels, which still remain the most important media in Poland. But traditional press and internet portals are being involved as well. Campaigns are carried out in various forms – starting from typical advertising spots and posters in public spaces that inform about a specific campaign, actions, to trainings, seminars and less common, but effective methods such as product placement in popular TV series and radio dramas. Good example has been set by the Polish Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture, that presented information about Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 in one of the most popular Polish TV comedy series “Ranch”. The project won in 2012 an CAP Communication Award for Innovative Communication^[84].

Polish authorities pay great attention to involve in their information campaigns the so-called intermediates and multipliers (experts, NGO's, associations and institutions). The guiding principle of communication which applies to all Polish institutions is to provide reliable, sufficient and on time information. A good planning is one of the key issues.

The communication policy of Polish authorities has evolved in recent years and one of the proofs for that is the fact, that almost every current strategy emphasizes the importance of the language of message, and for this purpose Polish institutions use a professional help of linguists. It is important that the language of communication should be clear and easy to comprehend for an average receiver.

A lot of effort is taken to eliminate technical language and bureaucratic jargon known from communicates of early years of the EU accession. When you read the communication strategies of Polish institutions from previous EU frameworks you can observe very clearly, that there is some continuity and evolution. It is important to be able to learn from past experiences, foresee upcoming problems and change what was ineffective.

The communication strategy of the Cohesion Policy for 2014-2020, introduced by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development in June 2015, has been prepared on the basis of the detailed research and analysis of the information and promotion system of European Funds. The experience from the programming period 2007-2013 was taken into consideration. For the purposes of the new strategy, the Ministry ordered in 2011 a semiotic audit of the notion “European Funds”, which showed that the human factor was missing in presenting the funds. The authors of the audit suggested to avoid presenting European Funds in large numbers and advised adopting a more personal perspective, a perspective of an individual transformation.^[85] This horizontal communication strategy includes national and regional operational programmes and, to a limited extent, European territorial cooperation programmes. Sets out the basic rules and schemes of carrying out information and publicity activities, including rules for information and promotion activities in terms of their efficiency and effectiveness. Unfortunately, the text is available only in

^[84] You may find the description of the project on: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/2012/cap-at-50/ranczo_en.pdf

^[85] The communication strategy of the Cohesion Policy for 2014-2020, p. 5 : https://www.funduszeuropejskie.gov.pl/media/5832/Strategia_komunikacji_PS_2014_2020_30_06_2015.pdf

Polish.

At the same time the strategy suggests moving away from a hermetic, to technical language, which is a major obstacle in communication. According to the authors of the audit, a company specialized in semiotic analysis, the communication had drew a straight path: from funds directly to the results and changes produced by those funds. This process, however, gives the impression of being impersonal and rather mechanical. There was no space for recognition of the positive role of people and institutions engaged in making those changes. EU funds often had been presented simply as a stream of money coming from the European Union. On one hand such kind of message had hindered the internal perception of Poland as an integral part of the EU, and enhanced demanding attitudes. On the other hand, instead of presenting the real meaning, the importance and a wider context of undertaken actions and projects, the message had focused on attracting and spending money. The EU funds help to achieve important scopes, to orient and to organize joint efforts. Therefore, communication should take into account development objectives and the local contribution to the achievements.

Communicating with citizens has long been a primary concern not only of national, but also of the European institutions, with the aim of fostering trust in the European project. When it comes to the near future, the main challenge for Polish authorities will be to involve more Polish society in the process of the decision making in the EU. Since 2012, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), an innovation in the Lisbon Treaty, has allowed citizens to directly suggest new EU legislation.

Most probably the current financial framework is the last in which Poland isn't a net contributor to the EU budget, so it might be challenging to prevent a drastic fall of pro-European attitudes among the society when the pay-receive ratio will change.

Recommendations:

- Coordination at the level of the government and ministries of all activities related to communication in order to develop a clear, consistent way of communication – a good example in this respect constitutes the collaboration of Polish institutions preparing the Polish Presidency of the EU Council in 2011;
- Development by institutions dealing with information and promotion of their own handbooks on specific EU policies, which would suggest also a specific language understandable to the average reader;
- Increasing the role of dialogue in the process of communication and promoting proactive forms of communication. Institutions should constantly refer to messages coming from the public. They should encourage civil society organizations to participate in the consultation process, thus promoting fundamental values of the EU – the principles of pluralism, participation, openness and transparency;
- The subject of promotion should be the EU not as an institution or political option, but concrete policies proposed by the EU and their impact on citizens' everyday lives;
- Informing instead of promoting;
- Avoiding the common mistake of overpromise and under-delivery;
- Long term strategy planning is a key element of success in communication.

Communicating the European Union in Hungary *Experiences from the pre- and post-accession periods*

Zsuzsanna Végh

Research fellow, Center for European Neighborhood Studies (CENS),
Central European University (CEU),
Hungary

EU communication started in Hungary at a time when the country was still undertaking a comprehensive transition process following the regime change, but when the leading elites had already declared that it sought to join the European Union having previously signed the association agreement. The EU was open to this ambition, but no clear timeline was set up initially. The complexity of the social challenges originating from the transition, the clear wish to join a desired but among the wider public largely unknown system of alliance, and Brussels' support to further this process were some of the key factors setting the stage for the initial communication work in the second half of the 1990s, and these also shaped what questions had to be addressed. The environment has evolved since with communication continuously trying to address new challenges but often facing the very same problems again and again. While good initiatives were developed in Hungary, the fundamental failure of communication efforts was not bringing the EU close and not explaining it to citizens.

The evolution of governmental EU communication frameworks

The attainability of the EU membership defined the goals and the nature of the tasks to be completed by the official channels of EU communication, which were identified in Hungary's first EU communication strategy in 1995. First, the strategy sought to raise awareness and inform people about the European Union, explain how it would impact their lives then and after the accession. In the planned second stage, convincing the people that EU membership is good for the country and for them personally was on the agenda and was to be achieved through an emotional campaign. This was supposed to lead up to a mobilization campaign ahead of the national referendum about Hungary's EU accession, but due to the constantly moving accession date, the pre-planned phases shifted, and the emotional and the mobilization campaigns essentially merged into one in 2002/03.

Communication activities to increase awareness and provide objective information were coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and implemented by a range of actors: e.g. ministries, market-based organizations or social partners.^[86] The more subjective, emotional-mobilizing campaign, which was in essence a PR activity,^[87] was handled by the EU Communication Public Endowment (in Hungarian: EU Kommunikációs Közalapítvány, EUKK). The EUKK was founded following the revision of the communication strategy in 2002, just ahead of the EU

^[86] Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of European Integration, *Magyarország Európai Unióhoz való csatlakozását előkészítő kormányzati kommunikációs stratégia [Governmental Communication Strategy in Preparation for Hungary's Accession to the European Union]* (Budapest: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of European Integration, 1995), 41-42.

^[87] Livia Losonci, "Interjú Balázs Péter integrációs államtitkárral a Külügyminisztérium EU kommunikációs stratégiájáról [Interview with Integration State Secretary Péter Balázs about the EU Communication Strategy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs]," *Európa 2002*. Vol. 3. Nr. 4. (2002): 87.

Following the EU accession, some previously established channels continued to function, first under the coordination of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), and later again under the MFA, which later managed EU communication during Hungary's EU Presidency in 2011, too. Following 2014, the framework fundamentally changed: the MFA's EU communication department was moved again to the PMO along with most EU-related departments, but its activities are neither clear nor visible in the current setting. Communication about the EU now appears as part of the government's political communication. Its earlier function to provide objective information about the EU, its programs and opportunities has been replaced by political communication in which the EU is often portrayed as an external force disrespecting Hungarians and issuing dictates. Instead of bringing the EU closer, the current official communication rather alienates the Union Hungary is otherwise an integral part of.

Challenges, failures and successes

After an early euphoria dominated by high – often unrealistic – expectations following the regime change, the Hungarian population sank into disinterest and turned inward as the initial negative impacts of economic transition unfolded and living conditions worsened in the 1990s. The appearance of foreign competition and expectations from the EU's side resulted in concerns and fears, especially among the older generation, the freshly starting small and medium-sized enterprises or the rural population. Apart from providing objective information (what to expect, how to adapt etc.), EU communication had to address these concerns too. For this, a clear picture about the knowledge, expectations, fears and exposure of the population concerning the Union was needed. Background research, polling and analysis rightly formed the backbone of the communication strategy. The goals, target groups, messages and tools had to be based on the specificities of the Hungarian context.

The communication strategy identified several target groups, all of which were to receive information specifically designed to address their own needs and concerns using channels reaching them best in light of their habits, media consumption patterns and reference groups. The targets were 1) the *big groups*, like a) youth, b) entrepreneurs, c) civil servants, d) rural population, whom the government wanted to inform and whose support it definitely needed; 2) the *opinion leaders*, like a) teachers, b) professional communicators (media), c) experts and d) the church, who could all have a multiplier effect in their communities and could support the government's activities; 3) the *interest groups*, like a) trade unions, b) professional chambers and associations, c) economic chambers and associations of local councils, d) CSOs with whom the government sought to cooperate to reach their members; and finally 4) *opposing groups*, to whom dedicated attention was only paid in the run up to the referendum as they were not significant in Hungary.^[89] If there had been a more sizable opposition, addressing their concerns should have been more central to communication. Based on subsequent surveys, the target groups were adjusted along the way. For example, during the mobilization campaign, women, small enterprises and those living from agriculture were specifically targeted.^[90]

^[88] Tibor Palánkai, "Az EU Közalapítvány feladatai és céljai [The Roles and Tasks of the EU Public Endowment]," *Európa 2002*. Vol. 3. Nr. 4. (2002): 110–111.

^[89] Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of European Integration, *Magyarország Európai Unióhoz való csatlakozását előkészítő kormányzati kommunikációs stratégia [Governmental Communication Strategy in Preparation for Hungary's Accession to the European Union]* (Budapest: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of European Integration, 1995), 9–11.

^[90] Béla Szombati, "Az uniós csatlakozás kommunikációja [The Communication of the Accession to the Union]," *Európa 2002*. Vol. 1. Nr. 3. (2000): 30.

The key challenge was to translate the legalistic and very technical EU language and policies to digestible and relatable messages, which, as certain insiders argued, the first few years of governmental communication failed to do.^[91] This problem concerned the media as well despite the introduction of regular EU columns and annexes in major papers. Prominent media representatives emphasized the difficulties of “selling the EU” and the general disinterest of readers and publishers in the topic – even years after the accession, e.g. during Hungary’s EU Presidency.^[92] Although the approval rating of the EU turned around from the low scores of the early and mid-1990s^[93] reaching a stable 60+ percent by the time of the referendum, the general understanding about the EU did not improve significantly and people felt that there is still not enough information. Furthermore, while they believed that the EU membership is beneficial for the country, they could not tell how they can benefit from it in their own life.^[94] The low level of understanding and the perceived distance from the EU continues to be a problem without real, wide-reaching initiatives developing to improve the situation.

The mere task of reaching the population turned out to be a challenge in itself: while activities were ongoing from 1996, they were not widely known around the time of the referendum. In fact, these activities went so unnoticed that some commentators saw the subsequent mobilization campaign in late 2002 and early 2003 operating with simplistic, emotion-driven messages such as, “Can I open a confectionery in Vienna? Yes!”, as if that was all that the government did. The campaign was much criticized for being superficial,^[95] but it succeeded in raising attention, which was the goal. The bigger problem was that answers to people’s questions and concerns regarding the political and economic situation were not provided as part of this mobilization phase, and thus the campaign did not increase people’s rational understanding.

This is not to say that no promising information tools were developed at all. One of the most important channels, a website and free telephone service called *EUvonal* (in English: EUline)^[96] was a successful and long-lasting project of the government receiving even international media awards.^[97] Its aim was to provide accurate information to concrete questions via phone (later also Skype) or email within a few days’ time at most, based on a knowledge pool concentrated at the center backing *EUvonal* employing EU experts. The most frequently received questions and their answers were shared also on the website. Set up in 2003, it was a relatively late addition to the official channels of EU communication, but it received good reviews from media and remained operational even after Hungary’s EU accession when new, practical questions arose. Before the era of social media, however, this tool had to be widely publicized in PR campaigns across the country

[91] Pál Tamási, “Stílusváltás az európai kommunikációs stratégiában [Change of Style in the European Communication Strategy],” *Európa 2002*. Vol. 1. Nr. 2. (2000): 13-14.

[92] Balázs Pócs, “A magyar elnökség mákos gubája [The Poppy-Seed Cake of the Hungarian Presidency],” *Európai Tükör*. Vol. 15. Nr. 11-12. (2010): 123-125.

[93] Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of European Integration, *Magyarország Európai Unióhoz való csatlakozását előkészítő kormányzati kommunikációs stratégia [Governmental Communication Strategy in Preparation for Hungary’s Accession to the European Union]* (Budapest: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of European Integration, 1995), 52.

[94] Pál Tamási, “A célegyenesben: EU kommunikáció belépés előtt [At the Finish Line: EU Communication before Accession],” *Európa 2002*. Vol .3. Nr. 4. (2002): 41-42.

[95] Gábor Lakatos, “EU kommunikációs stratégia Magyarországon [EU Communication Strategy in Hungary],” *Európai Tükör*. Vol. 8. Nr. 3. (2003): 116-124. István Hegedűs, “Csatlakozás, népszavazás, alkotmányozás, európai választások [Accession, Referendum, Constitution, European Elections].” *Médiakutató* (2004). accessed September 12, 2016, http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2004_01_tavas/07_csatlakozas/.

[96] The website is still available at www.euvonal.hu.

[97] “EUvonal – EU Tájékoztató Szolgálat,” Közigazgatás, accessed September 7, 2016, <https://kozigazgatas.magyarorszag.hu/intezmenyek/450191/450004/euvonal.html>.

in order to increase its visibility.^[98]

EUvonal relied on citizens taking initiative, but in a society that is rather passive, information campaigns and local outreach can often be more effective. Furthermore, the decentralization of communication can address regional differences better, as well. The still existing European Information Points, established in all 19 counties of Hungary, served this purpose. Events organized and info materials prepared by the EIPs could provide information specifically for the local population taking into account their demographics, professional composition, and concerns based on their life situation. A shortcoming was that EIPs rarely functioned as a proper network, whereas cooperation among them could have been useful when dealing with matters affecting several counties (e.g. regional development, transportation, agriculture). Such cooperation was, however, hampered by the variety of institutional models under which the EIPs functioned: in some places EIPs were run by city council, in others by chambers of commerce etc. A more unified structure and clear ties with the MFA's coordinating center could have improved the situation.

Supporting the decentralization of communication, the EU Department within the Office (today Directorate) for Foreign Relations of the National Assembly also played a role: it regularly organized local meetings before and after the accession debating EU-related sectoral policy issues relevant for the given community.^[99] These debates involved locally known actors, e.g. MPs representing the constituency (after the accession also MEPs), and paid attention to feature both the governmental and the opposition side, thus emphasizing the support for EU membership across party lines.

In its information activities, the National Assembly cooperated with the European Parliament, and cooperation between the government, the ministries and EU institutions has generally been a useful and (cost-)effective element of communication, as well. The practice of the MFA and the PMO to organize the programs of the Europe Day in Budapest and in regional centers in cooperation with the EU Delegation (later Representation) of the European Commission goes back a long way. The events across the country serve to provide programs and information that are relevant for the local population, while the Budapest event also seeks to create a tradition. Over the past several years every year a race took place in the capital, always as many kilometers long as many years Hungary has spent as an EU member. In the center of the city, the run passes by venues that have been supported, renovated, built with the use of EU structural funds, thus showcasing the very practical benefits of Hungary's EU membership. Similarly, the PMO's department responsible for the management of EU structural funds has established the so-called "Uniós fejlesztések nyílt napja" (in English: Open Day of EU Development Projects) organized across the country, when (mostly touristic) venues benefitting from EU funds open their doors to the public. This day is generally accompanied by information sessions about structural funds and grant opportunities, which target the entrepreneurial sector.

Although these programs certainly portray some of the very practical and positive benefits of the EU for Hungary, they keep the discussion in the domain of cost-benefit analysis. To convince people about the benefits of being part of the EU, which is not only an economic, but also a political and cultural community, a more complex approach and discourse would be needed. While this is missing in Hungary's current governmental EU communication, the Commission's *Európa Pont* (Europe Point) hosted at the EU Representation seeks to serve such a purpose by organizing debates on current issues with the participation of speakers from across the EU, giving space for exhibitions, concerts etc., and trying to reach social groups who were otherwise not necessarily

^[98] "EU-fória után rögválóság [After EU-phory harsh reality]," 24.hu, November 4, 2005, accessed September 9, 2016, http://24.hu/fn/uzleti-tippek/2005/11/04/eu_foria_utan_rogvolosag/.

^[99] Marianna Györkös, ed., *Párbeszéd európai fejlődésünkért. Az Országgyűlés és az Európai Parlament szakmai rendezvénysorozatának összegzése [Dialogue for our European Development. The Summary of the Professional Event Series of the National Assembly and the European Parliament]* (Budapest: Országgyűlés Hivatala, 2007).

interested in the EU by innovative means (e.g. slam poetry competitions).^[100] Although its outreach is still limited, the initiatives of the *Európa Pont* are commendable as they focus on making the EU more relatable – something that is much needed in Hungary, even after 12 years of EU membership.

Recommendations based on the Hungarian experience

The preparation of the EU communication strategy should be a joint effort of officials, PR and communication professionals, EU experts and researchers, and the EU institutions. It should be rooted in the local context: public opinion surveys which show the moods, priorities and the level of understanding of the citizens about the European Union and its policies can give useful orientation for focusing the content and the activities of EU communication. Communicators should closely cooperate with experts, who are well-versed in EU affairs and policies, have a clear view on what is expected from the respective country and what is needed to get there, so they can formulate clear and realistic messages, which at the same time resonate well with the public's concerns and interests. Developing the strategy in cooperation with EU institutions can ensure that Brussels is aware of the concrete needs of the respective country, and can increase trust among the two. When targeting the population, identifying the most effective channels to reach the specific target audience is essential. These can differ country by country and target group by target group, thus investing into mapping media consumption patterns can be valuable. Considering the specificities of the different groups, it can be useful to diversify and potentially to decentralize the strategy in order to address the direct interests of various segments of the target audience.

^[100] The website is available here: www.europapont.blog.hu.

Foreign Policy Association of Moldova

Chisinau, Republic of Moldova

64 A. Sciusev street

MD-2012

Web page: www.ape.md

Email: office@ape.md

Tel/Fax: +373 22 21 09 86





