



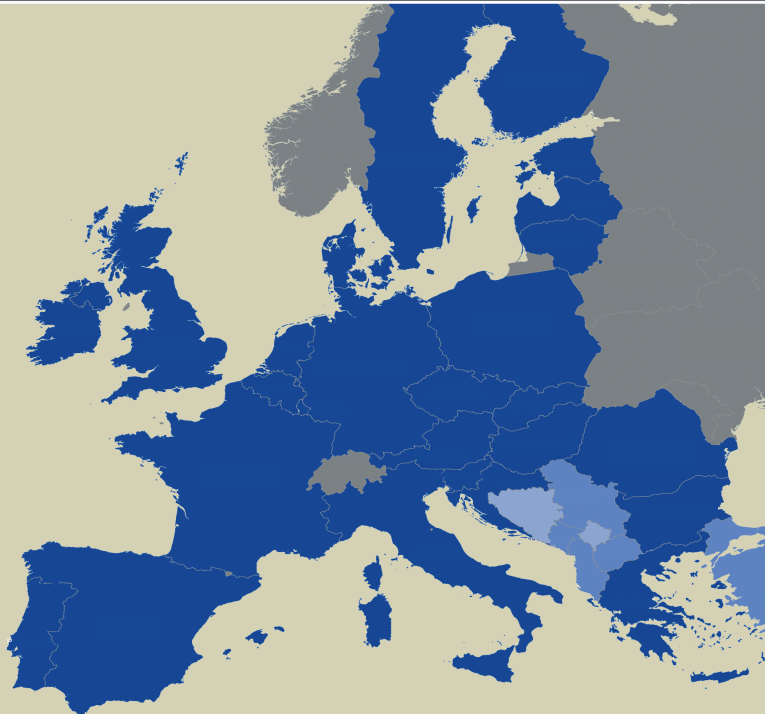
Republic of Bulgaria  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**DIPLOMATIC INSTITUTE**

# **THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR THE ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION**

## **CASE STUDIES**

Hungary  
Bulgaria  
Croatia  
Montenegro  
Serbia  
Republic of  
Macedonia



**Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute**

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**THE COMMUNICATION  
STRATEGY FOR  
THE ACCESSION TO  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Sofia 2017**





**REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA  
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
DIPLOMATIC INSTITUTE**

# **THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR THE ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION**

## **CASE STUDIES**

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## **PROJECT “HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE PUBLIC IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EU INTEGRATION”**

In 2017 Bulgaria marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of becoming a Member State of the European Union. The anniversary will trigger a lot of analyses and raise many questions – whether these challenging times for the world and the difficulties we face every day would have looked different for Bulgaria if we were not part of the European family. I believe that the answer could be only one – there is no alternative to our EU membership. As there is no other alternative except for joining the EU for those countries in our region that have expressed their will for membership and are already on their road to it. In order to make that road successful, it is very important how they communicate the European idea and each of the European policies.

To meet the requirements stemming from Bulgaria’s EU membership, the Diplomatic Institute to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduces and promotes common effective standards in the diplomatic profession, designed to meet the training needs of Bulgarian diplomats and members of the state administration. The Institute has also extended its activities on international level, involving in its trainings foreign diplomats and thus contributing to the spirit of regional cooperation. In its main focus have always been South-East Europe, the Black Sea Region and the Caucasus, with a special emphasis on the Balkans.

Of all its local and international partners, the Diplomatic Institute has worked in closest collaboration with the Bulgarian representation of the Hanns Seidel Foundation. Among the numerous joint initiatives are the Winter School of Diplomacy, the Energy Diplomacy course, conferences and public events, as well as the project “Western Balkans: Getting closer to the EU.

Strengthening the capacity of the state institutions to meet the integration challenges today” which aimed to enhance the capacity of the state institutions of Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina on their way to the EU.

A follow-up initiative of the latter, and another example of the successful cooperation between the two institutions, is the project “How to communicate with the public in the context of the EU integration” (2015–2017). It consists of two major phases: a field study, combined with gathering of information and writing research papers, and two conferences at which the results of the project will be presented.

Target countries are divided in two groups. The first one includes Montenegro, the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Serbia. Bulgarian experts researched on the spot the public attitudes towards the accession to the European Union, with the aim to understand what are the communication policies in those three countries on the various levels – the EU representations, the governmental policy (if any) and the activities of the NGOs, universities, etc., and to find out what is the link between the respective communication policy and the level of support and understanding of the relations and negotiations with the EU.

The second group includes the Republic of Bulgaria, Hungary and Croatia. Bulgarian experts researched the public policies and methods that were used in these countries in the process of their EU integration, with the aim to analyze the methods of communication between the respective governments and the people. One of the main results was the comparative analysis between the communication strategies of the three countries the successes of which could well be integrated in the strategies of the countries that are currently on their way to join the EU.

Based on the data collected, the experts produced 6 research papers, one for each country. Together with the overview articles of one other Bulgarian and one German expert, they have been incorporated into a joint publication which will be distributed through the network of the Foundation and the Institute and presented in the research countries.

As Head of the project from the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute’s side, I would like to thank our partners from the Hanns Seidel Foundation – Dr. Klaus Fiesinger, Regional Director Southeast Europe

and **Bogdan Mirchev**, Representative of the Hanns Seidel Foundation in Sofia.

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**Tanya Mihaylova**,  
Director of the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute



# **COMMUNICATING THE EUROPEAN UNION – WHY, WHO, WHAT, HOW?**

*Prof. Ingrid Shikova*

## **1. Communicating the European Union – Why?**

Reflections on the contemporary development of the European Union do not give grounds for predicting a promising and harmonious future. What happens to the European Union – is it just one crisis, or several; is that a collapse, or a new stage of closer integration? Are financial austerity and cost constraints being reconciled to economic growth, and job creation? Is a process of more integration or of limiting intervention in economic governance taking place? It is hardly possible to cover all important issues, but it is clear that the problems on the agenda of the European Union are numerous, acute and urgent: unemployment and especially youth unemployment, rise of nationalism and ethnic intolerance, incapacity of expanding to new countries, unclear future of the European construction. Many other more significant problems could be added to those already listed above: Brexit, the immigration crisis, terrorism, and insecurity. The search for answers inevitably leads us to establishing the causes of the current state of the European Union. In fact, the reasons are numerous and complex. Some of the most important ones are the reduced competitiveness and Europe's insufficient ability to change rapidly and to respond adequately to the new realities of globalisation. If we add to this the demographic problem that includes also the ageing of the population and the difficulties to provide pensions, the problem with innovations and the relatively slow introduction of new scientific inventions to the industry, and the problem with red tape creating a serious administrative burden on European companies, the picture of the present state of the European Union acquires realistic contours. But it would not be complete without the mentioning of heterogeneity in the political, economic, and social aspects

of today's European Union of (still) 28 Member States. The greater the differences among Member States, the more difficult, if not impossible the uniform implementation of integration policies in all countries. The sharing of sovereignty by Member States and EU institutions leads to complexity and even confusion. Often, it is not clear who exactly makes the decisions, and when they are delayed, nobody takes responsibility for it. Complex and difficult-to-enforce legislation is the result of many compromises among Member States, and the cumbersome decision-making procedures often lead to an excessive and inefficient legislative process. This makes the European Union ambiguous and incomprehensible for its citizens. The view that the European Union and the process of decision-making are beyond public scrutiny is increasingly spreading within society. The disorientation and the citizens' inability to influence decisions turn into an overt hostility toward the European Union, and that must be recognised as a major failure of the European project, and a serious threat to its future.

Alongside crisis phenomena, symptoms of loss of confidence and support, inactivity, loss of interest in the outside world, withdrawal, and low self-esteem appear in the European Union. Padoa-Schioppa called this state of Europe the "Europe of Melancholy"<sup>1</sup>. Even the most enthusiastic Eurooptimists notice the faded image of Europe: tired, bored, and unable to influence the world development; or as Pope Francis put it, "we encounter a general impression of weariness and ageing, of a Europe which is now a "grandmother", no longer fertile and vibrant. As a result, the great ideas which once inspired Europe seem to have lost their attraction, only to be replaced by the bureaucratic technicalities of its institutions."<sup>2</sup> Among citizens, it creates a feeling of insurmountable contradictions, political hypocrisy, serious weaknesses, and inability of the political class to resolve the existing problems and to create a clear vision for the future of the European project. Restoring citizens' trust in the European project became one of the main challenges before the European Union.

All of the above leads to the conclusion that European integration at this stage of its development is not a process independent on public opinion. The referendum in the UK is strong evidence of the truth of this statement. It is a proof that the so-called "permissive consensus", within whose framework the political elites carried out the integration project taking the support of

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<sup>1</sup> Padoa-Schioppa, Tommaso (2006) "Europe of Melancholy" – lecture delivered by the author on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2005, to inaugurate the Academic Year 2005–2006 of the Luigi Bocconi University in Milan. The text is published in Italian in the journal *Il Mulino*, LV (2006), n.1.

<sup>2</sup> Address delivered by Pope Francis to Members of the European Parliament, Strasbourg, France, on November 25, 2014.

citizens for granted, is no longer valid. The first signs of the destruction of the consensus between the political elites and the citizens came with the difficulties accompanying the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, and continued with the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty, and the negative results of the Irish referendum on the Nice and Lisbon Treaties. These signals are confirmed by opinion polls that show the citizens' declining confidence in the European Union. A number of EU analysts (Habermas, Moussis) began to talk about "information deficit" or "communication deficit" in the European Union. The information/communication deficit means that citizens are ill informed about the reasons, the goals, and the achievements of European policies, laws, and measures.<sup>3</sup> Trezn evaluated the efforts of the European Union to build a public sphere as "the illusion of public communication management"<sup>4</sup>. Although researchers often mention the communication deficit, it is not always clear with what kind of miscommunication exactly it is connected: lack of good communication between institutions, lack of reliable communication with stakeholders in the process of policy making, communication problems of the national governments and citizens, or of the European institutions and citizens.

The changing of citizens' attitudes from "permissive consensus" to "constraining dissent" affects significantly the process of European integration, and demands increasingly a public debate on European policies. A striking example is the enlargement policy. It is clear that future enlargements will depend very heavily on public opinion, both in Member States and candidate countries. Understanding the links between public opinion and enlargement is indispensable to assessing the integration capacity of the EU.<sup>5</sup> As Claes de Vreese rightly pointed out, "Effective democracy means effective communication".<sup>6</sup> Despite the efforts in the 1990s to bring the European Union closer to the citizens, after the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty the challenge of informing citizens and communicating European issues still remains. The crisis of confidence in the European Union may be defined largely as a manifestation of the communication deficit and inability to cope with this challenge. In this context, we can consider the implementation of the biggest enlargement of the EU. Although defined as integration success, this enlargement was not accepted unequivocally by

<sup>3</sup> Moussis, Nicolas (2007), *Guide to European Policies*, 13<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition, European Study Service, p. 150

<sup>4</sup> Trezn, Hans-Jörg (2008): *Media. The Unknown Player in European Integration*. In: Bondebjerg, Ib/Madsen, Peter (eds.): *Media, Democracy and European Culture* (pp. 49–64). Bristol: Intellect Books

<sup>5</sup> The 'Old' and the 'New' Europeans: *Analyses of Public Opinion on EU Enlargement in Review* Dimitar Toshkov, Elitsa Kortenska, Antoaneta Dimitrova and Adam Fagan, MAXCAP Working Paper No. 2, April 2014

<sup>6</sup> De Vreese, Claes (2003), *Communicating Europe*, Sixth output from the 'Next Generation Democracy: Legitimacy in Network Europe' project, British Council

public opinion in EU Member States.<sup>7</sup> Public discussions on the European Constitutional Treaty were mainly discussions on the issues of enlargement, the implications of enlargement to old Member States, and especially delocalization, i.e. the transfer of entire companies from the old to the new Member States, and the competition for cheap labour force.<sup>8</sup> One problem that was clearly at the roots of the citizens' negativism in some Member States was the insufficient awareness of the need of enlargement and its positive impact on the overall development of the European Union, both economically and politically. If we add the fact that citizens are usually interested in specific, everyday manifestations of the effects of integration, which are not and cannot be positive for all, enlargement, being in itself a success for the European project, has become a source of concerns and discontent for the majority of European citizens. The problem is not in the act of enlargement itself, the problem is in its perception. This requires a much greater commitment to communicate with the public and to explain the need of future enlargements. Moreover, not only European institutions, but also national governments of Member States and candidate countries should become key agents in removing the communication deficit.

It should also be emphasised that public opinion is very sensitive and strongly influenced by various factors: for example, it may depend on the austerity of the conditionality applied by the EU in candidate countries, on the geopolitical context, on the socio-economic development, etc. It is possible that the attitude towards the EU is determined by existing internal problems depending on that whom people blame for the inadequate, slow, or difficult reforms, i.e. the local political context should always be taken into account when assessing the public opinion about the EU and communicating the EU.

The main answer to the question "Why should we communicate the EU?" is that the future of the European project depends heavily on the citizens' support. Currently, communicating the EU is a necessity without which the European integration project cannot be developed and enriched.

## **2. Communicating the European Union – Who?**

The next question that arises is who should communicate the EU: are European institutions the only ones that bear the responsibility to carry out the communication policy and maintain a dialogue with European citizens? The necessity of involving Member States in the communication efforts is

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<sup>7</sup> According to the opinion polls, hostile to enlargement with 12 new countries were 56 % of Germans, 52 % of Austrians, 47 % of French, 45 % of the Dutch (European Commission Eurobarometer, NN 60 and 61).

<sup>8</sup> Shikova, Ingrid (2007) *Communiquer l'Europe*, in *Francophonie et Intégration Européenne*, Nouvelle Université Bulgare, p. 87

related to the fact that the public sphere remains national and that political parties are focused primarily on national issues. A special paper, entitled “Communicating Europe in Partnership” and devoted to the strengthening of the key role of Member States in communicating EU policies to citizens and stimulating the debate on European issues at national level, was adopted in 2007<sup>9</sup>. But often using “Brussels” as a reason for making unpopular decisions, national governments and politicians have little interest in informing the public about the functioning and decision-making process in the EU. It is justifiable to seek responsibility in the Member States which have difficulties to reach a consensus and often blame the European Union for the existing problems. Michel Rocard, former Prime Minister of France, wrote in the preface of the book “Wake up, Europe!” by Philippe Herzog, “Humiliated by the initial success (of the European Community), and Nation States take revenge.”<sup>10</sup> The helpless national governments are not able to infuse dynamism in the countries they govern, and blame the European Union for the existing problems. In fact, they are not ready to change and renew the national political models. That is why, in its current form the European Union is rather a cartel of countries which are still heavily steeped by its “past greatness” and have difficulties sharing national sovereignty in the name of European unification.

The possibility of spreading inaccurate and even false statements to the public about the role of “Brussels” indicates that a significant part of the citizens are unfamiliar with the mechanisms of functioning of the European Union. For example, the claim that Member States have no role in the legislative process, that everything is decided by the abstract entity called “Brussels”, and that governments must only implement the legislation enacted by the Brussels bureaucracy, is far from true. The complexity of the policy and decision-making process in the European Union allows the creation of myths that are accepted by society, and are difficult to disprove due to ignorance and lack of easily comprehensible information.

The European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso alluded to this issue, when he addressed the European Parliament on the preparations for the European Council in June 2005, saying: “It would be wrong to enter a “blame-game”. While EU institutions were not perfect – and could and would be improved – leaders should beware of blaming “Brussels” for all unpopular choices: If you attack Europe six days a week from Monday to Saturday, how can you ask citizens to vote for it on Sunday?”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> “Communicating Europe in Partnership” (CEP) (COM (2007) 569 final)

<sup>10</sup> Herzog, Philippe (2014), *Wake up, Europe!*, Le Manuscrit, Préface par Michel Rocard

<sup>11</sup> European Parliament debate – 8 June 2005, Daily Notebook

On the other hand, the information and communication policy of the European institutions, and mainly of the European Commission and the European Parliament as the most active ones in this area, has tried to compensate the lack of activity of national governments and political elites in communicating European issues. This has resulted in largely idealistic communication policy and information campaigns aimed not only at raising citizens' awareness about the EU, but also at convincing them to be positive towards European integration. However, the efforts of European institutions alone will not suffice to achieve the objective to have informed, concerned and active citizens supporting the European project, when national governments demonstrate disinterest and indifference to communicating European issues, and in some cases even misinform the public about the policies and the decision-making process. In order to be really effective, the communication policy for the EU should become a priority not only for European institutions but also for national governments of Member States and candidate countries. Moreover, EU communication strategies should complement each other and convey similar messages.

It is known that public opinion is constructed under the influence of different information channels and this should be taken into account when implementing the communication policy of European institutions, Member States and candidate countries. Beside national governments, NGOs, universities, political parties, but above all media (which are a powerful tool for shaping public opinion), can also be mentioned as key actors in the process of communicating the EU. In today's conditions, it is important to pay attention to the dissemination of information about the EU through both traditional media (television, radio, and print media), and social networks and the Internet, and keep in mind the fact that media coverage of the EU remains primarily event-driven.

Despite the existence of multiple sources of information, special attention should be paid to schools, which can play a key role in the acquisition of knowledge about the European Union and in educating proactive European citizens. A joint report on education and training in the EU published by the Council and the European Commission states: "The school has a major role in allowing everyone to be informed and to understand the meaning of European integration. All education systems should ensure that by the end of secondary education their pupils will acquire the knowledge and competences they need to prepare themselves for their role as future citizens of Europe."<sup>12</sup> The need

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<sup>12</sup> "EDUCATION & TRAINING 2010" THE SUCCESS OF THE LISBON STRATEGY HINGES ON URGENT REFORMS Joint interim report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe.

to promote active citizenship is explicitly referred to in the third strategic objective of the EU strategy “Europe 2020”. The ability to connect facts, political decisions, responsibility, freedom, solidarity, and active participation implies continuous efforts to prepare active citizens, and these efforts are crucial to the future of the European continent. Not only must young people know that something important is happening in Europe, but also realise that they have rights and responsibilities, that they can express their opinions and be active participants, instead of passive audience. However, the long-standing efforts to this end at European level do not receive practical application at national level, mainly due to some resistance by Member States. In today’s world of growing Euroscepticism, of nationalism and extreme populist movements, aggression, violence and xenophobia, of social problems resulting from the economic and financial crises, the education of young people in the spirit of European values is imperative.

The main conclusion that can be mentioned is that communicating the EU is the responsibility not only of European institutions but also of Member States and candidate countries. Their communication policies should be consistent and the specific strategies should be tailored to the specific political and economic context. The important actors in communicating the EU are media, NGOs, and universities. Schools can also play a very significant role in communicating the EU.

### **3. Communicating the European Union – How?**

While no one has denied the need of communication and dialogue with citizens on European issues, there are still controversies how to carry out EU communication and what tools and techniques to use. A number of criticisms are directed to the use of tools from business marketing and the implementation of the so-called “consumer concept”. Some people rely on that concept to convince European citizens to have a positive attitude and like the European Union. As early as in 1993, the report “Reflection on the Information and Communication Policy of the European Community” written by an expert committee chaired by a Member of the European Parliament, the Belgian Liberal-Democrat Willy De Clercq, favoured clearly a “marketing approach”, i.e. suggested that European institutions and Member States would have to undertake a better “selling” of the “EU product”, quite similar to selling a commercial commodity. According to this report, the communication strategy should be aimed at persuading citizens that the EU is a good thing for them, by highlighting “the achievements, the benefits, the opportunities in a positive, optimistic way, and not delight in criticism and

failure. As far as possible, ‘Europe’ should be integrated into the information, entertainment, advertising and didactic functions of media, not isolated in special sections”<sup>13</sup>. Initially rejected as a commercial concept and unilaterally defined as manipulation, modern marketing techniques have now become widely accepted. They are part of the modern form of proactive political communication, broadly implemented by national governments and political parties, especially during election campaigns.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, the practical application of different approaches such as the approach of political marketing, the so-called “voter as consumer” approach, or the public sphere approach known as “voter as informed citizen” often blends, and information flows into advertising. The need of public support for the European Union and its policies leads to the desire to “seduce” public opinion, making the European Union a “branded product” and “selling” it better to the public. Some researchers call it “commodification” of communicating the EU, especially during the Eastward enlargement.<sup>15</sup> The change in the way of communication between institutions and citizens is associated with a change in discourse: from informative to promotional, or the so-called “from tell to sell” discourse, using promotional and advertising elements in political awareness campaigns.

The dependence of the EU, including of the EU enlargement with new countries, on public opinion is obvious, but “selling the EU as a product” to the public via PR campaigns, hiring professional advertising agencies, sending messages composed by marketing agencies, and neglecting serious political discussions with citizens, turned into a trap of kinds. Instead of bringing people closer to the EU, these advertising and PR campaigns lead to the politicians’ detachment from citizens. It is important to emphasise that the use of the most sophisticated marketing techniques cannot compensate for inadequate policies and lack of a clear political vision for the European project. The seductiveness of the tools should not obscure the need of political vision.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> De Clercq, Willy (1993) Reflection on the Information and Communication Policy of the European Community. Report by the group of experts R.P./1051 March.

<sup>14</sup> Spanier, Bernd (2010) The Communication Deficit’ of the European Union Revisited. Structures, Key Players and the New Communication Policy, University of Zurich, Faculty of Arts.

<sup>15</sup> Blanco Cio-Lopez, Cristina (2015), From tell to sell: The commodification of EU institutional Communication through the Case of the Communication Strategy on EU’s Eastward Enlargement, *Officina della Storia*.

<sup>16</sup> Lodge Juliet, Sarikakis, Katharine (2011) Communicating Europe: political steps to facilitating a public sphere? in *Communication, Mediation and Culture in the Making of Europe*, Societa Editrice il Mulino.

## 4. Communicating the European Union – What?

Mahendran and McIver have identified three main challenges to EU communication: the knowledge challenge, the political challenge of media coverage, and the domestic political challenge of taking ownership of the European Union.<sup>17</sup> One of the important issues that stand in the implementation of EU communication is what exactly should be communicated to the citizens. This question may contain a number of answers, but one of them is indisputable: the need to respond to the citizens' relative ignorance and misunderstanding of the EU functioning. Often, the lack of understanding and the lack of clarity on the functioning of the institutions and the decision-making process play a key role in determining the attitudes of society towards the EU. The complexity of this matter leads to reluctance to receive more information, creates the perception of inability to influence the EU decisions that affect the everyday life of the citizens, and widens the gap between the public and the institutions.

According to Eurobarometer (2015), 44 % of the citizens did not understand how the European Union works, 35 % did not know the number of Member States, and 71 % did not feel sufficiently informed about the functioning of the European Union. Considering these results, it is not surprising, that only 56 % of Europeans knew that MEPs are elected by the citizens of each Member State of the European Union. As a result of insufficient knowledge, only 43 % of Europeans voted in the last European elections in 2014. The statistics data for young voters is even more disturbing: only 28 % of young people aged 18–24 voted in the European elections. “If you do not know, vote no” was a popular slogan in Ireland before the referenda on the Nice Treaty and the Treaty of Lisbon. This is a tactic to exploit the ignorance of voters.<sup>18</sup> The UK referendum is another proof that ignorant citizens could easily be misguided by false statements and well targeted propaganda. The elimination of ignorance and the existence of active and educated citizens are crucial to the effective counteracting of this tactic. Britain's decision to leave the EU had clearly exposed the need of better communication.

Here comes the next challenge: having the perception that their voice is not heard in European institutions and that they cannot influence European policies and decisions, citizens have no ownership on the European project. For them the EU remains an elitist, expert, bureaucratic, and incomprehensible project. Last but not least is the media challenge. All opinion polls show that

<sup>17</sup> Mahendran, Kesi, McIver Iain (2007) Attitudes towards the European Union & the Challenges in Communicating 'Europe'. Building a Bridge Between Europe and its Citizens, Evidence Review Paper 2, Scottish Executive Social Research.

<sup>18</sup> Moravcsik, Andrew (2008), Don't know! Vote “no”, *Opinions*, Princeton, 14–15

citizens receive information about the EU mainly from the media. Media, however, are reluctant to reflect European themes, and they even ignore them, or present partial and not always in-depth information. Moreover, some media are too biased in covering European issues, and citizens do not always have confidence in media information.

Traditionally, before accession, the debate on the European Union is focused almost exclusively on the benefits and costs that must be incurred because of the full membership in the European Union. Typically, the benefits of the EU that are related to the economy and the improvement of living standards, the free movement of people, goods, capital, and services are being communicated. Much less attention is paid to intangible values such as peace, democracy, human rights, and equality before laws that are no less important and have an indirect impact on the standard of living and the daily life of citizens.

The accession process is presented primarily as an “opening and closing of chapters”, the country’s progress is measured mainly by periodic reports of the European Commission, and the main goal is to respond to the observations and recommendations of these reports. The presentation of EU membership as a strategic goal and its achievement as a full European integration of the country creates false expectations in society. In fact, the correct view to be presented to the public is that EU membership is only a tool to help achieve the real goal: turning the country into a modern and prosperous state of law with a high standard of living. For example, in Bulgaria serious discussions on important European issues, including the future of the EU, at political level were absent during the pre-accession period. The existing political consensus on EU membership and the focus mainly on the negotiation process did not create appropriate conditions for a thorough discussion on important European topics. Even after 10 years of EU membership, European issues are not a priority and discussions are absent, or being held sluggishly. The main topic of discussion is mainly structural funds and the extent of their absorption.

This way of communicating the EU leads to the construction of certain specific images of the European Union in candidate countries and to some extent in some of the new Member States. Research on publications about the EU in Romanian media identified two images of the EU that were created: the “Messianic Europe” and the “Penalising Europe”; they were related mainly to the information on the EU’s structural funds.<sup>19</sup> To these two images another one can be added: the “Paternalising Europe”. The public image of the Paternalising

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<sup>19</sup> Bargaonu, Alina, Paul Dobrescu, Adina Marincea (2010) Does Europe Come to “Save” us or to “Scold” us? An Analysis of the Media Discourse on EU Funds, a paper presented at the international conference ‘Globalization and Changing Patterns in the Public Sphere’, Bucharest

Europe is created mainly in candidate countries, due to the paternalistic and mentor attitude of the EU towards these states. The EU instructions on what exactly should be done transform these countries into users of a developed economic area policies and solutions, rather than into active players. Moreover, the establishment of attitudes of “waiting and receiving” instructions from European institutions is not conducive to the full participation in the process of European integration, when candidate countries become full members of the EU.

The implemented communication strategies and the organised information and communication campaigns in the countries of the “big enlargement” can provide a number of lessons that could serve candidate countries when communicating the EU to the public. Simultaneously, it should be borne in mind that the communication strategies in the current candidate countries are held in a changed environment.

The period in which the EU enlargement with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was carried out was a period of hope, expectations, and enthusiasm. In this regard, the expectation of entering the EU was enough to motivate the accomplishment of painful reforms. These were years of sacrifices and of many difficulties for the citizens of Central and Eastern European countries. At the same time, public opinion in the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe was pro-European, and citizens saw no other alternative to ensuring consolidation of democracy, stability and prosperity in the future than EU membership. Thus, high expectations were created, which were not fulfilled after membership and caused justifiable disappointment. The same applies to the citizens of Western Europe, as the EU had no clear strategy how to explain to the public the need of the big enlargement. May be Margaret Thatcher in her book “Statecraft: Strategies for a Changing World” gave the most accurate picture of this period: “events were moving so fast, new states appeared, it was with such a pace that politicians still cannot catch their breath.”<sup>20</sup>

Currently, the candidate countries from the Western Balkans negotiate in different conditions. The crises that struck the European Union weakened its appeal, the difficulties experienced by Greece, the results of the referendum in the UK, and the failures of the Neighbourhood Policy changed not only the European Union itself but also the perception of the citizens of the candidate countries of the European Union as a space of democracy and shared values, as an area of prosperity and solidarity. As Panagiaotou asserts, “for the Western Balkans the experience of Greece resonates deeply. The country’s experience no longer symbolises the promise of modernisation and convergence with the

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<sup>20</sup> Thatcher, Margaret (2002), *Statecraft: Strategies for a Changing World*, Harper Collins Publishers

rich and well-governed ‘old’ Europe, but the prospect of success and prosperity gone sour”.<sup>21</sup>

The emergence of differentiated integration in important areas during the crisis/crises sharpens the criticism of lack of transparency and accountability. The decisions made outside European institutions increased institutional complexity. It is typical of a period of crisis that discussions on important issues take place in an atmosphere of secrecy and mystery. Some authors even call the differentiated arrangements in the field of monetary policy, security, and defence arrangements surrounded by “professional mystique”.<sup>22</sup> Not to be missed that differentiated integration is due not only to the enlargement with new members and to the heterogeneity of the EU, but also to the extension of EU policies. Extension of EU policies and/or their deepening have led to different interests, a different political will, and have generally affected the ability of the EU to be united and integrated. So, instead of reaching “an ever closer Union”, we observe in practice the creation of “an ever differentiated Union”.

At present, the attractiveness of the EU as an economically prosperous place, as a political model, and as a promise of membership looks outdated. Now, there are other alternatives that offer their own values and their own models, without putting requirements and conditionality that countries are not always able to meet. The changing contexts generate new priorities. Enlargement fatigue in the EU and the need to address a number of acute and urgent problems are factors that affect both the integration process and the conditions in which the communication with the citizens is carried out.

As a matter of fact, the EU’s Eastward Enlargement negotiations lasted fifteen years, during which a new world (dis) order was born, and the ensuing political priority issues, the time perceptions, and the socioeconomic expectations simply could not be the same.<sup>23</sup> Now, it is much more difficult to explain the benefits of membership compared to the period of the Eastern enlargement. This puts greater challenges to the implementation of communication strategies by candidate countries, and requires much greater and concerted efforts to inform citizens. An excess of “enlargement fatigue” has led to an excess of “accession fatigue”: transposition and implementation of

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<sup>21</sup> Panagiotou, Ritsa (2013): ‘The Greek Crisis as a Crisis of EU Enlargement: How Will the Western Balkans be Affected?’ *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 13/1p.97

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Blanco Cio-Lopez, Cristina (2015), *From tell to sell The commodification of EU institutional Communication through the Case of the Communication Strategy on EU ‘s Eastward Enlargement*, Officina della Storia.

EU laws in the Western Balkans has slowed to a standstill<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, a clear vision about the future of the European Union is needed badly. It should answer the questions what kind of European Union candidate countries will join. A renewed vision for the enlargement process should be focused on improving the lives of citizens, reducing unemployment and providing opportunities for young people, and communication efforts should lay an emphasis on the key principles and core values of the European Union. Difficulties in the implementation of effective communication with citizens are related to the fact that there is a number of unresolved issues: for example, how to justify the efforts of a candidate country to complete negotiations, if some Member States decide to hold referenda and the membership of new states is rejected. These uncertainties create citizens' distrust and scepticism that are difficult to overcome with the help of information and communication campaigns. Unlike the previous enlargement, in the current negotiations there are no timetable and specific deadlines for accession. This creates a feeling of dragging negotiations and does not stimulate the necessary reforms. The changing geopolitical context requires serious analysis, evaluation and adaptation of the enlargement policy, including the information and communication policy, which is implemented by European institutions, Member States and candidate countries. The development of certain socio-economic and political processes could jeopardise the needed reforms and could postpone the membership of the European Union. The reaction of the European Union to prevent these processes and to protect the candidate countries from the Western Balkans from internal instability is extremely important, and adequate communication of European issues to the citizens is more than necessary. In this regard, urgent change of diplomatic and political logic with the democratic logic of enlargement is needed: i.e. enlargement must be welcomed also by citizens, not only by politicians and diplomats. Public opinion in individual Member States and candidate countries in terms of EU enlargement differs because it is influenced by various factors of economic and geopolitical nature, and is highly dependent on the level of awareness about the negotiation process, as presented by national governments and political parties.

If the political and socioeconomic prospects are detached from the communication messages, the dialogue with the public could not be effective.

And let us not imagine the perfect European citizen as a convinced supporter of the European project. In this sense, the democratic revival of European integration requires hard enlightening work. The time of imposition

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<sup>24</sup> O'Brennan John, (2014), 'On the Slow Train to Nowhere?' The European Union, 'Enlargement Fatigue' and the Western Balkans, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Issue 2, pp. 221–241

of technocratic European integration projects seems irretrievably gone. What is happening in Europe proves it categorically. Today, the spirit of solidarity is threatened by fears and anxieties that nationalism and populism know how to exploit. There is a fragile balance between European solidarity and national egotism; the centripetal and centrifugal forces maintain a fine balance. Solidarity and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. If solidarity disappears, the European Union loses its meaning; if there is no responsibility, the European Union itself will disappear. Currently, European institutions, national states, and civil society are in a state of mutual alienation and lack of trust. Trust is the oxygen in the bloodstream of the European Union. The European Union cannot function fully without trust between Member States, European institutions, and citizens, but we must admit that today the trust that is the foundation of solidarity is not an indisputable fact. In essence, trust is a dynamic phenomenon. The process of building mutual trust is generally lengthy, and requires the participation of all stakeholders. Moreover, it is clear that the results can easily be destroyed. All this leads to the conclusion that building trust is a long and ongoing process that must be constantly maintained and carefully nurtured. In order to determine the EU as a success, citizens should trust institutions and have confidence in the political vision of the EU's future development.

In conclusion, but also as a new starting point, there is a need of a new approach to communicating the EU: we would call it the approach of the smart communication policy. Much more efforts are needed to consistently implement all the main steps characterising the smart policy design: to identify pressing policy problems, to diagnose underlying problems, to design high potential and feasible policy solutions, to test solutions through implementation and rigorous evaluation, and to refine those solutions based on continuous monitoring and feedback. The process of communicating European issues must be constant and national governments should be the real mediators between the European Union and the citizens, explaining European policies to obtain public support for their implementation. The need of "constant information and communication campaigning" is connected with the need to explain undertaken legislative measures, policies and solutions at the stage of their preparation, in order to gain public support. It is not appropriate to present the EU policies and decisions as a *fait accompli*, and then explain the benefits of adopted legislation or decisions.

In fact, the big problem is not the lack of information about the EU, but just the opposite: there is a tremendous amount of information, and it is difficult for the citizens to find the information they really need and to assess which of the available information is accurate, reliable, and useful. As

figuratively expressed by Moussis, the European Union's problem is less that of an information drought, but rather that of a flood of documentation. But floods can be more harmful than droughts, if the soil is not prepared to receive the overflow. The large majority of citizens ignores the flood of documentation, and expects to be informed through their familiar media, which is not the case.<sup>25</sup> Another serious problem is the specialised terminology and European jargon that is difficult to understand. The use of specific jargon reduces the willingness of citizens to be informed about European issues. Literally everything stated above stems from the enormous complexity that characterises the European Union's functioning: decision-making, initiating and implementing policies, and distribution of rights and responsibilities.

Last but not least, the EU information provided to citizens must be truthful, explaining both the benefits of membership and the opportunities it provides, as well as the obligations and responsibilities arising from this membership. The information must be specific to individual target groups: farmers, youth, business, etc. The "one size fits all" approach is not appropriate in communicating European issues. It is important to avoid creating false expectations for solving all national problems through EU membership. One should not rely solely on providing information to the public; the focus should be on the dialogue with citizens. It is also important to note that the provision of more information does not necessarily lead to a greater support for European integration. Citizens must be able to understand the system, so that they can identify its problems, criticise, and ultimately control it. In this respect, it is necessary to analyse, discuss, identify weaknesses, criticise, require, propose solutions, and not leave increasing nationalistic and Eurosceptic sentiments lull and divide Europe.

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<sup>25</sup> Moussis, Nicolas (2007), *Guide to European Policies*, 13<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition, European Study Service, p. 155



# **PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF EU ACCESSION – NOT A MATTER WHICH RUNS BY ITSELF: LESSONS LEARNT FROM ANALYSES OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN THE CONTEXT OF ACCEDING TO THE EUROPEAN UNION**

*Prof. Eckart Stratenschulte*

The European Union has, since it was founded, grown from 6 to currently (still) 28 countries, and additional states are either negotiating to become Member States or applying to the European Union even to be admitted to the group of candidate countries. It might therefore be thought that, at that moment in time when EU membership for a state finally becomes a reality, joy and approval in the candidate country, whichever this is, are huge. But this is not the case. The rule of thumb saying “The further a country is away from becoming an EU Member State, the greater is the agreement about joining the EU” also holds true in reverse – as accession draws nearer, more objections are being voiced.

It is therefore vital that governments and political forces working towards and negotiating their country’s accession to the European Union begin at an early stage to campaign for public agreement – and this means not only for a vote in favour of accession, but also for support, after the event actively to be a part of the process of European integration. After all, accession is only the starting point in a new political and social development which continues to be dependent on acceptance by the general public.

The present publication depicts communication strategies in six countries which either have joined the EU (Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia), are in negotiations for membership (Montenegro, Serbia) or which are still prior to accession negotiations being opened (Macedonia). Macedonia represents a special case,

in the sense that this country has been a candidate for accession for as long ago as 2005, and the European Commission has been recommending opening negotiations since 2009. As is well known in the region, this has been blocked by Greece because of the dispute over the name of the country, a fact which has led to political regression in Macedonia. It is not necessary to recapitulate the essays in this article. They are rather to be taken as an opportunity for some general comments about a communication strategy in the context of a country acceding to the European Union.

Twelve points have emerged as the quintessence of the analyses provided by the authors. For the sake of improved readability there will not be in each case a cross-reference to the material to which the idea is owed. The fact that a case study from one country is being adduced does not mean that there might have been instances in other countries as well.

## **1. EU accession is the concern of a society, not of one government**

Neither the accession negotiations nor the communication strategy are to be understood as the policy of one party. For this reason, it is a positive step if the communication strategy is fixed in legal form, so that it cannot be tossed aside by any capricious wind in a change of government. Certainly it is possible that accession itself is an object in party controversy and that in an election one party prevail which rejects EU accession. In this case then, as happened recently in the case of Iceland, accession negotiations are put on hold or broken off entirely and a communication strategy is no longer needed either. In so far as this is not the case, both accession negotiations themselves as well as the communication strategy should remain unaffected by changes of government.

Also, the communication strategy should be passed into law contemporaneously at the latest with negotiations opening, even better, at the same time as the application to be accorded candidate country status, and also implemented. Bulgaria, which became an EU Member State in 2007, accepted the first version of a National Strategy in 1998. In 2002, the government then adopted a communication strategy. The first strategy for Montenegro, which is not yet an EU Member State, originates from 2004, whereas Serbia issued its strategy in 2013. However, there had been earlier a precursor strategy, which involved the stabilisation and association agreement. The first strategy for Macedonia originates from 2003 and was revised in 2007. At the present time the government is preparing a new communication strategy. It must be said

that both the blocking of negotiations opening and also the government crisis in Macedonia have led to this process currently not being vigorously expedited.

Accession negotiations are a process which needs to go hand in hand with communication. At the moment, negotiations on a free trade and investment partnership between the EU and the US (known as TTIP) are currently in danger of failing. One fundamental reason for this is the lack of transparency. Members of the general public do not know what is being negotiated on behind closed doors and are being put off to wait for the conclusion. In the meantime, however, resistance is building up, based on rumours and superficial knowledge. Presumably, on account of its communications disaster TTIP will expire as in Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. (There is neither the space nor the time to discuss the issue here, but permit the writer to express in one sentence his personal opinion: the breakdown of TTIP will turn out to be a failure of historic proportions.)

## **2. The communication strategy requires a clear definition of objectives**

The issue at the point of departure is in this context not: “What do we want to do?”, but on the contrary: “What will have changed with respect to the target groups once the communication strategy has developed?” In this context, you should not be working towards a single ‘freeze-frame’ – the referendum – but rather towards a fundamental understanding of the EU. As in the case of Montenegro, it is quite clear that approval of the EU and understanding it in no way necessarily go hand in hand. This might for example also be said about Bulgaria and Croatia.

As any advertising professional knows, a message targeting everyone is a message which will reach nobody. It is necessary to zero your messages in. Before you start proposing and designing fora, newspapers, events or meetings, you need to be quite clear about towards whom the communication strategy is directed. The more precisely the target groups can be described, the more can a communication concept be elaborated as made-to-measure in a tailored fashion. The concept may certainly have more than one target group in mind, but each of these needs to be very accurately defined.

In this context it is helpful to imagine specific personal types: Paul, aged 35, computer software engineer with his own small consulting company, not married but in a steady relationship – what is his situation in our society; how

will being in the EU membership change his position; how will he react in an emotional respect to the fact that his country belongs to a supra-national union?

Advertising has been operating for many years with this typification, in order to provide an exact notion of the potential customers; political communication should do so as well – and bid farewell to statements of what ‘people’ think and want. In fact, there is no such thing as ‘people’, and the more you generalise, the more trite your statements become.

For every target group it is necessary to analyse how EU membership enters into their life. Only after this it would be possible to formulate an objective for the communication strategy: “After two years of running the communication strategy, the following will have changed for target group A: 1. ...., 2. ...., 3. ....”

In this way benchmarks may also be arrived at, enabling evaluation to be made.

In those Member States which have concluded the accession treaty and are facing a referendum to ratify the treaty contents, naturally a short-term objective is to achieve a majority in favour, with a high voter turnout. However, in the longer term this is not sufficient if the country wishes to play an active role in the EU and to exercise its influence.

All the communication strategies examined have defined target groups which were, or are, to be addressed particularly. There are no detailed descriptions about how intensively target group analysis was carried out.

What is important, and this is pointed out in several essays, is to decentralise communication efforts, so that regions and municipalities outside the capital city region can be reached. In doing so the local press has a major part to play.

Something that can happen if you certainly do consider what you want to do, but do not take the target group into account adequately, is described in the section about Croatian communication strategy:

*“Young people: primary and high school students, higher institutions students, employed and unemployed young people, declared as a priority by the government in the communication strategy, did not show any interest in the information material provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration.”<sup>1</sup>*

Only very precise focussing on the target group makes it possible to address the day-to-day consequences of EU membership for members of this social group.

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<sup>1</sup> Gergov (2014), S. 11

*“Research has shown that citizens are not impressed by communication of EU integration which lacks a convincing linkage to ‘everyday life’ and its context.”<sup>2</sup>*

### **3. Communication must be free of contradiction**

It is not possible to promise employed people higher wages as a result of joining the EU and to promise employers lower labour costs. Even if you are addressing target groups separately, nevertheless, they are part of a social continuum, in which they also communicate and receive signals across the bounds of their own social group. However, the basis of any successful communication strategy is credibility. If this is destroyed, the campaign is useless, indeed, it reverses into its opposite.

This means also that the communication strategy, even if it is designed and implemented with specialist division of tasks, must start out from the overall picture and there must be someone who is keeping this in mind. Bodies of this kind have also been envisaged in the various communication strategies. It remains undecided how great their control authority ranges, that is, whether they are only able to coordinate what is already there, or whether they can also direct, as the head writer in a television series, the person who coordinates individual episodes with one another.

### **4. Communication is not public relations, but on the contrary, civic education**

The message of public relations is: “Everything is fine, it is getting better and better, and for this we have Mr. X to thank (i.e. the person who ordered the job)”. PR is aiming towards persuading people about something, on occasion even taking them by surprise. It functions like advertising. What counts is that people buy the product. Whether they really need it does not interest advertising. It is their job to talk potential customers into believing that they need it.

Civic education, on the other hand, is aiming towards people being able to form their own opinions, to reflect their location within society and themselves to play an active part in decision making processes. Civic education sees its

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<sup>2</sup> Shopov (2015), S. 3

task in providing people with information and methods which enable them or makes it easier for them to form their opinion.

For civic education the following is important: whatever is controversial in society must also be discussed controversially. Therefore not ‘10 reasons to join the EU’, but on the contrary, “What can we say in favour, what is there against, our country becoming a Member State of the EU?” Civic education is also familiar with the principle which prohibits overwhelming people. In other words, you must not ‘talk people into the ground’ and count on the fact that they are not able to reply so quickly.

Public relations versus civic education is the parallel to quick success versus sustainability. Since we however not only wish to be sure that members of the public agree to a decision, i.e. to join the EU, but also that in the future they play a part in membership, then the slower and more laborious sustainability is to be preferred.

The communication strategies in Croatia and Bulgaria took this into account. Their approach was to put forward a picture which was in fact positive in tone, but which was weighing arguments for and against. The Serbian strategy additionally made an attempt to differentiate between reforms which were anyway required in the country and the issue of joining the EU, in order to inform the inhabitants that changes were not taking place due to pressure from the European Union, but on the contrary, were necessary in any event for the future of the country.

## **5. The communication strategy needs a clear message**

The European Union is extremely complicated, the ‘acquis communautaire’ covers thousands of pages. It is a complete illusion to think that it is possible to communicate all of this to the general public. It is also not necessary. Bulgaria, for example, elaborated the message: “We have always been a part of Europe and want to shape our future together.” This basic message may then be made more specific in the direction of a variety of target groups. Older people who, from their own perspective on life, are less preoccupied with a longer-term future may then be addressed by means of a variation: “We, the generation of older people, shouldered the burden and brought about the upturn in our country, in order to give our children and grandchildren a future. The European Union means securing the future for this generation. That is why we are supporting accession.”

In the communication strategy used in Montenegro, the following umbrella message was applied: “*Montenegro’s EU accession will improve the quality of life of all citizens.*”

Based on this, a number of central messages were derived:

1. *Better quality of life of all citizens through institutional reform and establishment of the rule of law.*
2. *EU membership will open new business possibilities.*
3. *Montenegro will preserve identity, language, and national characteristics after accession.*
4. *By supporting Montenegro’s accession to the community of the most developed European countries we are giving our country and compatriots an opportunity for development and prosperity.*
5. *EU accession funds are available to a broad range of institutions/organisations and they contribute to the alignment with EU standards and improved quality of life of Montenegrin citizens.*<sup>3</sup>

Every act of communication, whether it is a publication, an event or meeting, a public fair or a discussion, should be oriented towards communicating the message.

The message must have a factual and an emotional gist. The European Union is admittedly often perceived as a cold bureaucratic monster, but in fact it offers quite enough emotional elements: securing peace, the community of values, unity in diversity, exchange, culture, understanding and cooperation – to mention but a few.

## **6. The communication strategy should not operate with negative scenarios**

Admittedly, it is tempting to paint a picture for people of all the dreadful things that will happen if their country does not join the EU. But negative or even horror scenarios are not a good way to address people. Furthermore, they should not be deciding in favour of the EU out of fear, but on the contrary, because they are looking forward to the future. If the only reason they agree on their country joining the EU is because this is apparently the lesser of all the evils, they will subsequently also argue in favour of keeping

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<sup>3</sup> Shikova (2016), S. 21 f.

European commitment in the country as little as possible, since of course the lesser evil is still an evil too. Besides, up to now the country has survived without EU membership and other countries are doing so as well, Norway and Switzerland for example. The United Kingdom is even proposing to leave the EU. Unrelieved pessimism in this way soon loses its credibility – and thus so does the whole campaign, which after all was intended to persuade people in favour of the EU.

In Croatia the strategy was operating with a prospect that the alternative to being part of the EU was for the country to be isolated. This is of course correct objectively speaking, but it remains questionable as to whether such an approach would function.

A difficult area is that of denial. On the one hand you need to react like this to specific assertions (in Hungary: “EU membership endangers our national identity.”); on the other hand, any denial also strengthens the statement which it is intended to refute. It is therefore better, rather than picking up word for word on the negative statement, to contradict it with a positive statement. Thus, instead of saying “EU membership does not endanger national identity”, it is possible to declare “Being an EU Member State guarantees national independence and diversity within Europe.”

## **7. The communication strategy must not engage in window dressing**

It is overall not a good strategy to try and convince people of something by promising them the moon. Even if they do believe it for the moment, it does not produce any lasting effect. On the contrary, if this bright hope which has been conjured up on the horizon turns out to be an illusion, the result is massive frustration, and agreement transposes into violent rejection. People are disappointed if they have previously been deceived. If you therefore want to avoid disappointment, you have to dispense with deceit. You must not fuel expectations that the situation of the country will change radically over night as a result of joining the EU. No, the problems will remain, some will even be more acute because the EU lays down strict limits on national solo efforts (for example, in subsidising dilapidated enterprises). EU membership will in the long term be good for the country, but on the next day after joining nothing will be any different from what it was on the previous day.

## **8. Civil society needs to be included as part of the communication strategy**

Of course, designing and implementing the communication strategy is a governmental task, but right from the beginning the government should include civil society as a part. This is even more true because in many countries government credibility (whether this is justified or not) is not highly regarded.

Nevertheless, including civil society can only take place on a partnership basis. Civil society organisations (CSO) are not servants of government; they have their own agendas and their own ways of approaching their members and target groups. The government should therefore not attempt to compress CSOs into a predefined grid, but instead should allow them space to analyse the European dimension with regard to their work, to define the advantages of EU membership for their target groups and then to act accordingly. The government can support this by means of information, contacts and funds as well, but it should beware of ‘buying’ CSOs. CSO clientele is incidentally usually quick to spot something like this and will turn away. In Montenegro, CSOs are included in all the negotiating groups in the context of EU accession. Nevertheless, the author of the report notes:

*“However, a number of CSOs believe the government engages in cooperation only to satisfy Brussels, given that CSOs are generally unable to influence decision-making processes.”<sup>4</sup>*

## **9. The communication strategy must include the media**

This is of course easier to say than it is to do. The European Union stands precisely for a media system in which it is not the government which can issue instructions to the media that they are to report about this and that question in this and that manner. The fact that in the EU as well in some countries there are instances of interference with press freedom is just as much evident as it is regrettable. In those countries, too, which are the subject of this study matters are far from ideal as regards press freedom, if this is defined not only as an absence of state censorship, but also as editorial independence from interest groups, investors and political parties. The fact that this also diminishes the trust of the public in the media is pointed out by Ingrid Shikova in her essay

<sup>4</sup> Shikova (2016), p. 9

on Montenegro. But this deviation from the European norm should not be the basis of a communication strategy which is campaigning for European Union democratic values. You are urgently advised not to even attempt to exert any influence on the media. The fact that this does happen however, in acceding countries as well, is no secret. Admittedly, if we were to take Macedonia as an example, the obvious dependency of the media on political parties or interest groups also damages the credibility of press products or the television and radio stations. Including the media should therefore only be arranged in the sense that media personnel are given support in doing their jobs. If there are interesting events or meetings to which press representatives are invited, they will also report on them. If there are opportunities for interviews with notable persons concerning the EU, they will seize the opportunities. If information concerning difficult topics – for example on EU structural policy or the EU budget – is prepared in such a way that journalists can penetrate it in a short time, they will use this information. It is possible also to use the tool of making complimentary informative visits available to journalists. In this context it is essential to take great care in designing the visit programme that the diverse points of view have their say and that notable people are available to journalists. Board and lodging should be good but not extravagant. Otherwise of course the journalists will in retrospect not report about the discussions but, on the contrary, about how the EU is pouring money down the drain in order to buy off journalists. (There are some who perhaps will allow themselves to be ‘bought’, but these are then not the good and credible media representatives which are needed as partners.)

## **10. The communication strategy must take external players into account**

In the case of external players, there are on the one hand potential supporters whose help should certainly be availed of. These are other countries and their representatives, political foundations and naturally, European Union institutions. They can, based on their own situation, confirm specific statements about the EU and are able with their view from the outside to enrich the discussions. However, it is necessary to take care that opponents of EU membership do not succeed in discrediting the whole campaign as an operation directed from abroad, because it is only in the interest of foreigners. External players should offer their support; however, they should only play an active part in the context of the communication strategy and in agreement with the coordinators. External players should not act as if they were missionaries and the communication strategy coordinators should take up contacts and

coordination with them at an early stage. As they do so, the roles which the particular communication strategy partner may play should also be defined. The EU institutions should concentrate on factual aspects, other EU partners should concentrate on their own experience as part of the process of joining and being an EU Member State. It is something to be avoided by everyone that other people are instructing the inhabitants of the country in question on what is right for them.

It is more problematic with external players who are behaving as veto players. In this case first of all Russia must be mentioned, which in several countries is attempting with considerable outlay to sabotage the process of EU integration. Because Russia is embroiled in power political terms in the mind-set of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, seeing international relations as a zero-sum game and believing the EU is an opponent, Russian behaviour is in its own terms quite coherent. There is then on the one hand an appeal to the marvellous shared history, to the blood ties amongst Slav peoples and the Orthodox Church, promises of huge investments and favourable energy deliveries (which incidentally rarely come to pass) and references to deficiencies in the EU and its structures. A contrast is drawn between the stylised image of the Russian President as a decisive leader of his country and an unattractive compromise-based culture in the EU, which moreover is characterised by a decline in traditional values. Objectively seen, Russia has not a great deal to offer in this contest over integration and is obliged to hold its empire together in the main by means of threats (economic sanctions, expelling employees from other countries, military intervention). Nevertheless, since Russia does not need to 'make delivery', but, on the contrary, is able to make vague promises, Russian propaganda certainly finds a sympathetic ear. The communication strategy will neither be able to ignore this external player completely, nor should it go into the propaganda in minute detail. Every denial reinforces the issue. This is one more reason why it is vital to formulate a clear message which also has an emotional component and to make this the basis of all the communication strategy work.

## **11. The communication strategy should be evaluated continually**

The communication strategy is a core element in the EU accession process which cannot be brought about without public approval. Thus the strategy needs to be continually evaluated and adjusted. For this purpose, however, it is necessary to have benchmarks. In quantitative terms this is easy

to define:  $x$  number of presentations,  $y$  number of events,  $z$  publications. This, however, says little about the effect, and this is why it is important to elaborate qualitative benchmarks as well. How well was the target group in question reached? What topics determined public debate? In what way has the attitude of a target group changed over the past year? In Montenegro, according to the report, benchmarks were defined; however, it remains unspecified as to which they were.

In various strategies an objective is defined that by means of communication you are working towards members of the general public understanding the EU better. However, the instruments by which it would be possible to judge whether this took place are not present.

In the course of evaluation it is not possible to do without not only press monitoring, but also using social science tools (opinion surveys, interviews with experts), which subsequently also need to be evaluated. Resources for continual evaluation should therefore be incorporated in the communication strategy to adequate extent. If you make economies in this field, you can endanger the success of the whole operation, because without evaluation it is not possible to re-orientate and advance the communication strategy.

## **12. The communication strategy needs to carry on working after accession**

On the day after the accession referendum, the thought might be: mission accomplished, everything went well, we can pack up and leave. However, this would be a serious mistake, because only now is when the work really begins. Up to that point it was a question of whether the candidate country is ready to take on the commitments of being an EU Member State. Now, following accession, the country is obliged to do this. Even if EU policy were the best of all possible policies – and of this there can be no question – yet each Member State needs, as part of the process of compromising, to ‘swallow the bitter pill’ – sometimes of this kind, sometimes another, sometimes very bitter, sometimes less so. The communication strategy needs to parallel EU policy, to expound it and make it into the subject of public discourse. Otherwise it can quickly happen that an EU-sceptic opposition can discredit the whole project and by means of success at the ballot box can stall the ship. Hungary at the present time has a decidedly EU-critical government, the Prime Minister presents himself as grandiloquent nationalist and does not hold back on the insults. And yet, he is being put under pressure because of Jobbik by an even

more nationalistic party. The referendum in Hungary was incidentally both a success and a failure at the same time. Whereas 83 percent of those casting a vote were in favour of joining the EU, voter turnout for this plebiscite was a mere 45 per cent.

Biliana Decheva writes in her analysis from the Bulgarian perspective:

*“The information policy should not stop after the membership because there is a greater risk of a sharp drop in the public support on the basis of the changes taking place in the country as a result of the membership for which there is no understanding. It is very easy for citizens to begin to blame [the EU membership] for any unpopular changes that affect their lives, which would lead to the increase of the support for Euroscepticism in the country.”*<sup>5</sup>

Developments in the new (and several old) EU Member States bear her out.

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<sup>5</sup> Decheva (2016), S. 19



# **PRESENTATION OF HUNGARY'S COMMUNICATION POLICY ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION DURING THE COUNTRY'S PREPARATION FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

*Tedi Ganchev*

## **History of Hungary's accession to the EU<sup>1</sup>**

Between August and September 1989 the Commission of the European Communities convened a meeting of representatives of the Group of 24 (G24) in Brussels, which set up a framework for assisting Hungary and Poland. The meeting resulted in the creation of the PHARE programme.

Hungary travelled a long way from making the decision to work on the accession in 1990 to the signing of the Agreement in 2003. Every political party that won a seat in the National Assembly as a result of the first general elections held after the change of the regime in 1990 agreed that in addition to building democracy, market economy, and rule of law, Hungary's accession to the European Community would also be a priority. The diplomatic representation of the European Communities in Hungary played an active role in the accession preparations.

On 16 December 1991 Mr Jozsef Antall signed an Association Agreement with the European Communities, which came into force on 1 February 1994. On 1 April the Hungarian Foreign Minister at the time submitted in Athens the country's official application for membership. After that, the Commission drafted a strategy to assist the Central and Eastern European states in their preparation for membership.

Negotiations with these countries were launched on 26 April 1998, and were divided into 30 chapters. During the first year Hungary had closed temporarily 3 of them.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://eu.kormany.hu/the-history-of-hungarian-eu-membership>

By the summer of 2000, Hungary had opened all chapters, including the most sensitive one – finances. Due to a delay in the accession process, on 7 November 2000 the Commission adopted a new timeframe of three stages with the aim to speed up the proceedings.

Upon agreement from all parties to hold a referendum as additional legitimisation of the decision to join the European Communities, amendments to the Hungarian Constitution were made, which allowed the carrying out of a plebiscite. They required for a 25% turnout for a valid result instead of the 50% cut provided by the 1997 rules on referendum conducting.

Hungarian people had to answer the following question: “Do you agree that Hungary should become a member of the European Union?”, or in Hungarian: “Egyetért-e azzal, hogy a Magyar Köztársaság az Európai Unió tagjává váljon?”

The referendum was held on 12 April 2003, and 83.76% of voters said “Yes” to their country’s membership of the European Union. The National Assembly ratified the referendum result, and on 16 April 2003 the Prime Minister signed the Accession Treaty together with the leaders of the other 9 newly admitted countries.

Hungary became member of the European Union on 1 May 2004 and upon covering the requirements, joined the Schengen Agreement on 21 December 2007.

## **Context**

Like many other countries which applied for membership of the European Union, Hungary recognised the need to introduce its society to the specifics of this status, and to present the European Union as beneficial to both the state and the citizens. Therefore, a Communication Strategy was drafted to that effect with the aim to form a positive public opinion on the country’s accession to the Community. The strategy was divided into three stages, and country-specific target groups and message multipliers were selected based on the results of opinion polls about the people’s attitude toward the EU.

## **Features of the Communication Strategy**

### **Objective**

The main objective of Hungary’s Communication Strategy (CS) was to bring Europe closer to Hungarian citizens, and to raise awareness of EU

policies and their impact on the everyday lives of Hungarians. Preparing the ground for a public discussion on the consequences and opportunities arising from EU membership was also a priority. Thus, the Strategy aimed to establish sustainable attitudes in favour of EU membership, which had to be further developed and consolidated after its fulfillment.

The secondary objectives which could support the process were:

- creating conditions for holding a public discussion;
- provoking people's interest in European integration;
- providing extensive and solid information and easy access to it;
- disproving wrong notions of obligations, responsibilities and forthcoming reforms that would result from EU membership, and assuaging fears that the Hungarian identity would not be lost within the European Union;
- providing extensive information both on the positive and negative effects of membership. Any attempt to cover up the negative impacts would discredit the messages of the European Union.

### **The Communication Strategy was divided into three stages:**

- I. Prior to completing accession negotiations;
- II. Prior to achieving full EU membership;
- III. In the aftermath of full EU membership.

The approach in question differed from that applied in other communication strategies in its third stage. Hungary drew on the experience of Austria, which had terminated its Communication Strategy immediately after becoming a Member State, and in so doing had lost 52% of its supporters. That is why Hungary planned to continue the efforts to inform its citizens about the EU even after achieving full membership, in order to preserve the momentum and prevent the emergence of negative opinions in the first years of EU membership.

Keeping that in mind, the state did not suspend the paper after 2004, making ample use of all three stages with an indefinite deadline, during which time the established information sources of permanent access continued to provide citizens with answers to all questions related to EU membership and its benefits. It should be noted that the beginning of each stage did not necessarily mark the end of the previous one.

## **The Communication Strategy's timeframe per subject**

The provision of information was organised in three stages:

- I. Informing society about the structure of the European Union, the decision-making process, and other fundamental issues. The objective was to increase interest in and understanding of EU-related issues and to initiate an open discussion on accession problems (duration – approx. 2 years);
- II. Disseminating targeted information in accordance with the citizens' individual needs about EU accession negotiations and their progress in the respective areas. The objective was to stimulate society to form its own opinion on EU accession based on the received information;
- III. Mobilising citizens for a referendum: making sure they will participate in the popular vote, and building positive attitudes toward the future referendum on EU membership.

The Hungarian government found it important that society made an informed choice. The differentiation between a rational and an emotional “Yes” made it necessary to explain to the people why they wanted to join the European Union, which might influence also the emotional negative vote, making it possible for the citizens with a positive attitude to find solid reasons and eventually convince sceptics with specific arguments.

It can be argued how successful the mobilisation for the referendum was given the turnout of 45.62%. However, the referendum was declared legitimate since more than 2 million Hungarians had voted “in favour”. The positive votes led convincingly, with 89.61% saying “Yes” against 10.39% saying “No” to EU membership. Nevertheless, the relatively low turnout questioned the effectiveness of the campaign.

## **Target groups**

Considering the changing social environment and public opinion, the Communication Strategy formed “provisional” target groups which could be updated in order to achieve maximum effectiveness of the Communication Strategy. The main criterion which determined the variety of the groups was to address groups that were large enough to allow for a common approach to

the presentation of personalised information. As a result, Hungary divided its target groups into four main categories:

- I. Social groups with wide representation: young people, entrepreneurs, civil servants, and the population of the rural regions. The idea was to apply a decentralised approach to these groups, using the media to reach all representatives, and the type of provided information being basic and as general in nature as possible.

The designation of such a large and varied group hides in itself challenges to the Strategy and dangers that it might fail among the group's representatives. In order for the Strategy to take into account their diversity, it needs to provide information of general interest to all, but limited in terms of content and possibility for personalisation of the messages. It is a well established fact that the principal questions the people of any country applying for EU membership ask are: "In what way can EU membership help me?" and "In what way can EU membership harm me?"

Though it may seem strange at first, the majority is largely not interested in basic information about the EU: structure, relations among institutions, legislative procedures. Citizens are interested in sectoral policies mostly, and in changes that affect the key economy sectors and their specific area of interest as a result of EU membership.

The use of such a mass-based approach by the Communication Strategy can lead only to a likelihood of stirring an interest in personalised information within a segment of the target group. In other words, if Mr X, who is manufacturing and trading in strawberries, has found out about the forthcoming EU membership of his country through the media, he will have a chance to inquire about the impact of his country's EU accession on his own business.

In conclusion, I think that the described approach has a low cost-effect ratio, and needs to be applied only in combination with a personalised transfer of information.

With the development of modern technologies the number of people with access to the Internet has increased. By the date of Hungary's accession to the EU, 27.74% of the population had access to the Internet. Compared to 2012, this rate has now climbed to 72%.<sup>2</sup> Under these circumstances, the use of Internet becomes a widely used practice as the main source of information on any issue. Because of that I recommend when carrying out information campaigns to take into account the current circumstances, and to provide the widest possible

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<sup>2</sup> "Percentage of Individuals using the Internet 2000–2012", International Telecommunications Union (Geneva), June 2013, retrieved 22 June 2013.

range of data via the World Wide Web in combination with the mass-based approach, which is supposed to provoke an interest in the campaign itself.

II. Group of the people shaping public opinion: teachers, journalists, scientists, and church officials

- a. Specific channels;
- b. Small target groups;
- c. Possibility to forward information from this target group to other groups.

The approach to this target group is extremely effective, and the cost-effect ratio is largely in favour of the 'effect'. The preparation of these experts is easier because they already have the basic knowledge, and the Communication Strategy only has to develop it further. Having accomplished that, the representatives of this target group are able to decide on the kind of information they could deliver to their audience and the best way to do it.

I strongly recommend addressing this target group when implementing a communication strategy. It has exclusive advantages: easy preparation, a principal multiplier of information, a personalised approach, a possibility to initiate public debate; it has the greatest potential to change the 'emotional' "Yes" to a 'motivated' one, as well as relevant arguments in the debate with Eurosceptics.

III. Interested stakeholders: commercial associations, trade unions, non-governmental organisations

- a. Professionally oriented;
- b. Specific themes are discussed;
- c. Potential to be powerful information multipliers.

Addressing this target group provides unique opportunities. The supplying of relevant information is facilitated given the narrow sphere of activity of the individual actors. With this group the personalised approach is not only possible but mandatory. The majority of the citizens of any country applying for accession are mostly concerned about the kind of impact EU membership will have on their sphere of work. The designation of this target group allows taking away the worries of the representatives of the employed population, who in turn will explain to their counterparts the changes that will occur.

Another reason which makes it imperative to address this target group is the fact that its representatives have the greatest potential to organise protests against membership of the EU, and therefore, convincing them in the benefits of European integration would substantially reduce the potential of an efficient campaign held by Eurosceptics.

#### IV. The group of Eurosceptics.

- a. Identifying sub-groups classified by interest;
- b. Creating conditions for a constructive debate;
- c. Adapting the messages of the Communication Strategy in accordance with the changing thematic lines of the argumentation of Eurosceptic attitudes.

This is the group which presents the greatest threat to the success of the Communication Strategy. Communication with it needs to be detailed and with solid arguments. The preparation for a public debate needs to be thorough and directed to the positions defended by the opponents of EU membership.

It is mandatory that the people in charge of the implementation of the Communication Strategy pay particular attention to that group. The behaviour of this group is hard to predict, and its members have diverse interests, that is why an individual approach is required to every single one of its representatives who has become a public figure.

The target groups of the Communication Strategy address the main social strata in Hungary, and have been identified with the purpose of maximum society coverage without fragmentation and personalisation of the messages. In this way the Communication Strategy reaches a wide spectrum of people, without estranging the public by providing it with information that is not relevant to people's interests.

When drafting a communication strategy it is essential to identify the key target groups according to their representativeness in society, and to personalise the information supplied to them. This approach may be used only with a small number of target groups; otherwise, the message will be lost to the greater part of the audience.

### **Message multipliers**

The following multipliers of information have been used:

- supplying libraries with information materials;
- maintaining a telephone line where citizens can ask questions related to European integration;
- media – information accessibility and distribution by spheres in specialised publications (training of journalists);
- training and provision of materials to teachers who are expected to include information about the EU in their subjects;
- non-governmental organisations and trade unions;

- access to information via information points;
- online information network.

The main source of information provided by Hungary's Communication Strategy were the information centres located in the 19 provinces. There, citizens were able to ask questions regarding the country's membership, EU policies, the structure of the Union, and how they would benefit from EU membership. This allowed people to have a much easier access to specialised information. The positive aspect of this approach was that it provided flexibility in selecting and channeling the flow of information depending on the target group, which proved extremely efficient prior to the actual EU membership.

The mistrust of the rural communities in the political elite was taken into consideration. In a centralised approach, where only the capital city provides the information, it is possible that the target group in question might label the information it receives as "a politicians' game".

The challenge to this approach is the need to inform citizens about the existence of these information centres, their location, and the kind of information they provide, which makes them a secondary source of information (i.e. a special campaign is needed to promote their existence and to guarantee their impartiality and credibility). Another disadvantage is that a significant budget has been invested in them, but after the country becomes an EU Member State, interest in them declines, and from the point of view of the 'funding-results' ratio they are not cost effective.

The use of this multiplier is most effective in stages I and II, but after the accession interest in them drops dramatically. I recommend when implementing a communication strategy to take into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of this approach, and to enhance the commitments of the state in the course of the first two stages, whereas after the beginning of stage III, to shift toward a more reliable, accessible and interest-evoking multiplier of information such as the Internet, because of its huge popularity and the need of smaller investments in work power and maintenance.

Another Hungarian innovation in this respect was the compiling of a list of citizen's questions, which were answered by the European Union and were processed in an accessible way. After that the collected information was published in a single volume in 20,000 copies. The positive aspect of this approach is that it presents current "first-hand" information on problems which are of interest to society. The initiative was successful and the demand exceeded the expected interest. After the distribution of the first 20,000 copies, a second print of the same scale was ordered. However, the budget limitations did not allow for subsequent prints.

A possible problem in that regard is that the compilation of such a list requires time for correspondence with the European Commission, as well as time for translating, synthesising, and adapting the answers according to the needs of the target groups. Should this approach be applied, the recommendation is to begin work on it as soon as possible.

Here are a few possible solutions to problems connected with this initiative:

- looking for funding under a project on increasing people's awareness and enhancing cooperation with non-governmental organisations;
- publication of the information on the World Wide Web;
- keeping copies in libraries and community centres, where those who are interested in the information will be able to look it up.

## **Various categories of information and approaches to target groups**

The Communication Strategy divides information into four categories, depending on its source:

1. Written information;
2. Electronic information;
3. Events;
4. Special information sources.

It is important that all categories of information be identified by the population as a series of messages which have a common goal: to enhance knowledge in the sphere of European integration. Activities have been divided into general (for all target groups) and private (or specialised), the latter depending on the characteristics of the target groups.

### **I. General activities**

Written communication: a free newspaper, a brochure, articles on European topics, a collection of articles published during the year;

Electronic communication: a TV series, television and radio broadcasts, open debates on radio and television programmes, inclusion of European events in news broadcasts;

Events: "Regional Day of Europe" held twice a year in the regional centres to promote the idea of a Europe for the citizens;

Special sources of information: setting up a Central database in the Library of the Parliament, operating a telephone information line for the purposes of the Communication Strategy, carrying out interviews with

representatives of the highest-level EU institutions, and establishing information points.

## II. Specialised activities

- A. Target group I of the widely represented social groups: young people, entrepreneurs, civil servants, and the population of the rural areas.

In the field of *written communication* the information needs of the **young people** have been covered by including European subject matter into the school curriculum, and by launching a youth magazine with personalised information. Concerning *electronic communication*, a series of video productions has been created, which have also been integrated into the curriculum, and schools have been involved with the dissemination of information about upcoming EU-related events via email. Three types of *events* have been organised: conferences for university students, visits to the information points for high-school students, and competitions on European topics awarding the best contestants with visits to various European capitals. The *special communication* has been represented by bilateral relations among schools, European scholarships, summer camps, and incorporation of EU-related subjects in university students' competitions.

As far as **entrepreneurs** are concerned, the *written communication* has been carried out in the form of economic reviews advertising the financial benefits of EU accession, brochures on business topics, and publication of collections dedicated to special subjects depending on the EU's policies in the respective sector. The *electronic communication* envisaged the creation of specialised commercials, which were to be aired on selected programmes aiming to attract the business people to the opportunities arising from EU membership. Specialised TV commercials treating the same subject matter were also distributed via email or teletext. In terms of *events*, two types of conferences have been organised: meetings of the leaders of the target sub-group with representatives of European institutions, and regional business conferences to discuss the financial and economic mechanisms of the European Union and the opportunities they offer.

The **civil servants** enjoyed special attention. The *written communication* to them envisaged the publication of a newspaper for legislative harmonisation, whose purpose was to explain the direction of the future reforms and eradicate wrong perceptions. A series of *events* had also been organised in the form of conferences for selected representatives of the target sub-group, where discussions on tasks arising from the accession process were held with experts from various European institutions. The *special means* of communication were

represented by communication courses and seminars for the members of Parliament carried out in cooperation with the Committee for European Integration.

The *written communication* envisaged by the Strategy for the population of the **rural areas** included advertisements published in the most widely read newspapers, a specialised newspaper about the EU's agricultural policies, and the printing of brochures and publications on professional EU-related topics. The *electronic communication* envisaged radio and TV commercials with the aim of drawing attention to the opportunities offered by EU membership. Concerning the *events*, the Strategy used the approach applied to civil servants: specialised conferences were held with participation of experts from EU institutions.

- B. Target group II of the people shaping public opinion: teachers, journalists, scientists, and church officials.

The sub-group of the **teachers** had at its disposal school materials published as a result of public procurement, and they were intended for use as *written communication*. The “*events*” category was covered by a series of conferences held among representatives of the sub-group, where they discussed methods for communicating more efficiently EU-related issues to their students. The courses where teachers were trained for effective dissemination of the information provided by the Communication Strategy have been defined as *special communication means*.

The sub-group of the **media** also enjoyed a personalised approach. It included as *written communication* the correspondence between public institutions and media, and ensured the maximum transparency, professionalism, and objectivity of the message. *Special communication means* included the formation of a core of specialists on European issues from the sub-group, the organising of educational visits of small groups to Brussels, and the holding of seminars with lecturers from the academic and governmental institutions, as well as with European diplomats.

Regarding the **academic community**, the *written communication* was envisaged in the form of an annual publication that included selected essays and research papers on European themes. The airing of reports and interviews on radio and television programmes with the participation of academic researchers in the field of European integration was part of the *electronic communication*. The Jean Monnet programme, the setting up of centres for European studies, and the building of a network of experts at the Academy of Sciences have been defined as *special communication means*.

- C. Target group III of the interested stakeholders: commercial associations, trade unions, and non-governmental organisations.

The **commercial associations** were engaged in seminars and conferences and were the object of distribution of specialised, theme-oriented publications, depending on the respective policies of the European Union.

The information means considered above were effective only during the implementation of stages I and II of the Communication Strategy, whereas interest in them depleted dramatically after the accession. The only approaches, which remained expedient, were the integration of the EU-related subject matter into school curricula, and the holding of competitions in the same sphere. It is imperative that the frequency of the rest of the activities be reduced.

Television and radio programmes, seminars, and written communication were effective during the initial period of the Strategy's implementation. In the case of Hungary, stage III continued even after the country became a Member State, but the use of the above three elements of the Strategy with unreduced vigour might result not only in a waste of funding, but in apathy to the theme. It contains also the risk of emerging of negative attitudes towards the European Union because of the overexposure of the public to these issues. In view of this, my advice when implementing a communication strategy is to pay particular attention to the quality, content, and change in the flow of information, and to reduce the frequency of the transmission of information via mass media after the country joins the European Union.

## Financing

The financing in the 1995– 2000 period was provided by the European Commission through the Phare programme (€700,000 on an annual basis), and the state budget (€500,000 on an annual basis). After the withdrawal of the assistance under the Phare programme, the state budget increased the funding, and with the participation of partner organisations the financing of the Communication Strategy was guaranteed on the principle of projects' implementation.

The main expenses on the Strategy were divided into three entries:

- administrative expenses;
- expenses on research and assessment of public opinion;
- funding for approved projects.

## Public opinion<sup>3</sup>

Eurostat 2004 and 2014 statistics were used in measuring public opinion and assessing the success of the Communication Strategy.

It is difficult to outline a consolidated public opinion in regard to the Communication Strategy. On the one hand, there have been problems in key areas, and poor results of the referendum. Thus, in a criticising 2006 article entitled “Hungary: ‘There is no need to amend our EU communication strategy’”<sup>4</sup> the author disclosed the main challenges before the Communication Strategy:

- the political haggling over the control of the flow of information between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the government;
- the duplication of multipliers by the two institutions: the existence of two telephone lines with the same function;
- the use of the information flows for political propaganda, instead of for communication of European messages;
- the fact that the measuring of the Strategy’s effectiveness is carried out by the organisations that are actually implementing it.

According to public opinion, the main problem over the 10-year period of Hungary’s membership of the European Union remains unemployment (50% vs. 47%, in 2004 and 2014, respectively). However, an increasing number of people have stated that in comparison with 2004, crime has become the main problem, 23% vs. 12%, respectively.

On the other hand, despite the alarming data about the economic state of the country, the widely identified main problems bear no relation to EU membership and integration, which demonstrates the success of the Communication Strategy in this aspect. In 2004, attitudes among Hungarian society revealed that 48% considered that EU membership would be beneficial to the country, 33% did not agree with that, and 19% hesitated.

The 2014 Eurostat survey pointed out that the number of people who believed EU membership would be good for them remained the same, but a great many of those who in 2004 had expressed hesitation, in 2014 had changed their mind toward disagreeing with the belief of a favourable outcome. Here again results are controversial. On the one hand, Hungary retained its support for the European Union, which unlike Austria it still had back in 2004. This means that the third stage of the Strategy has worked just well enough to

<sup>3</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb82/eb82\\_anx\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb82/eb82_anx_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/opinion/hungary-there-is-no-need-to-amend-our-eu-communication-strategy/>

preserve the attitudes. Nevertheless, there has been no increase in the level of support over the 10-year period of EU membership, whereas disapproval has risen at the expense of hesitation.

Thus, we can conclude that continuing the implementation of the Communication Strategy even after the accession is a good idea; however, it needs to be reformed in order to achieve sustainable growth of the support. The intensity of the campaign needs to be preserved in the main multipliers giving prevalence in the current conditions to the television and the radio, which should redirect users toward the Internet and the information points. The latter should play the role of principal supplier of information.

In support of this view, I present a survey on the trust in information sources, whose results reveal the following: newspapers (34% in 2004 vs. 33% in 2014), radio (50% vs. 43%), and television (52% vs. 46%). There has been a considerable decrease in trust, with television remaining the most trusted source of information. Social networks are the least trusted (25%), while the Internet enjoys a level of trust similar to that in radio (39%).

It is important to note that the source of the information under the Communication Strategy needs to respond to public attitudes. According to statistics, trust in the political structures in the country has been declining all the time: political parties (18% vs. 14%), government (40% vs. 33%), Parliament (38% vs. 29%), and the European Union (64 vs. 48%). This made Hungary decentralise the flow of information and show that information came not only from the capital city, thus separating the political elite from the message.

I present also the results of several Eurostat surveys demonstrating the kind of information and the extent to which it has reached the Hungarian population. Thus, in 2014 there has been an increase in the number of Hungarians who associated EU with peace (21% vs. 34%), economic prosperity (15% vs. 31%), democracy (17% vs. 32%), freedom of movement, and education and employment within the Union (39% vs. 49%), the country's increased clout at international level (17% vs. 26%), and the single European currency, the euro (16% vs. 28%). The number of people associating the European Union with unemployment has increased by 5%.

Despite the fact that the main factor shaping public attitudes are the people's personal experiences of EU membership, the impact of the Communication Strategy should be also taken into account, and judging by the increased percentage of the answers pointing to the positive aspects of the European Union, the Strategy can be considered a success in terms of identifying the exact kind of information to be delivered to the target groups.

On the other hand, trust in European institutions has depleted dramatically over the 2004–2014 period. Fifty-two percent of Hungarians expressed trust in the European Parliament in 2014, compared to 88% in 2004. Similar trends have been observed regarding trust in the European Commission (51% vs. 64% in 2004), and the European Central Bank (37% vs. 49% in 2004). These results may be due to two kinds of attitudes: disappointment with European institutions, as they fail to meet the expectations, or shifting of mistrust in national institutions onto the European Union bodies. If the former is the case, the population needs to be informed about the functions and responsibilities of the European Union, whereas in the second case the state needs to lay an emphasis on the image it projects into the minds of the members of society, and to create positive attitudes towards the national institutions, which can then be shifted onto the bodies of the European Union.

In this connection, statistics indicate that there has been a trend of increase (from 37% to 41%) in the number of people who believe that they are aware of the way the European Union functions, and a decrease (from 53% to 30%) in the number of those who are not. Hence, the conclusion that the second assumption is more likely, therefore trust in national institutions has to be enhanced.

## Conclusion

The communication strategy in the sphere of European integration of any given country must take into account the political climate and public attitudes. It requires the conducting of a thorough survey on public opinion regarding EU-related issues, and identification of the main target groups with the largest possible scope and impact on society. The implementation of the strategy should continue even after the accession to the Union, but it should be adapted to the contemporary mass media and the level of trust in them.

Hungary's Communication Strategy is wide in scope and precise, and exceeds the minimum of the envisaged results, particularly as regards the mobilisation effort for the referendum. The fact that it was implemented during a time when information technologies were not that advanced as they are today, and thus reaching a wider audience was far more difficult, also needs to be taken into consideration. Nonetheless, the Strategy has achieved considerable success in the attainment of the majority of its goals.

The implementation of the Communication Strategy in the contemporary context would be in favour of social media as a source of information; however, it is necessary to acknowledge the positive results of the methods applied by

Hungary in the implementation of its Communication Strategy, as their use could increase the population's interests in EU-related issues. In today's world, many countries would be tempted to give considerable preference to modern technologies, but that would prevent them from using the full potential of the information means at their disposal.

Information multipliers should have two principal functions: they should form the need to demand and supply information. This may require the establishment of criteria for the identification of a multiplier which could be able to perform one of these functions. For example, television and radio broadcasts, conferences, and video materials are limited in their duration, and their goal should be to initiate the need for a debate and a desire for increased awareness. On the other hand, the Internet and the printed publications are able to present information of a larger volume, and their format allows the systematisation of data for the convenience of its users. The application of that approach presupposes that information multipliers act in synergy and complement each other. The information points are a hybrid phenomenon in this system and they may serve as a bridge between the multipliers that perform both functions.

In conclusion, I consider Hungary's Communication Strategy successful for the time of its implementation, and I believe it is an example of an efficient approach that managed to achieve good results with resources that were modest back in 2004. In the present day, the budget of the communication strategy would be smaller, and the strategy itself would be more accessible, but only because of the advancements in communication technologies. Hungary is an example of a systematic approach, and the use of good practices in future projects is of extreme importance to the attainment of optimal results in information campaigns.

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An Overview of Hungary's Communication Strategy Preparing Accession to the European Union



# **PRESENTATION OF BULGARIA'S COMMUNICATION POLICY ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION DURING THE PERIOD OF PREPARATION FOR FULL EU MEMBERSHIP**

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The European integration of a country during the period of negotiations for membership consists of two major, parallel running processes. One could be called administrative, as far as it covers the process of negotiations between Bulgaria and the EU: the opening of negotiations; the opening and closing of chapters; the implementation of relevant commitments and carrying out of certain reforms associated with them; the completion of negotiations; the preparation of the accession treaty, and, respectively, accession to the EU. I have used the term “administrative” because the players involved and responsible for it are mainly the administration and various state institutions.

There is another process, parallel to this one, which I refer to as civil or public, because it is related to the integration of society in the process of Bulgaria's European integration. This process is more important than the administrative one, because it is the citizens of Bulgaria who are the real subject of the accession of the country, as well as the extent to which they are committed and prepared for the onset of full membership.

Unlike the administrative process, which has a clear and predictable beginning and end, the civil one must move in parallel with the administrative one during the period of negotiations, but should continue after their completion in order to guarantee the sustainability of the public support and understanding.

Both processes described seek to achieve different aspects of European integration: the first one leads to adaptation of the institutions, legislation and all state mechanisms; and the second one refers to the change in the attitudes of Bulgarian citizens, which happens to be much more difficult and time

consuming. To achieve the objectives of both processes, it is very important that citizens be involved in the European integration of Bulgaria, which is the subject of the present study.

The model of the information and communication strategy for Bulgaria's accession to the European Union is dedicated to informing Bulgarian society about a state policy already being implemented. It aims at familiarising citizens with the specific dimensions of this political line, so that society become a real and conscious accomplice in this process. It is very important to have a clear goal from the very beginning when considerations are being made as to the approach to the conducting of such a communication campaign: whether the desired outcome is to achieve principled support for EU accession by the citizens, or whether there is a need to mobilise the real vote in favour of accession in a referendum on EU membership. In the provisions of the Bulgarian Constitution there is no legal requirement for a referendum, and the Bulgarian political elite did not resort to this democratic public vote, which determined the nature of the Communication Strategy as an informative campaign, rather than as a mobilising effort to achieve a positive vote in a referendum. The absence of a legal obligation is not the only reason for not holding a referendum on Bulgaria's membership of the EU. Our country has no serious tradition in the use of this democratic tool, and in fact, from the outset of the accession negotiations and the communication campaign throughout the negotiations the road to the EU has always enjoyed a very clear and strong support among the general public and the political elite. This clear and shared public will did not require a referendum to be held, and determined the nature and profile of the communication policy as informative and educational.

## **Background**

In order to determine the main parametres of a certain strategy for promotion of the process of Bulgaria's accession to the EU structures, it is essential to study the attitude of Bulgarian society to the European Union as a whole, and to Bulgaria's EU accession.

The first study was conducted between 22 November 1997 and 10 January 1998 among 1,160 respondents over the age of 18 by the Agency for Socio-Economic Analyses. The second survey was conducted in the period 1–15 November 2001 among 1,132 people over the age of 18, again by the Agency for Socio-Economic Analyses.

The support for Bulgaria's membership of the EU remained high throughout the period: in 1998, 91.6 % of the citizens wanted Bulgaria to join

the EU, and in 2003, 78.7 % had a positive attitude towards the country's EU membership. The socio-demographic profile revealed growing support among people with higher education, higher income, the urban residents, and the younger population: 97 % of the students, representatives of the business, and the people under the age of 37 had a positive attitude towards EU membership; so did 85,2 % of the housewives; and 88,1 % of the retired people. Interesting is the fact that the support for membership was very high among the ethnic minorities – 94.4 %.

The citizens who were against the country's membership of the EU gave the following arguments:

- There will be no benefit;
- Nothing will change in our everyday lives;
- The current Member States will take advantage of Bulgaria;
- The EU does not want us;
- There is a military risk arising from this membership.

Although the percentage of those who gave such responses was very small, these indicated clear fears and prejudices toward EU membership, as well as with regard to a complete change in the political outlook and orientation of the country.

In 2003, 54 % stated that the “pros” of Bulgaria's future membership of the EU prevailed. Above average was the percentage of the ones convinced of the advantages of our country's membership of the European Union among the highly educated respondents (two-thirds), including those living in big cities, and among people with above average standard of living. Two-thirds of the people informed about the way the EU operates stated that advantages outweighed disadvantages. This share was lower by 20 % among the uninformed. Therefore, awareness was an instrument for the advantages to be seen (a way to look positively on integration), while the unawareness determined an increased tendency to search for shortcomings.

**The main positive expectations among the public were related to:**

- The accelerated development of the market economy of the country – 86 %;
- The attracting of West European capitals – 84 %;
- The intensified economic cooperation between Bulgarian and European companies – 83 %;
- The expansion of cultural exchanges and scientific cooperation – 83 %;

- The strengthening of mutual visits and contacts between people – 82 %;
- The technical and technological support for Bulgaria – 81 %.

**The main negative expectations among the public were related to:**

- The predicted strong competition from imported goods – 81 %;
- The excessive influence of foreign capital on the Bulgarian economy – 68 %;
- The loss of some of the typical Bulgarian traits and virtues – 38 %;
- The lowering of national self-confidence – 31 %.

A study conducted in November 2004 by the Institute for Social Surveys and Marketing (ISSM) showed that 71 % of Bulgarians approved of the country's accession to the EU. This slight decrease in the percentage compared to previous years indicated that a trend had already begun of 'rationalising' expectations of the future membership. However, only 16 % of respondents said they were looking for information on the subject, which means that by this stage the main goal of the campaign should be to increase the principal interest in the topic and coverage of wider social circles.

The tendency for maintaining high overall support for EU accession was preserved in the period immediately before the date of full membership, and by July 2005 it reached 78 % of respondents in the survey conducted by the Alpha Research Agency. 63 % of respondents believed the implementation of reforms was of key significance to the country, and that its delay would affect directly the postponement of the date of the active Bulgarian membership. At the same time, the percentage of people who believed that EU membership would not affect them personally, and felt completely distant from this priority remained high. All this means that despite the approaching date of Bulgaria's accession and the clear political progress, proof of which was the signing of the Treaty of Accession of Bulgaria to the EU on 25 April 2005, there were still too many citizens who were not familiar with various aspects of the future accession of the country, and it was not clear to them what its impact on their lives would be. The percentage of people who simply did not have enough information about the EU and the implications of Bulgaria's membership, and did not look for ways to obtain such information remained too high. There were also people who claimed that they were not satisfied with the way information on issues related to the EU was being disseminated. The fact that according to some already mentioned opinion polls, between 30 % and 50 % of respondents stated they knew almost nothing on the topic, and over 80 % never looked for information remained disturbingly high.

This sustainable fact represented the biggest challenge in implementing the Communication Strategy from the very beginning: what messages and what communication channels to be addressed so that a maximum number of target groups be reached, provided that the percentage of those interested in the topic was very small. In fact, it is extremely difficult to disseminate information when there is very little demand. This meant that even at this relatively late stage of carrying out information campaigns within the Strategy, the formation of interest in European issues continued to be a major objective, so that the information disseminated could reach an audience that had audibility for these messages and searched for them. Another critical challenge was the continuing danger of developing and strengthening of the Eurosceptic tendencies, as was the case with the majority of the countries that joined the EU before Bulgaria. The general observation of previous accessions showed that with the approaching of the date of membership, the support of the citizens decreased.

On the basis of the studies carried out, the following **major conclusions** had been made while planning the Communication campaign:

- Throughout the period the support for the country's membership of the EU among citizens remained high. The lack of serious opponents of the membership can be explained with the relatively weak public debate about the 'pros' and 'cons' of EU membership, and about the practical everyday aspects of joining the EU during the negotiations.
- Among those familiar with the theme, a markedly pragmatic point of view as to future membership was registered, as well as with regard to the efforts that must be made to achieve it.
- The European integration was predominantly seen as a part of a foreign policy, which is largely due to the fact that mainly political figures spoke about it such as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Chief Negotiator and the Minister of European Affairs, and others whose responsibilities were associated with the sphere of foreign politics.
- The level of awareness about the process of negotiations remained relatively low: it was of rather superficial and sporadic nature and limited to the notion of opening and closing of chapters.

## Objectives

The main objective of the Communication Strategy is to increase awareness of the results and obligations arising from EU membership by making available factual and analytical information about the EU. Thus, it creates the conditions

for the emergence of a public debate on the subject, and for reducing unrealistic expectations.

The information disseminated within the Strategy is divided relatively into three main themes: what the European Union is; what challenges the country faces on the road to full membership; and the importance of the country's EU accession to the citizens. This relative division is not only thematic, but related also to the time course of the campaign.

The first topic considers the EU as a common vision and concept, history, structure and functions, and major bodies.

The second theme focuses on the criteria and the stages that Bulgaria has to achieve in order to integrate into the EU. This part of the campaign messages may very effectively be interwoven with the messages for reforms in some areas that the state is currently implementing. Thus, the overall positive attitude of society towards the EU is used to reduce the negativity towards the cost of the reform in the name of a positive ultimate goal.

The third theme is dedicated to the explanation of the real meaning of EU membership: what is changing in the life of the state and the individual citizen; their rights and obligations as EU citizens. This topic is related mainly to the later stages of the ongoing strategy, but it is of crucial importance to the preparation of citizens for their integration into the united area of European society.

The three main themes are designed on the basis of the messages of the Strategy that are distributed in parallel throughout its various stages.

The Strategy aims at involving every citizen in the efforts made by the institutions for joining the European Union.

It is important to bear in mind that the Strategy has the so-called "International Plan" that seeks to promote the image of Bulgaria as a worthy future EU member. An analysis of the campaign carried out abroad found out that an important factor was the failure to adopt the EU Constitution and the two unsuccessful referendums for its adoption held in the Netherlands and France. This political phenomenon led to the renewal of Euroscepticism in many EU Member States, and the related question about the need of EU enlargement. Overcoming this trend and its effects on the ratification of the treaty for accession of Bulgaria has become a major objective of the International Plan of the Campaign during the so-called second period of the campaign. Practically, such kind of risk is faced by countries currently negotiating, or about to begin negotiations. The current European Commission has made it clear that it has no immediate plans for enlargement of the EU. This makes the task of the

candidates very difficult, both nationally and internationally. In this sense, the experience of Bulgaria can give valuable practical ideas to the countries currently negotiating to join, or just preparing to start a process of changing the attitudes of the majority of EU citizens to the accession of new countries. Winning the support and trust of the citizens of the Member States becomes more difficult, especially in the current situation of acute crisis, migration and distrust in foreigners in the majority of not only the so-called 'old' but among the 'new' EU Member States as well.

## Administrative support

The need to conduct such a campaign is included in the "National Strategy for the preparation of the Republic of Bulgaria to join the European Union" (*March 1998, item 6 – Information campaign*). It aims at maximising the transparency of the process of pre-accession negotiations and the relevant measures to be taken by the government to accelerate their implementation.

The text of the Strategy itself determines the basic parametres that the campaign should include. The section dedicated to the information campaign provides, as follows:

*“Key features of the campaign will be: balance; openness; realism in assessing pre-accession work and socially expected results from EU membership; orientation, taking into account the specific interests of different social groups in supplying the information; variety of methods used, etc.:*

- *establishing of information centres on European problems;*
- *issuing of Euro-literature;*
- *preparation of radio and television European broadcasts;*
- *printing of materials with different European symbols;*
- *organising of days dedicated to the EU;*
- *training programmes;*

*In the short term, until the end of 1998 the substantial aspects of the campaign will bear a generally informative character. Within the period the following will be completed:*

- 1. Development of a strategy for raising public awareness in Bulgaria;*
- 2. Developing an information strategy to increase the awareness of Bulgaria within the Member States.*

*In the medium term up to 2001 the highlights shift gradually to the new qualitative characteristics of full membership.*

*The campaign will be consistent with the broad public support for EU accession. It will inform the public in two main directions:*

- 1. Characteristics, institutions, and functions of the EU;*
- 2. The benefits and changes to Bulgaria due to its accession to the EU.*

*The campaign will take into account the specificities of the different groups: large social communities; groups and individuals with high social prestige; organisations; groups with negative attitude.*

*The information campaign will be built on the use of forces and means of both national media (state-and-public ones), and resources of private media that are sympathetic to the problems of European integration.*

*The campaign will attract the structures and civil society organisations, including non-governmental organisations, specialised research and information centres in the EU, and others.”*

The dynamics of the process of negotiations between Bulgaria and the EU and the substantial progress made within the period 2000–2001, led to Bulgaria’s urging to begin in 2002 a targeted information policy on European integration directed at its citizens. In this regard, **on 24 January 2002 the Council of Ministers approved the Communication Strategy for the Accession of Bulgaria to the EU, and on 30 April 2002 adopted the Action Plan for its implementation for the period 2002–2006.** The Communication Strategy and the Action Plan are consistent with the dynamics of the process of negotiations and the main guidelines set out in the Strategy for accelerating of the negotiations for Bulgaria’s membership of the EU since 2002. Its priorities are consistent with the tasks in the period of the different EU presidencies set out in the Action Plan to the Strategy for accelerating the negotiations with the EU. The Communication Strategy is in line with the overall framework of the Communication Strategy of the European Commission, which covers both candidate countries and EU Member States.

The text of the Strategy reads: *“The integration of Bulgaria into the EU is a major priority of the government’s programme. At present, it enjoys tremendous support by Bulgarian society, and there is full political consensus. According to the survey carried out last autumn, 82 per cent of citizens are ‘in favour’ of Bulgaria’s joining the EU.*

*This is a favourable and encouraging fact, but the experience and logic of previous waves of EU enlargement show that the farther a country was from membership, the higher the support within society, and with the advance of the negotiations this support decreased to a greater or lesser extent. The more*

*real accession becomes, the more tangible is the experience of realities which have both a positive and a negative nature.*

*The task of the Communication Strategy is to weigh out both in the public space, and to enable any social entity (institution, group, individual) to realise the dominance of the positive aspects of the process. The Communication Strategy is not a parallel process, but a dialogue with society and a way to ensure its active position.*

*The analysis of the specific situation regarding what has been done to promote European integration within Bulgarian society, and to present Bulgaria abroad, leads to the following conclusions and observations:*

#### *Strengths:*

- *The level of support for membership within society is very high;*
- *Governmental and non-governmental organisations have worked many years for the country's accession to the EU;*
- *There are established professionals who implement this activity;*
- *There is a well-developed system of mass communication;*
- *There are operating information centres which have public authority on issues regarding European integration.*

#### *Weaknesses:*

- *The support for membership is too abstract, and citizens do not accept many of the real issues related to EU membership;*
- *The accession of the country to the EU is still perceived rather as a commitment and responsibility primarily of the administration, while the public stays away from the process;*
- *Communication among the various institutions (governmental, non-governmental, EC Delegation, and the embassies of the Member States and candidate countries) is insufficiently effective;*
- *The messages of the European integration are presented almost exclusively by political parties; the potential of experts in various areas (the members of the working groups on the negotiations) remains underused;*
- *The available communication network (such as newsletters and websites of various agencies) is not used effectively enough. These sources provide too little opportunity for feedback from citizens;*
- *Relatively little is known about the interests and the information needs of the various social groups;*

- *The viewpoint of the administration itself is aimed primarily at working with the EU institutions, the Member States, and the candidate countries. Communication with citizens is rather insufficient;*
- *The public debate on European integration is too weak and one-dimensional. It is organised around Bulgaria's application for membership, but the perspective of the future membership and the resulting commitments are completely missing;*
- *No important topics of EU significance such as the debate on the future of the EU are being considered or discussed;*
- *Work with various social groups depending on their immediate interests is not effective enough, and those groups are not clearly identified;*
- *Communication channels are too centralised; insufficient work has been done regionally and locally;*
- *Information on available projects and conditions for applying for them is relatively insufficient, and is not addressed with sufficient effectiveness, which is one of the reasons for the low utilisation of these funds;*
- *The funds for such an activity are insufficient;*
- *Information materials about Bulgaria's application for EU membership in foreign languages are almost missing;*
- *Work with foreign media to attract their attention to the topic of Bulgaria is also insufficient;*
- *There are relatively few events aimed at promoting Bulgaria abroad."*

The Strategy itself provides for an administrative mechanism for its approval, implementation and subsequent monitoring on an organisational level. The Council for European Communication (CEC) was established, chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, with participation of deputy ministers from all ministries. In addition, two task forces were established, responsible for the national and international implementation of the Plan and the Strategy. Representatives of academia, NGOs, and other representatives of civil society and the business were invited to participate in the two task forces, and that can play an important role in the Strategy's implementation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) acted as Secretariat of the CEC through its various departments. During the campaign, the organisational structure underwent certain changes, especially with regard to the Secretariat, which in the later stages of the Strategy was relocated to the Council of Ministers with the

aim to centralise coordination. MFA remained a coordinator mainly for the implementation of the International Plan of the Strategy on an international level through Bulgaria's diplomatic missions abroad.

## Principles

The implementation of the Strategy is based on three basic principles that are crucial to its success:

### **1. Decentralised approach to the implementation.**

This means an even distribution of activities throughout the country, rather than a concentration of efforts in big cities mostly. This is one of the main weaknesses of disseminating information on the EU, and overcoming it was a challenge to the conducting of this policy even after membership became a fact. The main events were held mainly in big cities, in order to attract a large audience, but at the same time in so doing the target groups of the campaign did not reach the population in smaller towns and villages by means of a direct dialogue which has a very significant impact on them.

### **2. Flexibility of the campaign.**

It is crucial, since one of the main ideas in planning and conducting the campaign is moving in parallel with the process of negotiations which has an extremely dynamic character. Hence, it is necessary that communication on various topics be easily changeable, according to the change in public attitudes, or with the emergence of certain trivial topics related to the future EU membership which is becoming the focus of public attention. Despite the fact that the Strategy's preventive nature (i.e. the aim to provide information proactively in order to avoid generating social tensions due to lack of information or manipulation of its dissemination) stands out among the fundamental principles laid down in its philosophy, the campaign has the ability to react to events which have not been previously envisaged and set in its plan. And experience has shown that such events always occur, and change the agenda of the Communication policy.

### **3. United actions from participants.**

As it has already been highlighted, there exists in Bulgaria consensus on the need to implement the country's European integration, which is why all major institutions and organisations maintain policies to achieve this essential national goal. It is paramount to the success of the Strategy that these

institutions and organisations act in a coordinated manner complementing instead of overlapping their activities.

The experience of other countries with such campaigns shows that the information and communication campaign should be conducted over a long period of time, and should continue even after the accession itself. The reason for this is that during the process of accession and the process of information, there is a possibility that confusion and hesitation arise within large target groups, that anxiety related to problems caused by membership increase, and, accordingly, the percentage of people supporting the accession be reduced.

## **Calendar of the Strategy**

**The first stage (from June 2002 to October 2004)** coincided with the most decisive stages of the negotiations for membership, when the most difficult chapters were discussed, as well as a series of unpopular practical measures were taken on the implementation of the adopted EU legislation that could not be postponed till after the accession. This necessitated closer alignment of the communication activities in this period with the agenda of the negotiations and the implementation of the Strategy to accelerate the preparations for accession and the National Programme for the implementation of the *acquis* of the EU.

The main objective of the communication activities during the first stage was the inclusion of Bulgarian citizens in the measures taken by the government to that effect. Society was prepared in advance for the actions, some of which were unpopular. Emphasis was laid on the long-term positive effects of these measures on the standard of living of the individual citizen. The specific objectives of the campaign during this period were the following:

1. Attracting to the promotion of EU ideas personalities in whom there is a great public interest, and working out effective channels of communication with the audience.
2. Establishing a communication and coordination network of organisations and individuals involved in the dissemination of information about the EU, as well as those having the opportunity to carry out research and expert work for the EU.
3. Expanding knowledge related to the EU and the understanding of the problems of accession among target groups, in order for them to become participants in discussions on the EU.

4. Expanding knowledge related to the EU and the understanding of the problems of accession among citizens, so that they can understand the following messages of the campaign and follow the debates on the topic.

The working programme for 2002 was implemented with a budget of BGN 637,500, nationally and internationally. This budget framework was preserved on an annual basis during the first stage until the end of 2004.

**The second stage (from October 2004 until the entry into force of the Treaty of Accession on 31 December 2006)** preceded immediately the accession of Bulgaria to the EU, and coincided with a series of events and processes related to EU enlargement as a whole, or to its internal development. This is a circumstance requiring intensification of feedback mechanisms and monitoring, with regard to the possible quick and adequate taking into account of the changes in Bulgarian public opinion.

The specific objectives of the campaign for this period were the following:

1. Specialisation of information on specific issues of the ongoing negotiations: membership criteria and level of Bulgaria's preparedness.
2. Specialisation of information on various aspects of accession: EU policies in each field (education, agriculture, etc.)
3. Strengthening of the campaigns aimed at the individual target groups. If during the first stage information is almost general, then during the second one it must be specialised, so that it answers the questions from different social and demographic groups on topics of their direct concern.
4. Expanding knowledge related to the EU and the understanding of the problems of accession among citizens, so that they can support the implemented state policy.

The budget per year for the entire period was approximately BGN 5 million, and it was allocated to projects carried out nationally and internationally. The level of absorption of funding reached almost 90 % – 95 % of estimates.

**The third stage of the Communication Strategy (after the entry into force of the Treaty of Accession on 1 January 2007)** covered the first years of Bulgaria's membership of the EU.

From that point on, the Strategy acquired different characteristics, which imposed its revision, and a redefinition of the main objectives and priorities: Communication Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria on the EU. The new strategic paper was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 27 April 2007. In its essence, it already differs in scope from the tasks set out by this study, and therefore only its basic features have been outlined here.

An ever growing number of Bulgarian citizens have realised clearly that EU membership has and will have a real impact on their lives, and according to a survey carried out by the Alpha Research Agency, the percentage of those who think they will not be influenced by membership has dropped from 62 % to 45 %.

The main principles of the Strategy for the period 2007–2009 were related to the stimulation of dialogue and to discussions on European matters, transparency, coordination, and cost efficiency.

## Target groups

As explained in the description of the objectives of the Strategy, it aims at reaching the entire society to help prepare each citizen for future membership of the EU. Throughout this process, several groups of priority importance have been identified because they fulfill the various criteria on whose basis they have been defined as a target group to the Strategy, i.e. as people to whom independent information activities are directed. These groups are selected on the basis of surveys because of their wide representation in society, because of their authority, and influence, or because of a certain attitude that is considered significant in terms of the campaign's priorities.

It is important to consider also the large group of people with solid knowledge of the EU, and the one made up of the people involved in the process of Bulgaria's accession to the EU. At the first stage it is crucial to raise the level of knowledge and interest in the EU among the identified target groups. They were selected because they would participate in the process of informing the public. In this case, the use of these groups is meant as a resource in the campaign because of their positive attitude, but target groups include also those who need further convincing due to their negative attitude.

Based on polls and a study of the experiences of other countries, the following main target groups of the Strategy have been defined:

**Youth** – The group of young people is made up of students and working young people. Both major groups of young people have a positive

attitude towards the EU. They are the only ones who at the very beginning of the conducting of the communication activities considered that joining the EU would have a direct positive impact on their everyday lives. This is due to their confidence that 'Europeanisation' will increase their chances of receiving a decent educational training that will help them find a good job. Because of their high motivation young people want to be informed as much as possible.

This is the group that should be given special attention because they constitute the majority of the people who will enjoy great social prestige in the future, and their early awareness and motivation will affect their future activities.

The youth community is divided in its preferences regarding the sources of information. High school students prefer electronic media, especially music radio stations and cable television. They rarely read newspapers, and when they do, they read certain sections only. Students also have a preference for the electronic media, but they read also certain newspapers, but not the party ones. They receive the main information on the EU from daily newspapers. The rest of the youth are informed primarily by television channels.

**Intellectuals** – (People with high educational qualifications) – They represent the most motivated and the most knowledgeable community in Bulgarian society. These are highly educated people who take part in public debates on various issues.

In opinion polls, intellectuals state that they collect information from printed media. They follow the specialised programmes on this issue. They also use foreign press and television channels as sources of information.

**Private businessmen and farmers** – For them, the EU is an economic force that can affect their business in Bulgaria. Small businessmen and most farmers are worried whether they would be able to cope with high-quality competition and the sometimes cheaper products coming from Europe.

Businessmen prefer newspapers, followed by TV channels, as a source of information. For farmers, the main source of information is the national television. When they want to obtain specific information, they read the publication '*Bulgarian farmer*'.

**Teachers and university professors** – They play a particularly important role in building an information network, in awakening interest, and explaining various issues and problems related to the EU accession of Bulgaria. An element of the establishment of this network is the cooperation between the universities in Bulgaria and those in the EU Member States. This is done

through various EU educational programmes such as Socrates II, Leonardo da Vinci II, Youth, and the Jean Monnet initiative. It is through participation in these programmes that the teaching staff acquires basic knowledge about the EU.

**Representatives of the central administration** – In all ministries there are departments devoted to European integration, and they communicate between themselves. They are an extremely important source of information as they are constantly working with the EU institutions directly involved in Bulgaria’s preparation for accession. Their representatives are involved in the campaign to assist in the preparation of different types of informational materials, as well as various live performances. The campaign announces their work, so that stakeholders and institutions can address their specialised questions to them.

**Media representatives** – As has already been mentioned in the results of polls, the television, the newspapers, and the radio, and at a further stage the Internet are the preferred means of receiving information about the EU. Therefore, the high-quality preparedness of broadcasts and publications is a priority for the success of the Strategy. The specialised preparedness and attraction of journalists to the cause of the EU can contribute to the effectiveness of the campaign. It is also necessary for them to conduct specialised training programmes, both factual and for the accurate usage of the vocabulary of the EU.

The journalists working on issues related to the EU are organised in the “Association of Journalists for the European Union” founded in 1995 and consisting of nearly 150 members. Similar existing bodies should be included in the structural network of the campaign, and their experience and ideas should be implemented both in its planning and implementation.

**Leaders of stakeholders** – They are the heads of large social structures, and due to that fact large groups of people trust them. They can serve as carriers of messages to the EU, which they can provide to their community in a more appropriate way. This group includes leaders of trade unions, business organisations, municipalities, political parties, and non-governmental organisations. They have already developed communication networks for their organisations, but they also have an established tradition of contacts between them. Information about the EU can spread in this way, and an important psychological advantage is that each of its recipients knows that they receive it from a person who already has credibility.

They are especially valuable in the promotion of specialised information to the communities with explicit and concrete interests that do not affect the mainstream of society.

The network of municipalities is very convenient in reaching groups of people that other communication channels have difficulties covering. These include mainly elderly people in smaller settlements, some of whom have a negative attitude to EU integration.

Party leaders are also very important to the campaign's aspect of persuasion, since they are the ones people trust, and their word is highly respected. Again, this applies more to this part of the audience that has less knowledge of the EU and is not particularly interested in obtaining such knowledge. Through their favourite political leader they receive this kind of information along with other party messages.

### **Groups with negative attitudes**

It is very difficult to define exactly the profile of this group at the beginning of the planning of the Strategy. But judging from the experience of other campaigns, there should be a well-planned approach to such social groups that are progressively identified during the process of negotiations, especially after membership becomes a fact.

## **Communication techniques**

The proposed systematisation of how to successfully disseminate campaign messages and to pursue the campaign's objectives is in essence a methodology for conducting a communication policy to convince the public and to receive its support for a comprehensive national policy.

The media in Bulgaria show that communication can be effective if it covers various channels of information. This study has shown similar multi-media behaviour of the Bulgarian audience. Therefore, structuring cannot be made by a particular media channel – one and the same group can be informed in a variety of ways.

92.8 % of the public receive information about the EU through the national television, followed by the national radio (79.8 %), and the national press (78.7 %). As in previous situations, educated people have a greater interest in the issue. Among the various social groups, the most affected ones are business people, followed by students and workers. *(It is important to clarify that these detailed plans for communication channels are made on the basis of polls from the very beginning of the Strategy and the media campaigns so that the picture of the media market is observed over the period 1998–2004.)*

The characteristics of the users of public and private television stations with local coverage are similar, but the scale is much smaller compared to the national television.

The main difference between the users of television and radio channels is that students and young people use the radio less frequently as a source of information about the EU.

The highest percentage of people receiving information about the EU through the press is among educated men, and among the business community. The press is associated with information about the EU mostly in terms of medium-sized towns, and much less in the villages and in Sofia.

The party press has the same distribution with the main difference that senior citizens prefer it as a source of information about the EU.

The local press has a larger percentage of trust compared to that of the party press. It is used as a source of information about the EU by all social groups.

Other sources of information about the EU are used much less frequently. The business community is the only significant group which receives and uses such information. Specialised publications on the subject rarely reach the public.

The summary of trust in the different types of media on EU information is, as follows:

National television – 92.8 %.

Within the national televisions Channel 1 has the largest audience for political and economic news, followed by *Efir 2* and *Nova TV*.

National television is considered as having a positive attitude to the EU, while private TV channels are perceived as more critically oriented.

National radio – 79.8 %.

In terms of national and private radio stations no such difference in attitudes towards the EU is noticed. Still, national radio stations have a large audience for political and economic news, which makes them more frequently sought as a source of news about the EU.

Central press – 78.7 %.

Among private newspapers the most trusted ones, with a positive attitude towards the EU, are *Trud* and *24 Hours*, followed by *Standard* and *Continent*.

The newspaper *Democracia* is defined as having a very strong positive attitude towards the EU, while *Duma* is defined as the negatively oriented.

Private and local television networks – 55.4 %.

Private radio stations with national coverage – 49.6 %.

### **Specific characteristics of the various types of media**

<b>Type of media</b>	<b>Characteristics of the public</b>
National television	Universal coverage
National radio	Seniors and fewer students
Private radio stations with national coverage	Young people, big towns, and Sofia
Local radio	Poorly structured audience, medium-sized towns
Central press	Readers of all ages, large and medium-sized towns
Local press	Poorly structured audience, small towns
Party press	Seniors
Trade fairs and exhibitions	Businessmen, big cities
Other sources	Poorly structured audience, small community

Analysing these characteristics it becomes clear that target groups receive significant coverage by all types of media. EU information is obtained from different sources, and each group has its particular preferred source of information.

Very few of the respondents (only 7.7 %) are able to indicate a specific TV programme dedicated to the EU and EU integration, and these include programmes of general political nature such as *Panorama*, *Ekip 4*, and *Otzvuk*. As a matter of fact, results show that the audience is not familiar with the specialised TV programmes on EU-related issues.

Even smaller is the audience which is able to indicate the specialised EU programmes broadcast by radio stations – 0.9 %, and these include shows and programmes of general political nature.

During the next stages of the implementation of the Strategy, communication via the Internet has been gaining in influence. This is what implies the recommendation laid down in the White Paper on a European Communication Policy,

which states that campaigning via the Internet allows citizens to learn more easily about European policies in an accessible language and recognise them. There has been a growing trend to phrase messages related to European integration in an accessible manner so that they can reach a larger number of people. The Internet allows to a much greater extent to understand the fears of citizens, the issues that directly concern them, and to give direct answers to the questions put forward. The direct participation of citizens via the Internet becomes a very essential element of the overall model of the campaign. Communication between citizens and the political elite is significantly increased, and thus, direct messages can be addressed not only at a group level but also to every citizen.

## **Building a network of partners and participants**

The building and maintaining of a network of organisations and individuals involved in the implementation of the Strategy is very important in terms of coordination of the implementation and unity in the activities carried out. This network consists of several circles of participants depending on their level of responsibility and commitment to the Strategy.

1. The first circle includes the network of institutions and structures of the executive power responsible for planning, coordinating and implementing the Strategy. These include structures like the directorates or departments in each ministry and agency charged with the implementation of the Strategy in the relevant field.
2. The second circle includes other state institutions, local and regional authorities which are partners in the Strategy as far as European integration is one of the common national objectives and policies conducted on the basis of national consensus.
3. The third circle consists of all the other organisations and individuals who work for the cause of the European integration of Bulgaria: economic and social partners, academic and educational circles, NGOs, etc.
4. Embassies and offices of international organisations implementing activities related to the promotion of the EU in Bulgaria, and thus facilitating the preparation of the Bulgarian citizens for EU membership. Among these the main partner is the EC Delegation in Bulgaria which implements the communication strategy of the EU for Bulgaria.

## Who did Bulgaria learn from?

Before drawing up the strategic document and making the selection of an institutional mechanism that will function, a very important task for each country is to examine the experience of those who have previously joined the EU with respect to their communication policy. Bulgaria turned to the experience of Sweden, Austria, and Hungary due to the relative temporal proximity of their accession, the comparable size of the countries, and the differences in the communication approach. A review was made of the other 10 countries in the first wave of the Fifth enlargement of the EU, as well as a comparison with the policy of Romania. Among the countries studied in detail there were ones that held a referendum on the membership, as well as others which sought to raise the awareness of their citizens without pursuing the effect of mobilising them for participation in a referendum.

The comparative analysis led to the model drafted and presented in this paper.

## Lessons learned and recommendations

The summary of the experience of Bulgaria in conducting such a communication strategy and the ensuing campaigns gives grounds to making the following major groups of conclusions and recommendations for countries that plan to produce a strategic document and select a mechanism for its implementation:

- A very narrow structure has to be established for the implementation of the communication, as well as country coordination mechanisms at the administrative level and with the non-governmental structures. This is one of the most important questions about the long-term implementation of the strategy, because the team working with and coordinating a growing number of employees, institutions, and structures in the course of the campaign should be established firmly at the outset, and only slight additions should be made at a later stage. In Bulgaria, during the implementation of the campaign there was a change in the institutional framework and some competition within the coordination unit represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Council of Ministers. The unity and coordination of the administration is very important, because it is the administration that should carry out the coordination of

policies and activities with other players in the implementation of the information campaign;

- The budget to be allocated for the implementation of the communication policy is managed by a coordinating unit, and this unit offers projects for approval and funding to the Working Groups and the CEC. This mechanism should include very clear and strict rules from the beginning, because allegations of unclear use of funds and lack of transparency in the selection of projects for implementation can arise easily. In the case of Bulgaria, the inclusion of representatives of the civil society in the task forces prevented this risk to a great extent.
- From the very beginning it should be clear whether or not the country will hold a referendum among its citizens for approval of the accession to the EU. The form, objectives, and timing of the strategy are a function of the possible need or decision for a national referendum to be held. In Bulgaria there is no such legal necessity, and no political decision of the kind was made, which is why the Strategy's goals were mainly related to the maintenance of high level of support for EU membership, increasing the knowledge and understanding of the essence of the country's membership of the EU, and preventing the emergence of Euroscepticism. Such a format of the strategy presupposes that it is rather complimentary to the process of accession, and not so visible, or even aggressive as in the case when it should serve for mobilising public support for a referendum;
- The target groups have to be clearly identified, and a specific approach and information channel for impact should be attached to each group;
- The dynamics of public opinion should be regularly monitored. This allows for the parallel measurement of the efficiency of the implemented communication policy. Otherwise, the only measure of the results of the campaign are the annual reports of the Task Force and the received reports on the implementation of the annual plan. This is the weakness of the Bulgarian Strategy, which is analysed mainly by the annual accounts approved by the SEC, but the change in citizens' attitudes cannot be linked directly to certain communication activities;
- The strategy should be flexible in order to meet all emerging needs;
- The groups who have the highest risk of experiencing Euroscepticism deserve special attention and individual approach in order to prevent their expansion;

- A clear distinction should be made between information dissemination and propaganda, especially when there is a risk of mixing European and party messages. For Bulgaria this risk was easily avoided because all parties had achieved very clear consensus on the priority status of EU accession. At the same time, the nature of the strategy which does not lead to a referendum can easily present EU membership as an entirely positive picture of a positive unrealistic expectation, hiding or ignoring any challenges and negative consequences. The Bulgarian Strategy experienced some criticism in this regard: its main focus was on the positive aspects of membership. The voice of the sceptics and the opponents of membership was not heard within the national Strategy.
- The governmental and the national policy in this field should be coordinated to the greatest extent with the communication policies led by the EU representation in the country, in order to avoid overlapping of activities and complementarity. The present study addresses a policy that leads the government to involve citizens in the process of integration. But in its overall planning, updating, and conducting of the policy, the EU Delegation in Bulgaria has been considered, and some of its representatives have had the role of a coordinating structure of the Strategy, namely the European Communication Council and its task force, and in particular the one on a national level;
- The implementation of the information policy should continue after the membership becomes a fact, because there is a greater risk of a sudden decrease in public support for lack of understanding of the ongoing changes resulting from the fully fledged membership. It is very easy for citizens to blame the EU for any unpopular change that affects their lives, and this fact could increase the support for Euroscepticism in the country.

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# COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

*Georgi Gergov*

The communication strategy aimed at informing Croatian society about the European Union and the country's preparations for EU membership was adopted on 27 January 2006 by the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia. The strategy itself was structured in eleven sections addressing the following issues: initial assumptions and implications; general purpose, objectives, and approach; communication tone, language, and messages; target groups; the process of providing information about the progress of the negotiations; participants and communication partners; tools, procedures, and approaches; methods and means; and information activities prior to the referendum on Croatia's EU accession.

## **1. Introduction**

The accession of the Republic of Croatia to the EU was a fundamental priority of the government of Croatia. The Croatian Parliament participated in this process through the following working bodies: the European Integration Committee, the National Committee for Monitoring of the Accession Negotiations, and the European Union-Croatia Joint Parliamentary Committee responsible for the relations with the European Parliament.

Croatia submitted the application for EU membership in February 2003, and received a positive opinion. Based on that positive opinion, in June 2004 the Republic of Croatia was granted official candidate status. The European Union approved a Negotiating Framework for Accession Negotiations with the Republic of Croatia, which was adopted by the Croatian Parliament in September 2005. The negotiations opened officially on 3 October 2005, the aim of the Croatian government being to have the country fully prepared for accession to the European Union by 2009.

To this end, each year a National Programme for the Integration of the Republic of Croatia into the European Union was drafted with the purpose to monitor the country's all-round preparation for membership. Taking into account the need for understanding and support from society, the Communication Strategy of the government, which was aimed at informing Croatian society about the integration process, became part of the annual National Programme.

The first Communication Strategy was adopted on 18 October 2001. Nonetheless, the dynamics of the European integration process and the beginning of accession negotiations necessitated the drafting of a new Communication Strategy aimed at introducing Croatian society to the European Union in general, and to Croatia's preparations for membership. With the adoption of the new Communication Strategy in 2006 the government laid out new strategic guidelines for providing information and communication regarding the EU accession process, taking into account the needs of information expressed by Croatian citizens in various public opinion polls. These surveys proved that Croatian society was familiar enough with the European Union, but needed further information on the advantages and disadvantages of the country's EU membership.

**The new guidelines laid down in the strategy were based on the following specific features:**

- The original strategic goals and approaches of the first communication strategy remained valid. However, the efforts and activities to inform society needed to be intensified so as to reach a larger number of citizens. New activities needed to be included in the frame of the negotiation process because of the increased need of a sector-specific approach;
- It is of utmost importance that the stand of the Croatian public on the EU and EU accession be based on sound knowledge of all facts. To this end, any anti-EU mood or fact of Euroscepticism needed to be countered by furnishing the public with timely and complete information;
- All of that called for the elaboration of a harmonised communication activity with participation of the general public and all social groups, particularly media, youth, civil society, the non-urban population, as well as population groups which are particularly susceptible to the changes triggered by EU membership.

The Strategy was developed on the basis of the annual Work Programme updated each year until the date of Croatia's full accession to the EU, and

included financial justification. The institution in charge of the Programme's drafting was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration.

The Strategy's envisaged duration was supposed to end with the date of the country's fully-fledged membership of the EU. During the last stages of the negotiation process the government defined the communication measures which needed to be taken into account in the preparation of the referendum on EU accession. The government implemented the Communication Strategy in cooperation with its collaborators and partners, i.e. people who influenced public opinion, or so-called public opinion multipliers: organisations of the civil society, social and economic institutions, and other potential participants in the communication process. In line with this, the National Forum on the Accession to the EU was founded on 27 November 2004 in the city of Rijeka, and it became one of the main platforms for open debates on the issue, and a good example of partnership.

## **2. General purpose, objectives, and approach**

The government's primary goal was to provide Croatian citizens with the most comprehensive and profound knowledge on all the aspects of the EU integration process. This meant implementing to the largest possible extent all of the following:

- introducing Croatian society to the advantages of EU membership, but also to the reforms it entailed;
- introducing Croatian citizens to the possible consequences of not becoming a EU Member State;
- presenting information to Croatian citizens in such a way that they could understand clearly the personal advantages to each and every one of them, and to the Republic of Croatia in general. However, society needed also to be informed about the obligations that EU membership entailed;
- preparing Croatian society for participation in discussions on EU membership, and for playing an active role in the accession process.

In order to achieve the above mentioned basic tasks, the Communication Strategy set as its major goal to provide additional information and inspire further motivation in the citizens of the Republic of Croatia by:

- improving the level and quality of discussions on Croatia's accession to the EU;
- creating the need of information on matters of the EU and the accession to the EU;

- eliminating any misunderstandings on EU-related matters.

These goals and approaches meant that the comprehensive approach to communication with the public had to be based on openness, transparency, and provision of timely, accurate, and relevant information. Therefore, the goal of the government related to the communication on EU matters was to:

- make information transparent and easily accessible;
- inform the public about the progress of negotiations and also about the implications for individuals, social groups, and Croatia in general;
- eliminate ungrounded stereotypes about matters related to the integration process and the EU, and in addition to:
- emphasise the responsibilities and obligations which accompany the benefits of EU membership, and to
- reduce unrealistic expectations.

### **3. Communication tone, language, and messages**

All the messages of the government were based on a rational and balanced approach. The government underscored both the obligations and responsibilities, and the rights and privileges arising from EU membership. The fact that at some point Croatia could face difficult challenges arising from EU accession was also taken into account. The overall tone of the communication conveyed optimism in regard to Croatia's future development and its place in the EU.

The language used in the communication was relevant and comprehensible by the target groups, and used the generally accepted terminology.

The government's communication was based on general messages, but meanwhile some specific messages were released that could be adjusted depending on the current state of the negotiations and taking into account specific sectors and/or local needs. The government developed the fundamental themes of the communication, which were then elaborated into specific messages for the specific target groups.

### **4. Target groups**

The new Communication Strategy started with the understanding that all citizens of the Republic of Croatia were to become members of the European Union. Therefore, the Strategy treated the entire population as a target group. The aim of the Strategy was to be universal and to make information accessible to anyone who requested it. Taking into consideration that EU membership

is a project of national importance, the government paid special attention to informing those segments of society which were against the country's membership of the European Union.

At the same time, identifying the persons who can have an impact on public opinion remained the most efficient means for reaching the greater part of the population. That is why the Strategy focused specifically on participants who in their own way played an important role in Croatia's preparations for EU accession. They were divided into the following groups:

- Group A: Public opinion multipliers: political parties, members of Parliament, government officials, media representatives, business and trade union representatives, NGOs, scientists, lecturers and elementary and secondary school teachers, local and district government authorities, religious communities' leaders and representatives, libraries, and diplomats from EU Member States;
- Group B: Youth: elementary and secondary school students, university students, working and unemployed young people;
- Group C: Groups particularly vulnerable to changes arising from EU membership: farmers, the rural population, retired people, disabled people, unemployed, senior citizens, home workers, people without school education, and people who have dropped from school.

## **5. Information about the negotiation process**

The purpose of providing information about the progress of negotiations was to enable the public to follow actively the negotiation process. Such information was targeted to the following main groups:

- the general public – through various media programmes, public discussions, telephone info-lines, publications, and websites;
- sector groups – target groups which show particular interest in specific areas of the negotiation process: business subjects (employees, firms, companies, professional associations, chambers of commerce), trade unions, farmers, non-governmental organisations, representatives of the local self-government, and the academic community.

These target groups were provided information through thematic publications, public debates, and discussions, relevant media programmes and specialised websites.

### **Means and procedures of supplying information**

The means and procedures of supplying information included:

- regular press conferences to whose holding it was essential to identify the journalists who followed closely the negotiation process and reported on it. Thematic press conferences on specific subjects were also envisaged with the aim to reach the widest possible representation of members of the target groups;
- public discussions such as the “National Forum on the Accession to the European Union”, radio and TV disputes, and other public discussions;
- specialised websites;
- a free-of-charge telephone info-line/voice portal;
- publications intended for the general public, as well as publications related to specific aspects of the negotiation process;
- media activities,
- reports of the negotiating team on the progress of negotiations. These reports should lay special emphasis on sensitive issues, and should inform the public about the results of the negotiations. They should be made accessible on the Internet, and, if necessary, in printed publications.

A special supplement to the Strategy included a detailed breakdown of the types of communication techniques with regard to the various participants and the three main target groups. It was prepared on the basis of sociological surveys on the preferred means of receiving information.

## **6. Communication participants and partners**

Accession to the European Union was one of the government’s key priorities, and it affected all aspects of life in Croatia. Therefore, it was the obligation of all state officials and state bodies to assume responsibility for raising, within their competence, public awareness. Interdepartmental cooperation was provided by establishing a network of coordinators for supplying information on the EU among the various ministries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration was responsible for providing assistance and for coordinating the activities of this network. A more intensive interdepartmental cooperation was attained at the level of spokespersons and public relations departments within the ministries. At the same time, in view of the regional diversity of the Republic of Croatia special emphasis was laid on the participation of the local government authorities and especially on the cooperation with the County Councils for European Integration. This shows a successful approach to the regional dimension of the communication activities,

which is an important task in such a strategy. In the case of the Republic of Croatia, considering the fact that the representatives of the local government and other local structures were clearly stated as part of the target group of the so-called multipliers of messages, an important element of the Strategy and the campaign was directed to the local public.

The Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Croatia was a key information supplier about the EU in addition to the government. Therefore, close cooperation with the Delegation of the European Commission was paramount.

The communication partners included a wide spectrum of organisations and individuals who played a role in the formation of public opinion, and acted as information transmitters. Media are a good case in point. The government worked in close cooperation with the media to facilitate the transmission of information about the EU and the integration of the Republic of Croatia into the EU. The government established also good cooperation with the electronic media and the press at national, regional, and local level.

At the same time, particular attention was paid to the cooperation with the Croatian National Television as a public broadcaster, in view of the popularity of its information programmes, as well as its capability to reach all the segments of the population. Through joint efforts with editors and journalists a sector-specific approach was achieved, so that citizens could receive extensive information on issues from various fields (economy, environmental protection, education, etc.).

Entities from the economy sector were important partners of the government in its communication with the public: business people, their associations, and trade unions. The government relied on these partners in its communication with the businesses and their employees.

Cooperation with civil society was provided through non-governmental organisations, foundations, associations, and other participants in the civil sector. They were all important mediators in the process of information dissemination not only among their own members, but also among other interested groups of society. Cooperation with associations dealing with EU-related issues was maintained at national and local level, including cooperation with other non-governmental organisations that played a significant role in establishing contact with target groups in different areas (e.g. consumer protection, youth associations, etc.).

The academic community was an important factor in view of the fact that its members, experts, and lecturers exert an influence on the formation of

social values and on the making of opinions among the youth, and especially among university students.

Religious communities were also important partners of the government in its communication with the religious citizens of Croatia, who represent a large segment of Croatia's population.

To sum it all, the government's most important partners in communicating with the citizens were:

- the media;
- the representatives of the economy sector;
- the non-governmental organisations;
- the academic community, teachers, and persons working with the younger generations;
- the mayors, regional and local government and self-government officials;
- the local associations, and organisations;
- the religious communities;
- the libraries.

## **7. Tools, procedures, and approaches**

### **a. Existing tools, procedures, and approaches**

The tools and activities that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration had applied so far, and which continued to be applied include:

- the National Forum on the Accession to the European Union;
- press conferences;
- public opinion polls;
- periodicals;
- publications;
- the Internet;
- the "Europe in Croatia" Project;
- projects within "Europe Week";
- promotional materials;
- a free phone info-line;
- cooperation with media;
- information campaigns;

- cooperation with non-governmental organisations;
- conferences, presentations, lectures, seminars, workshops, etc.

### **b. New tools, procedures, and approaches**

- More intensive communication with the various ministries through the newly established EU-related information coordinators;
- More thorough public opinion polls designed for specific sectors and target groups;
- Extensive cooperation with national and local media;
- Extensive cooperation with the civil society;
- Extensive cooperation with the religious communities;
- Sector-specific publications;
- Extensive cooperation and ties with the local and regional self-government.

## **8. Methods and means**

The choice of particular methods and means was largely influenced by the identified target group – the recipient of the communication. At the initial stage of its Communication Strategy the government adopted a proactive approach not only in its communication with the citizens, but also in providing information related to specific needs. This required an upgrading of the government's existing communication framework by building the so-called network of information coordinators on EU-related issues. In order to help maintain and coordinate this network, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration employed various tools such as thematic seminars and communication moderators.

The general approach to the three major target groups was as follows:

- **Group A:** The representatives of the group took part in the process as communication partners. Specific target groups within Group A were invited to take part in the EU information exchange in order to exert their influence and urge more people to join the process. The communication with representatives of Group A was maintained mainly by publications, seminars and conferences, media programmes, participation in large-scale communication activities, and other events such as Europe Week, etc.
- **Group B:** This group was represented by individuals to whom accession to the EU was of particular importance because in the long

term they would benefit the most from EU membership. As future citizens of the European Union, young people were encouraged to seek additional information on the EU and on what it really meant to be a citizen of the European Union. The communication with the group varied depending on the specific sub-groups (high school and university students, employed and unemployed young people), but definitely included media programmes, the Internet, school competitions, special publications, and special events within the various sub-groups.

- **Group C:** The representatives of this group were individuals who required greater efforts to explain to them the reasons for accession. Therefore, more intensive information activities had to be put in place, and suitable means had to be chosen: use of local and regional channels of information (radio, television, and press), special publications, and special events.

In order to guarantee the optimal results of the Communication Strategy, the government followed strictly its implementation and effectiveness by conducting regular public opinion polls, surveys, and by resorting to other sources of information.

## **9. Information activities prior to the referendum**

An information campaign was launched six months before the date of the referendum. The goal of this campaign was to provide all-round information to society, so that the public could form its opinion in an objective way. The campaign was an element of the entire Communication Strategy, and set as its goal to mobilise the public for a positive vote in the referendum.

The electronic media and the press were the main partners in the process together with representatives of the civil society.

The campaign proceeded in three stages:

- Preparatory stage (during which the public would be introduced to the upcoming referendum);
- Intensive stage (during which the most important negotiation results and the most important elements of the future EU membership were presented);
- Final stage (during which the focus was laid on the most important messages related to the upcoming referendum).

## **10. Attitudes of the population towards the European Union**

The highly positive attitude of the population towards the EU has been the prevalent one since the country's independence. The reasons for this were different than those in most of the post-communist states because in the Republic of Croatia the establishment of formal relations with the European Union played also the role of the country's international legitimisation, and also of severing ties with its Yugoslav past, as well as of distancing in geopolitical terms from the Balkan states which are burdened with predominantly negative connotations. Despite the criticism that many EU Member States addressed toward the first Croatian President Franjo Tuđman in the 1990s, support for the European Union during the first decade of Croatia's independence dominated public attitudes. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement and submitting membership application in 2003, the progress in the relations between the Republic of Croatia and the European Union was attached to the fulfillment of the commitments to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and more specifically to the surrender of Croatian generals suspected of war crimes. The population was particularly sensitive to General Ante Gotovina's surrender to the Tribunal, as many Croatians considered him a national hero in the fight for independence from the Serbs. The period 2003–2009 was marked by a serious change in the attitude of the population towards the European Union, because the conditions bound to the accession negotiations' progress contradicted to a certain extent the country's wish and ambition for national sovereignty and a steady national identity. The European Union required full cooperation with the Tribunal and extradition of the individuals suspected of war crimes, creation of favourable conditions for the return of the Croatian Serbs into the country, and participation in the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. These requirements came into conflict with the nationalistic attitudes in the country aiming at the national consolidation of the post-Yugoslav state. All this led to a drop in the support for EU membership from 72 % in December 2003 to 51 % in June 2004. The downward trend continued, and reached its lowest level in 2009, when only 43 % of the population had a positive attitude towards the European Union. In 2006, there was almost equal support for the nationalistic and the EU-oriented cause. The citizens continued to hold their national identity and patriotic stand in high esteem, whereas the political elite gradually turned its back on these causes, particularly after the beginning of the accession negotiations in 2005. When summarising the development of the social attitudes, it is a good thing to take into account the following facts:

- in 2000: 9 % “against” vs. 79 % “in favour” of EU membership;
- in 2003: 20 % “against” vs. 72 % “in favour”;
- in 2004: 41 % “against” vs. 53 % “in favour”;
- in 2005: 44 % “against” vs. 49 % “in favour”;
- in 2006: 45 % “against” vs. 46 % “in favour”;
- in 2009: 43 % “against” vs. 43 % “in favour”;
- in 2011: 44 % “against” vs. 47 % “in favour”.

Although it seemed at first that the main conflict in the citizens’ attitudes was the opposition between the national and supranational, or European, principle, there were other reasons as well. Proof of this is the return to the country of two Croatian generals indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia on charges of war crimes. The expectations were that these new developments would change radically the public attitudes in favour of EU accession, but no change was witnessed in the results of public opinion polls, and support for the EU remained very low. Similar to the other countries which held accession negotiations, the duration of the negotiation process itself, and its administrative and procedural complexity made it very difficult for Croatian citizens to understand and follow. The negotiation process was difficult also as an information product which had to be presented to the various target groups in an attractive manner, and that is one of the challenges to any communication strategy and campaign for EU accession. In the case of Croatia, another factor enhancing negative attitudes was the blocking of the accession negotiations by Slovenia over an unresolved territorial dispute. Negotiations were frozen from December 2008 till October 2009, and opinion polls revealed a decrease in the support for EU membership over that period. At the same time, like the majority of the EU Member States, Croatia too was affected by the financial crisis, which led to reducing economic ties, and increased additionally the Eurosceptic votes.

The entire array of risks to the support for Croatia’s EU membership forced the political elite to consider very seriously a way to avoid the constitutional requirement for a majority of all eligible voters when holding a referendum on the country’s EU membership, despite the fact that all political parties considered EU membership a national priority of paramount significance.

The solution was found in constitutional amendments which coincided also with one of the requirements set by the EU in the course of accession negotiations. Thus, in 2010 the Croatian Parliament adopted amendments to the Constitution. They included also an amendment to Article 142, so that alliances with other countries be adopted by ordinary majority, instead of a majority

of all eligible voters. The constitutional requirement for a referendum on EU accession remained, but under the mitigated terms. It is worth pointing out that in April 2009 Croatia joined NATO without holding a referendum, because legal experts considered the entry to the Alliance a signing of an international agreement in a certain political sphere, which allowed for its ratification by the Parliament by a two-third majority. Unlike the case of NATO membership, entry to the EU has a multilateral nature, and is interpreted as associating with other countries, which required the application of the provisions of Article 142 of the Constitution.

## **11. Results of the referendum on EU accession**

On 23 December 2011 the MPs from the newly constituted Parliament after the general elections held on 4 December voted on the date of the referendum on the country's accession to the European Union. The question was phrased in the following manner: "Are you in favour of the EU membership of the Republic of Croatia?" The referendum was set for 22 January 2012, despite the fact that it allowed for only a month to unfold the campaign "in favour". The principal campaign started on 2 January, which greatly limited its duration. Its main tools were publicity videos broadcast on the national media, in which the newly appointed ministers campaigned for a positive vote in the forthcoming referendum. The 24-hour telephone line, where citizens were able to ask questions, was considered to be the most successful tool of the campaign. This initiative began during the term in office of the previous government, but received criticism that even in the midst of the campaign it took almost an entire day to get a complete and exhaustive reply to some of the questions posed by the citizens. The main argument in the campaign for a positive vote was that membership of the EU had no alternative, because otherwise the country would remain isolated and among the least developed European states.

The campaign "against" was conducted by extreme right political forces that were not represented in Parliament, and by war veterans, whose main argument was connected with the national identity and national sovereignty. They relied also on the votes of the Eurozone critics and the critics of the EU model. The voices of this campaign were not coordinated, at times they overlapped, and the campaign was too chaotic. It was difficult to assess what the results of the campaign would have been had the campaign been better financed and organised, so as to attract more voters to take part in the referendum.

In the long run, the referendum held on 22 January 2012 ended with a positive vote in favour of the country's EU membership. It is important to bear in mind that this referendum was the second one in the post-communist

history of the country after the referendum of 1991 on the independence from Yugoslavia. Since Bulgaria and Romania did not hold referendums on the accession to the European Union, the plebiscite in the Republic of Croatia was the first after the ones held in 2003 during the Fifth wave of EU enlargement.

The sociological surveys carried out in 2011 about the attitude of Croatians towards voting in the forthcoming referendum gave rise to expectations of a high turnout. Eighty percent of Croatians replied with “Yes” to the question “Do you intend to vote in the EU accession referendum?” As a matter of fact, the results after the official referendum were considerably lower. Turnout was only 43 %, which was the lowest rate of all previously held referendums on accession.

Because of the legislative changes of 2010, which required a majority of those who took part in the vote for a valid result, the final results of 66.27 % “in favour” and 33.13 % “against”, despite the low turnout, made the result of the referendum on Croatia’s accession to the European Union valid. The demographic profile of the voters was balanced both in terms of age and gender. The political preferences of the voters did not add any additional peculiarity to the results either. However, the comparison of the results with the number of eligible voters in the country reveals that only 29 % of Croatians have actively supported the country’s future membership of the European Union.

The Eurobarometer surveys of 2013 confirmed the results of the referendum since the greater part of the population of the Republic of Croatia defined EU membership as positive and desired. According to the polls, more than 50 % of Croatians associated the EU with a facilitated regime of travel outside the country, and opportunities for employment and education in other Member States.

Expectations of an upsurge in the economic sphere remained strong, but mostly regarding the attraction of foreign investments. This was due to the fact that 61 % of Croatians declared having a strong trust in the single European currency (the euro), and one in three believed that the state of European economy will improve in the following 12 months.

The attitudes for improvement of the personal financial and professional state also remained optimistic: 45 % stated that the financial state of their households was good, and over 40 % defined the opportunities for professional development as favourable. Despite the optimism of Croatians concerning the positive development of their personal financial and professional state after the accession to the Union, the main challenges to their country remain the level of unemployment (unemployment rate among those aged under 25 exceeded 45 % in 2014), the improvement of the economic situation in the country, and trust in public institutions.

## Conclusions

The success of the Communication Strategy of the Republic of Croatia remains arguable. Despite the fact that it fulfilled the goals and priorities set by the government, the campaign did not succeed in mobilising a sufficient number of voters to participate in the referendum on EU accession, and Croats' turnout will be remembered as one of the lowest of all preceding referendums on accession to the European Union. Another fundamental drawback was that the initiative was ended when the country joined the European Union. In this way, the information on the benefits of EU membership remained unnoticed by a considerable part of the population. This fact marginalised the efforts of the campaign "in favour" of EU membership, on the one hand, and increased mistrust in public institutions, on the other.

The Target group B, Youth: elementary and secondary school students, university students, working and unemployed young people, declared as a priority by the government in the Communication Strategy, did not show any interest in the information materials provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. The special survey conducted among its representatives for self-assessment of the level of knowledge about EU institutions revealed that the majority considered themselves as having adequate knowledge on this issue. Actually, the results of the test demonstrated that there was a serious discrepancy between the respondents' self-assessment and the number of correct answers. In this case, the preferred means of obtaining information about the EU remains controversial. The Internet has been pointed as the preferred method; however, the Strategy did not succeed in motivating the target group to undertake real action to search information of such nature. Despite the fact that more than 75 % of Croatian households possess a computer with access to the Internet, the real level of young people's knowledge about EU institutions is ostensibly lower than that of their peers in the European Union.

As a whole, the positive attitude for membership of the European Union prevails in Croatian society. Nonetheless, the level of trust towards the EU was by far higher in 2004 than in 2011, and because of that in 2012 a great part of the population considered the accession of the Republic of Croatia to the European Union as a normal result of long and exhausting negotiations.

An interesting fact in the case of the Republic of Croatia is the interweaving of two major public attitudes, which contradict and oppose one another, but explain the change in the support for the country's accession to the European Union in the course of the negotiations and the implementation of the Strategy

and the campaign. On the one hand, there is the wish for national sovereignty of a state which split not that long ago from a greater state formation, Yugoslavia. Naturally, this fact motivated citizens to strive for a strengthening of the national identity, the sovereignty, and the independence. But at the same time, Croatia opened negotiations for accession to the European Union, which called for the delegation of national sovereignty and the acquisition of a supranational identity, and that made many Croatian citizens hesitate, and facilitated also the emergence of sceptical attitudes. In the long run, the voice for the European future of the country remained prevalent, and this can be summarised by the words of Croatian President Ivo Josipović, who addressed the leaders of the 27 Member States at the signing of the Accession Treaty of the Republic of Croatia: “Today Croatia is entering Europe, but more importantly Europe is entering Croatia.”

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# COMMUNICATING THE EUROPEAN UNION IN MONTENEGRO

*Prof. Ingrid Shikova*

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

*George Bernard Shaw*

## 1. Context

Montenegro has been an independent state since 2006, when 55 % of the Montenegrin population declared in a referendum that they were in favour of the independence. Montenegro has a population of 625, 266. It is a small country, and its economy is dependent on tourism and related services, and metal processing. The GDP per capita places Montenegro among the middle-income countries, with 39 % of the EU 28 GDP in PPS in 2014. The average salary in 2015 was € 482, and the average pension was € 270.78.

### • **European perspective**

In the aftermath of declaring its independence, Montenegro joined the United Nations and other major international organisations. An important event in 2015 was NATO's decision to extend a membership invitation to Montenegro. In his address at the third open session of the government on 24 December 2015, Prime Minister Milo Dukanovic called this decision "the most important one in recent Montenegrin history since the restoration of independence in 2006". On 16 May 2016 NATO Foreign Ministers signed the Accession Protocol for Montenegro, marking a historic step in Montenegro's path to the Alliance. Once all allies have ratified the Protocol, Montenegro will be invited to accede to the Washington Treaty, and become the 29<sup>th</sup> member of the Alliance.

The European perspective of Montenegro was reaffirmed in June 2006 after the recognition of the country's independence by EU Member States. In October 2007, Montenegro signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), and an Interim Agreement on trade and trade-related issues. Montenegro submitted its application for EU membership in December 2008. In December 2010, the European Union granted the country candidate status. Regular political and economic dialogue between the EU and Montenegro has continued through the SAA bodies. The Stabilisation and Association Council met in June 2014, and the Stabilisation and Association Committee convened in December 2014. Since October 2014, various subcommittee meetings have been held, including two meetings of the Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, in December 2014, and in April 2015.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to point out that there is a broad national and political consensus on EU integration as Montenegro's strategic priority. Preparations for EU accession dominate the political agenda in Montenegro. Recognising the progress made by the country on seven key priorities identified in its 2010 opinion, in October 2011 the European Commission proposed to open accession negotiations.

The government of Montenegro appointed the Chief Negotiator for EU accession in December 2011, and established the structure for EU accession talks in February 2012. The decision defined the six main bodies of the negotiation process: the Collegium, the Negotiating Team, the State Delegation for Negotiations on the Accession of Montenegro to the European Union, the working groups on the negotiation chapters, the Office of the Chief Negotiator, and the Secretariat of the Negotiating Team. The negotiation process between Montenegro and the European Union started officially on 29 June 2012.

In line with the EU's new approach, negotiations began with the screening of specific chapters of the Acquis: 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (Justice, freedom, and security). Negotiations within these chapters were intended to address some of the key challenges to the democratic governance in Montenegro. The screening of some other chapters started in the second half of 2012. Following the European Commission's progress report, negotiations on five chapters, including the demanding topics of the judiciary and rule of law, were formally opened on 18 December 2013. Within the framework of the accession negotiations, the screening process was completed in May 2014. By September 2014, twelve chapters, including chapter 23 and chapter 24 on rule of law, had been opened, and two of them, Science and research, and Education and culture, have been provisionally closed. (Provisional closure of chapter 25

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<sup>1</sup> MONTENEGRO 2015 REPORT, Brussels, 10.11.2015, SWD (2015) 210 final

“Science and research” occurred in December 2012, and of chapter 26 “Education and culture” in April 2013). By December 2015, 22 chapters had been opened out of a total of 35, and 2 have been temporarily closed.

The EU has provided financial assistance to Montenegro under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) for the period 2007–2013, with total allocation to Montenegro amounting to € 235.7 million. Most of the funding was earmarked as support to the implementation of reforms related to the rule of law, the public administration and environment sectors, and rural development measures in the agriculture and rural development sector. Under IPA II, Montenegro will continue to benefit from pre-accession assistance during the period 2014–2020, with a total indicative allocation of € 270.5 million. The 2014 action programme for Montenegro provides € 35.7 million to address key requirements of the accession negotiations, to support the country’s efforts on rule of law and public financial management, and to improve safety in the transportation sector. The European Union contribution to Montenegro for the implementation of the programme in 2015 is set at € 25.1 million.

Montenegro benefits also from support under the IPA multi-country and regional programmes. It continues to participate in five cross-border cooperation programmes with neighbouring Western Balkan countries and in transnational cooperation programmes with Member States under the European Regional Development Fund and the IPA Adriatic Cross-Border Programme. During the period 2014–2020 Montenegro participates in the following EU programmes, with IPA support: Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Employment and Social Innovation, Horizon 2020, Customs 2020, Fiscalis 2020, and the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (COSME) Programme.

As part of the EU accession process, Montenegro’s parliament introduced new laws and amended numerous laws, amongst others, on elections, civil service and state employees, and on funding for political parties and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). A constitutional amendment aimed at strengthening judicial independence has been under discussion, and the prosecution of corruption has led to several convictions of public office holders. The parliament amended its rules of procedure in 2012 to introduce more regular hearings and to establish two parliamentary committees on European integration and anti-corruption, which are chaired by opposition MPs.

However, according to the World Bank and Freedom House reports, Montenegro made little progress in European Union accession negotiations, despite opening new negotiation chapters in 2015<sup>2</sup>. Action plans for EU

<sup>2</sup> Marovic, J. 2015, Montenegro – Freedom House report 2015

negotiation chapters on rule of law and fundamental rights fell behind schedule, while the public administration reform stalled during the year. According to the European Commission's 2015 Montenegro Progress Report, the administrative capacity of government institutions remains limited, and there has been no significant progress in the public administration reform. Its results in ensuring merit-based recruitment and tackling politicisation are uneven. A lot of efforts are still needed in the field of public financial management, including in aligning accounting standards with international standards, putting in place a strong internal control framework, and improving legal compliance. In 2015, Montenegro's EU accession negotiations continued with modest progress in crucial areas. A persistent lack of results in the work of the administration, which is still highly politicised, and its sluggish modernisation are slowing down the reform. The process also suffers from a lack of transparency caused by a change in the negotiating structure.<sup>3</sup>

The domestic political scene was shaken strongly by a number of scandals. Disagreements within the ruling coalition were frequent on both political and economic issues, but the bloc did not dissolve. Montenegro's rating for national democratic governance remains unchanged at 4.25 in 2015. Pervasive corruption continues to be one of the key challenges to Montenegro's democratisation. The policy framework for fighting corruption was improved but the practical results were poor. Law enforcement bodies are understaffed and highly politicised.

As the European Commission emphasises, financial stability, fiscal sustainability, and competitiveness are major prerequisites for a country's integration into the single market, therefore the Montenegrin government's top priorities are the economy and the economic reforms, including the management of the deficit, the public debt, and the side effects of mismanaged privatisations, as well as the fulfilment of the obligations under the EU accession negotiations (especially on public procurement (chapter 5); company law (chapter 6); enterprise and industrial policy (chapter 20); judiciary and fundamental rights (chapter 23); and justice, freedom, and security (chapter 24)). Montenegro envisages to accelerate economic and democratic development, and to improve political and macroeconomic stability, with the necessary increase in the level of competitiveness of the economy. On 29 January 2015 the government approved the Montenegro Economic Reform Programme 2015–2017 which was presented to the European Commission. The Programme outlines the country's medium-term economic policy and GDP average annual growth of 3.8 %. The pace and stability of this process depend on the government's commitment to

<sup>3</sup> Marovic, J. 2016, Montenegro – Freedom House report 2016

advancing rule of law and democratic reforms in general, as the country still struggles with widespread corruption and weak institutions.

These priorities are often used as a means to capitalise on the short-term benefits of electoral competition. For example, European integration and Euro-Atlantic integration still offer two strategic goals, but they are often represented as goals that can be achieved insofar as the ruling coalition remains in power. One major hindrance toward EU integration is a lack of administrative capacity and know-how in tackling the major structural challenges that have been identified by the European Union. However, the government and its ministries are strongly dedicated to European integration. The main problem is policy implementation. For example, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration tries to serve as a body of horizontal coordination to mediate between different ministries and agencies that are part of the EU accession process, some policies are introduced simply because they are required by Brussels, without researching whether the new policies would have counterproductive effects on existing ones. In general, there are problems with overall governmental policy coherence.<sup>4</sup>

## • Political climate

The Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) is the dominant political party in Montenegro. The parliamentary elections on 14 October 2012 were the third parliamentary elections held in Montenegro since its independence. The Coalition for a European Montenegro, which consists of DPS, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Liberal Party (LP), won 39 out of 81 seats in the House. Together with their former coalition partners the Bosniak Party (BS) and the Croatian Civic Initiative (HGI), and an Albanian minority party FORCA, the Coalition has formed a government that enjoys support of 44 out of a total of 81 MPs. The opposition expanded its share of mandates. In September 2015, opposition parties embarked on a boycott of parliament. They organised also a series of protests outside the seat of the parliament, calling for the resignation of the government, and for early elections. The November 2015 European Commission Report on Montenegro stressed that all political parties should re-engage in a constructive political dialogue within the parliament.

The government has struggled to maintain the macroeconomic stability during the crisis, with both public and foreign debt levels increasing, and a continuing high current account deficit. Cuts in public spending have exacerbated dissatisfaction among citizens, whose living standards have diminished. Protests in 2012 over socioeconomic issues indicated a certain degree of social

<sup>4</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2016. BTI 2016 | Montenegro Country Report

discontent. However, the turbulence caused by domestic political developments triggered a crisis within the ruling coalition. These events were accompanied by strong pressure from the EU and the United States to resolve allegations raised by the so-called Recording Affair (*Afera Snimak*), in which leaked recordings of meetings among ruling party officials indicated serious abuse of state resources. Such issues shifted the focus from the advancement of the EU accession process to domestic party politics.

On 7 April 2013 Montenegro held its second presidential elections since declaring independence in 2006. Voters chose between two candidates – incumbent president Filip Vujanović and the candidate of the opposition Democratic Front (DF), Miodrag Lekić. Turnout was 63.9 percent, and Vujanović won narrowly, receiving 51.2 percent of the valid ballots. The election campaign held by the incumbent head of state emphasised the need for continuity in government in the context of the EU accession process, as well as Lekić’s past opposition to Montenegro’s independence, shifting the focus of the debate back to divisions regarding national identity. Lekić’s campaign focused on calls for a change in government, the need to tackle corruption, and the DPS’s monopoly on power and abuse of state resources. Challenges persist both at central and local levels of governance, and are coupled with the need for empowering citizen participation in various processes within Montenegrin society. At the same time, the European Commission’s progress reports repeatedly draw attention to the need to showcase a successful track record in the area of rule of law, access to justice for all, and fighting corruption at all levels.

## • Media

There are approximately 70 electronic and print media outlets in Montenegro. The Montenegrin media landscape features a national public radio and television, 14 public and 37 private radio stations with local coverage, 3 local television services, and 4 private television broadcasting services with national coverage. In addition, there are five daily newspapers, a news agency, and several online news portals and weekly magazines. Despite this high number, media pluralism is hampered by the financial sustainability of a majority of outlets, as well as by the strong influence of the government on media and otherwise strong links between media and particular parties that often prevail over the pursuit of professional standards and topics of public interest. According to a statement made by Ana Vujošević, programme coordinator for EU integration at the Centre for Civic Education, “the media scene in Montenegro is widely politicised and polarised. In addition, the practice indicates numerous flaws in the legislative framework, especially in terms of the possibility for influence

by the authorities on the media market, namely by supporting the media which cover positively the work of the authorities, and by sanctioning critically-oriented media through deprivation of financial assets, but also through other repressive measures on the part of the state administration which question the sustainability of critically oriented media. As a consequence, the effect of soft censorship is ever-increasing, and some of the first victims of such state of affairs are the journalists' code of conduct and professional standards, and it consequently reduces the quality of journalism in Montenegro". The Centre for Civic Education's findings reveal that soft censorship is primarily exercised through political, discretionary and opaque allocation of budget funds and state aid to media. Lack of transparency, benchmarks, and unbiased procedures during the allocation of public funds to media causes serious deviations on the media market, which improves the functioning of some media, while simultaneously questioning the existence of other. This questions directly the fact whether these media houses support or criticise the government when reporting on its activities.

### • **Civil society organisations**

As of 26 January 2016, 3,677 associations and 131 foundations, or a total of 3,808 NGOs were registered in Montenegro, and over 40 % of them are based in the country's capital.

The Law on Non-governmental Organisations is the umbrella law regulating the functioning of non-governmental organisations, namely, the manner of establishment, registration and removal from the register, status, structure, financing and other matters of importance for the work of non-governmental organisations. The Law on Non-governmental Organisations published in Official Gazette of Montenegro no. 39/11, came into force on 13 August 2011, and has been implemented since 1 January 2012. Due to changes in national legislation, NGOs were obliged to re-register with a set of new mandatory internal documents. NGOs maintain a strong presence in the media, and the civil sector has upheld the role of providing a platform for the public expression of concerns and criticism over the work of the public sector. The civil sector maintains the position of an important social factor, especially in terms of employment and working conditions, available primarily to youth and recent graduates.

Civil society organisations are among the most trusted institutions in the country. Although cooperation between state authorities and civil society has improved, financing remains the biggest challenge to the civil society, as most small non-governmental organisations rely on public funding. The institutional framework for the financing of NGOs comes down to the work of the

Commission for Allocation of Part of the Revenue from Games of Chance, which provides the largest amount of the budget earmarked for NGOs, followed by the Fund for the Protection and Exercising of Minority Rights, the budgets of the local self-governments, and the budgets of state administration bodies. During the period 2013–2015 the NGOs received € 9, 214, 330 for various project activities. In general, NGOs received their funds mainly through the tenders held by the Commission for Allocation of Part of the Revenue from Games of Chance: approximately € 6,5 million for 1,354 projects (€ 4, 733 in average per supported project). Additionally, the Fund for the Protection and Exercising of Minority Rights supported NGOs through its tenders to the amount of € 1.1 million. Thirteen ministries allocated € 286, 937 to NGOs during those three years. However, the Commission for Allocation of Funds to Non-governmental Organisations with the government of Montenegro has not been formed yet, even four years after the Law on Non-Governmental Organisations came into force, which left the NGOs deprived of their funds on that basis.<sup>5</sup>

Representatives of civil society are included in all negotiation working groups; of the total of 1,257 people engaged in the 33 groups, 381 are representatives of civil society, including nongovernmental organisations, universities, business and trade associations, and other entities. According to the 2015 European Commission Report, some progress was made in improving cooperation between the government and civil society organisations, especially concerning the latter's participation in the accession process, where civil society continued to play an active role. However, more transparency is needed in government procedures for cooperation with and consultation of civil society organisations, and civil society representatives have voiced their dissatisfaction with their level of involvement in policy-making on several occasions.

However, a number of NGOs believe the government engages in cooperation only to satisfy Brussels, given that NGOs are generally unable to influence decision-making processes. Foreign donor support has declined, and state funds for the sector are insufficient. Additionally, the allocation of state funds lacks transparency and clear criteria. The EU is the major funding source only for the most professional NGOs. In 2014, it became clear that lack of funding is a systemic problem, rather than a threat only particular NGOs have to deal with in order to ensure the sustainability and quality of their work.

It should be noticed that the retraction of foreign donors is severely affecting the financial sustainability of the civil sector, which consequently pushes organizations to become “catch all” entities focused on implementing donors’

<sup>5</sup> The data are from “FACTS AND PREJUDICES FINANCING OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION AND POLITICAL PARTIES FROM PUBLIC FUNDS”, Publisher: Centre for Civic Education, Podgorica, 2016

interests, and not on promoting their own agendas or the constituency's interests. Moreover, local specific interests are not properly represented in the capital of Montenegro – where all bargaining power is located – since local NGOs tend to be weak, without full-time and professional staff. Opinion polls show that 39.8 % of citizens have trust in NGOs, but since 2010 overall public trust in NGOs has declined.<sup>6</sup>

## • Challenges

The reforms required by the EU accession process pose a particular challenge to Montenegro, due to its small size and lack of administrative capacity. The mastering of this challenge will depend on whether the government will be able to cooperate with the civil society and use its resources. In addition, preparing the country for EU membership implies a transformation of Montenegro's inherited model of governance.

According to the 2015 European Commission Progress Report on Montenegro<sup>7</sup>, the issue of highest priority for Montenegro is the reform of the public administration, to ensure that the country has enough capacity to implement the European Union acquis, reduce politisation, and increase the transparency and professionalism of public services. Montenegro should pay particular attention to strengthening the independence and professionalism of the judiciary. The biggest challenge to its EU approximation will be the success in fulfilling the commitments set out in chapters 23 “Judiciary and fundamental rights”, and 24 “Justice, freedom and security”. The European Commission has established a new negotiation mechanism – the “overall balance” clause – which allows for stopping negotiations on other chapters, if progress on rule of law issues lags behind. Montenegro will have to make significant and measurable progress on chapters 23 and 24, in order to keep negotiations going. For 2016, that means implementing a new anti-corruption legal and institutional framework, making real improvements in the judiciary reform, establishing a proven track record in fighting organised crime, and levelling the playing field for democratic elections.

## 2. Public opinion about European Union membership

One of the key factors which unites the population is the national consensus on the EU integration process as a strategic goal, an issue that serves

<sup>6</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2016. BTI 2016 | Montenegro Country Report

<sup>7</sup> MONTENEGRO 2015 REPORT, Brussels, 10.11.2015, SWD (2015) 210 final

as a way to establish consensus across dividing lines in Montenegrin society. According to a study of the European Policy Centre, “polarisation is a key characteristic of the Montenegrin society. Divisions in terms of statehood, ethnicity, religion, and even language are very much alive in contemporary Montenegro. But if there is one issue that unites the public and political parties alike in the country, it is Montenegro’s aspiration to membership in the European Union. Joining the EU is perceived as a question of national interest and of no alternative, with Montenegro’s political parties competing mainly on who is more committed to the EU agenda and more competent in bringing about the country’s swift European integration.”<sup>8</sup>

All Montenegrin parties, without exception, back the country’s ambition to join the EU. There are not even extra-parliamentary actors in Montenegro that would express Eurosceptic sentiments. All the parliamentary parties have, since the 2006 referendum, amended their political programmes, clearly underlining the strategic goal of EU membership in their platforms.

The levels of support for EU accession had been growing in Montenegro between 2008 and 2010 (as evidenced by the Gallup poll), started to wane in 2011, but have increased in 2015–2016. The UNDP through its Capacity Development Programme, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, conducted a public opinion survey in 2013/14. It included 1,000 respondents, eight focus groups, and 10 in-depth interviews. According to the survey, support for EU accession was 57 %. Although tending to decline, it is still the highest support in the region of the Western Balkans. According to Eurobarometer 81/2014, the view that EU membership would be beneficial for Montenegro has strengthened significantly, and is shared by almost two-thirds of respondents there (65 %).

A recent opinion poll in Montenegro shows an increase in support to EU accession. According to a survey carried out by the Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM) in June 2016 with 1,003 respondents, 61.7 % support the accession of Montenegro to the EU, 24.5 % are against, and 13.8 % are neutral. The highest level of support to Montenegro’s EU accession was observed in 2009 – 76.1 %, and the lowest level – in 2012 – 59.9 %.<sup>9</sup> The CEDEM survey pointed out that 74.8 % of voters in a potential referendum on Montenegro’s accession would vote in favour. It should also be noted that, according to the survey, a convincing majority of citizens (59.3 %) believe that Montenegro will certainly become part of the European Union, regardless of their personal

<sup>8</sup> SOŠIĆ, M. and J. MAROVIĆ (2014), ed. Stratulat, C. European Integration and Party Politics in “EU integration and party politics in the Balkans” European Policy Centre, Paper N 77

<sup>9</sup> The picture of the NATO support is different – 37,1 % support NATO membership, 36,4 % are against, 26,5 % are neutral.

opinions about it. This means that the European path is perceived by the majority of the citizens as an expected and certain future of their country.

The survey discovered a substantial difference in the opinion on EU accession between the northern and the southern part of Montenegro. The opinion of the residents of Pljevlja does not necessarily correspond in anything to the opinion of the residents of Herzeg Novi. Their concerns and questions are of a different nature, and support for EU integration varies enormously, starting from nearly 83–84 % and reaching below 50 % in some of the municipalities. Also, the questions that these citizens have and that they pose are quite different. This could be explained with the difference in the socio-economic status between the southern and the northern part of the country. The Statistical Office of Montenegro Poverty Analysis 2011 reveals that the average poverty rate is 9.3 %, while for the northern region it is 17.5 %, which is nearly three times higher than the poverty rate in the central and southern regions and two times higher than the average for the country. The population in the north has limited access to public services, while women and the elderly have a considerably lower income. Unemployment rates in the north are two times higher than the national average, reflecting growing regional development disparities. Due to persisting gender-based disadvantages, women are vulnerable and lack political and economic empowerment. In the north, high unemployment, high rates of illiteracy, especially among the elderly and women, and low-income levels contribute to maintaining high poverty rates.

In fact, the population can be divided into two main groups: supporters and sceptics. The representatives of the first group believe that EU membership would bring along higher salaries, welfare state and better education. Due to poverty and the negative influence of the economic crisis, the European Union is seen as a magical prosperity carrier. On the other hand, euroscepticism is already alive in Montenegrin society, although it has not been articulated by any of the important social agents starting with the political parties, NGOs, media, or other public figures. The sceptic citizens are reluctant to changes. They believe that alignment to EU standards is an unnecessary complication which will not bring any benefits to them, and that applying European standards would hurt the economy (one of the main worries is related also to the home production of wine and rakia). The grounds for euroscepticism are linked to the economic and financial crisis within the EU and the fear of that group of citizens that they will lose more than they will gain.

In both cases, the common point is the lack of genuine information about the EU and the process of Montenegro's preparation for EU accession. And in

both cases it could bring about a lot of disappointment and a great deal of burden to the further process.

In November and December 2015 the De Facto Agency carried out another survey on Montenegro's EU integration within the framework of an EU-funded project "Informing the Public about European Integration and IPA support in Montenegro". The opinion poll was conducted on a sample of 1,000 respondents and 199 companies.

According to the results and analyses of the DeFacto Agency, the views of the Montenegrin citizens on the country's EU accession have not changed significantly since 2013, when the agency conducted its previous poll on the issue. The findings of the recent poll reveal a positive attitude towards the EU and Montenegro's accession process with a stable 74 % support for EU membership by those who would vote in the referendum, and over 54 % of Montenegrin citizens with an overall positive view of the EU and 19 % against. Almost half of the representatives of Montenegrin companies believe that EU membership will have a positive effect on the operations of their businesses.

It is important to stress that most citizens believe they are well informed about the EU accession process, but when asked specific questions about the EU functioning and the process of accession, they seem to be less familiar with it. The latest findings show that citizens are not sufficiently aware of the significant financial support provided by the EU to Montenegro.

Those opposing the EU membership often cite internal factors for their stance, with some of them saying that the EU accession is not in the interest of the people but in the interest of the local politicians. The respondents who are undecided cite as a main reason the crisis in the European Union. The distribution of negative attitudes regarding the EU shows a dose of irrational opposition to the EU accession of Montenegro. A smaller part of the population among those who do not support the EU integration process, or have no opinion on the issue, state as their reasons "fear of black entry into the European Union and loss of sovereignty" (8.9 %), "I am disappointed with the way EU treats Montenegro" (5.9 %), and "I do not care whether Montenegro will be a EU Member State" (5.4 %).

The above-mentioned surveys were important in order to evaluate not only the opinion but also the levels of awareness and knowledge of citizens about European integration, as well as the usual channels of communication that citizens can use to get information. Television is still the most influential source of information about the EU integration process, but there is a growing trend in the number of people who are informed via social media (30 % obtain information from Facebook and 15 % from Twitter). This does not apply just to

the youth, but also to the middle-aged. The EU integration process is best understood and most trusted by the young people. In their opinion, accession will bring increased mobility, a possibility to have their degrees recognized in the EU, and an opportunity to study and work in EU Member States. Over 50 % of respondents agree that EU accession will present great opportunities to young people and in the long term will improve the living conditions, ensure peace and prosperity in the Balkans, and will allow citizens to have equal rights with EU citizens.

Acceding and candidate countries typically experience lower levels of trust in media. According to the report “Trust in Media 2016” by the Media Intelligence Service, March 2016, Montenegro has a negative 5-year (2011–2015) evolution of trust in media.<sup>10</sup> The country shows decrease in trust in television by 37 points for the same period. The most substantial drop by 41 points in trust in printed media for the period 2011–2015 was experienced in Montenegro (compared to the other European countries). It should be noticed that Montenegrin citizens have demonstrated an increasing trust in online sources (by 3 points).

As to the trust in national institutions, the situation in Montenegro is the following: according to the Eurobarometer 83/2015, the level of trust in the armed forces is 59 %, in the police force – 49 %, in the judiciary – 48 %, in the government – 45 %, in the parliament – 38 %, in regional and local authorities – 33 %, and in political parties – only 14 % (decline by 8 % compared to the previous year). According to the same Eurobarometer, trust in EU is 48 %, in the European Parliament – 44 %, and in the European Commission – 42 %. It should be noted that 29 % answered “I don’t know” about trust in the EP, and 30 % – about the EC. According to the CEDEM survey of June 2016, trust in NGOs has increased to 39.8 % (compared to 35.7 % in 2015), and in the EU Delegation in Montenegro to 45.3 % (compared to 39.7 % in 2015)<sup>11</sup>.

The overall conclusion is that public opinion in Montenegro is pro-European and there is a broad consensus within the society for accession to the EU.

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<sup>10</sup> “Trust in Media 2016” by the Media Intelligence Service, March 2016. This report is based on data published in the 84<sup>th</sup> Eurobarometer survey. It gives an idea of European citizens’ perception of the trustworthiness of several types of media and includes EU Member States, as well as acceding and candidate countries.

<sup>11</sup> Political Public Opinion in Montenegro, June 2016, CEDEM, <http://www.cedem.me/en/programmes/empirical-research/political-public-opinion/send/33-political-public-opinion/1819-political-public-opinion-june-2016>

### **3. The information and communication approach**

#### **• State of affairs**

The high level of citizen's support to the European integration of Montenegro does not necessarily mean a high level of understanding of the process itself. A roundtable discussion on 17 May 2014 organised on the draft 2014–2018 Strategy for informing the public about the EU and Montenegro's preparations for membership<sup>12</sup> highlighted that it is very important that citizens have timely and quality information about the EU, that they understand its system of values and standards, and that they realise that the change has not been imposed by Brussels, but is due to an intrinsic need of reforms that will improve the quality of life. Prior to the strategy's development, UNDP conducted a public opinion survey in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, which included 1,000 respondents, eight focus groups, and 10 in-depth interviews in order to evaluate the opinions, levels of information and knowledge of citizens about European integration, as well as the usual channels of communication used by them. According to the survey results, when it comes to rating the quality and quantity of information, 52.2 % of respondents are not satisfied, although 21 % of them believe that the public is being provided with all of the most relevant information. Only 11.7 % of respondents believe that public information is good and comprehensive. These and other data suggest that further efforts should be employed to improve the information and communication in the actual process of Montenegro's accession to the European Union.

According to a representative of the civil society (Daliborka Uljarevic, executive director of the Centre for Civic Education), the discourse about the EU is present in the rhetoric of the political parties on a very superficial level. The political leaders and stakeholders inform themselves mainly from newspapers and magazines; they do not invest efforts in reading EU documentation, which is the reason for the superficial messages to society. The coverage of EU topics and the accession negotiations by media seems also general and superficial, without delving into the complexity of the process. The information, which is essential to the everyday life of the citizens, is on a low level, regardless of the fact that the government reiterates the fact that it is a necessary process that will actually bring a lot of changes. Another important fact is that 34.2 % of

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.me.undp.org/content/montenegro/en/home/presscenter/articles/2014/03/17/the-citizens-of-montenegro-within-the-process-of-eu-accession-.html>

Montenegrin citizens have never used a computer in their lives, and therefore Internet-based information cannot reach them.

Interesting results about the level of EU knowledge in Montenegro come from the research on knowledge, perception and expectations of Europeans from the EU as part of the project “Homo Europeanus – Overcoming the Knowledge Deficit”.<sup>13</sup> The research has been divided into three segments: 1. Concept of Education about Europe – a brief review of respondents’ education in terms of formal and informal education about Europe; 2. European Union and Europeans – with a focus on perceptions about the EU and European and national identity, as well as particular issues, including positions on EU enlargement; 3. European Parliament – an insight into the awareness of respondents about the European Parliament and its activities, as well as about the values and policies on whose basis MEPs get elected and decide on the priorities in their work. The results for Montenegro are the following: Montenegro is below average with 67.7 % of the respondents who stated that they did not have civic education as part of their formal education, and 61 % did not learn about EU as part of their formal education. 77.2 % of Montenegrin respondents are dissatisfied with the knowledge about the EU they received within the formal education. Data indicate that those who have been longer in a predominantly state-run formal system had the opportunity to gain more information on subjects related to EU and learn more. The environment also influences the level of EU knowledge – respondents from bigger cities learned more and knew more about the EU. This also conveys a direct message that the programmes of education on EU should be brought closer to target groups outside big cities. Research indicates that citizens of EU Member States learn more about the EU through the formal system, while in candidate states informal education about the EU dominates.

The vast majority of respondents from Montenegro (68.2 %) has an extremely positive opinion about the EU membership. Respondents from Montenegro find the enlargement important because it resulted in economic growth in the Central and Eastern European states that previously acceded to the Union; hence, they are hopeful of the same scenario in Montenegro. They also believe that enlargement will expand the area of peace, stability and prosperity, and empower the role of the EU on a global level. In addition, they believe that accession will bring a better quality of life due to the adoption of ecological

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<sup>13</sup> The project was jointly implemented by 14 organisations from EU and candidate states, financed through the EU programme Europe for Citizens. The Centre for Civic Education was the Montenegrin partner in the project. Research was conducted from 15 October till 23 November 2015 in 9 EU Member States (Spain, Italy, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, and Bulgaria) and 3 candidate states (Montenegro, Serbia, and Macedonia). Methodology: online questionnaire and direct survey (face to face) on the sample of 6,719 respondents. In each state the sample consisted of minimum 500 respondents stratified based on the area of living, gender, age, education and employment status.

standards, the fight against organised crime, drugs and illegal immigration, and because the EU will be enriched by new cultures.

According to respondents from Montenegro, the most important values which the EU should defend as priorities are: human rights protection, freedom of speech, solidarity with the Union and the poor countries of the world, and as somewhat slightly less important they stated migration policies and solidarity between Member States, and finally gender equality, protection of minorities and abolition of the death penalty throughout the world. Respondents from Montenegro stated the following as key priority policies of the Union, which the European Parliament should promote: fight against poverty and social exclusion, economy, tax and budget management, and combating terrorism.

### • **EU information and communication strategies in Montenegro**

Given the fact that EU membership is a strategic policy objective of Montenegro, the country faces communication challenges similar to any candidate country. Communicating Europe is not only an obligation, but also a tool to acquire the support needed for the final decision on EU accession.

The **first Communication Strategy on Informing the Public on Montenegro's EU Association Process was adopted in 2004**. The implementation of this Strategy was characterised by significant cooperation with non-governmental organisations, which have, independently or in cooperation with the Ministry for International Economic Relations and European Integration, the Secretariat for European Integration, and other institutions at local and country level, implemented their programme activities related to fulfilment of benchmarks, defined in the Strategy.

In the meantime, the dynamics of the EU integration process and the obligations that Montenegro had fulfilled in accordance with the requirements and membership criteria resulted in the need to prepare a new document, which defined guidelines for informing and communicating with the public on the process of Montenegro's accession to the EU. **The second Communication Strategy on Informing the Public on the European Union and preparation of Montenegro for EU membership 2010–2014** was adopted in 2010. The main goal of the Communication Strategy was to raise the awareness of the domestic public on all aspects of the EU accession process, to better explain the rights and responsibilities arising from membership, to raise the level of professional knowledge within public and private organisations and institutions, as well as to inform the international public on the progress that Montenegro makes in adopting European standards and values.

The specific objectives of the communication about the EU were the following: providing reliable, easily accessible, and comprehensible information; overcoming ungrounded and wrong stereotypes about the integration process; raising the level and quality of the public debate; emphasising on the advantages arising from EU membership; emphasising on the responsibilities and obligations arising from EU membership; mitigating unreal expectations in the domestic public; raising the level of general and professional information of individuals and structures within the state administration, local self-governments and other institutions and organisations; raising the level of general and professional information of individuals and structures within the academic, economic and civil sectors (universities, academic circles, NGOs, media, trade union, professional associations). A Memorandum on Cooperation in the area of European integration was signed by the government and representatives of 14 NGOs on 15 October 2009. Furthermore, the Memorandum on Cooperation in the area of European integration was signed with 16 NGOs from Bijelo Polje on 3 February 2010. The strategy identified NGOs as an important multiplier, so over the four-year period, NGOs were the government's key partner in the implementation of the Strategy, alongside the EU Delegation.

As the process of negotiations develops, the information needs put forward by citizens are becoming more specific. The available surveys point out that Montenegrin citizens are not sufficiently informed about Montenegro's EU integration process. At the same time, the interest among citizens in the topics related to the accession process is not very big. In order to overcome these challenges, a new **Strategy for Informing Citizens about the European Union and Membership Preparations 2014–2018**<sup>14</sup> was adopted. The aim was to adjust EU related information and communication activities to the new public needs, and to bring changes in the approach to the communication policy. The provision of information to the public was invigorated with the aim of reaching as large an audience as possible. A sectoral approach to specific target groups depending on their interests was developed, and new activities were initiated in line with the dynamics of the negotiation process. The topics about EU and the negotiation process are not attractive, and it is difficult to attract the attention of the media, which are the main information provider. The economic and financial crisis in the EU made the communication to present the EU as a desirable destination even more difficult for the governments of countries which are entering the process of negotiations with the European Union. EU membership does not promise the same economic benefits as it used

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<sup>14</sup> The government adopted a number of strategic documents in the context of the EU integration process, including the 2014–2018 EU accession programme; the 2013–2016 pre-accession economic programme; and the 2014–2018 strategy for informing the public on the EU accession process.

to, said Kristof Bender, deputy president of the European Stability Initiative (ESI) at the panel discussion “Croatia’s integration into the EU – lessons for Montenegro”, organised by the Centre for Civic Education (CCE) in cooperation with ESI.<sup>15</sup>

The survey results were used as a basis for a discussion before deciding on the EU information and communication strategy in Montenegro for the period 2014–2018. A roundtable on the draft 2014–2018 Strategy for informing the public about the EU was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration in cooperation with the Centre for Civic Education, the European Movement in Montenegro, and the Centre for Democratic Transition, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Montenegro and the Capacity Development Programme (CDP). The event was preceded by a ten-day public hearing that enabled citizens to provide their comments and suggestions.

The aim of the government’s communication strategy 2014–2018 is to contribute to a better understanding of the EU. According to the Chief Negotiator for Montenegro’s Accession to the EU, Mr Aleksandar Andrija Pejović, the communications in the coming period would be focused on a better understanding of the obligations and responsibilities, as well as on the benefits from membership through the three pillars of Montenegro’s European Integration: accession negotiations flow, implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, and EU support programs. Recalling that 33 chapters are being negotiated between Montenegro and the EU, Mr. Pejović said that in the coming period the communication would be focused on customising the legal system to the “*acquis communautaire*”, and the results that will emerge from this process. “This aims to a transformation of society and should provoke certain reforms that will affect the political, economic and social climate in Montenegro. The whole society is accessing the EU, and therefore it is important to inform citizens about the EU in a timely and appropriate manner, and about its system of values, rules and policies, including changes on the way to full membership.”<sup>16</sup>

The communication strategy will be implemented in the period 2014–2018 and will adhere to the Programme of Accession of Montenegro to the EU for the same period. Action plans will expand the Strategy in more detail, and they will be drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration in cooperation with partners, such as other state institutions, the EU

<sup>15</sup> European pulse, Electronic Monthly magazine for European Integration, N97, October 2013

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.me.undp.org/content/montenegro/en/home/presscenter/articles/2014/03/17/the-citizens-of-montenegro-within-the-process-of-eu-accession-.html>

Delegation to Montenegro, and the civil society. The action plans will be adopted by the government.

Looking at the experience of the previous strategy and the lessons learnt, the newly adopted information strategy strives for establishing a more efficient organisation and a better coordination, and the assignment of an adequate budget to the implementation of the strategy. The activities will be funded from the state budget (the budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, and other public administration bodies), bilateral projects, including EU support programmes, international donations, and funds provided for by the NGOs and/or other civil society stakeholders. An estimate of budget resources will be included in all annual action plans. The European Union has allocated € 550, 000 on an annual level. The model of implementing communication activities via multipliers has proved to be a good approach, and it will be continued, albeit with a more pro-active and coordinated approach.

The Strategy will be implemented by the following bodies:

**A Consultative Body** is selected from the members of the working group that prepared the Communication Strategy, and a representative of the EU Delegation to Montenegro. The task of this Body is to meet at least twice a year and monitor the implementation of the strategy in accordance with the action plans, to evaluate, and give recommendations to the Operational Structure related to the objectives outlined in the Strategy.

**The Operational Structure** comprises representatives of stakeholders tasked with implementing the strategy – representatives of the PR Bureau, ministries involved in the implementation of the strategy, representatives of the Parliament, Union of Municipalities, and the civil society. Civil society representatives are selected on the basis of a public call. The Operational Structure drafts annual action plans, which are adopted by the government at MFAEI's proposal.

**Local self-governments** are required to appoint at least one official in charge of communicating EU integration and of coordinating the overall EU communication in the municipality (municipal companies, NGOs, IPA projects, etc.). The local self-governments are required to draft communication plans in accordance with the national communication strategy.

**The main messages** of the information campaign within the Strategy are:

Umbrella message: Montenegro's EU accession will improve the quality of life of all citizens.

**Core messages:**

1. Better quality of life of all citizens through institutional reform and establishment of the rule of law.
2. EU membership will open new business possibilities.
3. Montenegro will preserve its identity, language, and national characteristics after the accession.
4. By supporting Montenegro's accession to the community of the most developed European countries, we are giving our country and compatriots an opportunity for development and prosperity.
5. Funds from EU accession funds are available to a broad range of institutions/organisations, and they contribute to the alignment to EU standards and the improved quality of life of Montenegrin citizens.

**• Selected examples of EU information and communication projects**

The project “**Europe in my Town**” was implemented by the Centre for Civic Education (CCE) during 2011 and 2012, in cooperation with the Centre for Monitoring (CEMI) from Podgorica and Civic Initiatives (CI) from Belgrade, with the support of the EU Delegation to Montenegro. The project “Europe in my Town” is being implemented in nine municipalities in Montenegro. This scheme established platforms for cooperation between local governments and civil society organizations, and combined efforts to promote the EU, its policies, and Montenegro's integration process. It was focused towards familiarising the public in Montenegro with EU integration. The documentary film “Europe in my Town”, which explores the new rules and the system of values that Montenegro will face once it becomes a member of the EU, was launched in Podgorica.

The project “**EU Info Bus – On the Road to EU**” was implemented by the Centre for Civic Education (CCE) in cooperation with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the NGO Natura, with the support of the Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro within its communication strategy. The project lasted 11 months, had over 45 events, followed by number of publications and promotional materials as part of the comprehensive information and educational campaign in 6 municipalities in Montenegro – *Cetinje, Danilovgrad, Kolašin, Mojkovac, Nikšić and Podgorica*. The final event of the project was a conference “**European citizenship as basis of European integration**” which was held in *Podgorica*. The EU Delegation is also funding two similar projects targeting coastal and northern municipalities in the country.

The project “**Bulletin – European Pulse**” is an electronic monthly newsletter published since 2005 by the Centre for Civic Education with support of Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Since 2013 European Pulse is published as part of the project “EU Info bus – on the road to EU!”, which is funded by the communication budget of the EU Delegation to Montenegro, and co-funded by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

The project “**Enhancing capacities of the Government of Montenegro**” is implemented by the UNDP Capacity Development Programme, and financed by the government of Norway and the European Union. The objective of this project is to enhance the capacities of the government of Montenegro, and in particular of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and EU Integration, to efficiently implement foreign policy priorities, and to coordinate the overall EU accession negotiations’ process.

The project “**EU Communication Strategy**” is a two-year project (2013–2015) developed and delivered by the British Council. The project is funded by the British government under the ‘Diplomatic Influence and Value Fund – Reuniting Europe’. The Programme includes a set of intensive training courses and follow-up workshops, which will contribute to building a staff of well-trained communication professionals within the government ministries. Additionally, it will contribute to establishing local networks and strengthened relationships amongst PR departments and officials. This project brings together around 30 PR professionals to be trained in the following areas: communication strategy design, analysis and measurement, communications campaign management, strategic media relations, how to tell the EU story to the media and citizens, campaign implementation, media, social media, direct events, measurement and evaluation of PR campaigns. This project is funded by the British government under the ‘Diplomatic Influence and Value Fund – Reuniting Europe’.

The British Council has been continuously supporting the EU accession in Montenegro through a set of projects developed around a two-year programme (2012–2014) called **ProAccession**, tailored to enhance the efficacy and professionalism at the operational level, but at the same time to introduce and mainstream European standards of communication across public administration, to align these standards to European best practices, and enable effective functioning in an international context before and beyond EU accession. Its aim is to support the development of key techniques and skills of formal communication with the EU structures in the EU accession negotiation process. The training included modules on: developing strategies and action plans, strategic work with the media, crisis communications, messaging, campaigning, and social media.

- Within the new Communication Strategy the British Council, jointly with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and European Integration, and supported by the Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro and the British Embassy in Podgorica, designed a project “**Communicating EU accession and IPA assistance in Montenegro**” (November 2014 – May 2016). The project aims at supporting the implementation of the Communication Strategy and is structured in two main areas: first, capacity building – continued upskilling of different target groups involved in communicating EU accession and IPA assistance, e.g. PR officials, IPA visibility officers, journalists, etc., and a second one, a public awareness campaign – development of social media and online tools for more effective communication with different audiences and implementation of the Strategy through an intensive and event-rich public campaign. A good case in point is the development of the web portal <http://www.eu.me/>, Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/me4eu.eu4me/> and Twitter <https://twitter.com/me4eueu4me>.

## 4. Lessons learned – conclusions and recommendations

1. The high level of citizen’s support to the European integration of Montenegro does not necessarily mean a high level of understanding of the process itself. It is very important that citizens have timely and quality information about the EU, that they understand the EU’s system of values and standards, and realise that the changes have not been imposed by Brussels and they do not come from integration itself, but from an intrinsic needs of reforms to democratise the society further as a prerequisite for sustainable development and improving the quality of life.
2. Communication is fundamental to achieving wider recognition of the benefits of EU membership, while showcasing the positive changes within Montenegrin society, as well as the EU-financed projects and programmes operating in the country.
3. One of the prerequisites for effective EU communication is taking ownership. Montenegro is clearly committed to communicate proactively about the European Union. The country is a good example of well-developed EU communication strategies, which

serve as a useful platform for communication work. There are many good examples of implemented communication projects.

4. There are still a lot of challenges that Montenegro faces, when it comes to effective EU-related communication. The communication campaigns have to be innovative and creative in finding new effective methods for disseminating EU information. Easily comprehensible language and specific examples should be used.
5. In order for EU-related communication to work and achieve its objectives, it has to be very well coordinated on a national level. Communication with the public requires constant oversight, evaluation and amendments. The model of implementing communication activities via multipliers (agents who shape public opinion) has proved to be a good approach, and should be continued. Multipliers should be included and better coordinated, with the aim of establishing a more efficient organisation and stronger networking, in order to then apply the principles of decentralisation and flexibility. The civil society organisations are very useful partners, and they should be actively involved in disseminating relevant information to different target groups. It is also necessary to assign an adequate budget to the implementation of the communication strategy.
6. It is necessary to ensure realistic expectations from EU membership, to cherish an open dialogue with the citizens, and to clearly communicate which rights and obligations result from EU membership. Creating excessive and false expectations of EU membership will lead to disappointments and disapprovals after the onset of full membership. It is necessary to target specific audiences in specific ways in order to provide as detailed information as possible on the specific topics. The emphasis in rhetoric should be laid on the shared and common European values, ideals, principles, norms, and rules, when communicating and debating EU accession.
7. The current phase of Montenegro's accession negotiations is too technical and not easily comprehensible for citizens. The communication approach to explain the negotiation process only with the opening and closing of negotiation chapters is not advisable. Such an approach can be very boring and may cause a decrease in trust in European integration.
8. Media are an invaluable tool for disseminating information to the people. Journalists' training on EU issues is crucial for the successful implementation of the Communication Strategy. It would be

important to include regional journalists in all types of EU-related communication and training activities, because they can contribute to managing the expectations and fears of the population outside the capital.

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# HOW TO COMMUNICATE THE EU IN SERBIA

*Vladimir Shopov*

## Context

In January 2014 the Republic of Serbia started officially its EU accession negotiations, marking a new stage in the relations between the two parties. After several years of uncertainty about the nature and direction of the relationship between the two sides, there now seems to exist a predictable, and relatively stable framework. The negotiations' methodology has been extensively elaborated, and is accepted by the various actors – the EC, Member States, and the Serbian side. Progress has been slow, but is expected to pick up in the current year developing and intensifying further the relationship. There is significant consensus on the overarching need for further modernisation of the country that can be assisted by the process of Europeanisation and accession to the European Union. On the part of Europe, there is firm acceptance of the prospect of membership for Serbia on the basis of full and sustainable implementation of EU law and accession criteria. Conditionality is now perceived as the main instrument of transformation, and is embedded in the current negotiations' strategy.

However, there are important contextual factors, which differ markedly from the previous, fifth EU enlargement wave, and pose important challenges to the forthcoming process of accession negotiations. These will be quite long and indeterminate in their timeframe, and will require also deep legal, social, and economic transformation and determination. The process will be uneven and much less linear than during the previous expansion of the Union. The degree of involvement of non-state actors will be more fundamental to the eventual success of the process, and will entail commitment and engagement by a wider network of public actors. Clearly, the overall context is quite different, and enlargement will be progressing against the background of increased

competition from other non-European actors offering alternative models of development. Bearing these factors in mind, it is clear that public opinion and communication will be central to the dynamics of the overall process. It will certainly be much more of a factor than during the fifth enlargement wave, and due analytical and institutional attention ought to be devoted to it. This effort needs to involve better understanding of key determinants, good mapping of attitudes, multi-layer analysis of society's interests, new communication approaches, etc. This analysis seeks to make the first step in view of this task.

## **Institutions, Strategies, and Projects**

The institution in charge of EU communication is the Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), which is part of the central executive power of the government of Serbia. It has been established in March 2004, and has already had significant experience and track record in managing EU affairs in the country. Its range of tasks is quite wide, and centres on the conducting of official negotiations with the EU institutions, the elaboration and coordination of various positions on the part of the Serbian authorities; it manages the process of legal harmonisation, and acts as the main counterpart of Serbian institutions, when it comes to EU affairs, etc. Importantly, it is in charge of the communication policy and the interaction with civil society on matters related to the EU and its policies. Since its establishment, the Office has gained administrative prominence, and should be considered at present the key institution within the central executive power in terms of EU affairs. Its proximity to the Council of Ministers also needs to be taken into consideration. Moreover, the structure is reasonably well-staffed and employs currently many young and well-educated people. The Office has received a lot of external support for its development and activities from various Member States (such as the UK and the Netherlands, for instance), as well from the EC.

More specifically, regarding the Communication Strategy, Serbia has based its activities on a paper drafted at the end of 2011 as part of a project run by the European Integration Office, the UNDP, and the British Embassy in Belgrade. The document entitled 'Communication Strategy for the Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union' is quite elaborate, and has all the components required of such papers of more strategic nature. Interestingly, its actual implementation is linked to the country's obtaining the official status of a membership candidate. This happened in March 2012, and action plans were developed after that date with work on the implementation of various projects starting at the end of that year and the beginning of 2013. The 2011

Communication Strategy is a ‘follow-up’ paper to a similar paper adopted in 2004, but mainly within the EU stabilisation and association process. Hence, the current document is politically related to the new stage in EU – Serbia relations, i.e. the prospect of membership via a process of accession negotiations.

The present Communication Strategy is based on an analysis of existing problems conducted by the Serbian authorities over the period since 2004, and contains a number of important elements and notions. While not all of these can be treated in detail, some deserve particular attention. One of them is the observation that in previous years the focus has been laid, probably excessively, on communicating the EU and its institutions in general terms. To some extent, this is a logical first step in the early stages of institutionalised cooperation between the country and the EU, but the Serbian authorities have clearly identified the need to go beyond such an approach. Another important element is the appreciated linkage between communication activity and the political relations between the two sides. In other words, when relations for whatever reasons are at a low point, communication and the public’s acceptance of what is being communicated stales as well. Hence, the uneven nature of the relationship between the EU and Serbia is reflected in communication activities and public attitudes. A third important element of the background of the new strategy is the documented decrease in trust in official sources and communication channels, when it comes to EU-related issues (and probably not only). In other words, Serbian citizens have less and less of a will to invest their trust in information distributed via state institutions and state media. As a consequence, successful information and communication campaigns need to be carried out in cooperation with civil society organisations, branch organisations, independent media, etc. The analysis of the SEIO reveals also some other important issues that need to be addressed by current initiatives and approaches. Research has shown that citizens are not impressed by the communication of EU integration, which lacks a convincing linkage to ‘everyday life’ and its context. In other words, relatively abstract benefits such as inclusion, integration, values, etc., do not seem to resonate convincingly with the Serbian public. Another interesting characteristic identified by the SEIO analysis is the increasing discontent of citizens as a result of the ‘permanent conditioning’ on the part of the EU. This will be examined in greater detail in the ‘public opinion’ section of this report, but needs to be borne in mind in this context. And last but not least, the analysis has identified the lack of sufficient coordination and synchronised messaging as important deficiencies that must be addressed in new communication efforts. These are by far not unique issues pertaining solely to the Serbian case, and are often encountered in various communication efforts either within, or across institutions.

The approach of the Communication Strategy explicitly takes on board the above-mentioned analytical points, and formulates three key pillars. The first one is based on the idea of creating a linkage between necessary change/reform and EU membership. In other words, EU-related reform is set within the framework of the national strategy for transformation, i.e. as reforms that will bring benefits to Serbian citizens, regardless of their relevance to EU accession. It is possible to describe this pillar as aiming to ‘de-EUnize’ the reform agenda. This integrates the insight from the research suggesting a decrease in trust and support, when changes are justified by EU accession. The second pillar is to an extent a sub-set of the first, and it seeks to place accession in an economic benefit context, beyond general and highly politicised topics, and to treat it as specific issues related to a series of sub-groups in society. In other words, the idea here is to move beyond the ‘general public’, and begin to communicate specific messages and points to specific groups by means of segmentation. The approach then would be to shift from addressing the body of citizens as a whole to elaborating and dialoguing with carefully selected segments of Serbian society (students, farmers, entrepreneurs, etc.). The third pillar is the attempt to personalise the benefits of change and EU accession. Again, this is an effort to move away from general arguments and explanations, as well as discussions on values and linkages of values to accession. A more pragmatic approach is required, one that seeks to place the individual and its relevant group identifications at the centre of the Communication Strategy. Clearly, this is quite a challenge, but it does respond to the much popularised criticism of EU communication tools over the last decade, or so. We need to remind ourselves that this line of critique was widespread during the accession process of the fifth enlargement wave.

The strategy then moves to define a key communication message in a language of ‘realistic optimism’. It is to be utilised in an appropriate manner in every communication act depending on target group, issues, timing, etc. As the negotiation process with Serbia will be quite prolonged, uneven, and will address numerous outstanding and sensitive issues, the Strategy takes appropriately into consideration speed, sectoral needs, specific issues of disproportionate importance, etc. These are to be defined and fine-tuned during the actual implementation of the Strategy. Furthermore, attention is paid to the need of communicating convincing and plainly spoken, well-targeted, and appropriate, tangible benefits. A logo and a slogan have also been devised.

The current Serbian EU Communication Strategy contains a well thought-out structure of ‘dialogue groups’, which are in essence its addressees. The first one is decision-makers and ‘multipliers’/generators of public ideas and awareness. Logically enough, it consists of state officials, civil servants, political party

people, trade unions, NGOs, policy experts, university professors, etc. These are not simply 'targets' of communication, but people who can initiate debates, change views and opinions, provide arguments, and engage with the public at large. One feature that attracts attention is the inclusion of celebrities in the list of people in this first category. This is quite innovative and very relevant in modern cultures, which often are more focused on entertainment and sports. Youth is defined as another 'dialogue group' with two main capacities. First of all, it is the most supportive group of EU accession in society, and secondly, young people are potential agents of influence within their families and communities. The documents perceive young people not simply as being the most supportive of membership because of their personal benefits, but also in their relative weight in the context of an accession referendum.

The last two target groups are even more interesting and potentially crucial to the efforts of the government to promote EU membership. The first consists of groups sensitive to change, i.e. people who are likely to experience quite significant transformations in their personal and professional lives, and need to be provided with unbiased information over a sustainable period of time. This segment includes the unemployed, housewives, retired people, and farmers. It is important to note that these people are not necessarily against change or accession, but are considered to have a general distaste for change, and therefore, deserve particular attention. The last group attempts to identify and include those who are opponents of Serbia's efforts to join the EU. No specific profile of this group is mentioned, and it is rather represented by the attitudes that motivate people's opposition – loss of status and standing during the transition period, sense of loss of sovereignty, identity, or culture, and lack of sufficient and convincing information.

The strategy has a component related to the overall cooperation framework with other actors: NGOs, the media, the commercial sector, etc. There is a commitment to utilise already existing networks within the public administration, which engage in communication work, and have experience in EU communication. For instance, this is the so-called 'expert group' that draws on the expertise of numerous general issues and policy experts. There are at least two points that need to be emphasised in this context. One of them is the prominent role NGOs are expected to play given the general level of distrust in official institutions and sources of information. Much of the tailor-made targeted information campaigning will require the expertise, tools, networks, and language of civil society organisations. While they are already quite involved in the various elements of EU accession work (participation in working groups, consultations, advice on specific issues, etc.), communication-related tasks entail even closer cooperation with them. The other really important point has to do with

involvement and engagement of local media. The Serbian experts are quite firm in their evaluation of the rising difficulties in working with national media. This view is actually confirmed by various NGO interlocutors and is reflected in the strategic document. The emphasis on local action, whether media, NGOs, or other types of non-state actors, is very notable, and represents a crucial element of the adopted approach. 'Going' local is perceived as an effective tool and channel of unbiased information provision, allowing communication to bypass the usual and much distrusted ways of engagement. This is a good example of an analysis being integrated into the strategic planning, but also of widening the interface of dialogue and communication, which is an essential prerequisite for effective and convincing EU communication.

The document being implemented by the SEIO has quite an elaborate breakdown of activities and tools specifically targeted at the various groups and sub-groups. In most cases, this entails the use of well-established instruments such as seminars, training courses, public events, roundtables, etc. In some instances, however, more flexible and innovative tools are employed: specific info hotlines, portals, help desks, dedicated social media groups, or events with celebrities.

Some examples of projects and their approach provide a better context to the efforts of the authorities to present EU matters and address information shortcomings. Such projects are either funded by the EC, or are joint efforts with the host country. At present, the creation of EU Info Centres is the most visible type of activity, which ensures that a wide range of information is provided to the public. These are already quite elaborate structures, which serve increasingly as focal points for a range of items. In terms of content, they offer details on project work and funding opportunities, as well as detailed information on ongoing EU projects and their effects. Also, the websites of these centres have blogs that address topical issues. There is a blog of the EU Ambassadors, where they have the opportunity to touch upon various matters and provide different viewpoints. Various publications are also available, as well as detailed explanations of EU policies, institutions, and decisions. More importantly, however, the active components of their activities are quite numerous. These range from opening info days, school competitions, European Parliament simulations, trainings, special events devoted to particular issues such as Roma issues, standards in agriculture, EU membership criteria, etc.

The adopted approach to these efforts is quite interesting and deserves special attention. The main Info Centres are in the capital Belgrade and the key cities of Novi Sad and Nis. Various events are also held across the country depending on topical issues, albeit in a less structured and institutionalised form.

However, the experience of the National Convent of NGOs is even more interesting and potentially very valuable as negotiations get into full gear. Apart from the function of engaging civil society and ensuring greater legitimacy for the process, the Convent has been given an information function on a number of dimensions of the EU accession process. One of these is to provide information about the actual state of play, but also to address important outstanding matters in the negotiations. Importantly, the adopted strategy here is ‘to go local’ and engage in a more direct manner with ‘real people, on real problems’, rather than simply talk in general terms about the process and its implications. This is done in cooperation with local NGOs from the particular cities and regions. The key idea is to have local sessions of the 21 working groups that cover all negotiation chapters and have them debate on the EU dimension of particular policy areas and their local impact. The actual format involves discussions on three priorities with particular local relevance placed in the context of EU policies and law, and necessary reforms. These discussions then produce recommendations, which are drawn to the attention of the state and the Convent. Clearly, this is a logistical and financial challenge, and is unlikely to be implemented in its envisioned scale, but the authorities are already making efforts. For instance, in 2014 such a meeting between the Convent and the state was held in the northeastern town of Zaichar. Representatives of all ministries were invited and attended, while at the other side there were representatives of NGOs, the organised business, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), etc.

At the same time, the local office of the EC and some of the NGOs have quite a different, more balanced and critical view regarding the EU communication efforts of the government. There is a common opinion that the political ‘buy-in’ of the communication documents and efforts is very thin and, in the views of some, even non-existent. Strategic documents are really followed up by proper and well-drafted action plans, and funding is always an issue with little political support for resolving it. Naturally, NGOs are more critical and suggest that ‘there is too much focus on technicalities’ and insufficient attention to the wider implication of getting closer to the EU. Furthermore, there is the criticism that government strategies do not really involve people, i.e. they are quite one-directional, even ‘preachy’ as considered by some. Again, some NGO experts are not really convinced that the country’s politicians support genuinely the EU accession process citing their lack of enthusiasm on European matters and their general reluctance to discuss and devote sufficient time to them. One analyst made an interesting connection between EU accession and cultivation of citizenship. In other words, the entire effort to bring the country closer to Europe and make that an acceptable path of development

for the country depends also on overcoming the nationalistic mindset. Exactly how that can be achieved is another complex issue, and remains outside the scope of this analysis.

As a way of bringing this section to a close, let me present some conclusions, based on document analysis and a series of meetings with relevant stakeholders. Serbia seems to have sufficient institutional infrastructure for communicating the EU and a reasonably well-developed approach to interacting with civil society. There are, however, several points that need to be highlighted. There is a general sense of impatience with the overall dynamics of the process of negotiation and interaction with EU institutions. At times, this is coupled with the implicit notion that it is not justified and rooted in an objective progress evaluation on site in Serbia. While officials are careful in making explicit statements to this effect, they are nonetheless sufficiently clear in their overall comments on these matters. Secondly, discussions leave the impression that there is a tendency for political considerations and attitudes to override objective assessments of the progress the country is making. In other words, the actual implementation of the EU *acquis* and the changes in practice and institutions are perceived as secondary to the political signals which determine the direction and pace of the EU-Serbia dialogue. In the implied responses to various questions, officials seem convinced that political issues such as Kosovo (or cooperation with the Tribunal in The Hague in previous stages of the EU-Serbia dialogue) would always trump sectoral and technocratic advance. Thirdly, there is a strong sense that the institutional and expert base of Serbia's bid for membership is, and has been sufficiently robust for a long time without sufficient recognition by its EU partners. Again, this leaves the impression that Serbian counterparts are frustrated by the fact that they are being 'lectured' on, or given advice, which hardly is beyond their own capacities and expertise. In less formal communication, this was especially tangible, and experts have not hidden their displeasure and sense of redundancy of some of the approaches to cooperation and project work. Finally, while the Communication Strategy has a sufficiently well-developed basis and has applied a sociological analysis to its segmentation and project work, there is a sense in which EU communication is seen as ultimately of marginal importance to the process of accession. This is not to imply that professionals and committed civil society actors are not interested and do not see a benefit in good EU communication, but there are some deep-rooted convictions about international politics, which are influential. For instance, the view that in the end it would be the politics of the 'Great Powers' that will determine the pace and timing of accession. All of this implies that EU communication is outlined and perceived as a secondary activity with a marginal impact.

## Public Opinion, Debate, Framework Setting

This section of the analysis will focus predominantly on the latest research on EU matters carried out at the request of the Serbian European Integration Office in December 2014. The survey provides the basis for a number of informative and interesting findings. There is a very clear and rather linear trend for EU membership support to decline. In October 2009, 64 % of Serbian citizens approved of joining the Union, while only 14 % were against, a clear and quite impressive majority in favour, which then slowly started to thin down. A year later, the figures were 56 % and 24 %, respectively, already a noticeable trend that the opposing camp was gaining momentum. In October 2011, the gap was narrower still, 50 % in favour, and 32 % against. The period between the end of 2011 and 2014 was quite interesting as the overall volatility of attitudes began to increase markedly, and on a number of occasions there were sudden drops, then partial rebounds, etc. At the end of 2014, the proportion was maintained, more or less, and remained stable with 44 % of Serbs in favour of membership, and 25 % against. A different question revealed another interesting element of the overall sociological picture of the situation. When asked how they would vote in a membership referendum, only 10 % responded with “I don’t know”, while 20 % said they would refrain from casting a ballot. While we would need a much more detailed and nuanced analysis to arrive at a deeper understanding of the dynamics of this process, it is noteworthy that the EU is now a matter of intense debate, one on which citizens have clear positions! This gives us an indirect indication of the growing relevance, prominence and intensity of EU issues in Serbian society, a very important feature that needs to be borne in mind.

The depth of attitudinal support for EU membership is also very important and has to be integrated in communication strategies. Not surprisingly, the positive expectations related to accession are linked to better opportunities for the young people, with greater employment chances and the ability to travel freely. These are to be expected, and they repeat patterns in other accession countries. What is more noteworthy is that the attitudes against EU accession are quite specific – more problems for local farmers and rising costs of harmonisation and accession. Also importantly, 43 % of Serbs associate EU membership with loss of the national identity and culture. In other words, belonging to the Union is perceived as a zero-sum situation, rather than one that enriches and creates more opportunities. When asked about the benefits of membership, another interesting discrepancy appears – people are more inclined to identify general rather than personal benefits stemming from accession. For

instance, while 31 % see general benefits, 29 % point out personal ones. This is more pronounced in the group which sees significant benefits – 6 % at the level of Serbian society as a whole, and 3 % at a personal level. Even more importantly, 36 % of all Serbs see no personal benefit at all, while 29 % are inclined to expect benefits that relate to them personally. These figures point to a situation in which a significant number of Serbian people are not able to identify effects, policies, and situations that would lead to an improvement in their personal circumstances. This is a crucial element of the analysis that needs to be taken on board in the EU communication policy and strategy.

However, the not-so-good news continues, and relates to the views and reasoning of Serbian citizens on the question of why progress has slowed down. The findings reveal a very interesting and challenging perspective. A significant proportion of citizens (36 %) perceive EU conditionality as the main obstacle. In other words, the policy of ensuring change in line with EU laws and standards is seen as the main reason why the country is not making any progress. This may indicate lack of understanding of the nature of the process, but also potential resistance to the essential task of making sufficient domestic transformations in order to gain entry into the club of EU members. If this is the main attitude on whose basis EU-Serbia relations are perceived, this bodes ill for the future of the entire process. Such a disposition can potentially inflate in a prolonged, very detailed, and arduous negotiation process leading to a very volatile and sceptical overall context. At the same time, there are other explanations, which are more inward, and relate to the inactivity or shortcomings of domestic actors. For instance, 14 % of respondents state ‘the ability of domestic leaders’ as the reason for the recent stalling of EU-Serbia relations. Another 13 % blame local ‘mentality and inability to change’. Still, the tendency to blame the process of conditionality will pose numerous challenges in the coming years, especially when coupled with the inclination to doubt personal benefits of membership, and the uneven nature of the current accession negotiation format. Moreover, Serbians tend to perceive relations with the EU in a very political manner, something not prevalent during the fifth enlargement wave, which ended with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania. In my view, this one particular element of public opinion analysis deserves the most attention, and needs to be addressed at a number of levels.

Besides the more immediate attitudes to the EU and EU-related issues, the survey contains interesting information that relates to the wider social dynamics. Essentially, it shows a decline in the conviction of Serbian citizens that accession requires significant transformation beyond the realm of politics. In May 2008, nearly 40 % of Serbs considered that accession would require changes in their working and living habits. 34 % were convinced that they needed to

improve their education and qualifications ahead of the moment of integration. Roll forward to 2014 and the picture is very different. By December 2014, all these indices had gone markedly down, and stand presently at just 27 %. Without wishing to over-interpret the data from this survey, it is rather poignant that most citizens appear to have de-coupled the wider social change from the accession process, which presumably remains very much a merely political affair, or legalistic at best. In other words, the scope of necessary transformation appears to have been narrowed to legal change, with the final decision on membership perceived as a game of politics. Again, this is potentially a very important finding as it runs counter to the present methodology of accession negotiations. Contrary to previous enlargements, the institutionalised focus during the pre-accession stage was on implementation, rather than on mere adoption of legislation, on actual changes in society and practices, rather than on the adoption of strategies and action plans. From this perspective, progress depends actually not just on legal amendments, but rather on the transformation of institutions, behaviours, and attitudes. These are seen as a much more stable and sustainable basis for membership. Data suggests that the negotiations will take place against the background of a declining conviction in the necessity of change beyond the realm of law. In this line of thinking, at the end of the day, decisions for membership are essentially political in nature and are not really determined by reform. Again, this is something that the EU Communication Strategy needs to evaluate and incorporate in its approach and activities.

When it comes to public opinion, collective and individual perceptions are of great importance. The research and the meetings reveal a very interesting picture regarding the manner and degree of awareness of donor support. A number of interlocutors insisted that there was a significant discrepancy between the actual support by external actors, and perceptions. The key point that has been made (even if sociological data has not been available) is that there exists an asymmetry between Russian support and perceptions of its scale, and EU support. While the ratio of actual financial support is purported to be about 10 to 1 in favour of the EU, this is not reflected at the level of perceptions. Serbian experts insist that the ratio is about 3 to 1 in favour of the Russian side. Even if these figures are not dead accurate, there is clearly an issue that the EU will have to address in its future communication activities.

In fact, the latest sociological data does suggest that there is truth in these assertions. For instance, only 22 % of Serbs have actually heard of EU-funded projects in their country, with environmental protection and social development projects being the most popular. An impressive 89 % are unable to provide even a rough estimate of the volume of EU support. At the level of perceptions, the majority (54 %) holds the view that Russia is the biggest donor in

the country. Even China is ahead of the EU – 30 % and 29 %, respectively. The discrepancy with the actual structure of donor support is even more staggering than suggested by the interviews. The EU and its Member States account for over 73 % of external support, while Russia, for less than 2 %.

The local representation of the EC is fully aware of this situation and is actually addressing it by a series of measures. Some are more traditional and have been employed across many countries that have gone through the process of accession negotiations. These include competitions on EU issues, study visits, TV information programmes, conferences, high-level visits, open days, club of journalists writing on EU issues, etc. A number of other activities point to a more innovative project that seeks to address local circumstances. For instance, there is more emphasis on ‘story creation’ and the EC will be sponsoring the production of various media products informed by this approach. Also, more and more communication efforts will be focused on the local level where ‘face-to-face’ interaction ensures better access, overcomes media access issues, and ensures greater ‘buy-in’ of the actual information material. ‘EU info points’ will seek to provide more direct information, and there is a greater focus on culture as a platform for dialogue and promotion of EU values. A new app for Erasmus is being developed and will be available for students across the country. Overall, the local EC office is fully aware of the nature and scale of the challenges, and is responding by being more strategic in its approach; it has been coming up with more innovative and relevant forms and content of interaction.

The Serbian authorities insist that they have been tracking public opinion on the EU for over a decade now and are quite prepared for the task of changing attitudes in the course of the accession negotiations. The involvement of NGOs and various organised interests has also been quite important in terms of better understanding of the specific concerns and fears of particular society groups. The Office of European Integration insists that their analysis of societal attitudes is quite deep and able to differentiate between various groups, thus able to develop specific messaging and to target smaller groups with particular grievances and concerns. This is the case with small farmers, older people with identity concerns, some business interests worried about loss of market and elaborate regulation, etc. NGOs also confirm their readiness to engage at this level. However, officials clearly, and in my view, quite rightly link this process of micro-targeting to the actual opening of chapters. It is difficult to engage with the dynamics of negotiations and the required change in policies; it is only then that stakeholders get really involved and begin to appreciate the finer details of EU policies, their consequences, and the need of national corrective measures. From this perspective, the actual work of elaborating, engaging, and communicating the various social sub-groups will gain momentum and substance, as

more chapters are being opened for negotiation. Support and assistance will be required at all stages of the process. The experience of a number of newer Member States can be particularly helpful. For instance, the transformation of Polish farmers' attitudes towards the EU can be very instructive.

The question about establishing the framework of EU debates and issues also deserves some attention in this context. The main point to make in this regard is that, in contrast to most of the countries involved in the fifth enlargement wave, the EU is immediately linked to very political issues, mainly due to the issue of Kosovo and relations between Serbia and Kosovo. In other words, and particularly after Kosovo's independence, Serbian citizens tend to view the EU as an active, biased player rather than an umpire. One side effect of this very political 'temperature' of EU representation is that there is hardly any meaningful interest in EU policies. This mixture creates a curious situation, where the EU appears at once very political, but also very abstract, and people actually struggle to relate it to daily issues and processes. This is the reason why some experts insist that the EU is 'simply not part of any important debates', it just stands on the sidelines, makes demands on the country, and then on crucial issues is often seen as a partial actor. Another interesting feature of the context in Serbia is that all too often EU stories are simply 'hard to sell' because they sound 'too optimistic'. The message here seems to be that there is already enough realism and even scepticism regarding the EU to 'pitch' stories and information in this way. I have only sketched some elements of this very important issue of framework establishment, but it deserves further analysis, as it provides the very framework for EU communication, and requires particular efforts in order to make it a success. As an extension to this analysis, at least a few suggestions emerge. One of them is that the EU ought not to be presented as a panacea to all problems, and has to be presented in an objective and informative manner without a sense of superiority. Honesty will pay off. Positioning the EU in a future-oriented context is also a good idea, although that would require an effort to present membership in clear, tangible terms, which is a challenge.

## **Involvement of Civil Society Organisations**

Interaction with civil society is a crucial dimension of the current wave of EU enlargement, presuming a much more prominent role for non-governmental organisations, and leading to a more structured and embedded relationship with institutions of the state. There is already evidence in this respect in the case of Montenegro, where these organisations have become a core actor in the actual negotiations, providing expertise and drive for change, but also actually

performing quasi-state functions. Official authorities in Serbia insist that NGOs are already involved at a number of levels in the overall EU integration framework. In the first place, this is happening at the level of screening monitoring, which precedes the opening of chapters, and involves the examination of the EU acquis, and the level of compatibility prior to the actual negotiations. This allows NGOs not only to get involved and gain access to the process, but to accumulate further knowledge, and develop their capacity in policy-making. Secondly, NGOs participate in the drafting of negotiation positions, which further strengthens the above-mentioned benefits. This is important, as civic structures have the opportunity to be involved in the policy-making process, and to shape to a certain degree the content of these positions. Thirdly, NGOs are involved in monitoring the entire process, and this is primarily being done via the National Convent, which brings together such civic organisations. In the rendering of authorities, the Convent is expected to provide its views on the various governmental positions before they are finally adopted and communicated to the EU side. Naturally, the depiction of the process is somewhat different from the point of view of the NGOs, and some have questioned the sincerity of the government, and have remained sceptical about the actual degree of consultation once the negotiation process speeds up. Moreover, meetings have made it clear that Serbian officials are quite convinced of their sufficient expertise and degree of preparedness, and perceive the role and involvement of civic organizations as secondary. In its self-perception, the administration has been ready for several years now to start and conduct professionally negotiations, but has not been able to do it because of obstacles of political nature. So, while there is sufficient understanding that the engagement of NGOs is an important element of the process, one needs to remain aware of a scenario, where these organisations may not be as involved as the current rhetoric implies. Indeed, some officials suggested even that behind the 'best practice' of NGO involvement in Montenegro, there stood a structural institutional deficiency. Namely, the immaturity of state structures in Montenegro, which has led to the necessity to recruit and involve NGOs in, what are in essence, functions of the state. In a sense, there is an implied understanding that the degree and depth of civic involvement in that instance is more of a compensatory mechanism to address basic deficiencies of the state, and this will not be required, when negotiations with Serbia accelerate.

The State Office for Interaction with NGOs is another quite important and active interlocutor. It is based on a Croatian model and has been operational for over four years now and has its prominent place in the more structured dialogue with civil society. In essence, it seeks to implement the intent for communication on EU issues and may be described as something of an intermediary entity.

Financial support for EU projects is managed by the respective ministries, but the Office does act as a body which integrates opinions, and provides/transmits civil society input on many issues. Negotiation-related work is very important in this respect, and both this Office and the EU Integration Office have regular activities. These include communication of important events and dates, views and opinions being sent to the working groups, the holding of regular debriefings of the chief negotiator and the sectoral negotiation teams, etc. Support for expert capacity-building of NGOs is another important element of their work, even if their limited financial support imposes some limits. The Office has a multi-year strategy for cooperation with NGOs, and will develop further its policy of 'embedding' civil society organisations in the EU negotiation process.

The meetings held during the field trip provided also opportunities to discuss, even in very sketchy terms, the media environment in the country. As was expected, people from civil society organisations were quite critical, while officials preferred to be quite non-committal. A number of issues have emerged related to various aspects. While few offered clear opinions, there appeared to be greater doubts about media freedom in the country due to the influence of owners on the editorial policy. Moreover, there is less interest in EU issues, as the entire process is now perceived rather in political terms and increasingly as a 'background' process not immediately related to the economic and social life. This is not to say that EU-related matters are not frequently in the media, but there appears to be less interest in them, and curiosity seems to have worn off. Interest in EU policies is also not particularly prevalent, and as EU membership is seen less and less as a panacea, this trend is likely to intensify. These are significant challenges and they will make public communication via the most accessible and popular channels very difficult, and will require a great deal of imagination and innovation.

The issue of an agency, 'which talks about the EU' was also raised by some non-governmental organisations as an important component for both sides of any future communication strategy. There are at least two points that need to be emphasised. The first one is related to what some describe as 'a myth of personality', which is quite characteristic of the Serbian political and social scene. In this rendering, people are much more likely to pay attention to trusted personalities than to messages that are institutionally delivered and communicated. While we do not need to venture into detail here, clearly, the degree of mistrust in institutions has to be considered and borne in mind, when elaborating messages and considering how to communicate them. In view of this and the prolonged process of negotiations, the selection of official and non-official speakers on EU matters is of central importance. The second point is more focused on NGOs specifically, and on the attitudes towards them.

Historically, there has been quite a significant overlap between the emergence and development of civic organisations and the activities of the anti-Milosevic movement. Furthermore, there is also the additional issue of external donor-driven development of civil society. This is a familiar story witnessed in most former communist countries in the region, and it is presently evident in Serbia as well. Some insist that as a consequence of this process the level of trust in NGOs is not particularly high, and many people are rather sceptical of their agenda and intentions. The degree of this problem is difficult to ascertain from this quite cursory examination of the local civil society scene, but needs to be appreciated even at this stage. While NGOs will have to play a crucial role in informing and convincing citizens of the benefits of EU membership, they will also need to do that in a balanced and objective manner that makes them truly a supporting vehicle in the process of Europeanisation.

There is another very important dimension to the engagement of NGOs in EU communication, which is currently overlooked. It is treated as a foregone conclusion that Serbia's membership would be preceded by a national referendum. The reasons for this are beyond the scope of this analysis, but clearly the fact that significant segments of society contest the idea of EU accession does mean that such a referendum would render legitimacy to the act of joining. Not only does this make communication central to the entire process of negotiations, but also implies a need of an elaborate and wide-ranging framework for cooperation between state and civil society. It is clear that NGOs and various other non-state actors will be essential to communicating with various groups in society and to addressing numerous misunderstandings and disagreements that would naturally occur prior to the referendum. This has important implications for the EU as well. Most notably, there is the need to develop stable, effective, and extensive cooperation partnerships with these organisations, and to invest sufficient efforts and resources in being an effective interlocutor in these debates. Referenda are notoriously difficult to predict, and campaigns are hard to structure, especially when the time framework is not clear at all. Still, even at this stage, pro-EU groups are in need of support in terms of information, engagement on the ground, help in developing content, etc.

## **Future Challenges/Some Conclusions**

This report and analysis can represent little more than a snapshot of the EU accession process and its numerous dimensions related to politics, public opinion, civil society, and governance. The relations between the EU and Serbia have gone through a series of stages, and there is a certain unevenness, which

is reflected in the overall framework of contacts between the two sides. The actual start of the negotiations marks the beginning of a new context, which gives some stability and predictability, regardless of the complex nature of the on-going negotiations and their impact on a wider society. Given this new and more stable framework, there are still various elements of this situation, which need to be appreciated and understood.

The current EU accession negotiation methodology, which has important implications to the dynamics of the politics and the attitudes, possesses some features, which in turn need to be taken into consideration, when devising communication approaches and strategies. The first one is that we are looking at a pretty prolonged negotiation process, which means that the relationship of scrutiny, monitoring, etc., will persist for perhaps up to a decade. This entails a very different time framework for communication than the one present during the fifth enlargement wave in the early 2000s. The second one is that the actual negotiations will be quite intrusive, reaching deep into the social, economic, and institutional reality. Going beyond merely changing legal norms and elaborating various strategies and action plans means that there is a greater likelihood of political difficulties, social reactions to persistent requests for painful reforms, etc. An intrusive process of transformation by an external actor is bound to lead to some questioning of legitimacy. A third important feature is the continuously expanding EU acquis, which Serbia needs to take on board, while also negotiating and closing chapters. This means that new issues and problems will be constantly appearing, and will need to be addressed by means of a communication policy. This calls for a very flexible and 'hands-on' approach able to respond quickly and to address potentially rather pressing specific issues. Current thinking at the local EC representation level shows sufficient awareness.

As a way of concluding, I would like to make a few brief points. EU communication in Serbia is occurring in a politically charged context that reflects fully the twists and turns of relations between the country, various Member States, and the EU. Not only is this likely to persist, but also to remain a defining feature. The intrusive nature of conditionality is meeting a widespread questioning of its legitimacy and uncertainty about many of the longer-term benefits of membership. This makes interaction and communication even more challenging, and calls for an open, honest, and innovative approach, which builds on the current best practices. Some of these include better story-telling and personalising of the benefits of membership, and more targeted messaging to specific groups in society, which have persistent doubts about the process. Support for EU membership is declining, and the social dynamics behind that process appear to be quite stable and sustainable, if not irreversible.

This is likely to remain the key sociological feature of the context for the coming years, and the communication efforts need to integrate it in their assumptions. Moreover, while political parties ‘talk the talk’ of EU membership, such support should not be taken for granted. There are electoral incentives for tough posturing, which may even enter anti-EU accession territory, but this aspect requires further and more detailed analysis. One also needs to appreciate the increased public and PR presence and activity of other actors, such as Russia, in the case of Serbia. Russia has been able to leverage its influence well, and has managed to achieve a level of recognition, which is very disproportionate to the actual level of institutional and financial support. This is a key challenge to the EU, and not only is the local office of the EC aware of this situation, but also it is already responding by various instruments. Civil society is increasingly active in the overall integration efforts, and more specifically in the communication work. Its involvement at the local level is increasing, and its participation in the key formats of the negotiation process is well on its way to being well-embedded. At the same time, their legitimacy is sometimes questioned by various groups in society due to the external financial support and their involvement in the anti-Milosevic movement.

As a consequence of all these considerations, the communication policy of the EU needs to develop a long-term approach, which is honest, addresses openly outstanding issues, and presents tangible benefits to the Serbian public. It ought to do this via a well-developed, segmented analysis of public opinion that talks to real people belonging to various groups across the country. NGOs can be a real ally, but communications and dialogue also need to be more-encompassing and inclusive of big businesses, SMEs, branch organisations, local authorities, universities, policy-makers, etc. EU membership also needs some convincing and well-respected spokespersons, who are not only convinced of the crucial importance of accession, but also able to communicate it in a comprehensible language. Personal, clearly contextualised stories are crucial, and activities at the local level ought to remain central to any effort.

## **Analysis details**

The field work for this project was carried out at the end of November 2014.

# HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE PUBLIC IN THE CONTEXT OF EU INTEGRATION REPORT ON THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

*Assoc. Prof. Kaloyan Simeonov<sup>1</sup>*

## **Context**

The Republic of Macedonia is one of the Western Balkan countries that participate in the EU Stabilisation and Association Process. It is also one of the successors of former Yugoslavia. Macedonia declared independence in 1991 and, at the beginning, the process of separation compared to some other ex-Yugoslav republics went peacefully.<sup>2</sup> It was not until 1993 that Macedonia became a member of the United Nations because of the dispute with Greece over its official name. The country was admitted to the United Nations with a provisional reference “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)”. Later, the dispute over the name between Macedonia and Greece played a substantial role in delaying its integration into NATO and the European Union. Some of the perceptions of the Macedonian citizens today regarding the European Union and the communication campaign and support for its European integration are also influenced by this still unresolved issue.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The report was prepared after a field mission that took place in Skopje, Macedonia, on 19–20 February 2015. The report was updated in the beginning of April 2016 without conducting new fieldwork and meetings. Kaloyan Simeonov, PhD, is Associate Professor at the European Studies Department of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

<sup>2</sup> A conflict between Albanians and Macedonians broke out in the period February – August 2001. The conflict ended with the help of a NATO ceasefire monitoring force. After the Ohrid Agreement and some concessions between the two sides, the conflict was overcome in general, but tensions between the country’s two main ethnic groups remained. The last serious clash occurred in May 2015, when eight Macedonian security officers and 14 gunmen were killed in the fighting in the suburbs of Kumanovo, just 40 km away from the capital Skopje. The ethnic diversity explains to a certain extent the differences in perceptions towards the European Union and the support for the European Union integration process among ethnic Macedonians and Albanians.

<sup>3</sup> In the European Union decisions about the accession process must be made unanimously by all current 28 Member States. Therefore, the Republic of Macedonia may not start accession negotiations with the European Union because of the dispute over its official name, and because Greece made the resolution of that issue conditionality to the launch of accession negotiations with Macedonia.

Visa-free travel for citizens of the Republic of Macedonia to the Schengen area was granted on 19 December 2009. First among Western Balkan countries, Macedonia signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) on 9 April 2001. The SAA came into force on 1 April 2004, following an Interim Agreement covering trade and trade-related aspects that took effect as of June 2001.

The Republic of Macedonia was identified as a potential candidate for EU membership at the Thessaloniki European Council summit in 2003, along with the other countries from the Western Balkans.<sup>4</sup> Macedonia applied for EU membership in March 2004. The Commission issued a favourable opinion in November 2005, and in December that same year the Council of the EU decided to grant the country candidate status. Since then, Macedonia has benefited some advantages in comparison to its previous status of potential candidate country. In October 2009, the Commission recommended for the first time that the EU and Macedonia open accession negotiations. However, to this day there has been no substantial change in that regard because of the name dispute. In March 2012, a High Level Accession Dialogue was launched between the European Commission and the government of the Republic of Macedonia. The last Progress Report of the European Commission on Macedonia was published in November 2015. It recommended for a seventh time in a row to EU Member States to start accession negotiations with Macedonia. However, such negotiations were not launched due to the need of unanimous voting by EU Member States.

It should be pointed out that the current recommendation differed from the previous six European Commission recommendations for opening negotiations with Macedonia in that it called for greater conditionality. During the April – June 2015 period Macedonia entered a serious internal political crisis. Afterwards, with the mediation of the European Commission and several Member States, the June/July 2015 political agreement was reached, which focused among other things on the need of holding the anticipated elections in Macedonia under certain strict conditions. Therefore, the European Commission concluded in the last 2015 Enlargement package that the accession process of the country was at a critical junction.

The last recommendation of the European Commission to the Member States for opening negotiations with Macedonia was conditioned on the

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<sup>4</sup> When referring to Macedonia in its official documents, the European Union uses the name “The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, or FYROM. In this report we shall use the constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia. The notion of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will be used only when the name of an EU institution (for example, the EU Delegation in Skopje) is given in full, or when an EU official document is cited.

implementation of the June/July 2015 political agreement and on substantial progress in the implementation of the urgent reform priorities. This issue was planned to be further addressed again after the anticipated elections. However, due to persisting internal problems, including different interpretations by different political parties of the June/July 2015 agreement, elections were postponed until June 2016, with still a great deal of uncertainty about the quality of the preparation and the election process.

All these processes affected further the prospects of starting EU accession negotiations and at the same time influenced the way the EU and the accession process is communicated to the public.

The EU is the main trading partner of the country. In the first seven months of 2015, 77 % of total exports went to the EU, and increased further compared to 2013 and 2014 figures. The share of the country's imports originating from the EU accounts for approximately 63 % of total imports.<sup>5</sup> The export structure remains highly concentrated on a few products. The Interim Agreement on trade under the SAA is characterised by asymmetrical trade liberalisation – imports in the European Union being liberalised faster than imports in the Republic of Macedonia. The majority of foreign direct investments also come from EU Member States. Trade relations, foreign direct investments, and the overall economic relations play a substantial role in the support for the EU integration process. The Western Balkan region is the second main trading partner of Macedonia.

Since its independence in 1991, Macedonia has made significant progress in liberalising its economy and improving its business environment. However, reforms were not swiftly managed, and the country somewhat lagged behind in terms of attracting foreign direct investments compared to some other countries in the region. GDP per capita also remained low and is currently measured at about 36 % of the EU average in terms of purchasing power parity.

Unemployment has remained consistently high at around 28 %. However, part of this unemployment is due to the existence of an extensive gray market, estimated to be between 20 % and 45 % of the GDP, and it is not included in official statistics. Another substantial problem is that there is a very high level of youth unemployment that exceeds 50 %. A problem in relation to the labour market is also the long-term unemployment: four out of five registered unemployed persons have been unemployed for more than a year.

Macedonia maintained macroeconomic stability throughout the global financial crisis by conducting a prudent monetary policy, which keeps the domestic currency pegged against the euro, and by limiting fiscal deficits.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission 2015 Progress Report.

However, the government has lately been loosening the fiscal policy, and the budget deficit expanded to 4.2 % of the GDP in 2013 and 2014. In addition, Macedonia has also suffered from the global financial crisis due to the already mentioned fact that the European Union is its main trading and economic partner.<sup>6</sup>

The population in the country is estimated at 2,090,000 inhabitants. The ethnic groups are distributed as follows: Macedonian 64.2 %, Albanian 25.2 %, Turkish 3.9 %, Roma (Gypsy) 2.7 %, Serb 1.8 %, other 2.2 %. The spoken languages are: Macedonian 66.5 %, Albanian 25.1 %, Turkish 3.5 %, Roma 1.9 %, Serbian 1.2 %, other 1.8 %. The declared religious affiliations are as follows: Macedonian Orthodox 64.7 %, Muslim 33.3 %, other Christian 0.37 %, other and unspecified 1.63 %.<sup>7</sup> Commenting on such percentages is a highly sensitive issue in Macedonia, which is the reason why it was so difficult to organise a new census in that country.

## **1. National communication campaign for communicating the EU integration process. Main characteristics and objectives of the strategy**

The latest national communication strategy is the Strategy for Public Information and Communication in the Process of Accession of the Republic of Macedonia in the European Union, 2007–2010, Government of the Republic of Macedonia, Secretariat for European Affairs. The previous strategy was developed and adopted in 2003. Currently, the Secretariat for European Affairs is preparing a new communication strategy, but it has not been finalised yet, and there has been no public version of the draft. The main reason why such a long period of time after 2010 has remained uncovered by a multiannual communication strategy is the name dispute and the delay of the launch of accession negotiations. The people who were interviewed were of the opinion that the delay was due to the fact that the Macedonian authorities wanted the new strategy after 2010 to focus on the accession process and negotiations, but the delay in opening accession negotiations led also to a delay in the multiannual planning of the communication campaign.

The fact that there is no multiannual communication planning on the part of the government does not mean that there is no planning at all in relation to communication activities. As a matter of fact, the component “Greater

<sup>6</sup> Sources of economic data: European Commission 2014 and 2015 Progress Reports and US Central Intelligence Agency, the World Factbook.

<sup>7</sup> Source: US Central Intelligence Agency, the World Factbook, according to data from the 2002 census.

visibility, transparency and inclusiveness in the process of European integration” is the third of three components on the annual agenda planning of the Secretariat for European Affairs (the other two components being: a) Stabilisation and Association Process implementation plus *acquis* approximation, and b) more efficient use of EU/IPA funds and other foreign assistance). One of the recent Agenda plannings was for 2015, and the report on the EU agenda implementation for 2014 was also reviewed during the preparation of the current report.<sup>8</sup> The report from 2014 and the Agenda for 2015 have identical structure, as well as similar communication activities for the two consecutive years.

The three main objectives of the last Communication Strategy 2007–2010 were:

1. to raise awareness of the significance of the EU for Macedonia, as well as the government’s reasons for pursuing a full accession policy;
2. to maintain public support by emphasising the reality and importance of accession through open and transparent discussions about the difficulties and benefits;
3. to influence EU Member States to support Macedonia’s candidacy for full membership.

These three main objectives are very similar to other communication strategy objectives from the region as they have both internal (addressed towards domestic stakeholders) and external dimensions (making the candidacy for membership more popular in EU Member States).

The Communication Strategy contains also specific sub-objectives, namely:

- continuing the process of introducing the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia to the everyday EU functioning through raising the awareness and understanding of the policy and process of integration;
- raising the awareness of the local communities;
- building trust in the capacities of Macedonian institutions involved in the process of European integration;
- building confidence in EU institutions;
- ensuring that specific sectors such as business, agriculture and judiciary understand the process and are completely involved and prepared;
- ensuring that EU Member States are aware of the readiness of the Republic of Macedonia for integration, as well as ensuring their support.

<sup>8</sup> See: Secretariat for European Affairs (2015), “EU Agenda 2015”, Skopje, 30.01.2015 and Secretariat for European Affairs (2015), “Report – EU Agenda 2014”, Skopje, 30.01.2015

There are two main reasons why the Communication Strategy has not been updated and why the EU communication campaign is currently not a real priority for the country. The first one is the delay of the start of the accession negotiations and the current “fatigue” among the administration and society in relation to the diplomatic deadlock. The second reason is related to the current political situation and problems in Macedonia.

Although there is no new Communication strategy, new communication initiatives have been planned and organised in Macedonia. For example, in order to realise the EU agenda 2015, the Secretariat for European Affairs organised the round of discussions under the motto “EU talks”. The aim of this initiative is to improve the quality of the process of accession to the European Union, following the principles of inclusiveness and transparency in its operations.

Through holding open, professional, and constructive discussions among various stakeholders on current topics and issues, the “EU talks” will aim at contributing the calibration of common positions, guidelines and suggestions that can lead to solutions.<sup>9</sup>

## **2. Responsible national authority for the management of the communication campaign**

A Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia is responsible for European Affairs. One of his responsibilities in the European integration process is also the communication campaign and events related to the European integration process. He has participated in several of the communication events and happenings.

The main government institution that has the leading and coordinating role regarding the national communication campaign is the *Secretariat for European Affairs (SEA)*. It is responsible for the overall management of the Communication Strategy and the communication campaigns. SEA serves also as a secretariat of the EU Communication Coordination Group. It raises awareness of the importance of communication in the association and accession processes. SEA helps also the ministries to develop their own capacities for their own communication strategy and events. SEA conducts and publishes horizontal reports on public and media attitudes through surveys and regular monitoring.

The line ministries are also an important element of the national communication structure. Their role will be increasing further with the start and advancement of the accession negotiations and the need of more specialised and expert knowledge in specific fields of the EU acquis. Each ministry has one

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<sup>9</sup> According to the statement on the website of the Secretariat for European Affairs.

or several contact points responsible for the communication campaign. They may be representatives of the respective ministry in public information offices, or may form specialised departments within the ministry, usually from the European Affairs Department.

The government of the Republic of Macedonia has established also an *EU Coordinative Communication Working Group* that comprises representatives from all ministries: usually the communication campaign contact points, as well as other interested partners who are responsible for communication and are involved in the accession process. Not only will this working group make the general communication coordination, but it will also maintain a calendar of forthcoming announcements, developments and activities; it will provide regular monitoring of media and public attitudes; and it will produce annual reports describing progress in communication objectives and activities.

The government of the Republic of Macedonia aimed at establishing also a *Subgroup for promotion of Macedonia in the European Union*. This subgroup will comprise representatives from the SEA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and when necessary, representatives from other ministries as well. This subgroup will coordinate and execute the activities that are related to the promotion of the Republic of Macedonia in the EU Member States and its candidacy for the European Union.

These working groups do not meet regularly but with the advancement of the EU integration process of Macedonia their work is expected to intensify.

It remains to be seen whether after the elections anticipated in June 2016 the structure of the EU communication campaigns and events will remain unchanged. It is likely that there will be no substantial amendments in that direction after the elections and the formation of a new government.

### **3. Specific coordination mechanism for the distribution of the available funds for communication and for the monitoring of the implementation of the communication campaign**

The Secretariat for European Affairs is the responsible institution for the coordination and final approval of the government communication projects with the aim to delegate further responsibilities to the respective ministries. The monitoring of the implementation of the communication campaign is executed also through the Secretariat for European Affairs. Some line ministries

have additional communication activities in relation to the European integration process as well.

Currently, the annual monitoring of the government communication activities is done by the already mentioned regular reports on the EU agenda. The report on the communication activities is within the framework of the third component of the paper related to the greater visibility, transparency, and inclusiveness in the process of European integration.

It is likely that with the new Communication Strategy that is currently in the process of elaboration in the Secretariat for European Affairs, the mechanism for approval of projects, distribution of funds, and monitoring will be preserved to a great extent.

#### **4. Existence of a link between the mechanism for distribution of funds for communication and the national mechanism (working groups) for preparation for accession negotiations**

There is a link between the mechanism for distribution of funds for communication and the national mechanism (working groups) for preparation for accession negotiations. The main coordinator for both is one and the same institution within the government, namely the Secretariat for European Affairs. In some line ministries the contact points for the communication events are the same experts who work for the *acquis* approximation, the fulfillment of the European Commission Progress Reports recommendations, and for the preparation of the accession negotiations. However, in some ministries the responsible contact points for the communication events in relation to the European integration process are from the Public Relations Offices.

There is also a tendency part of the communication events to be focused on issues that are directly related to the preparation for accession negotiations and not only on general knowledge about the European Union, its institutions, and their functioning. A good case in point worth mentioning is the series of annual communication events in the autumn that are related to the presentation and comments of the European Commission recommendations in its annual Regular Reports. Some of these events are directly targeted at the media, the business organisations, civil society organisations, etc. However, more targeted media and other events are needed in relation to specific *acquis*-related chapters that have greater significance for the democratic and economic development of the country.

## 5. Other communication campaigns in the country (outside the governmental one)

There are also other communication campaigns or communication events in Macedonia in connection with the European integration process of the country. The most advanced among them is the one executed by the European Union mainly through its Delegation to the Republic of Macedonia. Therefore, special attention is being devoted to the EU campaign carried out via the EU Delegation, the information and documentation centres and info-points.

There are also communication campaigns or events in Macedonia that are targeted at the European Union integration process and the preparation for accession negotiations. They are executed through local communities, chambers of commerce and/or industry, branch organisations, non-governmental organisations, etc. Some of these organisations and their communication and education activities are also presented below.

### **EU institutions, centres and info-points for communication activities in Macedonia**

In March 2000, the European Commission Representation in Skopje was upgraded to a permanent Delegation of the European Commission. With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009, the EU is represented in the Republic of Macedonia by the Delegation of the European Union. The Delegation is placed under the authority of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. It acts also in close cooperation with the Member States' diplomatic and consular missions.

One of the Delegation's key tasks is to inform the authorities, institutions, media and citizens of the Republic of Macedonia about the pre-accession process and about the EU institutions and policies. It maintains also regular contacts with academic institutions, the business community, and representatives of the civil society. The main EU institutions, centres and info-points for communication activities in the Republic of Macedonia are (the full list of them and their addresses is provided in the Annex):

- the EU InfoCentre;
- the Info Points;
- the EU Documentation Centres;
- the European Information and Innovation Centre.

The **EU InfoCentre** was founded by the Delegation of the European Union, aiming to enhance the EU-related flow of information among the public.

The general approach is to ensure that systematic, factual, correct, and comprehensive information is provided to the public. The EU InfoCentre has recently been relocated to more functional premises, which offer improved environment for enhanced communication activities. The goals of the EU InfoCentre are:

- raising awareness about the European Union;
- disseminating information about the EU;
- expanding knowledge about the EU, its institutions, bodies and mechanisms;
- addressing the information needs of specific interest groups and stakeholders;
- encouraging public discussions on issues related to EU accession;
- spreading the word about the fundamental values of the European Union;
- supporting professionals and researchers;
- co-operating and exchanging information with other EU info relays.

The EU InfoCentre comprises 5 team members.

The Delegation of the European Union sets up also a network of **EU Info Points** located in 13 (thirteen) sites throughout the country. They cooperate closely with the EU InfoCentre. The EU Info Points have been established in collaboration with the local communities. They provide the premises and the staff, and the Delegation of the European Union provides brochures, necessary IT equipment, financing of some events, etc. The first seven EU Info Points opened in 2003, another one opened in 2009, and the last five opened in 2013. The main objective of the EU Info Point is to be a place where citizens will learn about the functioning of the European Union, its institutions, policies and programmes, as well as about the development of relations between the EU and the Republic of Macedonia. The EU Info Points offer free access to publications related to the EU, free access to the Europa websites, as well as a chance to participate in meetings where EU-related topics of interest for the citizens are being discussed.

The idea of building these EU Info Points in addition to the EU InfoCentre (the latter being on the premises of the Delegation in Skopje) is to give an opportunity to local communities, business organisations, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, citizens, etc., from smaller cities to get information about the EU, its institutions, financing and other issues.

The first European Documentation Centre (EDC) was officially inaugurated in Skopje in 1995. Recently, the EDC was renamed and rebranded into

**EUi (European Union Information Centre).** In 2009, two new EUi (s) opened in Bitola and in Tetovo. The EUi (s) are also open to the population of the country and the broader region. The EUi (s) are part of the worldwide net of European Information Centres, and are specialised in providing documents from EU institutions. Their resources include more than 1,500 publications and more than 10,000 volumes published by the European Commission, European Council, European Parliament and other EU institutions and organisations. The publications are processed also to create a database searchable by various criteria. They have a separate CD-ROM collection of legal EU documentation, statistical reference data, and general information. They provide services to the academic community, governmental bodies and institutions, non-governmental organisations, enterprises, and other interested groups.

The **European Information and Innovation Centre (EIIC)** is part of the global Enterprise Europe Network. The main goal of EIIC is to enable the organised performance of the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) on the global market, so as to overcome existing barriers. The idea is to improve the competitiveness of the economy by increasing the capacity of SMEs. EIIC provides for the internationalisation of SMEs in the domestic business sphere; the transfer of technology and participation in research projects; dissemination of information in the domain of EU policies, initiatives, and relevant courses for SMEs; the finding of partners for international business cooperation, technology exchange, and joint participation in development projects; the organising of international events, company operations, brokerage events, meetings of companies, and other forms of bilateral and multilateral cooperation; the establishing, maintaining, and updating the database of companies of the country for international cooperation; the training, assistance, and support to SMEs for participation in the Single European Market; etc.

Below are some examples of non-governmental and other organisations that have also communication campaigns and activities in relation to the European Union integration process (the list is not exhaustive)

### **Example 1: Macedonian Centre for European Training**

The Macedonian Centre for European Training (MCET) is a non-governmental think-tank organisation that was established in September 2002. At the beginning, MCET was specialised mainly in professional training. Later, the organisation began focusing on other activities such as advising, developing evidence-based public policies, regional cooperation, and providing advocacy.

The gradual shifting from a primarily training institute to a think-tank organisation started in 2007.

According to MCET data, since its establishment, the organisation has delivered to date approximately 1,400 days of training to more than 8,000 representatives of the public administration, media, civil society, judges and prosecutors, members of political parties, local administration, etc.

MCET currently works also with the media, as well as with other non-governmental organisations in order to improve the information about the accession process and to develop tools to help understand better the EU integration and accession process. MCET issues monitoring reports on the public perceptions about the EU and on the European Union integration process, for example in the areas of political criteria, the Judiciary and Fundamental Rights chapter, the use of EU funds, etc. The organisation has released a number of publications in that respect that are available in electronic format through their website.<sup>10</sup>

### **Example 2: The Centre for European Policies of IDSCS**

The Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” – Skopje (IDSCS) is a Macedonia-based think-tank organisation that is non-governmental, non-partisan and non-profit. It was established in 1999 by a group of intellectuals gathered around the ideas of democracy, solidarity, and civil society. The long-term objectives of the Institute are to work toward a balanced socio-economic development, active citizenship, and participative political culture. To that effect, they focus their activities on rule of law, good governance, and multiethnic and multicultural coexistence.

One of the three centres of IDSCS is the Centre for European Policies (the other two being the centres for good governance and research). The Centre for European Policies was founded in 2001, and since then it has been working constantly on promoting, evaluating, and supporting the process of European integration in Macedonia. The Centre works on analyses of the European integration process, in forcing the process of public policy creating, but also ensuring public support and promotion of the European idea and integration. At the same time, the Centre implements constantly training programmes for various target groups, focused on both the European Union and the Macedonian integration process.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Some of these publications, monitoring reports and surveys are listed in the bibliography below. The website of the organisation is: <http://mcet.org.mk>.

<sup>11</sup> For more information see the website of the Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” – Skopje: <http://www.idscs.org.mk/en/>.

## **6. The use of best practices from the experience of EU Member States or European institutions in communicating the EU**

Macedonian institutions use the best practices and the experience of some Member States in communicating the European Union. Currently, the most notable example in that respect is drawing on the experience of France. According to the report on the EU Agenda for 2014 by the Secretariat for European Affairs, there is a bilateral cooperation with France in order to strengthen the visibility and information activities to raise public awareness of the availability and scope of EU assistance. During the field meetings with the Secretariat for European Affairs in the end of February 2015, the use of this assistance was also confirmed.

The Delegation of the European Union uses the experience of the other Delegations of the European Union in the region in communicating the EU to the public and different groups of society as well.

## **7. Available annual funds in the respective national or specialised communication campaigns**

During the field mission in February 2015, the issue of funds available for communication was not discussed. The expert did not find specific information on the websites of the Secretariat for European Affairs, the site of the Delegation of the European Union or other sources of information either. However, based on the discussions during the meetings, it may be concluded that currently there are no substantial funds allocated for the communication campaign, at least on national level, due to the blockage of the start of the accession negotiations. It may be expected that once EU Member States reach a decision to launch accession talks with Macedonia, the funds allocated to communication of the European Union integration and accession process will expand. The issue of the financing of the communication campaigns and events will also be properly addressed by the recent draft of the EU-related Communication Strategy of the government that was mentioned above.

## **8. Information about the communication methods and techniques that are used**

There are several traditional and more modern methods and techniques that are used in the communication events and activities in Macedonia. The

scope and scale of these methods and techniques are quite diverse. The idea of having so many different communication tools and methods is that the information about the European Union, its benefits, costs, challenges, etc., should reach various groups of society in the capital, as well as in the smaller cities and villages (the latter being concerned in particular by all topics related to EU agricultural issues).

In order to better illustrate the diversity and variety of communication methods and techniques, they must be presented on three levels: government, the EU Delegation in Macedonia, and other.

### • **Governmental communication methods and techniques**

The main communication campaigns and activities for the European Union integration and accession process of the Secretariat for European Affairs and other governmental institutions are:<sup>12</sup>

- Regular information provided through the website of the Secretariat for European Affairs;
- Monthly newsletters – 13 monthly electronic newsletters and an annual newsletter that covers the activities of the Secretariat for European Affairs;
- Press conferences and briefings – usually on a specific subject or field;
- Series of discussions and other communication events connected to the issuance of the annual Regular (Progress) Report of the European Commission;
- Series of communication events and happenings connected to Europe Day on 9 May, including an EU Breakfast attended by high level government officials, representatives from the EU Delegation and from EU Member States' embassies in Macedonia;
- “Youth for Europe” communication campaign that comprises different activities, events, and discussion forums, including the opportunity for some young people to participate for one day in the work of the Secretariat for European Affairs;
- “Public figures for the EU” communication campaign – the involvement of public figures in Macedonia in the process of promoting the European Union, its goals and values;

<sup>12</sup> The information for these communication activities is mainly from the following sources: Secretariat for European Affairs (2015), “Report – EU Agenda 2014”, Skopje, 30.01.2015 and Secretariat for European Affairs (2015), “Bulletin for 2014 of the Secretariat for European Affairs”, Skopje, Macedonia.

- “EU in Macedonia” – a project that aims at promoting the values of the EU and the national values of EU Member States;
- “Programmes of the European Union” – a cycle of communication activities aimed at promoting the opportunities provided through the European Union programmes;
- “EU/IPA Institutional visits” – series of working visits aimed at providing information to the institution beneficiaries about the IPA funds and the implementers of the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA);
- Opinion polls on topics related to the EU integration process of the Republic of Macedonia that are conducted by or for the Secretariat for European Affairs;
- Some interviews by the Deputy Prime Minister and high level officials;
- Analyses, studies, and publications by the Secretariat for European Affairs;
- Other.

**• Communication methods and techniques of the Delegation of the European Union and other EU-related information centres**

Some of the most frequent and widespread communication methods and techniques of the EU Delegation in Skopje, as well of other EU info-points and centres, are:<sup>13</sup>

- Provision of free Internet access to the website of the European Union and to other specific sites of European institutions, or on-line data related to the EU;
- Provision of free brochures about the European Union, its institutions, and policies. The majority of these are the official ones issued by the European Union institutions. They are provided in the official languages of the EU but in order for the information to be better distributed and understood by the Macedonian citizens, companies and organisations, a vast majority of these brochures is also being translated in the Macedonian language;
- A series of events dedicated to Europe Day on 9 May – central multimedia happening in Skopje, panel debates, exhibitions, etc.

<sup>13</sup> The information for these communication activities is mainly from the following sources: the website of the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Macedonia and the field interview with Ms. Ms. Jana Ivanovska – Public Relations and Event Manager at the European Union Information Centre at the Delegation of the European Union.

Usually, around 30–50 events are being held each year on the occasion of Europe Day organised by the Delegation itself, or co-organised by the Delegation of the European Union in the Republic of Macedonia. Many of these activities are held outside Skopje in order to reach a wider audience and to bring the EU closer to as many Macedonian citizens as possible;

- A series of communication events in relation to the publication of the European Commission annual Progress Report – Europe by satellite hearing of the press-conference in Brussels, organisation of a press conference by the Head of the Delegation of the European Union in Skopje, special roundtables and hearings with specific groups of society like civil society, think-tanks, business organisations, etc.;
- Series of annual events in relation to Human Rights Day and other special days that have a connection to the European integration process;
- The festival of European films and some other festivals;
- The Jean Monnet competition for media and photographs – organised for 12 consecutive years;
- EU-bus – this is part of the information campaign “The EU in Close-up” that brings representatives from the Delegation of the European Union, ambassadors of several EU Member States, government officials, representatives from the IPA-related structures, local NGOs, media and students by bus. Such bus campaigns allow information to be presented and distributed across the country;
- The Delegation of the European Union in the Republic of Macedonia financed for a 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive year the annual marathon in Skopje, as well as some other sport events;
- Other.

### **• Communication methods and techniques of other organisations**

The non-governmental organisations, the think-tanks, other civil society organisations, chambers of commerce and industry, branch and other organisations focus on the following communication events in relation to the European Union integration and accession process:

- Discussion forums and debates;
- Publication of special research and analytical papers and documents;

- Organisation of special trainings and workshops;
- Organisation of special polls in relation to the EU and the integration process;
- Participation in some of the government communication events or in some of the communication events organised by the Delegation of the European Union.

## **9. Communication campaigns – for the general public or for specific groups**

Some of the communication events – government, EU-funded, or held by NGOs and various business organisations, are directed to the general public. There are ones directed to the local communities in the country. The latter are the majority of the communication events and activities currently held in the country.

However, an increasing number of communication events and activities are being also directed to specific groups of society. The Strategy for Public Information and Communication in the Process of Accession of the Republic of Macedonia in the European Union 2007–2010 defined a large number of specific groups that needed special attention in relation to the communication campaign for the EU. The main specific groups that are currently identified are, as follows:

- media;
- young people;
- the business community;
- politicians and decision makers;
- state officials;
- local communities;
- Eurosceptics;
- decision makers and public opinion makers in EU Member States – the foreign branch of the communication strategy that aims at promoting the Macedonian accession process in the EU.

It is likely that the new communication strategy that is currently under development by the government and more specifically by the Secretariat for European Affairs will reconfirm these special groups that will need special attention on the part of the national communication campaign and activities.

## **10. Specific problems and topics related to the EU integration process**

In general, the communication events are directed at topics about the European Union, its institutions and policies, the benefits and challenges in relation to the European Union integration and accession process.

There are, however, certain communication events that are directed at some specific topics. In Macedonia, some of the specific topics of discussion are related to the fulfillment of the political criteria for EU accession. Another specific topic that is often discussed is related to the opportunities to absorb EU funds and to participate in European Union programmes. The opportunity to absorb funds for agriculture and rural development has become a widespread topic in recent years. Eventually, specific topics such as the EU energy, transport and environmental policy have also become the subject of discussions in communication events.

One of the recent new communication topics is related to the refugee crisis and the need to take measures in order to overcome that crisis and its negative effects. It must be noted that to some Macedonians the refugee crisis is due to ineffective EU policies which further damage slightly the image of the EU. Therefore, one of the current priorities of the EU must be to explain better the EU asylum and refugee policies and common actions.

## **11. Specific sectors of the economy that receive special attention in the communication campaigns**

The Strategy for Public Information and Communication in the Process of Accession of the Republic of Macedonia in the European Union 2007–2010 defined also a large number of specific sectors that need special attention in relation to the communication campaign for the EU. The main sectors that are currently identified in that strategy are, as follows:

- business and commerce;
- agriculture and food policy;
- justice;
- internal affairs;
- foreign affairs;
- finances;
- economy;

- education and science;
- transport;
- energy;
- social policy and employment;
- environment;
- culture;
- human rights;
- health care.

Although the strategy identifies specific sectors of the political, economic and social life that need communication activities, in reality such specifically targeted communication events are not very common at this stage. It is expected that with the start of the accession negotiations and the advancement of the accession talks there will be more need of such sector specialised communication activities.

## **12. Availability of communication campaign for EU funds (separate one or the same as the one for the overall communication campaign)**

In the Republic of Macedonia there is a separate strategy in relation to the communication activities for the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) funding. The most recent government strategy in that direction is the one adopted and published in 2013. It is called “Common Communication Strategy for IPA”.<sup>14</sup> This strategy describes first the actual situation in Macedonia. Next, it defines the goals of the strategy and the targeted groups. The two main target groups of the IPA strategy are:

- the civil servants and all other persons directly included in the communication activities of the IPA funding;
- the wider public and all the other intermediaries that may transmit information about IPA.

The IPA communication strategy focuses on the operative aims and the scope of activities that will be performed by that strategy. It describes also the main stakeholders in relation to the communication of IPA funding, as well as their responsibilities and the linkage between them. It provides brief information about the indicative planning and very general information about the budget issues related to the communication of IPA activities.

<sup>14</sup> See: “Општа комуникациска стратегија за ИПА”, јули 2013.

The EU Delegation in Skopje has some communication activities in relation to the IPA funding as well. Some of the communication activities of the Delegation are directly targeted at IPA funding. Some other communication activities are part of wider communication events that cover both the EU integration and accession process, on the one hand, and IPA funding, on the other.

Another important document in relation to IPA funding is the Indicative Strategy Paper for the Republic of Macedonia (2014–2020) that was published in August 2014 by the European Commission.<sup>15</sup> This Indicative Strategy Paper sets out the priorities for EU financial assistance for the period 2014–2020 to support the Republic of Macedonia on its path to EU accession. It translates the political priorities, set out in the enlargement policy framework, into key areas where financial assistance is most useful to meet accession criteria.

### **13. Training programmes for civil servants in relation to the EU integration process**

Some training is provided for the civil servants in relation to the EU integration. However, these trainings are provided through different sources, and there is a need of more strategic and better planning of training needs.

Some of the trainings are organised by the state. There are trainings that are organised by the EU institutions, namely the TAIEX programme of the European Commission. Trainings are provided also within the framework of some of the EU-funded projects.

There are trainings that are organised on a bilateral level: Macedonia – EU Member State (s). An example is the training held in October 2012 and titled: “Western Balkans: Getting closer to the EU. Strengthening the capacity of the State Institutions to meet the integration challenges today”. It was organised within the framework of a project by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria and its Diplomatic Institute, the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the Central European Initiative, and the Austrian Development Cooperation.

With the expected start of EU accession negotiations in the future, there will be a need for more targeted and better focused EU-related trainings on specific European Union *acquis* chapters and policies.

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<sup>15</sup> See: European Commission (2014), Indicative Strategy Paper for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2014–2020), 19.08.2014.

## **14. Specific programmes (such as Master's degree programmes) and courses for teaching EU integration issues at universities**

Currently, there is an increasing number of university programmes or specific courses dedicated to the European Union, its institutions and policies, as well as subjects that are focused on the European Union integration and accession process of the Republic of Macedonia.

In 2014, a Memorandum on cooperation was signed between the Secretariat for European Affairs and six state and public universities in the Republic of Macedonia. The Memorandum is about making joint research projects, debates and lectures, internships for students, awarding scholarships, etc. Special lectures and debates are held also on the European perspective of the Western Balkans, as well as on the presentation of EU funds and programmes.

The three European Union Documentation Centres, as well as the European Information and Innovation Centre, are established at different universities within the Republic of Macedonia (see the Annex for more details). This establishment brings the EU even closer to the academic community of the country.

The premises of the EU Delegation in Skopje and the various EU info points across the country are open not only for some research in relation to EU-connected topics, but also to some events co-organised by academic institutions such as debates and presentation of specific publications.

## **15. Specific communication events, organised by the NGO sector in relation to promoting and informing about the EU integration process**

The NGO sector in Macedonia is relatively active in relation to the EU integration process. There are different trainings and communication events that are organised by the NGO sector. Examples of such trainings and communication events are provided in item 5 of this report.

## **16. National studies for the level of support for the EU integration process**

There are different studies on national level about the support for the EU integration process.

Some of them are organised on government level. Other studies are organised by the non-governmental sector. There are some differences and

discrepancies in the results of the relevant studies, the ones of the government showing quite larger support for the EU accession process compared to some studies of the non-governmental sector.

On the official site of the government of Macedonia<sup>16</sup> there is some information about the level of support for EU accession. There is relatively no substantial change in the answers to the question: “If a referendum for an EU accession of the Republic of Macedonia takes place next week, how will you vote?” over the period December 2003–February 2007. There is a strong and steady support, nearly 87–91 % of respondents, for the answer “in favour”. Only a very small proportion of respondents declare that they will vote “against” – between 2–7 % over the entire period, and a small proportion of the people have not decided yet, or will not vote at all, if a referendum of the kind were held. Unfortunately, on the website there is no information about the surveys on a similar question after 2007.

The survey for the level of support for EU membership by the non-governmental sector (see below) and the ones carried out by Eurobarometer show lower results for such support. However, the general perception about the EU and a possible future membership is still relatively positive in Macedonia.

In addition to the national studies about support for the EU integration process, the standard survey of Eurobarometer also reveals interesting results.<sup>17</sup> The comparison of the support for EU integration in Macedonia and in other candidate countries is presented in the table below.

**Table:** Generally speaking, do you think your country’s membership of the EU would be ...?

Country	a good thing	a bad thing	neither good, nor bad
Macedonia	50	18	28
Montenegro	44	17	33
Turkey	38	37	17
Serbia	36	25	32
Iceland	33	33	29

Source: Eurobarometer

Support for the EU integration process and the perception that the country’s membership is a good thing is the strongest in Macedonia

<sup>16</sup> Source: <http://www.sep.gov.mk/en/content/?id=53#VPzhS9JO7qA>

<sup>17</sup> For information about the support of the EU Integration process in Macedonia and other countries in the Western Balkans, see: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm).

compared to other candidate countries for EU accession like Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, and Iceland. At the same time, the percentage of the perception that EU membership is a bad thing is one of the lowest in Macedonia. In countries like Turkey and Iceland there is an equal number of supporters and opponents of the EU integration process. The relatively high support for the EU integration process in Macedonia at this point must be used to foster EU-related reforms that will increase the level of Macedonia's compliance with the *acquis* chapters and the fulfillment of the political and economic criteria for EU accession.

However, it must also be pointed out that the level of support for EU membership is slowly but continuously decreasing in Macedonia. According to Eurobarometer data for the period 2007–2013, the percentage of respondents considering that Macedonia's membership of the EU would be a good thing has dropped from 75 % to 50 %. A relatively positive issue is that this does not lead to a substantial increase in the number of people in Macedonia who think that EU membership is a bad thing: their number has remained relatively stable and has even decreased a few times. The percentage of those who think that EU membership is neither good, nor bad has risen substantially from 5 % to 28 % over the period 2007–2013.

**Table:** Generally speaking, do you think that Macedonia's membership of the EU would be...?

Year	a good thing	a bad thing	neither good, nor bad
2007	75	18	5
2008	72	20	6
2009	64	25	9
2010	60	27	11
2011	65	11	23
2012	62	11	25
2013	50	18	28

Source: Eurobarometer, Autumn 2013

## **17. Are there national studies on the level of support for EU integration in specific sectors of the economy or specific groups of society?**

Currently, there are very few studies in Macedonia that are more specifically targeted: for example, studies on the level of support for the EU integration

process in specific sectors or specific groups of society. This is also due to the fact that Macedonia has not begun accession negotiations yet.

However, a study of the non-governmental institution Macedonian Centre for European Training in Macedonia in 2014 entitled “The Political Culture, Europeanisation and Fears in Macedonia, Report from the Survey Search Eurometer”<sup>18</sup> showed very interesting results about the support for EU integration, presented in the following table:

**Table:** Overall, will Macedonia’s membership of the EU be a good thing?

Group	Macedonia’s EU membership will be a good thing
Ethnic Albanians	91 %
People who have completed primary education	74 %
SDSM Supporters (opposition party)	68 %
University graduates	60 %
Ethnic Macedonians	54 %
VMRO-DPMNE Supporters (leading government party)	53 %

The level of support for Macedonia’s EU membership by ethnic Albanians is much higher than the one by ethnic Macedonians. The leading government party supporters show less enthusiasm about EU membership that is most likely due to the low level of progress in terms of opening accession negotiations that has been made in recent years, and certain disappointment by these supporters. The supporters of the opposition party are more positive about the EU integration process hoping that the road towards the EU will lead to greater reforms in the country. Another conclusion is that the highly educated people are less enthusiastic about the EU integration process than less educated people. Perhaps the latter is due to the fact that they understand better that the EU integration process is related not only to benefits but also to some costs.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Macedonian Centre for European Training (2014), “The Political Culture, Europeanisation and Fears in Macedonia”, 2014 Report from the Survey Search Eurometer”, Skopje, Macedonia.

<sup>19</sup> Another NGO that publishes very interesting results about the public opinion in Macedonia about the EU integration and accession process is the website of the Institute for Democracy “SocietasCivilis” – Skopje. See: <http://www.idscs.org.mk/en/public-opinion>.

## Conclusions

At present, Macedonian society is relatively divided. On the one hand, there is a very significant division between government supporters and opposition supporters with strong political disputes in the country. The anticipated elections, unfortunately, do not change that perception at the current stage. Secondly, there is still a division between the two main ethnic groups in the country – ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Both divides have some influence on the perceptions about the EU integration process and about the benefits and costs of the EU accession process.

A serious problem in relation to the EU integration process that has an impact on the EU-related communication campaigns and the general support for the EU integration process is the name dispute and the fact that the country receives for seven years in a row recommendations from the European Commission to start accession negotiations (although the last recommendation is a conditional one), but because of the need of unanimity in the Council of the EU such accession negotiations have not been launched yet.

However, there is still a relatively high support for the EU integration process in Macedonia. It must be used to foster EU-related reforms that will increase Macedonia's level of compliance with the *acquis* chapters and the fulfillment of the political and economic criteria for EU accession.

There is a divergence in the level of support for the EU integration process among various groups of society. Ethnic Albanians show the greatest support for EU accession; this is also due to the fact that they are not significantly influenced by the name dispute. Ethnic Macedonians have also expressed strong support for that process, albeit to a lesser degree. The level of support for EU membership is greater in opposition parties than in government parties. The highly educated people are less enthusiastic about the EU integration process than less educated people.

Currently, there are different communication events and activities that are organised by the government institutions, the EU Delegation, the non-governmental sector, etc. However, once Macedonia starts accession negotiations, the communication activities must be more targeted, i.e. focusing on specific groups of society, on specific sectors, or on specific *acquis* chapters and EU policies.

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12. Secretariat for European Affairs (2015), “Bulletin for 2014 of the Secretariat for European Affairs”, Skopje, Macedonia.
13. Strategy for Public Information and Communication in the Process of Accession of the Republic of Macedonia in the European Union, 2007–2010, Government of the Republic of Macedonia, Secretariat for European Affairs.
14. US Central Intelligence Agency, the World Factbook
15. [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/the\\_former\\_yugoslav\\_republic\\_of\\_macedonia/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia/index_en.htm) – site of the Delegation of the European Union to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

16. [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/instruments/funding-by-country/former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/instruments/funding-by-country/former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia/index_en.htm) – site with information about IPA funding to Macedonia
17. [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm) – information about the support of the EU Integration process in Macedonia and other countries in the Western Balkans
18. <http://www.sep.gov.mk/en/> – site of the Secretariat for European Affairs of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia with a special section on communication projects and activities
19. <http://www.idscs.org.mk/en/> – website of the Institute for Democracy “SocietasCivilis” – Skopje (IDSCS)
20. <http://www.idscs.org.mk/en/public-opinion> - website of IDSCS with interesting results about EU support.
21. <http://mcet.org.mk> – website of the Macedonian Centre for European Training, a non-governmental organisation, providing training, field research, monitoring reports and publishing other documents and papers in relation to the European Union Integration process.

## Annex

### European Union institutions, centres and info–points for communication activities in the Republic of Macedonia

<b>EU Info Centre</b>	
<p><b>European Union Info Centre</b>          Delegation of the European Union          Address: Mito Hadzivasilev Jasmin 52v, 1000 Skopje          Telephone/Telefax: (+389 02) 3296363          E-mail: euinfo@euic.mk</p>	
<b>EIIC</b>	
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<b>EUi</b>	
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## About the Diplomatic Institute

*The Diplomatic Institute to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria* was created on 23 September 2003 pursuant to a Decree of the Council of Ministers. Its status and functions were regulated by the Diplomatic Service Act adopted by the National Assembly on 13 September 2007.

The Diplomatic Institute (DI) strives to guarantee high-level expertise and skills of the junior and senior diplomats and staff of the Foreign Service and state administration. In this, it introduces and applies up-to-date professional standards of education and training. It promotes exchange of experience and good practices among generations of Bulgarian diplomats thereby aiming at continuity in the Bulgarian Foreign Service. Its work meets the high demands and professional expectations pursuant to Bulgaria's membership in EU and NATO, and displays perseverance and continuity that will allow the Bulgarian diplomatic profession to take the place it deserves in the large Euro-Atlantic diplomatic family.

In its work, the Diplomatic Institute is supported by two Consultative Councils, national and international. The National Consultative Council, which is approved by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, convenes twice a year and the meetings are organised and chaired by the Director of the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute.

### **Training Programmes**

The training programmes offered by the Diplomatic Institute aim at improving the expertise of the Bulgarian state administration. Special focus is put on the diplomatic and consular staff, and on state employees posted abroad. DI also offers training programmes for foreign diplomats that attract substantial international attendance, and is open to all interested in acquiring the skills and knowledge needed in the diplomatic profession. The DI-organised training programmes meet all demands of modern diplomacy and use the good practices of DI counterparts from all over the world. To respond to the need of high-quality training, DI focuses on inter-active sessions, which have been assessed by the students as exceptionally useful for their future employment.

Bulgarian and foreign career diplomats, university lecturers and other highly qualified experts teach at the DI. The latter thus provides the benefit of a broad range of opinions and approaches.

*Basic Course in Diplomacy* for young diplomats at the very start of their career and for interns working in the Foreign Service as attachés. It is held once in the year, and spreads over a period of 12 to 14 weeks, offering thematic modules on a wide variety of subjects. The graduates need to write a thesis on a topic of their expertise and defend their views before a committee appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The aim is to provide substantial foundation knowledge and skills to help the students in their future diplomatic career.

*Intense Diplomatic Course* for members of the state administration. For a month, they are offered lectures and interactive seminars/exercises in all fields of international relations and diplomacy. The course also takes place once a year. Diplomats, academic teachers and experts share their theoretical and practical experience.

*Specialised Course in Diplomacy for Third and Second Secretary Ranks.* The course offers individual modules flexibly organized at different periods throughout the year so as to fit into the students' schedules. The focus falls on providing the Bulgarian diplomats with in-depth knowledge by means of interactive lectures, discussions and exercises led by senior lecturers with considerable experience in international relations.

*Consular Diplomacy Course* is offering qualification to the Bulgarian consular employees throughout the world, and the consular staff in the MFA departments. Training lasts for a month and mainly consists of practical seminars dealing with daily issues in the work of consular services. The course is obligatory for all MFA employees that would be posted in the Bulgarian consular services abroad.

*Diplomacy and Regional Security Course* a specialized course for diplomatic staff whose tasks will be directly related to the military aspect of international relations. Training lasts for a month, takes place once a year and covers discussions, interactive seminars and lectures on the crossing points of diplomatic and military service. For a week, training sessions are in English for the benefit of students from Southeast Europe, the Black Sea and Caucasus Region, and EU Member States.

*Energy Diplomacy Course* is a one-week course with international participation for members of the Bulgarian state administration and diplomats and state administration employees from Southeast Europe, the Black Sea and Caucasus Region, and EU Member States, as well as for representatives of the business circles and non-governmental organizations dealing with energy-related issues. The seminar is instrumental in the building and strengthening of the relations, in the field of energy, among the states represented in the course.

It also provides a broad platform for dialogue. Internationally recognized experts in energy diplomacy lecture there.

*Economic Diplomacy Course* where students attend lectures on economic and financial topics of current interest. V Teaching at this course are well-known Bulgarian lecturers and analysts, diplomats, NGO-representatives. This is a one-week course which takes place once a year.

*Public Diplomacy Course* for the members of the Foreign Service who are interested in acquiring better qualifications in their own field of work. This, too, is a one-week course taking place once a year. Major aspects of public diplomacy, its subject-matter and instruments, and positive foreign experience are the topics of the discourse.

*Development Cooperation Course* is a specialized training course for the members of the inter-ministerial working group for cooperation in development. Training promotes better coordination and synchronization of the policy for development of the various state administration departments. The course is jointly organized with Clindgendael, the Netherlands Institute of International Relations.

*Training of Foreign Diplomats Programme*, based on the experience accumulated by DI in the organization of these courses, and through its contacts with lecturers on international relations. The foreign diplomats training courses cover a range of topics meeting the needs of the state which has required such training. The courses are in English.

*Winter School of Diplomacy*. The idea was launched in 2005 when a course for junior diplomats was set for the countries of Southeast Europe and in the Black-Sea Region. Nowadays, the Winter School also enjoys attendance by students from EU Member States and EU structures. The course is of a weekly duration, takes place once a year and offers a series of lectures, discussions and presentations on specific subjects, which allow for an exchange of opinions and contacts among young diplomats.

*Foreign Language Training*. The obvious need to have linguistic skills and improve their knowledge of foreign languages has compelled DI to organize language courses for the Foreign Service members. A wide range of language courses is on offer, with a specific focus on English, French, German, Spanish, Russian and Italian. Training is done in cooperation with the Cultural Institutes of the respective countries based in Sofia, or with the leading university language departments.

External participants are admitted to all types of training and courses organized by the Diplomatic Institute with the exception of the courses in

*Specialized Diplomacy, Consular Diplomacy, Development Cooperation, Winter School of Diplomacy and Foreign Language Courses.* Fees apply.

### **Public Policy and Cooperation**

The Diplomatic Institute has a multifaceted public activity to popularize its initiatives and to enhance its role in professional diplomatic qualification, as well as to set up positive attitudes to the diplomatic profession and to the foreign policy of the Republic of Bulgaria.

*Public lectures.* In its strive to contribute to the public debate on topical foreign policy issues, DI organizes, on an annual basis, series of free public lectures open to all. Speakers are prominent public figures, leading politicians and diplomats whose expertise and strategic vision on sensitive issues will enrich the Bulgarian and international political and diplomatic theory and practice.

*Forums, Conferences, Essay competitions.* DI is organizer, as well as active participant in numerous forums, conferences and round table discussions, as well as in many other events relating to important issues of the Bulgarian foreign policy and the Bulgarian Foreign Service. It interacts actively with universities and schools, also through its “Open Doors” Programme. It also organizes, on an annual basis, national competitions of essays on topical foreign policy issues.

*Research Programme.* Lead strategic task of the Diplomatic Institute is to provide synthesized, thorough and detailed materials on various topics. Fulfilling this responsibility we issue series of analysis on foreign policy. The Institute provides informational and analytical materials on the topics of international relations and security for the needs of the MFA, and series of textbooks, contributing to the increase of civil servant competence. Since 2013 the Institute conducts national contests for applied research projects with the participation of various experts from the MFA system.

*Publishing.* Since 2008, DI has published the Diplomacy Journal for political analyses. It comes out twice a year in Bulgarian and English and targets a wide variety of readers, from MFA employees (incl. the Bulgarian diplomatic missions abroad) to state agencies, the members of the Diplomatic corps accredited to Bulgaria, civil and non-governmental organizations, higher education schools, media and individual representatives of public opinion. DI publishes text books and study accessories, compendiums of presentations from forums and conferences and books by prominent Bulgarian and foreign political figures and diplomats. Since November 2013 Diplomacy Journal which combines the works of diplomats, authors, interpreters, editors of other thematic

journals on international relations and journalists is now not only available in paper edition, but online as well on <http://diplomacy.bg>.

*Library.* To assist its activities and programmes, DI manages a public library, which collects processes and offers literature on issues of international relations, European integration, security, international organizations, diplomacy, law, history, sociology, political sciences, economy etc. The library boasts of 5,000 titles, a substantial part of them in English, French, German, Russian and other languages. By a decision of the MFA board of the summer of 2010, DI was put in charge of all books of the Ministry, the number of which amounts to 60,000 in over 20 foreign languages. To visit the Library, one should make a preliminary appointment at +359 (0)2 948 2147.

*Internship Programme.* Through it, DI aims at attracting Bulgarians studying at home and abroad to the intriguing world of international relations and diplomacy. The programme strives to assist the participants in obtaining specific practical skills and experience in real-term work. Applications for the internship programme need to be sent to the DI Director at: [bdi@mfa.bg](mailto:bdi@mfa.bg) complete with a CV, a letter of motivation and an application letter addressed to the DI Director.

*Internet site.* The Diplomatic Institute maintains an Internet site in Bulgarian, English and French.

**<http://bdi.mfa.government.bg>**

**E-mail: [bdi@mfa.government.bg](mailto:bdi@mfa.government.bg)**

**Facebook: Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute**



# About the Hanns Seidel Foundation

**Hanns Seidel** was a Party Chairman of the Christian Social Union and Bavarian prime minister, who played an important role in the reconstruction efforts in post-war Bavaria. In 1933 as a member of the Bavarian Civil Party, he was temporarily imprisoned by the National Socialists. On this account he emigrated to Lithuania and returned to Germany after the Second World War. He especially campaigned for a new Teacher Training Law, which regulated the education and training of teachers in a new way, rebuild the infrastructure, developed a modern energy policy and introduced a transport and communication network across the Bavarian state.

Six years after his death, the German political foundation with the name “Hanns Seidel” was established on April 1<sup>st</sup> in 1967.

Nowadays, there are altogether six party near foundations at federal level in Germany. **The Hanns Seidel Foundation** is an independent German political institution, closely associated with the Christian Social Union (CSU) and its sister party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). As a non-profit-organization, it is financed by funds of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Free State of Bavaria.

The foundation is “in the service of democracy, peace and development”. This motto applies on the one hand to the engagement in Germany, especially in Bavaria, but on the other hand also to the activities abroad. Its task is to secure the interface between politics and science by analyzing political interrelations, creating a scientific basis for political actions and bringing experts, coordinators and decision-makers together.

Therefore, the Hanns Seidel Foundation is divided into four special departments:

1. Academy for Politics and Current Affairs;
2. Institute for Adult Civic Education and Cooperation;
3. Scholarship Organization;
4. Institute for International Contact and Cooperation.

Especially the last department, the Institute for International Contact and Cooperation, plays a key role for the work abroad, inasmuch as it is funding international projects with financial sponsorship from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the European Union, the United Nation Development Fund and other partners.

Nowadays, the Hanns Seidel Foundation attends over 90 projects in more than 50 countries. Very important components are the countries of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. In the EU Member States Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia the foundation supports the reform process towards the consolidation of the integration process.

With the foundation guiding principle “In the service of democracy, peace and development” we started our work in Sofia already 20 years ago – in 1994. We focus on issues involving the support of reform processes of administrative structures and institutions, the strengthening of civil society’s role in the transformation process as well as the political education and training of young officers and politicians. By supporting the reform process towards the consolidation of the integration process, the Hanns Seidel Foundation in Bulgaria sets two derived project objectives:

1. Support of civil society organizations and state institutions with the creation of the reform process;
2. Promotion of a cross-border regional cooperation and an intercultural dialogue.

These objectives are realized by specific consultation and training measures, seminars and conferences, fact-finding and short-term expert missions, fellowships as well as preparations of studies and other event publications in cooperation with our partners.

It was already nine years ago, when the Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic Bulgaria, the Hanns Seidel Foundation and the European Academy started a strong partnership with great events regarding current political issues, which contribute to the promotion of civil society processes and the intercultural dialogue.

*The Winter School for Young Diplomats* is only one important project. Especially for the Black Sea Region and Southeast Europe this initiative plays a significant role for the development of young excellent experts, presenting their countries in the future.

It is a fundamental part of training intercultural strategies and communications. Furthermore, the Winter School offers a wide range of discussions and lectures by top-class speakers from ministries, embassies and national as well as international institutions on such current topics as European Union, NATO, foreign and security politics or energy diplomacy.

The partnership between the Diplomatic Institute and the Hanns Seidel Foundation is very special and we hope to continue this strong partnership for a long time.



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