

EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE COMMUNICATION FIELD

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The indispensable tool to develop further social economic and cultural progress in the world or European Union society is undoubtedly communication. Any action people make it will include communication and its consequences due to initiate a relationship with others. In order to access basis information about daily activities people begin the dialog from inside and receive messages from outside. Particular interaction between individuals needs a solid and also a very practical platform to realize a successful contact. This is the moment when communication is used in different shapes according to specific grounding of any society. It is needful to mention the two big directions of the term *communication* divided and also correlated when the act of sending and reception of the signal is started. First signification of communication represents the process of sharing values, knowledge and resources between two or more participants at the dialog. This first meaning of the term is described as an instantly and direct act with assurance that the message was send and received but it is limited because of physical men characteristics. The second interpretation of the communication enlarges the first one offering technological support in order to transmit the message covering almost the whole world area. The main characteristics of this kind of communication are the amplification of the initiated signal, the direction of the message and a modern way to send it faster. Using this sort of communication people do communicate.

How does the communication, in both senses, affects the political, economic and social existence of European Union? Is there a strategy to improve this tool for a better function of a structure like European Union? Or, is European Union interested in develop the communication field?

There are various activities EU is carrying on, from regulations to partnerships, from treaties to sanctions, elements that lead to the unique social, political and economic function among states members of EU. The communication field is playing a crucial role to maintain and consolidate relationships even between simple citizens of European Union. Overall starting from transportation and ending with a dialog via internet or teleconference, everything signify a form of communication that brings people near from different countries, as well as economic and social issues could be shared more rapidly and precisely even at relatively big distances. The innovation of communication represents for European Union the next step to equalize the markets, concerns, responsibilities, and common actions due to realize the further stage of the states members evolution, especially for the new accessed countries. Therefore, the research in this domain is a priority to European Union, according to Lisbon Summit (2000) the goal to is establish development of new business concepts: technological, organizational or presentational. According to Lisbon Strategy “Communication highlights that there are many other forms of innovation”.

Key words: communication, innovation, development, sharing

Introduction

Relational boundaries within the communication process between two persons, groups or communities seem ever dimmer lately, and this is due to an ever-growing open-mindedness of the individual toward a multitude of options and messages. Since the choice is up to each individual in part, it becomes an intangible asset leading to a difference in class; the choice is no longer made based solely upon traditional economy, because knowledge makes the difference. Today, we may speak of people's tendency to the idea of "new", of openness to change, whereas traditional ideas tend to fade away in time. In this respect, the communication process stood only to gain. Messages have become clearer and more direct, as they are based upon extensive market research and segmentation. "Attention paid to communication destroys communication itself¹" was the statement of the Palo Alto researchers in one of communication's axioms, in other words the mechanisms of mutual understanding work best when we don't perceive them. That's why the development of the communication field is an ample process that has to envisage strategies and mechanisms best adapted to the target-market: messages designed to answer the needs of the target-public without being ostentatious. A message designed to directly reveal the intentions of the emitter shall be negatively perceived on the recipient side, which is why most of the messages we "receive" from various entities do not change public perception in any way, they are constructions in which information asymmetry is high, and mutual gain is low. All of these elements show up at EU communication-level, the EU being an entity that has been increasingly seeking to address its public lately by raising the degree of European cohesion and identity.

A whole communication process that mostly public institutions take interest in, must be defined as a total form: it includes an adequate communication channel, a well-structured speech, an easily understandable message that the public can relate to as well as the choice as to the communication channel best fit for the target. This is what the EU is after in its process of spreading messages of public interest. Considering citizen perception toward European public institutions, which has been that of general skepticism (or even mistrust), the EU has developed communication systems to facilitate the relationship between EU institutions, citizens, as well as the flow of information from producer to consumer.

Also, at a European Community level, efforts have been made to ensure the most effective communication within member states, however many aspects of this communication process have yet to be addressed. The reason for this could be the EU expansion process, the organizational capability resources and strategies having to adapt to the new EU borders. This institutional and strategic adjustment must also take into account the cultural background of each of the new member states, the level of economic development, the socio-economic potential of the new members, as well as the degree of compliance with EU regulations. By looking into these factors, the EU can shape custom messages and national campaigns, whose outline are closer to its target, and are designed to increase feedback and build a European

¹ Mihai, Dinu, *Comunicarea*, Editia a II-a, Editura Algos, Bucuresti, 2000, pg, 100

identity through national *instruments*. Through communicational construct, the EU should also highlight its identity elements within the life of its citizens, increase the degree of engagement by its citizens through debate and creation of direct communication channels with its citizens, and more important use the feedback received from its citizens to create programs for increasing the credibility of its representatives.

To achieve this cohesion, communication should be more than just an instrument for implementing European political and economic strategies.

The process of communicating within the European Union

In speaking of the **EU's target public**, one must mention the four categories it is split into. These categories are also made up of specific groups, according to their dominant features, interests and degree of involvement.

Communication takes place from one emitter, or sender (in this case the EU), to a multitude of recipients, segmentation is quite difficult considering the 27 member states, each one with its culture, mentality, specific ways and means. For instance, one element may be considered an important barrier: states with a strong national identity (such as France, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, and Italy) whose degree of development is higher than in other states, and which make a similar effort of maintaining this supremacy as the EU's desire to build and introduce a European identity. On the other hand we have the new member states struggling through a period of adaptation from the point of view of enforcing new policies and matching them with their citizens' mentality. This is why communicational construct must be based on all these elements that could potentially prove destructive for the purpose of those EU organisms responsible for implementing an EU-wide communication plan. On identifying the target-public of the EU, it can be split up in:

- **National authorities of member states.** Entities whose purpose is to harmonize European with national legislation and to enforce EU messages within their respective country and send feedback.
- **EU citizens, social and economic partners.** This target is characterized by its diversity, multitude of interests and expectations, and even lack of interest. Winning this segment over is the great challenge that the EU representatives have been trying to address within the last year, by using strategies entailing their direct involvement, through partnerships with NGOs, members of the civil society, and representatives of the business segment. One must also mention the encouragement of cultural communication by identifying key-personalities of each cultural component and their input in events whose motto is "integration through cultural diversity". One must also point out this be only an outline of segmentation, and, as mentioned above, further research and sub-segmentation is to be performed according to key-features.

- **Third party states EU maintains economical and political relations with**, which do not belong to the EU's sphere of influence. Nonetheless, communication with these states should bridge relations to a better understanding of their economical, political and social spectra, in order to be able to engage in mutual partnerships, effective for both parties. From economical trade to exchange of knowledge, one must always rely on a good knowledge of the partner's culture and background.
- **States wanting to join the EU** is yet another target that should be taken into account when developing messages. This *audience* communicates mostly through negotiations, talks between EU and national representatives of the respective states with the EU constantly supervising the implementation of policies and regulations / recommendations. One may argue the communicational relationship is a transactional one in which the possibility of equality in communication is harder to achieve (until this moment).

Another important feature of the communication process is the **communication channels** used. Communicational support plays as important a role as communication itself. "Noise" encountered by the message can change its essence misleading the recipient if the communication channel is not adequate to the audience. To ensure an adequate communication, the sender of the message (in this case the EU) must provide the recipient – citizen with a proper communication means so that the message remains clear all along. One must highlight that upon sending, the EU is totally responsible of message integrity, so the recipient does not misunderstand it. This is why it's crucial for the EU to choose adequate communication channels designed to gain the trust of the citizen over time (apart from being simple and correct). Communication channels within European institutions are both formal and informal. Formal channels deliver official information feeds. Informal channels rely on non-traditional communication channels, perhaps socio-cultural personalities involving in various informal events. Information being transferred through these channels is often used to persuade those resistant to official messages and authority in general.

In identifying *the formal communication channels* we may point out: the spokesman as an important factor of the commission's communication policy that focuses on EC news delivered by the audio-visual and written media in Brussels and outside it. The commission cooperates with member states in order to communicate EU actions in various political issues. Member states have the legal obligation of delivering information about the program to their citizens. The commission's activity in communication is destined to consolidate the EU's image as a global protagonist and generate favorable relationships through proactive public diplomacy thus supporting the commission in fulfilling its external political objectives. This relies on a common strategy between those departments responsible of specific external policies, by providing an enhanced coherence and a greater synergy in the process of communicating the different policies. For the most part this is done by active participation of the commission's delegates. The commission provides the Inter-Institutional Communication Group with a document detailing EU communication in third-party states.

Regional and local communication is essential for the involvement of the citizen in a European debate within the national political culture. An important factor in the activity of the commission is the management of a significant number of information and assistance networks that cover specific political fields, such as: EURES, ERA-MORE, SOLVIT, and the Euro Info Centers². The centers are information distributors and unique liaisons with a number of locally and regionally acting factors (social partners' organizations, universities, commerce chambers, foreign-language centers etc.).

Apart from communicating with the public and the civil society the EU representatives have intensified activities by sending commissioners to gain data, as well as by stepping up the effort to deliver data to regional and local media agents, through the use of both modern and traditional methods. The information bureaus of the European Parliament are also working together to establish closer ties.

All of the 27 European Union member states have a permanent representation in Brussels which stands for their political and economical interests just as the European commission has its representation in each of the member states. The permanent representations to the European Union are not just bilateral diplomatic missions but rather an extension of national governments, a sort of government offices, which interact with the European institutions as well as the other representations on a daily basis, looking after the interests of their citizens as a main communication channel.

The representation supports the European information replicators in developing both European affairs knowledge as well as communication skills. The information distributors receive various materials and information sheets from the European Community's representation and those can be used locally or regionally according to the strategies and necessities of the target group. Simultaneously the CE representation is developing instruments and programs designed to facilitate communication within the network and help its members to fulfill their communication objectives on European topics.

Information and communication regarding European problems has the following objectives: providing everyone with free access to correct and diverse information pertaining to the European Union, it seeks to allow everyone the right to free speech and to actively participate in public debates dealing with European issues. This is why this desired can only be fulfilled with the help of the member states that play an essential role in distributing information regarding the European Union on a national, regional and local level. Also in reckoning the participation to this process is by all means voluntary, the European Parliament, the Council and the commission of European communities encourage every member states to actively partake to this common intercession regarding the communication of EU issues.

² http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/ro/com/2007/com2007_0568ro01.pdf

The action plan projects three fundamental principles supporting the EU-wide communication activity:

1. Listen to citizens' needs in terms of communication to encourage democratic participation in decision-making at Union level; ultimately seeking to develop a research and analysis function of the Eurobarometer reports as well as other research performed by the EU, mass-media (mostly audio-visual), centralizing and automation of citizen feedback through information centers.
2. Communicate – the policies and activities of the EU as well as their impact on the daily life of the citizen, in an accessible manner
3. Act locally – understand the local audience, bear in mind the local needs, send out information using preferred communication channels, and initiate a genuine dialogue with the citizen.

The *informal communication channels* are made up of all sorts of information spreaders not affiliated with the EU authority. Among these we mention: mass-media through debates regarding EU issues – presenting both official and unofficial information, journalists' editorials within the written press, internet pages (currently numbering thousands) containing useful EU information, forums and personal web pages – are ever powerful an instrument of gaining insight. The latter two are gaining popularity since they are also a way of interacting with EU representatives. Considering the development and importance of the Internet one can foresee this communication channel shall gradually replace classic means of information distribution.

It also seems that EU representatives are aware of the aforementioned techniques and are trying to adapt to the trends set by the virtual world. A solid example is taking into consideration the possibility of introducing an EU representative in the popular internet based “Second life” game. This choice is supported by the ever-growing number of European players. Given the psycho-social features of the game, people tend to pay more attention to such informal communication channels versus those via traditional mass-media or state authority.

Communicational code

From a communication process perspective, one important element that helps transmit the message must be highlighted – the code. Communicational code is a sum of perceptions which must be matched at both ends of the communication. The code must be designed with no room for ambiguity. Words are mere physical signals that do not carry meaning³; they can trigger a meaning in the conscience of the *receiver*, but only if that meaning is already there.

³ Mihai, Dinu, *Comunicarea*, Editia a II-a, Editura Algos, Bucuresti, 2000, pg, 45

In our case, we may speak of social consensus. Basically, any delivered message should carry the same meanings upon broadcast as well as reception. Since the context is a Union of multiple European states, one cannot neglect the aspect of the various cultural and social differences among the members. The EU to member state communication must be country-oriented, just like a social campaign, applied on a local level. This means every message must be customized according to the specifications of the target country, speech must be adapted to the respective society and culture, without losing sight of common EU policy. Scandinavians for instance will not respond to a warm message in particular, and southerners will be reluctant to a cold message, lacking in detail. From this point, the message must not be a *general* one, since it is bound to be perceived differently across the nations, giving way to misunderstandings.

One just as important feature that influences EU to member state relationships is the language. Although the EU tends to a common market, culture and society, differences are not to be overlooked, no matter how insignificant. To promote EU policy to any state in a language other than its own is by default negative in terms of reception. Nevertheless, since European officials cannot speak all the languages, by consensus English or French is used. To ease and facilitate acceptance of messages, upon delivery of speeches EU officials make use of several expressions in the language of the respective state, at the beginning and end of the allocution. As such a liaison is made between the two parties, with specific and custom involvement on the EU part.

To simplify communication with member states (especially through the bureaucratic and diplomatic circuit), it has become a practice that any EU institution be staffed by people from all member states who also have a very good command of an international language, apart from their own. These people are the backbone of the well established EU to member state relationship, facilitating the communication process, information flow and properly interpreted message delivery.

Message delivery within the EU is done via communication channels developed by representatives of the community; they provide communicational infrastructure for the whole European Union. Yet another aspect to be elaborated on is the symmetrical both way communication, in other words, viewing the receiver via mass-media and internet channels.

Currently, communication channels' broadcast takes place through:

- mass-media relations – DG Communications organizes daily briefings with Brussels based journalists; they are broadcast live via Europe by Satellite (EbS) ⁴ ;
- Quick access of CE press releases. The database is accessed by more than 30,000 people daily⁵

⁴ http://www.europa.eu.int/press_room/index_en.htm

⁵ <http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/>

- Europe by Satellite is the CE's news agency. The CE provides TV and radio stations in 90 countries as well as studios, editing facilities, audio / video and photo databases in 21 languages. Europe by Satellite can be watched via satellite or Internet⁶.
- EuroNews⁷ is partially funded by the European commission, maintaining an editorial independence; it has more than 8 million viewers every day, more than CNN or BBC World, it broadcasts 24/7/365 in seven languages simultaneously (English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Russian). It is the only pan-European channel and the only multilingual TV operator whose purpose corresponds to that of a public service.
- EUROPA is one of the biggest multilingual websites offering information on Community policies and institutions, access to documents and a complex news service⁸.
- Europe Direct⁹ brings together more than 400 local organizations from all member states. The Europe Direct contact centre provides a toll-free phone number available to all member states, as well as chatting facilities that citizens can use to obtain information on the EU.

Also, as stated above, representations constitute yet another broadcasting channel. These are European Commission offices located in the 27 capitals of the member states plus eight regional offices that provide Brussels with daily political reports, news about sensitive topics showing up in the media, while maintaining contact with the civil society and national authorities. All these information networks envisage raising population awareness regarding European affairs and send feedback to European institutions. Communication channels are important links in maintaining transparency in EU policies and decisions. The EU has the duty to inform its citizens and provide them with public interest information. The transparency of the European institution is a key factor in raising citizens' trust and establishing closer citizen-institution ties. In fact, anyone can benefit from public interest information, ranging from opening hours to annual financial information. Whether these materials are necessary in the elaboration of personal work or writing articles, access to public interest info is one important link between the EU and citizen, EU and social partner (NGO, civil society members), EU and economical partner. This can be realized through good communication, counseling and support. The transition from coordinator to partner is a time consuming financially stressing and in general very demanding process, whose success may benefit the trust level of the citizen in European institutions as well as the European identity. By strengthening the Community's "internal environment" the EU will become an even stronger entity from a global policy decision point of view.

⁶ http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/avservices/ebs/welcome_en.cfm

⁷ <http://www.euronews.net/>

⁸ <http://www.europa.eu.int/>

⁹ http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/represent_en.

Strategies in communication development

Having a common market and extensive use of communication techniques lead to trans-nationalization. Communication plays an active role in this transformation, as it is now part of bringing markets together especially through information exchange, access to products and services without spatial and temporal barriers. Removing barriers helps in facilitating EU to member state relationships.

Telecommunications, social communication and the advanced services born of both, make up a vital instrument for the development of the different regions in Europe, especially the least favored. But the basic condition is the protagonist of local and regional administrations in a global policy for the information and communication sector. The experience of the regions within Europe reveals the new possibilities but also the risks inherent in this challenge¹⁰. When all is said and done, more than in any other field, both terrains are increasingly moving according to a regional-international dynamic in which nation-states are becoming both larger and smaller at the same time. Work and reflection about the implication and responsibilities of the European regions in the field of telecommunications and the audiovisual sector - in the role of regulator, promoter and co-coordinator, and not just enforcer of state policies - is relatively new.

With the development strategy, the Commission seeks to fully develop the communicational potential in its ties to the national parliaments. On the grounds of a European Parliament proposal, the commission is working on establishing pioneer Information Networks – a sum of internet based discussion forums between members of the European parliament, national parliaments and journalists, completed through EU-wide meetings. These networks will greatly contribute to the introduction of European debates within national parliaments. They will also promote discussions between national parliament members on European topics and support the electronic information exchange across parliaments¹¹.

Apart from ensuring communication with the public and civil society, representations will intensify their activity by organizing commissioners' visits as well as backing the efforts of providing regional and local journalists with up to date information delivered via modern media technologies and traditional methods. The involvement of other EU organisms will provide actual examples of EU initiatives in the service of the citizen. Representations and information bureaus of the European Parliament must work together if closer ties are to be established. In most cases, representations and information bureaus are located near one another, thus stepping up their common actions and boosting their visibility while at the same time maintaining each one's identity.

¹⁰http://www.wacc.org.uk/wacc/publications/media_development/archive/1997_2/the_audiovisual_sector_and_information_technologies_possibilities_and_risks_for_regional_development

¹¹ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/ro/com/2007/com2007_0568ro01.pdf

An enhanced coverage and more durable European affairs are also in sight through the development of audio-visual channels and by encouraging of European networks establishment. Promoting audio-visual and educational info regarding European affairs must be part of the public services' missions in the EU member states. Nevertheless this has to be done in a manner that guarantees full editorial independence.

Along the coordinates of communication channels development as to the creation and progress of European identity, the commission has initiated a project of providing multi-annual contracts to audio-visual networks across Europe. The networks are to produce and broadcast programs independently regarding EU affairs according to their own editorial standards, using common program formats.

The internet is the most successful propagation environment in years of late. Its capacity of information delivery being so great, it seems to offer the most advantages within the process of trans-nationalization. The Internet is the only means that use text, sound and image while remaining interactive to provide users with the possibility of expressing their opinion and discuss with one another. This is already the main cross-border way of debating as well as an important factor in the globalization era. Considering the above, the development of the "Europa" website by raising the interactivity levels and enhancing navigation and search functions, in order for it to become the main virtual communication channel at an EC level, has become a must in the process of developing citizen cohesion and delivery of economic, social and political information. The site content follows a more accessible and user-friendly structure and relies on more audio-video content. This way "Europa" must remain an important reference point in EU-related information delivery, completing the information provided by websites belonging to national administrations. Updating the site must consider the users' input, bearing in mind the feedback between EU institutions and its citizens. Additionally, it is necessary that the European Union intensify its presence over the web, apart from the Europa website.

Consequently, the commission intends to encourage the development of new websites belonging to civil society and / or the public / private sector that would promote contact with the European citizen, by supporting those websites paying particular attention to European affairs and stimulating debate on European policy related topics.

Although the supremacy of virtual communication is well known within the communication process with its target markets, the EU must also invest in paperback publications. In spite of the ever-growing domination of the Internet, the request for printed media is also on the rise. A policy of publication using all sorts of media must therefore be laid out, combining printed media with web and audio-video formatting taking advantage of the most recent progresses in technology.

Another line to be followed in developing the communication department is by consolidating the partnership at an EU level. National governments are responsible for the direction of European policy within the council as well as communicating these to the citizen.

In this direction, it is the commission's proposal to strengthen relationships between member states by organizing periodic meetings with the "national directors in charge of communication" belonging to every member state, in order to identify top-level priorities, to monitor the process of communication and to exchange information regarding communication activities. The commission is also seeking to develop management partnerships with interested member states. This type of partnership defines the specially adapted cooperation framework between commission, parliament and respective member state. These partnerships may serve as an instrument towards common activities regarding specific communication priorities based on common communication plans. The plans are negotiated at a political level between the commission, the European Parliament and member state authorities in charge of dealing with communication related aspects. This cooperation contributes to the adaptation of communication to local circumstances and its correlation to the national political agenda (such as elections, major national events and specific interests). The commission and member state authorities share responsibility in enforcing management partnerships. As such the commission deals with funding and member states come up with the infrastructure and human resources. Regional and local authority may also have a key role in promoting communication pertaining to Europe. Communication must be so designed to demonstrate local relevance of EU policies and decisions.

All aforementioned development directions within the field of communication must be backed by member states through bilateral processes, which encompass both information delivery from the decision-making centers (EU institutions) and promotion of requests from member states' citizens, public personalities, civil society members, etc. Increasing the feedback between all of these entities leads to the development of the social regulatory function due to role flexibility and fulfillment by each of the parties, both of which being designed to facilitate mutual understanding of different points of view.

Therefore the encouragement of partnerships, the increase of information role through formal and informal channels and the increase in citizen role must all be borne in mind by EU's communication policy in order to ensure a high cohesion degree, raise European identity levels and promote a harmonic development of all EU member states.

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