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## **INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS FOR EU ACCESSION: EXPERIENCE OF POLAND AND ROMANIA**

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## ***1. Introduction***

The integration of Moldova in the European Union is a key priority in the programme of the Government. At present, it enjoys the enormous support of Moldovan society and full political consensus. This is a favourable and encouraging fact, but the experience and logic of earlier waves of EU enlargement indicate that the further away from membership a given country was, the higher was the support for integration in the society, and accordingly with the progress of the negotiations, this support decreased to a greater or lesser extent. The overall positive attitude and support of Moldovans towards integration standing at 71%<sup>1</sup>, nonetheless, is based on many myths and stereotypes, anxieties and hopes as well as ideas concerning the benefits and costs of membership in the Union. This is a result of insufficient information on integration with the EU and its consequences for Moldova.

European integration for Moldova is a matter of concern not only to politicians, experts or governments, but to every citizen as well. It is a process of national importance, involving the society at large, which is a precondition for approval and success of the integration process. It is about integrating people, values and beliefs that have been affected by more than fifty years of communism and more than a decade of transition to democracy. Civil society, therefore, represented by the NGOs, along with the Government, should have a role to play in ensuring a sufficient supply of information, the reliability of information and an open information environment for the debate on EU membership.

This research analyses the experience of Poland and Romania in raising public awareness on EU issues in the EU pre-accession period. The analyses of those two countries' communication strategies are included in this research along with lessons drawn from their EU pre-accession experience. The paper focuses on the analysis of two options that the Government may choose from in its first steps of retaining and deepening permanent support of Moldovan society for Moldovan membership aspirations: the European Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAEI) can take the leading role or it can assume the role of the coordinator by developing a network of cooperation between the governmental and public sources of information.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Barometer of public opinion from April 2006 conducted by the Institute for Public Policy.

The process of integration into the European Union, which will eventually affect every person in Moldova, cannot be implemented without widespread public support. In turn, the public has to be provided with adequate information on the process of Moldova's integration into the EU, the institutions of the EU and their activities, as well as the position of the Moldovan Government concerning the EU accession.

## ***2. Problem description***

### **2.1. The current level of information**

Despite the high level of support for EU integration among the citizens of Moldova (over 70% of population in 2006), the population has little knowledge of the basic concepts of the European Union. For example, according to the same opinion poll, while 20.2% of the population have heard about the EU-Moldova Action Plan and know what it consists in, 48% of the population have heard about it but do not know anything about it, and 24.7% have not heard at all about it. Moreover, there is no other information available about the knowledge of Moldovan civil society about the EU. In this matter, several reasons may be cited why the level of knowledge about the EU is so low among Moldovans:

- The accession of the country to EU is perceived more as a commitment and responsibility of the administration, whereas society remains aside from the process;
- The communication among the different institutions is not effective enough (governmental, non-governmental, EC Delegation and embassies of the member states);
- The communication channels are too centralized – there is not enough work in the regions and on the local level;
- Work with the different social groups, depending on their direct interests, is not sufficient and these groups are not clearly identified;
- The NGOs do not explore their full institutional capacity for raising public awareness about the EU integration as the funds internally available for such activities are insufficient;
- There is a lack of well-defined legislative framework regarding the involvement of the NGOs in the process of raising public awareness on European integration;

- The government lacks an established framework for raising awareness on the EU, and for cooperating with other actors in disseminating information on the EU integration process. An information strategy framework is essential as its absence represents a significant gap which is a barrier to linking the reform process with the European integration process. The strategy is in process of being developed by the European Integration Department of the Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. In comparison, Serbia developed its communication strategy as early as in 2003.

These circumstances point to the need of raising the issue of the communication on European integration more broadly. If until now it has been the main foreign policy goal, our present concern is to present it to the society.

The next section presents the options for the choice of the institution to lead the information strategy on EU issues to the Moldovan public. These options are based on the experience of two countries that went through the EU accession process recently: Poland and Romania. The options describe the strategies of the countries, the actions undertaken by them, the actors involved, the role of the NGOs, and the risks as well as the costs of implementing one or another strategy by the Government of the Republic of Moldova.

### ***3. Options/Alternatives***

#### **3.1. Option 1: Case of Romania**

*The national Government (the Department of European Integration within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and European Integration) should take more responsibility and action for informing the public about EU integration issues, according to the Romanian experience.* The MFAEI is well positioned to inform the public for the following reasons: official government sources are the main and fundamental sources through which official information on the EU issues is disseminated, and it is the most specialized, thus most appropriate body to raise awareness on EU issues.

##### *3.1.1. Description of the information strategy*

The Ministry of European Integration of Romania (hence MEI) played a leading role in the process of spreading awareness on European integration through the communication campaigns of 2005 and 2006 both called “Information for Integration” which were developed one at a time. The information campaign of 2005 consisted of complex research on the population’s needs for the information on the EU, and the development of an action plan listing the activities implemented for various target groups, the events organized for the general public, the information institutions set up and the services developed. The information campaign of 2006 was the continuation of the 2005 campaign through the implementation of similar activities and consolidation of the information centers created in 2005.

### *3.1.2. Analysis of the public opinion*

Before developing the communication strategy of 2005, comprehensive research was undertaken by the Ministry of Integration through focus groups to determine the information needs of several social target groups: teachers and pupils from rural areas, students, women and managers. This research helped the Ministry to identify the message that had to be transmitted and the channels of information that had to be used to reach each group. The research also helped to determine the main guidelines of the information and communication campaign of 2005 and the projects that would be later developed by the Ministry.

### *3.1.3. Target groups and Activities Implemented*

The projects were developed specially for the following target groups that were identified through the research undertaken as the most important and vulnerable ones: university students and professors, business sector representatives, women, high school pupils and professors, public administration authorities, the internal audience (MEI staff) and the general public. The press was one of the most important communication channels used in the information campaign along with instruments such as the Information Point of the MEI, the MEI website and publications that were specifically developed for a greater impact on society. Moreover, various public events were organized to animate the civil society. All these activities were initiated by the MEI and coordinated by the specialized staff of the Ministry of European Integration.

### *3.1.4. Phasing*

The information strategy was implemented in two stages: the communication campaign of 2005 followed by the campaign of 2006. The assessment of the results of the projects implemented in 2005 reached the conclusion that the programmes should be continued in 2006 as well. The Eurobarometer of January 2006<sup>2</sup> showed that the Romanians would like to get more information about the European Union and especially on the rights of the European citizens, the labour force mobility, and on the activities of the European Union institutions. Based on the same research conducted in 2004, the activities for 2006 were determined and put into action. The same approach was continued: different social groups were approached separately through different programmes. Thus, the same direction of activities and events was followed in 2006.

#### *3.1.5. Involvement of NGOs*

The involvement of NGOs in the information activities developed by the MEI was insignificant. The NGOs specialized in European integration were identified as partners in the development of the campaign for 2005 and 2006. However, they were not directly involved in it. They did not play a significant role in spreading awareness on EU accession as partners of the MEI. Most of their activities were not coordinated with the activities developed by the MEI but with the activities implemented by the Delegation of the European Commission in Romania. Thus, in the case of Romania, the expertise of the NGOs specialized in EU integration was not taken in consideration by the MEI.

#### *3.1.6. Feedback*

It is important to mention that one of the conclusions of the assessment of the information campaign of 2005 is that the officials of the MEI need to strengthen the interdepartmental communication by sharing information on the programmes and projects that are developed by different departments for a greater impact on society.

Moreover, the online debates on the information campaigns condemn the inefficiency of implementation of the communication campaigns. Ordinary citizens are not satisfied with the limited

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<sup>2</sup> Eurobarometer 64: National Report on Romania published by the Delegation of the European Commission in Romania.

information they have access to. This is also supported by the Eurobarometer 64<sup>3</sup> that shows the need of citizens for more information on European integration, and namely: 32% of the population declared that they really needed more information related to the issues of EU, which is a much higher percentage than in the new member states of the EU or EU-15. The need for additional information is greater among those who know than among those who do not know: 40% of the Romanians who gave at least two correct answers to the EU knowledge test say that they need much more knowledge in this domain; but only 27% of those who are less informed say that they need more information about the EU institutions. If the psychological mechanism suggested by this finding continues to work, we may expect that those with greater knowledge about the Union will be increasingly informed while those with poor information will be less and less informed. The gap concerning information about the European institutions will add to the long series of other social gaps existing in Romania.

Moreover, during 2005, between spring and autumn, the Romanians' confidence in national institutions declined mainly as regards political institutions: from 35% to 23% in the Parliament, from 43% to 30% in the Government, and from 22% to 12% in political parties.

### *3.1.7. Conclusions from the Romanian Experience*

The Romanian information campaigns were developed and led by the MEI, were established based on the comprehensive research about the needs of information of the citizens, and did not encourage actively the NGOs to act as partners in the EU informative actions implemented by the MEI. Moreover, the staff of the MEI wish for more internal cohesion in sharing information of the projects developed by different departments<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, the population with poor knowledge, in rural areas usually, is less informed which means that the system of channeling the information through centralized channels is not so efficient after all.

To conclude, the case of Romania shows the example when the national Government can play the main role in raising awareness on EU accession issues by focusing on specific target groups.

### *Benefits*

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<sup>3</sup> Eurobarometer 64: National Report on Romania published by the Delegation of the European Commission in Romania.

<sup>4</sup> Text of the Communication Campaign of 2006 realized by the Ministry of European Integration of Romania.

The choice of Option 1 presents the following benefits:

- One actor is responsible for the process thus no double work will be done (unlike in the case of Poland in the referendum campaign where there was no coordination among the many actors involved in the information dissemination). When one institution takes the leading role, it bears the responsibility for failure or success, and is thus motivated to act efficiently and be more responsible for its actions, as its reputation is at stake.
- The citizens are going to see the Government in the more positive light. In case of the success of the campaign, the credibility of the MEI will increase in the eyes of its citizens. The department of European integration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Moldova has a comparably short history therefore its success in the implementation of the strategy will be a significant boost to its credibility.
- Finally, by acting on its own, the MFAEI can directly influence the process.

### *Risks and Costs*

On the other hand, the choice of Option 1 presents the following risks:

- The information and the communication should try to cover as much as possible of the country's territory, especially bearing in mind that at present it is concentrated in Bucharest. The same is valid in the case of Moldova. Coordination on the regional, district and local levels can be made difficult unless there is enough coordination and communication within the Department of European Integration, as the assessment has shown.
- The process of negotiations is very dynamic as well as the shifts in the public opinion, hence, the Department of European Integration should be in the position to respond to these changes and to adjust the messages. This means that the Strategy of communication and the immediate Action Plan need to be updated every year. If the same research is used for updating the Strategy year by year, as in the case of Romania, there is the risk that the needs of the population will be covered only partially.
- Since this is a governmental strategy, it should be in the position to coordinate and unite efforts of all institutions that are currently already making efforts to popularize and explain the European integration. Stated otherwise, it is very important for the implementation of the strategy to build a network of key figures and institutions actually participating in it, thus avoiding double work by coordinating the activities of other actors.

For the implementation of this Option, the following resources are needed to be made available to the Department of European Integration:

- Qualified personnel;
- Experience and expertise in campaigns of information dissemination;
- Capacity to disseminate the information;
- Transparency in the process of information on EU-related issues;
- Credibility. The population has to trust the good intentions of the Government.

Unfortunately, the Department of European Integration still faces many problems with the process of task execution. It is due to the fact that the post-Communist state has had a very short history of using European instruments and standards in administration despite the considerable efforts that have been made to catch up.

### **3.2. Option 2: Case of Poland**

*The Department of European Integration within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and European Integration should focus on coordinating the communication process by delegating part of the informative tasks to the NGOs specialized in the domain, according to the Polish experience.*

#### *3.2.1. Description of the information strategy*

The communication strategy of Poland was implemented by a working group set up at the Committee for European Integration. It consisted of specialists from those state administrative organs which were particularly involved in the information activities as well as specialists appointed by the interested non-governmental organizations. The strategy was implemented at different levels of society: the educational level – the curricula were changed, the administrative level – public authorities were specially trained, the level of the general public – EU information centers were established with the support of NGOs.

#### *3.2.2. Analysis of the public opinion*

Information on society's opinion on the adaptation process being implemented in Poland has been compiled and constantly reviewed since 1990 due to the annual research carried out by the State Public Opinion Research Centre and independent agencies. At the same time, specialized research teams carry out studies in this field. On this basis it is possible to identify the level of social acceptance of Poland's integration with the EU that has stabilized at about 75-80%. Having such a comprehensive research done on this matter, it is very easy to notice the impact of the communication activities that have to be implemented to raise awareness on EU integration.

### *3.2.3. Target groups and Activities Implemented*

The communication strategy was implemented on several levels: schools and universities, civil society, and public administration. The first step taken was to introduce EU studies in the school and university curricula. Professors could choose to teach within the boundaries of their subjects topics related to EU issues. Thus, from school benches, the youth was educated on European integration. Moreover, European School Clubs were established at the initiative of professors or pupils in 5000 schools to inform pupils on EU issues. During those extracurricular activities, pupils simulated the work of EU institutions and regional meetings for professors were organized in these centers.

In 2000, the Committee for European Integration announced an open call for NGOs to compete in the set-up of thirty-five European Information Points in the regions. NGOs were chosen to compete for this task as the information coming from the non-governmental sector was totally differently perceived than the information coming from the Government. The regional centers, besides providing assistance for the local NGOs and assisting the population, had the freedom to implement their own projects on EU integration by applying for additional funds from the Government.

In the early 1990s, the public administration had very few staff members prepared to work with the EU partners and able to communicate with the population on EU issues. Therefore the Government decided to establish a structure for education by encouraging universities to start educational and research programmes on the topic of the EU. Sixteen European centers were thus established at universities. Postgraduate studies in EU studies were launched and proved to be successful through their bilateral cooperation programmes with universities from EU member states. Moreover, the public administration, as well non-governmental and media representatives were trained in how to deal with the EU integration process. Thus the first group of experts of 120 representatives of the public administration, non-governmental sector and the media was trained in Brussels.

#### *3.2.4. Phasing*

The Polish communication strategy depended on the phases of integration. First phase, the introductory phase, consisted of informing the population about the EU as a global actor, the functions of the EU institutions, etc. The campaign was financed from EU funds. Further on, the population still needed to be informed about EU issues and further campaigns were sponsored from the state budget. Even after the accession, the population is still given the information on issues related to the EU.

#### *3.2.5. Results of the campaign*

Thanks to the activities implemented, the level of support for EU integration increased to 80% in the Polish society. The society was very well informed as separate groups of people were informed about their benefits from integrating in the EU. Moreover, the credibility of the message was high as it came from the grassroots.

#### *3.2.6. Involvement of NGOs*

By participating in the tender organized by the Government, the NGOs assumed part of the responsibility in informing the population about EU issues. Hosting EU information centers and developing further activities for and with local NGOs contributed significantly to keeping high the level of support of the civil society. The cooperation between the Government and the NGOs, in this sense, was very successful. Giving parts of responsibility to the NGOs, the communication strategy involved the civil society in the process of information on EU accession.

#### *3.2.7. Conclusions from the Polish Experience*

Poland's experience in disseminating information on EU accession is mainly important for its close cooperation with the NGOs. It demonstrated that by delegating part of the responsibility to the NGOs it automatically involved the society in the process of information, thus getting to the expected result – informing the society. Communication through third parties has to be used whenever it is possible and appropriate. In some cases, NGOs and similar institutions can develop better programmes on this subject than the Government itself. Using these channels opens up

possibilities for “bottom-up” communication, which adds to the credibility of the message. In other words, intermediaries like NGOs are able to provide feedback which they gather in public opinion polls.

### *Benefits*

The choice of Option 2 presents the following benefits:

- The public trusts the NGOs more than the Government in their efforts to disseminate information (according to the public opinion polls taken in Moldova only 1.3% of the population learned about EU issues from governmental sources<sup>5</sup>). The information channeled through the NGOs is more credible than the information coming directly from the Government. Also, the NGOs enjoy a continuously increasing trust on behalf of the population in comparison with the Government<sup>6</sup>.
- The NGOs have a greater capacity to do a more qualitative work in spreading awareness about the EU due to their focus on specific issues through projects. The governmental entity responsible for the implementation of the communication strategy, on the other hand, oftentimes has more tasks to accomplish thus it is less capable of implementing several nationally important tasks simultaneously. The Department of European Integration of the MFA of Moldova is directly responsible for the implementation of the EU-Moldova Action Plan. This task is very challenging as the department is understaffed and most of its officials are not deeply specialized in EU issues. By delegating the information task to NGOs, the needs of informing the population are likely to be better served.

### *Risks and Costs*

On the other hand, the choice of Option 2 presents the following risk: when more actors are responsible for implementing the communication strategy, there is the risk that the work will be duplicated. According to the Robert Schumann Foundation experience, during the referendum information campaign in Poland, much of the work was duplicated because there was no mutual coordination of activities.

To implement this option, the following resources have to be available:

- NGOs with valuable expertise in European integration issues;

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Barometer of public opinion from April 2006 conducted by the Institute for Public Policy.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Barometer of public opinion from April 2006 conducted by the Institute for Public Policy.

- Governmental will to cooperate with NGOs.

At present there are NGOs that have considerable expertise in the European integration and are indeed interested in taking part in the process of informing the society on EU integration. A strong argument for this is the expertise provided by the NGOs to the Government in the process of designing the communication strategy for the upcoming years. Thus, there are NGOs willing to be a part of the process but is there an adequate political will? Is the Government ready to delegate such responsibility to NGOs? The fact that the NGOs are consulted in the process of designing the information strategy is a positive sign of the willingness of the Government to cooperate on the issue.

#### ***4. Conclusions***

Moldova has the very important advantage that it can learn from the other countries' experiences and use them as the basis for charting its own course. The experiences of Poland and Romania in implementing the information strategy on EU integration represent valuable platforms that should be taken into consideration so as to avoid traps in the institutional design and performance as well as in the public opinion sentiments.

Popular support of Moldova's integration with the EU is a huge capital asset which must not be squandered. It has to be remembered that this approval is based on a shallow consensus which is not supported by sufficient recognition of the social costs which will have to be borne in the course of this process.

The most important lessons learnt from Poland and Romania are the following:

- Being aware of the needs of information of the society is very important in the context of implementing activities for target groups. From the experience of the two countries, both governmental and non-governmental actors can assume the responsibility for monitoring the public opinion on EU integration issues.
- Targeting the interests of the various groups within the population is a more efficient technique than addressing the society as a whole. Working with separate groups of people that have common interests will bring a stronger impact with a more efficient effect on the society.

- It is very important to work in phases for the sake of the efficiency. Only by readdressing the issues important for the population in new operational plans the information strategy will achieve the desired goal.
- The experience of both countries shows that the NGOs can bring a significant contribution to the process of information if perceived as partners. Both the Government and the civil society have only to win from delegating part of the information tasks to the NGOs.

## ***5. Recommendations***

Both cases described above have their strong and weak points if applied to Moldova. The main criterion for evaluating the options is the capacity and the expertise of the Government to implement efficiently the strategy by itself that was previously analyzed. Therefore, for the case of Moldova, a combination of the two options is recommended:

1. Phasing – The public information strategy has to be broken down into several stages, each of which implies a different set of information needs and requires different level of resources. In the first stage, the public has to be informed about the EU, the different aspects of the EU integration process, and its practical implications. The NGOs have demonstrated through the projects already implemented that they have the capacity to do this. The strategy for each stage has to be determined based on comprehensive research.
2. Comprehensive research is needed to examine the current levels of information on the EU and the integration process. At present, the Institute for Public Policy (IPP) and the Institute for Marketing and Sociological Studies Inc (IMAS) are the only institutions that conduct comprehensive public opinion polls in Moldova. The opinion poll undertaken in November 2006 by IPP, unlike the previous ones, does not contain any questions on the EU issues. Thus, there is no consistent monitoring of the public opinion in this regard. The research should be undertaken constantly to analyze the level of awareness among the citizens as well as the extent to which the information actually reaches the target audience.
3. The audience has to be broken down into target groups for a more efficient approach. In the initial stage, four groups have to be singled out as priority audiences: the media, opinion leaders, students and those undecided about or opposed to EU integration. It should be noted that the media are the main source of information on the EU. The mass-media represent the main source of

information on EU integration for 63.3% of the total population of Moldova. The opinion leaders, because of their influential role at the state, regional or local level, have opportunities for influencing opinions or are in a better position to express their own views. The students represent the next generation that will be the most instrumental in carrying on the process of EU integration. Therefore, its interests and commitments have to be secured at an early stage. For this reason, EU integration needs to form part of educational programmes and curricula. At present, a substantial portion of the Moldovan population is undecided about the benefits (and therefore the desirability) of EU integration. These audiences are crucial and have to be provided with information specifically targeted towards their personal circumstances.

4. According to the experience of both countries, the NGOs have to be provided with the necessary framework for raising awareness about EU integration. By delegating part of the information tasks of the MFAEI to the NGOs all institutions will profit, and the needs of the citizens will be more efficiently covered. The tasks that should be delegated to the NGO are as follows:

- Setting up regional European information centers that will provide the necessary information to the social groups interested in being informed and will assist the local NGOs in providing information on EU integration;
- Monitoring the dynamic of the public opinion in supporting the EU integration, which will help to the design of the operational plans of the communication strategy in its phases;
- Organizing seminars, workshops, roundtables for different target groups on a separate basis accordingly to their needs of information;
- Rendering regular assistance to the MFAEI in drafting operational plans for all phases of the communication strategy.

According to the public opinion polls taken in Moldova, the NGOs enjoy greater credibility as sources of information than the governmental institutions<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the Government ought to support financially the NGOs specialized in European integration by allocating special funds for them as well as facilitate their access to EU funds as much as possible to be able to utilize their full institutional capacity for implementing EU related activities.

5. By delegating part of the responsibilities to the NGOs, the MFAEI will be able to concentrate their capacity and efforts on:

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Barometer of public opinion from November 2006 conducted by the Institute for Public Policy.

- Changing the curricula in schools and universities by encouraging EU studies with the support of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport;
- Building the capacity of the local and rayon officials by organizing special trainings for them on EU integration issues.

This kind of partnership between the NGOs and the MFAEI will result in an even split of tasks and responsibilities according to the existing yet weak institutional and professional capacities (compared to Romanian or Polish standards) of these institutions regarding EU issues. Moreover, the MFAEI is busy executing the EU-Moldova Action Plan. The limited personnel capacity does not allow at least for the moment for the MFAEI to take a leading role in implementing the communication strategy therefore partnership alternatives have to be seriously considered. Moreover, the Department of European Integration should focus on its relationship with the EU institutions (implementation of the EU-Moldova Action Plan) as it is part of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs rather than raise awareness of EU issues in the civil society.