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**PROPOSAL FOR A EUROPEAN AND TRANSATLANTIC  
AWARENESS-RAISING CAMPAIGN IN MOLDOVA: THE  
PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT, MEDIA AND  
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**

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## 1. Introduction

The relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union started back in 1994 when the Partnership and Collaboration Agreement was signed. This agreement represents the legal basis for cooperation in the areas of trade, culture and education policy and lists as a major objective support for developing democracy in Moldova.

In early 2005 the government of Chisinau named European integration as the main priority of its foreign policy. In this respect, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the one to coordinate and implement the country's policy of European integration.

The Moldovan government committed itself in 2005 under the Moldova-EU Action plan to conduct several reforms in the country in order to approach European standards and affirmed its intention to join this structure. Moldova is part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It is envisaged that under the ENP Moldova will receive 209.7 million Euro of EU assistance in the years 2007-2010, which constitutes almost double the amount it received under the TACIS programme in 2003-2006. This means that per capita Moldova will receive more funds than any other country of the eastern dimension of the ENP.

In mid-June 2006, the Chisinau Government signed the Moldova NATO Partnership Action Plan (PAP). It should be mentioned that the plan does not envisage Moldova's membership in the Alliance, as the neutrality status of Moldova does not allow it. Instead, the document aims at deepening the cooperation and bringing Moldovan standards closer to those of NATO.

The PAP ends in 2008 and the Individual Partnership Action Plan Moldova-NATO (IPAP) has a two-year-long implementation period after which it will be reviewed and adapted to the new realities.

Both these documents represent a statement of interest from the Moldovan side to reach Euro-Atlantic standards in the democratisation of the country. Although they represent a significant achievement of the Moldovan government on an international scale, the Moldovan general public is certainly lacking information with regard to this developments.

This is exemplified by the fact that more than 20% of the population can not specify the time when Moldova could be a member of the EU and 15% considers that this could be realised in next 10 years<sup>1</sup>. With regard to NATO, around 40% of the population cannot say whether they would vote for or against NATO membership. The percentage of the undecided population can be treated as indicative of the lack of information. Moreover, concerning European integration, these figures show a lack of information as it is almost impossible for Moldova to be accepted as a member state in the next 10 years. Firstly because there has been no official request sent to Brussels, and secondly

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<sup>1</sup> Public Opinion Barometer, IPP, May 2007.

the scale of the reforms to be implemented in order to achieve this goal is too large to be able to develop them in the next 10 years.

The national public television is the main source of information for the population and it is the only one to broadcast on the entire territory of the country. Therefore, the lack of information could be firstly explained by the other large missing sources of information, and secondly by the lack of a state policy with regard to informing the citizens about European affairs.

The Moldovan population is poorly informed both about internal and external policy of the Government. Although most Moldovans support EU membership, there is a strong need to inform them about European issues because the public does not know about major changes to be introduced as part of the integration into the EU. In this context, it is better to prevent a possible Eurosceptic backlash than to cure it.

Moldova has inherited from the Soviet state not only the structures and governing principles (though adapted to the new reality) but also the mentality. Here the mass media have the duty to work on changing it and bringing it closer to the democratic and market economy way of thinking. Obviously it is a long process, but former Soviet bloc countries like Poland have proven that the status of a fully integrated member of NATO and the EU is an attainable goal.

The Moldovan government, after declaring European integration as the main state objective in foreign policy via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova, developed a communication and information strategy in 2006. This is still a draft and there is no strong evidence that the actions and tolls foreseen in the paper will be implemented soon, but regardless it will be necessary at least to update it before starting to use it. The strategy needs to be changed on several main lines, as it should clearly stipulate the resources for the activities to be carried out. It should also focus on the impact of EU integration on the population rather than focus only on the state policy.

In this context, the Polish experience could be helpful since both countries share a common communist past and have had to deal with the inherited Soviet mentality and governing habits.

Some aspects of the Polish experience in promoting EU accession<sup>2</sup> could also be used for enhancing public discussions in Moldova with regard to NATO accession. Though at the moment constitutionally it is not possible to become a member of the North Atlantic Alliance, the issue is being more frequently discussed among several political parties and will become a hot issue both in politics and society.

## **2. The Polish Experience in the Field of European Awareness Raising – the Role of the Government, Media and Civil Society**

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<sup>2</sup> It should be mentioned that there was no state policy in promoting NATO accession in Poland as it was decided in parliament without consulting the public like in case of EU integration, when a referendum was held in the country.

Before the negotiation process Polish society was mostly in favour of integration, yet the number of supporters dropped significantly in the late 1990s. Between March 1997 and December 1998 the public's acceptance of the integration of Poland in the European Union decreased from 72% to 64%.<sup>3</sup> It was clear that this change was generated by the fear of the future changes that would affect their lives. In turn, this fear was based on the lack of information and acknowledgement of the reforms implemented in Poland in that period. Under such circumstances, an informational and promotional campaign was strongly needed as the issue of integration in the European Union was to be decided in a referendum.

Several opinions were promoted by the political parties with regard to the necessity of joining the EU. In order to prevent future speculations and politicisation of the activities in promoting and informing the public about EU affairs, the government decided to create a separate body to coordinate the activity of the other bodies in matters of European integration. The body was called the Committee for European Integration (UKIE). UKIE was the one to develop the communication strategy for promoting participation in the referendum as well promoting the "Yes" vote. Moreover, it was decided that UKIE would coordinate the activities of all interested parties in informing the public about the impact and activities developed for integration.

The Public Information Strategy (PIS)<sup>4</sup> defined non-governmental organisations as among the most important partners of the government in realising the programme. The cooperation of the government with these institutions was based on the principle of partnership and building a social dialogue. The PIS assumed consultation of informational activities based on consultation councils and substantial and financial assistance for non-governmental organisations in informational, educational, and promotional activities that were undertaken regarding integration.

Local governments were also considered to be very important partners for government units on a local level. The cooperation concentrated on the distribution and flow of information, educational and training activities with the assistance of the local infrastructure and personal contacts.

An important partner for the government in realising PIS activities was the mass media – commercial and public, with a national, regional and local range. The electronic media, especially television, played an important role in the process. Public broadcasters have additional obligations because of the law on Radio and Television which means additional obligations towards the public. The production and emission of European-related programmes by public television and radio is an exercise of the right of citizens to be informed.

In order for these rights and obligations to be fulfilled, the public media received financial assistance for any production disseminating EU knowledge and the integration process providing reporters with EU information materials

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<sup>3</sup> Public Information Programme, Polish Integration with European Union, Committee of the European Integration (UKIE) 4th May 1999.

<sup>4</sup> PIS was drafted for a 4-year period and started in 1999.

## 2.1. General EU Awareness Information Strategy

Informational and educational activities of the PIS can be divided into the government units' own activities and activities of Programme Partners (non-governmental organisations, self-governments, media, and other non-governmental units).

The government units' own activities were designed to supply the citizens with basic information regarding integration issues. The PIS assumed that the government was a coordinator and contractor of activities resulting from the PIS, while the Programme Partners would be the main implementation agents.

Government units undertook the following activities on their own as part of the PIS:

- publishing government documents regarding the integration process with the EU
- maintaining databases of all ministries and institutions engaged in the integration process
- organising open tenders for non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- organising open tenders for media
- upgrading the basic package of informational and educational materials for the public (CIE/UKIE materials)
- developing an Internet presence (website, e-mail, Internet links)
- creating and updating databases
- carrying out promotional activities
- contracting sociological analysis and research
- organising and participating in international and national conferences and seminars regarding integration issues
- organising and participating in training sessions

In addition, open tenders were organised for non-governmental organisations for informational educational and promotional activities with regard to the integration process and the specificity of various social groups. There was also an open tender for public and commercial media (press and electronic media) with the special inclusion of regional and local media. The tender entailed press activities involving informational, educational, and promotional activities regarding the integration process and the specificity of various social groups.

The government financed the elaboration and production of basic informational educational and promotional packages (CIE materials) for the public; reprinting covers, updating existing materials and elaborating new publications.

The strategy assumed realising informational, educational, and promotional activities in selected phases of the integration process. These were:<sup>5</sup>

- negotiations
- referendum (informational and promotional activities leading up to the referendum – facultative phase)

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<sup>5</sup> Public Information Programme, Polish Integration with European Union, Committee of the European Integration (UKIE) 4th May 1999.

- accession
- Poland in the European Union

The key elements in realising the PIS were both the negotiation phase and the referendum as enlargement and consolidation phases of knowledge and public consciousness regarding EU integration issues.

Both phases, the referendum and post accession period, demanded elaborating separate strategies. During the referendum phase it was necessary to strengthen promotional elements, as the PIS stated.

## **2.2. The Media**

Before the accession, the opinion polls performed in Poland showed that around 70% of the population felt uninformed with regard to Poland/EU issues.<sup>6</sup> As in Moldova, around 80% of the population declared television as their main source of information. Public television was most popular in Poland, while the private media had less of an educational role.

The key problem was that the media considered it unprofitable to write materials on EU issues since they were not the main interest of the population. As one evaluation study reported, “There was not much information in the media regarding European integration; they were not writing because they considered it to be boring for the public”.<sup>7</sup>

The Polish government understood the importance of the media in informing its citizens (see: the “National Programme of Preparing Poland for the EU”) Moreover, as mentioned above, it used public funds for promoting European affairs, but the media also benefited from PHARE funds for popularising EU promotional shows. The Polish government also developed an Internet database, which was used mainly by local journalists since it was more difficult for them to access information with regard to issues of Poland and the EU.

Even though several successful shows appeared on television, on the radio and in articles in the printed media, the main problem appeared to be the difficult language used and the inconvenient broadcasting time..

In the case of public radio stations, an approach taken was to assign two people from each channel<sup>8</sup> to cover European integration issues. The public radio management believed that broadcasting programmes devoted entirely to EU issues would fail to find an audience and therefore they included this subject in the most popular shows. The

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<sup>6</sup> “Evaluation Study on the Strategy for Information and Awareness Raising Campaigns About European Integration in Poland, European Parliament, Directorate General for Research/working document, p. 36. 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Krzysztof Bobinski, Director of “Union&Poland”, former publisher of “Europe Magazine”, Warsaw 10.10.2007.

<sup>8</sup> It should be mentioned that there are five channels of the public radio in Poland.

programmes did not cover the negotiation process but focused on changes that integration would bring to the population.

A considerable impact was made by small radio stations that operate locally as they informed the public about matters that influence their communities. One example is Radio Oko, which collaborated with the local European Information Centre. The activities not only served as a tool of informing the population about EU-related issues, but they also raised the interest of the locals about the subject.

Polish public television broadcasted five shows daily devoted to EU issues. Initially it was decided to include this information into the daily news show (prime time). However, the impact was considerably diminished due to the technical language used by the journalists and some groups complained about missing the connection between the presented information and the future impact on their lives. Another problem faced by Polish public television was the broadcasting time, which was inappropriate for reaching a large number of potential viewers.

The printed media also had a considerable impact on the information process in Poland. The main dailies “Rzeczpospolita” and “Gazeta Wyborcza” published 2 to 3 articles on European integration issues every day. Another important source of information was the biweekly magazine “Union&Poland”, devoted to European affairs. The approach used by this magazine “was to write like we were already members of European Union<sup>9</sup>”. Training sessions were organised for journalists writing on European issues; however only a limited number could take part in them.

UKIE treated the media as the main vehicle for forming public opinion and was constantly consulting them on several aspects of organising the polls while implementing the strategy<sup>10</sup>.

Whatever were the reasons of the activities performed by the media, the result was positive and the goal of integration was achieved.

### **2.3. Civil Society**

Like the government, Polish civil society understood that there was a risk that the result of the planned 2003 referendum on accession to EU could fail as the voter turnout would be insufficient and there was a possibility that the population could vote against the idea of integration. In this respect, Polish civil society engaged in a broad coalition for promoting the “YES” vote and participation in the elections. The coalition was composed of NGOs, media institutions, trade unions and businesspersons. “We were worried that people will not go and vote and if they do, they will vote against”<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Krzysztof Bobinski, Director of “Union&Poland”, former publisher of “Europe Magazine”, Warsaw 10.10.2007.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Magda Kudlinska, UKIE responsible, Warsaw 5.10.2007.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Alicja Pacewicz, Director of Programs and Publications, Center for Citizenship Education, Warsaw, 5.10.2007.

Several organisations from different fields were involved in the coalition, including NGOs, media, trade unions as well business.

An important aspect of this coalition is that for the first time civil society representatives were given free airtime on public television for promotional spots among political parties. Most of them promoted participation in the referendum, and many were promoters of the positive vote, although there were a few that encouraged voting against integration. Moreover, there were some NGOs that were using the free airtime to promote themselves rather than their opinion towards integration.

The members of the coalition decided to hire a PR specialist that would coordinate the activities of the coalition. It was decided that every involved institution would contribute some resources (human, financial). In addition, these institutions worked closely with UKIE on joint efforts.

The civil society was involved in training teachers so that they could provide some information during their classes. A project that had a great impact and was successful enough to continue until today was the European School Clubs (ESCs). There were more than 1000 ESC in Poland. The schools organised debates among pupils regarding the main issues related to the EU and Poland; the added value of this type of activity was that the pupils talked with their parents about the information received during the debates. Since parents tend to trust their own children more than media/experts, the persuasion effect is more likely to appear from the children. The fact that ESCs still exist in Poland is an indicator that their primary objective went beyond persuading for accession approval, but aimed at increasing the public's interest and level of knowledge with regard to European affairs.

The coalition is considered to be a success, as it had focused all the efforts and put it into a strategy for promoting a common goal. The fact that the government, civil society media and business were partners and not actors on the same scene had a great impact on achieving the common goal –European Integration.

The creation of 16 Euro Information Centres in all the regions of the country had a significant influence on informing the population. These centres were administrated and controlled by civil society and financed by the government. The centres provided information to scholars as well to the media and to all interested persons.

“Letters to Europe” was a project involving schoolchildren. The idea was to send letters to schoolchildren in schools in the European Union, including pictures, which would inform the recipients about their country, habits, customs, culture, and present their school and class. This proved to be a good promotional tool for the country as well for learning about schoolmates in the EU.

### **3. Recommendations**

As mentioned above, the major body that is responsible for the coordination activity for the European integration of Moldova is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. However, practice shows that it has not yet been able to adopt a strategy in this regard, though some attempts have been made. It is also politically compromised and this could affect the level of trust of the society towards the promoted ideas and actions.

It is important that the body dealing with these issues should be politically unengaged and devoted entirely to its activities. It is recommended that it be separate from the Ministry, as in the case of Poland. This body could have the legal status of an NGO, which will act as a think tank and will both elaborate a strategy as well as coordinate its implementation.

Moldova should allocate a budget line for the activities devoted to the EU information and NATO awareness-raising campaign. If the coordination body will operate as an NGO it will be easier to attract external funds for its activities.

The Polish experience shows that a partnership with civil society (media, NGOs, business, trade unions) was a successful one. Moldova could create a National Civil Society Alliance, as it was the case of Poland, which would concentrate its efforts on promoting EU and NATO values. In this case the activities would not be dispersed and random, but based on an activity plan, which could considerably increase the impact of the activities. Also, this alliance should not be in opposition to the government policy, unless it differs dramatically from the stated objective of EU integration and NATO awareness. This alliance could address their specific target, but at the same time it could easily cover the entire society.

The media could have an informative and awareness-raising role for the segments of the target audience that are the most difficult to reach.

Civil society would advocate and monitor the state policy as well as steer it, if necessary, to the “right path”.

In the case of Moldova, it is important to limit the involvement of the political parties as much as possible since it could negatively affect all members of the “Coalition/Alliance”. It could be treated as politically engaged and lose credibility.

Here are the specific actions that could be undertaken in Moldova.

1. Creation of projects that cover all civil dimensions in the country, starting with intellectuals and youth and ending with the elderly. ESCs could be a good way to cover several social strata.
2. A television show with the participation of Moldovans who live in the European Union who talk about their daily life as well about living in a NATO member state. This show could be broadcasted on national television on a weekly basis.
3. Annual EU/NATO Parades on the Day of Europe, for instance, so that NATO could also be associated with the EU.

4. Regular television spots informing the public about the state of affairs with the EU and NATO and other practical things that the population needs to know.
5. Opening several information and documentation centres in the regions that will provide information to the local media, NGOs, members of the political parties and all interested persons.

#### **4. Expected Outcomes**

The Polish experience shows many successes as well some mistakes that need to be taken into account when carrying out some projects in the sphere of informing and promoting the Euro Atlantic values.

A problem that Moldova might face if it becomes an accession candidate for both structures is the criticism from Russian-oriented political parties. The present lack of information could also generate myths regarding the country's future in the Euro-Atlantic structures and manipulation on the part of those against the accession.

In this context, the present policy recommendations could help avoid the possible problems mentioned above.

Informing and raising awareness regarding these issues will encourage people to pay more attention to this, as well as develop their own opinions.