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Communication Policy Elaboration: the Experience of the European Union

Роботу виконано на кафедрі міжнародної інформації факультету міжнародних відносин ВНУ ім. Лесі Українки

Вироблення комунікаційної політики: досвід Європейського Союзу. Йдеться про етапи вироблення комунікаційної політики ЄС з 2002 р., коли Комісія визначила комунікацію однією із своїх стратегічних цілей, до завдань на 2010-2014 рр.

Ключові слова: комунікаційна політика, комунікаційна політика ЄС, Європейська комісія, План дій, Біла Книга.

Разработка коммуникационной политики: опыт Европейского Союза. Рассматриваются этапы разработки коммуникационой политики ЕС с 2002 г., когда Комиссия избрала коммуникацию одной из свих стратегических целей, до заданий на 2010-2014 гг.

Ключевые слова: коммуникационная політика, коммуникационная политика ЕС, Европейская комиссия, План действий, Белая Книга.

The article focuses on the stages of the EU Communication Policy elaboration since 2002 when the Commission made communication one of its strategic objectives to the tasks for 2010-2014.

Key words: Communication Policy, EU Communication Policy, European Commission, Action Plan, White Paper.

Modern communications being based on the newest technologies may intrude into privacy and violate citizens' rights and freedoms. These technologies may provoke total control both over an individual and information he/she sends. Hence, while forming the global information society, the role of communication increases significantly, as it is the communication that provides the total awareness of different social entities, the creation of the common system of values and reduces tension in relations.

Financial and commercial organizations were the first to elaborate the communication policy as the efficient means of communication with the external public aiming at promoting goods or a company or at making positive image of a company and its goods.

State government structures understood the importance of the provision of the feedback with the citizens, business, organizations. The goals of the state communication policy are to enable the citizens

- to get correct and clear information about their rights, obligations and possibilities;
- to accede to information on state activity and events;
- to be involved in the formation of policy, agreements and services.

The basic principles of the communication policy are openness, citizens' participation and the ability to reach everyone.

 Communication policy should be viewed as a number of means and techniques of a social subject promotion within some information space. Respectively, the European Union communication policy is a prospective direction of the EU activity which is based on the

grounded strategy of the use of the system of communication means directed at increasing EU image, reputation and the efficiency of the eurointegration process.

Communicating with the EU citizens has long been a primary concern of the European Commission, since after the rejection of the EU constitution by French and Dutch voters and the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty by the Irish the need to boost popular trust in the European project has become more important.

The first problem was the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 as it was not ratified by all the member states at the first time. This started a debate about the "democratic deficit" of the EU project. In response, the EU institutions took a series of measures to make their work more transparent and to bring themselves closer to the public.

It is strange but the Treaty of Lisbon does not mention an information and/or communication policy of the Union. Although it declares that "decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen" (Article 10 TEU), it does not obligate the European institutions to actively inform the citizens about the policies and legislation that they adopt and implement [6]. However, the Eurobarometers or other opinion surveys show that the citizens do not ask for a direct participation in the decision making process of the Union, but for clear information as to how and why decisions are taken and what impact they have on their lives.

The aim of our paper is to research the experience of the European Union concerning Communication Policy elaboration.

In this article by common information and communication policy we mean a policy with a common set of guidelines, decisions, rules, measures and codes of conduct adopted by the European institutions and implemented by the European institutions and the governments of the Member States [7].

The European Commission sets that communication is more than information: it establishes relations and initiates a dialogue with European citizens, it listens carefully and it connects to people, it is an essential part of the political process [1].

In March 2002, the European Parliament adopted a report calling for improved EU information policies and the development of a comprehensive communications strategy. In July 2002, the Commission produced a communication on a new strategy for its information and communication policy. The Commission has made communication one of the strategic objectives for its term of office, recognising it fully as a policy in its own right.

In July 2005 The Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe was launched. Its main objective was to ensure more effective communication about Europe supported within the Commission by a modern and more professional approach across all departments. The Action Plan grounds on a new approach aimed at earning people's interest and trust, namely

- *listening*: communication is a dialogue and the EU citizens should have the possibility to express their opinions so that the Commission can understand their perceptions and concerns; the citizens should have a direct bearing on EU policy formulation and output;
- *communicating*: EU policies and activities, as well as their impact on everyday lives, have to be communicated and advocated in a manner that people can understand and relate to;
- *connecting with citizens by "going local":* Good communication requires excellent understanding of local audiences. The Commission's communication activities must be resourced and organised in such a way as to address matching demographic and national and local concerns, and to convey information through the channels citizens prefer and in the language they can understand [1].

In October 2005, Commissar M. Wallström launched the Commission's "Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate," urging member states to start a debate with citizens on the future of the EU [8].

On 1 February 2006 the Commission adopted the White Paper on a European Communication Policy which was intended to give the EU an overall communication

strategy within which to work. The main purpose of the White Paper was to offer a way forward and to invite all the players to contribute their ideas on how best to work together to close the gap of the deficit of democracy.

The cornerstone of the White Paper is Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which claims that everyone has the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers [3].

The White Paper states that the effective communication is to be based on the following principles:

• *inclusiveness:* all citizens should have access in their own language to information about matters of public concern. This information should be made widely available through a wide range of channels, including the mass media and new technologies such as the Internet. People from all walks of life in all EU countries should be helped to develop the skills they need to access and use that information (it is particularly important in the case of minorities, disabled citizens and other groups that might systematically be excluded from participation in the public sphere);

• *diversity:* EU communication policy must respect the full range of views in the public debate as European citizens come from widely diverse social and cultural backgrounds and hold a wide variety of political views;

• *participation:* citizens should have a right to express their views, be heard and have the opportunity for dialogue with the decision-makers. This principle is of particular importance at EU level, where there is an added risk that institutions are remote from the citizens.

The Paper states five areas for action in partnership with other institutions, governments and civil society:

1) to anchor the right to freedom of information in the EU and national institutions, it suggests developing a European Charter or Code of Conduct on Communication. A special website on Europa will invite reactions from citizens on this document;

2) to "empower citizens", it proposes to provide tools and instruments to improve civic education (e.g. a network of teachers, digitally connected European libraries), connect people to each other (e.g. physical and virtual meeting places) and strengthen the relationship between citizens and institutions (e.g. minimum standards for consultation);

3) the White Paper recommends that the EU work better with the media and focus more on new technologies such as the Internet, but does not manage to define exactly how;

4) understanding European public opinion better: the Paper mentions a network of national experts in public opinion research and an independent Observatory for European Public Opinion;

5) The White Paper underlines the need to "do the job together" by communicating Europe via partnerships between the EU institutions, member states, regional and local levels, political parties and civil society organizations [9].

On 30 September 2006 the EurActiv Yellow Paper on EU Communication, entitled *"Decentralise radically: Empower the multipliers!"* was published. The Yellow Paper revealed that there is still room for improvement in a number of areas, specifically,

• communication is still largely centralised and comes from Brussels;

• there is still no overview of spending across institutions, directorates-general, programmes and member states;

• strategy needs to focus more on individuals or groups with whom communication can improve and efforts can yield results. The target of "active EU citizenship" for every citizen is too broad and unrealistic [10].

Expanding on the Plan D initiative, "Debate Europe" was launched in spring 2008. It aims to encourage debate about the future of Europe through public consultations and online networks, and to narrow the gap between European and national politics through debates and exhibitions in European cities. The launch was timed to coincide with the run-

up to the European Parliament elections in 2009 [4]. However, communication before the 2009 Parliament elections did not have enough impact, which was reflected by another decrease in turnout. So still there are many reasons behind the EU's communication challenge:

1) there is a general lack of trust in politicians and governments in all modern western democracies;

2) the EU has a unique and complex system of decision-making which is hard to understand and there is a lack of attention paid to it in national education systems;

3) linguistic barriers add to the complexity of EU policies;

4) national decision-makers have a tendency to blame the EU when unpopular measures need to be introduced and to take the sole credit for popular EU decisions;

5) there are no genuine EU-wide political parties and therefore any referenda or election with a European dimension will always be seen through a national filter;

6) there are no big EU-wide media and national media will look at EU policies only within the context of their national political system;

7) the EU's information and communication strategy has always had more of an institutional and centralised PR dimension;

8) the role of member states in communicating Europe at national level has always been underestimated [5].

The Commission has set the next political direction of communication for the period of 2010-2014:

• the dialogue with the citizens and other actors of the civil society as the main feature of the present Commission will remain to be of the utmost importance;

• the Commission will double its efforts to carry communication in the member-states and regions in partnership with the Parliament while listening to the citizens and solving important issues;

• the gap can be overcome only in partnership with national and regional authorities [2].

In the conclusion we may say that the EU communication is already a highly political commitment, but the European messages have often missed the link between concrete policy actions or legislation adopted and their wider meaning for the whole European integration process. It is necessary to remember why and what for the European Union was conceived.

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