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External Communication from Georgian Perspective

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Historical introduction

Republic of Georgia declared independence on 26 V 1918, right after the Russian Revolution of 1917. The parliamentary election was won by the Menshevik Georgian Social-Democratic Party, which leader, Noe Zhordania¹, who became prime minister of Georgia².

According to Stefan Talmon, despite the Soviet takeover in February, 1921, Noe Jordania was recognized as the legitimate head of the Georgian Government by France, UK, Belgium, and Poland through the 1930s.³

On 9 IV 1991, 8 months before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia declared independence on 26 V. As a first President of independent Georgia was elected Zviad Gamsakhurdia⁴, who stoked Georgian nationalism and vowed to assert Tbilisi authority over regions such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia that were given a status of the autonomous regions under the Soviet Union. As soon as Georgia was recognized as an independent state the government started EU-Georgia relations. External communication of the state wasn't anything special those times simply because of the civil war which had place in Georgia during 1992-1993.

Since 1994 Georgia began the process of preparation to the sign the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement⁵. The Agreement was signed in Luxembourg on 22 IV 1996. The PCA, which determines the major framework for future relations between the EU-Georgia, was signed by the EU Member States, the President of

¹ R. Jordania, *Georgia, Between Hope and Fea*, „Washington Post”, 21 VIII 2008.

² P. Nasmyth, *Georgia in the Mountains of Poetry*, New York 2006, p. 332.

³ S. Talmon, *Recognition of Governments in International Law*, Oxford 2001, p. 289-290.

⁴ <https://www.president.gov.ge/en/History/ZviadGamsakhurdia> (21 VII 2014).

⁵ *Official Journal of the European Communities, Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part*, 4 VIII 1999, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:1999:205:0003:0038:EN:PDF> (21 VII 2014).

the European Commission and the President of Georgia and entered into force in 1999.

Since 1995 Georgia benefits from the EU's Generalized System of Preferences.

On 1 IX 1997, in compliance with the resolution of the Parliament of Georgia, Georgia started the harmonization process of national legislation with the EU law. Clear steps of Georgian government towards the integration into the EU were fulfilled through the external communication tools on the state-to-state level, which were not defined as any sort of strategy.

On 7 II 2003, the EU appointed the Special Representative for the South Caucasus demonstrating the EU's interest toward the region. Bringing the attention from outside was used as an influencing instrument on the demand of the reforms provided inside the state.

After the elections on January 4 I 2004, as soon as the new government of Georgia was announced⁶, was created the position of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration – within the Government of Georgia on 17 XII 2004 according to the Presidential Decree # 597⁷. As the first State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration was appointed Mr. Giorgi Baramidze⁸, who on 26 IV 2006 was charged with implementation of obligations of a Vice Prime Minister of Georgia⁹ on the basis of the Decree.

The External Communication from Georgian Perspective

In order to define strategic communication, it is worth to refer to meaning of „strategy” in relation to the terms of „policy” and „tactics”, which are derived from Greek. The first one comes from *polis*, the city state and belongs to legislature, explaining the goals and, objectives and priorities of the state. The second one is derived from *strategos*, the general who was responsible for implementation of policy decisions¹⁰. Therefore strategy is a designed plan how, which drafts how the desired policy goals have to be achieved. In terms of political communication, strategy refers to the whole plan of communication of policies.

The Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration was created on 31 XII 2004 according to the Decree #133 of the Government of

⁶ <http://www.parliament.ge/en/saparlamento-saqmianoba/saqartvelos-wina-mowvevis-parlamentebi-1317/saqartvelos-parlamenti-2004-2008-ww-1321> (21 VII 2014).

⁷ <http://eu-nato.gov.ge/en/structure/history> (21 VII 2014).

⁸ <http://www.parliament.ge/en/parlamentarebi/moadgileebi-4/parlamentis-tavmdjdomaris-moadgile-giorgi-baramidze> (21 VII 2014).

⁹ <http://www.mfa.gov.ge> (21 VII 2014).

¹⁰ J. Pamment, *New Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century, A comparative study of policy and practice*, New York 2013, p. 5.

Georgia. The objective of establishing the Office of the State Minister was aiming the deepening Georgia's cooperation with the EU and NATO and facilitating the political, legal, military, economic and cultural integration. Among other aims, the Office of the State Minister was asked to „elaborate and monitor strategic and action plans in cooperation with the line ministries/state agencies. Establishing regular and direct contacts with the European communities and NATO has been defined as one of the key tasks of the Office”¹¹. It was the first time, when the „strategic plans” were mentioned.

One of the functions of the State Minister's Office is to provide information to society at large on the European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes and to contribute to the popularization of specific topics. For this objective the minister in cooperation with the representatives of non-governmental organizations, media, business circles, representatives of higher educational institutions and relevant international organizations, has developed *The Information and Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on European Integration for the period of 2014-2017*.¹²

In order to effectively fulfill the goals, were created three departments within the Office of the State Minister: European Integration Coordination Department, Euro-Atlantic Integration Coordination Department and EU Programs Coordination Department. On 10 VII 2004 according to Governmental Decree N76 was established Georgia's EU Integration Commission¹³, which was chaired by the Prime Minister of Georgia. Among the tasks of the Commission were „to support implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy¹⁴ Action Plan (ENP AP) and discuss ongoing implementation process”. On June 14, 2004 Georgia joined the European Neighborhood Policy.

Georgia's EU Integration Commission had to promote the harmonization of Georgian legislation with the EU *acquis communautaire* and to facilitate the implementation of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between EU and Georgia, which entered into force in 1999 and transformed into legal basis of the cooperation between the EU and Georgia.

Within the scope of its competence, the Office of the State Minister participates in the elaboration process of strategic action plans of different state agencies. In 2005, „State Commission of Georgia on NATO Integration” and „State Commission of Georgia on EU Integration” were created as per the Governmental Decree. For the reason of informing public on Georgia's NATO integration and future plans, a Legal Entity of Public Law „Information Center on NATO” was created in 2005 under the state control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹¹ <http://eu-nato.gov.ge/en/structure/history> (21 VII 2014).

¹² <http://eu-nato.gov.ge/en/news/4913> (21 VII 2014).

¹³ <http://eu-nato.gov.ge/en/eu/gov-commission> (21 VII 2014).

¹⁴ http://www.enpi-info.eu/main.php?id=344&id_type=2 (21 VII 2014).

Lately, NATO Information Centers were decentralized, i.e. were created in the every state university and mayors' Offices in order to deliver relevant knowledge, inform the population about the intention of the government and at the same time educate the civil society. It is necessary to inform not only the civil society, but more important the part of the population residing on the territories referred to under the Law of Georgia as Occupied Territories.¹⁵

The aim of The Information and Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on European Integration for the period of 2014-2017 is „to improve the provision of objective information to the population of Georgia on the European integration process, and to inform the international community about Georgia's process of integration with Europe, which includes the sharing of European values, in order to improve the image of the country”¹⁶. The Strategy supports the successful fulfillment of the process related to Georgia's integration into the European Union which is the key of importance in attracting foreign investments to Georgia, as well as in increasing the trade potential of the country and enhancing the free movement of citizens. The document aims the improvement of relations between business circle, the promotion of tourism and educational and cultural exchange programs.

The course of Georgia towards the integration with the European Union was and is supported by all key political and social groups, political parties and representatives of civil society. According to the public opinion poll conducted by the Caucasus Research and Resource Center¹⁷ in 2009, 66% of Georgia's population would like to receive more information on the European Union¹⁸. At the same time, 89% of the population of Georgia considers that support of Georgia by the EU is very important.¹⁹

The Information and Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on European Integration for the period of 2014-2017 is based on three main components:

- Education;
- Information;
- Public promotion.

Education component considers work with different target groups through specific educational programs directly or indirectly related to the European integration process.

¹⁵ *State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation*, <http://www.civil.ge/files/files/SMR-Strategy-en.pdf> (21 VII 2014).

¹⁶ *Communication and Information Strategy of the Government of Georgia in the sphere of EU Integration for the period of 2014*, p. 3.

¹⁷ <http://www.crrc.ge/> (21 VII 2014).

¹⁸ CRRC, Eurasia Foundation, *Knowledge and Attitudes toward the EU in Georgia*, Tbilisi 2011, p. 31.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

Information component aims to increase the awareness among various target groups, such as universities, NGOs, media, business and professional unions and associations, of the EU institutions and the decision-making processes within these institutions. The specific effort is directed to ensure that ethnic minorities residing on the territory of Georgia receive this information in an understandable language.²⁰ The emphasis in addition is paid to the painful reforms that the Government of Georgia committed itself to implement and the information which has to be provided to the public concerning the need to launch these reforms.

Public promotion aspires to support the European integration process through providing an active dialogue with the target groups by facing their needs in terms of information on the achievements gained within the framework of the European integration process. Another objective of this component is the promotion of Georgia's European integration way among the political centers of the EU member states, as well as in the EU's institutions and through the cooperation with civil society institutions in the EU member states.

The key message of Information and Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on European Integration is the following: „In spite of the fact that the process of European Integration involves the need to implement a number of fundamental and complex reforms, this constitutes a unique opportunity for each citizen of Georgia to improve the standard of living for himself and his family”.²¹ Special attention is considered for the language used for the communication processes as well as the content of the key messages has to be adapted to the specific characteristics of the relevant target groups and foreign media.

The Strategy considers communication on national and international level.

Communication on the national level includes appropriate communication channels for the target groups residing in Georgia, such as are young people, vulnerable elements of the population and disseminators that represents the subjects having impact on the formation of public opinion.

A key component of the communication process on the international level includes a strategic aim, namely the mobilization of stronger support from EU member states and their citizens. For this purpose the strategy goal is to improve the image of Georgia on the international arena and to provide more precise information on the sharing of European values by Georgian population to EU member states and European citizens. The international communication process includes the following target groups:

- Eastern Partnership countries;
- Organizations and persons that have an impact on the shaping of public opinion, attitudes and perception in the EU member states;

²⁰ *Communication and Information Strategy...*, p. 5.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

- Georgian citizens residing in the EU and Georgian diasporas abroad;
- Interest groups.

Therefore, the external communication strategy targets diplomatic missions and representations of EU countries accredited to Georgia, international organizations, the EU Delegation to Georgia, EU institutions and officials, academic circles of EU countries, international NGOs and foreign media. Organizations and persons who have an impact on the shaping of public opinion and perception in the EU include first of all the players of the political decision-making process in the member states. The goal of the communication process with this specific target group is to provide information on the progress gained in the sphere of European integration. The channels of communication within this process are Georgian diplomatic missions and representations accredited to EU member states.

On the basis of coordination with public entities government institutions have to work on the shaping of a positive image of the country and ensure information to the target groups on the progress achieved by Georgia on its road towards deepened integration with the European Union. Communication-based approach is quite clearly used in the external strategy of Georgia, though the „art of changing people’s minds shouldn’t be confused with teaching people the phrases one wants to hear them use”²². The strategy can’t be implemented by telling the world about it, therefore the information and feedback obtained as a result of the dialogue taking place with the above mentioned target groups have a significant role in the planning of the future communication process.

Taking into attention the diversity of the interest groups and time-oriented perspective, the communication with them requires the investment of essential financial and human resources. Therefore, the communication is concentrated on two major areas:

- 1) Improvement of the image of the country;
- 2) Communication on country-specific issues.

The first element aims increasing the awareness in EU countries of the historical, cultural, economic values and capabilities of Georgia. The second one involves specific issues which are the object of high concern on behalf of the population in the EU member states.

It is obvious enough that the international community should be provided with wide scale of information on the identity of the country that will contribute to foster a better understanding of Georgia by the population of the EU member states. The explicit intention of the state to create such a dialog between the international community and Georgia is quite challenging, because „even if a country can occasionally speak with something like a single voice, international public opinion can

²² S. Anholt, *Places, Identity, Image and Reputation*, London 2010, p. 33.

never and will never do so”²³ According to Simon Anholt²⁴, the only exception to this rule can be cultural relations, which with time, skills and patience can develop into a form of a real dialogue between peoples. Anyway, the long-term perspective, which Georgia establishes in its external communication strategy, includes namely cultural elements and such an exchange of cultural dialogues with the EU member states will also contribute to bringing Georgia closer to the EU.

In context of communication with the partners, the Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration cooperates with the state institutions, organizations and individuals whose activities may have an impact on the shaping of public opinion.²⁵ Taking into attention the pilot importance of the Strategy it has partners both at the local and international level.

The first one, cooperation with local partners, consists of:

- 1) *Local Governments*, because the cooperation with local authorities, communities and representative of local organizations is one of the main focal points of the Communication Strategy.
- 2) *Students and Academic Circles*, because the role of these institutions in shaping the values of young people is of key importance to the process of Euro integration.
- 3) *Non-Governmental Organizations*, which are linked to the promotion of European values and that implement programs and initiate activities based on the promotion of these values.
- 4) *Business Sector*, which considers constructive cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce, the Consumer Rights Protection Association, as well as with representatives of small and medium businesses and professional associations.
- 5) *Community Organizations of Ethnic Minorities Residing in Georgia*²⁶. Taking into attention, that community based organizations of ethnic minorities existing in Georgia play a significant role in the shaping of public opinion it is important to include them into the fulfillment of the activities that are part of the Strategy.
- 6) *Media*. The media and especially TV broadcasters play a decisive role in a shaping public opinion. A systematic cooperation with the media represents

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

²⁴ <http://www.simonanholt.com/> (21 VII 2014).

²⁵ In the Strategy they are referred to as disseminators.

²⁶ According to the „National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia Assessment Survey Report 2007-2008”, conducted by the UN Association of Georgia of a total population of 4,371,535 the following ethnic groups are living in Georgia: Georgians – 83,8%, Azerbaijanis – 6,5%, Armenians – 5,7%, Abkhazians – 0,1%, Ossetians – 0,9%, Russians – 1,5%, Greeks – 0,3%, Kists – 0,2%, Ukrainians – 0,2%, Yezidis – 0,4%. http://www.una.ge/pdfs/publications/survey_report_eng.pdf (21 VII 2014).

the instrument of the effective dissemination of information regarding Georgia's integration process with the European Union. Georgian Public Broadcaster provides regular coverage of issues regarding the process of European Integration, (for example visa liberalization, education, trade relations etc.) as it is foreseen under the law. The government aims an intensive collaboration with printed and electronic media at the central and local levels.

- 7) *Religious Associations.*
- 8) *Public Institutions.* The productive outcome of the reforms to be implemented in the framework of the European integration process depends to a large extent on the performance of public institutions, which are the key partners in the communication process, in particular in the development of slogan messages for the segments of target groups and the dissemination itself.

The process of information exchange between the central authorities and diplomatic, consular and trade representations of Georgia to EU member states requires trainings in communication, public relations and grass-root diplomacy as well as improved coordination, which has to be fulfilled according to the strategy priorities.

Partners at the International Level represented in the Strategy are the following:

- 1) *The Delegation of the European Union to Georgia.* The financial, technical and organizational support and assistance of EU institutions to Georgia is of key importance to the process of European Integration. The emphasis has to be made on the EU assistance to Georgia which is provided through different financial instruments.
- 2) *Consular, Trade and Cultural Missions of EU Member States to Georgia,* represent an additional channel of communication with the European Union. Taking into attention the fact that the governments of EU member states are the core stone in the setting agenda of the EU policy towards Georgia, it is substantial to maintain relations with these missions and to ensure them with the systematic information.
- 3) *International Organizations* and their experts can broaden essential technical and professional assistance to the Government of Georgia in the implementation process of the Strategy itself.
- 4) *International Funds* are contributing to the budget of the country via the direct EU financial assistance.
- 5) *Foreign Media.* Considering that within the process of communication with foreign media is strategically important to attract their concern towards the questions linked to Georgia's European integration process more actively, the relations with the foreign media are set as a component in the Annual Action Plans.

- 6) *Georgian Diaspora Organizations abroad*, represent important partners in the process of implementing the Strategy, because they are externally placed for the information dissemination on Georgia's European integration process to Georgian citizens residing abroad.

Approaches and Implementation of the Strategy

„The policy-based approach of competitive identity is far more challenging, since the implementation consists of proving the vision, rather than just communicating it. Turning the strategy into an agent of change within the country is without doubt the most challenging aspect of competitive identity.”²⁷ The Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration in cooperation with other relevant state entities, Georgian Public Broadcaster, representatives of the National Platform of the *Eastern Partnership Civil Society's Forum* and other partner organizations have to develop an Annual Action Plan for the implementation of the Communication Strategy.

The Action Plan itself reflects the activities applicable to the implementation of the Strategy, focuses on the forms and channels of communication, identifies target groups, activities, indicators to measure the fulfillment of the Strategy, implementing agencies, potential partners and sources of funding. The implementation of the Action Plan is under the supervision of a working group set up within the Commission on Integration of Georgia with the European Union. This working group consists of representatives from relevant ministries, variety of public agencies, and Heads of Departments of media and public relations inside the relevant governmental institutions.

Channels and Forms of Communication

In case of Georgia, TV and radio represent the most accessible sources of information both for the target groups residing inside Georgia and for those residing abroad. The aim of the messages distributed by the radio and TV channels is oriented on the providing of the activities oriented on the increasing the awareness about the EU and NATO in order to insure society with objective and comprehensive information on the ongoing process. Participation of political and public leaders in talk shows allow for direct communication, confrontation of opinions and the involvement of the viewers in the debates.

²⁷ S. Anholt, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

In order to conclude has to be mentioned the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008, that played a role of catalyst in the concentrating information and narrowing the communication of the state to the particular target areas and groups of society on different level. The establishment of governmental commissions specifically in the field of the EU integration in 2004 and 2005, providing internal reforms aiming the improvement of the channels of internal communication and sharing the changes to other former USSR members, providing of Foreign Policy Strategy in 2006-2009 and later 2009-2012 were quite significant steps towards the real transformation of Georgia, but that wasn't enough still.

In 2013 the fact of declaring the Information and Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on European Integration for the period of 2014-2017 showed that the state formed a clear vision and refines its own policy towards positioning the state not only in the region, but on the international arena. After establishing the clear position and framing exact direction the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU was simply the question of time. Relevantly the signing the Partnership Agreement together with Ukraine and Moldova will bind the three countries more closely to the EU both economically and politically, that one more time confirmed how important is not just declaring the position, but the implementation of the reforms and formation of clear external communication strategies.

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