



Estonian EU information strategy

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R i i g i k o g u

General facts

population: 1 358 500

area: 45 227 sq. km.

- Switzerland
- Denmark
- Netherlands



GDP per cap 2007: \$ 26 000



Where did we start from?

- Public opinion poll in the beginning of 2001:
51% opposed to EU accession
only 35% were supporters
- Main reason: low support to the government
- Estonia became “famous” as the most euro-sceptical candidate country
- Luckily in May 2001 – Estonia won the Eurovision song contest and this changed the emotional atmosphere



What went wrong?

Politicians spoke eurospeak:

- EU has secured peace in Europe
- EU nations have common ideals etc

What did people think?

- EU means significantly higher consumer prices – 80%
- Estonia will lose its sovereignty – 48%

Values (RISC analysis)

1. Fear of changes, especially among undecided's
2. Closeness' – localness
3. Horizontal, not vertical relations
4. Importance of money –the world is seen through 'money filter'
5. Social aspects unimportant, personal life important
6. Low readiness to act for the benefit of the society – focus on social developments is ineffective
7. High national esteem



Practical guidelines based on values

1. Communication by persons, not by institutions
2. Less government communication, more spokespersons from private and public sectors
3. Less EU symbols – more national colours etc.
4. Messages about personal life, not about social processes
5. Estonians are afraid of uncertainties and social change – major changes related to the ‘no’ vote (aspects of economy and security)



Main principles of the communication strategy

- Continuity and regularity
- Comprehensiveness of information
- Objective information only
- Efficiency
- Pro-activity of communications
- Reactivity of communication
- Flexibility



Target groups

- Primary target groups:
working people, rural people, businessmen, retired people,
students, non-Estonians
- Disseminating target groups:
 - Media
 - Opinion leaders
 - Representatives of interest groups
 - Yes- and no-organisations



Strategical messages

- Wealth – EU will help Estonians to reach to the living standard of Western Europe
- Freedom – to travel, to work, to learn
- Security – economical, social
- Sovereignty – will strengthen
- Democracy – this decision can be directly influenced by every citizen



Communication tools

- Interviews
- Briefings and press-releases
- Providing background information
- Commissioning surveys and publishing results
- Opinion articles
- Production of tele- and radioprograms, publications
- Professional training for journalists



Why did you vote “yes”?

- Life quality of young families will improve
22%
- Higher living standard
16%
- Estonia can't stay alone
11%
- Estonia will develop faster
11%
- There is no other choice
8%



Why did you vote “no”?

- Life becomes more difficult, consumer prices will rise
26%
- Loss of sovereignty 11%
- It is too early to join 11%
- Its no in Estonia's interests 10%
- I don't trust EU 5%



Pleased with membership

- Estonia has benefited from membership in EU - 78%
- Only in Ireland this rating is higher (79%). But in several countries this rating is down to 25-30%.
- It shows that Estonians had realistic expectations about EU membership unlike some other new members



Lessons learnt – positive

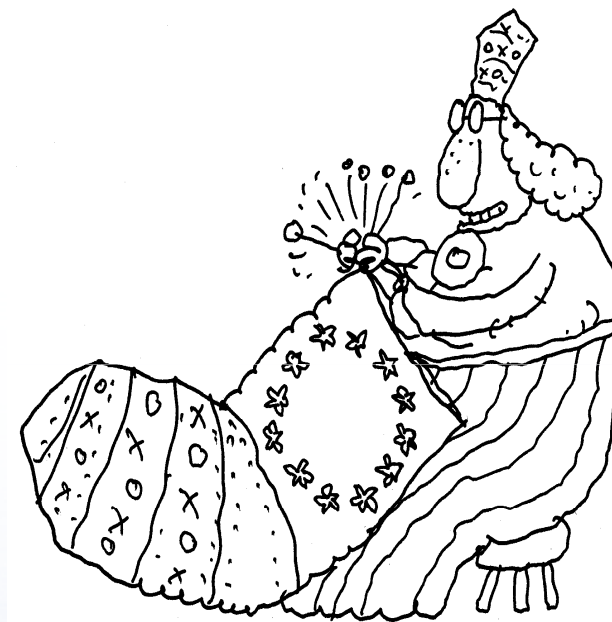
1. You need to know, what kind of information is really important for the voters and focus on it
2. In media relations the key-word is pro-activity. There will be negative stories anyway, but they can be balanced by selling good news
3. Media doesn't trust politicians and civil servants, thus its crucial to cooperate with independent opinion leaders
4. It's often more efficient to write articles, organise news-worthy events and commission surveys than to produce costly TV-programs, publications etc.



Lessons learnt – negative

1. Media is driven by principle – “bad news, good news”. Therefore they will publish lots of false, but funny or frightening stories, based on very unreliable sources
2. EU has not a very positive image (bureaucracy, un-efficiency etc) and that’s the reason why both media and voters will so easily believe to all sorts of disinformation
3. Euro-information officers are often left alone to tell the bad news, because politicians and other civil servants don’t want to get negative image
4. No matter how good you are, you will be blamed for the lack of information anyhow

Thank you for
your attention!



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