



Draft, 17 September 2009

OUTLINE OF THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF ARMENIA

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BACKGROUND

This document was written following a decision of the Working Group under the National Security Council of Armenia of 15 June 2009. The overall task of the Working Group is to elaborate, by May 2010, a national information and communication strategy on Armenia-EU cooperation in the contemporary framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership. The strategy should ensure public support to Armenia's European integration policy, including the implementation of the respective practical program ("List of Measures") endorsed by the Decree of President of 6 May 2009.

Apart from the strategy outline, AEPLAC supports this activity through a public awareness survey on the EU, to be finalised by end October 2009.

APPROACH

Any communication strategy has to be based on the organizational strategy. It means that a communication strategy can be successful only when it is based on the existing working plans of the Armenian administration in the field of European integration. In Armenia, such working plan is the mentioned List of Measures for 2009-11.

Defining the strategy. Communication does not just happen, it has to be organized, developed and built. The first step in this process is to define a communication strategy. A good communication strategy allows to exercise better control over the European integration process and to frame these issues in a broad and long-term perspective.

Collective process. Defining the communication strategy is a task that is best carried out when it engages representatives of all those organizations which will be responsible for its implementation. This method ensures that different kind of expertise will be pooled in, that both experts of European integration and communication will contribute to it. The Working Group under the National Security Council of Armenia is the platform to ensure the collective process.

SEQUENCING

The strategy can be developed in several stages:

- A preliminary outline can be prepared by the task-force which works at this body of the Armenian administration, which will have the leading role in its implementation. Nevertheless it is important to include even during this very first phase in the task-force representatives from some other key organizations. For instance, if it is decided

that the National Security Council will be coordinating implementation of communication strategy, it is needed to include into the task-force representatives from the President's Office, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs etc. Involvement of civil society and international assistance projects is also essential.

- The outline of the communication strategy will then be submitted to the various other bodies of the Armenian administration for their respective comments and revisions. These partners can be both consulted individually or in the groups.
- Further it is suggested to reach out to those external partners who will have important role in the process of European integration (business and farmers organizations etc) and to get their input.
- The strategy will then be finalized by the task-force.
- Once the strategy has been established, it must be communicated to both internal and external partners. This will make it easier to integrate them into the process of developing more detailed communication activities.

MAIN COMPONENTS, TIMING AND EVALUATION

The communication strategy should establish the following:

- Objectives
- Target groups
- Messages
- Tools and activities
- Resources
- Timescale
- Evaluation and amendment

Objectives. Objectives are the key to the success of any communication strategy. They should ensure that communication strategy of the Armenian administration is organizationally driven rather than driven by communication. Communication activities of the Armenian administration are not an end in itself but should serve and hence be aligned with organizational objectives. It must be asked what can be done within communications to help the administration achieve its core objectives.

Aligning communication and organizational objectives will also help to reinforce the importance and relevance of communication and thereby make a convincing case for the proper resourcing of communications activities within the administration.

Target groups. The Armenian administration should identify those target groups with whom it needs to communicate to achieve the organizational objectives. As it has been suggested by AEPLAC earlier, efficient communication strategy must rely on public awareness surveys, which explains what people know about the EU integration, what expectations and prejudices about it they have.

The most important target groups in order to achieve an objective may not always be the most obvious ones, and targeting audiences such as the media may not always help to achieve your objectives. Quite often organizations would like a higher media and political profile, yet activities aiming towards this may sometimes be self-serving and only driven by communication, with no wider impact. They can even have a negative effect if you dedicate

too many resources to media relations that would otherwise be put for communicating with key stakeholders (business communities, farmers, teachers etc).

It has to be stressed that among the most important target groups there must always be listed members of your own organization or in this particular case different bodies within the Armenian administration and people working at them. Internal communication within the Armenian administration has to be one of the core parts of the communication strategy because so many different governmental bodies will be involved in the process of European integration. Communication strategy has to guarantee that all those governmental bodies will be given full information about the process in order to motivate them to participate in communication activities and to ensure that they will be able to distribute this information further to the external target groups.

Messages. Strategic targeting and consistency are key to the messages of the Armenian administration. Strategic messages have to be worked out based on reliable public surveys, as every society has its specific values and information needs. It is needed to create a comprehensive case covering all the key messages, and emphasize the different elements of the case for different target groups.

Tools and activities. It is essential to identify these communication tools and activities that are most appropriate to communicating the key messages to the target groups. These tools and activities will be suggested by your audiences, messages, or a combination of the two. It has to be ensured that tools and activities will be tailored to the realistic level of time and human and financial resources available.

Resources and timescale. The key rules to observe are always to deliver what you promise and never overpromise. It is suggested that the Armenian administration will use its resources and timescale to set legitimate levels of expectations and outline the case for more dedicated resources.

Evaluation and amendment. The effectiveness of communication strategy and its implementation has to be measured on a daily bases by the media monitoring and on the annual basis by the communication audit. This audit has to assess the strategy with both the internal and external audiences. If possible, it is suggested that some independent (possibly private sector) organization will do the work in order to ensure its credibility. The results of the communication audit have to considered and discussed carefully and used to amend the strategy.

Questions which should be answered by the communication audit might be:

- Did the public knowledge about European integration increase?
- Do the general public and key target groups support the objectives of the Armenian government?
- What messages and communication activities have worked or not worked efficiently?
- What kind of information is needed by the general public and key target groups and has not been currently supplied by the Armenian administration?