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**European Union Communication Policy in terms of incoming challenges.
Internet as the new hope for a better understanding the EU.**

Position Paper by

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Introduction

European Union (EU) Communication Policy emerged in the 1950s with first union structures such as European Coal and Steel Community, European Economic Community and European Atomic Energy Community which provide the frames of modern European Union we live in today. The new institutions had to inform about their existence not only citizens of the member states, but also - and especially in several dozen years - an international arena. When the member states' societies pressed charges against the European Community and its lack of transparency, European Community decided to improve an internal sphere of the communication policy (inside the EU) instead of the external one (outside the EU). The so called "democracy deficit" among the European institutions, brought some changes. After signing a Maastricht treaty in 1992, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) have emerged. The new body of CFSP was *de facto* responsible for both internal and external policy of the EU. That implied an extra need for a support from the communication policy.

EU Communication Policy

The European Union foreign policy have emerged in 1992 Maastricht treaty, but a debate on the effectiveness of this policy started few years ago, on the occasion of Arab Spring or Russian aggression on Ukraine etc. Cumbersome actions coming from the EU institutions in terms of the new challenges piling up in the last few years. EU Communication Policy has been restructured in response to them and right now is trying to deal with incoming problems.

Internal measures

From the very beginning, European Institutions (especially European Commission) were the main creators of the EU communication policy. That time, European Commission was an author of reports and documents which provide comprehensive information on European Union matters for member states. Unfortunately, reports made by the EC and European Parliament were inconsistent and illegible for a potential European citizen. The information was not described precisely enough to communicate societies what exactly had happened inside the Institutions. Moreover, there was a lack of information on how an ordinary people from the member states could possibly participate in creating the Community policies. Another issue was a coordination problem between the Commission Directorates-General (DGs), the Parliament and the Council. The Institutions wanted to avoid duplication of some competences in the communication policy. However, the main problem was to match each competence to a particular institution.

External measures

EU Communication Policy outside the EU borders fulfils another goal. Instead of internal legitimisation of the undertaken actions, external measures help in spreading pro-European values across the globe and help in thawing relationships between EU and abroad. What is

more, by the communication policy European Union is able to deflect any third-party propaganda. However, there is a risk behind European external measures and the EU universal values. Countries which had experienced colonialism can perceive them as a post-colonialism paternalism from the EU member states. Some of the international arena actors may see it as the EU propaganda. Therefore, the information packages coming from the Institutions should be measured and wisely channelled. After a strict selection, all the useful information can see the light of the day.

Modern EU communication policy




The treaty of Lisbon from 2009 have launched a significant institutional change. It has instituted the European External Action Service (EEAS). With the European Commission, the EEAS is the main creator of the common external communication policy. European Institutions have noticed how media outlets are important in making an efficient communication policy. Except the traditional media such as a television, a written press and a radio, there is an Internet – new source which appeared recently.

A new source of information

Year by year, an Internet becomes the most popular source of information. In 2011, the Eurobarometer published its research, where an Internet was classified as a third most popular media outlet in the EU. Almost 45 percent of respondents claimed they were using the Internet every day or almost every day. Next 18 percent claimed their usage as “few times a week” and 6 percent as “few times a month”. *A contrario* 23 percent of people maintained that they never use an Internet and only 8 percent do not have an infrastructure to surf online at all. The same research demonstrated that year by year less younger people (15 – 24 years old) watched a TV. Instead of this traditional source of information, this younger group used an Internet more than any other age group.

At the same time, when we take a closer look at the latest available media Eurobarometer (QE3.5 table below) research from Autumn 2015, the numbers differ significantly from these in the 2011 survey. Almost 60 percent of population use an Internet every day or almost every day which means growth by 15 percentage points in comparison to year 2011. The outcomes from groups of “few times a week” and “few times a month” Internet users are quite similar – 15 percent and 3 percent respectively. Nevertheless, when we are analysing a particular age group scores, it becomes clear why an Internet becomes a second most popular medium and why it is effectively going to take the lead in a near future. Over 90 percent of 15 – 24 years old respondents use the Internet every day and 98 percent use it at least once a week. In the 25 – 39 years old group it is 82 percent and 94 percent respectively. That depicts straightforwardly, how important is the Internet nowadays. For a European society in a reproductive age it becomes a standard as a television or a paper press were in the past.

QE3.5 Could you tell me to what extent you...?
Use the Internet (% - EU)

	Everyday/ Almost everyday	Two or three times a week + About once a week	Two or three times a month + Less often	Never	No access to this medium (SPONTANEOUS)	Don't know	At least once a week
EU28	59	14	3	17	7	0	73
 Gender							
Man	64	13	3	14	6	0	77
Woman	55	14	4	19	7	1	69
 Age							
15-24	90	8	0	1	1	0	98
25-39	82	12	2	3	1	0	94
40-54	67	17	4	9	3	0	84
55 +	31	14	4	35	15	1	45
 Education (End of)							
15-	23	11	4	41	20	1	34
16-19	58	18	4	15	5	0	76
20+	78	12	3	6	1	0	90
Still studying	92	7	0	1	0	0	99
 Socio-professional category							
Self-employed	73	13	5	6	2	1	86
Managers	86	11	2	1	0	0	97
Other white collars	74	17	4	4	1	0	91
Manual workers	65	18	4	10	3	0	83
House persons	46	15	3	28	8	0	61
Unemployed	66	13	3	15	3	0	79
Retired	26	12	4	39	18	1	38

A television was the main source of knowledge about the EU (its structures and policies) until few years ago. However, that tendency has completely changed from 2007. The position of a TV and other traditional mediums undergoes deterioration. The Internet is the only medium which improves constantly its status, becoming a global leader in terms of information availability. There is one remarkable fact – the number of people searching for the information about the EU online or through the traditional outlets differs among the member states. In Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Holland and Estonia the Internet is more popular than a television nowadays. However these countries are the exceptions, because in other 23 member states, a TV is more popular. A domination of the traditional media outlets (especially the TV) does not mean that they give enough airtime to the EU institutions. There is a permanent problem with that – said Secretariat-General of the European Commission. The time given (to the Institutions and the EU at all) by the TV stations is more or less 10

percent of the whole airtime. *Notabene* information on the United States matters have the same airtime in the European TV stations.

From almost 30 years, the European Commission realises the fact, that the communication policy is not using main traditional media outlets as effective as it could and as it should. Numerous attempts from the EU trying to change this bad situation were made. Unfortunately, none of them brought the longed-for result. The main factor of these failures was the media situation among the member states. Each country has its own television or radio stations and written press. The consumers tastes are different too. That makes it really difficult to overcome the obstacle of number of media. Moreover, the European outlets such as EuroNews have too small recognition and popularity to pursue its goals - like spreading the European values. Furthermore, there is a massive lingual issue – 28 different countries with many languages and their own varieties of accents etc.

The new hope

In terms of European variety and numerous problems with pursuing a single communication policy, the Internet seems to be a promising media outlet. First of all, it enables an unlimited information transferring. What is more, it is very fast and low-cost way to communicate with wide groups of people, no matter how far they are living from each other. Substantial advantage of the internet is the possibility of interaction with people. Nonetheless, some of the traditional media problems can be applied to the Internet too, for instance lingual issues – dissimilar language interferes a free flow of the information. Another example is a limited focus of the internet users – a content on the EU matters could be perceived as unattractive if the Institutions would present it in improper way. There are plenty of corporations, political parties, governments, organisations, individuals etc. who try to capture cybernauts' attention. Seemingly, the European Commission is now competing with others in acquiring it too.

EU in social media

The number of institutions that are responsible for specific areas of the European Union causes extremely complex communication, Internet and social media. European Union as a single entity does not exist in the social media. It is represented by bodies, institutions, and even individual programs. However, there are also European bodies, such as the European Investment Fund, the European Investment Bank or the European Data Protection Supervisor without any social media activity. There is no clear code why some agencies or programs created their own channels and some important organs did not.

Those institutions which have its own social media channels and its support teams usually present slightly different content and activity. The efficiency of their work is well visible in the amount of people who like their websites. From the most important institutions Council of the European Union has 277 160 likes, European Commission 698 579 and finally European Parliament reaches great number of 2 118 335 likes on Facebook (18/04/2017). As

can be seen from the number of followers, European Parliament uses internet most actively and efficiently. Undoubtedly, the European Parliament is the most social institution of the EU. PE has adopted a policy of appearing in all emerging social media. Thanks to the national representations, not only in the global or European media but also local ones. It has appeared on many media such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+, YouTube, LinkedIn, Flickr, Spotify, Storify, Foursquare, Reddit and Blogs. It can be found on Pinterest, where dozens of boards are created on different topics (and in different languages). The European Parliament also has its profile on Instagram, Vine, and even on snapchat. Depending on the activity and interest of the society, PE intensifies, restricts or withdraws its activities.

Social media activities

It is extremely difficult to gain public interest in European affairs, thus, communication needs to be coordinated in Brussels, however, matched to the national audience in terms of language, suitable explanation, as well as the choice of information most interesting for the state.

Social media opens up new possibilities, gives opportunity to use a variety of formats: video, images, graphics, texts etc., often using the same medium. However, although some forms resemble old media, they should be used differently. It is unlikely that a young social media users will be attracted by a few hours of debate, but compilation of speech or a graphic film explaining the subject already could be interesting. Among European Union institutions pages despite the often high activity on various channels, content does not attract interest, and number of post views is often just several thousand.

The great advantage of social media is also interaction with other users. This gives opportunity to ask questions, comment information by the citizens to whom it is commented, their reactions, in turn, give instant feedback. This gives opportunity to immediately notice reaction to the proposal, thus, could be also seen as a tool for the transparency and democratization of the EU. This element function very well in the EU. Most comments do not remain unanswered. Most often prompt answer is given on the comment under the post, and often questions are collected for the special next post where answer are given by the specialist. The EU has also frequently animated discussion in social media by creating special hashtags and inviting users to discuss the topic.

An interesting idea is the EP Newshub project. This is an information service, platform that aggregates statements – MEPs, political groups, PE information posts from social media. Thus, it is possibly to quickly find out what subject is commented by members of the European Parliament the most or which MEPs are most active in the all social media.

Positive impact

In the United States, a number of studies have begun to examine the influence of social media on political activity and the election. Research presented that campaign held on

Facebook generated 340,000 additional votes nationwide. This means that the EU could also significantly increase turnout in the European elections thanks to the Internet. At the last election in 2014, a slight first attempt was made, also with a slight result. The attendance increased from 43% to 43.11%. It is possible that thanks to a suitable social media campaign, will increase the turnout in the next election.

New challenges

At a time when the EU has learned to better exploit and appreciate the internet and social media, the EU has begun to struggle with the refugee crisis and the announcement of UK's exit from the EU. These events have shown that the Internet is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can make the European Union more easily accessible to the public, facilitating an information campaign, but it also makes it easy to send false information to the public.

This means that the task at this point should not be merely informing the public about the activities of the EU, translating them new policies, but also attempting to verify and rectify false information.

With recent populist-nationalist tendencies emerging in the world, it is important to maintain right, high level content. Recently, false information mainly using Internet, distort perception of the European Union citizens. It is therefore important for the EU to focus on verifying information, overthrowing myths and educating public about the European Union. This is a very important to present facts to the people who bases their views on those information. And they are the source of the legitimacy of the EU's actions.

Examples of such activities may be web pages and pages on Facebook "euomyths" or "EU vs.. Disinformation ", which was made as a response to the disinformation. As it was described earlier, the EU allocates activities outside Member States as a foreign affairs, diplomacy and internal policy information to member states. Unfortunately, presented examples are mainly directed outside the European Union. In the case of EU vs. Disinformation is directed to the citizens of the Russian Federation. Incorrect information is taken from Russian traditional media or information provided on Facebook. However, it seems that this is a traditional approach to the media, not taking into account the easy exchange of information on the Internet, also between different countries and societies. Such a site could serve a wide audience both from member countries and beyond.

Conclusion

Over the years the EU has learned to use the Internet well and has improved its communication policy. However, level of involvement in the internet actions and especially social media of different institutions is significantly different. Some EU institutions effectively use social media, but there are still some which ignore importance of the new media. A

positive aspect is the general recognition and awareness of the importance of action in such areas.

At the same time, there are still areas for development, to create better transparency, the struggle against disinformation, education and reaching out to all citizens by treating internet as a whole. The European Community is able to positively surprised by its openness to new media, but also disappoint by treating it like the old media. Well managed social media channels can also be used as social media marketing or even diplomacy. Consequently, these actions should not be considered as additional, but rather as one of the main areas to develop.

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