

## KEY ELEMENTS OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR STRUCTURAL INSTRUMENTS

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**Abstract:** *European policies are carried out in accordance with the objectives and values assumed by the Member States. In most cases, implementation is accomplished through the participation of specialized personnel in the areas addressed. However, the population has the right to know how European staff are involved in solving the problems of European citizens and Member States. Given activities with high levels of abstraction, it is necessary to carry out public communication campaigns on the results and measures implemented. In this article we highlight the objectives and goals of the national communication strategy for structural instruments.*

**Key words:** public communication; transparency; information of the population; European funds; communication strategy.

### 1. Introduction. General Communication Framework

At EU level, a communication plan is developed for the entire funding period to achieve development goals. Currently, there are five types of European funds: ERDF, FS, FC, EAFRD and FEPAM, which provide for the financing of European objectives for the 2014-2020 period.

Financial allocations are consistent and accurate, and knowledge of common objectives at EU level as well as the funds to achieve them are a form of promoting values that transcend local elements that will not be able to provide such funding and which are protected by European public policies. For 2014-2020, "only cohesion policy will invest € 325 billion in the Member States, cities and regions of Europe to achieve common EU-wide targets for economic growth and jobs and tackling climate change, energy dependency and social exclusion." ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)). This investment is complemented by the participation of Member States that has a cumulative effect: "If the national contribution of the Member States is taken into account and the leverage effect of the instruments the estimated global impact of cohesion policy will probably reach 500 billion euros. The political reform of cohesion will ensure a maximum effect of these investments, which will be adapted to the specific needs of regions and cities." ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)).

In Romania, the amounts allocated through ESI are about 30.6 billion Euros, of which 22.4 billion are related to the structural instruments 2014-2020. European policy considers that the general public has the right to know how EU financial resources are used ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)).

## **2. The experience of communication strategies**

For the 2007-2013 period, communication activities were based on a National Communication Strategy that promoted the Structural Instruments through which the EU intervened to reduce development gaps. A Communication Plan has been developed for each Operational Program, and Horizontal Communication has been implemented through the Operational Technical Assistance Program.

In 2010 a national communication campaign was launched, with two TV spots and two radio spots for three weeks. Between 15 December 2012 and 15 March 2013, an integrated public information campaign was launched to promote funding through the Structural Instruments. The campaign consisted of creating and distributing 3 TV spots, 3 radio spots, 3 online banners, 3 brochures, 12 press releases, 6,000 posters and 115 outdoor panels ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)).

The impact of the two promotion campaigns was assessed by three opinion polls through which data on general information on the population were collected. Another objective of the evaluation was the knowledge of the benefits of European funding. In order to know the preferred information sources of the population, citizens' preferred channels of information were also analyzed. Conclusions of the surveys revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the information and promotion campaigns. The three surveys were conducted in three waves that took place in June 2010, March 2011 and September 2013 ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)).

In 2012, the Structure Information Tool Center (SITC) was set up, which only functioned for two years, although it had been designed since the programming period. Within SITC, there have been several departments that have provided information on Structural Instruments: a help desk, a call center, and a mailing address for providing information to anyone who wanted information on accessing and implementing structural instruments.

The impact of this center was reduced due to the fact that there was no territorial support structure, so that in 2013, 85% of the citizens interviewed had not heard about the existence of this center.

Instead, the [www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro) webpage has exceeded all vision targets, being an important source of information for those interested. This page was restructured in 2013 by SITC, to the standards required by the European Union. In addition to this activity, various promotional materials such as: brochures, internet banners, communication events, information seminars with media

representatives, informative and promotional materials were produced and distributed during the entire period of 2007-2013 ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)).

The analysis of the communication plans for the IS 2000-2013 revealed that the impact is limited in the case of the specific communication activities due to the ways in which public auctions can be carried out, there must be a cycle of public communication and promotion activities. The relationship with the press must be continuous on general and specific themes.

The evaluations revealed that over three years (2010-2013) the reputation of the structural instruments has increased significantly. The data collected through sociological surveys revealed an upward trend, ranging from 33%, to 40%, and the third wave to 48%, people who heard about structural instruments. However, only 28% of the people had sufficient information. The benefits of the structural instruments were mentioned by 70% of the interviewees in the third wave, but 61% believe that only a small number of people benefit from these funding. This conclusion shows that the communication plans should highlight the benefits of European funding for the entire Romanian society. Moreover, negative appreciations such as low trust in institutions, lack of transparency and difficulty in obtaining European funding can be corrected by improving the communication strategy for 2014-2020.

Sociological research has revealed that the eligible areas (infrastructure, health, human resources, education, and environmental protection) are known, but there is also a degree of confusion about the different categories of non-reimbursable funds (agriculture, culture, social protection, etc.). We are seeing an increase in both those who know the eligible areas and those who confuse existing funding with ineligible areas.

The same confusion is also found with regard to eligible beneficiaries for certain types of funding, and the idea is that they are granted to "anyone who needs money" ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)).

Sociological research has revealed that the Internet has become the most important source of information for those interested in knowing the conditions for obtaining European funding. Thus, the share of those who prefer the Internet increased from 13% in the first wave to 37% in the second wave, while the share of those who preferred the television decreased from 52% to 18%. Conclusions of sociological studies have highlighted that the transfer of communication strategies into the online environment will have a higher impact than those built over the other channels of communication. ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro))

Depending on the experiences of the period 2007-2013, for the new financing horizon, 2014-2020, the following objectives of the communication strategy have been set ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)):

"- to increase and strengthen the notoriety of the 2014-2020 Structural Instruments;

- to raise awareness of the role and contribution of the European Union to co-financing projects (including EU policy priorities and cohesion policy objectives);
- to increase the level of information for potential beneficiaries on the themes, priorities and funding interventions through the IS 2014-2020). "

Considering that the whole field of activity is the result of intermingling the activity of the public and private sectors, it is also necessary to understand the prospect of developing a professionalized marketing activity of the public sector. The purpose of such an activity is to inform the public about the efforts to implement activities of general interest. By using the concept of marketing, the idea of coherent action to promote the public image is concretized: "marketing is a social and managerial process through which individuals or groups of individuals obtain what they need and want by creating, offering and exchanging products and services of a certain value" (Kotler 1998:35). Marketing is "the science of persuading customers to buy a product". (American Association of Marketing 2009). By referring to public entities, "marketing is the ability to obtain and maintain beneficiaries satisfied with the programs developed and implemented by the public sector" (Scutaru 2010:54).

The need for public marketing is generated by the numerous situations in which public institutions are associated with inefficiency or activities generating additional taxes and duties. However, many public services are carried out by public institutions as outsourcing would cause disastrous consequences for the population. The need for efficiency is permanent, and there are always criticisms of institutional action. Thus, it becomes mandatory to improve the image of the public sector (Kotler&Lee 2008:16), or by pointing out the usefulness of institutional action, which, in the sense of Mill (1863), requires that public institutions do "the greatest benefit to as many people as possible". The dimensions underpinning institutional action are of a social, economic and ecological nature, all included in development strategies funded by European funds.

### **3. References to the Communication Strategy for 2014-2020**

A first condition for an effective communication strategy is generated by the circulation of contradictory information in society. Thus, there are opinions promoted in the public space of unknowing, unsafe or unverified sources, alongside reliable sources and clear information from specialized institutions. For the period 2014-2020, it is necessary to maintain the relevant information sources.

Interested stakeholders are considered secondary sources of information that can influence other stakeholders. Each category of stakeholders will be approached separately considering the communication and the links between

them, so that everyone is informed. The press is considered a communication partner, so future goals need to be built around the following principles:

- "More should be invested in raising the level of expertise of the media in the subject of European funding so as to avoid errors in the press;
- We need to invest in a correct relationship with the media, the answers the journalist asks for must be complete and obtained in a timely manner;
- Medium-term informal partnerships need to be made on which both sides will benefit: the information emitter will have coverage in the press, and journalists will have access to new, complete, news information. In other words, the journalist can find a familiar figure to come back for further information" ([www.fonduri-ue](http://www.fonduri-ue)).

Another category of "stakeholders" are NGOs, professional organizations, social partners and consultants. The degree of knowledge of the representatives of these entities is superior to that of journalists. The information they disseminate is credible and has a higher level of penetration for the general public or their collaborators. Students, student associations and educational establishments are milestones that need to be "interested" in the development of information and dissemination products. A working principle in public communication refers to the development of networks and partnerships with entities that will benefit from the organization of training, exchange of experience, the establishment of regional networks, etc.

Increased communication efforts consistent with the complexity of information, which in many cases involves the structuring of a personalized message according to the characteristics of the target group and the level of knowledge in the field ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)). Taking into account past experiences and new challenges for the years 2014-2020, the following strategic lines have been established:

- "The general tone of communication: simple and informative in the subject, with an emphasis on practical aspects, adapted to the characteristics and profile of the media channel used;
- Coordination of messages issued by different institutions, for the coherence of communication;
- Coordination of activities, for efficient spending of resources;
- More emphasis on personalized communication;
- Clear distinction of messages to the general public and to beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries of funds" ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)).

Communication to the general public will be done through advertising, based on the following elements ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)):

- "Emphasis on successful stories and emphasis on visual preponderance communication tools;

- Emphasis on the positive effects for the whole society, which can trigger the successful implementation of projects funded by European funds;
- Emphasis on the transparency and fairness of the fund allocation process;
- Emphasis on promoting the values that the thematic objectives support:
- Encourage research and creativity as the main source of progress;
- Harmonious development of society with respect to the environment;
- Support for personal development as an element of economic progress;
- Support for SMEs, as the main engine for the development of the whole society;
- increasing the state's capacity to manage processes in society;
- Increased focus on emotional messages, low emphasis on information;
- Use of a single logo for ESI funds, maintained as a graphic symbol for the period 2007-2013, with the possibility of differentiating the OP through the chosen slogan;
- Use of the specific OP signs in support of the imagery community, especially if the already well-known 2007-13 logos are used."

Communication with other types of audiences will be more specialized and will be accomplished through the following elements:

- "- online communication (including social media);
- direct meetings;
- information, work, seminars, workshops;
- informative and presentation materials: brochures, leaflets, newsletters, presentation films, multimedia presentations, etc.;
- personalized materials;
- specialized helpdesks, information centers and personalized assistance;
- encouraging partnerships between the management authority, ministries and private stakeholders to disseminate information" ([www.fonduri-ue.ro](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro)).

#### **4. Public Relations Department's mission in promoting EU policies**

Traditional perception retains three functions: "one of the points of view holds that public relations serves to control audiences, directing what people think to meet the needs or desires of an institution. Another view argued that the function of public relations is to respond to the public, to react to the evolutions, problems or initiatives of others. A third point of view states that the function of public relations is to create mutual beneficial relationships among all the publics that an institution has, by cultivating harmonious exchanges between the different publics of the institution (which include groups of employees, consumers, suppliers or producers) (Newsom Doug, Turk Judy VanSlyke, Kruckeberg Dean, 2003:39).

For effective management of public relations work, any organization that holds a certain share in public opinion needs to set up a public relations department. This organizational structure is important for ensuring a quality

management of the public image. Depending on the scale of the organization, we may meet organizations that have a public relations department or use the services of an independent public relations agency. In both cases the work of this department is subordinate to the overall performance strategy focused on the development of the organization.

The main mission of public relations practitioners is to define the organization's problems. This is the first step to solving. A correct definition allows you to choose optimal solutions. For the definition of the term that defines the most important attribution of the public relations department, we mention that this activity refers to the intention (Dagenais 2003:70):

"- to make a product, a service, an idea, a policy;

- to prevent a crisis;

- to improve the image of the organization;

- to create within the organization a sense of belonging, a better climate;

- to sell more products;

- to increase the number of adherents;

- to fight an opponent;

- to increase the share of the stock exchange;

- to prepare a merger. "

By defining these issues, the prerequisites for the elaboration of public relations strategies and communication with the press are created. A press office is set up within the public relations bureau, whose head must:

"- know everything that happens or will happen in the organization so that it can react quickly and correctly if the press requires some information;

- be able to track and even forecast the evolution of major events, especially those with a potential for crisis;

- to be aware of the decisions made by the management and to contribute to their correct orientation from the perspective of their communication impact;

- be able to obtain permanent cooperation of staff from the various departments of the organization, have a hierarchical position that is sufficiently important not to be blocked in the work of the various senior management on the intermediate stages;

- to avoid the dependence of those who work in the press office on marketing or advertising services" (Coman 2004: 74).

Cyclicity of economic life implies an activity of maintaining a permanent relationship of the organization with the environment. Thus, there is a need for a wide-ranging approach that draws attention to positive aspects of the organization. To meet these conditions of maximum efficiency, the following are required:

1. Forming and supporting a professional public relations department, or hiring a specialized company;

2. Precise delimitation of internal and external publications
3. Setting the message type
4. Creating an action strategy
5. Choosing the channels for sending messages
6. Evaluation of campaign results

These points do not include strategic calculations that are contained in much more complex and elaborate analyzes. The six points must be subordinated to a plan that will hierarchize activities and provide a unitary system of action. Depending on the type, complexity, and hierarchical level at which it is developed, there may be several action plans (Dagenais 2003: 57):

"- the general plan of the organization, which will specify its mission, the main coordinates of development, the global objectives to be achieved and the ways in which they will be reached;

- the specific plans of each administrative unit must aim to implement the overall plan in each of the sectors concerned;

- The marketing plan is one of the specific plans. It defines the product or service sold or offered, determining the price and distribution system. Public relations will come to an end in order to make the three elements of marketing known;

- public relations campaign plans will be based on the general plan of the organization and the specificities of the administrative units;

- public relations, press relations, publicity, sponsorship plans will complement the public relations campaign plan."

Theoretical frameworks for achieving relevant campaigns are limited by the quality and qualifications of specialists, which can be very diverse and can cover different public communication needs. From James Lukaszewski's point of view (1989: 39-41), a communications counselor must meet the following conditions:

"1) Be a good listener;

2) have insight to provide ideas and interpret events;

3) have the courage of your own beliefs;

4) provide feedback, both with objective data and impressions;

5) be a source of inspiration;

6) be trustworthy;

7) have perspicacity;

8) To be a complete thinker (meaning to be able to identify the problem, analyze it, anticipate results, recommend a wide range of ideas, and then test each option);

9) be pragmatic;

10) understand the financial value of time."



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