

## PUBLIC RELATIONS – A KEY ASPECT IN COUNTERING TERRORISM

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**Abstract:** *Today the security environment is characterized by a continuous increase in uncertainty - we are faced with numerous non-traditional threats and challenges. Regardless of time and place, these threats have an impact not only on individual regions and countries. They are generating different risks and negative consequences on a global scale. The radically altered security environment has increased the need to improve ways and mechanisms for interaction between institutions throughout the security sector. Developing coordinated policies and a strategic conceptual framework for countering new threats, including hybrids, has proved to be a key task in security. Obviously, all of this can't happen without the help of the communication experts in the structure. In almost all security-related institutions, units have been set up to support and inform the public of all actions of the security authorities. It is clear that the PR in the security sector must derive from the specific nature of the sector in which they take place. In crisis situations, activities related to PR include speaking to members of the media, crisis communication, etc. The goal in PR is to have interaction between the organization, the media and the society. It is generally good that the PR activity is proactive, not reactive, to outpace events, not to run after them.*

**Keywords:** Public relations in security sector, new threats, terrorism, crisis.

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, the trend of strengthening radicalisation and terrorist attacks globally has deepened. Modern terrorism and related manifestations are part of a dynamic and complex environment that successfully adapts to all political and economic conditions. The weak or failing state in areas near Bulgaria creates prerequisites for activity by terrorist organizations, as well as to merge terrorist with criminal structures. Today the security environment is characterized by a continuous increase in uncertainty. We are witnessing numerous non-traditional threats and challenges. Regardless of time and place, these threats have an impact not only on individual regions and countries. They are generating different risks and negative consequences

on a global scale. In our region, major influences have continued in the last few years - conflicts in the Middle East (Syria, Iraq) and Central Asia (Afghanistan), the activities of the Islamic State Organisation and other terrorist groups, as well as areas with Tensions in the Caucasus, Transnistria, Ukraine and the Western Balkans. One consequence of these problematic areas is the process of mass migration to the European Union (EU) with all the risks and threats included.

The examination of national security as a complex public system means the perception of the processes and phenomena that make it a unity, integrity, interconnection and contradiction.

## **2. New threats and new security environment**

The radically altered security environment has increased the need to improve ways and mechanisms for interaction between institutions throughout the security sector.

[1] Developing coordinated policies and a strategic conceptual framework for countering new threats, including hybrids, has proved to be a key task in security.[2] Obviously, all of this can't happen without the help of the communication experts in the structure. In almost all security-related institutions, units have been set up to support and inform the public of all actions of the security authorities. It can definitely be said that the need for the development of public relations (PR) in the security sector has been formed in recent years as a response to the democratisation of public-political life in Bulgaria and following the policies of the old democratic societies.

According to the implementation plan of the strategy to counter radicalisation and terrorism, the main risks to Bulgarian national security are:

- Conflicts and crises in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and the associated growth of the influence of the terrorist organization "Islamic State in Iraq and Levant" and other terrorist groups in these areas.
- The passage through the territory of Bulgaria of foreign fighters facing conflict zones in order to join the terrorist groups in force or returning to the countries of origin, radicalised and rich combat experience, generate risks and security threats both to the countries concerned and to Bulgaria.
- Numerous flows of refugees and illegal migrants from the Middle East, Africa and other crisis areas to Europe. A large part of these flows pass through the territory of Bulgaria, thus subjecting it not only to increased immigration pressure, but also a real opportunity for anonymous intrusion and sitting in the country of persons sympathetic to terrorist activity.[3]

All these risks require an improvement in

the organisation and operation of the specialised structures of the state, as well as increased public awareness in order to effectively counter terrorism.

## **3. Specific features of the PR in security sector**

It is clear that the PR in the security sector must derive from the specific nature of the sector in which they take place. In crisis situations, activities related to PR include speaking to members of the media, crisis communication, etc. The internal rules of each security sector organisation of the Republic of Bulgaria are a key factor in increasing the transparency of the national security system and as such it must be specifically investigated and managed.

In this context the PR should not be mistaken with propaganda. Propaganda is the dissemination of views and ideas with a view to their implementation in public consciousness to intensify mass practical activities. According to historians and philologists, the term 'propaganda' comes from the Latin '*propagare*' - to spread, and the concept itself was introduced in 1662 by Pope, who formed a special organization in Catholic Church, whose task was to spread faith with through missionary work.

In scientific circles, there is an opinion that the term propaganda is fundamentally opposes the concept of 'Public Relations', because the PR approach is characterized by the desire to elicit feedback from the recipient, while propaganda is often focused not so much on the listener as on the speaker. Describing the two sides of this phenomenon in terms of their goals in politics, the authors F. Jeffkins and D. Yadin noted that political propaganda aims to keep a certain group of people at the top power, while PR approach - to ensure that the actions of the political elite are becoming understandable to people [4]. However, PR and propaganda targeted a mass audience, representing an option for intensive communication. At the heart of PR and propaganda lies focus on the most

vulnerable groups in the structure of society. When propaganda is implemented in its constructive form, it has many points of contact with PR, and sometimes it is impossible to distinguish between these terms.

In crisis situations, activities related to PR include speaking to the media, working with the media, crisis communication, as well as communication with field workers. The goal in PR is to have interaction between the organization, the media and the society. It is generally good that the PR activity is proactive, not reactive, to outpace events, not to run after them.

In general, the information activity should collect, process and provide to the public the necessary information relating to the conduct of the particular share.

In order to carry out functions and tasks, alone or in synergy with other units, public communications from the security sector should inform and provide the public with some of the following information:

- The activity in the territory of a certain region in the country;
- Information about the activities undertaken to prevent, detect and investigate the particular crime;
- Data on objects and armament.

#### **4. PR in countering terrorism**

Another important task of the public relations experts in the security system is to promote through the media, in the form of clips, advertisements, fliers and announcements, what are the measures focused on prevention and protection against terrorist attacks:

- Preventing the execution of terrorist acts on the territory of the country, as well as against Bulgarian citizens, sites, representations and contingents abroad;
- Preventing the penetration and counteracting of the influence of radical ideas and their distributors among groups and communities of the population in Bulgaria as a basis for attracting terrorists;
- Improvement of the organization of the

specialized structures in order to effectively counteract the methods and tools used by the international terrorist organizations aimed at destroying a large number of people;

- Protecting the country's population and critical infrastructure and limiting the impact of possible terrorist actions;
- Expand and deepen synergies with EU countries, NATO and other countries in the anti-terrorist coalition. [5]

Society must be excellently familiar that terrorism is a strategic risk for the region and our country and the whole system of national security must establish and maintain the necessary normative, information, human and resource capacity for early responding, countering and effectively controlling its effects. It is necessary to apply an active approach requiring work in preventive mode, for example not to wait for the risk to take place, but on the basis of monitoring, preparation, analysis, evaluation and prognosis to react proactively.[6] Undoubtedly, no country is capable of dealing with terrorism on its own. It does not recognize boundaries, religions and cultures. Terrorism is a global problem and fighting it requires a pooling of efforts, a global approach and global cooperation to counter it. [7] It is of utmost importance to build national, regional and global early-warning and information systems, preventive measures and rapid response, i.e. to unite our efforts.

Given the overall security sector policy towards increasing publicity and transparency of the country's security and defence activities, as well as the policy of timely information on the implementation of this Policy, understands the need to create a clear vision in the security system for activities and practices related to the commitments of the public relations units.

In the context of the changes in the strategic security environment, the EU has adopted an act named "A global strategy for the European Union's foreign and Security

Policy”, which will be implemented by strengthening notably public diplomacy and communication.

## 5. Conclusion

Clearly PR is a key aspect in countering terrorism. Recent new threats and challenges are affecting global security situation every day. The goal of Bulgarian

government is to develop coordinated policies and one strategic conceptual framework for countering all new threats, including hybrids. This is where the PR will improve interactions between the security organization, media and the civil society – proactive and on time.

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