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POLITICAL COMMUNICATION, CREATIVE USE OF MEDIA AND THE PROCESS OF EU INTEGRATION OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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ABSTRACT

The human history relates to the history of communication, which has also been a co-driver of human development. Communication integrates the knowledge, organization and power of a society.

Today, there is an increasing debate over the importance of politicians' mutual communication, communication with voters and the media, the role of public relations in politics, and communication with the civil society. Thus, political communication and the creative use of the media remain the essential component of any individual involved in politics or even of a political group.

In this study, political communication in North Macedonia is presented in the context of political efforts into the integration process in European Union (EU), by observing all the stages within the process so far. From the content and the issues addressed, it is clear that

policymakers face the challenges of communication (as is the case in many countries aspiring the European integration).

In this paper, the premises of genuinely political communication strategy are analyzed separately, assessing them in the context of the political communication theory. It will be shown that successful communication is an important tool for convincing citizens that EU provides a better quality of life and work.

Key words: communication, integration, public, European Union, North Macedonia.

INTRODUCTION

Communication means many different things in this different corpus of action. In a certain sense, communication means something like the dispersal of influential symbols in order to shape public opinion. Peters highlights various theorists such as Lippmann, Bernays and Lasswel, who have offered historical discourse on the growing importance of communication and propaganda in modern society. Industrialization, urbanization, social rationalization, psychological research and new communication tools provide non-standard conditions for consensus building among the dispersed population. He points out that communication is intended as a power that must link the masses for good or for bad; it can create or undermine political order, an expression that is unfortunately elaborated in the second book of that period, Mein Kampf, by Adolf Hitler (1925), (Peters, 1999, p. 12).

Political communication is always presented as "a deliberate communication about politics" (McNair, 2011) mainly through the analysis of the activities of political actors (government, political parties, politicians, etc.), then media and public opinion, as well as their reciprocal interaction. On the one hand, it contradicts the way in which contemporary political actors (governments, parties, etc.) communicate with the media and the public and the effects of such communication, while on the other, media coverage of political events should be considered, taking into account the influence of the media on political processes and the creation of public opinion. There have been numerous attempts to define political communication, since both parts of the phrase itself, as McNair puts it, leave space for many definitions. We can mention the Denton and Woodward definition on political communication, such as: "A clear discussion about the distribution of public resources (revenues) to the official authority (who is empowered/entitled to make lawful, legislative and executive decisions) and official sanctions (which reward or punish the state)" (Denton, R. E., Woodward, G. C., 1998, p. 14). In addition,

according to McNair, “this definition includes spoken and written political rhetoric, but not acts of symbolic communication” (McNair, 2011). He also brings up the definition of the American writer Doris Graber who provides a more all-encompassing definition of what she terms ‘political language’, suggesting that it comprises not only rhetoric but also paralinguistic signs such as body language and political acts such as boycotts and protests (McNair, 2011, p. 3). However, going back to Denton and Woodward, McNair dwells on the fact that political communication is characterized by the form of his escorts to influence the political environment. “The crucial factor that makes communication 'political' is not the source of a message, but its content and purpose” (Denton, R. E., Woodward, G. C., 1998, p. 11). Political communication is any kind of communication that has policy as its object. This short definition has the advantage because it incorporates the two most essential features of contemporary politics: expanding the political sphere by increasing the number of problems and actors involved in the political field and enhancing the role of communication (Kanev, 2009, p. 164). So the question then is what is the content and to what extent is the political communication between political parties, the Government, civil society and other actors in North Macedonia? So at least, the political debate should not occupy with traditional arguments, but the actors in the process must finally begin to engage real political alternatives. However, it seems that the political elites have no interest in changing the status quo. The basic objective of political communication is to create the widest possible understanding of all aspects of integration among citizens about North Macedonia's accession to the EU. In practice, this means to contribute as much as possible in front of the Macedonian public in raising citizens' awareness of the benefits of EU membership, but also of the necessary reforms to be made. The public should be aware of the potential consequences of non-membership, as well as being aware of the rights, privileges, and obligations of membership for each prospective citizen of North Macedonia individually and for the state as a whole when it becomes part of the EU. The public should be prepared how to participate in the discussion about membership and its active role in the accession process.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AS A CONDITION FOR AVOIDING CONFUSION IN THE PUBLIC

Communicating with the public in North Macedonia, but also in the Western Balkans, should have a clear purpose, revealing issues from a new perspective and making them as accessible and interesting as possible in front of the public. Above all, the way this communication is

organized has a very pragmatic nature or a "very instrumental rationality: problems - arguments to act - concrete objectives to accomplish" (Shella, 2007, p. 127). This seems to be the most found structure of action thinking well suited for political communication and public relations. As an essential topic in political communication, the first and foremost is the involvement of civil society, where the mission of its actors should not be such as to become elements to fill programs of television shows and debates without preserving them **(**their specificity). The most important problem with this public communication expressed by civil society is the totality of alternative proposals to act differently, to propose different approaches, to open up other views of the collective activity of people - the public. During this public communication, shortcomings are noted, as evidenced by, for example, shortcomings in the drafting of laws, criticizing public and state administration attitudes, other important state policies, approaches of political actors, and then eliciting issues concretely, such as defects in the procedures or implementation of laws and constitutions by various state or judicial entities, calls for reform of the state, judiciary, electoral code, European integration strategy, information and communication with the public, etc. According to Shella, it rarely happens to say specifically what to do differently, how to do otherwise, what would the solution be. Therefore, this study aims to avoid the confusions that often appear in public, causing unintended consequences on the persuasive power of speech" (Shella, 2007, p. 130). This confusion of the perception of the citizen (the individual) must be overcome in close cooperation between the central public authority, local government, departments and civil society, through the promotion of the general interest and of the public good. Without this cooperation, there would be no realistic objectives and concrete impact on affirmation of projects related to day-to-day institutional activities and, worst of all, there would be no information or communication with the public.

According to a contemporary worldview, when talking about relations in (political) communication with the public, then one must understand that we are dealing with an organized whole of political activities and relations (of political organizations, institutions and civil society), in the function of European integration. This is where the special areas of public relations come from: public relations, lobbying, mediation and political PR.

Therefore, of great importance is the fact that a tradition has already been established, where, more or less, every actor in society covers a particular social field, where he or she performs some kind of activity by pushing others to other areas of action. This often seems like we are in a huge market of ideas and services, where there is a division of spheres of influence. This has influenced their view on European integration, so non-governmental organizations and

competing or rival social actors should not be driven by different ideologies or worldviews, rather than operate within the same civic framework (Shella, 2007, p. 120).

The experience of North Macedonia, as well as that of the neighboring countries and generally the Western Balkans, cannot be considered to have a clear political discourse, given the fact that the political options of political parties participating in public life (such as those in power, or in opposition), have no clear objective, either among themselves or in communication with citizens. In fact, although the flow of political communication is the responsibility of public relations, we are still witnessing a poor choice, often with unskilled people, who must represent political leaders in public. It has become almost a rule for political party leaders to carry out their public relations work themselves. Examples of political communication often based on mutual accusations and verbal assaults, especially during election campaigns, working behind the scenes, are quite common on the political scene. Usually, the so-called spin rhetoric and other manipulations are not lacking either. "All of this points to an atmosphere of moral ambivalence surrounding modern spin and rhetoric. At the principle level, rhetorical discourse is most often seen as unscrupulous, untrue, and even morally dangerous. However, at the level of practice, it is often accepted as an inevitable and indispensable part of the race of political parties" (Klemp, 2012). But, does that really happen? Politics, while being the most "material" to create a lasting edifice in society, it nevertheless fails to surpass itself. Politics is a process and way of decision making within a group of people. Although politics usually refers to government, political behaviors relate to a group or institution consisting of human beings. The very "governance of society is politics, because politics addresses the problem of how we want society to be now and in the future" (Solvberg, 2006, p. 37). Political science investigates political behavior and examines how it is created and implemented within the group, not excluding how one's behavior is transferred to other members of a group. Therefore, the policy starts from expressing the original diversity of views, which means trying to reconcile the differences between the parties involved in achieving their goals. **"**Politics treats opinions about a just society and, because of the diversity of opinions about such a society and how it is implemented, practical politics treats them through dialogue, discussion and confrontation. The policy has no ready-made recipes. This makes politics attractive and unpredictable: asking what is right and true, creating fronts and mobilizing constituents, parties, states, organizations and enterprises, and terrorist tools" (Kval-Mellbye-Tranoy, 2006, p. 5). This is achieved by proposing solutions that are considered rational and appropriate. This option needs to be done by other members of the community, which is achieved through dialogue and persuasion. Therefore, communication is very important for politics. First of all, this avoids conflict**.** The

decision, although biased towards the common good, may nevertheless interfere with the opposing interests of some members of certain groups, which leaves them unable to even pursue that decision. Therefore, we can say that politics is a product of democracy and where there is no democracy it cannot be said that politics is the art of the possible.

Radical controversies, meanwhile, highlight the need for a consensus agreement to resolve the political dispute. Political communication is needed here, which helps to resolve disputes through dialogue, just as the name-change deal with Greece happened. After all, typical policy outcomes are social conflicts, limited resources, planning for the future, relationships with other communities, etc. The theory of ideal political order was formed in ancient Greece, in the views of Aristotle and Plato. Aristotle had founded his theory of the ideal political order on the study of the basic principles of political order. He believed that the virtues needed to achieve were related to the ideal life of man, because only in this way could a good political order, which would take care of its citizens be achieved. The basic principles, according to Aristotle, are population and education.

PUBLIC OPINION - AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT IN NORTH MACEDONIA'S EU MEMBERSHIP STEPS

Many important summits and meetings, although without any concrete epilogue on Balkan accession to the EU, have conveyed messages to the countries of the region that the same will join Europe as soon as they meet all the necessary conditions. However, accurate information was often lacking, or at least insufficient. Some short sentences have been uttered by news agencies and that has been all. Apparently, politics (the politicians) and the media have forgotten about doing their homework - informing the public. And when it comes to the public, more precisely when it comes to creating public opinion, one should never forget that public opinion is an influential factor in all stages of North Macedonia's EU membership. Here as Kulla adds (Kulla, 2009), with reference on Habermas and Koselleck's study for 'public sphere' and 'public opinion' concept linking their birth with the Enlightenment movement of the 700s or more. Precisely, at the time of opening up a space for the critical discussion of public functions even towards 'private' ones, therefore those who were not holders of these functions who traditionally had to avoid interference with state affairs. Here is why the rise of public opinion is historically linked to the affirmation of a rich bourgeoisie, but without political power and a move towards liberalism, amassing around the press an entire intellectual wealth, which managed to organize and even come to power in France in 1789. Today, the function

that has been attributed to public opinion is that of expressing - through the newspapers and the media - a critical capacity on the part of society towards the governing institutions (Kulla, 2009).

From a Hegelian perspective, society is divided into two popular spaces: civil and political. The first is the "zone" of private interests, of everyone's activities, of conflicts and of individual peace. The second is the space of politics, of public institutions, of the state. It is born and created from scratch, precisely to guide it. And, this in time, for the simple reason; "People always want the best for themselves, but they don't always see for themselves." "So here comes the need for a legislator." For a leader, or rather, a political space, to make Jean-Jacques Rousseau, quoted above, simpler. Over time, these spaces "embrace" the tendency for separation and recession, giving rise to a very dangerous orientation for democracy- that of the ultimate loss of power by the citizens. In a representative democracy, by being sufficed with the vote once in a few years, citizens can no longer be the "producers" of the general will. "They can neither speak nor act except through their representatives," as Sieyes says. The solution to such a situation, the product 'representative sui generis', is found in the development and consolidation of a third space (Habermas), which grows and develops between the first two, civil and political space: public space. The last component is the place in which, through civil society, associations, social movements, the mass media, ideas that arise and are shaped in the civil space are captured and filtered. And, it is not over. In this "public shipyard", the above mentioned ideas are subject to public debate and confrontation and in a given time they become a prevailing public opinion. In order to transform later when democracy functions normally with concrete normative proposals for the political space and its institutions (Totozani, 2010). Thus, the term public opinion as a synonym of people's social political community has developed under the influence of European culture and theory. The German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, one of the greatest contemporary theoretical authorities, who highlights the forms of the disappearance of critical discourse and publicity in contemporary society, has termed 'resurgent public opinion' as a risk (Warner, 2013, p. 285). This fact makes necessary the role of the media in the community in order to 'place the public interest ahead of profit maximization'. Therefore, influenced by post-structuralism French concepts are increasingly coming to terms with the notion that public opinion by the social community is being transformed into a mass media public or 'interpretive community'. In fact, "Interpretive communities are not necessarily related to common geographical boundaries or even to common physical characteristics, but are initiated and maintained through interactive discourse with the help of common symbols" (Singer, 2003, p. 436). There is also an increasing number

of supporters of the so-called 'new public' as a result of the power of the advertising, PR and political marketing industries and the changing formats of communication (rationalizing persuasion and mode of influence). Here, it should be added that, "interaction forms the basis of the emergence of the new public" (Mučalo, M., Šop, S., 2008, p. 51). According to Vukadinovic, public opinion is presented as one of the attitudes of citizens towards social developments and processes, which may have the character of internal development, or dealing with a country's foreign policy. This is primarily about the attitude of the citizen to the political events, namely the foreign policy of a country and its directions. This attitude of citizens and social groups is created by the action of different factors and at different stages of social development. A whole range of elements is influenced by public opinion (Vukadinoviç, 2006, p. 218).

Before going even further, one must distinguish between the uses of the term "public" - when referring to its meaning for public opinion and when speaking of the pure meaning of the term. The latter, in a more general sense and also based on the first works of communication, means the recipient of the message, whether it is the reader, the viewer or the listener, and regardless of the nature of the medium through which the communication process takes place, as well as the content of the message. Public research can be based on research of its nature or structure, depending on existing determinants, such as place ('local' public), group (a specific social group making up a particular public), media (public television or radio), content (preference for a particular type of content) and time (e.g. Rock'n 'Roll's' original' audience). So, to explain the public as 'public opinion', Tomic explains that the political meaning of the word 'public' in this context derives from the Latin word 'publicus' (public) and 'populus' (people). 'Public (s)', according to these terms, refers to something popular. The concept of public is made up of the same relationships of the concept of privacy, namely intimacy. The Latin word "privatus" means personal, but also deprived, and in its social foundation is located in the Roman family and in the institute of private property (Tomic, 2003, pp. 115-129). Jillian H. Poole, using Walter Lipman's definition, will point out: "Widespread public opinion is also shaped by the limited attention to selected 'facts'". Walter Lipman, at the beginning of this century, wrote about the nature of human perception and the way ideas are created" (Poole, 2006, p. 65). In his book, "Public Opinion", Lipman points out that "the environment in which our public opinions operate is translated in many ways (...) through physical and social barriers (...), through limited attention, language poverty, distraction, unconscious changes of feelings, fatigue, violence, monotony. These limitations of our approach to this environment combine with the ambiguity and complexity of the facts themselves to distort clarity and fairness of

perception, to replace functional ideas with deceptive fantasy.. " (Lippman, 1997 (1949), p. 49). T. Dervshi in "Square in the Drawer", discloses public communication, which is conducted through official press releases of institutions and statements of leaders who make such statements as if public opinion did not exist, or, as he calls it, "a bunch of zombies that seem to regard it as a 'resonating' crowd that has cows above sunrise before its radius has fallen into the grass that grazes it" (Dervishi, 2010). Perhaps, many scholars have observed that, "even democratic states remain quite independent of public opinion" (Majer, 2003, p. 82). According to Samuel Huntington, "the expansion of politically important segments of the population will inevitably raise the level of hope and pressure on the regime" (Huntington, 1968, p. 266). This contributes to a deeper understanding of what public opinion actually is, or what they call "opinion about politics, state, society, morality" (Tushi, 2009). However, public perceptions play a role even when the public in this case is nothing more than the sum of rational judgments to convince the public of the effectiveness of the measures and the government's commitment to the course of crisis stabilization. Here, however, "the key to overcoming the difficult legacy of the crisis will be based on how its very origin is perceived. If public opinion attributes the crisis to policy mistakes or a lack of reform, then there is a chance that appropriate policy lessons will be learned and that determined growth policies will follow." (Balcerowicz, 2010) This means that, above all, it contributes to the goal of new reform measures being accepted by citizens as natural and necessary.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

It should be said that political communication occurs in the area of 'tension' between government and political opinion, or between the political field and the civil society sector. In this case, we have understood political opinion as a form of critical and active grouping of individuals and groups in communication. They resonate on policy issues, assess interests presented to the public, and participate in discussions about finding acceptable measures between competing interests, which in a historical moment and in certain circumstances may be of a 'general interest'. In this sense, there are a large number of symbolic actions of citizens and their associations, on the one hand, and of political actors and institutions of power, on the other, that occur daily and provide the dynamics of political communication. However, most of the political communication activity flows through previously defined channels with the help of the work of specific public institutions that are intended for public and mass

communication - the mass media. We say the most, because it would be naive to think that all political efforts and measures would only be presented in the public arena. Admittedly, political actors often conceal their views and interests, trying to embellish them with beautiful words, or symbols acceptable to the public. This speaks to a deliberate issue of actors in politics.

According to McNair, the purposeful communication regarding politics is known as political communication. The three points about political communication are:

1) Political actors use different forms of communication to attain specific goals and objectives.

2) Non-politicians, including columnists and voters, use different forms of communication to address these political actors.

3) Communication regarding political actors and their activities, done through columns, news reports, features, editorials and many other forms of media debate of politics (McNair, 2011).

Publicly, in the media and generally through various channels of political communication, they broadcast false symbols, formulas, and words enough to enter into negotiations and agreements with the idea that if they do not honestly say what they think is of interest to them, they will succeed in emboldening and deceiving other political entities. And, indeed, as Arendt (Hannah, 1967), points out, truth and untruth in politics are relative. The boundary between them will always draw the one who determines it from the position of greatest power or historical winner. That is why this political discourse occurs, especially in environments with low political culture, such as ours, contaminated by the presence of euphemisms and lies and suffering from chronic lack of dialogue. This is reflected by the low willingness to really listen to others, which would mean not respecting arguments or ‘force of argument’ but force of the policy as an argument.

In the debates about media and politics, it is understood that the media behave inferiorly due to the lack of finances and editorial policy, which is often not in the service of the political options in power. Thus, the media have largely become advertisers, serving as 'spin doctors' for political leaders, who easily create the programming scheme and make the editorial policy to create public opinion. A completely distorted picture of democracy, the latter, unfortunately, having no deep roots in the Balkans, has made the media a strong tool in the hands of politics! Communication must be based on a rational and balanced approach. It is now necessary to emphasize that the obligations and responsibilities that derive from membership, but also the rights and benefits of integration, must be sometimes taken, as they are, difficult and facing many challenges. The overall tone should be to reflect a realistic optimism about the prospects for the future of the Balkans in the European Union. The language used must be appropriate and understandable to those to whom the information is addressed, so it is necessary to use a

more generalized terminology. Communication must be based on the central message. However, given the complexity of EU-related issues, the dynamics with which they can develop must be adapted to ethnic and social diversity in practice, which requires creating such messages to fit the dynamics of the integration process and the needs of the target groups.

EU information messages must be prepared for each individual case, in order to provide answers to specific questions and requirements. Common themes between government and civil society need to be developed to communicate with the public. Thus, messages tailored to specific purpose groups will be developed.

The debate on the European integration process should be open as a precondition that should encourage all stakeholders in the society to have access to information on the progress of this process. The aim is to enable civil society in Macedonia to become a key player in the democratization of the country and to contribute to the building of a European civil society.

To achieve this, the state needs to continuously develop a communication strategy to inform and motivate citizens to contribute in increasing the level and the quality of the EU accession debate. Anticipate and implement the need to create a media plan on the transmission of information in the public interest, in order to have as much clarity as possible about EU information and the process of accession and membership of North Macedonia in the EU, removing misunderstandings on EU-related issues. Above all, work should be done to achieve the goals and objectives of defining an overall attitude of communication based on openness, transparency and timely, accurate and relevant information provision.

The purpose of EU communication is to provide information that is easily accessible and understandable; informing the public about the progress of the integration process but also about all its consequences and possible implications. Its purpose is also to avoid the wrong stereotypes about the EU integration process, reduce unrealistic expectations as well as to point out the responsibilities and obligations that come with the benefits of membership.

CONCLUSION

Lack of information always creates a gap in the debate between the actors in communication. Therefore, detailed information on successful initiatives in the field of inter-ethnic or economic relations is extremely necessary for the North Macedonian public. Of course, efforts, which are also political ideas, must be effective for interest groups in order to increase the likelihood of progressive political efforts towards European Union membership. So far, many times has been proven that politicians have little thought and work little to ease the path to EU membership.

In this study, after we have faced the actual communication approaches of different actors in North Macedonia's vis-à-vis the EU integration processes with the political communication theories, the following conclusions for improving it were derived:

- Instead of trying to develop a pro-Western election campaign model, the opposite happens. Political campaigns are conducted without a clear political vision, without a presentation program and without a unique image. Thus, the campaigns needs a clear vision, to articulate it with confidence while presenting the program's objectives with transparency and simple argumentation, creating a positive image of messages.
- So far, the irreplaceable role of the media in the European integration process has been clearly seen, based on the great impact it has on shaping public opinion. Therefore, the Government should cooperate extensively with the media to transmit information on the European Union (EU) integration process, especially given the news programs and programs devoted to Euro-integration.
- In collaboration with editors and journalists, a sectorial approach (within ministries) should be encouraged to provide better and more comprehensive information for citizens on specific issues in certain areas (e.g., economics, environment, education, etc.). Contributions and programs that will bring citizens closer to the European Union should also be encouraged. Important partners of the Government in communicating with the public are the entities of the economic - business sectors, non-governmental associations and trade unions.

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