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# LACK OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY ON EUROPEAN VECTOR: WHIM OR NECESSITY?

2012 was for the Republic of Moldova a so-called historic year, if we refer to visits of senior European officials, who come to support the idea that the Republic of Moldova is increasingly in the focus of the EU. Although there are a number of advances mentioned in the legislation, an obvious shortcoming is the lack of citizen involvement in the modernization of the Republic of Moldova by means of proximity to European standards. Government officials talk about obvious successes in the state's domestic and foreign policy, but they are understood only by a small circle of people, usually officials, experts, people who have to do with the institutional system, though, even in this case we are talking about a vague understanding of the overall reform process.

## How is European integration perceived by citizens of the Republic of Moldova

For some time, the terms “European integration” and “success story” have become clichés, used to express a progress, but it is not either felt or fully understood by those directly involved in the process. Wishing to create a positive image of the Republic of Moldova abroad, the authorities have overlooked a defining element.

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Moldova's Foreign Policy Statewatch represents a series of brief analyses, written by local and foreign experts, dedicated to the most topical subjects related to the foreign policy of Moldova, major developments in the Black Sea Region, cooperation with international organizations and peace building activities in the region. It aims to create a common platform for discussion and to bring together experts, commentators, officials and diplomats who are concerned with the perspectives of European Integration of Moldova. It is also pertaining to offer to Moldova's diplomats and analysts a valuable tribune for debating the most interesting and controversial points of view that could help Moldova to find its path to EU.

If we carefully analyze citizens' preferences regarding the two integration models: West and East, the former being a comprehensive reform process and having as finality the European integration and the latter including integration into the Customs Union of Russia - Belarus - Kazakhstan/ and respectively the Euro-Asian Union - a vaguely defined framework without clear purpose, we will observe that priority is given to the latter. Thus, according to the Public Opinion Barometer in November 2012, if they were to choose between accession to the EU or Russia - Belarus - Kazakhstan Customs Union, 16.1% of Moldovan citizens prefer integration into the EU and 22.5% integration into the Customs Union Russia - Belarus - Kazakhstan. Surprising is the number of those undecided representing more than half of the respondents (58.4%), which shows a clear lack of understanding of the two integration models.

Why is preference given to the East while the basic vector of domestic and foreign policy is European integration? What is the dilemma of undecided respondents? If we try to give an answer to the first question then we could say that the reasons are different, from nostalgia and ideologization to the existence of an information space mainly under Russian influences. Many still live with the myth that Russia is the country that supports us financially, provides us cheap gas and protects us from external threats. Analyzing both questions, we notice, however, that there are two phenomena that do not coincide with government policy, phenomena that, at a certain moment, could change the course of the Republic of Moldova. Here the problem is the lack of a coherent, consistent and continuous information and communication policy with the citizens of the Republic of Moldova concerning the European integration process and development of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU.

For more than 13 years there is a discussion about creating a new reality, a modern society based on democratic principles where there will be respected fundamental human rights, an environment where citizens will be given priority and their choices will be respected. For this to happen, citizens must be informed, educated and involved in processes that affect their everyday lives. According to the same Barometer of Public Opinion of November 2012 we notice that citizens of Moldova associate European integration with the liberalized visa regime, jobs and higher living standards. The reason is obvious: over the last two years there has been much talk about implementation of the Action Plan concerning visa liberalization so that you might think that here ends the bilateral cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union.

The visit of the President of the European Commission in Chisinau was an important one not only because it demonstrated once again the political support provided by the EU to Moldova, but also because it was said clearly and loudly that from now on authorities must pay increased attention to public, youth, civil society involvement in the process of reforms and profound changes and explain the essence of the steps taken. The period of reform, transition and major legislative changes is extremely difficult, and if it is not fully explained in an understandable way, then the results will hesitate to appear.

Implementing the Action Plan concerning visa liberalization and other processes related to the harmonization of legislation with the European standards imply two basic phases: adoption and revision of legislation and its implementation. To date, in pursuit of achieving as much progress as possible, but also because of permanent encouraging statements from abroad, authorities paid little attention to the preparation of the second phase - the implementation of legislation, a process of major importance that does not refer just to some institutions, but to every citizen. Visa liberalization does not imply only allowing visa-free travel of Moldovan citizens but also a range of regulations, duties and responsibilities ensuring human security at different levels. It also has to be taken into account that changes and reforms that are conducted require a new way of living, working, perceiving rights and freedoms, but also obligations of some citizens to others and a new citizen - state relationship. These changes can not occur overnight, and the lack of clear information, of profound educational activities, eventually lead to confusion, lack of interest, discontent and loss of electorate. It is easier to advocate a chimera than a reality because the latter requires effort and work to obtain tangible results.

Another aspect that is missing in communicating with the general public is the support the EU, as a whole, and the EU member countries, in particular, give to the Republic of Moldova. The last year the EU significantly increased the amount of bilateral financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova. It reached the amount of 122 million Euros annually. So far this amount has never exceeded € 100 million,

thus the Republic of Moldova ranks first among the countries of Southern and Eastern Neighborhood in terms of the amount of assistance received. Although there are carried out a number of major infrastructural, social, environmental projects and other projects that contribute to progress in the negotiations concerning Transnistrian conflict settlement, the information on these processes rarely reach citizens and it is often limited to press releases or some materials in printed or audio-visual media.

## The need for an instructional - information campaign concerning the European vector of the Republic of Moldova

The Republic of Moldova European vector involves a complex process of reforms, which should be fully understood by citizens of the Republic of Moldova in order to get full support and be implemented. The reform itself requires a new way of life, behavior and interpersonal relationships. It is critical, at this stage, that every citizen be involved in the social, economic and political life in order to perceive and know the essence of change, new regulations, rights and responsibilities they have. This can be accomplished by:

1. developing an effective and multidimensional communication strategy with the public;
2. a massive information campaign concerning the essence of reform, the progress made, legislative changes carried out, practical implementation;
3. developing communication tools, or using the existing ones to spread information concerning values, principles, European standards and their correct explanation;
4. developing communication tools, or using the existing ones to instruct, at different levels, the citizens of the Republic of Moldova concerning the operation of the EU, the meaning of the European community, the rights and obligations of the EU citizens, benefits and possible disadvantages of the European integration (for example introduction of several compulsory courses in the university and school curriculum);
5. promoting, as actively as possible, the results of social, infrastructural, economic and environmental project carried out with the support of the EU;
6. facilitating access to information regarding the activities of the EU and EU member states in the Republic of Moldova;
7. communicating, promoting and explaining the benefits and disadvantages of European integration and other integration models;
8. setting up platforms for communication, discussion and training concerning the reform process, domestic and foreign policies of the state.



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