

ATLANTIC COUNCIL OF GEORGIA

**Analysis of Georgian National
Strategic Communication System
on the Issues of Euro-Atlantic Integration**

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CONTENT

1. BRIEF REVIEW	5
2. THE FRAMEWORK OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PROCESS ON THE ISSUES OF EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION	7
3. STRUCTURAL UNITS OF MAJOR STATE AGENCIES PARTICIPATING IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PROCESS ON THE ISSUES OF EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION	8
4. THE PROCESS OF PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS	10
4.1. Strategy of the Government of Georgia for Communication and Information on the Issues of European Integration	10
4.2. Action Plan of the Strategy for Communication and Information on the Issues of European Integration and Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan	12
4.3. Evaluation and Monitoring of the Implementation of Strategic Communication Activities	14
4.4. Strategic Communication on National Level	15
4.5. Strategic Communication on International Level	19
4.6. Interagency Coordination of a Strategic Communication Process	21
4.7. Professional Capacity Building Efforts	23
5. CONCLUSION	24
6. RECOMMENDATIONS	25
SOURCES	27

Analysis of Georgian National Strategic Communication System on the Issues of Euro-Atlantic Integration

1. BRIEF REVIEW

European and Euro-Atlantic Integration are top priorities of Georgia's foreign and security policy. These priorities stem from a desire of Georgian population to build a modern, free, democratic and prosperous state based on full respect of human rights and freedoms, democratic institutions, supremacy of law and free economy. Joining European Union and NATO is a clearly decalred aspiration of Georgian population.

Proceeding from fundamental national interests of Georgia, the important task for the government is to develop and implement an effective communication strategy that fosters the process of Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration and effectively counters Russian propaganda.

Since the restoration of independence in Georgia, Russia has strongly opposed the process of state-building and democratic development in the country. Russia's ongoing aggression against Georgia has a complex nature. Together with hard and economic power, it includes information war as a weapon against Georgia.

The information war conducted by Russia in Georgia, as well as in other countries, contains multiple components. The war aims, on the one hand, at stirring up nihilism towards Euro/Euro-Atlantic integration and increasing anti-western sentiments among local population and, on the other hand, at cementing skepticism in the West towards the idea of building united, free and peaceful Europe.

Stemming from its statements, it is clear that the Georgian Government is aware of a big role strategic communication places in the pro-

cesses of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Efforts made by the government in this direction are also evident; still, a lot of work remains to be done to achieve satisfactory results.

This survey overviews institutional, conceptual and substantial aspects of Georgian Government's strategic communication and offers recommendations aimed at enhancement of the effectiveness of the strategic communication process.

Conceptual base for strategic communication of the government is limited. In 2013, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the Strategy of the Government of Georgia for Communication and Information on the Issues of European Integration, which can hardly be recognized as a strategic document. The document, which is rather extensive, describes mainly the forms of government activities and presumptive target groups and, less focused on the communication message content, strategic aims and the principles of message formulation. While determining forms of activities and supposed target groups, the document lacks clarity and, in many cases, keeps repeating the same definitions. As for the action plan for the implementing the communication strategy, it is more a non-systematized compilation of activities of various agencies, some of which have no connection with a communication strategy.

The principal reason for separating of European Union integration communication strategy from that of NATO integration, in terms of communication both within and outside the country, is unclear. Both organizations are based on democratic values and aim at reinforcing freedom and stability. These two processes – integration into NATO and the European Union – are strategically inseparable for Georgia. Consequently, a communication strategy on the integration of the country into these organizations should be focused, first of all, on the support and advancement of democratic values, as well as clear communication of multifaceted benefits of this integration for Georgian population. It is understandable that technical aspects and action plans for European and NATO integra-

tion differ; however, these differences are less explicable to ordinary citizens, who are not professionally engaged in a daily routine of integration. Therefore, in terms of strategic communication, separation of these two processes is unreasonable.

The key aspect of strategic communication is clear formulation of policy and creation of effective mechanisms for its implementation. This, in turn, requires introduction of effective institutional mechanisms for the decision making and coordination within and among the agencies.

As the study has shown, the structural units involved in strategic communication, both on national level and in the agencies are still in the process of formation. Serious problems have been detected in the policy formulation and implementation process, as well as in interagency coordination. One of the main reasons for malfunctioning of strategic communication system on a national level is its scarce institutionalization and lack of engagement at a high political level.

One of the ways to solve this problem might be an effective use of existing institutional mechanisms, state/governmental commissions on European and Euro-Atlantic integration, as well as National Security Council for creating the viable communication strategy, developing adequate policy and properly coordinating its implementation.

2. THE FRAMEWORK OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PROCESS ON THE ISSUES OF EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

The system and process of strategic communications on the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration are still on a forming stage. For now, a guidance document for a strategic communication process has been approved on national level and is valid only for the issues of European integration. The document is called “Strategy of the Government of Georgia for Communication and Information on the Issues of European Integration,

for 2014-2017”. Coordination of performance process is provided by the Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration (mentioned hereinafter as “State Minister’s Office”).

According to the information obtained from the State Minister’s Office, the governmental strategy on communication and information about the issues of Euro-Atlantic integration is in the process of development and is going to be approved in the near future. So far there has not been formed a competent interagency working group under the State Commission of Georgia on NATO Integration on the issues of strategic communication, whereas such a group is functioning under the State Commission on the Integration of Georgia in the European Union (EU).

The State Commission of Georgia on NATO Integration (started on January 31, 2005) is entitled with the coordination of activities on national level towards Euro-Atlantic integration. The State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and his office provide coordination, monitoring and control over the commission’s activities. Five theme groups functioning under current commission have been rendering assistance to the State Minister’s Office. The functions of these groups do not cover the sphere of strategic communication and are mainly oriented on elaboration and implementation of the Annual National Program (ANP) on Collaboration with NATO.

As mentioned above, unlike the direction of Euro-Atlantic integration, a unified government strategy on communication and information, concerning the issues of Euro-Atlantic integration, has already been approved and implemented. An interagency working group has been formed to implement the strategy under government document about the communication and information on the issues of European Integration. The group is entitled to work out annual action plans on the implementations of the strategy. These plans are approved on the meetings of the Government Commission of Georgia on EU Integration (started July 10, 2014). The first such plan was created in 2014. Currently, 2014, 2015 and 2016 annual action plans are available to public.

On the basis of the data obtained from state agencies and other organi-

zations involved, an annual report on implementation of above-mentioned action plans is compiled as well. The reports on the implementation of 2014 and 2015 action plans are publicly available as well.

It should also be noted that the information center on NATO and the EU under the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration compiles an action plan annually. The annual report on the activities conducted by the center is available on the center website.

3. STRUCTURAL UNITS OF MAJOR STATE AGENCIES PARTICIPATING IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PROCESS ON THE ISSUES OF EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

The structural units working on strategic communications under state agencies involved in planning and implementation of strategic communication on the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic Integration are still in the process of formation. In some of them the issues of strategic communications fall under the obligations of structural unit/governmental official (for example, the Department of Public Relations/Deputy Head of Department), and they perform this function along with main daily activities. So far, staffing the majority of these structural units has mostly failed. Meanwhile, the process of staffing and providing trainings for functioning governmental officials is under its way. Part of the respondents on research interviews has noted that there is severe deficiency and a few newly appointed officials working on the issues of strategic communication do not have thorough understanding of the essence of the work to be done.

In part of the state agencies involved in the process of strategic communication on Euro-Atlantic Integration, and namely, in the issues of integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, special departments of strategic communication were established in the Office of the

State Minister and in the Ministry of Defence of Georgia in summer, 2015. These departments are still in the process of formation and staffing. In other state agencies these functions fall into the obligations of the International relations and Public Relations structures/ staff working specially on these issues.

The Ministry of Defence is a state agency of special interest in terms of Euro-Atlantic Integration and is especially noteworthy. The number of personell, working only on strategic communications for the issues of integration into NATO, is relatively big in comparison to that in other state agencies. By the time of conducting the survey, the Department of Strategic Communications at the ministry had 13 employees. The staff is going to be doubled in the near future. The department will get assistance from the advisor of NATO main group on the issues of strategic communications, assigned to the Ministry of Defence. The assistance will cover elaboration of documents and action plans.

In coordinated implementation of strategic communications on Euro-Atlantic integration, the Department of Strategic Communications at the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration gets strong support from the information Center on NATO and the European Union. The center, staffed by 17 employees for now, functions through the headquarters located in Tbilisi and 8 regional bureaus, planning, coordinating and implementing strategic communication on Euro-Atlantic integration.

In National Security Council strategic working on communications is the responsibility of Public and International relations Department and the Head of the Department.

In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the above-mentioned function falls into the obligation of Media and Information Department. In future, after the reorganization has taken place, Political Department at the ministry will, supposedly, perform this function.

For the purpose of daily coordination of strategic communication on

governmental level, a new unit for coordination service was created at the Department of Public Relations under the government of Georgia. The agency is in the process of formation and staffing.

4. THE PROCESS OF PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

The process of planning and coordinated implementation of strategic communications on national level towards European and Euro-Atlantic Coordination, guidance documents for the effective process management and structural units for their implementation are on the stage of formation and development. Despite this, relying on the analysis of data obtained from research interviews conducted in agencies participating in this process and information from guidance documents on strategic communication, as well as from practice, first evaluations can be made.

4.1. Strategy of the Government of Georgia for Communication and Information on the Issues of European Integration

As the governmental strategy on strategic communications towards Euro-Atlantic integration is still in the process of formation, the strategy of Government of Georgia about the issues of European integration has been taken as a study example on governmental approach towards communication and information on the issues of European integration.

According to the document, the aims of the strategy for communication and information on the issues of European integration within the country are: to raise public awareness on the relations between Georgia and the EU, on the EU, on challenges and opportunities connected with European integration, also – reforms to be carried out within the process of European integration; prevention of unrealistic expectations from European integration and neutralization of wrong and stereotypical perceptions with the regard

to this issue. The key elements of the strategy in terms of foreign policy include raising awareness of EU members on Georgia and strengthening the country's image.

The strategy is based on implementation of activities in three main directions: education, raising awareness and support/public advocacy. On national level the strategy aims at three basic target groups: the youth, vulnerable groups and the people contributing to the formation of public notions (they do have influence on the formation of public opinion); on international level there are identified four basic target groups: Eastern Partnership countries, organizations and individuals who have influence on the formation of public opinion in EU member countries, Georgian citizens and diaspora organizations working and functioning in EU member countries, and interest groups (interest groups include: diplomatic corps, attaches of EU member countries accredited in Georgia and international organizations, EU Delegation, EU institutions and officials, academic circles of EU member countries, international non-governmental organizations and foreign media).

A closer and thorough look at the sub-groups making up basic target groups on a national level, elucidates the fact that dividing population into target groups, in a number of cases, is artificial to some extent and is more like the classification of society by different characteristics than the target grouping. For example, it is unclear why all our countrymen living abroad, persons with disabilities and internally displaced people belong to vulnerable groups. This view is also backed by the fact that no target groups have been thoroughly studied on the basis of the information obtained from research interviews, to determine the degree of problematic issues concerning these groups.

The results of surveys, conducted according to the schedule of the communication strategy on European integration at the beginning and the end of a year, are not disclosed and consequently, it is difficult to make the following assessments: how detailed these surveys are and to what

extent they can reflect the nuances of support dynamics by target groups.

In this regard the information obtained from research interviews is noteworthy. According to the information there is not enough research in specific target groups and no adequate criteria have been determined to measure the effectiveness of specific activities and the effect obtained with each target group. Hence, it is clear that measuring the effectiveness of efforts towards target groups and of specific types of activities is rather problematic. According to the information obtained from the Office of the State Minister, on the basis of a recently developed standard questionnaire, a special survey method is being implemented to correct shortcomings.

It is also worth pointing out that there are not set mid-term specific goals (milestones) and their deadlines in performing the governmental strategy about communication and information on European integration, which makes it difficult to conduct periodic monitoring of accomplishing ultimate goals and consequently, to ensure their achievement.

4.2. Action Plan of the Strategy for Communication and Information on the Issues of European Integration and Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan

The annual action plan on the implementation of the strategy about communication and information on the issues of European integration is compiled at the Office of the State Minister at the beginning of the year. The plan is made up of the activities obtained from different agencies and planned on departmental levels and transformed into a unified document. It should be noted that the dates for conducting majority of the activities provided are not specified beforehand. According to the information from respondents, one of the main reasons for that is the fact that state agencies are not provided with special budgetary funds for strategic communication activities, which complicates accurate planning of these activities beforehand and independently from other events.

According to the information from the Office of the State Minister, from the implementation of the first annual action plan to the period of

conducting survey, about 750 events were held with 25 000 citizens participating. These events include strategic communication activities focused on the issues of the EU, as well as those on Euro-Atlantic integration.

Even a quick look at the annual action plan and the report on its implementation enables to see easily significant shortcomings in the process of planning the activities included in the document.

The annual action plan is more like a mechanical set of activities provided by state agencies than the plan, which has been made on the basis of the efficiency of the activities done in previous years and which has been planned beforehand. The activities included in this document are somehow scattered geographically and in terms of time, and some of them have nothing to do with strategic communication.

In the above-mentioned documents you will encounter almost all types of activities which are done in different agencies all year round, beginning from school educational event “The Clock of Park Birds” and the action “One Day without a Plastic Bag” and finishing with the activities about the revision of the methodology for a targeted social assistance system, discussion of basin management plan for the river of Chorokhi and aerophotography of temple city Vani and its surroundings.

The analysis of annual action plan and the structure and content of annual report documentation on the implementation of action plan provides the basis for the following conclusion: conducted events embrace a very wide range of activities and despite the scarcity of resources, problematic issues are not prioritized properly and no emphasis is made on target groups and key problematic issues. The majority of research interview respondents pointed to the need for the improvement of prioritizing while planning activities.

The structure and form of the report on the implementation of the action plan makes it difficult to understand specific contents of the main governmental messages while implementing the action plan and which target group of which quantitative composition they were delivered to. In the report of action plan there are not separated the activities implemented on national and international levels; besides, in a narrative part there are not

mentioned those additional factors which made it necessary to make a few amendments during strategy implementation.

In the report on 2014 action plan there are described a few projects and events which have nothing to do with strategic communication. These projects cover generally the process of integration between the UN and Georgia and are implemented through the activities on legislative amendments, harmonization with European verdicts and others.

Indeed, there is certain probability that such projects/activities could have the component of governmental communication; however, in most cases no description of the above-mentioned components is provided in the report. For example, it is unclear how communication strategy relates to the conformity of meteorological service with UN standards. Considerable part in the document is dedicated to various events on the issues of trafficking. Although this is an important issue, making such emphasis on trafficking in the documents of communication on European integration is illogical and unreasonable. The report includes activities done by various international organizations which have no clear connection to the governmental strategy towards integration into the EU.

According to the information obtained from research interviews, activities of one of the major agencies implementing strategic communication policy on the issues of European integration – the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development – are mainly oriented on a business sector and less focused on other target groups identified within strategy frames. Civil society is provided with relatively more general information on the agreement with the UN about Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The only criterion for the assessment of these activities is the size of the audience taking part in, and less attention is paid to the effectiveness of activities. It should be noted that on the Ministry website the agreement is allocated a special place which publicly displays all the information and documentation connected with the agreement. It is planned to design a separate web portal on DCFTA. The ministry cooperates with a non-governmental sector, which is mainly manifested in making speeches by ministry officials on events organized and held by non-governmental sector.

4.3. Evaluation and Monitoring of the Implementation of Strategic Communication Activities

There is no need to further explain the need for monitoring the process of strategic communication. Naturally, for the evaluation of results it is necessary to create efficient mechanisms for measuring quantitative and qualitative effects of activities on specific target groups. According to simple logic, without measuring the results of strategic communication it is impossible to determine the possible extent of achieving priority goals, which will complicate adequate correction of strategic communication policy.

According to the information obtained from the respondents, assessment on the efficiency of events is made according to their number and the number of participants, also – on the basis of national and international surveys ordered by the state at the beginning of the year. The results of surveys ordered by the state are used for domestic purposes and, hence, they are not delivered to non-governmental organizations involved in the process of strategy implementation and to any other actors of civil society.

None of the agencies, and among them, coordinating bodies, has an effective methodology to evaluate and measure effectiveness of implemented activities on strategic communication.

According to standard practice, in case of failing to meet quantitative parameters, the Office of the State Minister sends relevant agency notification with the recommendation of holding more events. Hence, it is clear that governmental responses are based not on the conclusion made through the evaluation of work effectiveness conducted by the agency, but on meeting quantitative parameters planned and included in an action plan.

According to the information from the interview, implementation of a special system of written surveys is planned to be utilized for the attendees of strategic communication activities, which is a right but not a sufficient measure to improve the situation. There is clear need for conducting additional, and among them, target group-oriented periodic surveys. The

respondents stressed the need for conducting mid-year surveys as well, inasmuch it would give agencies the possibility to correct shortcomings immediately in the second half of the year.

4.4. Strategic Communication on National Level

The activities on strategic communication conducted by the agencies involved in the process of strategic communication on European and Euro-Atlantic integration are quite varied and numerous. The events of a non-virtual contact type with the local audience are held as in the capital city, as in the regions, and among them, in the districts populated with national minorities. While target groups have been determined for the communication strategy on the issues of European integration, the same has not been done formally on governmental level for the communication strategy on Euro-Atlantic integration.

The absence of target groups and packages of main messages reduces significantly the effectiveness of strategic communication activities which aim at intensive implementation of strategic communication on Euro-Atlantic integration within the country. The field of media propaganda monitoring and responding properly and on time is still in the process of development in major agencies involved in the process of strategic communication on integration into NATO. Consequently, the process of working out adequate responses neutralizing the effects of negative media propaganda is not immaculate as well.

With the help of NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Center (JTEC), the process of preparing institutional communication strategy on Euro-Atlantic integration is in progress in the Ministry of Defence – one of the key state agencies involved in the process of strategic communication on Euro-Atlantic integration. The process of media monitoring has determined priority areas which will become key components of the action plan.

At the beginning of the year a short information booklet about the NATO-Georgia essential package adopted on Wales Summit was translated from English into Georgian through the efforts of the Ministry of Defence in collaboration with the main group of NATO experts. The booklet aims at raising

public awareness on NATO-Georgia expanded cooperation and the benefits to be obtained from that. This is a really progressive step forward taking into consideration the lack of detailed information about NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Center and the programs to be implemented within Wales package. Besides, delivery of this and other types of positive information on a regular basis still remains a serious problem.

According to the information from the respondents, the Ministry of Defence composes and finances publication of special tabs in Georgian in popular regional newspapers, aiming at raising public awareness on the current issues concerning Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia and the benefits from this process. Ministry officials are also planning to make short videos, upload them on social networks and broadcast on different TV channels. Joint events are held together with non-governmental organizations on current topics of Euro-Atlantic integration, holding discussions about the problems in the process of strategic communication. Meetings are held with the population of ethnic minority regions. On the meetings local residents are informed about current processes of key issues on Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia, taking place in the Ministry of Defence. They are also informed about the benefits resulting from the expansion of relations with NATO.

The Office of the State Minister works closely with several non-governmental organizations, and among them, with Civil Development Agency (CiDA) and the Center of Development and Democracy (CDD), as well as within eugeorgia.info project. The work is in progress with target groups, and among them, with academic and business circles, ethnic minorities and clergy. We welcome the practice of publishing articles and brochures in the languages of ethnic minorities. Joint visits of state agencies and non-governmental organizations are held in regions. The visits aim at explaining to local entrepreneurs the possibilities of getting benefits from the Association and Free Trade Agreements with the EU. In the frames of the project initiated by CDD and oriented on clergy, authentic information is delivered to the target group through outlining specific benefits of the integration of Georgia into the EU.

The informational center on the EU and NATO is working intensively as well. For the purpose of raising public awareness on the EU and NATO, the center, on the annual basis, organizes EU and NATO Weeks and several hundred events as in the capital city, as in different regions. Despite the priority of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, the center gets little funding from state budget and frequently has to do different activities on fundraising from non-budgetary sources, in order to provide implementation of planned projects.

In spite of strengthening Russian propaganda and outbreak of pro-Russian media on Georgian media-market, which offer the above-average reimbursement to professional journalists, there are not functioning any programs within state aid for regional broadcasters who are excessively vulnerable in financial terms. Such projects would undoubtedly contribute to spreading objective information and positive messages through regional media, which on the one hand, would raise public awareness on the issues of Euro-Atlantic integration and on the other hand, would reduce their vulnerability towards anti-NATO propaganda.

Unfortunately, so far there are no regular TV series on the current issues of Euro-Atlantic security and integration, which would cover the key aspects of current process, encourage building of correct and reasonable expectations and give explanations to population in public and explicable language about specific benefits being obtained and to be obtained in future from the integration into NATO. However, the fact is that after switching to digital broadcasting in Gori region, the people in some villages adjacent to occupational line have no access to Georgian channels.

We welcome the fact of assigning the persons responsible for coordination on self-governance level in regions; however, in practice, it is very difficult to monitor the events, and especially, the activities conducted by non-governmental organizations, which increases the risks of their duplicating, implementing of similar communication activities in a specific region/district and omitting more problematic regions/districts. It is hoped that an electronic calendar, uploaded recently on the website of the State minister's Office, will partly eliminate this problem. It will supposedly in-

clude all the activities – governmental and non-governmental – planned on the integration into NATO and the EU.

The use of webpages and social networks of the agencies involved in the process of governmental strategic communication is increasing steadily. However, it should also be noted that regional broadcasting resources are barely used for this purpose, while in both – the capital city and regional towns and villages TV is the main source of getting information. As mentioned above, it is no secret that there is severe shortage of the programs dedicated to the topics of integration into NATO, in television programming of both – regional and national broadcast.

For the purpose of strategic communication, the Office of the State Minister is planning active use of short videos. A special short video on the topic of visa liberalization with the EU has been made and broadcasted on TV. The work on making other relevant short videos and their popularization is in progress as well. Brochures and guides are being published, tabs are financed to be published in regional newspapers, mainly in different – Armenian, Azerbaijani, Abkhazian and Osetian languages.

In conclusion, it should be noted that together with general informational messages it is important to collect and popularize the cases of particular success about real benefits from European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The work is under its way in a given direction, however it is highly recommended to increase amount of work and make it more systematic. These cases might include specific examples, namely: how a Georgian entrepreneur working in a specific field managed to enter European market and increased his expert; how much did a large company from a EU or NATO member country invest, what new technologies were implemented and how many people did the company employ in Georgia. It will be equally beneficial to show the extent to which Georgian armed forces are becoming more and more professional within the process of integration into NATO and to elucidate the trend of continuous process of strengthening country's defence system.

4.5. Strategic Communication on International Level

Studies of the events included in action plans for implementing the strategy of communication and information on the issues of European integration have shown that in connection with European and NATO partners, the dominant role is given to cultural and tourist activities, and namely - participation in tourist exhibitions/fairs/festivals and arrangement of various cultural events. It goes without saying that such events make a vital contribution to the awareness on Georgia and raise benevolence towards the country; however, in order to achieve long-term goals towards the support of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, it is necessary to implement other, more specifically-oriented activities in a systematic and consistent way.

An analysis of the activities included in the above-mentioned documents and the information obtained from the interviews reveals that the contacts with academic circles of supporting and skeptical NATO member countries, non-governmental organizations and media representatives are very scarce and irregular. While experiencing shortage in proper planning and funding on national level, there are implemented very few projects with above-mentioned sources of “word of mouth”. Besides, no links are established or strengthened, no channels of direct communication are created, which could be used intensively to formulate and popularize a positive narrative about Georgia.

Strategic communication activities implemented outside the country are very few and, as a rule, are held within and during general official visits planned in advance. Introductory visits arranged for influential middle and high rank political figures and other so called “popularizers” from EU and NATO member skeptical countries are very rare.

According to the information obtained from interview respondents, even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is oriented more on the activities within the country and participates mainly in the activities held in Georgia. One of the reasons for that trend is the shortage of budgetary funds, which hampers the process of conducting more activities outside the country; in addition, setting up the structure of strategic communication is delayed, which creates obstacles in relevant planning and reasonable utilization of current resources.

Both sources – the information presented by the respondents and the content of reports on action plans and their implementation – make it clear that cooperation of state agencies with non-governmental sector is very rare while conducting strategic communication activities outside the country, and that the necessity of financing such events is virtually ignored. The absolute majority of respondents stressed the necessity of more active work with “popularizers” from EU and NATO member countries and in these terms, emphasized the importance of the involvement of Georgian non-governmental organizations in the projects connected with these issues.

Georgian diasporas and Georgian students studying abroad – a unique human resource – remains largely unused in the activities on gaining support on worldwide scale. Through proper planning and organization and with extremely low costs, it is possible to fully mobilize this unique and voluntary human resource towards implementation of diverse activities for enhancing friendliness of NATO and UN partner countries to Georgia. The students and diaspora representatives can have a key role in holding various cultural, informational and educational or other events worldwide.

There is a shortage of contacts with those prestigious media publications, journalists and experts who provide regular coverage of Post-Soviet news and whose notions and statements do influence public opinion in their countries on the narrative about Georgia and hence, contribute to the creation of relevant policy and attitude towards this issue.

An effective and internationally approved practice of lobbying should not be demonized. In case of proper and transparent selection of targets set and lobbying firms, and balanced implementation of mutually agreed and approved activities, lobbying support can significantly contribute to the accomplishment of mid-term and ultimate goals in strategic communication with foreign partner countries.

For clear demonstration of inseparability of Georgia and Euro-Atlantic security, it is also necessary to highlight and put forth the topic of cooperation safety on a regional scale, and namely, the issues of safety cooperation among the countries of the Black Sea basin and lobbying before NATO and EU member countries.

At present the environment for such lobbying is quite favourable. On the one hand, aggression of Russia in the Black Sea region and consequently, NATO focus on the eastern borderlands; and on the other hand, surge of refugee migration from the Near East to the EU via the countries of the Black Sea region can be used as an excellent opportunity for the effective lobbying more involvement of NATO and the EU in providing the security of the Black sea region.

4.6. Interagency Coordination of a Strategic Communication Process

The part of the research interview respondents has noted that there should be an effective structure on strategic communications in the Government of Georgia, which would provide general political management of a strategic communication process and make it easy for the Office of the State Minister to act as a coordinator in the process of implementation. The necessity for the formation of a clear and well-grounded narrative for the support of deepening NATO-Georgia relations on national level was underlined as well. The narrative will become the basis for working out and developing specific messages in each agency involved in the process of strategic communication and compiling the collection of general messages.

The respondents paid special attention to the need for arranging regular interagency meetings on the issues of integration into NATO. Unfortunately, the Public Advisory Council of the State Minister on Georgia's integration into NATO, which aims at increasing interaction between the government and a non-governmental sector and achieving the effect of synergy, do not meet regularly as well. However, it is worth noting that in early 2016 the Council meeting was held and the idea about creating electronic calendar was offered by the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. The calendar, displayed on the webpage of the State Minister enables governmental and non-governmental sectors to share-upload regularly information about their activities, which will increase the awareness of both sectors and reduce the risks on unnecessary duplicating.

Despite the efforts of the Office of the State Minister, the Information Center on NATO and the EU and other agencies, it is unclear, to what ex-

tent the process of regular delivery and presenting unbiased information to problematic target groups in a simple and understandable language is coordinated, which is crucial in reducing the impact of current negative myths about NATO and the integration of Georgia into NATO. The mechanisms of monitoring negative myths spread by Russian propaganda on integration into NATO and the UN and coordination of relevant responsive actions on national level are unclear as well.

Without mobilizing the efforts on national level and in the absence of a governmental strategy in communication and information on the issues of European integration, the work done by separate agencies in this direction will always be fragmented and insufficient for reaching positive outcomes.

It is not clear to what extent the work on special information messages for problematic target groups is coordinated. These messages are intended to cover all the issues which are sensitive to them and to present simple explanations about the benefit to be got from the process of deepening further Euro-Atlantic integration.

No general collection on messages on European and Euro-Atlantic integration is compiled. Such a collection, agreed at governmental level, would be presented in a sequential and synchronized way by all agencies involved in the process of strategic communications. One proof for the absence of unified message collection is the interview with Mr. Zurab Chekurishvili - Advisor of the Minister of Agriculture of Georgia – published in “Sputnik-Georgia” on March 10, 2016. In the interview the respondent notes that selling Georgian products on European market extremely difficult, as “they have surplus in terms of production and cannot find the use to their own goods”; at the same time, he welcomes return of Georgian production to “its historical and traditional place” – Russian market.

There is urgent need for the designing the collection of special messages focused on important international forums – whether summits, ministerial meetings or other high-rank meetings.

The process of coordinating common state position, development of message package with its consistent presentation on the key issues of integration into NATO remains to be a serious problem. A clear-cut example of that is

a public declaration of apparently different positions on the request of documentation on NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) by the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs. It is unknown which short-term goals are to be accomplished before NATO summit in Warsaw, to what extent their performance is coordinated and how this process is monitored effectively.

4.7. Professional Capacity Building Efforts

According to the information obtained from the respondents, increasing the capacity of strategic communication in general in competent structural units and namely, professional development of the staff involved in these activities remains to be one of the main challenges. In response to this challenge various types of programs are in progress and trainings/workshops are arranged for the personnel.

In order to increase the effectiveness of strategic communication process on the issues of Euro-Atlantic integration, the representatives of agencies involved in the process attend special courses planned within the program on Professional Development financed by NATO. Studying visits take place in NATO Center of Strategic Communications located in Riga. A special informal working group of international donors supporting development of strategic communications operates under the Office of the State Minister. The group provides help in coordination of the aid from partner countries, the EU and NATO structures.

In regions, on local governmental level, certain officials are assigned the responsibility of implementing the governmental strategy about communication and information on the issues of European integration. Special introductory tours are arranged for these officials in Brussels and EU structures. The meetings of Georgian and EU countries' farmers are arranged for the purpose of sharing experience of entering European market. The Information Center on NATO and the EU conduct periodic lecture/seminars for local officials about the current issues on European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

5. CONCLUSION

The system of elaboration and implementation of governmental policy for strategic communication on the issues of Euro-Atlantic integration is still nascent. Structural units the system is comprised of are still in the process of formation and staffing, and majority of the personell requires further professional development. A guiding document of strategic communication on the issues of Euro-Atlantic integration is in the procees of elaboration and the effective interagency coordination mechanisms necessary for its implementation are yet to be developed.

The significant progress is already achieved in regards with establishment and activation of a strategic communication system on European integration. Nevertheless, analysis of content and the process of implementation of the strategy document on communication and information on the issues of European integration clearly indicates serious problems in terms of adequate understanding, planning and implementation of strategic communication policy.

While measuring the results and effectiveness of strategic communication activities the emphasis is generally made on quantitative indicators, what significantly restricted effectiveness of a current system for evaluation-monitoring and revision of strategic communication activities. Special mechanisms for monitoring the proliferation of negative myths on NATO integration and coordinating proper and timely responses should be devised on national level. Without these mechanisms, the efforts made by separate agencies will have fragmentary effect and the negative impact of Russian propaganda could not be decreased significantly.

It is necessary to conduct more intensive and focused research of target groups that comprise the domestic audience. Based on these research efforts, national programs targeting the problems identified should be elaborated and implemented. This will undoubtedly contribute to designing the strategic communication activities of a more appropriate type and content, ensuring their better prioritization and focus on the main target groups.

The situation is rather gloomy in regards with conducting effective stra-

tegic communication policy on international level. The problems of international support for Georgia's integration into NATO and EU are not grouped and analyzed in terms of its geographic (country/regional) and thematic characteristics. If conducted, such research-analysis would ensure more in-depth and adequate understanding of the problems of international support, which would contribute to better prioritization of activities in terms of their geographical and thematic direction and, consequently, could significantly increase their effectiveness.

Budgetary funds allocated for strategic communication activities are rather meager. This is particularly evident when analyzing the activities conducted internationally – the number and content structure of activities do not meet the requirements of strategic communication policy.

Finally, it should be noted that elaboration and successful implementation of effective strategic communication policy on the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration requires more involvement on the highest political level and activation of current governmental/state commissions and their working groups.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

For conduction of effective policy for communication and information on the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, the Government of Georgia is recommended to implement the following recommendations:

Management of Strategic Communication Policy

- Progress in achieving strategic communication goals and improving interagency coordination can be reached only in case of proper involvement and support at the highest political level, including through active discharge of duties by the Prime Minister of Georgia as a Head of the the Commissions on integration into the EU and NATO;
- For the effective management and control of the processes for elabo-

ration and implementation of strategic communication policy on the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, concrete responsibilities of agencies/bodies, coordinating these processes, and the mechanisms for their implementation should be clearly defined;

- The practice of elaboration of general message packages on key topics, as well as of separate message packages for specific important forums should be instilled; such message packages should be elaborated and approved by a relevant Governmental Commission on the EU/NATO integration, and communicated by relevant agencies within the margins of their thematic competences in a coherent and synchronized way.

Strategic Communication Process and Its Main Documents

- The strategy of communication and information on the issues of EU/NATO integration should be more specific, rather than a declaration type document; it should include not only general goals, but also specific target goals to be achieved during the period of document's validity, as well as strategic approaches chosen to facilitate their achievement;
- For ensuring the effectiveness of strategic communication policy, apart from the quantitative indicators, the qualitative indicators should also be elaborated and used for assessing the efficiency of strategic communication activities, and based on such assessment, the relevant amendments to the policy of strategic communication should be made;
- The annual action plan on the implementation of communication and information strategy should be oriented on achieving specific goals defined by the strategy document; for this purpose, the national programs focused on target groups and relevant topics should be elabo-

rated, based on which, the series of specific types of activities will be planned and conducted;

- The relevant interagency working groups of Governmental Commissions on EU/NATO integration should prepare semiannual reports on the implementation of an annual action plan; for this purpose, they should coordinate the processes of evaluating the effectiveness of the activities conducted during the reporting period and drafting of binding recommendations;
- Thematic monitoring of media and evaluation of public opinion surveys should be carried out periodically; the gathered information should be analysed with a focus on negative perceptions in population and degree of vulnerability of target groups, and findings of such analysis should be reflected in a semiannual report on the implementation of the action plan;
- For the effective management of strategic communication process, the state agencies' current practice of not specifying planned activities, their timing and budgetary resources allocated for their implementation must be revised; significant part of the planned activities should be more specific topic oriented and better focused on sensitivities of the target groups.

Resource Management

- Taking into account the shortage of human and financial resources, it is important to overcome a temptation to maximally cover all audiences and to ensure focusing the strategic communication activities on relevant regions, topics and target groups;
- Ensuring viable strategic communication process necessitates not only establishment of relevant structural units on national and agen-

cy levels, but also their adequate staffing, which requires allocation of additional resources for financing educational and training programs for the personnel;

- As the main source of information for the absolute majority of population remains a television, it is necessary to allocate additional resources to fund series of informational and educational TV programs supporting European and Euro-Atlantic integration to be broadcasted on national and regional TV channels;
- For the effective use of national media resources towards achieving the goals of strategic communication policy, it is important to support the media companies, which promote Georgia's integration into NATO/EU and democratic values, through awarding grants, implementing joint projects, financing TV/Radio programs and special supplements in newspapers and magazines;
- The human and financial resources of the structural units involved in the implementation of strategic communication process should be increased significantly; the agencies should be provided with a separate budget for strategic communication activities, what will facilitate precise, in advance planning of these activities independently from other events;
- Public Advisory Council on Georgia's NATO Integration of the State Minister should intensify its activities and facilitate full realization of the strategic communication cooperation potential between governmental and non-governmental sectors;

Integration of Modern/Innovative Approaches

- To generate innovative approaches for achieving the goals of communication strategy, the creative resources of non-governmental and

private sectors should be tapped, what requires establishing the practice of outsourcing work to the organizations/companies experienced in the given field;

- For reducing the impact of propaganda efforts against European and Euro-Atlantic integration, it is necessary to put in place, on national level, the mechanisms for permanent monitoring of local media and rapid response to specific facts of false information proliferation;
- For reducing the impact of negative perceptions about western integration on the population, as well as communicating in simple language the benefits gained from this process, it is necessary to increase visibility and comprehension of the social assistance provided by EU and NATO countries through creating simple narratives, easily understandable infographs and short videos;
- To increase foreign support for Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration, it is necessary to significantly expand the cooperation efforts with influential foreign non-governmental organizations/think tanks, prominent experts working on South Caucasus region, public figures and journalists, to host introductory visits for projecting a positive image of Georgia; such cooperation projects should involve Georgian diasporas functioning abroad and Georgian students studying overseas;
- The persons with the high credibility and authority within the target groups, among them, celebrities, clergy, professionals from different fields of life and others, should be involved in relevant strategic communication activities;
- To raise awareness among the pupils of higher classes of secondary schools, the relevant information packages on Georgia's NATO and EU integration should be integrated within school study programs.

SOURCES:

1. Research Interviews
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5. 2015 Action Plan of the Strategy for Communication and Information on the Issues of European Integration
6. Implementation Report of 2015 Action Plan of the Strategy for Communication and Information on the Issues of European Integration
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8. Periodical Reports of the Information Centre on NATO and EU