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Politico-Institutional Communication: Challenges and Impacts

Associate Professor Valentina Cornea, PhD
Cahul State University "B.P. Hasdeu", Republic of Moldova
valycornea@yahoo.com

Abstract: In a society which is organized according to democratic principles, public institutions obtain important prerogatives relating to administration of problems concerning public interest. Communication in governance represents the instrument which follows local institutional politics in its materialization, it makes known for the public the administrative act, it determines the needs and willing of the community members. The issue of communication in public institutions it is a part of actual concerns; well known authors argue the importance of communication process, its' quality as an instrument in achieving goals etc. The scope of this article is to analyze the mode in which the communication in public local administration evolves. Basic concepts will be reviewed, the explanation of fundamental processes of communication, networks and channels. The second part of the article contains a description of communication practices inside the system of local public administration. The reference framework used for public communication in Republic of Moldova is presented, methods of implementing communication are described and analyzed, having as a milestone electoral campaigns for local elections, also a short analyses of web pages that belong to local public administration authorities as an instrument of institutional communication. The approached themes tend to relieve the stake and effects of communication inside the system of local public administration, and also some considerations concerning the specific of communicative process in public institutions.

Keywords: democratic principles; public institutions; communication; communication practices

In a society which is organized according to democratic principles, public institutions obtain important prerogatives relating to administration of problems concerning public interest. That's why public institutions should approach to community members, to maintain contact with them. In this context, public administration, through its institutions, should communicate and to be opened to the dialog, to respect and to consider the citizens.

Communication in administration represents an instrument which accompanies local institutional policies contributing to its realization, make known the social

corps administrative action, determine the needs and desires of the community members. Only under these conditions it is possible to strengthen democracy in different levels, such as to permit the exercise of rights and duties of citizens, as well as to satisfy the collective interests.

By definition, politico-institutional communication represents all forms of communication which relates to political activities, (election speeches, surveys, media communication, social communication, etc.) even we can differentiate political communication then institutional. (Dictionary of Political Affairs: 60 stakes of contemporary France, 2002, p. 51) Political communication includes procedures, norms and actions by which is used and organized political information. It takes, obviously, of the persuasion register, while institutional communication is more explicit. Institutional communication is a process while the institution from public administration aims to strengthen image, inspires around it a spirit of confidence and sympathy from citizens, and informs citizens, in logic of general interest, frequently within public policies. Given the diversity of public institutions, multiplicity and complexity of their tasks, frequently citizens have difficulties to distinguish public corps which performs a particular action according to its competences (often attributed to an action performed by a district council to local council or decentralized services). Therefore, each public institution seeks to inform on its competences, to define the domain of actions, building thus its own identity, affirming their specificity.

The border between these two concepts – political and institutional communication, is very permeable. Most of the state actions of communication, administrative institutions and political actors are carried out in a confused kind where is mixed political and institutional communication. Also confusing character is maintained that the politicians use their institutional position to give legitimacy to their application. There are factors of confusion and opinion polls, designed and ordered in large numbers by administrative authorities, concerned to know better citizens.

Political actors and administrative institutions are required to communicate, to prove under their actions which need to be started. Both political communication and institutional, behave duties and responsibilities and is submitted to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties provided by law, which constitutes necessary measures in a democratic society. Rallying option of Republic of Moldova to the European standards of human rights compliance, implied right of

access to information, has led to create legal basis which will ensure this objective. The main normative acts, which constitute the reference framework to ensure public communication of Republic of Moldova, are:

- *Law regarding to Access of Information* no. 982 from 11.05.2000;
- *Law regarding to Local Public Administration* no. 436-XVI from 28.12.2006;
- *Law regarding to transparency in decision making process* no. 239-XVI from 13.11.2008;
- Government decision *regarding to official websites of public authorities in the Internet* no. 668 from 19.06.2006.

Mentioned laws expressly provide applicable norms to ensure transparency in decision making process within authorities of local and central public administrations, another public authority and regulates their relations with citizens, with associations established in accordance with the law, and with another interested parts¹. Public administration authorities are required to have an own official Internet web page, for the purpose to public information about their activity. Transmission of information is provided by different means:

- a) placing it on the official website, displaying their premises in an accessible area to the public;
- b) through media dissemination;
- c) by another means established by law.

Also, public authorities are required to prepare and to provide to the society annual reports on transparency in decision making process. These reports, obligatory, must contain the following elements:

- a) the number of decisions taken by public authority during the reporting year;
- b) the total number of recommendations in decision-making;
- c) the number of consultative meetings, public debates and public meetings held;

¹ Interested part, in a sense of *Law regarding transparency in decision making process* no. 239-XVI from 13.11.2008, represents citizens, associations which were legally established, private legal persons, which will be affected, could be affected by the decision adaptation and who could influence to the decision making process.

d) the number of cases in which actions or decisions of public authorities have been challenged for violation of the *Law regarding to transparency in decision making process* no. 239-XVI from 13.11.2008 and penalties.

As a benchmark for revealing how citizens communicate with government institutions serving the websites of public authorities. Report dates of the Department of Analysis, Monitoring and Evaluation of the policies of Chancellery of Republic of Moldova¹ demonstrate that the main purpose for which web sites are accessed by public authorities was to obtain the information, and the weight of this purpose is growing. Unfortunately, sites of public authorities provide a very limited degree of interaction.

Regulation on how to publish information on official websites of public authorities in the Internet defines following mandatory sections of the official web pages in Internet:

- the structure of public authority and the dates about their leaders;
- timetable of citizens audience;
- available language versions;
- legal-normative base related to the activity of public central and local authorities;
- presence of updated information with data indicating;
- international collaboration, programmes, projects with external assistance;
- official statistics and basic indicators;
- provide public e-services i, ii or iii levels of complexity;
- transparency in decision-making;

Of the 35 local government authorities only $\frac{3}{4}$ (27) have web pages, among them web pages of Dubasari and Stefan-Voda districts temporarily not working. Although registration is done for free, some web pages of local authorities do not comply with Regulation regarding on name management of the top-level domain “.md”.

Information on the structure of authority and dates on leaders are available on most official web pages. Some authorities place reduced information only a mere enumeration of subdivisions without duties mention and/or their contact phones. The dates about organizational chart are missing in Hincesti and Soldanesti districts. About 1/3 of the web pages do not provide information on the schedule of

¹ http://www.mtic.gov.md/img/news/2010/12/R_pagini_web_APC_decembrie_2010.pdf

received audience of citizens. The requirement to publish the information on Romanian and Russian language is respected by about 8% of Local Public Authorities (LPA), 76% of public information is only in Romanian language. Only the official web pages of the Leova district and the Autonomous Territorial Unit Gagauzia, is published the information in full in all three languages (Romanian, Russian and English), which is accounted for 8% of total local public authorities.

Information on official statistics is located in a quite low level, it follows from the fact that only 2 district councils (Drochia and Causeni) have this section on their web pages. Only $\frac{1}{4}$ of local public authorities benefit from international collaboration or from some programmes of external assistance, informing the public by placing the information on official web pages.

Current media product, web page of one of the local authority is designed to provide transparency in activity of all public institutions in the locality, to inform citizens about social, cultural events, economical or political community and to promote through published materials moral, cultural and social values. One of the arguments which support the creation of web pages instead of traditional forms of information is citizens predispose to use Internet as a source of information. Barometer dates of public opinion from Republic of Moldova shows that population use Internet as a source of information more often than newspapers. Age category 18-29, 50.9% use the Internet daily, up from 7.0% in the same category, who read daily newspapers. Age category 30-44, 27,1% use daily Internet and 7,7% read newspapers. Even older people use the Internet more often than read newspapers – age category 45-59 – 16,6% use Internet, 10,1% read newspapers. According the dates, Internet is situates on the 2nd place and is one of the sources of information that citizens have greater confidence, as television and newspapers are on the 6th place. However, web pages partially justify their role. Even if available, the information given is in brief and interactivity component is missing.

The most conclusive examples clarifying the way in which the policy provides communication election campaigns, because, within them are found not only printing election posters or recording of a televised candidate interventions; election campaigns includes all activities of personal recruitment, conception, investigation, marketing, strategic assessment, graphics, analysis of audio-visual landscape, financial calculation, the preparation of responses preceding [...] printing election posters or intervention of a candidate on a television.” (Stoicu,

2000, p. 14) The campaign of local elections from 2007, as agents of political communication, manifested mainly political parties. The themes and messages in the communication campaign through display and electoral spots were presented either moderate (Veaceslav Iordan), either exploiting fully the ideas and solutions proposed in the electoral programs (Vlad Filat). Basic themes promoted by the candidates, not always coincided with the written and promised in the election programs. Formal, most political parties assume a political doctrine – liberal, social, conservative, etc. - to legitimize its occupation of a constant place in the political arena of society. However, they often mention that will not let constrained by the respective doctrine, when they have achieved certain pragmatic goals.

The campaign moved through the various messaging to voters: from the message method directed before the commencement of election (coupons allowed), up to tricks and extravagant, like pictures of candidate in white gloves, suggesting clean hands policy, or posters pasted on the box of matches. How the agents efforts of political communication have generated the expected results? Experts who have analyzed the processes of conducting election campaigns consider that support of one of the political parties is determined to offer its policy. In the three election campaigns defeated parties which made offers to satisfy abovementioned needs. In general, left and center-left formations have focused on economic security and stability in the transition conditions, but those from the right-wing, born on the waves of national revival movement, put in the forefront the major values of these movements. (Boțan, 1998, p. 4)

In conclusion, the behavior of citizens from Republic of Moldova indicates a limited degree of control that can occur in connection with the political and social process. In 1995 the per cent of participation rate in local elections were 60.02%, in 1999 - 58.45%, in 2003 - 58.66%, but in 2007 - 52.34%.

The expected effects of political-institutional communication can be provided by upgrading direct contact with citizens, both in election campaigns, but, especially, in the period between them. As an exemplary form of social organization, political communication should not be used only in the delegation of power, but during the course of its' administration, to strength the participatory democracy, to form civic and administrative skills of citizens.

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