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INTEGRATION THROUGH COMMUNCATION AND INFORMATION

INTEGRARE PRIN COMUNICARE SI INFORMARE

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Abstract: *The article is part of a research on the management of communication in the EU programs. It describes an experiment meant to find out what a European citizen can learn about European integration only by accessing the internet. The results obtained show that EU integration is a complex ongoing process, not yet completed. The author presents the changes in the EU communication policy and suggests ways of improving communication and information on EU matters for the Romanian citizens.*

Key words: *European Union, integration, communication, information, EU citizen.*

INTRODUCTION

The article is part of a research on the management of communication in the EU programs for agriculture. We intended to find out how difficult it is for an average EU citizen to get information on a certain EU subject and what role plays information in understanding the EU policy. The experiment consisted in finding out what information on EU matters an average European citizen can get using internet. We simulated a situation in which we needed to know what EU integration means.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The first step was to access the European Web Site on Integration. The first piece of information given by the legal notice was that: *the opinions expressed on this Web Site are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission*. [1] Therefore, we

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/en/legal_notice.cfm

had to continue and see what the documents of the European Commission mean by EU integration.

To our surprise we could not find a plain explanation of the concept, but we found hundreds of places where all types of integration were presented. Among them we can mention: political integration, economic integration, immigrant integration, cultural integration, environmental, agricultural, tourism integration, etc.

Hence, the first logical conclusion is that there are different types of integration.

Next, we needed an official point of view and for this we chose José Manuel Barroso[1], president of the European Commission. In a speech delivered at a symposium on integration at the University of Berlin, he stated that:

> "*… integration is an imperative. It is a collective endeavour ultimately based on education, which opens the door to employment and active participation in social and cultural life* […] *Integration is not a luxury. It is actually a political, economic, social and ethical imperative. […]. Integration is a two-way process. The citizens of the Union must adapt to the diversity of those they welcome into their midst."*
>
> *(2007:pp.5-8)*

Thus, so far we have learnt that EU integration is of different types, is not optional but a political, economic, social and ethical imperative and implies adaptation from the parties involved.

The following step was to look up for the word in a dictionary. In a general dictionary, integration is seen as: *the process of becoming a full member of a group or society, and becoming involved completely in its activities.*[2] So we another characteristic can be added, i.e.: integration is a process.

Considering, the fact that integration is a process, we can infer that like all processes it must have several stages. Logically, there must be different degrees of integration, i.e. a country can be integrated politically,

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[1] Barosso, J.M., Integration Through Education in 21st Century Europe, *International Symposium – Federal Foreign Office, Berlin, 16 October 2007*, http://www.integration-symposium.de/Speech_Barroso_16102007.pdf, *pg 5-7*

[2] http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/integration

but not economically, educationally and culturally, but not environmentally, etc.

The next step was to see what average people from different European countries think about EU integration. The point of view expressed by the director of the Belgium's European Movement office, Maïté Abram[1] drew our attention. According to her, in Belgium and in other EU countries as well, there is tendency of increased apathy about European integration.

The information is very interesting considering the fact that Belgium joined the European Union (EU) in 1957, being one of the six founding member states of the European Union. Hence, we can infer that in almost half a century one of the founding member states has not yet resolved the integration problem. Belgium's case is not singular, two other founding states[2] (France and the Netherlands) did not ratify the European Constitution and the Ireland said "no "to the Lisbon Treaty.

The results of the surveys conducted at EU request indicated that the members of the public are insufficiently informed on EU policies and how these have an impact on their everyday lives.

The director of the Belgium European Movement considers that one of the causes is bad communication. As far as the EU policy is concerned, she thinks that this is better explained by "EU outsiders" because they are closer to the average people. Her explanation is rather simple the average citizens do not understand the EU jargon and she acknowledges the fact that her academic background, related to literature and linguistics, has been an advantage in her current position.

At this point we can also add that EU integration is an ongoing process and that it depends rather much on the level of EU information and on communication.

We continued our experiment by trying to see how EU integration is seen by Romanian professionals. We took into consideration some of the points of view expressed at a symposium on integration held in 2007.

[1] Brand, C., Promoting EU integration, http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/promoting-eu-integration/70580.aspx,
[2] Communication policy, http://circa.europa.eu/irc/opoce/fact_sheets/info/data/policies/culturale/article_7320_en.htm

According to professor Zamand[1], as far as Romania's integration is concerned, there is an entire specialized literature which analyses to the smallest details the gaps separating Romania from the average level of EU-12, EU-25 and EU-27:

> "*…researchers have developed even a passion in unveiling the weak positioning of Romania with respect to competitiveness and other economic and social efficiency indicators". (2007:13)*

Unfortunately the same passion is not displayed to find out viable solutions of catching-up, he adds.

Dinu[2] (2007) thinks that Romania has to be connected to the realities of the EU and has to make efforts to modernize*:*

> *Connecting the evolution of a country, region or community to the times tendencies represents the very essence of the modernization. The history is proving that this operation has been performed every time, as an undertaken project of the creative segments inside the territorial entities. There are no miracles known in this respect. (2007:20)*

There are no universal solutions for EU integration they depend on the country, its particularities, natural and psychological and circumstantial grounds and of course of the stage the country is in at that particular moment.

Changes in the EU communication policy

Since the sociological survey results indicated "general lack of interest of the public opinion towards the European problems", EU reacted promptly, changed its communication policy and took the decision to redefine "the communication culture" in order to enhance communication with EU citizens.

New strategies were needed to get citizens involved actively, not only as citizens of the national state, but also as European citizens. One of them was the "two-way communication strategy". It consists of the improvement of the quantity and the quality of the information provided to

[1] Zaman, G., 2007, Strategic Milestones of Romania's Integration to the European Union Process Efficiency, *Bucharest, Symposium AGER, pp11-13,* *http://www.asociatiaeconomistilor.ro/documente/simpozion_AGER_2007_engleza.pdf*

[2] Dinu, M. , 2007, Context Vision And The Ultimatum Modernization, http://www.asociatiaeconomistilor.ro/documente/simpozion_AGER_2007_engleza.pdf, pg 20

the citizens and the citizens' points of view influence the political decisions at EU level.

Another method used to communicate with the citizens and to regain their support and trust was to take the debate beyond the institutions to its citizens[1], to provide full and comprehensive information on the European Union and to involve them in a permanent dialogue.

Besides the tools previously used: regular meetings of the National Contact Points on Integration, elaboration of Handbooks on Integration for Practitioners, annual reports on integration and a European Integration Fund providing financial support for integration measures in Member States, two new tools have been introduced: the European Integration Forum[2] and the European Web Site on Integration[3]. These mechanisms were announced by the Commission in its Communication 'A Common Agenda for Integration: Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union' of September 2005 (COM (2005) 389)[4].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The article presents a possible way to get information on an EU subject matter. Even if there is a brief analysis, the time spent for doing it was considerable. We have to state that the information was obtained using three different linguistic codes, Romanian, English, and French and internet as a research tool. We cannot say whether people who speak only Romanian could have reached the same conclusions or got the same information. Up to a certain point the experiment can be made by any average EU citizen.

We are going to make two similar experiments on accessing EU funds for agriculture: one in which we use only Romanian and a parallel one in which we will use English, French and Romanian. The results are going to be compared.

We spent many hours accessing only articles and official documents on EU integration, thing that is not likely to be repeated by many people

[1] Communicating Europe in Partnership, 2007, pg. 3, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0568en01.pdf
[2] The European Integration Forum, http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/en/policy/legal.cfm
[3] European web site of integration, www.integration.eu
[4] A Common Agenda for Integration Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union, 2005, pg. 13, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2005:0389:FIN:EN:PDF

involved in other fields of activity and certainly not by our target audience, i.e. people involved in agriculture.

Our experiment showed us that EU integration is an ongoing process and it is obvious that Romania is at the beginning of a long way. If countries which are in the EU for more that 50 years have to invent new strategies to solve the integration problem, the difficulties that the Romania has to cope with are easy to imagine. We think that Romanians have the potential to deal with the difficulties of integration if they are properly informed. In our point of view, they have to be told that the EU integration problem is not just typical for Romania. Integration is just a stage of the transition and […] in order to avoid that the transition gets eternal exceptional steps of interventionism nature are allowed. (Dinu et al., 2005[1])

We consider that the Romanian citizens have to be informed on the recent developments in the other countries of EU. They have to be aware of the ripple effects of the European integration, one of them being the increased demand for lifelong learning which starts from simple productive activities to the highest skilled ones. People permanently need new knowledge and also more updated.

One solution would be that specialist people from different fields provide EU information on regular basis, on different subjects, for all walks of life. We have to be realistic and say that not all the people have the time, the energy or the capacity to make research, but many people are inventive and to succeed they need update information.

There are no universal solutions for EU integration, they depend on the country, its particularities and of course of the stage the country is in at that particular moment.

We think that Romania should learn from the experience of other European states and focus more on communication with its citizens. We definitely agree that it is a very good to focus the attention on young people, so they grow up with a better understanding of the EU policy. For this we should develop educational tools and promote cultural aspects of European integration. Of special interest for our target audience would be the

[1] Dinu, M. et al. (2005). *Economia României. O viziune asupra tranziţie postcomuniste, Editura Economică*, Bucureşti, pg 26

community tools such as the 'find-a-project-partner-tool'[1], which supports networking between stakeholders and the development of common projects.

Many of the actions suggested by the Belgium official can also be applied in the Romanian school and universities, i.e.: educational seminars, the use of innovative ways to explain the EU through textbooks /on the web/ you tube/ facebook.

Romanian officials have to be aware not to repeat the same mistakes the other member states made, i.e. lack of information and communication of the EU policies. Romania has to try a new communication policy, new strategies and a new approach in tackling EU matters.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion we can say that there is a link between information and communication. Even the results of the surveys conducted at EU request indicate that the members of the public are insufficiently informed on EU policies and how these have an impact on their everyday lives. One of the causes is the difficulty of the average EU citizens to understand the EU jargon.

New strategies have to be applied to get citizens involved actively as European citizens, too. The quantity and the quality of the information provided have to be improved and the citizens' points of view have to influence the political decisions at EU level.

It is obvious that in order to reach an objective, such as EU integration, strategies have to be adapted permanently and the interdependence between communication and information cannot be ignored.

We reached the conclusion that EU integration is a complex ongoing process, which is of different types, is not optional but imperative and that it implies adaptation; it depends rather much on the level information and on the level of communication.

Romanian officials have to be aware not to repeat the same mistake made by the other member states, i.e.: lack of information and communication of the EU policies.

[1] Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/partners_en.html

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11. http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/integration [accessed March 2011]