

ACTION PLAN ON STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

1. Context

The use of communication tools has played an important role in the dramatic political, economic and security related developments that have affected the EU's eastern neighbourhood over the past year and a half. This has been recognized by the European Council that, in its conclusions of 20 March 2015, “stressed the need to challenge Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns and invited the High Representative, in cooperation with Member States and EU institutions, to prepare by June an action plan on strategic communication.”

The European Council further referred to the “establishment of a communication team” as “a first step in this regard”. A start-up team (East StratCom Team) has now been established (see point 5.a) This Action Plan has been developed by the East StratComTeam in cooperation with the EU institutions and Member States. It outlines the measures foreseen in relation to EU Strategic Communication on issues related to the Eastern neighbourhood and beyond, as well as wider EU efforts in support of media freedom and strengthening of the overall media environment. The East StratCom Team will maintain an overall coordinating and monitoring role in relation to its implementation.

2. The role of strategic communication in furthering EU Policy Objectives in the Eastern neighbourhood

Strategic communication is an important tool in furthering the EU's overall policy objectives. The policy objectives of the EU towards its Eastern neighbourhood were most recently summarized in the Declaration adopted at the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit in Riga on 22 May, which defined the EaP as a partnership aimed at:

"building a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability and increased cooperation" based on "mutual interests and commitments and supporting sustained reform processes in the Eastern European partner countries", and aimed at strengthening “democracy, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the principles and norms of international law”.

and based on:

“...the sovereign right of each partner to freely choose the level of ambition and the goals to which it aspires in its relations with the European Union...”

3. Objectives of the Action Plan

The overall objectives that will guide the measures contained in this Action Plan can be summarised as:

1. Effective communication and promotion of EU policies and values towards the Eastern neighbourhood;
2. Strengthening of the overall media environment including support for independent media;
3. Increased public awareness of disinformation activities by external actors, and improved EU capacity to anticipate and respond to such activities.

4. Effective communication to the wider public – guiding principles

EU strategic communication towards the Eastern neighbourhood should first and foremost focus on the development of positive and effective messages regarding EU policies towards the region. These messages should allow citizens to easily understand that political and economic reforms promoted by the EU can, over time, have a positive impact on their daily lives. These messages should also clearly communicate the universal values that the EU promotes, including a commitment to democracy, the rule of law, the fight against corruption, minority rights and fundamental freedoms of expression and of the media. Rather than explain the detail of EU policies and programmes, they should clearly explain their benefits to the people of the region. This positive narrative should be communicated in clear language, and based on real-life success stories that will resonate with the target audience.

Where necessary, the EU should also be prepared to anticipate and respond to disinformation relating to the EU.

5. Key areas for action

a) Increase EU Strategic Communication capacity

In line with European Council conclusions of March 2015, a start-up team has been established within the EEAS, with contributions from EU institutions. The Team will also include experts from EU Member States, and is expected to reach full capacity by 1 September 2015. The work of the team is focused on proactive communication of EU policies and activities in the Eastern neighbourhood and beyond. In particular the Stratcom Team will develop dedicated communication material on priority issues, where EU strategic communication needs to be improved or the EU is subject to disinformation campaigns. Such products will be put at the disposal of the EU's political leadership, press services, EU delegations and EU Member States. The Team will develop communication campaigns targeting key audiences and focused on specific issues of relevance to those audiences, including local issues. The actions of the East Stratcom Team will build on existing work and

will be coherent with wider EU communication efforts, including activities of the EU institutions and EU Member States.

b) Work with partners and development of networks

The development of effective networks of communicators will be key to maximising and amplifying the impact and effectiveness of the communication activities undertaken by the East Stratcom Team. Networks should provide a platform for relevant stakeholders to exchange products and ideas, to amplify communication messages, and to coordinate their activities. EU level networks will aim to improve the overall coherence and coordination of EU messaging in relation to the Eastern Neighbourhood.

Networks will be built incrementally so as to include key communicators in the EU institutions and delegations, EU Member States, like-minded third countries, regional and international organizations, and partner country administrations. In parallel, networks of journalists and media representatives will be developed with a view to better communicating EU policies and supporting independent media in the region. Contacts will also be maintained with civil society actors.

c) Communication activities on EU funded programmes, projects and activities in the Eastern Neighbourhood

Understanding of EU policies and activities in the neighbourhood will be strengthened via other current and planned activities, notably ongoing communication activities carried out by the EU delegations and Member State embassies on the ground, the new regional communication programme OPEN Neighbourhood, and communication related to EU projects. The East Stratcom Team will work with relevant actors to ensure coherence between these activities and the overall strategic objectives identified.

d) Support for freedom of the media and freedom of expression

The EU and its member states will continue to engage actively in efforts to promote freedom of the media in the Eastern Neighbourhood region, notably through its cooperation with and support for the activities of the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The EU will work closely with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia on the implementation of relevant aspects of the Association Agendas, notably with regard to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

e) Public Diplomacy Initiatives in the neighbourhood

The EU will engage with local populations - including young people, members of academia and civil society - via longer term public diplomacy initiatives aimed at exposing target

audiences to the EU, explaining EU policies, promoting dialogue, and ensuring that citizens are generally well informed about the EU. Specific support is foreseen under the Partnership Instrument and the Jean Monnet programme, as well as ongoing support for Erasmus Plus.

f) Capacity building for journalists and media actors

The EU will support targeted training and capacity building of journalists and media actors in the region, notably via the OPEN neighbourhood communication programme which will run from 2015-2019. This programme will build on experience of the previous programme, and will include opportunities for placements with EU based media to facilitate exchange of best practice. The EU will consider how best it can support training for journalists experiencing conflict situations, to better enable them to report on issues of relevance to local populations. Coordination with key partners and Member States in relation to their training and capacity-building efforts will be ensured through dedicated networks and coordination by EU delegations on the ground. The EU will also consider how best it can support the development of a network of journalists throughout the region to exchange information, encourage best practice, and act as advocates for local reform efforts.

g) Supporting pluralism in the Russian language media space

The EU will ensure that communication materials and products are available in local languages, notably in Russian. Consideration will be given to appropriate follow-up to the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) Feasibility Study on Russian Language Media Initiatives. A number of Member States are already increasing their support for broadcasting in the Russian language to cater to national minorities. In the meantime the EU will continue its support at local level for independent media, including Russian language media, to ensure that citizens have access to alternative sources of information in their local language.

h) Engagement with Civil Society

The EU will work to improve the capacity of civil society to exercise its role as 'media watchdog' and hold Governments to account, including via support for the EaP Civil Society Forum.

i) Increase awareness, develop critical thinking and promote media literacy

The EU will work with Member States and key partners to raise awareness of disinformation activities amongst the general public. EU Member States and partner governments should put in place media literacy actions at all levels. The EU can support these efforts by finding, documenting and promoting best practice in the field of media literacy. EU actors should support journalist organisations in defence of the values of the media profession and encourage self-regulation of the media.

j) Strengthen cooperation on regulatory issues in EU Member States

While recognising that media policy remains primarily a national competence, the EU (Member States and the Commission) will work to improve cooperation between national regulators, including through meetings of the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA).