Strategic Communication
26 - 28 May 2013

IRC-05-CF
EXTERNAL REPORT

Background

The conference was a continuation of a series of events dedicated to the topic of public media and security in the SEE. The first event was held in RACVIAC - Centre for Security Cooperation in November 2011, followed by an event in the town of Pula, in May 2012. Strategic communication is a complex and sophisticated matter – more than a commonplace activity and rather more than common sense. The first step towards realizing the potential of strategic communication to contribute to national security strategy must be to ensure that it is properly understood as a component of national security strategy and made integral to the national strategic process. Therefore, for the countries which are NATO members and for those that are in the process of obtaining NATO membership, there is a need for exchange of knowledge, experience and lessons learned, as well as a need for more events like this one that would contribute to and enhance strategic communication as a process that supports and underpins all efforts to achieve the aims of collective security and defence systems.

Purpose

The purpose of this event was to foster and underpin the collaboration/communication between representatives of the public relations agencies in security departments and public media services from the SEE region and international organizations and partners by using dialogue and exchange of information, views and ideas, with the aim of encouraging more open relations and environment in the region.

Acknowledgements

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Venue and participation

The event was held in the town of Skopje (MK) from 26 to 28 May 2013. The Conference gathered more than 35 participants - spokespersons and representatives of the ministries of defence of the regional countries, representatives of public media services, as well as organizations such as the RCC, OSCE, MNIOE (Multinational Information Operations Experiment) and independent media experts, thus serving as a forum for the exchange of views, information and ideas focusing on different aspects of strategic communication.
Mr Milan Janicijevic, acting RACVIAC IRC Pillar Programme Manager, chaired the opening remarks. Mr Janicijevic welcomed his Excellency, the Minister of Defence (MK), Mr Xhaferi, as well as all other distinguished speakers and participants and kindly opened the event, inviting the Minister of Defence (MK), Mr Talat Xhaferi, to take the floor and give his welcome remarks.

Mr Talat Xhaferi underlined that in its Strategy for Strategic Communication, the Ministry of Defence had clearly defined its goal – open and effective communication with its citizens, observing the principles of credibility, understanding, dialogue and unity. The Minister outlined to the representatives of respective Ministries of Defence and public services from the region basic guidelines that define the public relations within the Ministry. “We are committed to the efficient practice of transparency and timeliness as our guidelines in conveying the essential message to the public, regardless of whether it is inter-institutional, national or international one”, Minister Xhaferi added.

The Director of RACVIAC - Centre for Security Cooperation, Ambassador Branimir Mandić, underlined the fact that the very first step towards fulfilling the potential of strategic communication for contributing to the national security strategy was to actually understand what it meant and what its relation to the overall security strategy was. The Ambassador stressed that NATO member countries and candidate countries needed to exchange knowledge, experience and lessons learned in the field of strategic communication.

Ms Dinka Živalj, RCC Spokesperson/Head of Media Unit, delivered opening remarks on behalf of the RCC Secretariat, and subsequently also a presentation entitled "Developing a Communication Strategy". Ms Živalj gave a brief overview of the RCC structure and activities, including a reference to the organization’s key activity in the upcoming years: the South East Europe 2020 Strategy. She then focused on the key elements of a communication strategy, including definition of mission, vision, goal, objectives and tactics, target audiences, resources, as well as development of an action plan. Ms Živalj also briefly touched upon the issue of crisis communication.

Ms Cathie Burton, Spokesperson from the Press and Public Information Section, OSCE Secretariat, addressed the key elements that constitute the foundation of communication, as a manner of building mutual trust with the public. “Communication is part of democracy and the world today has become a communication highway”, she said, stressing that strategic communication is based on finding and conveying the real, key message. She also addressed the place and influence of the social media in contemporary society, implying that they must not be neglected as they serve as
one of the most efficient tools for multifaceted communication with the public today.

The Conference continued with a presentation entitled "The Narrative Construct, a MNIOE approach to narrative development within coalition operations", which was delivered by Mr Dirk Schweickhardt (OF4) DEU Army, International Policy and Doctrine, MNIOE, Germany. Mr Schweickhardt informed the audience that the information strategy included interagency and multinational approach across all levers of power to crisis/conflict prevention and resolution in the information environment. It provides mission-specific, strategic and political guidance for civil and military information activities in support of mission objectives. The narrative, he continued, was a coherent system of stories that creates a cause and effect relationship between an originating desire or conflict and an actual, desired or implied resolution. In so doing, narrative has the capacity to express identity, values, moral basis, legitimacy and vision around which entities (organisations or activities) can unite.”

The following speaker was Mr Sasho Kuzmanovski from the analysis section, MoD (MK) who delivered a presentation on strategic communication as part of National Security Strategy.

He was followed by Col Tome Trajkov from the Army General Staff, MoD (MK). Col Trajkov presented the current StratCom structure/Public Affairs structure and said that in order to be effective, public affairs support commanders required the function to be properly resourced and fully integrated into the decision-making process for military operations, policy development, programme design and service delivery. Col Trajkov continued that the mission of public affairs office/officers was to support CHOD/Commanders by communicating accurate information in a timely manner to audiences to improve public awareness and understanding of the military aspects, aims, operations, missions, activities and other issues of enhancing the Army’s organizational credibility. This includes planning and maintaining external and internal communications and community relations. Within the Army, a PA office / officers at each level of command directly support the commander.

The first working day was closed with a presentation provided by Ms Eli Tanaskovska from the MK Radio and Television. Ms Tanaskovska emphasized that the exchange of experience and lesson learned were very much needed and welcomed. Therefore, she proceeded, this kind of event was very important and this conference supported and identified new ways of deepening the understanding and relationship between public service media and security institutions. The second working day was dedicated to a more practical approach. It was intended to provide a more in-depth view of the
relations and access of public media services and defence PR departments. The first panel was entitled: Strategic Communication on Social Networks /New Media (New Communication Channels-Facebook, Twitter): Possibilities/Opportunities versus Risks/Threats. In the framework of this Panel Mr Mirko Štular from the Slovenian Radio and Television (RTVSLO) gave an Introduction to Social Media Usage in Public Service Media (PSM). Mr Štular shared his experience regarding changes in the media landscape - traditional media v.s web media. In this light, the following benefits were highlighted: monitoring quickly emerging events: disasters, protests, breaking news, etc; checking the public mood; measuring the temperature of a current issue; testing the reaction of the public; getting new ideas.

Following this presentation, Mr Tomislav Špoljar from the Croatian Radio and Television, delivered a presentation entitled: “Army (MOD) and police on Social Media – a view from the media side”. He demonstrated good and bad examples of using social media. Mr Špoljar stressed that even if you were not involved in social media, people and media were talking about you. Therefore it is better to engage in communication. He warned that social media today were necessary and very useful, especially in emergency situations, as indicated in the examples from the region.

Mr Eric May, Media Consultant, who delivered a presentation on “Effective Communication in a Crisis”. The Panel consisted of a crisis case study and the participants were divided into different groups. The case study was aimed at outlining trough a practical exercise the steps for assisting institutions to be better prepared to handle a crisis and to be more effective in communicating their message to the news media and the public when a crisis occurs.

Closing remarks

This Conference was the third consecutive event dedicated to enhancing dialogue and cooperation between security sector institutions and public media. The activity was a continuation of a series of events dedicated to the topic of public media and security in the SEE. The first event was held in RACVIAC - Centre for Security Cooperation in November 2011, followed by an event in the town of Pula, in May 2012. The conference was co-organized by the Ministry of Defence (MK), RACVIAC – Centre for Security Cooperation, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Secretariat, NATO Public Diplomacy Division and the Croatian Radio and Television. The conference was closed with a unanimous conclusion that this event was truly beneficial and provided a platform for discussing difficulties related to strategic communication and setting proper strategic objectives, but also for deepening the dialogue and cooperation between security institutions and public media. The following closing remarks were made:
- Strategic communication is both a skill and science;
- Strategic communication is about creation of communication based on trust;
- Strategic communication is finding the right message;
- Understanding of the information environment is an issue and overall communication is crucial for passing the same narrative;

The last conference panel was dedicated to the recent experience of Strategic Communication in crisis management operations. This panel was coordinated by
All participants and co-organizers contributed to the excellent two-day conference;
- The activity provided a platform for the PR officers from security institutions and journalists from public service media to get to know and understand each other and their communication better.

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