INTELLIGENCE, SECURITY AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION AND WHAT IT SHOULD BE? PROBLEMS WITH MODERN PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract:

In regard to public and strategic modern communication, at least in one respect everybody agrees - there are serious issues and ever larger categories of population seem to be increasingly difficult to reach by official messages and narratives, there are increasingly numerous left and right radicals and consensus, social cohesion and trust in authority and institutions is ever decreasing not only in Romania, but throughout the Western world. Not to mention proliferation of fake news, disinformation and conspiracy theories. The simple question is "Why?" But, going a bit further, the subsequent question this analysis is asking is whether "Do we really care to know why or we do not?" Are we really ready to know why and to admit why? Or are we the senders of public communication, part of the problem, and not only the recipients, the lack of education, as we like to think, or just hostile entities like the Russian Federation or others? As Stănciugelu et al. (2014, p. 338) stated that: Have we not diverted from the status of public communication issued by an impartial sender, as theory states it should be?

Keywords: *disinformation, fake news, communication, sociological bias, ideology, superiority complex.*

Introduction

If different analyses of the questions "Why is this happening?", why is it that we are having such problems regarding public communication, regarding disinformation, regarding increasing public distrust, come with different answers, linked to the academic profile of each of the researchers, each of them having, of course, their own

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pertinent and rational arguments, this analysis will focus on an answer according to which the main problem appears to be of sociological origin. In other words, the main problems behind increasingly efficient disinformation campaigns, increasingly less efficient public and strategic communication campaigns are sociological in nature and are quite serious – bias is one of them. And the bias is all the more of a problem when, of course, it is not only that we may not realize it, but we may not even want to consider or admit it. We will provide many examples below. However, before addressing the main problems on the issue, we should first see what the current understandings of communication or public communication are.

Communication Perspective

What is communication? If we were to take a look at the etymological root of the current word, we find out that in Latin the word *communicare*, among other meanings, also meant *to unite*, *to connect*.

What is public communication? Pierre Zémor, a well-known theoretician on the subject, says that: "public communication is formal communication which converges on exchanging and sharing public information and maintaining the social bonds, whose responsibility lies on public institutions" (Zémor, 2003, p. 27). So, social cohesion is one of the essential objectives of public communication, of public institutions, and we will ponder on this issue.

But which are the effects of public communication? Bernard Miège (Miège, 2000, pp. 75-78) considers there are four categories of effects that are usually sought after through public communication:
1. modernizing the way administration's function;
2. changes of behaviour in citizens (for example, wearing the safety belt);
3. building a modern image for some institutions or administrations;
4. seeking approval from citizens on certain issues (Bernard Miège himself says about this effect that "it is based on arguable principles (…); it is hard to accept that this communication would fall into public communication; it

belongs to political communication (with the one exception that financing is… provided by SID)" Bernard Miège goes on to cite Jürgen Habermas who says that this function actually means publicity implemented exclusively in relation to the imperatives of manipulation. (Miège, 2000, p. 78) Thus, it is actually an effect filled with negative implications.

Nowadays, we have to ask ourselves whether we, as senders of communication, are still following the basic objectives and principles of public communication, which are information and social cohesion, or we are actually following other objectives while pretending to still care for the main purposes stated above – because all of these actually have an overwhelming impact on both the results of the communication act, and especially on our entire society.

What is strategic communication? If we were to synthesize a number of definitions mentioned here (Cornish, Lindley-French, Yorke, 2011, pp. 3-5), strategic communication would mean public communication which follows and supports accomplishing strategic objectives, identified here as primarily national objectives, but they can also just as well be political, economical, organizational or military objectives etc.

Which are the goals of StratCom? We cite some of these goals as they are mentioned in an analysis here (Mârzac, 2019, p. 2): "At a national level, StratCom has two objectives and values. On the one hand, to consolidate the nation through a common inspired idea, lasting and strategic, as a long-term platform for the strategy and the national strategic objectives. The same, it can strengthen cooperation and cohesion at a government and society level in accomplishing strategic goals. At the institution level (ministries, armed forces, police), StratCom is an instrument of organizational development which answers at questions like "why do we have armed forces?", "which values does the Ministry of Defence add to society?", "how is the Internal Ministry providing human security" etc. – problems linked to the fundamental objectives of government organizations. So, once again we have social cohesion and building trust in institutions, an objective somewhat subordinated to the first one. And although the way in which strategic communication is used differs a lot, just like the objectives in mind, the

main goals need to be these two: cohesion and building trust. But modern European and Romanian societies seem to show that we are somehow failing at acquiring both cohesion and trust. The current analysis tries to offer an answer to the question "Why is that?"

What Communication Should Be. Issues. Just as Pierre Zémor (2003) said, cited above, communication should be centered on the citizen, on unifying a society and on information, otherwise we leave a lot of room for fractures in the society. This is an elementary conclusion, well-known to anyone interested in public and strategic communication. Regarding these fractures, we may find it easy to point out that the Russian Federation is exploiting and enlarging them, but it is much more difficult for us to admit that it may be us who are causing them, in the first place.

How did we do that? It is simple – by using our public communication to push into a corner, to push away, to antagonize on purpose or not large segments in the population, at a European level, segments in population that some thought might not be "educated enough", "not modern enough" or not "progress-centered enough". So, what do we want to do with these large segments in the population deemed "uneducated", "unmodern" or "not progress-minded"? A question that was surely asked in certain circumstances, but nevertheless a question that should have never been addressed like that in a multidimensional, diverse society, centered on mutual understanding and recognition, and, it should have never been even thought like that.

Why? Because we must never start from the assumption (which is common to all ideologies) that "we are the ones who are right and everyone else is wrong and it is in our mission to 'enlighten' them all." What do we do with the ones who do not want to be "enlightened"? History gave us grueling examples of what happened in circumstances like that. And it is in our duty to represent all, our duty is to be the representatives of the society, to watch over its well-being, and not at all to be modern "apostles" of an ideology or another. However, unfortunately, this is the feeling given by most public communications at the European level, when dealing with societal aspects, societal

projections, public policies or the future of a society, just the same as in Romania.

How did we push people into a corner? We are interested in public discourse, public narrative that one too many times has assumed the role of forming opinions on ideological basis instead of trying to form a unity, a social cohesion. We talk a lot about cohesion, but the public narrative seems to address only some people, as if this cohesion is meant for some, but not for the others, which actually leads to a blatant contradiction. And, in the end, we should not be at all surprised to see that we have exactly the results that we sought after – ideological leveling and radicalization on the one side, and marginalization, pushing away, antagonizing and radicalizing maybe an even larger segment of population on the other side.

And one more important idea here, we should not fool ourselves at all, this is exactly the way in which we are fully contributing to weakening our society not only by the lack of unity inflicted (which leaves a lot of room for proliferation of hostile actions), but also by losing a lot of valuable members of our society who do not feel at all represented by public discourse and, thus, refuse to get involved in public institutions and in society with their full potential. What do we do, do we "despise" them, do we treat them with superiority as if we were self-sufficient, from the "heights" of our moral ideological perspectives that we deem to be a priori faultless, as if we did not need them at all? Do we really believe we do not need them? Because this is how many of them feel. This would be a big mistake that would cost us all a lot, but this is how many times European and national public communication feels like.

Examples. In order to try and give an example of what we mean, there was a famous interview (Alexandru M., 2021) when segments of the population that disagreed to Covid vaccination and other measures were called "terrorists". Afterwards, many people were upset that maybe this type of approach and by calling people "terrorists" actually drove even more citizens away from the objective that was insistently wished for, and that is vaccination (so, the primal objective was vaccination and not a united society or going through the crisis together and getting out of the crisis even stronger as a society than before).

But we believe that the biggest problem with the narrative above was not that an elementary public communication mistake was made and many citizens were insulted from the highest level as being "terrorists", but the biggest problem is that somebody actually could conceive of such a thing. The problem is that someone, advisors of this public person or maybe even the public person himself actually thought that these citizens would resemble terrorists or, maybe even worse, would wish to discredit them by associating them to terrorism. And if someone responsible for communication thinks like that (and they are not an isolated incident or individual), we should consider that person may be under the influence of a bias. **This is exactly why we consider that the true problem of current strategic and public communication is actually a sociological one**, because this is how people think in certain entourages.

Thus, the sender of public discourse does not care about or does not manage to understand his or her recipient anymore, but they are actually trying to model the recipient according to their own ideological ideas. But what happens to the ones that cannot be modeled? Do we insult them as "terrorists"? The different ways in which such an imagined scenario could go are nothing to be proud of for any human society, especially for a society that thinks of itself, in many aspects, as the best there ever was, up until now.

Basically, this strategic communication mentioned above does nothing but to contradict its own main principles cited at the beginning of the analysis: instead of having cohesion and building trust in society as primary goals, we have a different purpose here, and that is vaccination, wrongly considered a priori as identical to or more important than cohesion and trust. And when we see that this objective of strategic communication that was wrongly taken on is not being adopted by a large segment in the population, what do we do? Instead of making good on our retreat, instead of retreating to new common ground, instead of trying to achieve cohesion and build trust on new factors, do we want to push away and to ostracize an important part of our society that does not do what we want them to do? Then there is no wonder that we seem to have emerged from the pandemic crisis even more polarized and disunited than before.

We wonder how is it that some societies get over crisis and seem to become more united instead of giving way to fractures. They may be doing so because the main objectives of their strategic communication are centered on creating cohesion and building trust in their society no matter what happens on a certain issue, and not by trying to impose a certain issue on the society at the expense of unity and trust. So, things do not go the other way around. And then we could ask ourselves again, why was the strategic communication handled in such a bad way? Because of the same reasons of sociological and ideological bias mentioned earlier.

We can find more famous examples of narratives at Balau M. (2020) and on HotNews (2021) – even though there are also other issues beside the Covid pandemic when a segment of the population was treated with some disrespect by some public communicators, thus missing out on the most important thing – we are all here together and it is only together that we will be able to build a better life and a better society –, when in different circumstances people made public analogies between functional analphabetism and vaccination rates, that is they compared the decision to vaccinate or not to being a functional analphabet. It is hard to conceive not only that these kinds of statements were part of a public or strategic communication campaign, but that these ideas have even been thought in the first place.

Which brings us again to the real problem mentioned earlier, and that is a sociological one – where the sender of communication does not understand or does not want to understand the recipient, a large segment of the population that the sender represents, and, moreover, even treats it with disrespect, superiority, a certain amount of despise as well. And people feel these things and they only antagonize citizens even more. Which is the exact opposite of what a public communication campaign should do or mean for a society.

As an example of communication that would have united a society (or at least would have made no new fractures), in the context of that really difficult pandemic crisis, it could have been said that:

> *"We, the Romanian State and Government, have purchased enough vaccine shots for everyone who wants to get vaccinated, we have managed to equip the hospitals to the best of our capabilities in this*

very difficult moment worldwide, we are doing the best we can to have enough medical personnel, medical equipments and medical supplies. However, citizens should understand that intensive care beds are limited, and so are some medical treatments, it is possible that these may soon become scarce or unavailable if the number of severely ill patients increases, which could mean less appropriate medical care for some and more victims.

Having said that, We, the Romanian State and Government, strongly recommend vaccination. However, we will not instate mandatory vaccination, the Romanian State understands and respects different opinions in the society, understands that vaccination is a personal matter for each citizen, that it requires self-conscious choices, weighing the information that we presented above.

In these circumstances, it is the responsibility for each of us to do as they think is best. The responsibility of the Romanian State and Government is to adequately inform the citizens and to do our best to provide them with medical care, equipment and supplies, with vaccine shots for each citizen that chooses to get vaccinated, in these very difficult circumstances for the whole world, and this is exactly what we have done and will continue doing." (Author's suggestion)

That is all. And it would have been a very professional narrative that would have managed to do exactly what the theory at the beginning of the analysis said it should do: that is informing people and social cohesion, inclusive for the entire society. Not to mention that it may have actually convinced even more people to get vaccinated than the actual narrative that deemed people as "terrorists" or "functional analphabets". It would have been a common-sense message that each and every citizen could have related to.

And this is what it is all about – that all citizens can relate to our message, because we are interested in the unity of the society, cohesion before all, inclusion and the realization that we need to go together ahead with our society even if we do not agree on all the issues with each other, even if we lose sometimes and things will not be perfect, but we win by being united. Because we really need each other, don't we?

Sociological Perspective

The Problem. Ideological Bias. Confirmation Bias. The things mentioned earlier about the Covid pandemic were just examples. Because nowadays, whether we like it or not, public communication has managed to become a means of ideological dissemination on a number of issues. Public communication is no longer about unity, it is not interested in the unity of the society, it is about building arguments or excuses for certain actions and policies ideologically motivated and issued, which means it is about the fourth effect acknowledged by Bernard Miège at the beginning of our analysis as being charged with negative implications. It is about rebuilding a society. And as long as we fool ourselves that we are "only" trying to communicate and to inform just so "we can be educated", but at the same time we are very well determined beforehand about what is right and what is wrong, as long as we think about ourselves as being faultless, then we are under the influence of an ideological bias.

Because, in order to give examples as well, how could we otherwise interpret the fact that there were (rightfully) written lots of analysis on the fake news and disinformation that ran through a part of our society during the Covid pandemic, but there was no analysis written by us, who talk all the time about fake news and manipulation and disinformation, about what was at that moment the unequalled campaign of fake news, disinformation, manipulation that came from the other part of our society in 2018 and tried to convince people to boycott the Referendum to define *the family* in the Constitution (and succeeded in doing so)? How did we miss that huge disinformation campaign? There was evidence for analysis on a level almost the same as the pandemic one in quantity and probably even more in violence than the pandemic one, especially online. Why did we not do any analysis? It is simple – the same ideological, sociological bias, that is hurting all of us so much.

And there is also a confirmation bias here, the way we find it defined by Martha Whitesmith in "Cognitive Bias in Intelligence Analysis: Testing the Analysis of Competing Hypotheses Method": "Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for evidence that supports a preconceived or favoured theory, to interpret information to confirm a preconceived

or favoured theory, or to ignore or unfairly discredit information that would disprove a preconceived or favoured theory." (Whitesmith, 2020, p. 184). Which is exactly what a part of our society did.

Trust. As we showed in the beginning of our analysis, when we talked about the objectives of strategic communication, if we want to have an even better and more functional society, we need to have a united society, based on truth and trust, impartial. If we think we can regain the trust of our society in any other ways, we are mistaken. And we should not even think about gaining trust in other ways, because truth, impartiality and strengthening the social bonds are, in theory, an inherent condition to the public institutions in a society. And, as we well know it and numerous analysis show, the trust of the society is a big problem to which we have thoroughly contributed ourselves, in the academic world – while, as a paradox, we think we are doing the right thing, that we are somehow new "apostles" of an ideology, of democracy and inclusion and "tollerance" and no one else can teach us anything more about these, we forget or leave aside the exact basic instruments that help build trust in society and all the other advantages that come from it. And the moment we thought the above, we have lost the right to be true ambassadors of the values listed there.

It is the same regarding fake news – we are all aghast and upset that a lot of citizens fall to fake news, while at the same time we do not want or we cannot realize why this is happening – because of a critical lack of trust in state institutions (LARICS, ISPRI, 2022), lack of trust based exclusively on the fault of their representatives, lack of trust that can not always be solved by communication – it needs facts, action as well. So, we, as senders of messages, if we believe or expect that we can fix it all just with words, then we are mistaken and all we do in that situation is add more fuel to the lack of trust by exactly the things we are saying – that is by saying and pretending we can fix just by words things that everyone knows should be solved by actions as well.

And if we do not communicate the truth, how can we stand up to the lies? By another lie? Maybe some people would say that works, that it all depends on how efficient and professional the communication is – a maybe it works but only for a while, and the side effects are horrible –

and this is exactly what happened to the Romanian society after decades of "communication" instead of action as well. **Communication that disregards facts or truth lacks consistency and all it does is that it manages to discredit itself in time**.

We believe that it matters a lot to what end do we communicate – if our communication starts from the idea that all we want to do is make the target group believe or do something that we want them to do (no matter if we believe that *something* to be true or not), then we open the path for conflicts in the society on the medium and long-term no matter how professional our message is, because we actually do not care about our target group or we hold it in disregard. Communication becomes a monologue; it does not go both ways anymore. And we all know too well that often the "civil society" we hold so dear and we like to talk with does not represent everyone, that there often is a silent majority, and the "civil society" is often just an excuse to justify certain policies, especially when we like a "civil society", but we do not like another; so, bias again.

If, on the other hand, our communication starts from the idea that we want to create harmony in a society, that we want to create solidarity, trust and consensus by non-coercion for common good (which we may not even know ourselves beforehand which is that), then inevitably we bend down to listen and understand this society in spite of our new or old ideological perspectives, in spite of biases or prejudice and in a very humane way we realize that we are actually part of this society as well. Communication coming from outside of a society has on the short or medium-term less chances to succeed than communication coming from the inside, which is exactly where we should think of ourselves as being from as well. Actually, Pierre Zémor, cited at the beginning of the article as well, argues that two of the main functions of public communication are "to listen (the expectations, questions and public debate), to contribute to ensuring social networking (the feeling of collective belonging, taking into account the citizen as an actor)" (Zémor, 2003, p. 27). We should ask ourselves whether we are doing that.

Superiority complex. The paradox is that we are or we are capable of being truly objective and relevant only if we truly care as well, because otherwise we cannot understand the realities and needs of the target group. And regarding the needs and realities of a society like that

of a nation-state like Romania, realistically speaking, if we think of ourselves as being above it, on the side of it or outside it instead of being part of it, then our communication will not reach the real problems of this society and risks being compromised. Just as it has been compromised, unfortunately, to a different degree, almost every message in the Romanian society because of a lack of trust. Lack of trust generated, as well, by a superiority complex resulting from the public communication of some representatives and some policies, both in Romania, and in the rest of Europe, in general. And this lack of trust has a deep impact on general security too, as we will show below.

Impact on Security. Perspective

Afghanistan. It was already in 2010 that, in the context of another crisis, *NPR* and *Foreign Policy* published an article where there was issued a warning about the American and European superiority complex: "In simple terms, we can now see that the United States and much of Europe were like happy drunks enjoying a pleasant if prolonged pub-crawl. But eventually the party has to end, sobriety returns, and the hangover must be faced. (...) If this analysis is even partly correct, then we are going to need some serious rethinking of grand strategy in both Europe and the United States. Hard choices will have to be made, and traditional world-views and familiar platitudes won't help us very much. Experience is a valuable trait for policymakers in normal times, but it can also blind them when new circumstances arise and the conventional wisdom is no longer relevant." (Walt, 2010) And what do we do in this difficult context nowadays? Do we go forward with our ideological biases that cleavage our society?

And if we want to know where this superiority complex might take us, all we have to do is take a look at many analyses that identified this moral superiority complex as being responsible (among other things, sure) for the painful American disaster in Afghanistan. We cite from an article published in *The Washington Post:* "U.S. leaders must rid themselves of a crusading impulse and a moral superiority complex in international affairs that has done more harm than good to the nation.

Instead, they should recognize the limits of hard power and show humility, prudence and respect for other cultures." (Gerges, 2021)

Everything that was stated above seem remarkably similar to the phenomenon that we are analyzing here regarding European and Romanian politics and communication – which is a moral superiority complex that neither admits, nor tries to understand others and causes a lack of public trust. We surely do not want a societal disaster in the European or Romanian society similar to the American military disaster in Afghanistan and yet we make the exact same mistakes The United States made in Afghanistan and we insist on making them. Considering all the gravity of this potential situation, but both the United States and us should regard what happened in Afghanistan (which came after a semi-failure in the Middle East and Irak) as a warning – if we do not change our approach, if we do not get over this moral superiority complex (which should not be, however, thoroughly mistaken for exceptionalism), just as the analysis cited earlier warned us, then, at one point, "hard power", military or political or even economical power, might not be enough, with catastrophical consequences for both Romania and the entire Western world. And we definitely want to avoid that. This is exactly why, in the context of the rise of China, of the competition, rivalry or emerging confrontation with China, the Russian Federation or other important international actors, like Iran, for example, and others, we must not take things lightly and we must learn from our mistakes. Both from our military mistakes, and, maybe, especially, from our societal mistakes, that have long lasting effects, harder to indentify and potentially more dangerous.

We need to keep our societies united, especially as we notice how adverse societies tend to get together into rather united blocks, both political, economical and in the respect of the general attitude towards the Western world. It may be easy for us to forget this or, sometimes blinded by conventional learning, just like the text cited earlier mentioned, it may be easy to miss the huge global changes that are occurring all over the world, in so many ways.

If we keep doing things the way we are doing them right now, we risk alienating not just places like Afghanistan, but important segments in our own societies. Do we really want to do that no matter the cost? We

can easily imagine how hostile entities like the Russian Federation (which is not at all alone in this regard) can and will not miss out on such opportunities, just like they showed. Especially as, while they profit from this, we do not want to admit the real reasons behind our ever more fractured societies, we exclusively blame the Russian Federation (which is really ok for them, because in our doing this they know we are failing to address the real reasons) and we persist in making those mistakes. Maybe our current narratives, under the influence of sociological biases and a moral superiority complex, exhonerate us from any blame, but the future problems will not be hampered by these at all.

The Communication Problem – A Sociological Problem. Just as we stated earlier, current communication problems are, in our view, actual sociological problems. And it is obvious that the senders are to blame for most of the problems. Because we have to assume that the sender communicates to a receiver they understand. That is part of the job of the sender, to understand and represent the receiver. And if you do not actually understand the receiver, if you just think you maybe understand them, but instead you are under the influence of stereotypes, prejudice, old or new ideologies, then it is obvious that, as the sender of messages, you are the problem. Even though it is difficult for us to admit it, we have to seriously consider this.

Public Communication to a Nation. We have to find common ground, but we have to do this in a very responsible and people-orientated way, because we all know how important communication is, how it can save a society or how it can be used as a weapon against it. And we also have to be aware that when we use this tool for personal, group or ideological purposes, then we are making problems in a society much worse by compromising maybe the only tool that can unite, consolidate our society today, especially in the digital era – and that tool is public and strategic communication.

And we can easily notice this when we take a look at both: communication used as a weapon by old or new authoritarian regimes, and at communication used to save and consolidate a society, like in the case of Ukraine, nowadays. Because the President of Ukraine, Volodimir Zelenski, did not run at the beginning of the invasion, he did not leave the

capital, he felt and acted as part of the society, he took a risk just like the other members of the society and his message was real and concerned the exact real problems his society was facing. He could understand his society when he felt its exact problems, when he was part of it, and, thus, he could speak "its language". Because in the end this is what it is all about – **in order to be able to communicate to and reach a society we have to know and speak its language – not in a linguistic way, but in a societal way.** How could we efficiently communicate to a nation during a crisis (and crisis are one after the other nowadays) if we regard ourselves as being outside that nation or if we somehow disconsider a small or large segment of it or if we believe we know beforehand all of its problems, without even listening or understanding it?

Distrust. Marginalization. The Ideology. And all of these things can easily be felt by part of the society which, later on, often because of distrust, falls victim to disinformation and fake news. And afterwards, of course, it is so easy to point fingers and say that they are "uninformed", "uneducated", "conspiracists", "anti-democrats" and "pro-Russian", "functional analphabets" or "terrorists" etc., but we really have to ask ourselves whether we really did everything we could, whether communication coming from the European Union or from us, all the others, really did everything it could so that these people sat right beside us? Or did we actually drive them away with our elitist communication, ideologically biased communication or just plainly ignored certain serious social problems and focused instead on non-essential issues, solely ideologically justifiable? Didn't, we do all of that?

Discrediting. It is indeed really easy to discredit part of the society after you may have neglected its concerns in your policies or public communication campaigns, its needs, after maybe you let it fall victim to disinformation, maybe sometimes even on purpose, in order to discredit it or its ideas, because you do not agree to its ideas. Maybe just because decidents or the senders of public messages consider a priori that these concerns or needs are illegitimate or obsolete, coming from "The Middle Ages", as unfortunately some people sometimes refer to them in our society as well. And is this how you unite a society or this is

how you want to actually get rid of part of the society? It sometimes seems and feels like a communication lynching.

Not everyone resisting some policies of the European Union are implicitely pro-Russian and not everyone supporting these certain policies in Bruxelles stay far away from doing profitable business with the Russian Federation at the expense of our security (former German Chancellors Gerhard Schröder and Angela Merkel are perfect examples). And then what do we do with this part of the society that is not pro-Russian, but just happens to disagree with us on some internal policies? Do we estrange it, do we push it into the hands of Moscow because of our ideologies, just like we have been doing for the past 10-15 years? And in the meantime, the representatives of this part of the society have conducted very profitable business with Moscow and increased Moscow's leverage on European security for a number of reasons. So, we are offering Moscow (and not only Moscow, but to any other adversary) a double win – while we alienate our own societies? And yet we have been doing all of that for the past 10-15 years.

And even though now it may seem that we have a good chance to rebuild, with great cost and effort, a certain security in regard to the Russian Federation, societal problems, fake news, disinformation campaigns, alienation and radicalization of the society (both left wing and right wing) will only get worse if we do not realize on time what we are doing wrong.

Example. In order to give an example, as a paradox, the Russian Federation does not have at all a lot of popularity in Romania out of several historical reasons, but at the same time there is also a certain distance in the Romanian society regarding certain policies of the government in relation to Ukraine. (Krastev & Leonard, 2022) We ask ourselves why is that? It is definitely not a pro-Russian attitude, then what is it? Apart from certain historical factors, again, one of the answers is the systemic lack of trust in state institutions (LARICS, ISPRI, 2022) – when these state institutions get really focused on certain policies, then the first impulse of the society is to say no, to go the other way. And this is a direct consequence of different policies and statements and communication campaigns during the pandemic and years before that,

which have eroded trust and did not represent the people, did not speak their voice. This is just an example of how this fracture in society can have a serious impact on security.

And there will be more crisis, more circumstances that require very serious security concerns and we just cannot afford to have an alienated part of our society just because some of us systematically drove it away with ideologically generated policies.

We really have to be aware that the distance between two parts of our society is increasing from one crisis to another, instead of decreasing, and if we go on with these ideological biases then we will generate a number of radical attitudes, both on the left, and on the right, all over the European continent, not only in Romania.

Plea for a United Society. We are living in difficult times, complicated and challenging, both internally, and externally, and as long as some of us may believe that they can get through it all on their own, without being part of our society, without *the others*, no matter whom these *others* are, and then we are mistaken. Because we will end up even more fragmented and vulnerable than before.

We have to go back to the beginning – a strong society is, above all, a united society and not an ideologically uniformized society, not matter if it is on the left or on the right. The concept of unity and the concept ideological uniformity are two very different things. Actually, this is exactly what the European Union motto "United in Diversity" wants to say, even though, unfortunately, too often people in Romania or throughout Europe forget its true meaning.

Conclusions

The Initial Purpose of Communication. When there is a fake commited, when one of the primordial meanings of communication is distorted, this is the purpose to generate solidarity and common ground to the benefit of all the members of the group, then society can feel it. Even though most members of the society cannot verbalize it like that, they do feel it and trust is lost – which is exactly one of the biggest problems of our society. Do we want to regain trust? If we do, then public

communication has to be true and not fake, it has to follow in its original objectives and has to be about the real problems, and not about ideologically motivated concerns that only interest a part of it (often the less numerous parts of it). We all know situations when things were and are like that.

Public Communication vs. Political and Ideological Communication. It is often stated in academic literature that public communication should be different from political communication (even though many people mistake one for the other), but it is just as well that public communication should be differentiated from ideological communication, should be protected from being turned into an instrument of ideological propaganda. We are saying this again; the receiver can feel these things and then both communication in general and the public institution are subsequently compromised when we do that. With a very serious impact on the whole of the society and on the security of everyone, that keeps adding to previous problems and impacts.

To make a difference between the two that is between public communication and propaganda let us take a look at how Le Nef defined them (apud Baylon & Mignot, apud Stănciugelu et al., 2014, p. 338):

● "**Public communication** is an impartial sender which is not vassal to any particular entity, may it be a power, group or person."

● **What is propaganda?**

"- It disseminates belief in its primordial meaning, fights so that public opinion accepts certain political or social opinions, and supports a political view, a government, a representative;

- It is a set of information tools that are deliberately used in service of a theory, a political party or an individual, so as to gain support and endorsement of as many people as possible;

- It serves any political strategy as long as it is exploited favourably by scientifically elaborated means of convincing spirits".

We believe that these are quite explicit in revealing what this analysis is also trying to say: **out of sociological reasons, we have diverted from the public communication of a neutral sender**

towards ideological communication, towards ideological propaganda, many times not even realizing it ourselves, and the state of our society is a direct result of these actions. Nowadays, every time we talk about disinformation, its success, how to fight it, when we talk about failed public or strategic communication campaigns (even though we do not talk about that so much, probably thinking that if we do not talk about them, that might save face), **it seems that we are trying to address the consequences instead of what caused them in the first place**, and the Russian Federation is not at all the only causeout there.

All of the above are an insight into one of these causes, a „root cause", as we see it, inflicting both societal, and security and even geopolitical damages, as we showed earlier. Of course, it would be easy to dismiss it, not to admit it for what it is, and this is exactly the reason why it is so widespread and will, unfortunately, continue to be for quite some time. This is the reason why its impact and proliferation are at such a wide scale.

Maybe some people would cinically, ideologically think that this is an impact we can afford, a sort of "collateral damage" for "the greater good", but when we are talking about the future of an entire society, that would be a very dangerous way of thinking and not at all a path we should go on. Especially as we would be doing that while at the same time pretending to do the opposite, which, again, people feel and drives the population even more apart from essential public institutions.

We have to seriously consider all of these things and we have to be honest with ourselves about where we are and what we want to do – do we regard public communication as a tool to change ideological or political views of a target group, no matter what, or do we see public communication for what it was meant to be from the beginning, that is a means of information and of consolidating, uniting a society for the common good? We believe the best idea would be to turn back to its original objectives, that is to inform and to increase social bonds, otherwise we risk emptying and discrediting one if not the most important element of a functional society, with negative consequences which, among disinformation campaigns, conspiracy theories and lack of

trust in public institutions and authority, may still be only at the beginning.

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