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EU-communication challenges 3 years prior to Hungary's presidency

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Abstract

What challenges will Hungary face when it assumes the presidency in early 2011?

Close cooperation will be required of the Presidential Trio when identifying presidential priorities. To garner both social and political support it is vital that, during Hungary's EU presidency, one be cognizant of Hungary's current situation. It is important to recognize successes and failures and produce a new solution. It will be the first time Hungary has assumed the presidency and it will entail a great challenge as the nation will be responsible for managing EU policies.

Key words

tasks, roles, concerns of citizens, national responsibilities, future prospects

Introduction

It is now four years since Hungarian EU accession, and the time has come to review the public's attitude, knowledge and expectations toward the EU. Given that Hungary will assume the presidency in early 2011, it is pertinent to assess the last four years' achievements and suggest future directions in EU communication. Understanding Hungary's present situation means recognizing the country's former successes and failures in the field of communication, and providing an appropriate change in orientation may prove crucial in rallying popular as well as political support behind the Hungarian EU presidency.

In 2011, Hungary assumes the EU presidency from January 1st until June 30th. But how significant is the inherent challenge in Hungary's assuming the presidency within the European Council? It is noteworthy that the Lisbon Strategy supervises the EU's uniform, coherent and transparent policies which define the tasks and the role of those countries assuming presidency within the European Council. Spain, Belgium, and Hungary are the three member states forming the candidate countries and will thus have to cooperate closely when identifying their presidential priorities. The EU presidency is a great challenge for Hungary, since the year 2011 will be the first time Hungary holds this position and it has to take the responsibility for managing EU policies throughout its presidential term.

Many questions arise as to why is it important to know the public's attitude toward the EU, and why is it necessary to review communication tasks when popular opinion looks on 2011 as simply an administrative matter. It is necessary to point out that Hungary can choose from two approaches regarding communication and its presidency. The first is a conventional approach which was, for example, followed by the United Kingdom in 2005, and which sees the presidency as a 'logistical' challenge exclusively for the administration, eurocrats, and diplomats. Following this approach, the presidency and its subsequent communication policy include just a narrow range of informational duties; the UK presidency simply shared its presidential priorities, topics, and the outcomes of meetings with the public through the media and the internet. However, another approach was tried by Germany in 2007, and offers a wider perspective within the framework of the Aktion

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Europa program. This approach uses the *hype* caused by the presidency to stimulate public attention toward European questions and to deepen citizens' knowledge of the EU. Thus, the Germans realized that the presidential term provides a unique opportunity to put forward the EU's policy and media agenda. They realized that it is a governmental obligation to utilize such an opportunity to attract and motivate the citizenry.

Not only do we believe that the Hungarian presidency and its subsequent communication policy should follow the German model, but Hungary should be even more active during the years before its presidency.

Two factors support this energetic approach toward the forthcoming Hungarian presidency. First, in the summer of 2010, there will be parliamentary elections, occurring seven months prior to Hungary's assuming the presidency, and it is unlikely that the strong political divisions that currently affect the country will disappear by that time. Regardless of which party takes power in 2010, it is in the next government's interest to ensure that electors who supported other political parties still support the presidency. The government can achieve this goal by involving the opposition and the public in all phases of this process: in the preparations, in the selection of Hungarian presidential priorities, and in the actual management of the presidency, and through transparency and total freedom regarding the acquisition of information. It is highly important for the Hungarian presidency's success that the public should look at the presidency as a broad national endeavour, not merely as a government task.

To understand the second factor advocating for more active communication, we have to scrutinize people's current attitude towards the EU. In the four years since accession, Hungary has gone from being one of the most pro-EU countries to one of the most EU-skeptic.

Methods

In terms of methodology, the study illustrates part of the national and international literature on EU communication, synthesizing survey results conducted by Hungarian institutions and the European Commission. Upon examining these results, it is obvious that in 2008 those who see accession as having a negative effect on Hungary significantly outnumber those who see accession as beneficial. In the remainder of the study, we will reveal pertinent details related to this phenomenon.

The study reveals that the number people believing that Hungary's joining the EU hurt the country now exceeds those who find it beneficial. Among EU citizens, Hungarians are among the most subjective when it comes to the EU, their opinions based on perception rather than fact. Obviously such strong disappointment and indifference by the public do not mesh well with organizing an event whose goal is likely not apparent to the average citizen. Only the costs are apparent (Boros, 2006).

It is thus clear that political divisions, ignorance about the EU, and EU-skepticism are factors that could undermine the chances of the Hungarian presidency's success. But we are convinced that by actively engaging the public many of the problems can be solved, and also that Hungarians might, despite their political division, embrace the presidency's success as a national responsibility. Therefore, in this study we will attempt to find an answer to the following questions as to which (communication) problems demand more attention in the preparatory phase of the Hungarian presidency and how to capitalize on previous successes in order to achieve the above mentioned goals.

In doing so, we will examine three topics: the citizens' level of knowledge, the citizens' attitudes, and the citizens' active involvement. For all three topics, we relied on surveys prepared by European organs, supplemented with communication institutions analysis.

We hope that this review will fully expose the challenges regarding citizens' attitudes towards the EU, and will contribute to the planning of pre-presidency EU-communication.

1. The citizens' level of knowledge

Only if one has the necessary information about the European Union is one able to utilize the inherent rights and opportunities stemming from the EU. Only if one is well-informed can one influence the EU's operation, and confidently formulate opinions.. Facts are the best weapon against mindless pro-EU propaganda and against baseless populist accusations that blame every inconvenience on accession. Only if the public is basically informed about the EU can people come to appreciate the importance of the Hungarian presidency, and only then can one expect citizens to support or constructively criticize the goals of the Hungarian presidency. In our view, if the majority of Hungarians are not familiar with the notion of the EU presidency and how the different European policies apply to everyday life, then one cannot expect them to actively support the events of 2011.

Although EU awareness campaigns began more than ten years ago, surveys reveal only partial success. In the following, we will examine the levels of effective and subjective knowledge, and then we will examine those problems that hinder information transfer. The cause of communication failure might be the 'sender' (European institutions, the government, NGOs), the channel of communication (media, books, brochures), the message (the dispatched message is of no interest) or the 'receiver' itself (public ignorance). It is thus important to examine which of these most impede greater public awareness (Boros, 2006).

1.1. Current problems with citizens' level of knowledge

Two factors need to be distinguished regarding knowledge levels. The real (effective) knowledge level and the knowledge level based on self-perception (subjective). Regarding citizens'³, several problems arise. One of them is determining what is relevant knowledge. Do citizens really need to know who the members of the Committee of Regions are, or be familiar with the history of integration? What kind of lexical knowledge does one require to capitalize on everyday EU opportunities? Generally, within the field of EU-communication, these questions have not yet been adequately answered. Concerning the 2011 Hungarian presidency, emphasizing a few topics might help involve the public. Such basic topics may be the notion of the European Council and the EU presidency, the priorities set by the Hungarian government, and EU measures taken to achieve these. Probably if citizens basically know the ins and outs regarding events occurring in the first semester of 2011, then they will be more likely to support it.

What notions do citizens currently have toward an 'imaginary scenario' about the Hungarian presidency? So far no survey has been conducted on the concept of the EU presidency, but Eurobarometer annually screens public knowledge about the functioning of the EU. To this question, 43% replied that they have some ideas about how the EU works, while 52% admitted to have no such knowledge (European Commission, 2007a). Familiarity with the different European institutions such as the European Council is also relatively high, 62% (European Commission, 2006a: 20). These results exceed the EU-27 average as Hungarians are usually more informed about the institutions than about other topics.

³ The level of effective knowledge stands for the set of information gathered for the decision making that was at the moment available for the consumer.

When examining the possible topics related to the Hungarian presidency, let us assume that the Hungarian government will probably select three priority topics. First, neighborhood policy and further EU enlargement including the West-Balkans question. Second, the “Health Check” reform regarding the Common Agricultural Policy, which was conducted in 2003 and known as Mid Term Review. Third, solving problems caused by the rejected Constitution. Presently these are the likely topics to be addressed in 2011. But how do the public relate to these topics which politicians and diplomats hold so dear?

- Only 23% of the Hungarian population have heard of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) which constitutes one of the worst scores in all of Europe. Moreover, even the 23% are ignorant when it comes to the CAP content. (European Commission, 2007c). Chapter 4 will detail the result of a questionnaire made in the agricultural sector.
- 47% of Hungarians know something about neighborhood policy. Nationally, 59% support enlargement, but regional differences are pronounced: people living close to the southern border tend to support enlargement towards the Balkans 27% less than those living in the North-Transdanubia region (European Commission, 2006a).
- 78% of the people support the idea of the Lisbon Strategy, which could be considered a sweeping triumph (European Commission, 2007a). It is, however, noteworthy that among all potential European issues this is the one which interests Hungarians the least only 12% are seriously interested, and 36% somewhat interested (Szonda Ipsos, 2006).

We highlighted these data to show that upon selecting the presidential priorities and subsequently communicating them, citizens' knowledge of the topics and their attitude towards them are worth considering. Evidently, selecting priorities solely on public readiness would be ill-advised, but one should consider the public's previous total indifference toward the Constitution, their ignorance regarding the CAP, and their strong support for enlargement.

Besides measuring real knowledge, self-perceived knowledge is also important. When using subjective surveys⁴ people are asked to evaluate their knowledge on a scale of 1 to 10. The subjective tests reveal very low levels of subjective knowledge or self-perceived knowledge. 48% of those interviewed said they hardly knew anything about the EU and only 20% claimed to be somewhat familiar with the Union. 15% awarded themselves a score of 1 and 0% a 10 (European Commission, 2006a). This represents the third worst European score (European Commission, 2007a).

Measuring self-perceived knowledge is important because people's perception as to how informed they are may influence their attitude towards the EU, their behaviour and their feelings concerning the common European identity. It is likely that a person who feels ignorant on European questions will be reluctant to boldly and continually support European integration, and actively participate in the process as well as seize available opportunities.

In Hungary the problem of low level subjective knowledge is even worse when one looks at its social distribution. The more socially disadvantaged a group, the worse they consider their level of knowledge, and their interest in European issues is also less. Those who see themselves as badly informed tend to have only completed 8 years of elementary school, live in villages, and do unskilled physical work; poor people and women also view themselves as the least informed. It is therefore predictable that recent EU surveys indicate that the EU is perceived as an organization serving elite interests, which contradicts major EU objectives such as helping disadvantaged regions and social groups, and creating equal opportunities.

⁴ Subjective knowledge: An aggregation of information based on unique, personal evaluation.

1.2. Problems on the 'sender' side

Unfortunately, the least is known about those governmental and non-governmental organizations that deal with EU-communication, the so-called *sender* side of the equation. Most of these organizations (the Ministry for Agriculture and Rural Development is an exception) do not measure their effectiveness, do not specify outcome indicators, and do not evaluate feedback. Even if they do such things, they do not make their findings public. This means that neither the organizations themselves, nor the public know anything about their accomplishments or about areas needing improvement. Supposedly, the different information channels like the EUvonal (EU line), the Europe Direct Information Points, the EU Library Network, Team Europe and NGOs impact significantly on the public's EU awareness. But exactly how much? Nobody knows, and nobody measures it. This lack of information means we cannot examine Hungarian EU-communication organizations' effectiveness. However, their strategy, operation, and coordination are documented, and thus can be screened. In this regard, an absence of objectives and coordination are apparent.

Governmental EU-communication is currently based on short-term action plans, making preparation for 2011 difficult. Fortunately, after recognizing this problem, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has initiated a program that encourages EU-communication 'key figures' to rethink their imminent tasks.

Besides a lack of strategy, another problem is that in recent years EU-communication has been characterized by multi-polarity. After 2002, the EU Communication Public Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sometimes ran parallel programs without any coordination. When the Public Foundation ended its activity, EU-communication was passed to the Prime Minister's Office, and the communication activity was successfully restarted. In 2006, however, another change transpired and EU-communication was returned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but coordination was not assumed by any of the ministries. Given current financial and power relations, the National Development Agency would logically be suitable for assuming coordination tasks. However, strict control over the use of structural and cohesion funds means the Agency's flexibility is relatively limited and it might be difficult for it to deal with EU issues beyond tenders.

1.3. Problems with the message

This is the most significant problem and it deserves special attention regarding the 2011 presidency. If presidential priorities do not reflect the will of the citizenry, then governmental communication attempts will never be highly successful. Thus, whether one views EU-communication in general or related to presidential preparations, the primary question must be: what issues drive popular interest and what the public expects from the European Union?

Regarding this matter, a number of detailed surveys exist which should be divided into two categories. In examining what policy issues attract general public interest, one can say that Hungarians overwhelmingly consider employment the most important (60%), followed by the economy (43%) (European Commission, 2006a). But in recent years none of these issues has been at the forefront of EU-communication. Other shortcomings are apparent when specifying European issues which interest Hungarians. According to surveys, the introduction of the Euro, European subsidies, and agricultural policies interest people the most. Regarding the last two topics, citizens want much more information than currently available (Szonda Ipsos, 2006). It is essential to mention that in Hungary post-material values which transcend self-preservation are extremely weak (Internet 1). Those topics closely linked to the individual's everyday well-being predominated on the surveys' lists. However, in the general public value-centered thinking has recently been more prevalent, meshing with EU-measures striving to further a more just society and the creation of equal opportunities.

1.4. Problems with communication channels

When examining the use of communication channels, comparing supply and demand is a viable tool. In Hungary, as in other EU countries, television is the general public's primary information source, followed by radio and newspapers (European Commission, 2006a). But we must not forget that, although often wary of their political elite, more than half of Hungarians expect EU information from national politicians. However, rather than TV, EU representatives prefer the internet, organized events, and brochures.

Commercial TV channels and the tabloids offer scant coverage of European matters but quality dailies (e.g. Magyar Nemzet and Népszabadság) regularly cover these topics (Boros, 2006). The real problem is that EU-related information does not reach tabloid and daytime television, which comprise the most accessible media outlets, so European issues are restricted to the highbrow media. Often public service channels only give information about European issues in EU-financed programs, suggesting that they mainly broadcast them to get the grants, and not for ratings. This problem is aggravated by the fact that EU representatives rarely consider tabloid readers a viable target group (Internet 2).

1.5. Problems on the 'receiver' side

Europeans are apathetic when it comes to their own continent, and this certainly applies to Hungarians. The most apathetic toward European issues are those in the 15-17 age group, which presents a serious problem. Given that there is a clear correlation between indifference towards European issues and levels of self-perceived knowledge, it is evident that our goal should not be simply to increase public information. In order to counter apathy, the information has to be well-prepared.

1.6. Goals until 2011 concerning the citizens' level of knowledge

To improve citizens' knowledge levels, there are several factors on which we can rely. In fact initiatives undertaken during the past couple of years are already starting to bear fruit. On certain topics Hungarians' knowledge level definitely exceeds that in other countries. It is necessary to pinpoint these areas and then build on this knowledge in the future.

The *sender side* is already an established nationwide information network, and for this reason it should be at the forefront in preparing the population for the 2011 Hungarian presidency. EUvon-al⁵'s online and telephone information service is especially significant (Internet 3). EUvon-al also has efficient call centre functions, a database with tens of thousands of questions and answers and is staffed by well-prepared young professionals, meaning it should play a central role in preparing for 2011. For effective communication, regular coordination among participants is indispensable, which is why it is necessary for EU communication to return under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office.

Major steps have to be taken concerning 'the message' so that EU topics transcend intellectual debate and reach the tabloid press, TV, and radio. Not only should the media be involved in this *tabloidization*, but also the current EU communicators. It is obvious that if European information services gear their communication campaigns more to concrete public demands and to various surveys, then over the coming years significant results will be achieved.

⁵ EUvon-al (EUline) – Information Service: founded in 2004, currently operated by the Department of EU Communication and Public Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Moreover, current trends indicate that by 2011 TV's role (TV is an expensive form of advertising) will diminish and the internet will become increasingly popular. Presently the largest amount of user-friendly, thematically arranged information is found on the internet, but only 37% of the Hungarian population uses this communication channel (Internet 4). But in the coming years internet penetration will shoot up and online information will play a greater role. We should also note that the European Parliament elections in 2009 and the 2010 European Capital of Culture program series will provide an exceptional opportunity to focus the media's – and thus the public's – attention on European questions.

2. Citizens' attitude toward the EU

2.1. Current problems with citizens' attitude toward the EU

As mentioned in the introduction, the Hungarian presidency will only garner public support if serious steps are taken before 2011 to regain public confidence in Hungary's EU membership.

The first phase in this process is increasing citizens' knowledge of EU matters and permits the second step, which is to bolster acceptance of the Union.

In this regard a major challenge is that citizens are not keen on understanding the European image and identity. In most cases this apathy is caused by inadequate communication.

A telling indicator regarding the Hungarian public's attitude toward EU integration is a poll on whether Hungarians would still support Hungarian EU membership in a referendum; 62% would still support membership, and only 29% opposite it (European Commission, 2007).

Opinion polls also reveal support for European institutions, and an attachment to the European Union. But trust and attachment are often not based on well-grounded knowledge but rather on the perception that the European elite is preferable to the highly disliked Hungarian elite, and embodies unity and professionalism. However, little has been done to teach people to differentiate between the EU's political jurisdiction and the Hungarian government's. That is why currently those finding European membership not beneficial (45%) exceed those who think it is (41%) (European Commission, 2007b).

When compared to citizens of countries who joined the EU with Hungary, Hungarians are still highly pessimistic. Job security is their chief concern, 66% of Hungarians interviewed believing that the situation has worsened since 2004. In this regard Hungarians rank last (54%) when it comes to a positive assessment of EU accession. Among Poles, Estonians and Lithuanians the ratio is 80% (Internet 5).

2.2. Pre-2011 concerning citizens' attitude towards the EU

If citizens remain unaware of how the Union helps solve their problems, then fewer and fewer might view Hungarian membership as beneficial. It is also clear that communication solely focused on financial benefits creates expectations that cannot be met. For the EU to viably communicate with Hungarians, it is necessary to differentiate between the Hungarian government's jurisdiction and that of the EU so citizens realize just what rights and investment opportunities the EU has created. By 2011 such an endeavour could bolster Hungarians' attachment toward the EU. *Pragmatic* attachment could be further enhanced by advertising the EU's contribution to the HUF 8,000 billion investment in the New Hungary Development Plan. Moreover, a priority should be value-based communication and strengthening emotional bonds.

3. The level of citizens' active involvement

3.1. Current problems with citizens' level of involvement

Between 2001 and 2004 the Commission adopted three statements on orientation and communication. These statements improved partnership and cooperation between the institutions and member states. In the statements the Commission revised the financing of communication work and stressed the following goals: multi-year programming; placing citizens' interest first when creating messages; sharing synergies and exemplary experiences. Despite all this, 2005 public opinion polls and analysis of voter's behavior show that there is distinct reticence toward institutions and the creation of a common Europe. This impedes civilians from enthusiastically participating in the European project.

In the last two years the European Commission's communication measures, namely the D-plan⁶ and the White Paper⁷ strongly emphasized motivating citizens regarding European questions (Internet 6). Involving them means citizens come to understand their potentially active role in forming European policies. Accordingly, in the past couple of years the Hungarian communication actors have also been focusing on projects that promote active participation. While completing these projects, the communicators faced serious difficulties. These difficulties stemmed from the fact that when one seeks to motivate citizens, one should firstly inform them and instill emotional attachment. As with the creation of a commercial brand, there are three logical steps: brand familiarization, the creation of emotional bonds and the creation of a need to buy the product. With European topics too, one can only expect citizens to vote in parliamentary elections, to exercise their EU rights, or form an opinion about the EU's future if they already know and like (or dislike) the 'product', namely the European Union. Given these criteria, it is not surprising that Hungarians' participation rate lags behind that of citizens from older member states.

As there is no consensus as to what kinds of indices show citizens' level of participation, we examined indicators suggested by the Dutch POLITEA. The Dutch organization suggests seven components when measuring active citizenship rate (Internet 7). One of these is the ratio of NGOs participating in international or European activities.

According to a 2005 survey, 0.1% of the population previously took part in NGO work dealing with European or international affairs as a volunteer (Czike et Kuti, 2005).

If one assumes that organizations that focus on European issues often apply for grants, then an approximate index is the number of communities or NGOs in 2006 applying for a program grant through the EU either at the ministerial level or European agency. Although we do not possess exact numbers, it can be generally stated that the number of those who submit applications is about a 100 every year. Thus, all together there are only a few hundred people willing to organize events dealing with European issues for a local community.

No measurements are available as to how many people show interest in virtual and real forums concerning Europe. Therefore, only a general tendency can be indicated. Since 2004, the number of those participating in discussions about the EU has been continually decreasing. An 'elite group' was formed, who regularly attend and take active part in the debates on Union matters; these

⁶ "D-plan": it aims to generate a widespread discussion on the relationship between the citizens and the democratic EU organs. "The Commission's contribution to the work of theoretic path-finding and beyond: D-plan for the sake of democracy, dialogue and discussion."

⁷ White Paper: It was adopted by the European Commission in 2006 over the European Communicational Policy.

debates, however, do not reach the greater public. Still, it can be assumed that those who engage in discussions about European issues with their relatives and friends are genuinely interested and active. Therefore, research usually examines how often the EU emerges as a topic during these conversations. 12% of those asked state that they often or very often discuss EU matters, 36% very rarely, and 23% never (Szonda Ipsos, 2006).

Comparing these results with similar data from other countries clearly indicates that, compared to Western Europeans, Hungarians are much more passive. But in regional terms, Hungarians' involvement rates as average. The analysis of involvement trends (what topics interest and inspire citizens) also yields interesting results. In recent years it has become apparent that it doesn't matter which topics the media and EU communicators wish to put forward, citizens only express opinions about contentious European matters that divide opposing political parties. Analyzing internet chat rooms, letters to the editor, various online and offline forums, reveals that politicians determine the Hungarian public's EU political agenda (Boros, 2006).

3.2. Pre-2011 goals regarding citizens' involvement

It is essential that a broader social spectrum- NGOs, teachers, young people-lead discussions as to what issues the Hungarian presidency should stress. Citizens need to feel that they can have an impact by working through the administration, Hungarian MPs and MEPs, and through their election. They also need to feel that they can actively influence European institutions, the NGOs, the companies, and lobby organizations. If more social groups are involved in debates and discussions about the future, more weight can be given to Hungary when establishing presidential priorities.

At the same time, experience shows that trying to motivate the general public won't be easy as people are apathetic. Involving quarrelsome politicians from the right and the left is a way of sparking public interest and motivating the public to get involved, but this is a risky strategy as national politics is divisive and the goal is to unite Hungarians around the presidency. Therefore, a less divisive method could be involving NGO's as well as teachers and schools in discussions, thus inspiring younger people to participate.

4. Communication problems in the agricultural sector and proposals for the future

4.1. A pre-accession agricultural survey

A 2002 survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) on the agricultural sector revealed that less than 40% of farmers felt they had enough general information about the European Union. It is noteworthy that at the same time less than 20% of the respondents felt the same regarding Accession's agricultural aspects (Baksa, 2004).

Geographical location influences farmers' views on the EU. In the observed eastern counties, the dominant view was that EU accession is not going to alter production, but in western counties, near the Austrian border, farmers were much more EU informed and thus much more aware of the expected consequences.

Ninety-two percent of those surveyed already knew that Hungarian EU accession would impact on agriculture. Nearly all large-scale farmers, about three quarters of medium-scale farmers, and more than half of small-scale farmers felt they would personally be significantly affected by Hungarian EU accession.

On the basis of the questionnaires we can draw the following conclusions regarding how farmers informed themselves regarding the EU.

According to the survey data, the majority of the farmers said that they learned about accession's agricultural aspects from television, constituting the major information source as television combines the advantages of live speech, music, and virtual pictures. About 80% of those surveyed watch television regularly. The majority, 87%, watch channel MTV1, channel TV2 or RTL Klub. The most frequent viewing time is between 7pm and 9pm. Less frequent is between 5pm and 7pm. For this reason, the MARD's feature film productions about the EU and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have been broadcasted at this time.

Daily papers and Professional Journals are the communication forms most highly distributed in terms of number of copies. If one considers the number of copies, dailies are actually a relatively cheap source of information. Professional Journals can competently satisfy a definite market segment, but circulation is limited.

A less effective way of attracting attention is *radio* as it does not visually stimulate the receiver which impedes communication. According to the research, all those surveyed are radio listeners, the most popular station being Kossuth Radio (67%), usually listened to between 5am and 7am in the morning.

Brochures focus on a specific interest group. 25% of those surveyed (mostly working at medium or large size farms), received such brochures regarding Accession's impact on agriculture.

Organized events have a major role in communication. These events constitute forums where participants can form contacts, obtaining more sophisticated information better enabling them to make future decisions. Twenty-seven percent of those surveyed had already attended at least one event that dealt with EU Accession's impact on agriculture.

Regarding the above issue, sixty percent of the farmers would have willingly participated in dialogues, presentations, or some form of training. People were mostly interested in production subsidies and quotas (63%), then plant production regulations (62%). After came rural development (52%), stock-breeding (35%), forestry (20%), and fishery regulations (7%).

In 2002 most producers did not have access to *electronic communication* equipment. The most relevant CAP information was available on the internet, but lack of internet access meant small-scale producers were most disadvantaged and the least informed.

At that time 33% of the large-scale farmers, 16% of the medium size producers, and 10% of the small-scale producers had internet access. This indicates that electronic information access, albeit small-scale, was starting to develop.

The survey as a whole indicates that a small portion of the farmers had excessive expectations of EU membership, while an even smaller portion of those surveyed were highly pessimistic. However, lack of information meant that the majority were most uncertain when it came to evaluating the implications of EU Accession.

4.2. Post-Accession Hungary and the Hungarian presidency: communication tools aimed at preparing agricultural producers

When implementing programs geared to meeting farmers' needs, special attention must be given to communicating with farmers. Providing vital information is a difficult task as the target group is scattered throughout the country.

Agricultural workers are varied and dispersed, and for this reason they have different concerns and communication patterns. Probing local and regional conditions is of particular importance when addressing the agricultural population.

Given the pessimism among the farming population, it is necessary to involve other organizations in the information process. These include professional organizations, public and civil bodies, the network of village consultants and experts in agricultural education, etc.

It is thus necessary that the Hungarian presidency thoroughly explain the reasons for and the possible effects of CAP reform, and every effort must be made to reach the widest range of agricultural producers using every possible communication tool. Based on the 2002 surveys, it is apparent that TV, plus newspaper and periodical articles, are most effective at communicating EU agricultural information.

But, based on previous experience related to afternoon broadcasts, TV does not constitute an economical form of communication. It is much cheaper and more effective to utilize regional and local papers and professional periodicals.

At the beginning of 2003, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development organized a wide range of agricultural forums. These forums dealt with informing participants about the progress of Accession negotiations. They also presented CAP reform results which started as a 2003 Mid Term Review, and later fundamentally changed the agricultural sector. In 2007 the subsidy framework was outlined, then the potential for further progress and future CAP reform.

A useful way of informing agricultural producers about the EU is the Ministry's written materials which are published in agricultural papers and supplements.

As for access to electronic communication, providing producers with information has been successful. The MARD utilizes up-to-date electronic facilities to inform producers and professionals about the EU.

On the MARD website (www.fvm.hu), there is a special page devoted to European integration, supplying information on Accession, and up-to-date regulations regarding product lines. The EU-INFO (Internet 8), managed by GAK Kht, provides current information about the Common Agricultural Policy and relevant regulations. A teletext abridged version of this service is also available on Hungarian Channel MTV1 (Vajda et Baksa, 2008).

One can conclude by stating that the agricultural sector is the one most affected by EU Accession and, politically and socially, it is agriculture which is the most vulnerable, the one which suffers most due to joint European policies, meaning the CAP. Due to the sector's particular vulnerability, it is the area where adequate communication is most urgent. In fact, Hungary not only lags behind its western competitors in terms of subsidies, but also in terms of information quantity and quality.

Summary: present and future prospects

So what is the situation like 3 years prior to the Hungarian presidency? It is obvious that in the coming years EU-communication has its work cut out for it. Much remains to be done in order to enhance public awareness and strengthen citizens' bonds with the EU, and it is also imperative to motivate citizens to become more involved with the EU. Over the next few years, attention should focus on solving problems that so far have attracted scant attention.

Although Hungarians scored above average on certain EU issues, there are areas of national interest where Hungarians remain ignorant and these include agriculture, grant applications, etc. Thus, it is advisable that Hungarian presidential priorities focus on EU-communication.

When it comes to subjective knowledge about the EU, Hungarians have reached their nadir, and this could constitute a significant factor behind citizens' apathy and passiveness. If citizens are predominantly bewildered about the Union, then it is unlikely they will actively participate in EU issues. Besides providing practical everyday information, one should try to bolster self-esteem which is related to the use of knowledge.

In the years prior to Hungarian Accession, Eu-Communication was so 'successful' that Hungarians had unrealistic expectations. Gradually these expectations have turned to apathy or hostility. Nowadays Hungarians only feel optimistic about matters they are not yet acquainted with. They continue to believe in European organs and in the euro, and that the Union helps preserve peace. But they do not foresee any improvement in the Hungarian economy; nor do they believe Hungary will progress. The majority feel that Accession's positive effects won't appear for a long time yet.

Since Accession, participation in European matters has almost gone to zero. And this doesn't only hold true for the general public, but also for the elite. Evidence of this was already visible during the 2003 EU Accession referendum and the 2004 EU parliamentary elections, and skepticism regarding the political elite means that by 2009 the situation will likely worsen. Despite this, or rather because of this, politicians should strive to motivate the public, and provide alternative viewpoints not only in domestic but also in European affairs.

The Hungarian presidency offers not only an opportunity for Hungary to receive international attention and for the nation to help create a better Europe, but it also provides an opportunity for citizens to rethink Hungary's EU membership and see it as a success rather than a failure.

In the next three years many obstacles will need to be overcome. If those striving to improve communication obtain well-prepared, organized information that facilitates an alternative approach, then Hungarians could become knowledgeable and exuberant toward their 2011 presidency.

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