

THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
SLOVENIA'S DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
AND REFORMS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Communication Strategy is based on established communication practices regarding the reforms, foreign experience, and the experiences of individual advisers who participated in drawing up the Strategy.

The Strategy rests on the assumption that Slovenia needs a development breakthrough which must be socially sustainable. On the one hand, a more favourable and dynamic business environment needs to be ensured, while at the same time conditions for more solid and lasting foundations of the welfare state must be created.

The Strategy is complex and will, therefore, demand the active involvement of PR experts within the civil service, in particular in heading individual projects. The Strategy also employs a wide range of communication tools: in event management, and relations with the media and the electorate, and includes production and advertising activities, and the use of the Internet.

2. PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE STRATEGY

2.1. Objective and purpose

The key objectives are to inform the Slovenian public about the proposed reforms and their effects on the life of each individual, and on the Slovenian economy, and to build confidence in the proposed measures. If until recently, a part of the general public has perceived the reform measures as being an 'integrated package', necessarily including the introduction of the flat tax, which has little public support, in the next phase the 'package' must be segmented into individual measures and introduced as such. The integration of individual measures, however, should not be overlooked.

Slovenian citizens must understand the key measures and changes they bring. In relation to this, two basic questions need to be answered: *What do we gain from the implementation of individual measures; and what are the risks involved for each individual and for Slovenia, if the reforms are not carried out?*

The Communication Strategy addresses the Slovenian public-at-large. We intend to pay special attention to particular target groups, which may either show 'discontent' with individual reform measures, or lack sufficient/appropriate knowledge of them.

Our activities are proactive and encourage the involvement of the interested public. They also offer room for discussion concerning open issues, either on the Slovenian political scene or within individual interest groups. Special attention will be paid to individual target groups in the business community. This will facilitate two-way communication, with the active participation of all parties, also at the regional level and in local communities.

The Strategy builds its success on coalitions within the Slovenian political scene, the business community, the academic and professional sector, and civil society. As the latter three groups are particularly important for successful communication, we will strive to establish a dialogue with those who disagree with particular measures, and form alliances with those in favour of particular reform measures.

2.2. Duration

The Strategy has been designed as a long-term process for two principal reasons. First, raising public awareness is a time-consuming process. Second, in relation to the key reform measures, which will elicit particularly strong public interest, this process should be endorsed by the 'legislative process'.

Broadly speaking, there are two phases:

- o **Phase 1: March 2006 to December 2006** will focus on:
 - o the promotion of relevant measures to individual target groups;
 - o informing the public, i.e. target groups about individual measures;
 - o dialogue with social partners;
 - o presentations of detailed calculations pertaining to tax reform, and other measures;
 - o establishing and 'implementing' a public support group;
 - o communication support for individual legislative measures.

- o **Phase 2: 2007** will focus on:
 - o communication support for individual legislative measures;
 - o continuation of informing the public about proposed individual measures;
 - o assessment of the first results of reforms.

Although the Strategy is intended as a long-term process, only the activities for 2006 have been planned in greater detail. The reason for this is simple: further planning depends on the success of Phase 1. The underlying concept of the Strategy, however, is that it is a long-term process, which also makes it useful in the following year.

2.3. Management and Partners

The Strategy has been planned as a model of cooperation among the supporters of the reform measures. It therefore requires inter-sectoral cooperation and the collaboration of coalition partners in the Government of the Republic of

Slovenia, cooperation in the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, and cooperation with experts (particularly members of the Reform Committee).

2.3.1. Management

The management of the Strategy's implementation falls within the competence of the **Government PR and Media Office (UVI)** and the **Government Office for Growth**.

Executive management is the responsibility of the so called **Communication College**, which is comprised of the heads of PR offices of individual ministries. The Communication College will be responsible for managing projects relating to the communication in the Strategy's implementation, such as local visits, individual events, etc.

2.3.2. Partners

The Strategy will be successful only if the key decision-makers coordinate their activities. Coordination within the Government is of utmost importance for this project.

The partnership stipulates:

- o coordination relating to key issues with the Prime Minister and the Office for Growth;
- o public support for reform measures;
- o active participation in the implementation of the Strategy.

The key partners in this project are thus the ministries implementing the key measures of the reform package. When drafting legislation, ministries will have to inform the public extensively about their work. The public must be made aware that all members of the Government are fully committed to the reform process.

The other important element for success of the project is experts. Initially, public strategic alliances can be made with individual members of the Reform Committee.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

3.1. Qualitative Assessment of the Situation

Since the Government adopted the Strategy, a public debate and a range of activities have been in progress. Initially, the latter focused mainly on presenting the proposal to expert and interest groups, and later also to the general public. In certain parts of the public the proposed reforms have spurred many heated debates. The public is now divided into those strongly in favour of the reforms, their opponents, and the majority, those who support the reforms to some extent.

Main conclusions:

- among the expert public, trade unions, and partly in the opposition, it was the proposed tax legislation that met the strongest opposition;
- trade unions see the reform process as a threat to the current level of social rights, which is the reason they strongly oppose certain measures (albeit not all);
- a part of the student population sees the reform package as a threat, which will reduce established social rights and benefits;
- lately, it was mainly the opposition which voiced its opinion in the media; ministries did not do enough to advocate the reforms;
- detailed calculations intended to show the public the actual effects of the reforms in a clear and simple way are still being prepared;

3.2. Public Opinion

In recent months, a few public opinion polls have been conducted to assess support for the reforms. Research shows that the percentage of respondents who fully support the reforms, and those who are entirely against them, is the same, with very little fluctuation (around 20 per cent on both sides).

Approximately 55 per cent of respondents support the reform measures to some extent, and even more say that they support them in principle.

One of the first public opinion studies relating to the reforms was conducted through a public opinion poll with a sample of 901 interviewees, in November 2005. It shows that from the beginning of November, when familiarity with the reforms stood at 71 per cent, it had risen to 78 per cent by the end of the month.

In comparison, data gathered in February shows that familiarity with the reforms rose once again and is currently hovering around 85 per cent.

Support for the reforms is highest among those with an undergraduate diploma or certificate. With regard to earnings, the picture is not that clear. However, the reforms enjoy the highest support with those with earnings slightly below and slightly above average. Most in favour of the reform programme are the inhabitants of the Prekmurje, Goriška and Coastal-Karstic regions.

3.3. Media Coverage

An overview of media coverage from mid-July 2005 to the beginning of January 2006 shows that economic and social structural reforms in Slovenia are a central and omnipresent issue in the media. Approximately 2,700 news items (of which 270 were commentaries), relating to the reforms and Slovenia's Development Strategy were published or broadcast in this period.

A media overview shows that the relationship between negative and positive views of the reforms was 2:1 in favour of negative views.

4. INFRASTRUCTURE

4.1. Communication Objectives

The two principal objectives of the Strategy are to raise awareness, and increase support. However, attention must be paid to other messages that we wish to pass on to targeted groups, and thus influence support for the reforms.

The communication goals are as follows:

- to raise the basic awareness of the public of the reform objectives;
- to raise the basic awareness of the public regarding key individual measures;
- to draw attention to the consequences which will ensue if the reforms are not implemented;
- to provide opportunities and space for dialogues between individual target groups and the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, and for understanding the reforms;
- to raise the credibility of individual measures by explaining specific advantages, calculations, etc.;
- to raise the level of trust in the proposed reforms, and those proposing and implementing them;
- to raise the level of support for the reforms as a whole, and for individual measures.

4.2. The Main Message

If communication objectives determine the process, the main message is the guideline for preparing individual activities, and the guideline for speakers giving public presentations. The main message is brief, clear and unambiguous.

The main message is that Slovenia is at a development crossroads. The current economic and social system is weakening; therefore, a development breakthrough is a necessity. We must not make the same mistake as some developed countries which started implementing reforms when it was too late, when the key macroeconomic indicators had already worsened. Today, Slovenia has a chance to gradually, in a controlled way, and through dialogue, move things forward. Slovenia must reach a consensus on a new development model, as offered by the reform package.

4.3. Speakers

Defining a system of speakers is essential, as it provides key guidelines for all speakers.

Speakers are ranked according to their significance:

- The Prime Minister is the **first speaker** to address strategically important issues, explaining the vision and giving public guidelines, etc.;
- Minister without portfolio in charge of growth, who determines the mode of public appearances, is the **key expert speaker** for the framework of reforms, and key measures;
- Individual ministers and state secretaries are **key speakers for individual areas of reforms**;
- Expert groups, that is key members (heads) of individual expert groups, are **key expert speakers for individual areas of reforms**, communicating with other experts and the media regarding the expertise underlying the reforms;
- The Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development, and the Ministry of Finance are **technical speakers**; they provide information on calculations, macroeconomic influences, etc.;
- Coalition MPs (and the coalition parties together with their youth sections) are **political speakers**, clarifying the political background and commenting on the views of the opposition parties;

- The expert public are speakers who explain the **expertise underlying** individual measures.

4.4. Tone

The tone must be positive and rational, with an open, complex, current, up-to-date approach based on verifiable facts. The Strategy itself, in its layout, explicitly calls for openness, dialogue, confrontation of opinions, and the achievement of consensus. The language of individual speakers follows these principles.

As to public debates, a space for dialogue must be created which will enable the supporters of reforms to encourage discussions and constructive exchange of opinions.

4.5. Slogan

In order to build recognition of the 'trademark' of the reforms, we have devised a slogan which should contribute to better recognition of the reform campaign, and at the same time function as a central graphic symbol which will remind people of reforms wherever it appears.

The slogan is: **Slovenia Tomorrow!** The slogan is positive and looks toward the future.

5. TARGET GROUPS

The Strategy addresses the **Slovenian population as a whole**, and will focus particularly on individual groups. These have been formed on the basis of public opinion polls and experience with similar communication strategies. If, during the campaign, there is a need to communicate with a new target group, this will be included, and communication tools will be tailored appropriately.

6. COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES AND ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

With regard to their complexity, communication activities are divided into national (*macro*) and regional (*micro*) levels. This Strategy merely lists the communication activities in individual areas, while the executors will define the precise course of activities within individual communication programmes.

The macro level includes press conferences, events, meetings, and public debates, which aim to arouse the interest of multipliers.

The micro level is multi-layered and carries the most content. The authors of the Strategy believe that people should be presented with the reforms directly in their own environments. It also seems sensible to present the reforms to individual target groups where they live or work.

We estimate that mass advertising should be avoided. The costs of such action would be extremely high, and we also believe that the reforms are too complex, and therefore mass advertising could not ensure good positioning of the messages.

As an alternative to mass advertising we propose to make extensive use of **regional print and electronic media** and thus follow regional events. These media, also because they are cost-effective, enable us to communicate more relevant topics.

We recommend that advertising be replaced by a series of brochures/publications:

- a general brochure;
- publication for opinion leaders;
- series of brochures for target groups;
- series of brochures relevant to individual key measures.

We propose that in support of the communication strategy a special website called **Slovenia Tomorrow!** be established to serve as the main web communication tool. The interested public will also be informed through electronic newsletters. We also propose the use of additional web tools which are effective in encouraging public debate, such as weblogs and forums.

A report on public opinion on the reforms will be submitted by the Government PR and Media Office as part of its regular monthly activities. The office will record the number of published articles, key points, summaries of commentaries, and chronology of activities relating to the reforms. When necessary, the report will also include extensive coverage of current issues.