PUBLIC DIPLOMACY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS REFLECTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Acest articol se bazează pe cercetarea efectuată pe tema propusă care analizează evoluția diplomației publice a Uniunii Europene și reflectarea acesteia în Republic Moldova la etapa actuală. Acest subiect este examinat din perspectiva regională și națională, astfel, fiind analizate instrumentele și mecanismele de diplomație publică ale Uniunii Europene aplicate în cadrul Parteneriatului Estic, inclusiv în Republic Moldova.

Public diplomacy proved in time to be one of the most important instruments for international and intercultural communication. In the era of globalization, international actors across of the world use intensively public diplomacy as an effective tool to communicate successfully with broader audiences and to build a positive image with publics of other countries. Building the positive perception and attractiveness of the states or regional entities represent another global goal and competition among international actors nowadays. Thus, until the present time, it represents an indispensable part of the country's foreign policies.

The European Union has been working on strengthening its role as a global player for decades. Public diplomacy and communication actions started to be crucial elements in achieving the respective goal.

The European Union has always promoted itself as a regional actor of peace, security and prosperity. A leading regional actor that embodies the respect for the rule of law, protection of human rights, democracy and well-being of its citizens. Moreover, the European Union is a major donor that assists the development of many countries across the globe, with the specific attention to its neighborhood countries. Hence, public diplomacy of the European Union is precisely focused on communicating these principles to the world public that aim to generate positive perception of the Union overall. The role of public diplomacy for the European Union advanced together with strategic communication that

became a necessity after facing acts of Kremlin and jihadist disinformation that discredited the European Union as a global actor and a regional leader. Due to this fact, it started to develop advanced public diplomacy activities in the neighborhood region that tend to improve the perception and understanding of the European Union and increase awareness of the Union's assistance in partner states.

Moreover, it began to produce effective fact-based communication actions that strive to counter disinformation. Hence, public diplomacy of the European Union goes in tandem with strategic communication, as these both complements each other in external communication that make overall communication more efficient. This aspect is characteristic for the European Union's public diplomacy strategy.

External communication of the EU and its public diplomacy activities had considerably improved after the launch of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in 2010, the institution that was created in order to have a more comprehensive approach towards the external affairs of the EU. The respective institution represented certain instruments that contributed to a better implementation of international affairs, including external communication [1].

Public diplomacy of the European Union is defined by the European Commission as a tool that deals with the influence of public attitudes.

It seeks to promote EU interests by understanding, informing and influencing. It means clearly explaining the EU's goals, policies and activities and fostering understanding of these goals through dialogue with individual citizens, groups, institutions and the media [2].

However, the Belgian expert in public diplomacy Bianca Baumler states that since 2017, the public diplomacy of the EU focuses on "channels of engagement" with citizens, in particular with young people.

It notes their sense of exclusion, and calls for the EU to involve the youth in policy-making. Thus, it can be observed that nowadays there are more public diplomacy campaigns, activities, actions that focus and involve the youth [3]. In addition, taking into account all these technological challenges of the current century, the EU understood the importance of well-elaborated external communication, especially from the strategic perspective. Hence, this strategic communication of the EU

focuses mainly on its partner countries or third countries. Consequently, the overarching objectives of the EU's communication with third countries can be grouped under two main pillars – public diplomacy and strategic communication – with a focus on five main areas of activity:

- Effective communication and promotion of EU policies and values.
- Development of positive and effective messages regarding EU policies.
- Support for freedom of the press and the media environment.
- Raising public awareness of disinformation activities by external actors.
- Improving the EU's capacity to anticipate and respond to disinformation and propaganda campaigns [4].

Public diplomacy and strategic communication of the EU goes in tandem, as both of them complement each other, creating the perfect synergy for the better external communication. However, if public diplomacy of the EU tends to communicate with foreign publics by influencing their perception, and generating a more positive attitude towards the EU, then strategic communication aims to combat disinformation and fake news by showing real facts and true impact of the EU's efforts in its strategic partners. The EU develops and implements strategic communication and public diplomacy activities in the Eastern Partnership region within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

The role of both amplified after 2015, when the EU comprehend the importance of making visible its assistance to the citizens of the Eastern Partner countries.[5] At the current time, most of the instruments are oriented to broader audiences, such as youth and other workers from important development fields of the states. Hence, public diplomacy instruments of the EU take the format of projects, initiatives, networks, organisations that mostly focus on youth and people from development sphere. The role of the EU Delegation to the Eastern Partner countries become crucial in conducting well-developed public diplomacy and strategic communication actions. The EU Delegations started to prioritise and invest in visibility actions of many national projects conducted with the support of the EU. As these projects are oriented to bring tangible results for citizens, it is of major importance that people compre-

hend that. Youth and education programmes portrays another key instrument of the visibility in the Eastern Partner countries, which tend to increase the positive perception of the EU. Projects offered to the youth and academic environment such as Erasmus+, EU4Youth programme, the Eastern Partnership European School, EU4Alumni Network, European Solidarity Corps, eTwinning etc., increase the visibility of the EU as a partner that contribute to education and professional preparation of this important group of society [6]. In the same vein, several public diplomacy instruments applied by the EU in the Republic of Moldova can be mentioned: Organisation of Europe Days; Investments in the implementation of sectorial projects; Public campaigns on DCFTA, human rights etc.; Public events of launching programmes; EU information centres, such as Euro Clubs, the National Erasmus+ office; High-level visits of the EU officials to different districts of Moldova etc. Taking as reference the researches and results, certain recommendations are prosed in order to improve the overall public diplomacy of the EU: 1. It should be created a certain policy paper regarding public diplomacy of the EU that will include well-defined purposes, tools, implementers, resources, target audiences, mechanisms etc., that will have a pragmatic approach. 2. The EU in the neighbourhood countries focuses more attention on disinformation actions and less on the nature public diplomacy actions. This results less efficient external communication. 3. The EU can create the EU public diplomacy scholarship, taking the example from the American experience. As there is an absence of scholars and experts on public diplomacy of the EU, especially from the Eastern neighbourhood, such programme can contribute to the development of a community of EU public diplomacy scholars that can be an effective way to generate more innovative and practical research.

Finally, yet importantly, certain national recommendations are suggested in order to fortify the performance of public diplomacy of the EU in Moldova: 1. It is important to develop public diplomacy approach towards its actions oriented to informing and engaging with public. 2.

The EU shall hire a public diplomacy expert within the EU Delegation for proving necessary expertise in developing public diplomacy actions on national level. 3. The EU shall create a national policy paper that would define the public diplomacy approach resulting from the national context.

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