



The pace of economic development and long-term projections of energy security and stability in countries in transition depends on the resources available and how to use existing and finding new sources of energy. Energy crisis in the history led to small and large conflicts and wars for energy resources. They have also caused economy crises at the global level. For these reasons, the media is closely monitoring what is happening in the energy sector of a country, because this area has a large impact on the economy and security of the state and nation. Thus it becomes the object of attention of many stakeholders in the country and abroad.

Refinement of communication when it comes to the energy sector in transition countries begins with the identification of significant energy projects due to the pre-defined energy reserves that can be exploited. Given the deficit of financial resources and the exploitation of new technologies, these countries are forced to opt for specific projects, and select the so-called “strategic partners” from abroad who have in their possession the mentioned technological resources.

From the moment of choosing a partner, signing contracts and further cooperation process, the state and the ministry initiates a process of communication with the general public with the aim of gaining the trust and support for its selection of partners and the announced projects. In the Western Balkans, for example, a key player in the energy sector is the state while the private sector has an inferior role. This is the case with foreign international companies too, although they are officially declared as “strategic partner”. Given that the domestic state energy companies have a monopoly on the market, they also believe that they can determine the rules of the game, despite the fact that their cooperation with foreign partners is clearly defined by agreements.

Due to the social aspect, work of state or public enterprises has been under particular scrutiny of local media and the general public. More specifically, the current price of energy has a strong influence in the election cycles on votes received by parties who have a direct influence on work, budgeting and personnel policies of these public enterprises.

However, it is a long way to the realization of such a project, especially if it entails great financial resources, as is usually the case in the energy sector. At the very start of the project numerous obstacles pop up. Political opposition and numerous stakeholders in the economy – both domestic and foreign will try to sabotage such projects at each step using the ultimately creative means. For this reason it is very important to develop preventive strategies in communication by all partners of a major project. This means that for at least a year in advance, you need to define a PR strategy and preventive action starting at the local level, or location where the implementation is intended (local government, local media, local NGOs ...) to the national level (broad public opinion). Every working hour in communication involvement in such international projects is essential.

In all the projects in the so-called. “Green energy”, for example, in the beginning it is necessary to identify a series of challenges and potential problems (threats). This is a “standard” PR package that includes the entire communications strategy including post-project engagement.

In external communication, special attention is paid to the environmental aspect, then the benefits to the national economy and its citizens that will arise from the project, such as greater energy independence, then a significant reduction in energy imports, the possibility of increased export, transparency in cooperation with the local government and the calling of tenders for each phase of the project, technology know-how that foreign partner brings with him, intensifying cooperation with the EU through the project and so on. However, it is also important to devote considerable attention to the internal communication with project partners as well as companies that are subcontractors and workers.

Every major project in this sector requires a well-prepared, agile and flexible communication strategy. Past experiences have shown that, for example, “green projects” are related to 12 to 20 target groups and for each of them we separately define messages, tactics, and most important goals and channels. Channels are defined in accordance with the needs and opinion makers.

Large closed and privileged monopolistic business models, as well as public utility companies in the Western Balkans, often cause major media scandals, and they have an unpopular position in society and the local public. Large systems are also extremely slow, with old ways of thinking - of both management and employees and unions - and therefore they are totally inflexible. They consist of various political and interest groups and individuals who, because of their personal interests as “insiders” lobby for the interests of the various companies on the side. With so many internal and external influences in business especially when starting a big project, foreign companies which have concluded a partnership or joint venture with a domestic public company in the energy sector, should pay particular attention to this because domestic partner can draw them down in a series of internal scandals. This can cause immense damage to their international image and reputation of their companies and all that in an international context because the development of the implementation of their project will certainly be monitored by the media in their home country.

For all these reasons international companies in the country where they realize their projects, engage at least one of the local national experts who can be an important lever in their cooperation and strategic communication planning. In addition to coordinating and implementing PR strategies with the selected PR agency that monitors the project, they are able to react timely and take preventive measures based on internal observation of all relevant events in the system of the local partner. Such people are familiar with how government monopoly system, with no awareness of corporate responsibility, operates. At

the same time, they can be an important advisor to foreign companies regarding the interpretation of irresponsible public statements of top management of domestic public companies: for example recently the new director of the EPS (Electric Power Industry of Serbia) made a statement to the media that “his company is facing bankruptcy.” This further implies that the Serbian government, as the owner, is also facing bankruptcy. I do not know how did the foreign partners of EPS, well-known international companies in a number of large countries, as selected strategic partners in the planned projects, understand this statement at all. But certainly a more precise interpretation of “what the writer is trying to say” they could get from local communication experts.

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