

# EUROPEAN LEVEL COMMUNICATION THROUGH NON-CONVENTIONAL MEDIA

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## **Abstract**

The present paper illustrates a few unconventional means of communication (untraditional) in the European public space and the attempts of some public Romanian legal persons at the use of social media.

**Keywords:** social media, blog, social networks like Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, multimedia tools such as YouTube, Flickr, opinion sharing tools such as Wikipedia, GoogleReader.

Communication, regardless of its nature, no longer takes place through traditional media. More so, depending on the groups that it targets, communication is more and more often achieved by means of social media. European communication obviously fits this same paradigm.

In an essay published in 1979 entitled “Intellectual Power in France”, Régis Debray<sup>1</sup> classifies the history of intellectual power in France into three eras - the university era, that of written publications, and the mediated era, starting in 1968 (the year in which major student protests took place in France, culminating in a general strike within the entire society in May, movements which lead general De Gaulle to lose his power).

The classification done by Régis Debray (who meanwhile established the fundamentals of a new discipline entitled mediology<sup>2</sup>) is extremely valid and represents a key and tool in the analysis of social events, not only regarding the French society, but at a global level. Now more than ever, it is obvious that we are living in a mediated era, where traditional media means such as the written publications, audio-video press, coexist and are in (rapidly increasing) competition with non-conventional media (globally entitled means of “social media”). Among the latter, we mention: blogs and other social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, multimedia tools such as YouTube, Flickr or for opinion sharing and information dissemination – Wikipedia, GoogleReader, Eopinions.

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<sup>1</sup> Jules Régis Debray (born 1941) is a French intellectual, journalist, government official and professor. He is known for his theorization of mediology, a critical theory of the long-term transmission of cultural meaning in human society; and for having fought in 1967 with Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara in Bolivia.

<sup>2</sup> In the 1990s, Régis Debray coined the term mediology. Is this a new discipline that has emerged in academic circles or simply the whimsy of a philosopher? Not widely discussed in either francophone or Anglo-Saxon milieus, mediology remains fairly unknown and little taught. But by reading Debray's books or issues of Cahiers de médiologie, we can gain a better understanding of what mediology is.

Effectively, communication, regardless of its nature, no longer takes place through traditional media. More so, depending on the groups that it targets, communication is more and more often achieved by means of social media. European communication obviously fits this same paradigm, whether it is communication made by European institutions or political decision makers, or, on the other hand, communication of other players in European public affairs, interested in sending a message to the “European public space”: professional federations or associations, NGOs, consultancy companies, publications, or even people simply interested in European affairs.

For example, for over two years, the European Commission has been “attacking” the YouTube website in terms of communication, and so many videos on the policies conducted by the Commission, may be accessed and viewed. At the same time, more and more European members of Parliament provide information related to their work on personal websites and / or blogs, and a (growing) number of them are already present on networks like Facebook or Twitter.

Moreover, even the European political parties and political groups in Parliament have adapted, almost in an institutionalized form, to the new developments and imperatives of communication, on the one hand, and new media, on the other. Thus, the European People's Party (EPP) is now on Facebook and on YouTube, and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) has posted videos on YouTube. The Greens party / European Free Alliance also has a presence on Youtube, however less significant than the People's Party and the Liberals. The activity of another political group, The Confederal Group of the European United Left / Nordic Green Left, may be followed, other from their official site, on sites like YouTube and Twitter. But perhaps the most advanced political group in terms of using new media in communication is the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, currently on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.

Blogs or the Twitter network, are among the preferred communication tools of large consulting companies, operating in European public affairs. Thus, for European Parliament elections in June 2009, one such company created a special blog, posting all public information, but especially the informal kind, that the company gathered through its own means (an action which specialists in public affairs in Brussels call “intelligence tracking”). During and after the European elections to the constituent sessions of Parliament and parliamentary committees, the company blog that was frequently accessed by all those interested in finding first-hand information, backstage information, news regarding the Members of the European Parliament, of the members of the parliamentary committees or information regarding the negotiations between political groups. Moreover, some information was also posted via the Twitter network.

What would be the motivation for such a company to invest resources of time, energy and especially human resources, in finding some information behind the scenes, and afterwards make it public is a natural question. Why not just keep that kind of competitive advantage for itself, but prefer to publish it, in a manner which implies that, almost automatically, it will be shared by other actors, including its competitors? In a first assessment, which would take into account the specific European public space, such an attitude might seem paradoxical and incomprehensible.

But one of the key features of the European public space is transparency, which is very much encouraged and promoted, both by European institutions and other actors

whose interests are better represented in a transparent environment. "The world is a small village, was and is one of the metaphors related to the globalization phenomenon.

Paraphrasing and updating this metaphor to the European public space in Brussels, we could say: "The world is a small village, and Brussels is an even smaller village". Well, in the "village of Brussels", where, metaphorically speaking, everybody knows everybody, transparency is, as mentioned before, one of the key features, be it exercised at the institutional level, or that promoted of other actors (federations and associations, NGOs, consulting companies, publishers, journalists). In such an environment, so many times transparent, players do not gain a competitive advantage when they don't release information, but on the contrary, when they share it with others. That's because, in the same way, people can see, from employees to competitors, that you're a step ahead. And in the "village of Brussels" to be one step ahead, especially in consultancy, is essential. Most times, it is even decisive.

Prestigious publications such as The Financial Times, The Economist or EUObserver have blogs dedicated European business, where many opinions and ideas can be found, which is sometimes a supplement to the articles in publications or, not infrequently, a more direct approach to European issues. The blog of the correspondent to the newspaper "Liberation" in Brussels, Jean Quatremer (na: who, among others, was the one who made significant contributions through disclosures which in 1999 lead to the resignation of the Commission led by Jacques Santer) is a mandatory "destination" for any player of the European public space that wants to find original information, especially about the European Commission and European Parliament.

It is also worth mentioning that, in the "village of Brussels", transparency is manifested on the one hand, and determined on the other hand, by the fact that European players have started to monitor each other, out of the need to find new information and to be aware of any development that happens in the European public space. And this monitorisation can only increase. It can be said that the monitoring of all critical journalists and political blogs (especially those of the MEPs) is performed daily, as well as the monitoring of sites of European political parties. However, monitoring isn't carried out just by players in consultancy, but by everyone else, on a more or less organized basis, not necessarily daily. This monitoring has another very important effect: the density of information from the European public space in general and in Brussels in particular, is very high and, as such, in order to be visible, one must communicate. If we were to come up with a slogan to describe this situation, it would be: "To communicate is to exist".

Where to place the communication of Romanian actors in the European public space? If we are to stay in the "village" metaphor for the European public space, Romanian players are still on edge of the "small village" of Brussels. There aren't too many Romanian EMPs who have personal blogs and there are even fewer people who can be found on other social networks, but their number is growing. In respect of the other Romanian players, their presence in the European public space, determined by communication, is very low (na: the "Casa Europei" blog is a notable exception, especially since, apart from its role in communication, it also plays an exceptional educational role). As for Romanian journalists, the number of those who are interested in European affairs is also very low, and when they report on European topics, they almost always do it from the perspective of Romanian reality. In this context, language plays an

important role - thus, to enter and be part of the European public space, a player of any nationality must communicate in an international language, preferably English. Even those nostalgic for concepts like "language, race and country" must recognize the fact that in the European environment, English is used unanimously.

### **Conclusions**

We may say that the main features of the European public space are: transparency - the continuous expansion of social media - information density - English as a common language. All this helps create a space where anyone has access and can build his status of European player (and can be recognized as such), provided they have something to say and they communicate. In the nineteenth century, men of letters and culture, urged the Romanians to: "Write on, boys, just write" (Ion Heliade Radulescu) or "Write, Children, just write" (Titu Maiorescu). Adapting these "classical" urges to the media age we live in, to the characteristics of the European public space and its heterogeneous and multi-national actors, it would be no mistake at all to say: "Communicate, just communicate!".

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