

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

FOR

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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This strategy was developed within the framework of the UNDP project „Strengthening the institutional capacity of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova”. Opinions expressed therein do not necessarily reflect the official views and policies of the United Nations Development Programme.

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FOR THE PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Executive Summary:

This strategy is a part of UNDP's project to "Strengthen the Institutional Capacity of the Moldovan Parliament". It was designed after a field trip and desk research. It recognizes that the pro-EU stance of the Moldovan Presidency and of the majority (Communist) party has created a uniquely **favorable context in which to place the new communications offensive of the Moldovan Parliament**. Indeed through communications, the Parliament can help push the EU Agenda, enhance its credibility with the public and become a true protector to Moldova's democracy.

For Parliaments all over the world one of the most important tasks is to create an **effective link between the public and its representatives**. Allowing voters to have an input into the law-making process and, on the other hand, being able to communicate the purpose of legislation to voters are two twin aspects of legislative work which require a concerted effort. Effective communications contributes to avoiding disconnect between voters and deputies. In Moldova, the system of list voting and the existence of only one electoral circumscription for the whole country raises **particular communications challenges**. The most important one is that constituents do not have a deputy uniquely representing their area. Hence effective communications between parliamentary representatives and constituents needs to be a key objective.

In addition, several recommendations will facilitate the implementation of a strategy that can make **Parliament an effective protector of Moldova's democracy**. This positioning is supported by the recent openness of the Parliament's leadership towards civil society and will help build needed trust with the public at large.

Among the recommendations to enhance Parliament's presence on the national scene and increase the **public's trust** and support of the institution are some that can be implemented immediately, such as:

Create a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section on the Web complete with **answers to the most common queries** people may have about Parliament.

Update and add to the Web site:

The existence of the Website is a spectacular step forward. The site should be commended for being clean, simple, and easy to navigate.

Carve up a substitute for the Intranet:

Even before there is a proper Intranet, carve out a **section of the Website for internal use** only

Appoint an official spokesperson (as part of the Parliament administration);

Cancel the News Digest; redirect the energies of freed staff in the Press Office and the Analysis & Prognosis Office:

Institutionalize regular hearings:

Replace the live broadcasts of the Plenary sessions on National TV with a specialized Cable broadcast.

Provide weekly Info-packs with draft laws before the sessions

Open door days:

Establish once a month an **Open Doors day** where anyone is invited to tour the Parliament;

Bring your children to work:

Allow deputies and Parliament Staff to bring their children to work one day a year, every year, to **familiarize the kids** (and the family—invite one child and one adult each year) **with the work of a Parliamentarian;**

Institute European days:

Institute **Colloquia and Conferences on key themes** of interest to the Moldovan Public in relation with specific EU events: e.g. European Union history Day on May 9th—discusses the motivation and actions behind the initial Treaty; European Consumer days—discusses the rights and obligations of EU Consumers, etc.

Target communications to Brussels (Commission and European Parliament)

Increase the frequency of the Parliament's newsletter to 6 times a year and consider **translating it in English for distribution throughout Moldovan Embassies** throughout the world and through the Romanian EU mission.

Celebrate the UN days—especially those pertaining to human rights, other democratic values or issues established as a priority in R. Moldova:

In addition, this report suggests further medium term recommendations. These recommendations are not considered “medium term” because they are less urgently needed but primarily because they **require additional funds** and in turn budgets need time to be negotiated.

Deputies have to travel as representatives of the people, not of political parties

Library to be Automated, new books (EU) purchased or donated, CDs with legislation provided as well as language training

Language training for Deputies and staff

Integrate Press and part of the Information unit into a Communications unit

Set up a Department of Relations with the Public

Set up a C-Span-like public cable TV channel:

Offer working internships to students of Political Science, Law, Public Administration and Communications

Communicate Code of the Civil Servant on the Web-site

Communicate with Moldovans abroad

Long-term recommendations

Information systems:

As mentioned in Section 2, **each desk/workstation** ought to be equipped **with a computer and internet link;**

Deputies and their staff need to **take the European Computer Driver's License (ECDL)** test to enable them to use computers at their full potential and navigate easily on the internet;

Make an **arrangement with a general manufacturer to provide low/cost leasing arrangements,** or work with US Foundations to ship a cargo of second-hand computers, one on every desk. (Also explore the opportunity to acquire refurbished equipment or receive donations of computers).

Potential changes in the electoral law:

Proper communications cannot be established if voters do not identify individual Deputies taking a special interest in their particular issue;

Thus it seems necessary to **rethink the electoral law and consider turning every raion into an electoral district.** There should be other solutions to the Transdniestran problem that do not mean high jacking the entire electoral system and throwing the baby with the bathwater.

Project background:

The mandate:

UNDP's project seeks to “strengthen the Moldovan Parliament’s institutional capabilities, transparency and [the] effectiveness of legislative structures, systems, and processes”, while “developing and expanding the knowledge of legislators and staff.” The project seeks to accomplish all this through:

- **Improving skills of legislators** to analyze, debate, introduce and amend legislation in compliance with international standards;
- Developing procedures and processes to **clarify the roles and responsibilities** under the oversight function;
- Strengthening legislative outreach, **information dissemination** and responsiveness to citizen constituents;
- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of **internal management systems.**¹

In addition, the project document states that:

- A **communication strategy shall be developed** and implemented which will include reorientation of Parliament's committee on Mass-Media and Public Relations, design and distribution of a parliamentary newsletter, information access and dissemination consistent with European best practices, organization of Parliamentary Open Door, etc.

The Expert:

This proposed strategy has been developed by **Sandra Pralong**, international specialist in communications and consultant to the **World Bank, UNDP, USAID, the Soros Foundation, the OECD, the Youth Organizing Institute, the Princess Margarita Foundation, the Romanian-American Enterprise Fund**, etc. Formerly Regional Communications Advisor for UNDP in Europe and the CIS, Sandra Pralong has been involved in training and **advisory work on behalf of UNDP since 2002**. Prior to joining the UN, Sandra Pralong set up one of the top 10 Communications and Public Affairs consultancies in Romania. She has been an **Advisor to the Romanian President Emil Constantinescu** in charge of International Communications, has set up and ran the **Soros Foundation** and has worked with **CNN World Report** and other media. Prior to returning to her native Romania in 1990, Sandra Pralong was Director of Promotion for **Newsweek magazine** in New York. She has a **Masters in Political Science** from Columbia University in New York, a **Masters in**

¹ See UNDP Project document:
http://www.undp.md/focus_areas/demgover/docs/Parliament%20project_revised_final1.pdf

International Relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Boston, Mass., and a **Graduate Certificate in Business Administration** from the University of Lausanne, Switzerland.

Methodology:

The document which follows discusses various issues related to the role and public expectations about the Moldovan Parliament and establishes a communications strategy for it. The document is **divided in four parts**:

1. General assessment, challenges and opportunities;
2. Issues in Parliament communications;
3. Recommendations on improving Parliament communications:
 - § Short term
 - § Medium term
 - § Long term.
4. Calendar of Activities.

The strategy presented has been designed after **extensive desk research and intensive field inquiry**. The field mission was undertaken between May 10th and the 13th in Chisinau and included **personal interviews** with:

- 7 members of Parliament representing 5 different political parties,
- A key Advisor to the Chairman of Parliament,
- two heads of department of the parliamentary apparatus and some of their staff;
- 5 Representatives of Civil Society organizations/think tanks;
- 6 representatives of mass media;
- UNDP representatives as well as other experts.

The UNDP Team that facilitated the Expert's work was comprised of: Angela Dumitrasco, Iulian Rusu and Cornelia Vintilova—the author wishes to thank them for their extraordinary dedication.

Part 1: General Assessment:

1. 1. Moldova's Transition: challenges and opportunities:

Moldova's **democracy is young but growing**—witness the several rounds of successful elections in which the incumbents lost power² as well as the youth's strong commitment to expressing their voice. The democratic institutions, the rights and liberties they brought about as well as the responsibility to protect them needs to be vocally defended and the **Parliament**, as the first institution in a Parliamentary

² “A democracy is a system where incumbents lose elections” is Adam Przeworski's succinct and powerful definition of democracy.

Republic must assume this public role: of **being the protector of Moldova's democracy**.

The importance of **EU integration as a driver of the country's transformation** is now agreed upon by all political forces. The idea of "joining Europe" enhances democratic values and is a key pillar of domestic politics as well as the country's foremost foreign policy objective. The communication strategy that follows builds on Moldova's **aspiration of EU integration** and proposes that **Parliament be the first public voice to drive of this process**.

The people of Moldova need to look up to Parliament to show the way of their future. Hence the **Parliament must articulate a vision for the country**. Without this, and given that the economic benefits of a free market are slow to take root, the risk is that cynicism and alienation will gain ground and the progress made so far could be reversed. Hence it is incumbent on Parliament not just to do but to express whatever it takes to protect and enhance Moldova's democracy and speed up its economic growth and prosperity.

1. 2. EU aspirations: An old message from a new messenger.

Moldova has **(re)stated its intention to join the European Union** a few months prior to the last parliamentary elections of 2005. While the message was not new, the messenger was, in some respects, surprising. The move, undertaken by President Voronin as he launched the electoral campaign, represented a change in strategy. The President had been a staunch ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin and an important architect of Moldova's special ties with the Russian Federation and with other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CSI). This **change in orientation from East to West is an important leap** both for the President and for its administration. The credibility of this message is enhanced with the ability of institutions—such as the Parliament—to demonstrate commitment to European and democratic values.

Moldova's European aspirations are not new. Ever since 1991, after the dismantlement of the Soviet Union, Moldova has sought to establish relations with the European institutions in line with the country's new European aspirations.

For instance, on July 1, 1995, Moldova was the first CSI country to be admitted into the Council of Europe, a move seen as a stepping-stone towards closer relations with the EU. Subsequently, by 1996-97, then-Moldovan President Petru Lucinschi undertook a major letter-writing campaign to the European Commission as well as to the Presidents of EU member states, emphasizing Moldova's intention to enter into an association agreement with the EU by the year 2000. In **November 1994, Moldova signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA; known as the "APC" in Romanian)**, which finally entered into effect 4 years later, on July 1st 1998, after ratification by the EU Member states.

The Action Plan, instituted for a period of 10 years, focuses among others on trade and the opening of markets, the free movement of people and goods, measures to protect foreign direct investments, an increased role for the EU security issues and peaceful conflict resolution, etc.

After the extension of the EU towards the East, on May 1st 2004, the EU has issued a **“New Neighborhood Policy” that includes Moldova**. The new policy will be implemented via a new financial instrument of **17 billion Euros** (for all participating countries³ for the next six years.

With the adoption of a New Neighborhood Policy in 2004, Moldova has entered a **new phase in its relations with the EU** (though it maintains the same legal basis for its cooperation—the APC.)

While useful as an overall framework, the APC is considered too vague to offer steady guidance on benchmarking progress towards EU integration, now that this represents a common objective. Hence the **need for a clearer sense of direction and a stronger message** about what kind of expectations come together with closer EU ties.

Speaking at Chatham House in London in February of this year, the President of the Moldovan Parliament Mr. Marian Lupu said: **“[Moldova’s] pro-European option has become an axiom of domestic politics.”**⁴

Specifically discussing the “Declaration of political partnership”, President Lupu said: “[T]he **priorities Moldova undertakes in this declaration are practically the same as the Copenhagen Criteria** [for EU accession]: stable democratic institutions, fostering rule of law and respect for human rights, the establishment of competitive markets, etc.”⁵

Finally, President Lupu concluded: “Moldova perceives its European Integration primarily as a domestic task, indeed the **modernization of the Moldovan state**”.⁶

The Moldovan public agrees: In the latest IPP Opinion Barometer of April 2006, asked if they **would vote for EU accession**⁷, a whopping 70% of Moldovans say a resounding “yes”, up from 64% in December 2005 and from 57% in May 2004.⁸

Given the key role the Parliament plays in a Parliamentary republic such as Moldova, the **Assembly is perceived as the key architect of Moldova’s integration**.

³ The European Neighborhood Policy applies to: Algeria; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Egypt; Georgia; Israel; Jordan; Lebanon; Libya; Moldova; Morocco; Palestinian Authority; Syria; Tunisia; Ukraine

⁴ See <http://www.parlament.md/news/02.02.2006/> Underlined by the author.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ The question asked “Should a Referendum ask the question next week, would you vote for EU integration?”

⁸ Barometrul de Opinie Publica, Aprilie 2006. Institutul de Politici Publice, IPP, see www.ipp.md

Yet, **surprisingly, public trust in the Parliament is low.** Only 39% of Moldovans have “some” or “very much” trust in Parliament, up from 34% in December 2005 but down from 46% in February 2005.⁹

A proper communications strategy will **help Parliament carry out a national conversation on the requirements of EU integration** in order to firm up both expectations and policy deliverables. In addition, better communications will strengthen the Parliament’s other roles in providing oversight and representation (more about communications objectives in a separate section).

A communication strategy for the Parliament ought to help **raise the level of trust in elected officials** in order to enable Parliament to carry out its lawmaking and oversight duties and to **successfully pursue the goal of EU integration.**

Part 2: Issues in Parliamentary communications:

2. 1. Key objectives of an impactful communications strategy:

A communications strategy for the Moldovan Parliament should have the following **objectives:**

1. Raise the level of **public trust** in elected officials, by:
 - a. Encouraging Deputies to be responsive to public inputs into the law-making process and by strengthening the “oversight” function of Parliament;
 - b. Empowering citizens to get involved into the law- and policy-making process, by strengthening both the “representative” function of Parliament.
2. Consolidate public support for the stated **goal of European integration** by:
 - a. Effectively promoting the European values of pluralism, human rights, tolerance, public participation, the rule of law, accountability, etc.
 - b. Including respect for democratic values into the law-making process.
3. Help promote the role of Parliament as **defender and promoter of Moldova’s democracy.**

The invitation addressed to civil society groups to contribute to the law making process either in standing committees or via the internet is a salutary decision that proves openness and **willingness to dialogue** with the representatives of the public. **Laws made without consent, acceptance and ownership are not implemented.**

I will review each objective and offer specific recommendations in section 3 below.

⁹ Barometrul de Opinie Publica, IPP, Aprilie 2006. *Op. Cit.*

The ability of Parliament to communicate will **help the public feel a part of the national dialogue** about issues that matter to them.

2. 2. Structural challenges hindering Parliamentary communications:

Parliamentary communications means a **two-way exchange between voters and elected officials**. On the one hand voters must be aware of the legislative proposals and should be able to contribute to legislation that affects their lives. On the other hand deputies must be forthcoming with information and need to be involved in the community since their mandate is to represent voters.

The country's constitutional set up as a Parliamentary Republic gives the Moldovan **Parliament considerable prerogatives**, including the power to elect the President, appoint the Prime Minister and approve the Cabinet. Parliament also has primary legislative authority¹⁰.

A quick overview of political systems shows that the **101 Deputies in the Moldovan Parliament have powers exceeding those of representatives in Presidential or Semi-Presidential Republics**. Being more powerful, they equally need to listen and to be heard.

The link between each of these 101 representatives and their constituents can be improved. Indeed, two structural biases separate the electorate from their representatives, weakening the crucial link that connects elected officials and their constituents.

These **two structural biases** are:

- The system of list-voting¹¹
- The existence of a single electoral circumscription (Art 73. al. 2)¹².

Voting on party lists **weakens the ties between elected officials and voters** (while strengthening the identification that voters have to political parties) because political parties select their representatives with little or no formal input from voters. Since citizens vote for a party rather than an individual candidate, there is little sense that the **representative is accountable to voters**. Voters have no power to influence who gets to be placed on the list and thus who will be selected to represent them. When voting, citizens express their sympathy towards the party rather than towards a particular representative who, most often, remains an anonymous figure to voters.

To compound this **low degree of connection between voters and their elected officials**, Moldova also faces the limitation of a single voting district. This means that

¹⁰ The Moldovan system is not a traditional parliamentary set up: the President, although elected by the Assembly rather than directly by the public, does not have a simple ceremonial role but maintains considerable executive powers with an unusual accountability.

¹¹ Although independent candidatures are allowed, given a number of specific requirements.

¹² Legea Electorala: "Articolul 73. Alegerile Parlamentului. Al. 2) Alegerile Parlamentului se efectueaza intr-o singura circumscripție electorala nationala, in care se aleg 101 deputati."

each of the 101 elected deputies represents the entire country rather than a particular geographic area. Thus **voters in a particular location do not have a given deputy to represent them**—rather all 101 deputies are equally responsible, in theory, for all of the country’s districts. In practice this means that voters have no particular deputy to contact in order to seek redress—voters lean on the party machinery instead. In case of problems they thus **seek solutions from the party rather than from a particular elected representative**¹³.

These two structural limitations—the fact that voters do not choose individual deputies and the fact that specific deputies do not represent voters in a particular district—make for a rather difficult identification between voters and their elected officials. The **distance between voters and their representatives can be compensated by targeted communications** that close the gap between the elected and their voters. (Please see following sections for recommendations.)

2. 3. Other issues hindering effective communications:

The **Parliament’s external communications**—the ability of deputies to transmit messages to their constituents and to take on board the concerns and suggestions of voters—is a **vital element for the proper functioning of a democracy**. Such communication is either mediated or occurs in person—i.e. the deputy goes to his/her constituent district (in the Moldovan case, around the country), or the voters bring their grievances directly to the deputy through petitions or the request of an audience.

At the same time, internal, **intra-parliamentary communications is just as critical as is the communications between deputies and their constituents**. Such internal communications enables the deputies to be properly informed about meetings, agendas, resources, in order to respond quickly to new developments and to adjust their output accordingly.

Both these elements need further strengthening in the Moldovan case:

A. External communications:

a) Constituent relations—travel around the country:

Even though the Parliament’s resources are said to be **allocated according to the repartition of seats and size of the “fractions”**, some deputies feel that the resource allocation is unfair. Indeed, sometimes proportional allocation contradicts the constitutional principle of equality among the deputies. **Cars and phones are indispensable communications tools and need to be granted equally**. Yet skewed allocation could be interpreted as being politically motivated: There are for instance party fractions which have been granted 1 assistant and one car to 11 deputies and

¹³ Most deputies with whom I talked about this issue recognized that it is a problem, yet said that apparently this was done in order to prevent the creation of a separate Transdnistran electoral circumscription. I believe that there is more harm than good in this set-up, including with regards to the Transdnistran issue whose needs are thus perhaps not sufficiently addressed specifically.

where the fuel made available barely covers one trip per month outside of the capital, and others where the proportion is very different. In addition, the legitimacy of the actual use of such resources as fuel is equally contested. Some deputies for instance are being accused of taking the Parliament’s cars simply to go home over the weekend. Whatever the truth, **“perception is reality”, hence the perception of impropriety must be eliminated.** For this, decision-making about resource allocation should be public and transparent to eliminate whatever doubt various groups may have about the use of resources.

Recommendation:

Since cars and fuel are indispensable for transportation in the constituency—hence are a critical communications means—an effort should be made to **distribute available resources equally** or, at the very least, transparently, with allocation criteria well spelled out in advance and open to discussion.¹⁴ The same goes for phones and other items that pertain to improving communications.

Also see recommendation section.

b) Granting Audiences—the importance of face to face meetings:

Some deputies take Mondays off considering them to be “audience days”, whether in Chisinau or elsewhere around the country. Such days are however not consistently observed and the public is mostly unaware of the practice. Yet being **able to speak to an elected official to share a grievance is an essential part of the democratic process** and a right that all people should equally enjoy. Since deputies do not have particular links to a specific constituency, their trips around the country are made at the party’s behest and are organized by local chapters of the party structure. Hence **rarely do deputies cruise the country as representatives of the people, as parliamentarians.** More often than not they are seen—and indeed are—representatives of a given party. In some cases it works well and local authorities make rooms available to visiting deputies. But in some cases it doesn’t. This happens especially in those parts of the country where local authorities have a strong party affiliation, different from that of the visiting representative. Indeed it seems sometimes difficult for a member of a different party to find enough local cooperation to organize a visit.

Recommendation:

Since personal encounters are so critical to strengthening the link between elected officials and the public, both **trips around the country and audience days at the Parliament should be facilitated.** Audience days should be publicized on the web-

¹⁴ Most deputies said that they do not know how decisions about car allocations have been arrived at; several cited mysterious construction cranes being supplied with as much petrol per month as the allocation of fuel to most political fractions.

site, offering people the opportunity even to book a special appointment times with the deputy.

In addition, it should be **expected that local authorities cooperate with visiting deputies regardless of political affiliation**. For that, arrangements for the visit should not be made by local party officials but, instead, should be handled centrally by the Parliament staff. The staff need not necessarily be increased to handle such travel if parliamentary assistants can be properly trained. It is necessary however that each deputy be independent and have his/her means of transportation. Such **Parliament-organized visits in the territory will help drive home the point that the visitor does not go in the territory as a party representative** but rather in his/her capacity as an elected representative of the people.

c) Press releases and other institutionalized communications:

The Press Office of the Parliament is manned by 3 people, two of whom are in charge of excerpting agency news and re-packaging them twice a day for internal distribution to Deputies. In the Recommendations section I will address specifics about the News Digest. Here I will address the other attributions of the Press Office, which encompass all communications between Parliament and the media. The able head of the Press Office, himself a former journalist, mentioned during our interview that the **Press Office serves the President, the Vice Presidents and the permanent commissions**. The other groups in Parliament (political factions) take care of their own communications—the Press Office mainly helps them with the distribution of Press Releases and other materials. The personalization of the Press Office services may not be seen as fair by deputies who lack the skills to handle their own communications. Everyone agrees that the office should serve the whole institution, not just its top leaders. On the other hand, the Press Office staff rightly complains of being overloaded with work, hence not being able to cater to the needs of all 101 deputies. Hence staffing needs should be reconsidered to make the same services available to all deputies.

Recommendation:

The Press Office would diminish its workload and would increase the availability of its services to other players if it were to **consider that it has only one institutional client: the Parliament as a whole**. This perspective would alter what is considered news. For instance: does the President receiving a foreign delegation affect the way in which the Parliament works? Then it *is* news. Likewise, when a particular fraction introduces a bill for discussion it is news as well. In addition the staff might be supplemented with people able to transform simple events into newsworthy titles.

B. Internal communications:

a) Availability of assistance, research and analysis:

The Information, Analysis and Forecast unit has a total of 8 staff, of whom 4 are doing analysis and another 2 are in charge of information, which means a daily international Press Review and a Weekly Press Digest, plus a regular update on the Transdnianstran conflict. It is hard to imagine that 101 deputies can have their needs met by **such a small staff**, no matter how competent. This is especially relevant since not all of Moldova's Parliamentarians have access to the internet and even if they do, many do not know foreign languages to use it fully. Hence the vast majority relies heavily on the Prognosis department staff for their information and research needs. (The Parliament's Library is in a similar situation—it has slow IT Access, is staffed by a well-meaning librarian with low language skills, and features an outdated stock of socialist-era books).

Recommendation:

The expected restructuring of the Parliament apparatus will redistribute tasks among the support staff and analysts. In the meantime, the Information, Analysis and Prognosis bureau **may seek to further involve Moldovan Think Tanks in assisting the Parliament** to provide background and impact analysis on the legislation. The cost of such expertise might be supported from grants either directly to specialized Think Tanks or to the Parliament itself.

This way of handling legislative expertise involves **establishing consultations as a routine process rather than as one-off events**. Parliament must extend more than an open invitation but make it a habit of having Think Tanks (IPP, IDIS-Viitorul, ADEPT, etc.) attend hearings. By establish an ongoing and formal dialogue Parliament could kill two birds with one stone: it would provide deputies with state-of-the art analysis about themes of interest and, at the same time, it would **support civil society and the NGO sector by occasionally employing think tanks for research projects** and to provide analysis.

b) Transparency of Permanent Bureau proceedings:

Many people, both inside and outside of Parliament, recognize that the posting of the plenary meetings stenograms—even if delayed by two weeks—represents **the most important development regarding transparency and openness** of communications undertaken by Parliament recently. Indeed, alongside the televised debates broadcast live on Moldovan television on Thursdays, the stenograms allow the public to have first hand knowledge of the Parliament's deliberations. However, inside the Parliament, deputies expect similar transparency and openness with regards to the meetings of the Permanent Bureau (PB) and the Commissions. Even though technically the Fraction heads belong to the PB, **posting the Agenda ahead of time would increase transparency** and foster a sense of ownership of decisions among deputies, thereby contributing to a well functioning, cohesive Parliament.

Recommendation:

E-mail and/or distribute in hard-copy the Agenda of the Permanent Bureau meetings and the stenograms/minutes after the session. Likewise for the President's Agenda of meetings. (E-mail, the most cost effective alternative, requires however that Parliamentarians use IT routinely.)

c) Transparency of Budgetary allocation:

One of the primary measures of organizational transparency is the ability to **discuss publicly issues of financial governance**. When the institution is using public funds there is the expectation to make finances transparent. With regards to the Moldovan Parliament, the **expectation of financial transparency** was expressed both by the deputies themselves and by the press. Having the Parliament's Budget made available publicly will not only fulfill an obligation of transparency of public finances but, and perhaps more importantly, it will **eliminate internal questions** about the allocation of resources and raise the level of public trust in the institution.

Recommendation:

Make public the Parliament's Budget and **publish a yearly Annual report** on expenditures and the various projects undertaken¹⁵.

d) IT and Intranet availability:

No effective communications—internal or external—is possible nowadays without the benefit of the new technologies. This is not the place to discuss the IT & C needs of the Moldovan Parliament—a special assessment about that was made separately. But I do want to underscore **the importance of proper access to Information Technologies** for the establishment of effective communications.

Recommendation:

Endow each workstation with a computer so that each deputy and staffer has access to a computer and the internet. Instruct deputies and their staff not only to use IT but to understand that the Internet represents their link to modernity and to the rest of the world.

¹⁵ For an interesting overview on Parliamentary Budget issues at the time of the last wave of democratization, see the minutes of an Inter-Parliamentary Assembly discussion of 1991: http://www.asgp.info/Publications/CPI-English/1991_162_01-e.pdf. Also, see how budgetary issues are handled in the UK: <http://www.parliament.uk/faq/faq.cfm>.

Part 3: How to improve Parliament communications: Strategy and Recommendations

3. 1. The Parliament's priorities and strategic objectives:

The Moldovan Parliament has established 4 priorities:

- Legislative process and law harmonization;
- Governmental Oversight;
- Parliamentary Diplomacy;
- Transparency of Parliamentary work.¹⁶

In addition, alongside the government, the Parliament is the standard bearer of EU integration, having taken the position that **EU integration is a part of the domestic policy agenda**. In addition, given the Government Oversight priority, the Parliament is doubly involved in promoting and pursuing EU integration.

3. 2. Communications Objectives:

As stated above in Part 2, Section 1, a sound communications strategy ought to have the following objectives:

- 1. Raise the level of public trust** in elected officials, by:
 - a. Encouraging Deputies to be responsive to public inputs into the law-making process and by strengthening the “representative” function of Parliament;
 - b. Empowering citizens to get involved into the law- and policy-making process, by strengthening both the representative and the oversight function of Parliament.
- 2. Consolidate public support** for the stated goal of European integration by:
 - c. Effectively promoting the European values of pluralism, tolerance, accountability, etc.,
 - d. Including these democratic values into the law-making process as well as into public discourse and the national conversation.
- 3. Help promote the role of Parliament as defender and promoter of Moldova's democracy.**

In short, Parliament needs to be:

- trustworthy,
- convincing and
- an example of the very democratic processes it promotes.

¹⁶ For more ample discussion see “The Functional Review of the Administration of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova” by Anita Dudina and Maris Sprindzukus, May 2006 Chisinau.

3. 3. SWOT Analysis:

<p><u>Strengths:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considerable constitutional power; • High institutional recognition; • Charismatic leader, able to communicate well; 	<p><u>Weaknesses:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of set procedures to facilitate communications; • Some deputies would rather stick to the old system and keep out of public scrutiny to avoid undue criticism; • Lack of resources to affect change;
<p><u>Opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness and willingness to communicate on the part of key MPs; • Involvement of civil society in Parliamentary deliberations breeds public support; • Citizens want to look up to the institution; • Relatively small number of parliamentarians can facilitate exposure of each and every one. 	<p><u>Threats:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low public trust and credibility; • Public disheartened and increasingly impatient; • “All talk” communications strategy (i.e. Live TV broadcasts of plenary sessions) can become counterproductive; • Lack of meaningful relationship with constituents (because of list voting and single circumscription) makes effective communications more difficult.

3. 4. The proposed strategy:

The Parliament Communications strategy can be articulated in one proposition that **establishes the position the institution should seek to occupy** on the Moldovan scene.

The Moldovan Parliament is an open, transparent and democratic institution, which seeks to promote European values and set an example of openness, dialogue, toleration and rule of law.

Positioning:

The Moldovan Parliament is the guardian of Moldova’s democracy.

Content/Message:

The Parliament is listening to the citizens of the Republic of Moldova and considers their views in the design of laws and in carrying out its attributions.

Audience:

The **Internal communications** campaign is destined to the deputies themselves and the whole apparatus staff.

The **External communications** campaign is targeted primarily to the media, to the public at large (especially via civil society organizations) as well as to the EU (Commission and European Parliament especially), other bilateral and international donors. Last but far from least, it is also targeted to the rest of Moldova's decision makers (other branches of state power) who can help Parliament achieve its objectives.

Allies for the implementation of this strategy will be the public and their representatives: **the media and civil society**;

Obstacles to implement this strategy will come from those who **fear change** and prefer to cling to the old thinking. Other state institutions may also feel competitive in terms of public recognition. (However, if well managed, **competition among state institutions may turn out to be positive** and speed up the process of European Integration.)

3. 4. 1. Elements for the effective implementation of the strategy:

- Establish—through internal consultation of the Deputies and of the Parliament apparatus—a **Mission statement** for the Parliament as a whole as well as (a separate one) for the Parliament's Administration—this latter mission will ensure the fulfillment of the first¹⁷. **Communicate this Mission widely** inside the organization (posters, flyers, e-mail reminders, etc.) Refer to it often in public statements and interviews.
 - Possible clues for establishing the **Parliament's Mission**:
 - § *The Moldovan Parliament is a modern, European institution that supports democracy, representation, rule of law, dialogue and participation.*
 - § *The Parliament listens first and acts only after having heard all voices.*
 - To handle the process of establishing a proper Mission statement, and in order to ensure that the process is sound and all inclusive¹⁸ **establish a Communications Task Force/Working Group** formed of key Parliamentary officials and deputies, civil society representatives, communications professionals (PR or communications experts) and a few representatives of key media¹⁹.

¹⁷ For a discussion about the Secretariat's Mission see Functional Review, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ in order to guarantee ownership and best results

¹⁹ Have the Working Group meet regularly (brainstorms, focus groups, etc.) to produce the Mission and possibly oversee the whole implementation of the communications strategy.

- Having agreed on the Mission statement(s), **establish a tagline/slogan** that embodies it:
 - Possible tagline can be drawn from the strategy statement as follows:
 - § *The Parliament is the guardian of Moldova's democracy.*
- Communicate to the public the **importance of EU integration** and the steps needed to get there:
 - Establish the **relationship between Parliament's role and the process of EU integration** (and its importance):
 - § Approximation of laws and EU Directives;
 - § Governmental oversight and sanctioning the laggard governments;
- **Communicate with the EU** (Commission, European Parliament, Brussels-based Think Tanks) as well as bilaterally with key member states about Moldova's commitment to the EU:
 - Hold meetings in Brussels, Bucharest and Chisinau of Moldova's EU integration Agenda—work with Think Tanks, media and civil society groups East and West.
- Design a special programme to **enlist the support of the Romanian Parliament**—and specifically of Romanian Euro-observers and future parliamentarians—in Moldova's EU integration plans:
 - Establish a once-yearly (at least) stock-taking conference on Moldova in Bucharest, inviting the political elite, diplomats, business people, think tanks, civil-society, local and international scholars, etc.

3. 5. Tactical recommendations to implement the proposed strategy:

There are many ways to organize recommendations: according to whether they concern internal or external communications, thematically, etc. I will choose to present them according to the likely delay necessary for their implementation:

- § Short term
- § Medium term
- § Long term.

My focus will be on the implementation efforts taking into account the necessary resources for their implementation.

3. 5 .1 Short term recommendations (3-6 months):

1. **Create a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section on the Web** complete with **answers to the most common queries** people may have about Parliament, the deputies, the legislative process and the House's administration (organizational diagram, budget, etc.) See as a model the extraordinarily explicit FAQs of the House of Commons in the UK.²⁰
2. **Communicate widely the Parliament's priorities;**
Establish a sense of direction and of mission (see section above). Discuss publicly (in a series of interviews) the common thread among the 88 EU Directives up for adoption²¹. **Explain** the most important ones and **why they are necessary for Moldova** (find palatable domestic reasons, rather than negative arguments such as "because without this we cannot integrate in the EU"). Make the list and the explanations available on the internet.
3. **Update and add to the Web site:**
The existence of the Website is a spectacular step forward. The site should be commended for being clean, simple, and easy to navigate.

Now it may be improved with the following items:

- Upgrade/**improve the Search Function** of the web-page, by prioritizing search results, applying advanced search functions, etc.
- Put a **Contact address** on the Home Page;
- Make the website visibly **interactive**—respond to queries promptly. The Interactivity of the function may have to be formally stated in the administrative regulation of Parliament or the protocol of cooperation with civil society.
- Have an **automated answer** to each query saying the request was received and it will be processed in the order of receipt.
- Likewise have a **similar automatic reply for all e-mails** sent to Parliament, including MPs and other staff.
- **Add explanations** when presenting on the web-site the various Committees, Directions, Services, etc. (explain mission and attribution of each);
- **Name all members of each staff** (in Departments, Services, etc.) and attach CVs (hyperlinked) to *all* names on the site (propose unified template for all such information);

4. **Carve up a substitute for the Intranet:**
 - a. Even before there is a proper Intranet, carve out a **section of the Website for internal use** only:
 - i. Have a section of the Web page off limits to the public accessible only with a password (login);
 - ii. Use this login (closed-off section) of the Web to post documents such as:

²⁰ <http://www.parliament.uk/faq/faq.cfm>

²¹ The ones that need to be taken as harmonization basis for the Moldovan legislation in accordance with the Legislative Programme of the Parliament for the years 2005-2009.

1. the Permanent Bureau Agenda and stenograms/minutes;
2. The Agenda of the Plenary session presented in due time;
3. The package of laws being debated in the plenary session

These last two items might also be posted on the regular Web-site in public view since the sessions themselves are public and televised.

5. Appoint an official spokesperson (as part of the Parliament administration):

- a. Most of the communication about the Parliament revolves around people: the President, the Vice-Presidents, the Commission heads. This is desirable and most continue. However, it is not enough to **give the public a rounded view** of what is at stake;
- b. An official Parliamentary spokesperson will **tell the press each week what laws are on the legislative agenda**, what is being discussed in the Standing Committees, why these discussions are needed, etc., educating the press and the public on the multiple aspects of the MP's role.

6. Cancel the News Digest; redirect the energies of freed staff in the Press Office and the Analysis & Prognosis Office:

- a. Abandon the production of the News Digests: Offer Deputies the **ability to check the full newswires by themselves**. If too costly to share the license with them, provide them with a selection of news done for other services (Embassies, etc.) so as to avoid the tying up of staff to prepare such digests;
- b. This will **free up considerable staff time** (4 people total) for more productive pursuits (such as PR activities for the whole Parliament, preparing stories for cable TV shows on parliamentary activity, organizing seminars, conferences, study visits, etc.)
- c. In addition, this will please Deputies who express frustration at their inability to **judge for themselves what they consider important**.
- d. Produce only a **compilation of "The Parliament in the News"** with stories about the Parliament's activities which appeared in the domestic and international press;

7. Institutionalize regular hearings:

- a. Repeat invitations to selected **Think Tanks and Civil Society organizations to participate to Standing Committee hearings each week**—even if they don't come, they will be grateful for the invitation and will feel their voice matters.
- b. Invite selected **groups from the public**—people who are likely to be affected by the laws being discussed—to participate in the hearings and express their opinion;

- c. Such **careful listening and inclusion into the decision-making** process will greatly contribute to **restoring trust** in the Parliament's credibility;
- 8. Replace the live broadcasts of the Plenary sessions** on National TV with a specialized Cable broadcast: I realize that this proposal may seem counter-intuitive. **Justifiable pride goes into the broadcast** which highlights the openness and transparency of Parliament. However, please consider why such unedited broadcasts to all viewers, regardless of their interest in political debates, may be counterproductive:
- a. The Parliament's real **work happens in the Commissions**. The Plenary sessions are mostly posturing and voting;
 - b. Yet **watching the plenary sessions live gives the impression that all deputies ever do is argue** and fight each other;
 - c. To **eliminate this negative impression**, the live broadcast on Moldovan TV should be replaced with a packaged report that relates weekly the activity of Parliament;
 - d. Using footage from the work of the Commissions as well as from the Plenary sessions and having a **narrator explain the work being done by the Parliament** will create a sense of purpose and of order and replace the aimless, chaotic impression offered by live broadcasts.
 - e. In addition, for a special target audience of interested publics, a **separate, cable, C-Span-like channel** should be set up on cable, complete with features, interviews, reports, evaluations, talk shows, etc., alongside live broadcasts from the sessions. With the expansion of Cable throughout the country, Parliament could **adopt a law requiring that one cable channel be reserved for public access**, as is the case in the US.
- 9. Provide weekly Info-packs with draft laws before the sessions:**
- a. Facilitate the Deputies' work by **sending on-line packages** of the laws to be discussed before a meeting.
 - b. Order laws in the **Info-pack in the exact order in which they are set o the Agenda**;
 - c. Make **hard copies** available as well.
- 10. Open door days:**
- a. Establish once a month an **Open Doors day** where anyone is invited to tour the parliament;
 - b. Separate the last row in the hemicycle with a glass wall and **give exclusive access to the public to attend sessions** (the Press might have another space reserved in the hemicycle);
 - c. Work with the Ministry of Education to establish a **visiting program for school children** from around the country to attend plenary sessions.
- 11. Bring your children to work:**

- a. Allow deputies and Parliament Staff to bring their children to work one day a year, every year, to **familiarize the kids** (and the family—invite one child and one adult each year) **with the work of a Parliamentarian;**

12. Institute European days:

- a. Institute **Colloquia and Conferences on key themes** of interest to the Moldovan Public in relation with specific EU events: e.g. European Union history Day on May 9th—discusses the motivation and actions behind the initial Treaty; European Consumer days—discusses the rights and obligations of EU Consumers, etc.

13. Target communications to Brussels (Commission and European Parliament):

- a. Have special **manifestations set in the European capital**, targeting both the Commission and the European Parliament;
- b. Present Moldova’s position taking advantage of existing manifestations, or **partner with key Brussels-based Think Tanks** (CEPES, ERC, Bertelsmann, etc.) to create special events featuring Moldova;
- c. **Hire a PR Agency to work in Brussels, Chisinau and Bucharest** (enlist Bucharest as key advocate once Romania enters the EU).

14. Increase the frequency of the Parliament’s newsletter to 6 times a year and consider translating it in English for distribution throughout Moldovan Embassies throughout the world and through the Romania EU mission.

15. Celebrate the UN days—especially those pertaining to human rights, other democratic values or issues established as a priority in R. Moldova:

- a. Extend celebrations of Human Rights Day on December 10th **throughout the country**, with various conferences bringing together deputies, civil society, the media and other opinion-makers; likewise celebrate the Environment day and discuss how to keep Moldova safe and clean, etc.

3. 5. 2. Medium term recommendations (6-18 months):

These recommendations are not considered “medium term” because they are less urgently needed but primarily because they **require additional funds** and in turn budgets need time to be negotiated.

1. Deputies to travel as representatives of the people, not of political parties:

- a. The Members of Parliament (MPs) are all equal representatives of the people and should be **treated equally regardless of their political affiliation**. Hence there is no good reason or justification to differentiate the services they are entitled to;

- b. This includes the **use of cars and fuel** to which all should be equally entitled as traveling to meet constituents is part and parcel of their mandate as representatives of the people;
- c. Therefore every effort should be made to endow each deputy with a car and make it mandatory to **go each time in a different location**.
- d. To create disincentives with regards to using the cars for personal trips, a simple rule can be established that all but one trip every quarter to the *same* location will be charged against the MP's salary;
- e. Work with established European automakers to **secure a preferential, reduced-cost leasing arrangement** to endow the Parliament with the necessary number of cars.

2. Library to be Automated, new books (EU) purchased or donated, CDs with legislation provided as well as language training:

- a. The Library could become a full fledged **resource** to help Deputies fulfill their mandate;
- b. It should **request donations** from bilateral donors (Embassies accredited in Chisinau) and from international donors;
- c. To make room for new arrivals it should **archive the old Soviet Legal literature**;
- d. All entries should be **catalogued electronically**;
- e. The staff should **know at least 1 preferably 2 other EU languages** in addition to English;
- f. Library tours to be provided regularly to Deputies and their staff;
- g. Arrangements to be made with the Moldovan Press and Embassies to **provide a wide array of publications to the Library**, free of charge;
- h. Library staff to routinely **research (international) scholarly articles** on given themes in preparation for standing committees work and distribute them electronically to Deputies;
- i. Library staff to **signal articles or publications of interest according to Deputies' specialty**;

3. Language training for Deputies and staff;

- a. Special **language classes** need to be established for deputies—perhaps a special arrangement can be negotiated with the British Council or the US Embassy (or the Soros Foundation) to provide English language classes on site (on the Parliament premises) for Deputies and the staff (as suggested in the UNDP project).

4. Integrate Press and part of the Information office into a Communications unit:

- a. Both the Press & Image and the Information, Analysis & Forecast Services have communications attributions—the first domestically, the second internationally;
- b. It would make sense to **merge the two press and outreach functions in one single “Communications unit”** responsible both for domestic and for international media relations (keeping current reporting relationships of the two units);

- c. The new Communications Unit would be **in charge of all internal and external communications** work (a complete Audit with Mission, Terms of reference, Organizational Diagram and Job Descriptions can be provided upon request);
- d. The Communications Unit would also be **responsible for the Website and the (future) Intranet service**;
- e. The remaining Analysis and Prognosis unit could be beefed up to **include a section for relations with Civil Society** and other Social Partners (academia, business, think-tanks, etc.)
- f. Thus the Analysis unit would **enroll the social partners into providing evaluations and impact analysis of the proposed legislation**; it would organize regular debates and hearings, etc. (upon request, a separate Audit, complete with Mission, Terms of Reference, Organizational Diagram and proposed Job Descriptions could be provided separately);

5. Set up a Department of Relations with the Public:

- a. Parliament receives substantial correspondence but the mail is mostly blind—addressed to “The Parliament” or its President;
- b. To service (and encourage) direct contact, **upgrade and publicize the current Petitions unit into a full fledged Department** of Public Relations that receives people who bring petitions, responds to queries, directs questions to relevant MPs or other state institutions, etc.;
- c. Such a department should act as a filter (pre-screening) but also **facilitate the access of individuals to Deputies**;
- d. Department staff ought to be able to **educate petitioners** into what is feasible to expect, what is a realistic petition and what state organ is best habilitated to respond to the petitioner’s query. Facilitate the creation and funding of information/public awareness campaigns on the competences of the Parliament (in order not to hinder people’s access to state institutions via petitions).
- e. This way the level of frustration of requestants will diminish and the public will get increasingly **initiated into what can and what cannot be accomplished by Parliament**.

6. Set up a C-Span-like public cable TV channel:

- a. The new Communications Unit need not set up its own production and editing studio. To keep costs low and not branch out into another area (such as audiovisual production) it should select and cooperate with an **external partner** (video studio) to provide film and edits of official visits, etc.
- b. The Communications unit should consider canceling the Broadcast arrangements with Moldovan TV (see previous section for the motivation) and **establish instead a cable C-span-like full fledged channel to broadcast live sessions** and have other packages with information that puts the sessions in context, as well as talk-shows and analysis of parliament activities;

- c. The expense for such operation would be borne by outside partner, **funded partly from advertising and sponsorships, and partly from state subsidies** (especially in kind contribution such as location, staff time, etc.)

7. Offer working internships to students of Political Science, Law, Public Administration and Communications:

- a. The shortage of consultants, analysts and administrative staff is one of the most serious constraints in the fluidity of the Parliament's work, including analysis, communications and outreach activities;
- b. Therefore a **regular internship program** could be established,
- c. These internships can be negotiated with the **Ministry of Education to make real-job practice a part of the curriculum;**
- d. Even in the absence of a wide-ranging Ministerial arrangement, the program can still be set up in **agreement with individual professors or directly with interested students;**

8. Communicate Code of the Civil Servant on the Web-site:

- a. As part of the effort to **align the mission of the administration** and to create an "esprit de corps" of the institution, a deontological code of the parliament staff can be established and publicized;
- b. The Code (simple and straightforward, with a few Do's and Don't's) should be presented in the form of **Posters and be hung around the building** in individual offices, elevators, etc.;

9. Communications with Moldovans abroad:

- a. One third of Moldovans are said to be working abroad, their needs **ought to be heard in Parliament** and their rights protected;
- b. Several issues pertaining to **pensions, health insurance, the equivalence of education and diplomas**, etc., need to be addressed;
- c. A small sub-section of the Communications unit or of the Analysis and Prognosis Unit (that deals with social partners and beneficiaries) could be mandated to **focus specifically on their needs** and help keep open the communication lines.

3. 5. 3. Long term recommendations (+18 months):

1. Information systems:

- a. As mentioned in Section 2, **each desk/workstation** ought to be equipped **with a computer and internet link;**
- b. Deputies and their staff need to **take the European Computer Driver's License (ECDL)** test to enable them to use computers at their full potential and navigate easily on the internet;
- c. Make an **arrangement with a general manufacturer to provide low/cost leasing arrangements**, or work with US Foundations to ship a cargo of second-hand computers, one on every desk. (Also explore

the opportunity to acquire refurbished equipment or receive donations of computers).

2. Potential changes in the electoral law:

- a. Proper communications cannot be established if voters do not identify individual Deputies taking a special interest in their particular issue;
- b. Thus it seems necessary to **rethink the electoral law and consider turning every raion into an electoral district**. There should be other solutions to the Transdnistran problem that do not mean high jacking the entire electoral system and throwing the baby with the bathwater.

3. 6. Monitoring and Evaluation:

3. 6. 1. **Proper monitoring** and evaluation requires funds to perform an initial benchmark research to detect perceptions, respond to public expectations and prevent miscommunication. In the absence of proper funds, the following evaluation criteria can be used:
 - a. **Ad hoc focus groups**—especially among civil society, academics, business leaders and the media.
 - b. **Internal benchmarks**;
 - c. **Deputy and staff satisfaction**.

Part 4: Calendar of activities and next steps

4.1 . Calendar of Activities (see separate sheet):

4.2 . Next steps:

- a. Proposed Strategy discussed, amended, approved;
- b. Implementation plans drawn up and budget established;
- c. No-cost or low cost items carried out;
- d. Fund raising campaign for large-ticket items;
- e. Monitoring and evaluation.