



Good.
Better.
Regional.

Communication
Strategy

2017-2019

Good. Better. Regional.

Full title - Regional Cooperation Council Communication Strategy 2017-2019

Publisher: Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat

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This is an online publication

Design of the publication has been financially supported by the Federal Republic of Germany



Communication Strategy 2017 - 2019



TABLE OF CONTENT

1.	Introduction	6
2.	Summary	8
3.	The mission statement	10
4.	The vision	12
5.	Slogans	14
6.	The publics (target audiences)	16
6.1.	Internal audience	17
6.1.1.	Goal and objective	17
6.1.2.	Strategies, tools and tactics	18
6.2.	External audience	20
7.	Key messages	22
7.1.	General messages	23
7.2.	Specific messages	23
8.	Goal, objectives, strategies, tactics and tools	24
8.1.	Goal	25
8.2.	General objectives	25
8.3.	Strategies	26
8.4.	Tools and tactics	28
8.4.1.	Direct communication: face to face, reporting, Daily News Overview	29
8.4.2.	Website	30
8.4.3.	Media (electronic, print, online)	32
8.4.4.	Social media	33
8.4.5.	Public information materials	34

8.4.6.	Events	35
8.4.7.	Multimedia (video and photo)	36
8.4.8.	Grants	36
8.4.9.	Support to regional cooperation projects	37
9.	Resources	38
10.	Measure of results	40
10.1.	Current results	42
10.2.	Specific measurable objectives	44
11.	Assumptions and risks	48
12.	Conclusion	50

ANNEXES¹

Annex I:	Sample of events calendar
Annex II:	Sample table with contact addresses
Annex III:	Sample table of list of publications
Annex IV:	RCC Brandbook
Annex V:	RCC letter template
Annex VI:	RCC internal memorandum template
Annex VII:	RCC e-mail signature template
Annex VIII:	RCC document drafting guidelines
Annex IX:	Social media guidelines
Annex X:	Target audience matrix
Annex XI:	2017 Action plan - strategies/tactics/tools matrix

¹ All Annexes are RCC's internal documents, and therefore available only with the RCC Secretariat.



INTRODUCTION

1.

INTRODUCTION

Since it was established in 2008, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) has worked to develop and maintain a climate of dialogue, tolerance and openness towards cooperation throughout the South East Europe (SEE) and amongst its participants, promoting their European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations and supporting the reforms related to their preparation for the EU accession. In line with the statutory mandate and the evolving regional challenges, RCC has been operating under the political umbrella of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECPP), and the three triennial strategies and work programmes that are guiding its work in developing and supporting the implementation of regional programmes, to address the needs of SEE governments in the areas of economic and social development, energy and infrastructure, justice and home affairs, security cooperation, and in building institutional and human capital. During over eight years of its operation, the RCC has worked very closely with all the governments in the region and with the relevant regional cooperation mechanisms, achieving tangible results.

In time, RCC's agenda has shifted considerably from networking and convening in a wide number of themes to more focused and result-oriented interventions in a restricted number of intervention areas. This shift was particularly evident in the previous three-year period covered by the [RCC's Strategy and Work Programme 2014-2016](#), where a strong focus was put on supporting economic cooperation and development in the region through the [SEE 2020 Strategy](#) and strengthening cooperation on justice and home affairs issues. The [RCC Strategy and Work Programme 2017-2019 \(SWP 2017-2019\)](#) defines the principles of operation, the priority areas of interventions and the goals to be achieved in the coming three years. It is based on a thorough analysis of the realities and the present challenges in SEE, the progress made so far in the European integration process of the RCC participants, the agreed regional priorities and on the common goal to advance these processes.

SUMMARY



2.

SUMMARY

Over the next three years, RCC will work to enhance economic integration through easier flow of capital, people, goods and services within the SEE and between the SEE and the EU, with better governance, improved functioning of the rule of law and enhanced security in South East Europe. RCC will continue to engage with all participants from SEE, guided by the SEECP, in order to ensure broad geographical scope of cooperation.

This strategy reflects the new agenda of the organisation, upgrading the established RCC profile to reflect its increasingly regionally-owned, active and all-inclusive role and influence. It continues to streamline ways in which the RCC Secretariat builds the organisation's public profile, with guidance and backing from the Secretary General, as well as with support of all RCC staff.

The primary objective is to keep building the understanding on what the RCC does, increasing political, financial as well as public support for its activities, but also to keep raising awareness of the organisation and the regional cooperation process in general, building and promoting the SEE image based on the RCC's key mission postulates - serving regional cooperation and European and Euro-Atlantic integration of South East Europe, in order to spark development in the region to the benefit of its people.

This Strategy and the action plan are transposing the RCC priorities and the Secretary General's vision into concrete goals and objectives, keeping in mind the resources available. The Communication Strategy supports goals of the key documents of the organisation: [Strategy and Work Programme 2017-2019](#), [South East Europe 2020 Strategy](#), and the organisation's [Statute](#). It builds on the achievement of both, organisation and its communication strategies, over the past eight years since the RCC has been established and started its operations, but also introduces new methods generated from lessons learned in the past.

THE MISSION STATEMENT



3.

THE MISSION STATEMENT

The Regional Cooperation Council serves regional cooperation and European and Euro-Atlantic integration of South East Europe in order to spark development in the region to the benefit of its people.



THE VISION



4.

THE VISION

Helping prosperity and growth through regional action in South East Europe, while supporting European and Euro-Atlantic integration, is what the Regional Cooperation Council is all about. We see our region as a place of dialogue, freedom and mobility, rich in cultural heritage, where each person feels safe and protected by the rule of law.





5. SLOGANS

Good.
Better.
Regional.

One region, one economy!



THE PUBLICS (target audiences)



6.

THE PUBLICS (target audiences)

The RCC needs to maintain the old and build new relations with the publics/ audiences necessary to the organisation in pursuing its mission and vision. This includes promoting current activities but also constantly gaining better understanding of RCC's overall mission and stepping up promotion of its core values and actions aimed at reaching the set goals and objectives.

In line with the tasks and set goals, the target audiences are divided into two main groups: internal audience and external audience.

6.1. INTERNAL AUDIENCE

6.1.1. Goal and objective

The internal audience, being the most important one as it serves as an extended communications pool, continue to be the RCC employees.

Given that great portion of the overall RCC's communication efforts is executed through both direct contacts with the target audiences (face to face) and reporting to them, RCC staff represents crucial element of the entire communication efforts. Having this in mind, this Strategy envisages steps and measures to train and equip the staff with necessary skills to make them proper 'RCC ambassadors' in communication terms.

Furthermore, in order to raise impact of communications with all external audiences, internal communications need to be strengthened and streamlined to result in higher efficiency, timeliness and synchronisation throughout the organisation.

Objectives:

- ▶ Strengthen and improve the flow of information inside the organisation;
- ▶ Equip the staff with necessary skills for them to become proper 'RCC ambassadors'.

6.1.2. Strategies, tools and tactics

For the purpose of reaching the set internal communication benchmarks the RCC's Communications Team has developed a series of strategies and tools in agreement with the staff, mostly referring but not limited to the programmatic segment as the most publicly exposed one.

These strategies and tools include:

- Updated events calendar and coordinated approach to manners and channels for communicating identified contents to external publics (Annex I: Events calendar template);
- Regularly updated and revised groups of target audiences/partners/stakeholders integrated into the Content Management System (CMS) web platform as a means for direct communication with desired audiences as per topics/areas of activities. This tool will be developed and launched together with the new RCC website, with prior inputs from all RCC staff (core and projects). (Annex II: Sample table with contact addresses);
- Regularly updated list of pending publications (Annex III: Sample table of list of publications);
- In addition, in order to achieve ambitious internal communication goals the Communications Team to increase its presence at important programmatic and (when possible) managerial meetings, aspiring to obtain information on plans and achievements but also to provide information necessary for communication needs and plans.

On top of this, the tactic is to train and equip a whole team of experts so they could act as 'faces/ambassadors' of the organisation, presenting the activities in their field of expertise to variety of audiences, including the media. This process has already been initiated in the past and will be continued intensively in the coming three-year period. The rationale behind such an approach is to present organisations' multi-national and all-inclusive nature, thus making it more recognisable as a regionally-

owned and managed structure, working in the interest and to the benefits of their countrymen.

In order to become fully-flagged faces of the organisation, the RCC staff (especially the newcomers) needs to be adequately and timely informed about the Communication Strategy and all its stipulations. It is important to underline that all RCC staff, headed by the RCC Secretary General are the RCC communicators and implementers of this Strategy. Therefore, the following documents developed in line with the new strategic approach serve as an integral part of this Strategy:

Annex IV: RCC Brandbook

Annex V: RCC letter template

Annex VI: RCC internal memorandum template

Annex VII: RCC e-mail signature template

Annex VIII: RCC document drafting guidelines

Annex IX: Social media guidelines

Another excellent tool to improve the flow of information and communication in general within the organisation is the SharePoint (DMS), which the RCC already possess. This is an online tool, the Intranet that enables sharing information, documents, tasks, etc. The upgrade of the system has already begun in late 2016. It will be followed with staff training on how to use it, thus the use of the upgraded DMS would coincide with the beginning of implementation of this Strategy in early 2017.

Once approved by the Secretary General, the RCC Communication Strategy will be distributed to all RCC staff, together with accompanying documents. It will also be introduced to the newcomers as they join the organisation, as the welcome communications package.

6.2. EXTERNAL AUDIENCE

External publics can be divided into the following groups:

Primary	Secondary
Governments of 13 RCC SEE participants a) RCC and SEE 2020 National Coordinators b) Governmental officials at various ministries, institutions, organisations and agencies	International organisations
European Union (European Commission, European Parliament, etc.)	Business community/ investors, academia, researchers, civil society groups
Donors	
Partner initiatives in SEE	
Media, as a distinctive public, but also as a channel to the wider, general public	
General public in 13 RCC SEE participants	

The ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ differentiation of these external target audiences does not reflect their importance and/or relevance in terms of communication but rather different approaches, level and type of information shared with them. Given the frequent changes of the governmental structures in the region, information shared with them frequently varies from the basic background information, updated subsequently, when there is a lack of institutional memory noted to advanced information exchange in case of a long-term cooperation that requires maintenance.

Without assistance and commitment of the listed publics it would be very difficult for the RCC to reach the envisaged goals and objectives. All of the publics have

their important roles in the operations of the RCC and are mutually interlinked. There are many common denominators for all these audiences - from a simple desire to live better and common market interest of regional businesses to the need to hear exclusive and interesting news about what is new in the region and how their neighbours cope with different issues - none of which should be underestimated.

These target audiences also have opinion-influencers and decision-makers who affect perception of our organisation in public circles. Given the wide range of audiences they would all need to be approached in an adjusted and tailor-made manner to generate a desired effect in terms of RCC’s objectives and goals reaching.

Annex X: Target audience matrix

KEY MESSAGES

7.

KEY MESSAGES

7.1. GENERAL MESSAGES

- Regional Cooperation - a shortcut to faster South East Europe's progress on the EU path
- Working together makes the region a stronger player on the global scene
- The answer to EU requirements lies in harmonised regional responses

7.2. SPECIFIC MESSAGES

The RCC is working towards:

- Decent work and economic growth
- Modernised transport infrastructure
- Quality education
- Efficient and accountable public administration
- Safe and stable region
- Responsibly managed resources
- Boosted investments
- Utilised tourism potential
- Innovative research
- Included Roma
- Reliable and predictable judiciary
- Safeguarded environment

These messages are made short and simple to fit all target audiences. However, more specific messages, as per the area of cooperation and deliberated audiences, will be developed subject to the mode and channel of communication, i.e. extensive, explanatory and/or more technical messages would be developed for the first 4 groups of primary external audiences that are mostly being delivered through direct contact - face to face or reporting, while brief 'straight to the point' messages communicating results would be exchanged with media and wider public.



GOAL, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, TACTICS AND TOOLS

8.

GOAL, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, TACTICS AND TOOLS

8.1. GOAL

- ▶ *The communication goal: RCC recognised as a power-tool for regional cooperation and growth of South East Europe.*

In order to reach this goal the RCC will have to ensure *maximum utilisation of its current and forthcoming activities, its resources, knowledge, lessons learned, information and know-how, so as to gather as much understanding and attention as possible and thus widen its footprint.*

A set of different strategies, tools and tactics will be applied in order to achieve this goal.

In the strategic domain, given the planned results and envisaged budget of the [Strategy and Work Programme 2017-2019](#), the RCC would invest efforts to plan for and execute communication segments of activities when and where possible. Furthermore, should the processes allow, the RCC Communications Team would use any given opportunity to take part in planning of a joint programmatic-communication activities (for example: employment fair, Roma inclusion cultural/bonding events, education projects, etc.)

8.2. GENERAL OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Achieve better understanding on what the RCC does, thus increasing political, financial as well as public support for its activities;
- ▶ Increase general awareness of the organisation and regional cooperation process to build on the positive image and influence of the RCC.

2017 is the year when the new RCC Strategy and Work Programme 2017-2019 comes into effect: focusing on the future, which would be included and communicated

adequately through communication channels with appropriate tools and activities. The communication efforts will be focused on using various strategies, tools and tactics to achieve better understanding on what the RCC does, especially on the results achieved during the implementation of [SWP 14-16](#) - regional cooperation success stories, thus increasing political, financial as well as public support for its activities.

In **2018** the RCC marks its 10th anniversary. A jubilee year should be utilised to the maximum with face-lifted visual identity and by launching a public information campaign about the organisation's results and achievements. The campaign would kick-off with an event marking the RCC 10th anniversary on 28 February 2018, where Champion of Regional Cooperation would be presented in presence of RCC friends and partners, followed by a panel discussion and a cultural event. A special design would be created to highlight the anniversary, focusing on the RCC's achievements and its benefits for the end-users - the citizens of SEE, rather than on its sole existence. The communication staff, in cooperation with relevant RCC departments, would ensure production of appropriate public information materials that would be distributed throughout the year. The fact that 2018 is the European year of cultural heritage would also be considered and reflected in the campaign.

2019, being the final year of [SWP 17-19](#) implementation and the last step of the [SEE 2020 Strategy](#) implementation, would require communication efforts focused on the results and preparations for the new cycle of the Strategy to start in 2020. It would single out successful projects from the implementation phase, featuring them at various forums and through RCC communication channels but also proactively tackling the key issues and challenges as raised on annual basis by the Balkan Barometer.

8.3. STRATEGIES

Given the demanding [RCC SWP 2017-19](#) as well as annual [Balkan Barometer](#) findings, the RCC communication efforts could also use other programme efforts to build on the existing organisational profile. With timely and strategic joint planning of both programmatic and communication activities the impact could be multiplied.

- Develop and maintain a list of target audiences split into smaller groups, as per cooperation areas; create a database of contacts and incorporate it into the RCC website;
- Improve the format of reports the RCC is producing for its external stakeholders, more result-oriented and user-friendly;
- Directly approach the relevant target audiences by sending them the desired content through RCC website and social media channels, instead of relying on media to inform and/or interpret the RCC activities;
- Develop, launch and maintain the new website in accordance with [RCC's new SWP 17-19](#);
- Adjust the new website for mobile devices (mobile application) as 23% of our audience in 2015 used it for visiting our website, the analytics show²;
- Expand and strengthen the network of media/journalists who have been promoting RCC work;
- Explain the RCC through public information materials (produce a 'RCC business card', infographics, brochures, etc.);
- Continuously inform our core target audience (internal and external) about the RCC activities as well as about developments in the region (producing and distributing the RCC's Daily News Overview) on daily basis; expand the distribution list for this product, with inputs from all RCC employees;
- Use RCC-organised and co-organised events, publications, studies, etc. not only to promote the event/publication but also the entire process in the respective area of cooperation;
- Ensure continued presence of RCC field of activity in media through media coverage of specific activities and organise articles/interviews/appearances of RCC staff around these events; the prerequisite for this being media training for RCC staff;

² The source of all website-related statistics in this document is Google Analytics.

- Organise and support ‘light topics’ events, and create contents (videos, publications, etc.) that are highly valuable to raising awareness efforts;
- Continuously and timely plan the public component of the activities in a strategic manner to ensure optimal exposure and coverage of RCC work;
- Use various means of communication with the media on a regular basis to increase awareness of RCC activities and generate public interest;
- Reach out to a wide range of publics via website and social media tools, and keep updating these online tools;
- Attract continuous political and financial support of RCC contributors and targeted stakeholders by regular attention-catchers of key players through direct communication and distribution of RCC public information materials and visual identity items;
- Keep raising the RCC profile and improving communication with target audience, including the media, by organising special networking activities during the year;
- Organise planning workshops twice a year for all RCC staff in order to inform each other on the activities ahead, pinpoint shortcomings and problems, and seek for management support; promote internal cohesion, maintain RCC staff motivation and gain staff support throughout the year;
- Use ‘piggy-backing’ mode for promotion of activities supported by the RCC;
- Continue the use of existing social media channels and open LinkedIn profile to position the RCC in official business market.

8.4. TOOLS, TACTICS AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

In order to maximise the effects of the RCC communication efforts throughout the [SWP 2017-2019](#) three-year period that the Communication Strategy corresponds with, the RCC staff, and communication staff in particular, will be implementing a set of core tactics and tools that proved to be successful in the past period, while simultaneously introducing a set of new ideas represented with tools and tactics that would be tailor-made for each year of the Strategy’s implementation.

A wide range of tools and tactics will be used by the RCC in order to communicate its mission, goal, objectives, and values, but also to maintain and, where needed, create a good public reputation. The most important ones are listed and explained below.

8.4.1. Direct communication: face to face, reporting, Daily News Overview

The direct communication with the audiences (partners/stakeholders/beneficiaries) that includes meetings (bilateral or multilateral) and reporting are the most important tools being used by RCC staff. This type of communication is led by the RCC Secretary General and the senior management, setting the political and programmatic tone and positioning the organisation in the respective environments. It is followed by the rest of RCC staff, with all target audiences of the organisation, at various meetings, conferences, events, interviews, etc., and through a number of reports the RCC produces. These tools need to be cherished and constantly improved by using the organisation’s key messages wherever possible.

This Strategy identifies specific messages per priority area that need to be communicated directly with the most important target audiences. As for the reporting - the existing reporting system, as an equally important tool, requires an improvement and upgrade. The RCC should strive to make its reports (RCC Annual Report, regular reports of the Secretary General to the RCC Board, triennial RCC Strategy and Work Programme, etc.) for the external stakeholders shorter, more result-oriented and user-friendly. The Communications Team will, following the lead of the management, assist in upgrading the reporting formats.

Daily News Overview (DNO): The RCC is producing Daily News Overview (DNO) since 2008 on the basis of media reports on the most interesting topics related to the region. It also covers all RCC activities featured in the media as well as topics relevant for SEE and RCC. As the DNO is being widely distributed, to all RCC staff, RCC Board participants, NIPACs, and various individuals interested in the region, it represents an important tool of communication with internal and external audiences by keeping them updated on the RCC activities and developments in the region.

The RCC will continue using this tool in the future, but also invest more efforts in expanding the distribution list to include more recipients from the identified target audiences, and distribute analyses made by RCC staff whenever possible.

Objectives:

- ▶ Maintain good relationships through continuous outreach amongst public officials, politicians, opinion-makers, diplomats, think-tanks, students, academia, business community, etc., attempting to gain their support and engagement in communicating the RCC agenda as well;
- ▶ Widen the understanding of the RCC mission, vision and results; and keep building the positive image of the organisation.

8.4.2. Website

After the direct communication, the RCC website is the most important tool of communication with the target audiences. It is the face of the organisations where all audiences eventually come to inform themselves on the organisation’s activities, achieved results, future plans, etc. For the purpose of illustration in 2015 the website had 42,604 visitors, out which 59.7% were the new ones. This clearly shows a rising trend of visitors to our website, as in 2014 this number was 32,470.³

Therefore, a complete redesign and update of the RCC website was initiated in July 2016 to make it more user-friendly, but also to reflect the new [RCC SWP 17-19](#) and to present and utilise RCC’s products and contents more efficiently. The Communications Team also planned for an adjustment of the website application for mobile devices, as the traffic in 2015 proved that 23% of the RCC website visitors used mobile devices to visit the website.

The process of changing the website content took into consideration the fact that in 2015, 33.5% of users fall in the 25-34 age category, while 27.5% of them are in the category 18-24, pointing strongly to job seeking population, especially having in mind that the most visited page at the website was Vacancies. Only 28% of users fall into the 35-54 age category, which is the most relevant one for the RCC. This

³ Source Google Analytics: Number of visitors to RCC website per year: 2008: 6,334; 2009: 19,124; 2010: 21,912; 2011: 23,476; 2012: 29,000; 2013: 31,869; 2014: 32,470; 2015: 42,604; 2016 (Jan-Oct): 32,981.

information suggests that more contents of interest for this age group need to be published.

In 2015 huge traffic to the RCC website was created by the ‘Voice of the Region’ competition which was launched in April and lasted until the end of the year. It is most likely that the evident increase of users in the age group 18-24 was due to this competition.

In order to increase participation of the age group 35-54 that is more relevant for the RCC work (involving officials, employees and representatives of the SEE governments, governmental institutions/agencies, EU, partner SEE initiatives, donor and business community, international organisations, civil society, think-thanks, academia) RCC’s Communication Team considered creating adequate online contents. Such content would include, but not be limited to, texts of the renowned experts - ‘influencers’ in SEE societies, whose analytical opinions are deemed valuable and relevant. They would be asked to write articles, analysis of frequently asked questions, etc., which would be published on RCC website and social media, to open a debate on a specific area of cooperation in which the RCC is actively working and has made actual results so far (for example roaming, open data, verification of diplomas etc.)

Reference statistics for 2015:

Parameter	Explanation	Value
Page Views	Page Views is the total number of pages viewed at the website, including repeated views of a single page.	142,312
Avg. Session Duration	Average session duration is the time user spends on the website.	00:01:55
Bounce Rate:	Bounce Rate is the percentage of single-page visits (i.e. visits in which the person left the website from the entrance page without interacting with the page)	61.29%

Objectives:

- ▶ Create more user-friendly website where RCC stakeholders will be able to follow overall information on the activities as well as information on specific processes related to the area of cooperation of interest;
- ▶ Increase the total number of viewers, especially the new ones;
- ▶ Increase percentage of the 35-54 age category users;
- ▶ Increase page views including the average session duration and reduce the bounce rate.

8.4.3. Media (electronic, print, online)

Besides being the RCC's target audience, electronic, print and online media are also distinctive and very important tool and channel to reach the other target audiences.

In the next 3-year period covered by this Strategy, the RCC will focus its efforts on engaging more online media, which are becoming increasingly important in the complex and interlinked media market. Broadcast media, television in particular, remain the most influential when it comes to general public, suggesting that additional efforts need to be made to present organisation's activities in broadcast media in the region. For this reason, the Strategy envisages continued efforts in engaging the most influential media, nationally and regionally, whenever possible and especially in covering the most important RCC's public events.

For the reference: in 2015 the total number of media reports was 1200, and 58% of those were general or political topics, while only 42% referred to the organisation's programming activities. Considering such a status of topic distribution and expressed media interest in the RCC actions so far, the goal for the next three years is not only to increase the overall number of reports but also to invert the statistics in favour of the programmatic activities, through regional success stories.

The RCC Secretariat, the Secretary General and all other staff, being the prime communicators of the organisation, should use every opportunity to promote the RCC, its public policies, projects and activities, ensuring the visibility, transparency and understanding.

Lessons learned from the past media engagement prove that practice of using services of seven senior and reputable journalists from SEE economies has been very successful and therefore it will be continued in the next three-year cycle for the purpose of boosting RCC external communications.

Media Monitoring: In 2016 the RCC subscribed to Mediatoolkit, a real time media monitoring tool that is tracking meaningful insights behind every online mention, in order for the RCC Secretariat staff to be informed of the most important news and reports on the RCC-related issues. This tool proved very useful and the plan is to use it for the purposes of media monitoring in the future as well.

Objectives:

- ▶ Expanding media pool familiar with RCC's activities and mission, getting them more engaged in the regional cooperation agenda;
- ▶ Increase overall number of media reports on RCC activities;
- ▶ Increase the number of articles on RCC programme activities;
- ▶ Generate more electronic media reports on RCC activities.

8.4.4. Social media

The existing social media presence of the RCC on Facebook, Twitter and You Tube continues the trend of steady growth, causing more interactions with representatives from all trades of targeted audiences. The social media will continue to be used for the purpose of informing about the RCC activities as well as raising awareness on its core mission and vision. Another very important segment of social media presence is a constant interaction with key partners/stakeholders/beneficiaries through sharing their contents relevant for the RCC activities thus positioning the organisation as a leading and relevant pool of information on regional cooperation in SEE.

Twitter singled out in the social media communication. As the fastest and the most brief social media it proved to be an excellent tool for promoting both activities and raising awareness especially because of its nature to set the trending topics and attract traffic of all relevant audiences to the RCC contents through tagging and introducing recognisable hashtags. This allows for fast and timely reactions, sharing of information in a geometrical progression mode by the RCC Twitter audiences,

quickly and cost efficiently. The past Twitter presence managed to network the @rccint (RCC Twitter name) with numerous decision-makers, executives, influencers from the region, EU and beyond, resulting in affirmative RCC-related contents being posted on the network without RCC initiating it.

In this manner the Communications Team intends to continue broadening its gained audiences, influence and credibility in social media. The usage of existing social media channels will be constantly upgraded by continuously seeking different and more efficient ways to deliver our messages - using more social media 'live feed options' to report from major RCC events, creating interesting and informative content for our target audience, organising contests, opening galleries, etc.; and adding some new ones (LinkedIn) to cover as many audiences as possible.

Social media targets are set on annual basis, in which mode they would be measured. For each social media channel that RCC used thus far an increase of 30% is envisaged, with the exception of LinkedIn profile which is to be launched in 2017 and its measuring will begin in its second year.

Objectives:

- ▶ Increase stakeholders' understanding and engagement in RCC activities;
- ▶ Increase the number of followers on Twitter and boost interactions with the existing ones;
- ▶ Increase the number of page likes on Facebook, strengthen the existing network with relevant subjects and advance exchange of contents through sharing, tagging, etc.;
- ▶ Increase the RCC YouTube presence by producing and publishing more interesting video contents and increasing the number of subscribers.

8.4.5. Public information materials

The RCC has been producing a number of public information materials and visual identity items in the past 8 years, the practice of which will continue. In the next

three years the focus will be on production of more public information materials oriented towards explaining organisation's activities and results/products.

Objectives:

- ▶ Increase stakeholders' understanding of RCC results and future activities;
- ▶ Increase quantity of activity-oriented and achievement-based publications and visual identity items, as well as the quality of the produced materials.

8.4.6. Events

An important segment of the RCC's communication activities is related to organisation, co-organisation and support to various events throughout the entire region: meetings, workshops, presentations, conferences, forums, lectures, debates, exhibitions, press conferences, etc.

These events represent an excellent networking opportunity to communicate RCC mission, goals and messages to various target audiences, who are interconnecting during these types of activities. Therefore, this kind of events has to be utilised to its maximum, carefully applying different communication tactics and tools, depending on the type of the event.

For events of special importance for the RCC mission, especially those requiring media presence, such as RCC Annual Meeting, Balkan Barometer Presentation or similar, presence of communication staff is a necessity.

Events that are not at media exposure would be covered by RCC communication staff through an RCC staff member present at the venue, should the presence of RCC communication staff not be feasible.

Objective:

- ▶ Increase quantity and quality of PR coverage of RCC activities through organised/co-organised and supported events, focusing on processes and/or outcomes and not the events themselves.

8.4.7. Multimedia (video and photo)

Multimedia as a powerful, catchy, cost effective and engaging communication tool has evidently been an efficient one, as the experience has showed so far. It generated substantial traffic on all of RCC multimedia-carrying channels. Therefore, it requires an upgrade, as already planned by the website refreshing, and constant update, since it loses its effect if not regularly updated.

The multimedia gallery includes photo and video contents, both of which could be boosted in quality and quantity. This especially applies to video contents as more videos on specific topics and areas of activity would be highly beneficial mode of presenting RCC's activities. The Strategy plans for production of series of short video 'success stories clips' on affirmative projects from SEE 2020/SWP 17-19 scope of work, such as: roaming charges, diploma verifications, labour mobility, tourism, economic corridors, etc.

Objectives:

- ▶ Advance photo and video galleries with professional photo reference pool and set of video clips representing the regional cooperation success stories;
- ▶ Step up promotion of RCC's multimedia contents to attract as wide range of publics as possible.

8.4.8. Grants

The RCC Work Programme for Grants, launched in 2015, covers the period 2015-2016 and relates to the RCC's strategic documents such as its Strategy and Work Programme and the SEE 2020 Strategy. The initial grants cycle pointed out the communications and PR potentials of this practice. As this activity will continue in the future period, several RCC communication activities have been planned around it. They will be used to spread the word about the specific RCC activities, explain them in greater detail to wider audience, raise awareness and equally important, continue positioning the RCC as a major regional cooperation point on many fronts. Interlinking and promotion of RCC grantees and their activities through RCC's communication channels are just some of specific activities aimed at this promotion.

The plan also envisages utilising the grantees' audiences and channels to get the word further out. Through contractual provisions the grantees have already been advised on how to make the RCC's assistance visible in their promotion. On top of that, the Strategy plans to develop a brief and clear communications/visual manual for the grantees to use and reflect on.

Objectives:

- ▶ Gain additional understanding and awareness amongst RCC target audience on RCC activities;
- ▶ Gain additional media coverage and reports through RCC-grantees communication activities.

8.4.9. Support to regional cooperation projects

Regional cooperation projects relevant to or in accordance/in cooperation with RCC are another fruitful field for promotion and communication of RCC activities and its core essence. These could be a valuable tool for both promoting activities on the front of regional cooperation and awareness raising, and spreading the information on RCC nature, mission and achievements to wider public.

Subject to the character of a relevant project, different sets of promotion and communication tools could be devised, starting from financial and logistical support in event-organising and media engaging to production of visibility materials such are brochures, press kits, videos, etc.

This type of cooperation could be established in the fields of education, tourism, youth-culture-sports, organisation of cultural events such as theatre performance from SEE in one of the region's capitals, etc.

Objectives:

- ▶ Partnering with initiatives in regional cooperation in promotion of their cross-border projects;
- ▶ Supporting regional cooperation projects complementing the RCC's scope of work in the field of culture, tourism, and education.

Annex XI: Action plan - strategies/tactics/tools matrix



RESOURCES

9.

RESOURCES

It is proposed that the communication and media development budget share be set to cca 5% of the annual RCC Secretariat's budget. Programme units of the Secretariat should also ensure that additional programme planning includes/ allocates portions of resources for communication activities per activity/ event. Any extra-budgetary project also needs to include resources allocated for communicating its activities and messages.

Additional funds might be needed for implementation of any media development activities of the RCC Secretariat.

In terms of human resources the current RCC Communications Team consist of Public Affairs Assistant, a full-time employee, and external associates: Social Media Manager and Communications Associate.

For the purpose of efficient implementation of the envisaged actions, the Strategy heavily relies on the support of all RCC staff, given the limited human and financial resources.

MEASURE OF RESULTS

10.

MEASURE OF RESULTS

Measuring process will be relying on the obtained statistics from the past period of the RCC's communication efforts. The new results will be compared to the old ones summarised at the end of each year, in the categories as devised in the table.

Non-measurable, qualitative results include subjective assessment of the communication strategy achievements. These are not to be confused with qualitative indicators of the overall RCC performance as they pertain solely to execution of this Strategy.

Many of these qualitative indicators can be translated into numbers and easily measured. For example, a subjective feel that RCC is presented in an affirmative/negative way can be tracked down through media monitoring tools; count of positive comments, etc. However, due to lack of adequate mechanisms to differentiate such criteria in the past, these cannot be compared to the past period. Therefore, the non-measurable results will be introduced with this Strategy and only from 2017 onwards this dimension of results' measuring will be available.

Indicators:

- Reported regional commitment to RCC activities;
- Affirmative take on RCC's role and influence;
- Interest of regional cooperation initiatives/partners in joint communication activities;
- Attitude/interest of media towards RCC and its activities.

10.1. CURRENT RESULTS

The *Current results* section features the results in execution of the old communication strategies, with key tactics and tools. The success of communication tactics employed by the RCC Secretariat so far can be measured by several concrete outputs, as listed in the table below.

Notwithstanding this generally positive assessment, communication would benefit from a wider support and stronger perception of it as a strategic activity. The communication is mostly deemed as a technical affair rather than a strategic activity at the RCC. In order to reach wider audiences as well as spread the public word on RCC further, the communication would be better placed in a core strategic planning of activities, rather than a post-festum technical affair.

Output	Description/note	Result
Daily News Overview	The RCC Daily News Overview is being produced since 2008 on the basis of the most interesting topics related to the region in the regional and international media. It covers all RCC activities featured in the media, but also topics relevant for SEE and RCC.	The most important RCC stakeholders have been kept informed about organisation's activities and the latest developments in the region since 2008.
Media reports (press clipping)	Keeping track of reports on RCC activities in online, print and electronic media.	Since 2008 we tracked almost 10,000 articles, news, interviews and reports by the media on RCC and its activities.

Output	Description/note	Result
Media advisories, press releases and news items	Production and distribution of media advisories, press releases and news items are PR tools that are being used regularly to promote and/or announce RCC activities.	Since 2008 more than 500 news, press releases, media advisories and personal angles have been written, published and distributed through SEE media channels.
Publishing of documents and publications	This includes only publications and documents published on RCC website.	Almost 400 documents and publications have been published at the RCC website so far.
Website	The RCC website is one of the key tools in promoting RCC work to its stakeholders. Since its launch in May 2008, it "survived" two facelifts.	Page views: 1,087,207 Visitors: 229,653
Multimedia gallery (photo, audio and video files)	RCC website contains a multimedia gallery, but much more of this content is being published through RCC social media channels.	Almost 800 photo, audio and video files published in RCC website's multimedia gallery.
Newsletter	Electronic Newsletter - with several hundred prominent contributors from across the RCC area featured in the publication; disseminated to close to 3,000 subscribers, from April 2010 to January 2014.	30 issues published; publication stopped in 2014.

Output	Description/note	Result
Twitter	Social media channel active as of 2011.	1400 followers
Facebook	Social media channel active as of 2014.	10000 page likes
YouTube	Social media channel active as of 2014.	6176 views 27 subscribers including N1 TV, Al Jazeera Balkans, and other leading media in the region.

The outputs in the table present only one segment of the RCC's strategic communication efforts that are set to enhance understanding of the organisation's activities and boost its visibility.

The other segment or rather type of outputs refer directly to the organisations political and programmatic activities and are closely linked to them. Namely, communication efforts were simultaneously deployed to present and follow up activities and events organised and/or supported by the RCC Secretary General, Political and Programme Department. This involved creation of events' design and visual identity, dissemination of promotional and informative materials, on top of the regular activities that include coordination of (co)organisation of events and ensuring adequate visual representation of the RCC, etc., which are followed by activities presented in the table (ensuring media coverage, news writing and dissemination, follow up).

10.2. SPECIFIC MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES

The following table sets the objectives for 2017 and long-term ones for measurable results.

Target	Description/note	2015 result for reference	2017 target	Long-term target (subject to changes on the basis of 2017 results achieved)
Total number of website visitors	Visitors that have had at least one session within the selected date range. Includes both new and returning visitors.	42,604	47,000	10% increase for each following year
Website page views	Page Views is the total number of pages viewed at the website, including repeated views of a single page.	142,312	145,000	10% increase for each following year
35-54 age category of website users	This represents the portion of the total visitors that fall in this specific age group.	28%	32%	3% increase for each following year
Average website session duration	Average session duration is the time user spends at the website.	00:01:55	00:02:00	5 seconds increase for each following year

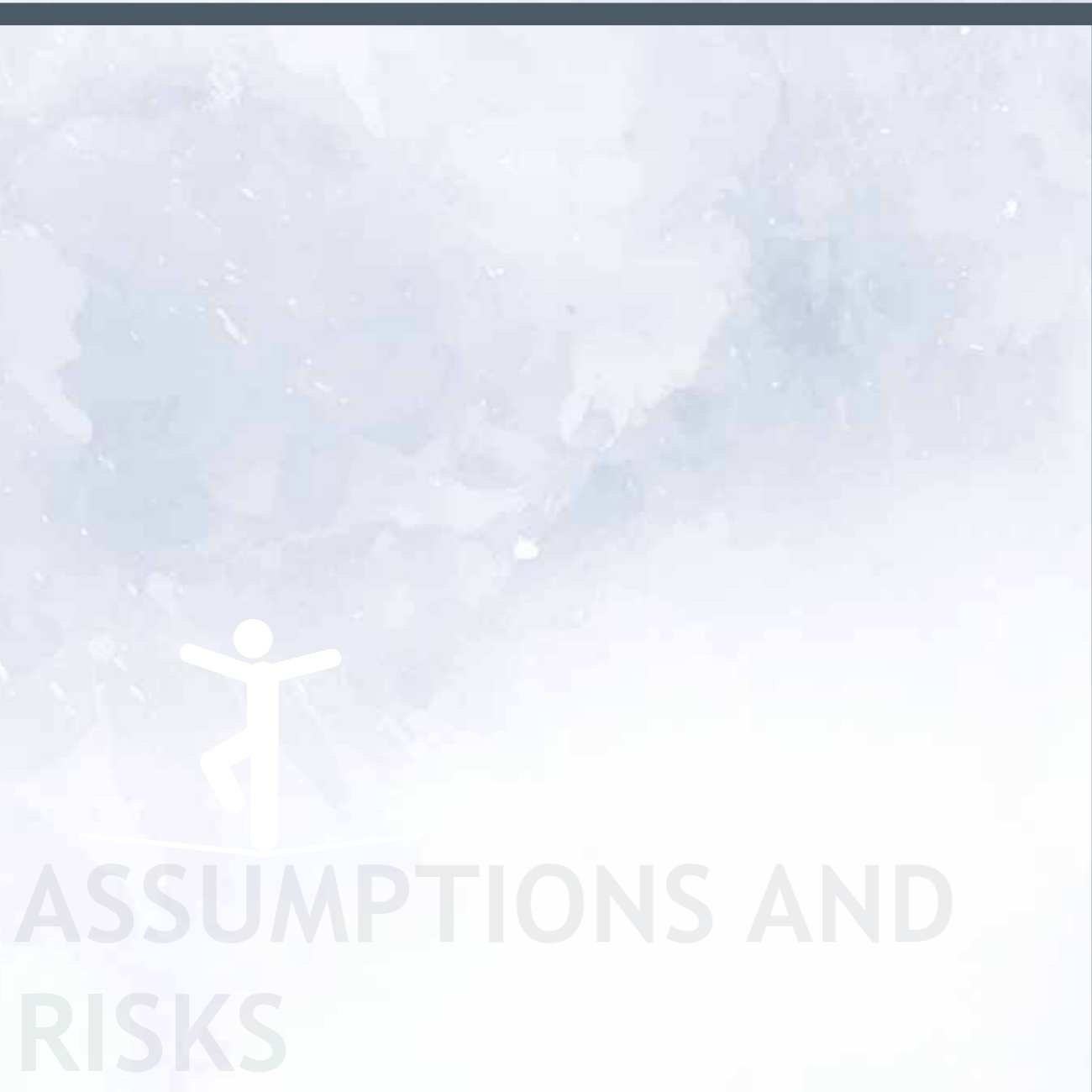
Target	Description/note	2015 result for reference	2017 target	Long-term target (subject to changes on the basis of 2017 results achieved)
Website bounce rate	Bounce Rate is the percentage of single-page visits (i.e. visits in which the person left the website from the entrance page without interacting with the page).	61.29%	58%	3% increase for each following year
Media reports	Increase the overall number of media reports on RCC activities.	1,200	1,500	15% increase for each following year
Media reports on RCC programming activities	Increase the number of articles on RCC programming activities.	42%	50%	3% increase for each following year
Twitter	Number of followers	1,400 ⁴	1,850	30% increase for each following year

⁴ This data refers to the total number of page followers, for the entire period since the launch of RCC Twitter profile.

Target	Description/note	2015 result for reference	2017 target	Long-term target (subject to changes on the basis of 2017 results achieved)
Facebook	Number of page likes	10,000 ⁵	13,000	30% increase for each following year
YouTube	Number of views	6,176 ⁶	8,000	30% increase for each following year
Media advisories, press releases and news items	Number of PA materials produced	68	80	3% increase for each following year

⁵ This data refers to the total number of page Likes, for the entire period since the launch of RCC Facebook profile.

⁶ This data refers to the total number of page viewers, for the entire period since the launch of RCC YouTube channel.



11.

ASSUMPTIONS AND RISKS

This Communication Strategy is based on the following assumptions:

- Communication is part of the strategic and policy planning;
- RCC's shift from activity to theme-based, strategic approach is enhanced; with the communication content and tools reflecting the shift;
- Internal communication is strengthened, promoting staff cohesion;
- Sufficient resources outlined in this Strategy are ensured;
- All staff members are provided with communication skills upgrade on a regular basis;
- Communication staffing capacities are sufficient, with permanent education and skills upgrade.

The risks include:

- Lack of funding;
- Insufficient substantial and logistical support for the envisaged activities;
- Changes on the market affecting the overall costs for the outsourced services;
- Political lack of interest in regional cooperation issues;
- Media freedoms hindered;
- Loss of human resources for implementation of the planned activities.

The efficiency of the Strategy is directly related to the fulfilment of the mentioned assumptions. A failure to fulfil (any/some of) them carries a risk of impeding adequate implementation of this Communication Strategy.

CONCLUSION



12.

CONCLUSION

Communication should be an integral part of all the work - starting from within the house, moving outdoors. The good communication starts within the team, therefore the new Communication Strategy places emphasis on the internal communication, targeting the RCC staff as its key audience but also spokespersons and communicators.

All RCC staff, having the role of insider-communicators, should be trained to present their work and work of their organisation starting from their closest circles, spreading wider. The internal communication within the organisation should also focus on timely and transparent exchange of information, so all elements of the equation would be fulfilled and fine-tuned in order to achieve adequate planning that leads to satisfactory result.

Audience targeting is an issue that should also become a high priority on the communication agenda. Whenever and wherever something relevant for the RCC is happening there are many cases that would require approach to both internal and external audiences. Therefore careful consideration should be given to recipients of the message(s) based on which the content would be tailored, subject to activity, sensitivity, relevance, transparency and level of technical detail. The communication staff's task is to identify the ways and means to best place the desired messages to the targeted audiences. This assumes regular update of the communication staff on RCC's activities including the time-plans and the envisaged outcome. This approach would result in a coordinated exercise in which the communication staff together

with other RCC staff, as a single team, would create content, enable tools and implement the communication.

In a wider context, all communication activities have to respect and reflect the RCC's political position, led by the RCC Secretary General and the Political Department. Therefore the overall external communication outputs have to be based on coordination within the RCC to allow for an easy access and exchange of information as well as a clear guidance on the official position regarding the key issues and developments relevant to the work of the organisation.

Also, open, welcoming and friendly attitude and approach to the media, partners and other stakeholders is crucial. The RCC approach has always cherished good relations with media, government officials, civil society organisations, regional initiative representatives, academia, and all other partners and stakeholders, respecting their roles, position, credibility and dignity. This Strategy will operate on the same principles. The RCC Secretariat's policy needs to continue to be one of openness, accessibility and promptness, to maintain the good reputation and position gained in the societies of the region thus far.

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