



# Comparative Analysis of The Effectiveness in Communication Management of EU Programmes in Bulgaria in the Previous and Current Programming Period

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**Abstract:** Each Member-State of the European Union has clearly developed national system for management European Funds. This system is built according to the EU Regulations and reflects national characteristics and specifics. Communication management, as part of the whole process of EU funds management, is again under subordination of the national management system, but has its own main goals and different techniques to achieve.

Republic of Bulgaria is now on his second programming period. Logically, the communication policy and connected strategic documents and implementation tactics have to be changed, according to the identified needs of different target groups on one side, and to the results that have to be achieved during the period, on the other. This paper presents comparative analysis of the effectiveness in communication management of EU programmes in Bulgaria in the first programming period (2007-2013) and current period (2014-2020).

**Index terms:** Communication Management, Communication Policy, EU Programmes, EU Regulation, Programming period, Member-State

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Effective management of EU programmes and funds on national level is a main responsibility for each member-state. To build an effective management system, national authorities have to developed national legislation that corresponded to the European Regulation for this programming period. For Republic of Bulgaria current period 2014-2020 is the second programming period as a member-state of the European Union. Our country already has experience in management EU funds and programmes, e.g. in their communication and publicity aspects. The new organization of system should be based on the deep analysis on the previous programming period, main conclusions and lessons learnt.

Communication management of EU programmes and funds in Bulgaria is just one of the important parameters of the national management system of EU programmes and funds that need to be subjected to analysis in order to propose an effective techniques and measures.

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## II. NATIONAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OF EU PROGRAMMES AND FUNDS

Management EU programmes and funds has become a fundamental policy on national level, one of the priority investment policy, especially for developed economy (such as Bulgarian is). In the previous programming period, European Commission has adopted 7 Bulgarian programmes, funded by Structural and Cohesion funds and 2 programmes, funded by European Agriculture fund for Rural Development and European Maritime and Fisheries fund. In this paper due to the limits of European legislation (there are different Regulations for Structural and Cohesion funds and the other two funds, which programmes are managed by national authorities) and as a results of this - the specifics of implementation, monitoring and reporting, we will focus only on the programmes funded by Structural and Cohesion funds.

Each programme has developed Communication Plan for 7 years implementation (with appropriate budget), that according to the EU Regulation 1828/2006 (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02006R1828-20111201>) should be presented to and adopted by the European Commission in concrete period after the final approval of the programme. National Strategic Reference Framework (<http://archive.eufunds.bg/en/page/66>) of the Republic of Bulgaria as a basic document for 2007-2013 programming period has Communication Strategy that cover measures for all operational programmes and separate budget for additional activities to support Managing Authorities.

In summary - in the period 2007-2013 only for communication of EU programmes Bulgaria has on national level 8 strategic documents, 8 budgets for communication and publicity measures, 8 different authorities responsible for their implementation. Depth study of all documents reveals many weaknesses and only part of them we could refer and explain with the lack of enough experience during the preparation of documents with similar character.

We can underline several important strengths from all communication plans for the programming period 2007-2013:

1. Similar planning activities such as:

- Obligatory measures for information and publicity, according to Regulation 1828/2006 - organizing different informational campaign for potential beneficiaries; minimum one major event a year presenting the progress of implementation of the programme; campaign for general public, measures for visual identity etc.

- Extra measures for information and publicity, planning by all managing authorities: development and maintaining of an internet site of the programme; measures for media monitoring, sociology surveys, trainings for beneficiaries etc.

2. Clear identification of all target groups of the programmes. Regardless the specifics of each programme, we can focus on the several important targets for the needs of Communication plan: potential beneficiaries, present beneficiaries, media representatives, general public, relevant NGOs in the same economy sector as the programme is.

3. Administrative capacity, responsible for implementation of the Communication plan – each Managing Authority has a publicity expert (or experts). As a general practice in Bulgaria we can resume that each Managing Authority has minimum one responsible person and his deputy expert.

4. Specific budget from the Priority axis Technical Assistance, planned for the implementation of Communication Plan.

5. Measures for monitoring the results of the implementation of Communication plan.

On the other hand, we can point out some of the major weaknesses of the Communication plans 2007-2013:

1. Illogical budgeting – it is normal programmes with more beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries to have more budget for publicity. But the practice shows that infrastructural programmes which have limited number of beneficiaries have biggest budget (for instance the planning budget of OP “Transport” 2007-2013 is 12 million euro and this programme has only 5 beneficiaries; the planning budget for communication of OP “Environment” 2007-2013 is approximately 11,200 million euro with 225 beneficiaries. On the other hand, the two programmes with various type of beneficiaries – for business and NGOs, have lower planning financial resources - the starting budget for communication and publicity of OP “Human resource development” is 8 million euro for 3906 beneficiaries, and OP “Development competitiveness of the Bulgarian economy” – approximately 5,8 million euro with 2552 beneficiaries).

2. Overlapping of activities resulting on ineffectiveness of the financial and administrative resources.

3. Varieties of strategic and implementation documents on the communication and publicity measures that reflect to the confusing of potential and present beneficiaries due to the different Managing Authority requirements for implementation information and publicity measures that beneficiary is obliged to execute.

4. Lack of coordination between all documents - according to the National Communication strategy of the National Strategic Reference Framework, National

Coordination Unit will develop network of 27 District Information Points to support on local level Managing Authorities. But in many Communication Plans of Managing Authorities there are no planning activities with this network.

5. Low level of involvement different strategic partners – such as Europe Direct Information Centers, academic and scientific society etc.

Despite above mentioned weaknesses in the field of communication and publicity Republic of Bulgaria as a new member state of the European Union has engaged not only with the implementation of the Regulation requirements, but with extra activities on transparency. One of the major achievements on this point is the public profile of the Unified Management Information System for the EU Structural Instruments in Bulgaria.

For the effectiveness of the Management Structure of Communication and Publicity 2007-2013, presented at figure 1, we can understand from the relations and degree of interaction between different management levels. In the Central Coordination Unit, in Central Information Office there is one person, called “national communication officer”, directly responsible to the European Commission in the field of communication and publicity. The role of this person is to be “one stop shop” between European Commission and Bulgaria as a member-state for information and publicity. This person has to be up-dating with information on every day base and involved in all information and communication activities to fulfill requirements of the Commission. On the other hand, Bulgarian National communication officer is in the Central Information Office, that focus on the Managing Authorities of the programmes and has no comprehensive view especially when the activities of 27 District Information Points are concerned.

Another important thing regarding the Management System of communication is that the units managed by Central Information Office and Central Information and Coordination office have no direct relation and their communication has to be mediated. Thus creates an impression that the two central offices within the Council of Ministers Administration actually work in parallel rather than together. On the implementation point of view this model should create more problems and burdens than it facilitate the everyday work, having in mind that communication is one of the fast increased activities.

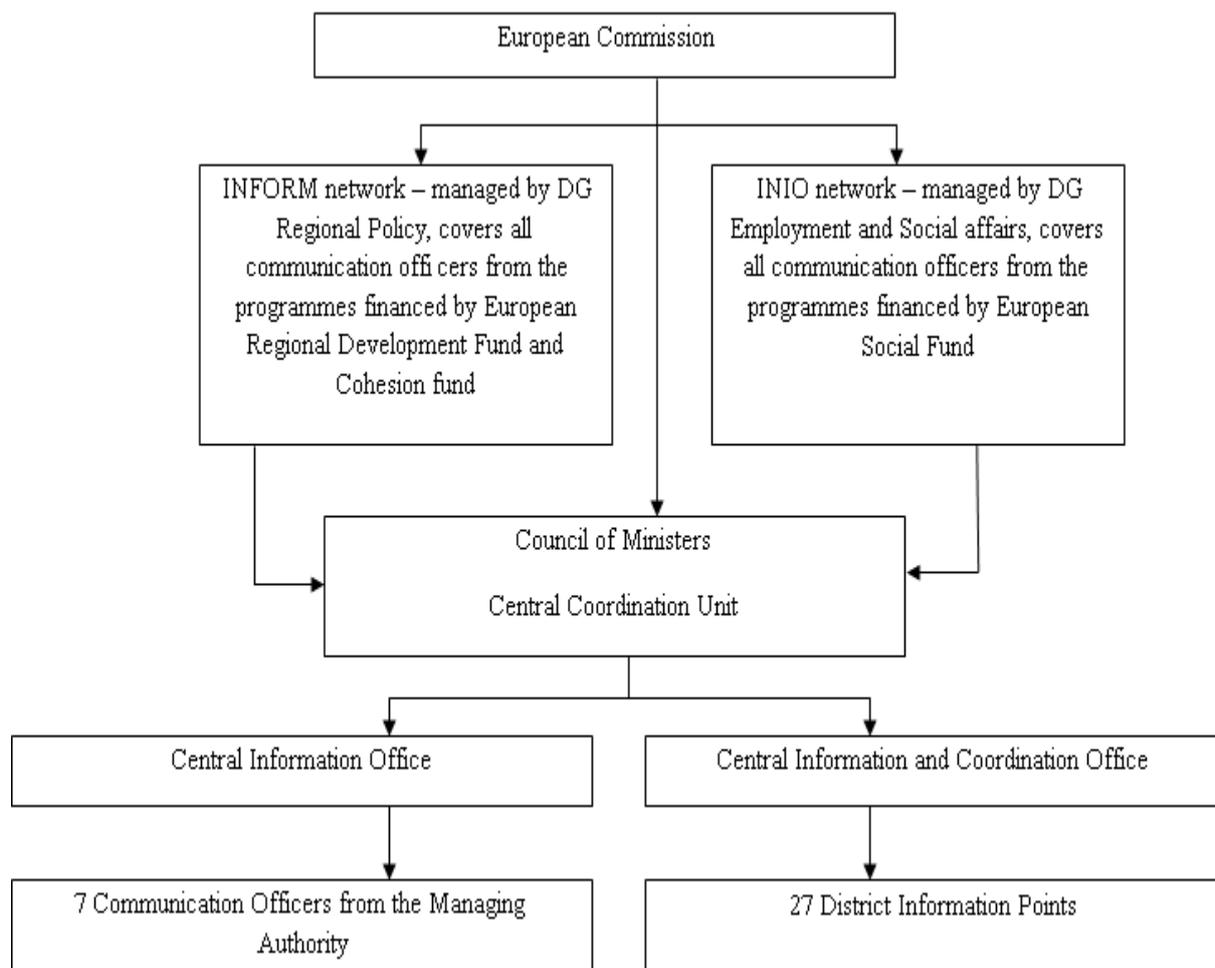


Fig.1. Management Structure of Communication and Publicity 2007-2013

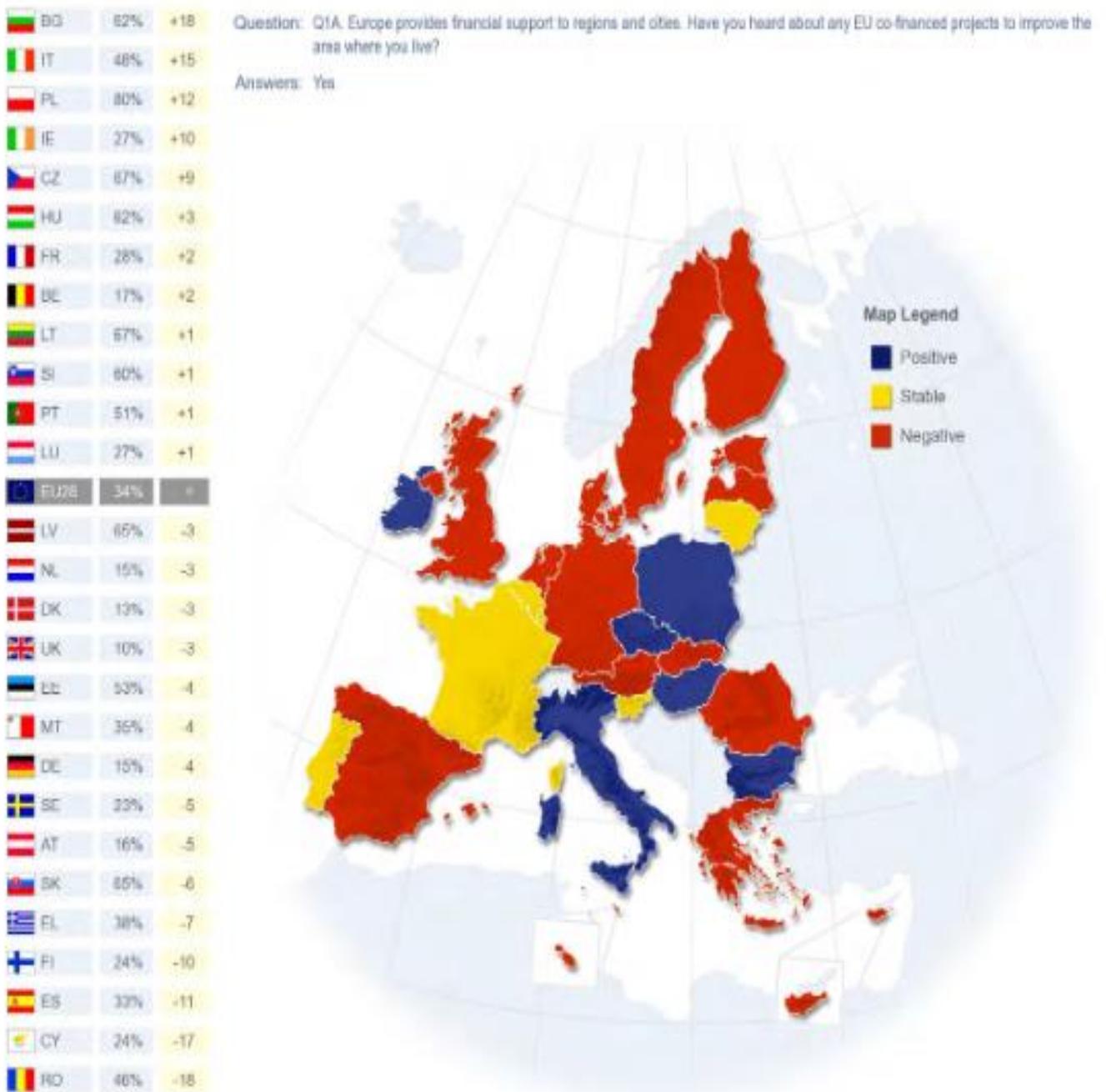
Despite abovementioned, results from Eurobarometer survey (conducted in 2013) about the effects on the implementation of communication and publicity measures show that Bulgaria is on the first position in achieved progress in awareness of EU programmes and funds among all EU-28 member states ([http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/flash/fl\\_384\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_384_en.pdf)).

Fact sheet for Bulgaria of this survey clearly shows that the most preferable communication channel for information about EU policy, programmes and funds for Bulgarians is television, followed by newspapers.

Having this in mind it is not surprise that the biggest part of the financial implementation (Table I) of Communication Plans during the period 2007-2013 is concentrated through payments for contracts with different

electronic media (radio and TV channels).

Financial implementation of the communication plans of programmes for the period 2007-2013 shows that a significant part of the funds (nearly 50%) of each programme is spent on contracts with electronic media as an exception from the scope of the Bulgarian Public Procurement Law (<http://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135482815> art. 4 p. 2). The only exception to this conclusion is implementation of Communication plan of Operational Programme “Technical Assistance”, where main resource (83%) from the Communication Plan was spent for building, establishment and support functioning of a network of 28 information centers for the promotion of EU Cohesion Policy in Bulgaria.



Evolution 2013 - 2010

Fig. 2. Citizens` awareness and perceptions of EU Regional policy, Eurobarometer report 2013  
(Source: Eurobarometer Survey,2013 p.14)



TABLE I

FINANCIAL IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNICATION PLANS OF OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES FOR THE PERIOD 2007-2013, IN EURO

(Data are collected by the author on the base of official information, published in the [www.eufunds.bg](http://www.eufunds.bg) )

Operational programme	Payments only for electronic media	Payments for other information and communication activities	Total payments Financial implementation of Communication Plan	Percent Correlation
OP Development of the competitiveness of the Bulgarian Economy 2007-2013	2 974 256,65	2 836 446,81	5 810 703,46	<b>51,18%/48,81%</b>
OP Human Resource Development 2007-2013	4953746,93	4 638 626,07	9592373	<b>50%/50%</b>
OP Administrative capacity 2007-2013	718 544,41	999 079,59	1717624	<b>41,2%/58,8%</b>
OP Technical Assistance 2007-2013	1099286	4 642 064,00	5 741 350,00	<b>16,7%/83,3%</b>
OP Environment 2007-2013	9308226,13	2 745 019,44	12053245,57	<b>75%/25%</b>
OP Transport 2007-2013	4 077 805	4 064 822,75	8 142 627,75	<b>50%/50%</b>
OP Regional Development 2007-2013	3472068,5	3 826 254,50	7298323	<b>42,9%/57,1%</b>

Key conclusions that can be made in terms of communication plan`s financial implementation of the of the programmes 2007-2013 are:

- This is for the Republic of Bulgaria the first programming period as a Member State of the European Union. This greater focus on the Communication Plans implementation through contracts with electronic media can be explained with the main goal for widely popularization of EU programmes in Bulgaria and new possibilities for investment in implementation Regional Policy of EU in the country that potential beneficiaries can use. A number of sociological studies, including the European Commission (Eurobarometer) show that

Bulgarians are informed mainly by electronic media (television is the most preferred communication channel). The result of this activity we can see on the significant progress (18+) that general public in Bulgaria presents in the level of awareness of EU Regional Policy and Programmes in Bulgaria. This result is also the best progress made among all 28 member states of EU.

- The broadly usage of television and radio as the most represented communication channels among the general public is a prerequisite and basis for further communication activities in order to achieve specific objectives including more detailed targeting and specific communication activities based on their concrete needs.

- On the base of data from the Eurobarometer survey we can conclude that the main goal of Communication Plan of the National Strategic Reference Framework is achieved – 62% from Bulgarians claim that they have heard about EU regional policy and any projects with financial support of EU. This result should be used for integrated communication campaign that gives people in depth information in order to achieve on the second level not only awareness, but knowledge, confidence and support. In case that Managing Authorities of Programmes decided to continue on the same way – with separate contracts with electronic media (without connection as information campaign for instance) that doesn't give target groups specific information they need. One of the most unpleasant consequences from this would be loss of interest from the potential beneficiaries and general public as well for the EU subject.

In brief summary of abovementioned, Managing Authorities during 2014-2020 programming period should be focused on the several key points in order to develop and expand their communication policy and goals:

1. More precise identifying the specific target groups of programme and sub-groups;
2. Annually planning of concrete communication activities for each target groups that combine in one specific information needs of target on one hand, and on the other – execution of Regulation requirements for Managing Authorities.
3. Focusing on priority on the integrated information campaign than on the individual contracts with different media. This will provide Managing Authorities with the opportunities to release periodically targeting messages to the right audience and effectiveness of all communication activities through different communication channels because they will be subordinated on one specific main communication goal.
4. Use of potential of social media. In the previous programming period only a few programmes have profile or site in social media. Operational Programme "Transport" has profile in YouTube, Operational Programme "Human Resource Development" and OP "Environment" have profiles in Facebook. Central Information Unit that supports Single Information Web Portal ([www.eufunds.bg](http://www.eufunds.bg)) has developed its profile in Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. But the main impression from the presence of all programmes (i.g. and the Single Information Portal) in the field of social media is that all authorities prefer just to "copy" information from the web site to the social media, without adapting information for the specific social media audience. Furthermore – none of the authorities doesn't develop on the passable level interaction activities through social

media. General conclusion for the social media is that the main force of this media – users generated content and on-line interactions are not explored and used in satisfactory level.

### III. SITUATION DURING 2014-2020

#### PROGRAMMING PERIOD

On strategic documents based level this programming period Bulgaria started much better. We have now one common strategic document (instead of 8) in the field of information and communication measures. National Communication Strategy 2014-2020 (<https://www.eufunds.bg/en/programming-period-2014-2020/operational-programmes-2014-2020/national-communication-strategy-2014-2020>) describes Bulgarian system for management communication policy of EU funds and programmes in country.

This document has a number of advantages some of them are attempt to overcome weaknesses in implementation Communication Plans in the previous programming period:

1. Clear identified goals and connection between achieved results and goals.
2. Attempt to targeting in depth and planning specific activities according to the specific target groups and their communication needs.
3. Planning common communication campaigns for all programmes, coordinated by Central Information and Coordination Office.
4. Common indicators for progress reporting and single media monitoring.
5. Clear developed responsibilities of all level involved in the process of information and communication – from Central Information Unit to Managing Authorities and District Information Points with relationships and communications.
6. Logical connection between activities and responsibilities on different levels of implementation – for instance the responsibility of the network of 27 District Information points is to develop and expand on regional level the information campaign provided by MA for concrete open call of proposals.
7. In this programming period through the National Communication Strategy are presented the templates of documents, developed by the National information office and obligatory for all MAs – such as template for Annual Action Plan on information and communication activities and template for Progress Report.

Some of the main differences in management of EU programmes and funds in Bulgaria communication policy are presented in the Table 1.



National Communication Strategy for 2014-2020 lays down the principles and basic methods for implementation communication policy on the national level. As this document is concerned we can see many advantages, but more important is the way that Central Coordination Unit and Managing Authorities will fulfill requirements in National Communication Strategy and as well in European Regulations.

However we still define weaknesses, some of them can be interpreted as a retreat from initial position (comparing with 2007-2013 programming period):

1. Lack of transparency on total budget for implementation communication policy for 2014-2020. In the previous programming period each MAs had concrete budget for information and communication under Priority Axis "Technical Assistance". In addition, on central level for common activities there were Priority Axis 3 "Promotion of the European Cohesion Policy in Bulgaria and ensuring the Provision of General and Statistical Information" in the Operational Programme "Technical Assistance". Now through National Communication Strategy is planned only 5 million euro from OP "Good Governance" for common activities. Each MA has to plan on annual base budget for information and communication measures in Annual Action Plan. On the operational level this requirement is relevant, but still we have no information about the strategic financial resources for EU communication policy in Bulgaria for this programming period.

2. Centralized activities (especially such as common sociological surveys, media monitoring etc.) require more flexibility in Central Coordination Unit level to launch tender procedures. The Bulgarian Law for tender procedure is one of the most modified law on national legislation and this results on the inadequate timing, or canceled tender procedures. This is the reason that we can identify these common activities as a risk in planned communication policy – not on terms of its definition and nature, but in terms of its implementation.

3. Insufficient attention on the communication through social media. Still social media are not focus on the communication activities despite their popularity and broad audience. "Communication" is a key word in regulation 1303/2013(<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R1303>) that replaces "publicity" from the previous programming regulation. This can be achieved in naturally with social media and especially in generating content by users. The feedback is important and can be further developed by planned action on central by Central Coordination Unit, on "OP level" – by each Managing Authority and on local level by District Information Points.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

On the field of communication management of EU programmes in Bulgaria we can conclude that on the strategic level there are many preconditions to approve

communication policy, based on the experience in the previous programming period. However from the way of implementation of these strategic documents depends the final progress not only of awareness, but also of knowing EU programmes among citizens. We have to realize that audience needs are changeable and if our goal is to develop confidence and transparency we have to think about development administration flexibility and sensitivity about public opinion. The main focus of the communication policy should now be presented to the specific activities with various target groups and in-depth specialized work with them, according to the identified communication needs. There must be provided and various communication activities, including innovative events for direct communication and social media.

#### RESOURCES TO TABLE II

1. Annex II – Unified Manual for the beneficiary <https://www.eufunds.bg/en/programming-period-2014-2020/operational-programmes-2014-2020/national-communication-strategy-2014-2020/item/13789-national-communication-strategy-2014-2020>
2. For instance one of the biggest differences between programmes progress reporting is on the manner that they report printed materials. The majority of MAs reports edition (for example 10 000 leaflets, 15 000 brochures; 2 000 posters etc.), but the MA of OP "Technical Assistance" counts printed materials as a type or title ( for example 1 leaflet, 3 brochures, 1 poster)

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TABLE 2  
COMPARATIVE TABLE FOR THE MAIN DIFFERENCES IN MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES IN  
BULGARIA IN THE TWO PROGRAMMING PERIODS (2007-2013 AND 2014-2020)

Difference	2007-2013	2014-2020
<b>In Strategic Documents</b>	One Communication Strategy and 7 Communication Plans = 8 strategic documents	One National Communication Strategy = 1 strategic document
<b>In Implementation level Document</b>	No precise requirement for documents on annual base	Annual Action Plan Annual Report
<b>In the Managing Structure of Communication on the Central Level</b>	Two parallel units – one for coordination national communication officers and other – for coordination network of 27 district information points	One unit with different experts in it for coordination two networks
<b>In visual requirements</b>	8 different logos – for each programme and one of the National Strategic Reference Framework	1 common logo and slogan
<b>In visual identity requirements</b>	8 different documents for visual identity and requirements for beneficiaries for each MAs and one for Central Coordination Unit	1 brand book on central level, obligatory for all MAs and beneficiaries <sup>1</sup>
<b>In Budget</b>	Clearly defined Budget of Each programme for Communication and Publicity Activities in strategic level document	Unidentified budget on Strategic Level – only 5 million euro from the OP “Good Governance”.
<b>In progress reporting</b>	No exact format of documents for progress reporting – each MAs has developed its own document and as a result – 8 different practices in progress reporting. That results on the impossibility of summarizing and generalizing data on national level, due to their different character <sup>2</sup> .	One format of reported document, developed by the Central Information Office, applied for all MAs.
<b>In planned activities</b>	Each MAs, as well as Central Coordination Unit has planned activities without clear connection between them. In implementation phase there were many situations where MAs has provided similar communication activities at the same time and the same place.	Clear identified responsibilities on each level of implementation National Communication Strategy. Leading role in coordination on the Central Information Unit.
<b>In media monitoring</b>	Several media monitoring in almost same subject – EU funding and projects, with focus on the concrete Operational Programme. Ineffective costs.	One centralized media monitoring that helps in different aspects: optimizing costs, provides MAs with comparable data, easily summarized on the central national level.
<b>In planning Sociological surveys</b>	Made by each MAs with no developed methodology for data comparability. Implementation of sociological surveys is through the National Tender Procedure Law and we observe lack of periodicity and delays.	Made by Central Information Office with information in the questionnaire for all OPs.