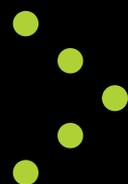


PR & 'Direct Elections'

in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In 2004 Bosnia and Herzegovina for the first time faced one of the highest forms of democratic participation of its citizens on its territory. What was it about? In fact, with a history of a great number of elections in the previous nine years, then, for the first time, we had an opportunity to chose our mayors and municipality leaders in the so-called direct elections.





So what does it have to do with Public Relations, you will ask yourself? Very much so, because we are faced with an entirely new form of building of a tower (hopefully not like the Tower of Babel) out of solid democratic material. However, as you will later see, it can sometimes be margaritas ante portas, especially in this region.

All this because PR strives to create a positive presentation, trust and prestige for an individual in the eyes of as greater group as possible, practically in public. For an individual, indeed, in this case.

To start with these new words and intentions:

- The word “direct” by itself also means responsibility (of citizens above all) but also of elected persons to feel affiliation to a particular interest group with a single objective - to do good on specific territory. Here and now, at least until this moment; we would elect someone so that he could put in charge another one. We would give our trust to parties so that they could name, according to their own interest, partisan or national criteria, mayors and municipality leaders.

- If we compare our elections with elections anywhere else, in, let us say, democratic world (by this I do not mean the current situation in the U.S. which more and more resembles the situation in the Balkans - suspicious elections of the last president), two major differences can be noticed at once:

1. The goal here is always - to grab the power and we will “figure out” later what to do. People have a short memory anyway. They will accept a rotten pear too in a nice packaging.

2. In this region we still do not have a well organized state with all its prerogatives (rule of law, tolerance of differences and art of knowledge). We have just started. After all, even this PR magazine, thanks to its publisher, creates prerequisites for understanding possible advantages of healthy communication inside a society.

However, let us come finally to the basic postulate of this pr text i.e. to the answer to what does Public Relations as a theory, art and a skill have to do with

all that has been mentioned above.

Namely, we have to find an answer to a question How to design one man band politician in such a way as to make electors understand the advantage of voting for him.

To do this we have to act on several fields simultaneously.

1. First and foremost, is HOW to explain our “movement members”, not to say political parties, that we have to address an individual instead of hiding behind the blur and pulling the wool over people’s eyes about OUR man, OUR nation, OUR...

2. The second is: HOW to deal with that most beautiful and at the same time most dangerous means of direct communication - MEDIA... with a purpose to be so kind as to make them be “on our side” without being aware of that, or, being aware of that, to still ‘tolerate’ us because of our good intentions.

3. The third, and probably the most important, is how to build a bridge over a troubled water between the elected one and those who elect him so that in no time do we commit a fraud within denotations to be elected.

4. The fourth are VOTERS themselves. HOW to determine them, to target the group within this magic word - STRATEGY of future development of the specified area of a municipality and/or a city so it would be us or someone close to us reelected in another 2, 4, or 6 years (here, thanks to International tutors one can never know how long a term would be). At the same time, to target groups of those who do not vote and engage at least 30 % of them to come to elections and vote. If 15 % of them votes for our candidate it is an exceptional success.

5. And last but not least, creation of an image of a municipality leader or mayor, a person who will be a part of our individually directed common cause, that is a mayor who will live and work locally and not as it was the case until today: live locally and be concerned with global subject matters of the state, not seeing the wood for the trees. And for something like that we need positive publicity, which is opposite to privacy and isolation. In other words, it requires openness of information and facts about the work of the candidate himself in order to the conclusions of public reasoning i.e. to shape a picture, a positive image of our candidate.

And, of course, this is where Public Relations become important.

The potential of Public Relations is great since it amasses a lot within the field of our intentions:

- a) Defining the target group (voters - taking care of both genders and all ages)

- b) Space analysis

- 1) What has been done so far...

- 2) What is being done...

- 3) What can our person do if he or she wins a term

- c) Having a PR person in a wider controlling circle within a campaign team also in the case of electing a candidate for a particular town or municipality (‘scanning’ of the person and determining pros and cons for him in the particular area). Above all

it is a team work and everything is subjected to one goal - election success.

- d) Precisely determined time schedule in electoral campaign for everything we plan: duration, when, where, how, with whom, who, why...

- e) Creation of a plan of our person’s communication with voters and visiting the area of the municipality and/or the city during the campaign - participation in building residents’ meetings (even occasional afternoon kafa, kava and/or kahva with a random group of voters/family - our potential voters), local communities (analyzing the most serious problems of these communities), factory visits (especially those most critical with higher chances of possible strikes), sports and cultural events (book and CD promotions, openings of art exhibitions), visits to schools and kindergartens, minority groups and elderly people.

- f) Regular organization of press conferences on exactly defined topics (make a particular topic a current issue and lobby in councils for it to be discussed even before the election of our candidate); Mandatory attendance of the future Mayor at press conferences and finding an adequate replacement in his absence (a well known member of our party, an actor, a sportsman, a singer, a beauty contest winner who would be there and speak about the advantages of electing ‘our’ man within the particular domain of interest - communal infrastructure, culture, sport, social thematic, health, etc).

- g) Planning of events on significant dates (of historical or contemporary importance) and allocation of funds for that, which for the electoral campaign depend on: the size of a municipality and/or a city, number of voters, our concrete goals and tasks. However, there can be no complete campaign under 100,000 km or 50,000 euros in BiH.. Of course, a campaign may cost less, however then we cannot hope for success and we will be left aside on a margin of election waiting for new elections with more money. The story about the campaign itself and its costs is a story for itself, but today we have no time for that. I leave it to you for thinking and working out because I am sure that each of you have their own vision. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country with almost three million politicians. Why? Because it is still a country where all forms of democracy are in their infancy, sui generis.

- h) Creation of a web page of the future mayor or municipality head, in which, among other things, voters can ask the candidate direct questions and we will deliver the questions to the media on a daily basis (at press conferences or by delivering press-kits specially made for these occasions).

- i) Our marketing department will certainly prepare materials ‘to give away’ (such as labels, stickers, badges, leaflets, newsletters, which, of course, prepared in co-operation with us, will be published every 15 days on four pages of A4 format) . It will also prepare posters, billboards, slogans, even music jingles and TV clips. Just now you might ask yourself how come there is marketing department and PR department? I recommend a truly excellent book written by Sam Black called “Pu-

blic Relations”, which you can find in any well-equipped bookstore in Belgrade and Zagreb (here, you can try in Buybook in Sarajevo but I am not sure that have it). Let us quote his definition of difference and simultaneous likeness of these two disciplines “Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations have a lot in common, but this must not serve as an excuse to enter each others territory. Public Relations care about the name and good reputation of a company, marketing protects a product and a brand... In other words, marketing is controlling process to determine, predict and satisfy consumer demands in a cost-effective way. Institute for Public Relations describes its activity as follows: planned and constant effort to establish and retain benevolence and understanding between an organization and its target public.”

j) Analysis of a person who will take part in elections for Municipality head or Mayor on our part:

1. His or her biography should not have “black stains”, maybe a bit gray but not too much
2. The person must be in their “best” age - from 35 to 45 years (we play on card of youth and experience)
3. Education of Mayor or Municipality Head - higher education at least.

k) Be fully engaged in presentation of positive sides of Mayor’s or Municipality Head’s biography in struggle for common good. We know...yes, we know that here in Bosnia and Herzegovina we have supremacy of personal interest over the interest of general public, but as long as we as PR persons do not perceive general interest as the prerequisite for individual success we cannot succeed.

l) For live TV and / or radio duels of our candidate and his opponents we must work on his image (clothes, attitude, movements, facial expressions, voice) so to take advantage of our opponent’s weaknesses. And not only during media appearances but also during all previously mentioned public presentations (press conferences, public appearances, visits)

m) Media - we have to be at their disposal 24 hours a day. There should be no sour face, who so far has thought that the media are here to serve him and not vice versa. We are the means of their goal - to inform public. I know, somebody will say how we in Bosnia and Herzegovina have dispersive public and how in fact we do not have public opinion but faceless “mass manipulator”, as Elias Canetti nicely puts it in his book “Mass and Power”, but we have to leave it aside since we are not dealing with global Bosnian and Herzegovian field but a local self government, limited area where everyone knows everyone and there can not be empty promises when direct elections for Mayor ad District Mayor respectively are in question.

Yet there is one more problem here: medias favor particular parties i.e. politicians (have you noticed that I have just now used the word “politician”) concerning the fact that the word “autonomous” concerning the media is in Bosnia and Herzegovina has different connotations. In that case we must very carefully approach to those medias that are unfriendly towards us from the beginning and never allow them to use our weakness



against us - this I would say, they could hardly wait. On the contrary, we must always be relaxed and never allow ourselves to be provoked. If, in fact, on a press conference our candidate is provoked enough to leave the conference, we may as well leave the campaign and go home. We have to teach both the media and our client that there is no question that we cannot give an answer to because the answer is already in the question. A smile on the face and a direct look at a journalist can be very strong card ... for future contacts.

However, the most important thing is possible competitors i.e. other parties’ representatives. In an electoral campaign everything is allowed. We also have to have crisis team that will deal with opponents and exit strategy in crisis situations when we find ourselves during the campaign on the edge of the abyss, where our own mistakes have brought us as well as opponents’ well thought moves and regularly, in cooperation with marketing department place half truths, what may be a bit rude, and truths in moments when it will hurt our opponents the most. And it will not be known where it came from. Now, this is something we need to take care of.

Why not?

Only carefully, my dears, because of course we must not forget the bumerang effect if we overdo it. It is enough to “poke” the opponent two or three times, but quickly and effectively to make sure that by the time they figure what we have done we can be a 100 meters in front of them in a 10.000 mile race.

Example: when opponents find something compromising from our candidate’s past: while he was a student he was arrested for drunken fight. What to do? Simply, strive for an explanation how in those times we all had similar problems - refer to own example and ask journalists if they were in similar situations. However, try to get out of it by counter acting with his good acts. From the time of the young up until today a lot of time has elapsed, and today he is a fighter against alcohol and all vices. Give examples...

And the final conclusion:

In all of this there are five most important truths:

- a) DO NOT LIE (this is Bosnia and Herzegovina, it’s going to be very hard won’t it?);
- b) DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE opponents;
- c) KNOW ONE SELF’S WEKNESESS and work on their removal;
- d) USE THE WEAKNESES OF AN OPPONENT;
- e) CREATE AN IMMAGE OF OUR OBJECTIVE IN THE EYES OF PUBLIC THAT STRIVES FOR THE COMMON GOOD, then individuals will do fine...

The press does not allow us the development of specific lines hereby written, but I think that we have created prerequisites that finally even us, here and now, can try to be a part of the ‘normal’ world. I have always asked myself what is normal around this region because “fragile is knowledge... OF THE BALKANS”.

by **Sabahudin Hadžialić**
PR Consultant
Writer and free-lance journalist