

THE HIGH COURT COUNCIL

**THE
COMMUNICATION
STRATEGY**

- Draft -

2013

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I. Introduction

The High Court Council (HCC) was founded in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and the Law on the High Court Council. The organization and functioning of the High Court Council are regulated in the Law on the High Court Council and the Council's Rules of Procedure. As an independent institution, the High Court Council provides and guarantees the independence and autonomy of the courts and judges.

The National Strategy of Judicial Reform lists the main principles of the judiciary: independence, accountability, transparency and efficiency. These principles also represent a part of the Strategic Plan of the High Court Council that has been created to contribute to the planned judicial reform. The activities and realization contained in the Strategic Plan represent a continuation of the judicial reform and serve to determine the direction of its development. The Strategic Plan for the period 2011-2013 was adopted in March 2011. Duration of this Communication Strategy is tied to the duration of the Strategic Plan.

A transparent and accessible judiciary is one of the main strategic objectives and priorities of the High Court Council. A transparent judiciary is a judiciary with work which is accessible to all of the citizens under equal conditions, and which allows access to all the information that is important to the citizens.

The Communication Strategy of the High Court Council is a document that identifies the goals, types and manners of communication, as well as activities performed within the High Court Council itself, between the Council and the courts, and with the public or target groups, including provision of timely information about the work of the High Court Council and the courts in the Republic of Serbia, aimed to better acquaint the professional and general public with the work of the Council and the courts, rendering it therefore more accessible and transparent.

The objective of the Communication Strategy of the High Court Council is to create the framework for continued work on and constant improvement of internal, external and especially crisis communication. Also, a goal of this Strategy is the constant improvement of transparency and quality outreach of the High Court Council and the courts in order to increase the public confidence in the judiciary, and to significantly strengthen the role of the High Court Council as provider and guarantor of independence and autonomy of courts and judges. Both objectives represent strategic priorities of the High Court Council.

The Communication Strategy includes definitions of all types and manners of communication, clearly defined goals and specific target groups, as well as activities to be performed depending on defined target groups.

The High Court Council drafted the Communication Strategy for the period 2013 – 2015.

2. Objectives

The HCC performs legally defined duties that guarantee and protect the justice and independence of the courts. Objectives of the Communication Strategy are:

- **Transparency and accessibility of work of the High Court Council and the court system;**
- **Increased confidence of the citizens in the court system**

To realize these goals, the Strategy defines: target groups, the protocol for the implementation of the Communication Strategy, types of communication and activities intended for specific target groups and their timeframes. The time frame for conducting activities is set with the adoption of the Annual Calendar of Activities.

3. Target groups

The Communication Strategy identifies the target groups:

- The High Court Council
- The courts
- The public (the general public, the professional public, , the media)

4. The Protocol

The HCC will adopt a Protocol which will closely regulate the implementation of the Communication Strategy and how it is applied (Annex A).

4.1. Authorization for implementing the Strategy

The Communication Strategy is implemented by offices of the Cabinet of the President:

- The Public Relations Organizational Unit;
- The person in charge of Public Relations;
- And upon approval and/or at the request of the President or Deputy President of the High Court Council, other Administrative Office staff.

In order to realize the objectives of this Strategy, it is necessary to establish as soon as possible a Public Relations Unit of the High Court Council, and train its employees. The Public Relations Unit is a primary operative carrier of this Strategy and conducts coordinated activities in segments that necessitate joint action.

The Public Relations Unit consists of:

- Employee in charge of public relations;
- Employees in charge of internal and external communication

Analysis of the public confidence in the work of the High Court Council and/or the courts is conducted annually by the Public Relations Unit aimed at assessing the effects of the Communications Strategy. Analysis will establish if there is a need to form temporary working bodies which would give guidelines aimed at improving the communications strategy.

5. Types of communication

This Strategy distinguishes three types of communication:

- 5.1. Internal communication of the High Court Council;
- 5.2. External communication of the High Court Council;
- 5.3. Crisis communication of the High Court Council.

The creation of an adequate system of internal communication represents a necessary precondition for successful external information, while a successful and synchronized internal and external communication are necessary for good and timely crisis communication. Basic preconditions are clear definition of types of internal/external data and information, their carriers, mechanisms and methods of their exchange.

5.1. Internal Communication of the High Court Council

Internal communication is communication that occurs between the management, members and employees of the High Court Council. It secures the distribution of internal information, through special channels of communication and provides specific types of information.

Internal communication should represent an integral part of all the activities of the High Court Council and all its internal organizational units, the Public Relations Department in particular. All the activities made in relation to internal information should be planned, supervised and evaluated in terms of realization of the goal of internal information.

Information transmitted by internal communication may be different: general information about the work of the High Court Council; information about the members of the High Court Council and their activities; information about the work of the court; information between the employees.

To achieve optimal results and to provide information in a timely manner, all the **channels of internal communication are used:**

- Oral
- Print
- Electronic

The Means and Methods/Instruments used for the Distribution of Internal Information:

1. E-mail;
2. Various types of materials;
3. Informative brochures and bulletins;
4. Registers of names and last names of the High Court Council's members and staff, and their official telephone numbers and e-mail addresses;
5. Information about the meetings, their frequency, scheduled days and planned duration;
6. The Information Bulletin (electronic and printed versions);
7. The internal bulletin board (including the electronic bulletin board);
8. Intranet

5.2. The external communication of the High Court Council

External communication occurs between the High Court Council and the courts, between the HCC and the public in the widest sense of the word (state bodies, universities, professional associations, entrepreneurs, the media, and the citizens), by means and in ways that allow distribution of information about the work and activities of the High Court Council, through different channels of communication and information.

This type of information satisfies the needs of the courts, the professional and general public, the media, and other state authorities for fast, truthful and timely information about the High Court Council and its work, at the national as well as international levels. Active promotion of the work of the Council and the courts contributes to the improved knowledge about the High Court Council.

Information provided about the High Court Council must be easily accessible, given in a timely manner and accurate, while using all available types of information channels: oral, printed and electronic.

Activities undertaken by the High Court Council in external communication with the above mentioned target groups will be discussed in detail in **Chapter 6** of the Communication Strategy.

5.3. Communication of the High Court Council in Crisis Situations

Crisis situation is a specific, unexpected and unusual event that requires swift reaction even though it creates a high level of uncertainty and threat. A crisis situation or incident may occur at any moment and may significantly jeopardize the High Court Council reputation and endanger the Council's work. Crisis situations may lower the level trust in the HCC and the judiciary, creating suspicion about the existence of abuse or corruption.

Most common indicators of crisis are: disorganization; inefficiency; passivity; overlapping of authorities and responsibilities; lack of clear objectives; obsolete methods of work; lack of transparency and objectivity.

To solve a crisis situation successfully, a planned approach is needed in two equally important segments:

- A crisis should be solved by use of the plan for potential, latent or acute crises;
- In a crisis situation, the communication should be open, honest, specific, and proactive, and may thus have preventive effect on the occurrence of a crisis, or reduce its negative impact.

The rules related to the crisis communication and key messages are:

- A crisis cannot be hidden;
- Begin work to solve the crisis before it becomes public knowledge;
- Do not treat the media as enemies;
- Do not use language that the public cannot understand;
- Do not provide incorrect, contradictory, confusing or incomplete information;
- Prior to making any statements, determine what the public should be informed about;
- Assess the recipient of the message;
- Assess the opinion of the public in relation to the event at hand and adjust the statement accordingly;
- In a time of crisis, never use the term „no comment“ which implies lack of honesty and produces a feeling that something is being hidden.

When reacting to a crisis situation, the President and/or Secretary of the High Court Council. Once the crisis had passed, an analysis of the efficiency of the crisis communication plan should be performed.

6. Activities to be taken to accomplish the goals of the Strategy

Activities related to the transparency and accessibility of the work of the High Court Council and the increased public confidence in the court system is strategically divided into several groups:

- Activities performed within the High Court Council;
- Activities performed in relation to the courts;
- Activities performed in relation to the general public;
- Activities performed in relation to the professional public;
- Media activities.

6.1. Activities Performed Within the High Court Council

- Informing the public about the realized work results and activities pertaining to the work of the both the Council and the courts - **constant transparency**;
- Informing the public about the activities of the High Court Council planned for the following period (every three months and every six months) – **planned transparency**;
- Holding of two HCC sessions open for public twice per year;
- Publishing of the schedules of regular and, possibly, extraordinary sessions of the High Court Council (annual calendar of sessions published in January, individual session agendas published before each session);
- Publishing information on the Council's website about the HCC session:
 - Agenda of the session (after it is scheduled)
 - Minutes taken at the session (after it is adopted)
 - Decisions (after they are drafted if they are not part of the minutes)
- The activities and the schedule of activities of the High Court Council are published on the website of the Council and are regularly updated;
- Professional training of the Staff in the Public Relations Department will be organized in the areas of communications and public relations

6.2. Activities of the High Court Council in Communication with the Courts:

In order to increase transparency, public accessibility and trust in the judiciary, the High Court Council holds regular meetings with representatives of courts of different jurisdictions and gives guidelines, instructions and recommendations to the courts related to and informing the public about it; The High Court Council provides guidelines, instructions, and recommendations to the courts,.

- Establishing a minimum of mandatory content of the courts' websites and recommendations for their improvement;
- Introduction of info-desks and signage in all courts to help the citizens
- Adopting of protocols on cooperation with law faculties, high schools and other institutions which would bring the work of the courts closer to the public
- Initiating and organizing trainings and another forms of professional improvement in the courts for employees who work in the public relations area;

- Initiate organizing of mock trials by the courts

The HCC regularly informs the public about the above activities.

6.3. Activities of the High Court Council in its Work with the General Public:

In addition to various general public outreach activity areas described in this Strategy, the Council is informing the public about its work through:

- Open door days
- Internships;

6.4. Activities of the High Court Council with the Professional Public:

Activities of the High Court Council in working with the professional public imply cooperation with judicial bodies and with the representatives of professions that are by their nature related to the work of the Council and the courts (Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Protection of Personal Information, the Ombudsman, Commissioner for Gender Equality, Bar Associations, law faculties, international organizations, professional associations, representatives of the judicial trade unions).

These activities, among others, include:

- Strengthening institutional cooperation
- Organizing professional/expert national and international events
- Starting joint projects

6.5. Media Activities of the High Court Council:

- Holding of news conferences with the President of the High Court Council to present the results achieved during the previous period and announce future activities (twice per year);
- Inform the media about the time of schedule HCC sessions
- Timely replies to the requests of the media;
- Daily monitoring of information published about the activities of the High Court Council and the courts, and timely reaction to incorrectly presented information;
- Use of the social media;
- Holding of informal yet regular meetings with the representatives of the media, in order to identify mutual needs and requests for exchange of information;
- Once per year, organize an informal media event with participation of the HCC members.

***Draft produced by the HCC
Working Group for the Drafting of
the Communication Strategy***

Annex A:

Protocol

Upon the recommendation of HCC Communication Working Group, the Communication Strategy is adopted by the High Court Council, and will be closely regulated and applied through the following Protocol.

I.1 Legal Grounding of the Communication Strategy

The Strategic Plan of the High Court Council, adopted by the Council in March 2011, calls for the establishment and implementation a HCC Communication Strategy.

In addition, the Consultative Council of Judges of Europe (CCJE), of which Serbia is a Member, emphasizes the leadership role of Justice Councils in national outreach programs. Moreover, according to the practice of the European Network of Councils of Justice (ENCJ), of which Serbia has observer status, it is customary for European Justice Councils to adopt and implement Communication Strategies to maintain public trust and confidence.

I.2 Adoption of the Strategy

The High Court Council will adopt the Communication Strategy recommended by the HCC Communication Working Group

I.3 Authorization for Implementing the Strategy

The Cabinet of the President, upon approval and/or at the request of the President or Deputy President of the High Court Council, will authorize implementation of the Communication Strategy.

I.4 Responsibility for Implementing the Strategy

The Communication Strategy is implemented by:

- The Public Relations Organizational Unit of the President's Cabinet;
- Primary duties fall to the person in charge of Public Relations, who will report to the President or Deputy President;
- The Public Relations Unit of the President's Cabinet will have the authority to work with the Administrative Office Staff to facilitate implementation of the strategy.
- The Public Relations Unit will be responsible for assembling the Communication Strategy work into the Calendar of Activities (Annex B and C), and carrying out those activities.

I.5 Regular Reporting to the HCC

Communication Strategy implementation, carried out by the Public Relations Unit, will be reported regularly to the HCC at HCC meetings. Annually, the Communication Strategy will be revised as necessary to reflect ne

Annex B:

Proposed annual calendar of activities of the High Court Council

1. News conference by the President of the High Court Council (twice per year).
2. Public session (twice per year).
3. Forming of the Public Relations Department.
4. Presenting the Public Relations Department to the Media.
5. Informal media event with HCC members.
6. Open doors day.
7. Presenting the HCC's visual identity.
8. Signing of the protocols with law faculties.
9. Presenting the Communications Strategy to the courts.

Annex C:
Template for the annual calendar of activities of the HCC

Annual calendar of activities		
Q1 Activity	Responsible person	Deadline
Q2 Activity	Responsible person	Deadline
Q3 Activity	Responsible person	Deadline
Q4 Activity	Responsible person	Deadline