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Moldovan Regulator Makes Strides in Building Trust with the Public, Communicating with Stakeholders, and Responding to Energy Crises



August 2024 – With support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC), the ***Communication Strategy of the National Agency for Energy Regulation (ANRE) of the Republic of Moldova for 2024-2027*** was finalized in May 2024 and approved by ANRE’s Board of Directors in July 2024. By establishing a strategic plan that delivers cohesive messages on the commission’s roles, responsibilities, and achievements, ANRE can better convey its value proposition to the public and foster effective collaboration across energy stakeholders that enables a unified approach toward achieving market development goals. The finalization of the *Strategy* also supports USAID’s U.S.-Europe Energy Bridge goal of bolstering the resilience of critical infrastructure by empowering ANRE staff to respond more efficiently to crises that affect energy prices and supply, such as geopolitical events, natural disasters, and cyberattacks.

Effective communication plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions, building trust, and fostering understanding between organizations and their stakeholders. Perceptions, whether positive or negative, significantly impact how stakeholders view and interact with the regulator, and NARUC strongly recommends utility regulatory commissions across the world implement communications strategies. In the case of Moldova, since 2021, developments in regional energy markets caused by the post-pandemic economic recovery and the Russian war in Ukraine have led to unforeseen energy price increases.ⁱ As a result, the entire energy sector is working to enhance the country’s energy security and resilience in parallel with increasing transparency and communication with the public to promote the adoption of energy saving practices and address misinformation on topics such as potential tariff fluctuations for gas and electricity.ⁱⁱ

Mr. Veaceslav Untila, the General Director of ANRE, noted the importance of developing a communications strategy, stating, “High energy prices and geopolitical developments in the region prompted a lot of confusion about energy pricing and the role of responsible authorities in managing the energy crisis. Misleading information in the mass media about the energy regulator required very well thought out communication with consumers. In this context, the development and the implementation of a communications strategy is not only appropriate, but a necessity to educate consumers and react to the spread of distorted information.”

To guide ANRE in establishing its *Communication Strategy*, in August 2023 NARUC provided recommendations in the form of a detailed strategy template that ANRE could build on to enhance its communication efforts, effectively engage with all outside stakeholders, and manage the public perception of the organization. General Director Untila commented that “USAID and NARUC assistance in developing our *Communication Strategy* came at the right time. We appreciate USAID’s support on drafting the *Communication Strategy* and many other activities that will help Moldova overcome the energy crisis. The *Strategy* will help consumers to better understand the market and the role of each responsible authority.”

Q&A

Following the finalization of the *Strategy*, we asked Ms. Galina Sanduta, Head of the Communications Service at ANRE, to tell us more about the importance of strengthened internal communication and how ANRE plans to follow the *Communication Strategy* to achieve its goals more effectively.

Can you tell us about yourself and your role at ANRE?

For the last seven years, I have been responsible for the institutional image and communication of ANRE. As the Head of the Communication Service, I prepare, coordinate, and publish press releases and other press materials about ANRE’s activities. The members of the Administration Council of ANRE also delegated me to be the spokesperson of the institution.

In your point of view, what is the role of the regulator when it comes to communicating with the public and energy sector stakeholders?

ANRE’s role is to inform interested parties and manage the perception of the public about its activities. By delivering coherent messages regarding its role, responsibilities, and achievements, ANRE provides accurate, transparent, and useful information to the public. In doing so, we reiterate our commitment to fair competition, transparency, and the efficient functioning of the energy market.

Can you describe the objective of ANRE’s Communication Strategy and how USAID and NARUC assistance contributed to its finalization?

Rising energy prices and misleading information in the last two years have caused some confusion and irritation among consumers, and many consumers blame the authorities and the regulator for the sharp rise in prices. The main objective of ANRE’s *Communication Strategy* is to explain its role and build a positive image of the institution in mass media. Achieving this objective will facilitate collaboration with stakeholders and increase the level of trust and basic knowledge about price setting among consumers.

Drafting the *Communication Strategy* over the last two years was a challenge, and ANRE used the template provided by NARUC as the basis of the final document. We are incredibly grateful to our partners at USAID and NARUC for their commitment and availability to share their knowledge and best international practices to help us draft our own organizational communication strategy.

What are some goals you would like to achieve through the finalized Communications Strategy?

By approving this document, ANRE aims to have a strategy that effectively communicates its mission and objectives as a regulator in the energy sector to regulate companies/operators and consumers. We intend to use the *Communication Strategy* to strengthen our reputation; deliver clear and comprehensive messages to the market about ANRE's duties, responsibilities, and achievements; and be able to respond efficiently to energy crises.

Can you give us some examples of how ANRE plans to improve consumer education and handle media inquiries moving forward?

Consumer education is a major objective for ANRE. To attain effective communication with the public, we will implement a multilateral communication approach that describes our role and reiterates our commitment to protect consumer's rights while ensuring the transparent functioning of the energy market.

Additionally, ANRE will maintain ongoing communication with target groups by distributing market updates, success stories, and positive developments in the energy sector to inform them about ANRE's achievements and their impact on consumers. ANRE will use various communication channels (i.e., Facebook, Telegram, and YouTube) to disseminate this information to reach a broad audience. By delivering clear and accessible information, we can engage the public and promote a positive perception of our activities.

Given the increasing prevalence of cyberattacks, do you think that strengthened internal communication will be critical to preparing ANRE to respond to a cyber incident?

Responding to cyberattacks in a quick and well-organized way is critical. It is important that every relevant department is quickly informed about possible threats. Teams that communicate efficiently can react adequately. Strong internal communication also facilitates the post-event collection of information from many departments, which helps determine what went wrong and where improvements can be made.

What is ANRE's implementation timeline for the Communication Strategy?

The *Communication Strategy* shall be implemented from 2024 to 2027. All the objectives outlined in this document are based on country specifics and recent developments in local and international markets.

Next Steps

As ANRE implements its *Communication Strategy*, NARUC looks forward to seeing it build a reputation as a champion of accessibility and transparency while promoting the interests of consumers and energy sector enterprises. Moving forward, NARUC will continue to support ANRE on other

important regulatory topics, including electricity market coupling, undertaking natural gas reforms, and improving market monitoring functions to ensure efficiency and fairness.

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i “Addressing the impacts of the energy crisis in the republic of Moldova. UNDP.

<https://www.undp.org/moldova/projects/addressing-impacts-energy-crisis-republic-moldova>

ii “Moldovan energy regulator says it has no plans to rule to increase tariffs for gas, electric energy.” Moldpres.

<https://www.moldpres.md/en/news/2019/02/19/19001402>