

## **Telling the CIS Story**

In the next few years, governments of the former Soviet Union will need to focus more than ever on communicating their positions and messages. Transitional governments of all sizes will want to assure that their country's needs and contributions are not overshadowed by what powerhouses, such as Russia, China, and India, are doing to advance their transitions. At the same time, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries can use strategic communications to highlight their accomplishments, giving them greater visibility during a period of significant geopolitical shifts in power and influence.

## **Trends to Consider**

While Moscow is no longer in direct control of everything that happens in its former satellites, there is no question that Russia's politics and economy have a tremendous impact in the region. For example, Russia is preparing for its upcoming presidential elections; eventual World Trade Organization ascension; readying itself for the Sochi 2014 Olympics; diversifying its economy to be less dependent on gas and oil; and managing whatever comes out of the Obama Administration's reset policy, including an evolving NATO in search of a relevant mission and purpose. There will be much news coverage and analysis of how each of these trends affects CIS countries, and those countries will have to work to get their sides heard – constructively or possibly defensively – among influential audiences in the U.S. and elsewhere.

China, expanding in almost every arena, is exerting its influence accordingly. Beijing is offering both import and export opportunities to a plethora of nations and increasing its presence in developing countries near its borders, some of which it shares with Russia. The Chinese military is extending its capabilities, including a sophisticated navy. Chinese students are studying in colleges and universities around the world, further broadening international exposure to Chinese culture and values. International media coverage of China – through traditional and digital platforms – is becoming ubiquitous. CIS countries need to leverage this unprecedented attention to their own advantage by communicating their dealings with China in as transparent a manner as each situation permits.

India's voracious outsourcing industry continues to recruit young people from an array of transitional countries, leading to a loss of creative talent and energy that could lead to serious problems in the future, unless it is combated. CIS countries will want to promote their own growing industries, not only to recruit talent from other countries, but perhaps more importantly, to retain their own youth.

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Each and all of these trends will create opportunities and challenges for CIS nations, demanding a need for clear, crisp, and cogent communications with the western media, think tanks and academicians, the U.S. Government, NGOs, global investment decision makers, and politically important Diaspora communities. Embassies and consulates will assume some of the responsibilities for this task, but CIS governments should also consider retaining American public relations counsel to enhance what they do through government-to-government conduits.

Saylor Company has worked successfully with a number of former Soviet Union countries in various stages of their transitions. We understand the critical issues posed by rapid political and economic change, and we have dealt with the resulting communications challenges – from the top down and from the bottom up.

### **Transformational Change**

In addition to the macro-economic and geopolitical influence on CIS governments, we also have a deep appreciation for some important issues that are impacting this region.

First, as CIS countries transition away from a system of central control, and their media becomes more aggressive and independent, people have become much more accustomed to public discussions of even controversial topics, including politics. Still, westerners do not always recognize that our style of communications may be perceived as the wrong – even dangerous – way to operate in many former communist countries. That is neither right nor wrong. It just is. Knowing how to manage around the situation is integral.

The next trend is closely related to the first. Most CIS countries are in the final stages of a monumental generational transition. Older leaders brought up in a communist system where individual achievement was purposely limited, are retiring. New, often-western-educated go getters are emerging into government and business leadership. They are eager to accelerate change. Their skills are broader and more international. Their drive to achieve dramatically challenges the conventions of their parents and grandparents. While that is a normal generational evolution in all societies, changing an entire economic and political system – not just masking the old one – presents enormous obstacles to young CIS leaders taking the reins from their elders.

This transition – which involves the blending of long-held traditions with characteristics of previous and emerging political systems – creates a hybrid of institutions, values and laws. Many young CIS leaders, in their eagerness to make progress, are tremendously aggressive and may ignore or overlook important issues that westerners feel are essential to successfully communicating the changes underway in their countries. They may not understand, for example,

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the importance of communicating their stories in a way that the western media will understand, and not simply dismiss as propaganda.

Young leaders from the former Communist bloc, particularly those educated abroad, understand the important role that the western news media has on public policy internationally – and more frequently these days, domestically. Yet, people in this part of the world do not have a long history of working with professional PR consultants and will need to be convinced that this is an area worth investing in. Understanding the history and culture, and showing a willingness to be flexible and patient, are critical for anyone working in this region.

Saylor Company understands these important trends and recognizes the influence they will have going forward. We respect their power – constructive and potentially destructive. It also means we embed this knowledge in everything we do for countries in this sphere.

Saylor Company knows there is no unique formula for providing effective communications services to any country. Each nation has different needs, different expectations, and different demands on its leaders and populace. But all countries, particularly those who are emerging onto the global scene, will benefit from a communications plan that encompasses a media relations program, outreach to think tank and academic institutions, strategic U.S. government relations, increased visibility with American business leaders and enhanced interaction with their Diaspora populations. Our international communications professionals have been employing this recipe for more than a decade for 20 foreign government clients – from the former Soviet Union to the Middle East, to Africa, to Latin America, and to Asia.

When countries need to find solutions to their most challenging communications challenges, Saylor Company is ready to partner with them. We have the experience, knowledge, and cultural sensitivities to help them succeed. We provide professional counsel – firmly if the situation demands. Still, we know we are guests in another country and do our best to respect our hosts while at the same time, serving their communications interests.

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For more information, please visit [www.saylorcompany.com](http://www.saylorcompany.com).

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