



**Republic of Serbia
High Judicial Council**

THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

2016-2018

2016

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1. Preamble

The High Judicial Council (hereinafter referred to as: High Judicial Council or Council) was established pursuant to the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and the Law on High Judicial Council, as an independent and autonomous body ensuring and safeguarding independence and autonomy of courts and judges.

Members of the Council are the president of the Supreme Court of Cassation and minister in charge of justice and chairperson of the competent National Assembly committee as members ex officio and eight elective members elected by the National Assembly, in accordance with the law. The elective members include six judges with a permanent tenure of judicial function, of whom one from the territory of autonomous provinces and two respectable and prominent jurists with minimum 15 years of professional service experience, of whom one lawyer and the other professor of the Faculty of Law.

In accordance with its constitutional and legal powers, the Council elects judges for permanent tenure of judicial office; decides on termination of judicial function; proposes to the National Assembly candidates for first election of judges for a three-year term of office; proposes to the National Assembly election and dismissal of the President of the Supreme Court of Cassation and courts presidents; jointly with the State Prosecutorial Council proposes candidates for the Constitutional Court judges; decides in the procedure of evaluation of judges and court presidents' performance; determines composition, duration and termination of the term of office of the disciplinary bodies' members; appoints members of such bodies and regulates the manner of operation and decision-making in these bodies; decides on the legal remedies in a disciplinary procedure; decides on the transfer, assignment and objection against the suspension of judges; determines the number of judges and juror judges for each court; passes the Code of Ethics; performs tasks in relation to implementation of the National Judiciary Reform Strategy; cooperates with judicial councils of other states and international organizations and performs other tasks pursuant to the law.

Besides the aforementioned, the Council, in compliance with the Law on Organization of Courts, performs the tasks of judiciary administration, as follows: passing instructions for compilation of reports on the courts' operation; setting general guidelines for internal organization of courts; maintaining personal files of judges, lay-judges and court staff; proposing part of the budget for courts' operating expenditures, save for the expenditures for court staff and maintenance of equipment and buildings, same as allocation of such funds; performing oversight of the intended spending of budgetary funds and performing oversight of the financial and material operation of courts.

For performance of professional, administrative and other tasks within the Council, Administrative Office was established. The Administrative Office is managed by the secretary reporting to the Council on their work.

The National Judiciary Reform Strategy for the period 2013-2018 envisages fundamental principles for the judicial system functioning, those being the following: independence, impartiality and quality of justice, expertise, accountability, and efficiency. The above principles ensure the framework for establishment, development and organization of judicial institutions aimed at creation of the judiciary system fully capable of protecting the rights of all citizens with ongoing work on improvement and specific application thereof in each phase of the judiciary development and law enforcement.

Transparency was not listed as a separate principle; however it horizontally stretches as a general principle throughout the strategy and is present in all principles by means of strategic goals.

Transparent and accessible judiciary is one of the basic strategic objectives and priorities of the Council. Transparent judiciary is the judiciary whose work is accessible to all citizens under equal conditions, enabling access to all information relevant to the citizens.

Communication Strategy of the High Judicial Council (hereinafter referred to as: Communication Strategy or Strategy) is a document which defines objectives, types, manners of communication and activities, both within the Council itself, and between the Council and courts, general public and target groups, thus including as well timely informing on operation of the Council and courts in the Republic of Serbia aiming to bring the work of the Council and courts closer to the professional and broader public and in that way make it more accessible and transparent.

Previous Council Communication Strategy for the period 2013-2015, elaborated in line with the principles and objectives of the National Judicial Reform Strategy for the period 2006-2011, has expired. The new Council Communication Strategy covering the period 2016-2018 builds on the previous Communication Strategy and is aligned with the National Judicial Reform Strategy 2013-2018 and the accompanying Action Plan, same as with the Action Plan for Chapter 23, Law on High Judicial Council and the High Judicial Council Rules of Procedure.

The Council's Communication Strategy specifies activities envisaged under the Chapter 23 Action Plan and Action Plan implementing the National Judicial Reform Strategy aiming to achieve principles and priorities defined under the National Judicial Reform Strategy. The Council recognizes importance of establishing Public Relations Organizational Unit, both for the Council and the courts, as one of the activities laid down under the Action Plan implementing the National Judicial Reform Strategy. This activity will be implemented as permissible by circumstances.

2. Objectives

The objective of the Council's Communication Strategy is to establish framework for continuous work on a constant improvement of internal, external, and especially crisis communication, when so should be required. Likewise, the objective of this Strategy is ongoing work on permanent improvement of transparency and quality presentation in the public of the Council and courts, in order to strengthen trust of the general public in courts, but also to significantly empower the Council's operation and its role in achieving and safeguarding independence and autonomy of courts and judges.

The Strategy objectives are:

- **achieving full transparency in the Council's and judiciary system operation;**
- **bringing justice closer to the citizens and strengthening citizens' trust in the judiciary;**
- **ongoing work on improving quality of public presentation and enhancing reputation of the Council.**

To attain the objectives of the Strategy, the following has been defined:

- target groups;
- communication types;
- activities.

Adoption of the Annual Activity Plan has set a time frame for undertaking activities aimed at achieving the Strategy objectives.

3. Target groups

Communication Strategy laid down the following target groups:

1. High Judicial Council;
2. courts;
3. public authorities;
4. publicity;
 - 4.1. general and expert public;
 - 4.2. the media.

4. Communication types

The basis for good communication is reflected in clearly defined types of internal/external data and information, their creators, mechanisms and manners of their exchange.

The Strategy differentiates three types of communication:

1. internal communication of the Council;
2. external communication of the Council;
3. crisis communication of the Council;

Creation of an adequate internal communication system makes a precondition for successful external informing, whereas successful and synchronized internal and external communication are necessary for efficient and timely crisis communication.

4.1. Internal communication of the High Judicial Council

Internal communication is realized between managers, members and staff within the Council. It ensures transfer and exchange of internal information via adequate information channels and provides certain types of information.

Internal communication makes an integral part of all Council activities and its internal organizational units. All activities in the area of internal informing ought to be planned, monitored and evaluated against the achievement of the internal communication objective.

Internal communication is carried out by all of the Council staff. The Council secretary, managers of organizational units and a person in charge of public relations are responsible for the overall implementation of internal communication.

Information being transferred and/or exchanged via internal communication is related to the following: work of the Council, status and activities of the Council members, operation of the

Administrative Office and work of the courts.

To achieve optimum results and timely and complete delivery of information, all internal communication channels are to be used:

- verbally;
- in printed form;
- electronically.

Means and ways ensuring the exchange and transfer of internal information are the following:

- electronic mail (e-mail);
- various kinds of working material;
- informative brochures and newsletters;
- directory of names and surnames of the Council members and Council Administrative Office staff with contact details;
- data regarding meetings, their schedule and planned duration;
- Information Booklet (electronic and printed versions);
- internal notice board (including an electronic one);
- Intranet (internal computer network);
- joint calendar of activities for the staff;
- application for registration and processing of the Council cases same as other potentially suitable ICT tools.

4.2. External communication of the High Judicial Council

External communication is realized between the Council and courts, public authorities, same as between the Council and the public in the broadest sense of the word (universities, scientific institutions, professional associations, businesses, the media, citizens), using the means for the exchange and transfer of information about the work and activities of the Council, via different communication and information channels.

This manner of communication meets the needs of the courts, general and expert public, the media and public authorities for speedy, accurate and timely information about the Council and its operation, at national and international levels. Active promotion of the Council and courts' work contributes to enhanced and improved knowledge and understanding of the Council and courts' competences, activities and procedures.

Information in relation to the Council must be easily accessible, timely and accurate, and to that end all available communication and information channels are to be used: verbal, printed and electronic.

Activities undertaken by the Council in external communication towards the above listed target groups are described in detail under items 5.2, 5.3, 5.4. and 5.5. of the Communication strategy.

External communication is carried out by the Council president, members of the Council based on the authorization of the president, and a person in charge of public relations.

4.3. Crisis communication of the High Judicial Council

Crisis situation is a specific, unexpected and unusual event requiring prompt response despite

creating a high level of uncertainty and threat. Crisis situation or incident are possible at any moment and can seriously jeopardize reputation of the Council and threaten operation of the Council. Crisis situations may diminish the trust in the Council and judiciary, creating suspicion in the existence of abuse or corruption.

The most common indicators of a crises are: disorganization, inefficiency, passivity, overlapping jurisdictions accountability, lacking clear objectives, outdated modus operandi, lack of transparency and objectivity.

To successfully address the crisis, a planned approach is required in addition to two equally important segments:

- addressing the crisis using a plan for addressing potential, latent or acute crisis;
- open, honest, specific and proactive communication in a crisis situation, which may have a preventative effect on the crisis emergence or on mitigation of adverse effects thereof.

Basic principles of crisis communication are:

- crisis cannot be hidden;
- initiate activities addressing the crisis before it becomes known to the public;
- do not treat the media as enemies;
- do not use language the public do not understand;
- do not issue inaccurate, contradictory, confusing, incomplete information;
- prior to making any public statements, make sure what needs to be communicated to the public;
- estimate the set-up the message is being communicated to;
- assess the public attitude towards the event and adjust your statement accordingly;
- in the course of the crisis never use the expression "no comment", which is associated with the lack of honesty, conveys the feeling of something being hidden or avoided to be communicated.

In responding to crisis situations, besides the person in charge of public relation, as a rule the president, member of the Council upon the president's authorization, and/or secretary of the Council are to be involved. After the crisis situation had ended an analysis of efficiency and crisis communication plan is to be conducted.

Crisis situations include political or any other influence on the Council and courts' work. In such situations, the Council shall respond urgently in accordance with its competences.

5. Activities undertaken to achieve the Strategy objectives:

Transparency and accessibility the Council's work and strengthening citizens' trust in the judicial system are implemented through activities which are strategically divided into several groups:

1. activities undertaken within the High Judicial Council;
2. activities undertaken in relation to courts;
3. activities undertaken in relation to public authorities;
4. activities undertaken in relation to general and expert public;

5. media activities.

5.1. Activities undertaken within the High Judicial Council

- presenting to the public the work of the Council and courts in terms of achieved operational results and activities undertaken relating to the work of the Council and courts– **constant transparency**;
- familiarizing the public with planned activities of the Council in the forthcoming period (quarterly and semi-annually) – **planned transparency**;
- organizing public sessions of the Council with clear definition of rules referring to the sessions involving the public;
- publishing information about the Council's sessions:
 - session agenda;
 - minutes of the session;
 - conclusions of the session;
 - decision of the session.
- activities and timetable of the Council's activities are published on the Council's website with regular updates;
- organizing training for the Council staff in the area of communication and public relations;
- publishing the press release;
- submitting operational report and publishing the Information Booklet;
- bringing the work of the Council closer to the public by publishing information and brochures of relevance for the operation and functioning of the Council and courts on the Council's website;
- promoting the importance of evaluation of the judges' performance and the effect thereof on their career advancement by publishing detailed information of the Council website;
- publishing information of the Council website in relation to permissible limits in commenting on the court decisions and proceedings;
- publishing a brochure intended for judges aimed at awareness raising on the ethical rules on the Council's website.

5.2. Activities undertaken by the High Judicial Council in communication with courts

The Council holds meetings with court presidents, while the person in charge of public relations of the Council cooperates with representatives of courts in charge of public relations, for the purpose of improving transparency, accessibility and strengthening citizens' trust in the judiciary.

The Council supports the courts by issuing opinions, guidelines and recommendations in relation to:

- mandatory content of the courts' websites, their improvement and visual identity;
- introduction of info desks and signs in all courts aimed at assisting the citizens;
- conclusion of a cooperation memorandum with faculties of law, high schools and other institutions to bring the work of the courts closer to the public;
- initiating and organizing trainings and other kinds of professional development courses in courts for the staff working in the public relations area;
- organizing a press conference to present annual operational reports;
- establishing a Commission to increase the trust of the public in courts' operation; the Commission is to draft a Plan for increasing the trust of the public in courts' operation

once a year, defining objectives and specific activities regarding informing on the courts operation and promoting the work of courts;

- organizing "Open Door Day" event, on the occasion of 25 October- European Civil Justice Day and thus enable the citizens to get directly familiarized with operation of courts and their rights and responsibilities in exercising court protection.

5.3. Activities undertaken by the High Judicial Council in working with public authorities

The Council undertakes activities in working with public authorities, and especially through cooperation with: the National Assembly, Constitutional Court, Ministry of Justice, public prosecutor's offices, Judicial Academy, Anti-corruption Agency, Commissioner for information of public importance and personal data protection and Ombudsman.

Activities:

- institutional cooperation strengthening;
- organization of expert meetings at national and international levels;
- initiating joint projects;
- organizing joint training for the staff.

5.4. Activities undertaken by the High Judicial Council in working with general and expert public

The Council undertakes activities in working with general and expert public through cooperation with schools, civil society organizations and citizens, but also with representatives of professions who are by nature of their jobs referred to cooperate with the Council and courts (law schools, bars, international organizations, professional associations, Chamber of Bailiffs, Chamber of Public Notaries, representatives of the judiciary trade union, etc.).

Inter alia, these activities include:

- Open Door Days;
- internship;
- simulated trials organization;
- institutional cooperation strengthening;
- organization of expert meetings at national and international levels;
- initiating joint projects.

5.5. Media activities of the High Judicial Council:

- delivering press conferences by the Council president, to present results achieved during past period and to announce future activities and in other cases when assessed the issues concerned are of public interest;
- informing the media on the schedules Council sessions and other activities;
- timely response to the media requests;
- daily monitoring of published information on the Council and courts' activities and timely response to inaccurately presented information;
- organizing informal meeting of the PR person and media representatives
- organizing annual informal event for the media with the Council president and members;
- organizing workshops for the journalists aimed at adoption of European standards and internal norms regarding adherence to court decisions and reporting on court

proceedings;

- publishing information of the Council website in relation to permissible limits in commenting on the court decisions and proceedings.

6. Annual Activity Plan

The Council elaborates the Annual Plan defining activities and time frames, same as responsible persons for their implementation. The purpose of the Annual Activity Plan is to operationalise and improve the Council's communication with all target groups. The Annual Activity Plan is subject to changes and regular updates depending on the needs and newly emerged situations.

Addendum 1 to the Communication Strategy is the 2016 Annual Activity Plan.

7. Final provisions

Secretary and person in charge of public relations regularly report to the president and members of the Council on the implementation of the Communication Strategy. If so required, Communication Strategy is to be reviewed once a year in order to be adjusted to the newly emerged changes in the judiciary.

The Communication Strategy for the period 2016-2018 was adopted by the High Judicial Council at its session held on 8 March 2016.

Elaboration of the Communication Strategy was supported by the USAID-funded "Institutional Strengthening of the High Judicial Project", implemented by the "4 Digits Consulting- Judiciary and Public Sector Support Project" based on a donor contract.

In Belgrade, 8 March 2016

Number: 021-02-00033/2016-01

**PRESIDENT
OF THE HIGH JUDICIAL COUNCIL**

Dragomir Milojević

Addendum 1

ANNUAL ACTIVITY PLAN FOR 2016

Activity		Person responsible	2016											
			01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
1.	Drafting High Judicial Council Communication Strategy 2016-2018 proposal	Council secretary												
2.	Drafting the 2016 Annual Activity Plan	Council Working Group												
3.	Adoption of the High Judicial Council Communication Strategy 2016-2018	Council												
4.	Council public sessions delivery	Council president												
5.	Publishing information on the Council sessions	PR person												
6.	Submitting Annual Council Work Report to the National Assembly	Council president												
7.	Delivering Press Conference by the High Judicial Council president for the Annual Report presentation	Council president, PR person												
8.	Submitting Report on the work of the Disciplinary Prosecutor and Disciplinary Commission to the Council	Council president, Disciplinary Prosecutor and Disciplinary Commission president												
9.	Drafting a brochure on the actions in the disciplinary procedures	Council president and disciplinary prosecutor												
10.	Publishing and updating Newsletter on the Council's work	Council president, PR person												
11.	Publishing a press release	PR person												
12.	Giving recommendations to the courts to organize a press conference and present the Work Report	Council president, PR person												
13.	Giving recommendations to the courts for the Commissions on increasing the public trust in the work of the courts to elaborate Annual Plan for increasing public trust in the courts	Council president, PR person												
14.	Issuing recommendations to the courts to organize "Open Door Day" events on the occasion of the European Civil Justice Day on 25 October	Council president, PR person												
15.	Delivering press conference of the High Judicial Council president for presenting new elective members of the Council from the rank of judges	Council president, PR person												

16.	Timely response to the media requests	Council president, PR person												
17.	Daily monitoring of published information on the Council and courts' activities and timely response to inaccurately presented information	PR person												
18.	Organising informal meeting of the PR person and media representatives	PR person												
19.	Organizing an annual informal event for the media with the Council president and members	Council president, PR person												
20.	Organizing training sessions for the Council staff in the area of communication and PR	Council president, PR person, supported by the World Bank												