



A CONCEPT FOR A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS APPROACH TO THE SECURITY AND DEFENCE SECTOR IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognising the need to communicate its policies more effectively, the Supreme Security Council (SSC) endorsed the development of a StratCom (StratCom) concept to better align cross-government communications within the defence and security sector.

As a high-level document, this concept restricts itself to the initial steps needed to develop StratCom in terms of an operating model within government and creating the necessary capabilities. It is a concept not a plan, and is accordingly deliberately light on detail, providing the principles that would, if accepted, but worked up into a plan and implementation.

It was developed following interviews with key players within the Moldovan authorities during November 14-16, and these insights are allied to the extensive experience of the writers.

The authors recognise that Moldova faces significant resource constraints and therefore the recommendations are considered the minimum necessary to creating an effective capability.

The key elements of the concept are:

1. High level commitment to the concept.
2. Building competency and knowledge within communication practitioners and understanding of StratCom within leaderships.
3. Streamlining the institutional process to support the implementation of a StratCom mindset and process.

The key recommendations for immediate action are:

- To establish a Whole of Government (WOG) StratCom structure and process to create, manage and oversee StratCom,
- A review and enhancement of education and training for communications staff.
- Formalise the requirement for direct reporting and responsibility of the senior communicator to their senior leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Moldova's major security challenge comes from external actors conducting a hybrid campaign against it. That hybrid approach attacks many sectors, notably economic, but includes a major StratCom component that is integral to disinformation and destabilisation campaigns by malign actors. Recognising this, the Supreme Security Council (SSC) endorsed the development of a StratCom concept to better align cross-government communications within the defence and security sector.

As noted above the concept followed interviews with key stakeholders¹ and it is significant that there was considerable agreement among those interviewed, so there is high confidence in the analysis.

Emphasising the paper highlights initial steps, the concept recommends how to define and introduce StratCom, leading to a detailed plan that can be developed and implemented largely within the existing decision-making structures.

Moldova recognises it has low capacity in StratCom in both resources and expertise. The government as a whole is resource-constrained while facing an immediate and urgent need. The recommendations are targeted at the minimum necessary to creating a StratCom capability, aiming to provide relatively simple proposals in order to get the process underway in a timely manner.

STRATEGIC SITUATION

Intent on StratCom:

The Republic of Moldova has acknowledged and assumed that in accordance with Chapter III, para. 44 of the National Defence Strategy that:

"StratCom will become the indispensable informational element of the national authorities, representing one of the tools that the state has at its disposal to achieve its objectives in the field of security and defence. In this direction, the efforts will be oriented towards the elaboration of an efficient vision of StratCom, towards the transformation of the institutional communication structures and towards the elaboration of some forms of collaboration and interaction between them. Thus, a common interpretation is needed on the necessary StratCom at the level of all public authorities and at the level of all national policies and strategies. The main objective of StratCom initialization and application in practice spotlights on the need to achieve inter-agency and even "state-society" co-ordination in delivering information that might give the real understanding about the Moldova positions across both national and international stakeholders, binding the communication messages with the real Government policies, actions, challenges, and achievements"

Current attitudes to government:

Beyond current crisis management related to the Ukraine conflict and Russian meddling, the government faces a daunting array of challenges which go beyond poor public relations. Existing demographic and economic problems combine with the fact Moldova ranks poorly on indexes of good governance to create low levels of trust in Moldovan institutions and leadership. This makes the system vulnerable to malign actors who will exploit weaknesses while not needing to provide a viable alternative.

¹Institutions interviewed: Bureau of Reintegration Policies; Ministry of Defence; Supreme Security Council; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Intelligence and Security Service; Ministry of Internal Affairs; Inspectorate of Border Police; Prime Minister's Office.

StratCom's impact:

The introduction of a StratCom approach to Moldova's defence and security sector will improve the efficiency and transparency of its communications as it seeks to explain its activities and challenges to different stakeholders. StratCom can be used in pursuit of national interests using the coordination of information, synchronized with other elements of national power. However, effective StratCom is not a silver bullet that can replace effective activity or a say/do gap.

INSIGHTS

The development of this concept was supported by a number of insights. The key ones are:

- At present Moldova has no systematic process to do this, with staff relying on what they hear and see from their own sources and reading.
- The hybrid challenge to Moldova is multi-faceted, for instance economic and corruption, but has a critical StratCom element. It is well resourced at all levels. Within the social media area it effectively uses disinformation, but with a strong coherent narrative that targets well-identified vulnerabilities.
- Moldova's StratCom capacity is low. Most communication capabilities are in reality conventional Public Relations and media handling, albeit with some exceptions where institutions are seeking to take a more holistic approach. The following weaknesses (not ranked) are identified:
 - Low numbers across the whole communication field
 - Variable quality of personnel
 - Minimal specific training and further education
 - No common understanding of StratCom
 - Limited co-ordination within Moldovan institutions
 - No StratCom structures or processes
 - Communication is reactive not proactive
 - Limited ability for analysing the information environment
 - Limited coherence for cross-government themes and messages
 - In most institutions inadequate linkage between communicators and senior leadership
 - No Moldovan national narrative
 - Unclear authorities on StratCom, including at top of government

While a daunting list of issues, the positive side here is wide recognition of the weaknesses and openness to addressing them, which should not be underestimated as it is a prerequisite to overcoming them.

CONCEPT

The concept is based on the authors' experience and best practices drawn from NATO and NATO nations. They have been shown to work across a variety of nations and can be complementary to support from other Moldovan allies, for example the UK. Nations like the Baltics and Ukraine

follow the same principles.

As stated in the executive summary, the key elements of the concept are:

- 1. High level commitment to the concept.**
- 2. Building competency and knowledge within communication practitioners and understanding of StratCom within leaderships.**
- 3. Streamlining the institutional process to support the implementation of a StratCom mindset and process.**

Institutional streamlining and further development to support StratCom

StratCom must be led and directed from the top to ensure alignment across government.

StratCom should be a standing item on SSC meetings - deciding on issues that require a StratCom approach. This ensures that the institutions receiving the StratCom direction form part of the decision-making process – essential to successful buy in and implementation of that direction.

Experience shows that this Whole of Government (WOG) StratCom structure is most successful when led by a top of government **StratCom Policy Board (SCPB)** to provide direction and guidance (D&G) to identify, manage and oversee StratCom issues. The SCPB should be **supported by a small secretariat** to disseminate D&G and assure implementation of decisions. Ideally, the expertise required is drawn from supporting institutions, providing updates, suggestions and feedback cooperation and coordination. A suggested SCPB structure is at Annex A.

Acknowledging the introduction of StratCom and the associated mindset is a challenge, it is important that ministers and heads of bodies are in direct control, with the senior civil servant overseeing the initial re-structuring, until the head of any StratCom body takes direct control going forward.

Narratives aligned to policy and strategy

Effective StratCom is founded on well-constructed narratives, easily understood by all and used to cohere communication with an audience. Those narratives need to combine the emotive power of stories with strong argument and the credibility of the person presenting the narrative. A clear, Moldovan national narrative that articulates the Government's vision for Moldova needs to be recognised as an essential part of StratCom

It should be noted that disinformation at the tactical level flourishes and exploits wider narratives. In developing narratives, it should be noted that accurate information alone does not counter disinformation. Russia's disinformation efforts succeed where the audience is already open to them because of a wider discontent with government. Counter disinformation requires a strong narrative to contest this.

A strong narrative not only makes a population more resilient to disinformation but more supportive of government. Such a narrative then becomes the basis for subordinate narratives and StratCom activities that echo these key themes.

StratCom Frameworks

To be usable, StratCom requires a means of disseminating top-level D&G. This should provide enough guidance to align words and deeds but be broad enough to give subordinates the

freedom to adapt communication activities to their particular area. NATO and other nations use a **StratCom Framework** structure to achieve this.

Each framework – endorsed by the SCPB - identifies the **situation, aim, narrative, audiences, objectives, themes, focus topics, and coordination**. This simple structure enables the linking of communication with outcomes; with an overarching national StratCom Framework supported by subordinate frameworks to guide communications on specific cross-government issues. See Annex B.

Building knowledge and competence

There is little or no shared understanding of StratCom. To create that common understanding it would be valuable to **develop a StratCom Handbook to offer guidance on best practice processes and procedures**. This would be based upon existing such products from NATO and partners. A common view of StratCom is a major catalyst for effective StratCom. At the same time, most communicators have little or no training, and is largely media relations focussed and tends to reinforce reactivity.

Training in specific processes, tools to support a StratCom as well as other integrated communications action, is vital. The UK's OASIS, RESIST and Campaign approach offers a turnkey solution and is broadly applied and acclaimed internationally.

Analysing the information environment

In order to properly target audiences then **Information Environment Analysis (IEA) is essential**. You must know your audience to know what to say to them in ways that work. At present within Moldova such analysis is media-focussed and largely intuitive. Given the complexity and breadth of the modern information environment technical means are needed. Commercial IEA processes and systems are effective but can be expensive. Nevertheless, seeking further skills for IEA is vital.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

These recommendations are deliberately focussed on simple evolution and development, recognising Moldovan StratCom starts from a relatively low base with limited resources. The concept is also designed to be compatible with current NATO and European national practices, so will enhance future integration. Our recommendations are:

- To create and adopt a national narrative, offering a resonant, emotional story that explains what Moldova stands for.
- To establish Whole of Government (WOG) StratCom structure² to create, manage and oversee StratCom, This, should include, as a minimum:
 - StratCom as a standing item on SSC meetings to identify cross-government issues requiring a StratCom approach.
 - The establishment of a top of government SCPB to provide direction and guidance (D&G). The location of this body is for the government to decide. See Annex A
 - A StratCom Secretariat to support the SCPB
 - The introduction of StratCom Frameworks as a means of disseminating SCPB D&G.
- To produce appropriate legislation and regulations to enable the introduction of StratCom as outline above within ministries and governmental bodies.

² Led and directed by a cross government body and implemented and executed by the individual institutions as appropriate.

- To formalise the requirement for direct reporting and responsibility of the senior communicator to their senior leadership
- To identify those immediate issues requiring a coherent StratCom Approach.
- A review of education and training for communications staff. To include the establishment of a StratCom basic course for all staff, followed up as appropriate with special to task training eg Social Media or IEA. Additionally senior leaders would benefit from short StratCom awareness courses to understand how they can exploit StratCom in support of their work. A comprehensive training and education plan will be required.
- The creation of an authorised StratCom Handbook. This could draw on existing NATO work, which is effectively the shared understanding of 30 nations and even more partners. This would also provide a good base for the training effort.
- The creation of a cross-government federated IEA system and processes to develop and share the materials across institutions.

Once effective governance structure is established at the WOG level, future works would seek to:

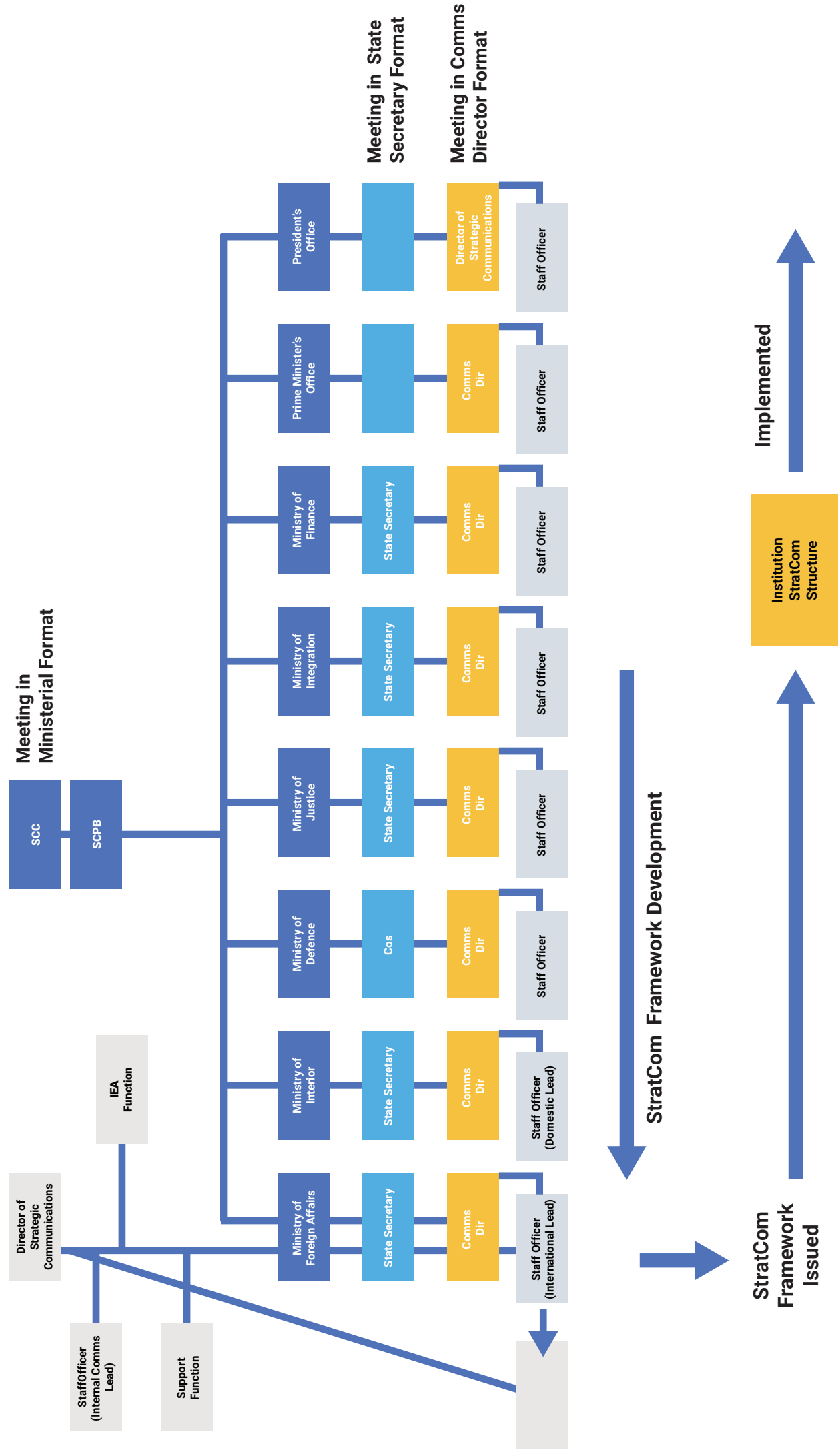
- Support the introduction of a StratCom Coordination Board (SCCB) within each ministry and institution involving the key decision-makers of each body to discuss and agree on StratCom activities as an integral part of overall institutional work. Frequency of meeting can be decided, but it should be supported by an SCPB at staff level.
- Support the transformation of current structures within each ministry or institution to a more standardised StratCom unit with the same basic structure. Some variation is inevitable for bodies with widely varying purposes, but they will each have the common functions of 1. Policy and planning. 2. Information Environment Assessment (IEA). 3. Promotion, outreach and engagement, eg media relations, social media.
- Increase staffing within communications departments. Resource constraints are recognised, and improved processes and initiatives as outlined above will make a positive difference, nevertheless current numbers of communication staff are too small to enable the transformational effect the government desires. We can provide further advice on staffing as required, although our experience is that relatively modest investments are highly cost-effective.
- How civil society organisations can be integrated into the StratCom structure and processes.

CONCLUSION

Moldova's StratCom capabilities start from a low base but with the critical element that the problem is recognised, and the officials we engaged with were very capable and had a strong motivation for improvement. The analysis of problem was widely shared and the recommendations above were widely welcomed in discussion. While implementation will be far from easy, we feel that these changes would be positively received.

Recognising the capacity constraints, we have consciously kept recommendations as simple as possible, although without increased resources then it must be accepted that improvement will be incremental rather than transformational. We stand ready to support the government in those next steps.

Example StratCom Management Structures



- ▶ The requirement for StratCom Direction and guidance is identified, developed and issued through a StratCom Policy Board (SCPB) structure.
- ▶ The SCPB is supported by a Secretariat - led by a Director of Strategic Communications who holds delegated authority of the President and Prime Minister for issuing StratCom Frameworks - made up of a small number of permanent staff plus one representation from each institution.
- ▶ An issue is identified as needing a cross-Government approach and proposed as an agenda item to the SCPB in ministerial format – in practice as an agenda item for the SSC.
- ▶ Following the discussion, top level cross-government agreed Direction and Guidance (D&G) is developed by the Secretariat under the Director of Strategic Communications
- ▶ This is D&G is then validated by the SCPB in State Secretary Format and refined by the SCPB in Communications Director Format
- ▶ The Secretariat staff take this D&G and develop a StratCom framework for the issue.
- ▶ The framework is issued under signature of the Director of Strategic Communications on behalf of the President and Prime Minister and briefed to the SCPB in Ministerial format.

Note: An alternative is that the StratCom Framework is co-signed by the President and Prime Minister

STRATCOM FRAMEWORKS

1. The purpose of a framework is to provide overarching guidance in order to generate a 'golden thread', linking top to bottom so that at every level communicators and their leaderships understand the overall intent of the governments
2. The document is deliberately simple in structure. It balances clarity of overall aim while at the same time allowing subordinate structures to tailor their specific activities in line with particular functions and circumstances.
3. Frameworks and variants on them are used by NATO and increasing numbers of NATO nations. The example here is very close to that used by NATO. A top-level framework is produced (eg Presidential or Prime Ministerial level), distributed to subordinate ministries, who then produce their own framework incorporating that intent and adapting it to their circumstances. For example the focus of activities of the Ministry of Defence would be different but complement those of the Interior Ministry or Border Police.
4. The exact content of the framework will be dependent on the specific requirements of the activity, but it will routinely adopt the following format:
 - a. Situation. This section provides a brief background to the issue from a StratCom perspective.
 - b. Aim. The scope of the StratCom Framework and what it seeks to achieve.
 - c. Narrative and/or StratCom Core Message. A brief narrative/story that sums up the intent in a resonant manner, ideally with a sentence that encapsulates the issue.
 - d. StratCom Objectives/Effects. The linkage between the strategy and the information effects and activities that will support achieving success.
 - e. StratCom Themes. The (3-6) themes which guide message development by communicators in support of achieving the StratCom objectives/effects. These are not the same as messages, but overarching themes and approaches intended to gain and maintain support among audiences. Examples could include broad themes such as 'unity' and 'resolve' with succeeding message development consciously incorporating them in day to day activities.
 - f. Focus Topics. Focus topics are designed to complement StratCom themes and to identify specific activities and/or calendar events around which focused StratCom action should be considered.
 - g. Coordination. An overview of the key roles and responsibilities of specified headquarters in delivery of the StratCom approach.
5. Additional annexes can be attached as required, concentrating on more specific issues, such as audiences and implementation. Audience analysis is of particular importance in this respect. It must be understood that a framework is a catalyst for action and should be supported by follow-on implementation plans and action.

Concept paper for a Strategic Communication approach to security and defence sector in the Republic of Moldova is developed by the Platform for Security and Defense Initiatives and the StratCom Academy, with financial support from the KAS Foundation Moldova.

Platform for Security and Defence Initiative (PISA) is non-governmental organization that aims to provide a platform for civil society, experts, researchers, journalists to contribute to the supervision of the work of the security and defence sector, but also to ensure a constant and transparent dialogue between civil society actors and institutions in the security and defence sector, as well as decision-makers with competences in this sector.

Republic of Moldova

The StratCom Academy brings together strategic communications experts who have all played leading roles in the development and evolution of the NATO and National strategic communication policy and doctrine, processes and campaigns. Their experience covers all levels, across political and military spectrum, to the frontlines of major military, disaster response, and humanitarian operations.

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