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Session I - Supporting paper

**EXPERIENCE OF THE SSORM IN THE PUBLIC RELATIONS DURING THE FIELD
CONDUCTING OF THE CENSUS OF POPULATION, HOUSEHOLDS AND
DWELLINGS IN THE COUNTRY, 2002¹**

Submitted by The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia²

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The census as the most massive statistical survey in the country requires an involvement of a large number of subjects in the country, irrespective if they have a close co-operation with statistics and with the objectives and goals of the statistical surveys. Moreover, it raises strong public interest because of the large importance of its output results. In our country, where the census was conducted one year after the war crisis and after the signing of the Ohrid Frame Agreement, it was very important to inform the population objectively and transparently in order to build mutual trust.

2. To realize efficient public relations for State Statistical Office (SSO) it was not only an important task but also a great challenge. SSO realized all necessary activities in order to provide completely, timely and qualitatively informing of the citizens in the country and abroad. SSO informed about the Census importance and goals, about its flow and the process of enumeration and gathering of the census row material. It presented in appropriated manner the practical conducting of the Census 2002.

¹ This paper has been reproduced in the form in which it was received, because the ECE secretariat received it too late in order to subject it to any form of formal editing. It is being made available to all participants in this form so that they will be able to read it prior to coming to the meeting. The designations of all terms used in the paper are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of either the United Nations or the European Commission

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II. PRIOR PREPARATIONS

3. From its previous experience SSO knows that good co-operation with the population is one of the basic preconditions for successful census conducting on the field. This could be achieved only with a well informed population, that is to say only if citizens dispose with reliable data based on facts, which they got from the free media.

4. SSO nominated a spokesperson that was involved in all activities related to the Census, 2002, respectively she was a part of the strategic team (Census Bureau, and later Census Headquarter), that had resulted with a good knowledge of all phases and decisions related to the census activities, and it had a key role for a proper media informing. At the same time the SSO's spokesperson was a spokesperson of the State Census Commission, as well. By doing this a parallel following of the information and media informing about their work was enabled.

5. US Census Bureau's expert trained SSO's instructors in order to prepare them for the journalists training, stressing certain domains, such as:

- Census aims;
- Census Law;
- Possible manners for describing of the census activities, stressing out the coverage and the possible errors that could appeared;
- Detail information for the economic data that will be obtained with the Census;
- Post enumeration survey - explanations in relation to it

This activity had provided easier selection of the topics for the journalists training and instructors training for the forthcoming lectures.

6. A journalist caravan was realized in order to instruct the journalists for the Census, so they would have a solid base when informing the population about all peculiarities for Census conducting. The Caravan visited seven regional centers established by the Journalist Association in the country, where more than 300 journalists obtained complete information for:

- Census content;
- Time and method of conducting;
- Organization of the field activities;
- Individual data protection.

Following materials were distributed to the journalists:

- Census Law;
- Leaflet with basic information for the Census 2002;
- Brochure with statistics from the previous censuses.

This caravan was organized as a joint co-operation between SSO and Journalist Association of the country and it was completely sponsored by the USA Agency USAID. During the caravan SSO's instructors received lots of questions and they tried to explain them in a simple and plastic manner all Census elements.

7. The International Republic Institute in co-operation with SSO organized Government Communication Training. Representatives from SSO's Census Bureau and members from the State Census Commission were included in this training. It covered more domains, such as:

- Composition and transferring of the message;
- Aspects of pro-active communication;
- Running a press office;
- Media training etc.

The aim of this training was to provide a professional attitude during the performance of the persons that are included in the public communication. During the training more practical examples were done regarding the organization of a press office; following of the field activities in co-operation with the media representatives; preparation of press releases etc. Moreover few technical-organizational suggestions were given, which during the census conduction on the field were used.

III. PUBLIC RELATIONS DURING THE PREPARATIONS AND CENSUS CONDUCTING ON THE FIELD

8. SSO had a double role in the public relations. In the contacts with the media it tried to transfer as much as possible information, to correct misinformation and to make effort the existing information to be understood well. Furthermore it tried to foresee the journalists' needs. In conditions where the Census had got a political dimension the most important was SSO to give one unified message that the census represents a regular statistical survey which is conducted in a certain periodicity and provides many important data for realizing the conditions in the country and for the planning of the future macroeconomic movements in the country. The State Census Commission run the political side of the Census in the public communication.

During the public relations for SSO it was very clear that a starting point always should be the Census Law and the Methodology for preparation, organizing and conducting of the Census and the real status of the conditions and that everything that was said in front of the journalists is official even in an unofficial conversation.

9. SSO had prepared a communication plan. With this plan the most important census points were marked and a certain event was planned with them (press conference, field visit, interview for an important medium). This communication plan was certainly only a frame for the public relations, and with it SSO acted pro-actively, while the exact realized contacts were in a much bigger number.

Media for communications

10. A separate census web site was established. On the web site, which was on Macedonian and English, all information related to the Census 2002 were placed, such as:

- Census aims;
- Census Law;
- Census Methodology;
- Census forms;
- Brochures;
- Press releases;
- Census points for enumeration abroad and everything else that was related to the Census 2002.

11. The usage of electronic mail was shown as a very quick and useful media for communication. It was used very often for sending information, press releases and other materials important for the media. Furthermore it was shown to be a very save method for providing a proper interpretation of the matters from journalists side.

12. Briefings with one or more journalists were appointed very often, where SSO's representatives informed them for the current situations.

13. Journalists preferred to get short information through telephone conversations. From its experience SSO has concluded that telephone responds should be avoided. There is a risk that the journalist won't interpret correctly the information. Due to the time limits in which the journalist should prepare the story, it is hard to believe that he/she would check again if he/she didn't understand well the news.

14. Census 2002, as an event of high state interest, was really attractive for the media. Therefore it was not a problem to provide their presence on the press conferences (more than 30 journalists on each meeting). Prior to each press conference, SSO had submitted a written invitation to all medias with an announcement of the topic of the press conference. Besides this, prior to each meeting it had contacted all media in order to confirm their presence. On these meetings the SSO's Director, as well as professionals and persons in charge for the Census were participating that

informed the journalists about the course of the census activities. An informal journalists network was formed from journalists that were nominated from their institutions to follow the Census, 2002. After realizing this informal group, SSO made a list of journalists that turn out as a very efficient when there was a need for quick reaction or when an important press release should have been delivered.

During the final preparations and conduction of the Census on the field four press conferences were held. On the meetings journalists were informed for:

- Realized activities;
- Current activities;
- Census financing;
- International Census monitoring and observation;
- Census data confidentiality;
- First field results;
- Post census survey etc.

15. Media published press releases related to the course of the census activities from SSO and State Census Commission every day. Press releases had a standard form, they were short and clear and written as news in order to assist the journalist to review them and interpretate. They were published on Macedonian and English. SSO informed the public with its press releases about all activities in the preparation phase and during the actual census conducting on the field:

- Census preparations;
- Preparations of the census instruments;
- Engagement of persons for census activities;
- Training of the persons engaged in the census activities;
- Starting of the Census field activities;
- Census data confidentiality;
- Course of the field census activities;
- Certain irregularities that were registered during the field work;
- Ending of the field activities;
- Legal possibility for persons that were not enumerated during the period between 01-15.11.02 to be enumerated in the Regional Census Commissions or SSO till 20.11.02;
- Starting of the Post census survey and the aims of this survey;
- Continual informing for the co-operation with the international monitoring;
- Concentration of the census material from the regional census commissions to the SSO.

16. During the Census conducting on the field, SSO was publishing a brochure every day. Its aim was to present:

- Census goals;
- Methodology for Census conducting;
- Current activities;
- 39 regional census commissions and state instructors;
- Anecdotes from the Census 2002;
- Census Headquarter and the working groups;
- State Census Commission;
- The Mission of the International Monitoring;
- Census data from some countries in the region etc.

Brochures were published on Macedonian and English. They were distributed to the readers in two forms: printed and electronic. Media used them as a good source for preparations of interesting stories.

IV. FACTS FOR THE PRESENCE IN THE MEDIA

17. SSO had an excellent co-operation with the media that were “bombarding” with requests for statements and performances of professional stuff from SSO, State Census Commission,

regional census commissions and Mission of the International Monitoring. During the final preparations and Census conducting on the field were realized:

- More than 60 appearance with statements on electronic media;
- More than 300 articles in the printed media.

There was a good co-operation and most frequently there was a forecast for a certain interview and agreement for the content of the interview.

VI. INTERNATIONAL MONITORING

18. The International Monitoring, whose general aim is:

- Confirmation of fair and impartial enumeration;
- Building of confidence in the Census;
- Widely acceptance of the results,

was often present in the public with its statements. SSO's statements as well as International monitoring statements were harmonized. This was a result of mutual highly professional co-operation.

VII. DEVIATIONS IN THE PROCESS OF ENUMERATION

19. In certain cases there was inappropriate implementation of the Census legislation, such as:

- Filling in the census forms with a pencil;
- Usage of photocopies as documents for enumerations of persons that are absent abroad;
- Data releasing by a regional census commission.

SSO and the State Census Commission were reacting quickly with an adequate press releases and statements for this cases. Doing this, an open and direct answer and explanations were given for each deviation from the Census Law and the Methodology for preparing, organizing and conducting of the Census. SSO was always stressing the fact that the above mentioned legislation is strictly respected and that it doesn't leave any space for sneaking of any deviation.

VIII. SUMMARY

20. All these activities jointly with the other informative-propaganda activities, have given the expected results: completely, qualitatively, objectively and timely informing of the population. Good co-operation with the media have contributed to the good co-operation of the population with the enumerators. SSO has confirmed itself as a professional institution which basic goal was to conduct the biggest statistical survey successfully and has succeeded to marginalize the daily political comments. The statements of all interested parts regarding their expression of trust to SSO as a professional institution and respectation of the census results are another confirmation to this assessment. SSO's experience in the public relations during the Census, 2002 could be assessed as a very positive one that is of great benefit to SSO, and which could be also used wider.
