

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs Political Party Program, Croatia Cycle Three Image Building Working with the Media

by Mike Spear and Karen Gainer¹

"We should think like wise men but speak as common men"
Aristotle

Elections are not won or lost in the four weeks leading up to an election, but in the work that a party does between elections. Political parties must learn how to campaign between elections on local issues that matter to people. Branch offices need to identify local issues and take actions on them. Simply put, a successful branch office must reach out to citizens and include them in the work of their political party all year round. Parties must work to become active members of their local community. In this way political parties will become relevant to ordinary citizens. Branch offices which understand local issues will win the support and confidence of voters who together will build a more open and accountable democratic system.

Role of a Media Campaign:

Your media campaign should serve to demonstrate that your party is one which speaks to and represents people all year round. A media campaign does not exist on its own - It is the vehicle through which you communicate your message to your voters. An ideal media campaign is one which highlights the actions which you are taking in the community.

The action can be as simple as a press conference to announce your intentions to take action, it could be a public forum on the subject of your action, or it can be as elaborate as a public sports or cultural event. The point is, your party needs to become political activists in your community- your media campaign should serve to inform the public of the actions your

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party is taking in and for the community. It is the actions of your party which should form the foundation of your media campaign. The media will always respond first and foremost to news. An action to cleanup the beach is news, a public forum on health is news. The media will want to cover it. A news conference about your party is **not** news.

Why You Need to Get the Attention of the Media:

Where the media is independent and open; members of the press- from the print media to radio, and television are free to ignore you. There are endless stories concerning your community, your city and your country everyday. Many of these stories go unreported; that is an unfortunate fact of media and politics everywhere. You must create a reason for the media to tell YOUR story about YOUR issue.

Planning your event to get Media attention:

Media like to tell stories. They need to fill the pages of a newspaper with photographs and text, radio with sound, and television with pictures. If you can supply the stories that will fill the space or the time, you are more likely to receive media attention.

People follow the news especially when they have a stake in it or when it touches them personally. An event will make the news if the media believes it will reach out to their audiences. Remember that the opinions of you or your party alone are not news.

Telling your story:

People think and remember in images, in sounds, and in feelings rather than in words. In a dream you remember images, sounds, feelings or even smells and not written words or abstract ideas.

This is the same in all cultures and you can build on this when communicating your story or message to the media.

Give the media images they can use for television, the sound clips that will work on radio, and events with photographs, that newspaper reporters can write about.

The Press Release:

Your press release must answer five basic questions:

1. **Who** is staging the event? Your party obviously! Make sure you include a contact name and phone number if the media want more information. If there are only certain hours they can call, make sure you mention those hours.
2. **Why** the event is happening? This is tied to the message you are trying to deliver. It is crucial that you use this part of the press release wisely. Keep it simple, direct, and to the point.
3. **What** will happen at the event - is it a press conference, public forum, etc? You can also send a press release out after an event to let the media know what happened, how many people attended, or what everyone had to say.
4. **When?** The time and date of the event must be clear.
5. **Where** the event is going to happen. Give directions if you feel it is necessary.

Try to keep your press release to one page. Media like to see all the necessary information at a glance. Remember you want to inform as many people in the media as possible regardless of whether you think they will attend your event. You should also send your press releases beyond the usual journalists. You should think about sending it to business people, local cultural organizations or other community leaders. You should use your press release as a tool to inform the wider community of your activities.

In terms of design of your press release, keep the writing simple, to the point and avoid jargon and rhetoric. Be creative in your writing as many media may simply use your press release or headline as theirs. The test of an effective press release is if the journalists simply publish your press release as their story!

The layout should also be simple with sufficient white space, adequate margins and with a large font. It should be easy to read. Use bigger, bold type for headlines.

Follow-up: After you send out your press release call the media to make sure it was received and to ask them if they will be attending. As a rule it is more difficult for them to actually say 'no' to you directly. Therefore it is important to maintain a comprehensive, current list of all media contacts, which includes; names, phone numbers, and addresses. Ensure to maintain a list of not only local media but national and international media as well.

The Press Conference:

Press conferences should not always be held in a room with a panel of people at the front speaking. You should think about holding your conferences outdoors. Think of a location which depicts what message you want to convey. For example, for a press conference on health-choose the front door of the local health clinic or hospital; a beach clean-up-go to the beach, etc. Think of places which would give the media an opportunity to tell the story in pictures. This will make your event stand out from other press conferences in the area. Everywhere in Croatia has unique landmarks which speak to the individual character of each region. Use these as backdrops. People will recognize the venue. It will serve to link your event to the place and issue at hand.

If you do choose to hold the press conference in the more traditional setting, ensure that the room has adequate lighting and suitable sound characteristics (big rooms have too much echo). Wherever you choose to hold the press conference make sure you take pictures or even a video for your own use. You may be able to use it later for a newsletter or other forms of publicity.

Be aware of media deadlines. Generally, an event that is too late in the day or near a holiday will miss broadcast or press deadlines. On the other hand if you have some bad news to deliver, later on a Friday afternoon may be ideal!

If you have a document or questionnaire that you will be referring to make sure there is a copy for everyone and a copy you can hold up for a photographer or television camera.

It is a good idea to send out notification for the press conference well in advance, then a reminder a few days before the actual press conference.

And finally, media like to be fed and watered. It does not hurt to let them know coffee and croissants will be served.

Building Media relations:

Believe it or not, media are people too. Get to know them whenever possible. Invite them for coffee, talk to them when they come to your press conference, or call them on the phone occasionally to let them know what your group is doing.

There is no guarantee that the media will carry your message or cover your event, but they will never cover your event if you never call them.

What to do if you or your party are accused of something:

Sometime other parties, organizations, or individuals may accuse you of doing something wrong. If they are right and you DID do something wrong, you owe it to yourself or the party to set things straight. If you did NOT do what you are accused of, you must clear things up in the public eye. Either way, remember some of the basic rules about press conferences, press releases, and media relations, then consider taking the following steps IMMEDIATELY:

- Express your concern about what MAY have happened;
- Promise to look into it and suggest a general timetable for the investigation;
- Promise to release details of the investigation;
- Point out the accusation may be false;
- Promise to review the final investigation report and say you will set things right if the accusations are true (and remember to be seen to do it!)

Tips for Radio Interviews:

Never say 'no comment'. People will assume you are hiding something and in politics perception is reality. If you are caught off guard either rephrase the question into the question you would have liked to have been asked, and then answer your question or ask your interviewer if you can return the call later in the day. This will give you time to collect your thoughts. This is fairly common and accepted practice. However, if you offer to call back

later, remember to do so. You must establish a reputation for promptly returning calls. In this way the media is sure to call back. Keep your answers short and simple so as to control your message. Work on giving 'sound clip' of 30-60 seconds. You need to be concise and know exactly what point you want to make. Limit yourself to one and at the most two ideas for any one interview. If you can consistently provide short "sound bits" then it will be very difficult for journalists to edit your words. It is always a good idea to make 'small talk' with the reporter beforehand to give yourself sometime to think about what you have to say.

Maintain eye contact with the interviewer. This will help you assess whether your statements are being understood by the reporter. Eye contact is also an important part of body language; it demonstrates confidence and a willingness to talk. Stand or sit straight up but stay relaxed. This will help keep your voice clear and even.

Let the interviewer control the microphone and equipment. People have a tendency to lean into microphones or get distracted by the reporter fiddling with the tape machine. Just do as they ask and ignore the technical side. If you have printed material that may help the reporter, give them a copy - it may help them write their story later.

Get to know the reporter. It will usually make the interview go better.

MEDIA SUMMARY:

1. Be open and cooperative.
2. Build personal contacts.
3. Don't say "I don't know" or "no comment". Always have *SOME* answer.
4. Always be well prepared for any media event or media contact.
5. If you or your party makes a mistake, admit it, say you are sorry, and move on.
6. Always think of ways to give the media good pictures, video, sound, or stories about people.
7. When things go wrong be ready to deal with the situation.

Attachments: Examples of Media Advisories

Press release examples:

ZS Zašto Stranka

Zvonin trg 5

Senj

052 342 675____

ZS TO HIT THE BEACHES

Every day our beaches seem to be covered in garbage that is not pleasant or safe for us or for our children.

To try to deal with the problem the ZS wants everyone in Senj to join with the Zašto Stranka in a clean up our beaches. Ekograd has donated garbage bags and the city crews promise to come by to pick up the garbage bags as we fill them.

ZS spokesperson Ana Zilena is excited about the event: " Broken bottles, old newspapers lying around, and garbage that has washed up on the beach are not a pleasant sight. By getting together on May 18th we can get the job done quickly and easily". Ms. Zilena also added that without the help of Ekograd or the city, the clean-up would have been much harder to organize.

Mayor Zdenka Zgrebo will be at the beach to start off the event on May 18th at 10:00 am and will be joined by ZS secretary T.Rex.

Thanks to Ekograd, there will be juice available to everyone who drops
by to help out.

For more information call: **Mikhail Špehar**: 052 342 675

MEDIA ADVISORY:

ZS **Zašto Stranka**

Zvonin Trg 5

Senj

052 342 675

HIT THE BEACH THIS SATURDAY

Don't forget that this Saturday at 10:00am, Mayor Zdenka Zagrebo and ZS Secretary T.Rex will be on hand to kick off the beach clean-up.

Ekograd has generously donated garbage bags to help the clean-up and company president Vlado Vlada is please to be part of the event.

" I felt it was important that our company be involved to make the beach look better not only for residents of Senj, but also for the thousands of tourists who come here every year.

Juice will be available for everyone who comes by to help us out.

Post Event MEDIA ADVISORY:

ZS **Zašto Stranka**

Zvonin trg 5

Senj

052 342 675

ZS Takes to the BEACH

Last Saturday, over 30 members of the ZS, Zašto Stranka, together with local citizens of the community took to the beaches of Senj, picking up over 25 kilos of garbage, broken glass and plastic bottles.

With the support of Ekograd who generously provided garbage bags and refreshments for the participants the event was seen by all as a great success.

Ana Zelima, speaking for the ZS said: " We were thrilled that so many students and neighbours came out to help restore our beaches to their natural and beautiful state. Also we were grateful for the support of Ekograd who provided garbage bags and refreshments for all participants. This was truly a community initiative! Summer is just around the corner. ZS wanted to help make our beaches clean for the tourists who will be here soon."

For further information contact: Mikhail Špehar: 052 342 675