



Policy Communication Report

Coherent Communication

Sustainable Governance
Indicators 2016

Indicator

Coherent Communication

Question

To what extent does the government achieve coherent communication?

41 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = The government effectively coordinates the communication of ministries; ministries closely align their communication with government strategy. Messages are factually coherent with the government's plans.
- 8-6 = The government coordinates the communication of ministries. Contradictory statements are rare, but do occur. Messages are factually coherent with the government's plans.
- 5-3 = The ministries are responsible for informing the public within their own particular areas of competence; their statements occasionally contradict each other. Messages are sometimes not factually coherent with the government's plans.
- 2-1 = Strategic communication planning does not exist; individual ministry statements regularly contradict each other. Messages are often not factually coherent with the government's plans.

Australia

Score 9

Australian governments have traditionally made considerable efforts to align their policy priorities with the messages that they communicate to the public. This policy continued over the review period. However, governments have been relatively unstable since 2007, rendering coherent policy communication more difficult. Efforts to align policy priorities with the messages communicated to the public have been aided by a number of factors: a tradition of very strong discipline across all the major political parties (perhaps the strongest among the Westminster democracies) and a tradition of suppressing dissent within the parties (often by the threat of de-selection at the next election); strong adherence to the Westminster doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility; and an activist mass media and political opposition that seeks to exploit any apparent policy divisions within the government.

Finland

Score 9

Since the prime minister's position is one of *primus inter pares* (first among equals), rather than one of absolute leadership, it is natural that the government's policy positions are advanced through discussion and consultation rather than through directives and commands. Furthermore, as directives and commands would challenge the principle of freedom of speech, such communication would probably be regarded as illegitimate and foster opposition. In practice, therefore, contradictory statements are rare. However, the fact that Finland has a tradition of broad-based umbrella coalitions that accommodate diverse interests and ideological shadings serves to diversify communication to some extent. This has been true of

communications from the Sipilä government, which have been notably vague and often undecided, reflecting tensions or even conflicts between the Finns Party and the other two government parties. The existence of an agreed-upon and fairly detailed government plan in principle serves to streamline communications; however, the present government has demonstrated that different interpretations of the plan can certainly arise.

Netherlands

Score 9

The Informatie Rijksoverheid service responds to frequently asked questions by citizens over the Internet, telephone and email. In the age of “mediacracy,” the government has sought to make policy communication more coherent, relying on the National Information Service (Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst, RVD), which is formally a part of the prime minister’s Department for General Affairs, and whose director general is present at Council of Ministers meetings and is responsible for communicating policies and the prime minister’s affairs to the media. The government has streamlined and coordinated its external communications at the line-ministry level. In 2011, there was a total of about 600 information-service staffers in all departments (down from 795 in 2009). Another effort to engage in centralized, coherent communication has involved replacing departmentally run televised information campaigns with a unified, thematic approach (e.g., safety). These efforts to have government speak with “one mouth” appear to have been fairly successful. For example, the information communicated by the government regarding the downing of a passenger plane with 196 Dutch passengers over Ukraine on 17 July 2014 and its aftermath was timely, adequate and demonstrated respect for the victims and the needs of their families. The continual technological innovation in information and communication technologies has led policy communication to adapting to the new possibilities. New developments are focused on responding more directly to citizen questions, exploring new modes of behavioral change, and utilizing Net-based citizen-participation channels in policymaking and political decision-making.

Citation:

Voorlichting, communicatie en participatie. Gemeenschappelijk jaarprogramma voor communicatie van de Rijksoverheid in 2014 (rijksoverheid.nl, consulted 23 September 2015)

Communicatie Online, Nog honderd persvoorlichters bij ministeries, juni 2011 (www.communicatieonline/nieuws/bericht/nog-honderd-persvoorlichters)

Overheidscommunicatie (rijksoverheid.nl, consulted 26 October 2014)

Sweden

Score 9

Improved communications dovetails with increasing coordination among the government departments. During the past couple of years, the government has developed and implemented a more coherent communications strategy. The flow of

communication from government departments and the PMO is now carefully controlled such that only a very limited number of officials are authorized to engage the media or other actors outside the core of government.

This strategy is very similar to the communications strategies today used in countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom. This strategy implies that cabinet ministers carefully assess invitations from radio and TV and, perhaps surprisingly, frequently decline those invitations if they cannot control the format or if they are to debate with representatives from the opposition.

This strategy has been rather successful; it may even have been too successful. The media are increasingly complaining about problems with access to ministers or other representatives of the governing parties. There is also increasing frustration with the government's tendency to be slow in providing the media with public documents. Even among several agencies there is now frustration about the decreasing access to government departments and government information.

Citation:

Dahlström, C. J. Pierre and B. G. Peters (eds) (2011), *Steering from the Center* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

Erlandsson, M. (2008), "Regeringskansliet och medierna. Den politiska exekutivens resurser och strategier för att hantera och styra massmedier", *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* 110: 335-49.

Jacobsson, B., J. Pierre and G. Sundström (2015), *Governing the Embedded State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

United States

Score 9

With politically appointed leadership in every agency, executive agencies and departments carefully coordinate their messages with the White House communications strategy. Agency press releases and statements on politically salient matters are often specifically cleared with the White House. During 2012 and 2013, a minor scandal developed over the administration's formulation of a public response to a terrorist attack on U.S. diplomatic offices in Benghazi, Libya. Eventually, the White House released 100 pages of e-mails detailing discussions between the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the White House. In the end, it appeared that most of the revisions were prompted by the State Department and the CIA rather than the White House, and were motivated more by concerns for accuracy than political effect. Regardless, the episode indicated the extensive involvement of the White House in public communications.

Canada

Score 8

Under the Conservative government, communications functions were centralized in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). All departmental policy communications had to be approved by the PMO. This process effectively coordinates the communications

(or lack of communications) of ministries, and aligns any departmental message with the government's overall communications strategy. In practice, however, there have been instances displaying an obvious lack of coordination in managing communications with the media. Media leaks – deliberate or not – are still part of the Ottawa process at both the political and bureaucratic levels.

The new Liberal government has promised a much more open communications policy and to date has delivered on this promise.

Denmark

Score 8

It is important for a government to effectively communicate its policies to its citizens. In Denmark, communication strategy and media attention have become important aspects of politics, and political survival depends on efficient communication. Good communicators are more likely to get ministerial posts than poor communicators. The PMO plays an important role in communication, and in recent years prime ministers have employed media advisers.

There are only a few examples of ministers speaking out on issues that were not in accordance with the government's policy. In such cases, the prime minister will act swiftly and a corrective statement will follow from the minister in question – or he or she will most likely be replaced.

However, the fact that Denmark usually has coalition governments can in some cases create problems in policy communication. This may arise both due to different viewpoints within the coalition and the need for the different government parties to communicate their views and visions, especially as the next election approaches.

Citation:

Henning Jørgensen, *Consensus, Cooperation and Conflict: The Policy Making Process in Denmark*, 2002.

Jørgen Grønnegård Christensen et al., *Politik og forvaltning*. 3. udg., 2011.

Hungary

Score 8

The PMO has sought to coordinate and control the government's communication. It has placed regular "success stories" in the government-controlled media, which are often based on a dubious interpretation of statistics and border on propaganda. Ministers have tended to follow the wording of the prime minister in their own statements. For that reason, the cabinet has often been derided as a "parrot chorus." Since the 2014 elections, however, the National Communications Office has been less and less successful in ensuring coordination and discipline. Ministries have provided diverging information on many issues thereby exposing problems with coherency in government communication. These incoherencies have pretty much reflected the emerging cracks in the Fidesz camp.

Latvia

- Score 8** The government office organizes weekly coordination meetings of ministerial communication units. Communication and statements are generated by the ministries and are generally consistent. A communications coordination council sets annual priorities for the main messages to be propagated to the public. Communication messages are coordinated prior to weekly cabinet meetings. However, this system means that partisan ministerial disagreements are highly visible.

Luxembourg

- Score 8** After Council of Ministers meetings on Fridays, the prime minister holds a public press conference to communicate the body's work effectively and coherently. This weekly press briefing had been the government's main method of communicating. Whereas public press briefings under former Prime Minister Juncker were rare toward the end of his administration, public relations have been given more importance under the new coalition.

Aside from the prime minister, no government member has a press officer. Reporting directly to the prime minister, the state Press and Information Service (SIP) works to coordinate a coherent and wide-ranging government communication policy. Government members are encouraged not to voice disagreement in public so as to give the impression of unanimous decision-making. The search for consensus is one of the main traditions in Luxembourg government. In 2010, however, ministers spoke out publically over austerity, a policy that the coalition began modifying shortly after the beginning of this parliamentary term.

During the years of the Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party (LSAP) and the Christian Social People's Party (CSV) coalition, the press reported that there were some disagreement between government members, but this was never expressed explicitly by government members.

Citation:

<https://www.gouvernement.lu/4021433/attributions>

For further information: <http://www.gouvernement.lu/sip>

<http://www.wort.lu/de/politik/nach-dem-ausrutscher-von-schneider-die-acht-groessten-kommunikationsspannen-der-regierung-553d34f80c88b46a8ce581f0>

Norway

- Score 8** Norway has had coalition governments in recent years. These coalitions have worked effectively, but there will unavoidably be disagreements within any coalition, including in the current conservative-liberal coalition. The dynamics of party politics

require that disagreements on important matters find some expression, leading to an occasional lack of clarity in government communications. On the other hand, Norway's coalitions have been remarkably cooperative and its cabinet members well-behaved, often going to great lengths to avoid airing disagreements in public.

Switzerland

Score 8

Switzerland's government acts as a collegial body. All members of the government have to defend the government's decisions, irrespective of their own opinion. However, in the 2003 – 2007 period, when the Swiss People's Party's (SVP) Christoph Blocher participated in government, communication was less coherent than before and afterward, and the country's politics moved in a more populist, aggressive and confrontational direction. Although the current government is much more consistent in its public statements, coherence has not yet returned to the level reached in the 1970s through the 1990s. The new government elected by parliament in December 2015 includes two SVP members who will have little incentive to increase communication coherence. The following factors have contributed to this decline in the coherence of government policy communications:

- the structure of the collegiate body itself, which makes it difficult to speak with one voice in the mass media age;
- political polarization, even among the members of the broad coalition government;
- the systematic distortion of the Federal Council's communication leaks on the part of some aggressive media outlets; and
- the Federal Council's lack of authority or capacity to punish and deter communication leaks, and its inability to manage its communication policy effectively.

United Kingdom

Score 8

Compared with the culture of secrecy of earlier decades, government has become much more open in the United Kingdom in recent years. This is due to a combination of the Freedom of Information Act passed by a Tony Blair-led Labour government, and a willingness to use the internet to increase transparency and open up government. The recently renamed www.gov.uk website provides extensive information on government services and activities, and has been redesigned to be more user friendly. The site is part of the Open Policy-Making (OPM) initiative, which also includes a blog and novel approaches such as a "policy lab" that was launched in 2014. These are recent innovations appear to represent a new means of enhancing communication.

Occasional differences do occur between ministers and/or special advisers, which causes some tensions. In 2014, this led to the resignation of a Home Office special

adviser after she was found to have publicly briefed against another minister. The prime minister tends to deal harshly with such discord.

Citation:

<https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/> is an open site with short articles on the OPM approach

Chile

Score 7

Each new government designs its own communication policy. As a result, strategic communication often tends to be rather haphazard at the beginning of a presidential term, but improves as the administration gains experience. Both the former and current governments have shown a fairly high number of communication lapses.

Iceland

Score 7

The government of Iceland generally speaks with one voice. However, in the so-called West Nordic administrative tradition, where a minister is responsible for institutions subordinate to their ministry, every minister has the power to make decisions without consulting other ministers. Nevertheless, ministers rarely contradict one another and generally try to reach decisions through consensus.

However, the previous government proved to be an exception to this tradition. In late 2009, members of the Left-Green Movement parliamentary group, including government ministers, opposed measures brought before the parliament by the government. Later, three Left-Green Movement legislators withdrew from the governing party coalition. This brought the government close to the threshold of becoming a minority government and forced it to negotiate with the opposition on contentious issues. Jón Bjarnason, the Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture between 2009 and 2011, left the government in 2011 in opposition to Iceland's application to become a member of the EU. However, despite internal dissent, the previous government's coalition arrangement held together to the end of its mandated term.

Since the formation of the current coalition government, formed between the Progressive Party and the Independence Party, the situation has reverted to the traditional Nordic practice. While the leaders of the two coalition parties have sometimes issued conflicting statements, this has not resulted in any open conflict.

Ireland

Score 7

Under the constitution, the government is required to act in a collective fashion and all ministers are collectively responsible for government decisions. This doctrine of

collective cabinet responsibility is normally adhered to and creates a clear incentive to follow a closely coordinated communications strategy.

In some controversial policy areas, communication between ministries as well as between ministries and the government has lacked coherence. Statements regarding health care continue to lack clarity and consistency, with inadequate coordination between the ministry and the government about what is planned and feasible in this area.

The launch of the new water services authority has been characterized by a serious lack of transparency and coherence. This problem has persisted throughout 2015. The government's attempt to remove Irish Water from the General Government sector and have it treated as a commercial state-owned body in the national income accounts was dismissed by a judgment from Eurostat: "Eurostat considers that Irish Water is a non-market entity controlled by government and should therefore be classified within the government sector." Over the past two years, there has been a complete failure to clarify this problem within government and to communicate the situation to the public.

Citation:

The complex details of the treatment of Irish Water in the national income accounts were discussed in an exchange of views between the Irish Central Statistics Office and Eurostat: see <http://www.cso.ie/en/surveysandmethodology/nationalaccounts/classificationdecisions/classificationofirishwater/>

Israel

Score 7

By law, the PMO supervises and coordinates activity between government ministries through a designated division. However, annual reports from the State Comptroller reveal major shortcomings in ministerial coordination, emphasizing the mutual tension and recrimination between ministries. Contradictory proclamations from different ministries are not uncommon, resulting from political power struggles within the coalition as well as from the treasury's stronghold on ministerial budgets and practices. In recent years there has been a shift toward creating a more "open" government and improving the government's communications vis-a-vis the third sector and the public as well as within the government itself. The new emphasis on sharing and transparency has somewhat ameliorated the technical aspect of the divides, but its influence over communicating policy is still uncertain.

Citation:

Ravid, Barak and Lis, Jonathan, "After criticizing the government: Netanyahu fires deputy minister of security Danon", Haaretz, 15.7.2014: <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politi/1.2377994> (Hebrew).

"Open government partnership: Progress report on action goals", Official state publication, October 2013, (Hebrew).

"Special report regarding the Mount Carmel Forest fire – December 2010 oversights, failures and conclusions," the state comptroller website, 20.6.2012, (Hebrew).

"The governmental guide for sharing: A model for inter ministerial cooperation", Official state publication,

September 2013, (Hebrew).

“The Prime Ministers Division for Coordination follow up and Control,” PMO’s website (Hebrew).

“The governmental guide for sharing: A model for inter-ministerial cooperation”, Official state publication September 2013 (Hebrew).

“The Prime Ministers Division for Coordination follow up and Control,” PMO’s website (Hebrew).

New Zealand

Score 7

The coherence of government communication strongly depends on the topic under consideration. All recent governments have been of the minority type, which has increased the chances of conflict between the governing party and its small support partners. This may include disagreement over what constitutes an electoral mandate, as well as accusations of broken promises when sacrifices have to be made during the course of the post-election negotiating process. Successive minority governments have freely acknowledged that tension is part and parcel of the governing process under a mixed-member proportional (MMP) system, with an “agree to disagree” clause being all that may separate the government from instability and collapse. That said, MMP governments have been remarkably stable, with only one early election (2002) since the advent of the proportional electoral system in 1996.

Citation:

Jonathan Boston, Innovative Political Management: Multi-party Governance in New Zealand. *Policy Quarterly* 5:2 (2009), 51-59.

Poland

Score 7

Ministry communication is coordinated by the Government Information Center, a department of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. However, ministers have occasionally voiced positions that differ from the government’s line. Moreover, the Government Information Center has failed to inform the citizens regularly or comprehensively about government activities.

Slovakia

Score 7

Learning from the mistakes of the preceding Radičová government, Prime Minister Fico has emphasized coherence in government communication. Capitalizing on his strong position in a single-party government, he has sought to control the messages of individual ministries and to set the tone. In order to do so, Fico has appeared frequently in the media. For major issues in 2015 such as the Greek debt crisis, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict or the refugee issue, no deviating opinions by members of the government could be identified.

Spain

Score 7

From the point the government took office in late 2011 until mid-2015, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy received considerable criticism for not taking questions and for regularly appearing at press conferences via a TV feed. The government's sparse communications led to a phenomenon in which many PP supporters had little understanding of many of the measures undertaken by the government they voted into power (particularly with regard to austerity measures and tax increases). However, after the Popular Party's poor showing in regional and municipal elections held in May 2015, the government party announced a new approach in which it would "be closer and communicate more with Spaniards." Rajoy himself and the director of his Private Office, Jorge Moragas, are in charge of this communication strategy.

At the administrative level, since the Popular Party took office in 2012 and the role of coordinating ministries' messages was returned to Deputy Prime Minister Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, communication coherence has improved. She is not only the head of the Government Office (Ministerio de la Presidencia, GO), but also serves as government spokesperson, seeking to ensure that the executive speaks with a single voice. A communication office (Secretaría de Estado de Comunicación) exists within the GO, and is responsible for the government's information policy both internally (through a consultation procedure with the ministries, and by providing a press service for the entire public administration) and externally (by informing the mass media of the government's activities, planning the political messages sent to the public and controlling institutional communication campaigns). The communication office and the spokesperson try to conduct coherent communication planning and ministries tend to align their statements and press releases with government strategy. Contradictions do occur from time to time, but most messages are factually coherent with the government's plans.

Citation:

In rare press conference, Rajoy blames poor election showing on failure to communicate (El País) http://elpais.com/elpais/2015/05/26/inenglish/1432626773_688913.html

La nueva estrategia comunicativa fue idea del presidente Rajoy http://cadenaser.com/programa/2015/07/31/hora_14_fin_de_semana/1438347161_254741.html

Italy

Score 6

Italian governments have in general coordinated communication rather weakly. Ministers and even undersecretaries have often been able and willing to express their personal positions without coordinating their comments with the Prime Minister's Office. Under the Renzi government the prime minister (especially with the use of

social media, such as Twitter) and his press office have largely overshadowed the communication of other government bodies. Instances of uncoordinated and contradictory communications have nonetheless taken place. This has mainly to do with the fact that information from the presidency has often anticipated the political relevance and details of measures still undergoing finalization within their respective ministries. As a result, the finalized policy often differs from that policy communicated earlier by the presidency. This has required corrections in communication and has sometimes given the impression that certain government policies are not sufficiently well thought out.

Japan

Score 6

Policy communication has always been a priority for Japanese governments. Ministries and other governmental agencies have long taken pains to publish regular reports, often called white papers, as well as other materials on their work.

Recent discussion of Japanese government communication has been dominated by the triple disaster of March 2011, in particular by the lack of transparency and failure to deliver timely public information about the radiation risks of the nuclear accident. This experience may have seriously undermined citizen trust in the government, although according to the Edelman Trust Barometer, trust levels in Japan have recently recovered somewhat.

The LDP-led coalition started into 2013 with a massive and – during its first months – highly successful public-relations campaign in support of its policy agenda, particularly its “three arrows” reform agenda. This included the carefully planned timing of announcements, trips and interviews; resulting in high approval ratings. Already in 2013, however, the government started to lose touch with public opinion, particularly with respect to the heavily criticized State Secrets Act. Despite some unpopular policies, voters nevertheless returned the ruling coalition to power in the 2014 general election. As a consequence of the highly controversial introduction of security legislation in 2015, the government lost some public support. The LDP-led coalition has pushed through its policy priorities more assertively than did earlier governments, while giving less consideration to dissenting opinions. For the time being, this approach seems to be working, with public approval for the government having increased again in late 2015.

Citation:

Edelman, 2015 Edelman Trust Barometer - Japan, Slide presentation, no date, <http://de.slideshare.net/EdelmanJapan/2015-edelman-trust-barometer-japan>

Public support for Japan's Abe rebounds after security law, New Straits Times Online, 30 November 2015, www.nst.com.my/news/2015/11/114703/public-support-japans-abe-rebounds-after-security-law

Lithuania

Score 6

The political fragmentation associated with Lithuania's ruling coalitions has made it difficult to formulate and implement an effective government communications policy. Line ministries and other state institutions are responsible for communicating with the public within their individual areas of competence; however, the Communications Department of the Government Office attempts to coordinate these activities and provides the public with information about the government's performance. For instance, a unified government portal that aims at providing relevant information to the citizens about the performance of the whole government (the cabinet, the Government Office, ministries and government agencies) was launched in 2015.

On the whole, the government lacks a coherent communication policy. Contradictory statements are rare but do occur to varying degrees depending on the particular government. Although the Butkevičius government announced that it would pursue a whole-of-government approach to public policy and management, the implications of this goal in terms of coherent communications had not been addressed at the time of writing. Moreover, Prime Minister Butkevičius has himself publicly made contradictory statements on such politically important issues as tax reform and the future of nuclear power in Lithuania, probably reflecting the diversity of opinions within his party and the ruling coalition, as well as changing political circumstances.

The OECD recently recommended that the core government rebalance its engagement with other institutions by emphasizing its role as a facilitator of exchange and dialogue across government and with non-state stakeholders, rather than primarily focusing on top-down communication.

Citation:

OECD, *Regulatory Policy in Lithuania: Focusing on the Delivery Side*, OECD Reviews of Regulatory Reform, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2015 http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/regulatory-policy-in-lithuania_9789264239340-en.

Portugal

Score 6

The government's communication strategy improved during the reporting period, with the government avoiding substantial communication mishaps. This was in part aided by the stabilization of austerity policies, though the fact that it was an election year also appears to have been important in ensuring more effective communications.

In June 2015, the government abolished the Secretariat of Social Communication and integrated its functions into a reorganized General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, into the regional commissions for regional development, and into the Agency for Development and Cohesion.

South Korea

Score 6

Park is seen as a president who lacks the ability to clearly communicate her objectives and policies to the public. As compared to previous presidents, she appears far less in public and gives fewer press conferences. Three years into her official term, she had given only four press conferences, with some lacking a question-and-answer or focusing on a previously set short list of questions.

The government seeks to coordinate communication between ministries, but contradictions between government-agency statements occasionally happen. Bureaucratic politics and turf rivalry take place at various levels of policy-making and communication, but contradictions among ministries can be generally mediated by the Blue House and prime minister's office.

:

JoongAng Daily 12 April 2010

Austria

Score 5

The cabinet uses occasional, informal policy-coordination meetings to define the general direction of government policies. Following such meetings, the government holds press conferences to provide the public with information about what has been decided. These are typically led by the chancellor and the vice-chancellor, representing the two government coalition parties.

Government communication is overwhelmingly dominated by the individual ministries. This communication is usually also seen as an instrument for the promotion of one of the coalition parties' agendas (and of the specific minister belonging to this party), rather than the agenda of the government as such.

An interesting example of communication deficits could be observed in 2014: The cabinet (in particular the ministers for European and international affairs and integration) drafted a bill regarding the legal status of Austria's Islamic community. What could have been seen as an attempt to improve the legal standing of a rather fast-growing minority was instead understood by the Islamic community as an attempt to isolate and treat their community according to different standards. As a result, the draft was criticized by the Islamic community immediately once it became known.

Belgium

Score 5

Maintaining coherent communication is sometimes difficult in coalition governments, in which each party needs to display its contribution and its power to its voters. In addition, the center-right Flemish Christian Democrats (CD&V) in the

federal coalition have quite different views on inequality and some tax expenditures than do the more “radical” liberal-right N-VA. There also are some cleavages between the only French-speaking party and the other three Flemish-speaking parties in the coalition. These tensions limit the prime minister’s capacity to control the communications of his ministers and of other high-profile politicians who criticize the government despite belonging to a government-coalition party. In spite of this, communication remains surprisingly coherent under the circumstances.

Citation:

<http://www.levif.be/actualite/belgique/michel-ier-risque-fort-de-rester-dans-l-histoire-comme-le-gouvernement-de-la-zizanie/article-opinion-365977.html>

Estonia

Score 5

Ministries in Estonia’s government have remarkable power and autonomy. Therefore, ministers belonging to different political parties in the coalition government sometimes make statements that are not in line with other ministries or with the general position of the government.

Germany

Score 5

In a formal sense, the federal government’s Press and Information Office is the focal point for communication, serving as the conduit for information originating from individual ministries, each of which organizes their own communication processes and strategies. However, this does not guarantee a coherent communication policy, which is a difficult goal for any coalition government. There is a persistent tendency of coalition partners to raise their own profile versus that of the other government parties. This became very clear during the political conflicts over migration policies in 2015. Conflicts between the governing parties were widely and openly discussed with little evidence of a coherent communication strategy.

Mexico

Score 5

Communication performances under recent administrations have been mixed. Former President Fox had remarkable public-relations talent, but not much grasp of policy detail. For example, the president and the Finance Ministry occasionally provided conflicting economic forecasts. Under former President Calderón, there was marked enhancement in the general quality of official communication, but Calderón had less feel for the news. He certainly ran a much tighter ship, with a clearer government line, but there were sometimes communication problems between the security sectors. Various agencies, including the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Defense and the Attorney General, competed with each other to take the lead in fighting the drug cartels. Meanwhile,

the government failed to communicate its response to the disappearance of 43 university students in 2014 adequately or transparently.

Slovenia

Score 5

Ministerial communication with the public has been more coherent under the Cerar government than under its predecessor. Due to the prime minister's inability or unwillingness to control his coalition partners, however, there were instances of contradictory statements given in short periods of time. In particular, the ministers from the second-strongest coalition party Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS) have sometimes publicly opposed policies proposed or adopted by the coalition.

Turkey

Score 5

In spite of its centralized and hierarchical structure, Turkey's executive is far from being monolithic or able to speak with a single voice. For example, a spokesman for the Council of Ministers issues public declarations on behalf of the council, while a prime minister or minister may make different declarations. After former Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's election to the presidency, and the fall 2014 accession of Prime Minister (former Minister of Foreign Affairs) Ahmet Davutoğlu's government, public communications came from three different major sources: the president, the prime minister and the Council of Ministers. This has increased the need for a coordinated communications policy.

The minister of economy and the minister of finance have frequently expressed opposing views regarding macro- and microeconomic policies. When Ali Babacan, former deputy prime minister responsible for the economy, also participated in such public debates, the AKP was considered to have multiple "types of policies" regarding the economy. President Erdoğan also publicly criticized the Central Bank's interest-rate policy in late 2014 and early 2015, causing some speculative financial crises. Similarly, bureaucrats from various ministries also make opposing statements on economic policies, again causing public confusion.

A high-profile example of such variance emerged after the Ankara bombing in October 2015, when three different official views were expressed in public concerning the failure of security measures. While the minister of interior affairs claimed that "no failure" had been made in advance of the bombing, the deputy chairman of the AKP admitted negligence, and the prime minister wondered aloud if any failures had been made.

Citation:

Zaaf bir varmış bir yokmuş! AKP'li Şahin: Var; Bakan: Yok; Başbakan: Varsa..., 10.10.2015, <http://www.diken.com.tr/zaaf-bir-varmis-bir-yokmus-akpli-sahin-var-icisleri-bakani-yok-basbakan-inceliyoruz/> (accessed 27 October 2015)

Patates fiyatında bakanlar da anlaşılamadı, 8 May 2015, <http://www.ohaber.com/patates-fiyatinda-bakanlar-da-anlasamadi/> (accessed 27 October 2015)

Ali Babacan'ı Vekillik İçin Davutoğlu İkna Etti, 19 September 2015, <http://www.haberler.com/ak-parti-ekonomi-kurmaylarindan-vazgecemedi-7706500-haberi/> (accessed 27 October 2015)

Zeybekci ile Şimşek arasında konut çıkmazı, 14 Ekim 2015, <http://www.fortuneturkey.com/zeybekci-ile-simsek-arasinda-konut-cikmazi-21033> (accessed 27 October 2015)

Erdoğan Merkez Bankası'nı eleştirdi, dolar rekor kırdı, 4 February 2015, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/ekonomi/2015/02/150204_erdogan_dolar_faiz (accessed 27 October 2015)

Bulgaria

Score 4

The coherence of government communication in Bulgaria is relatively low. The communication activities of the various ministries are not centrally coordinated, so it is easy for the media to identify inconsistencies and contradictions in the information and positions of different ministries. Inasmuch as there is coordination between different messages, it is accomplished mostly through the political cabinets and the public-relations experts of the ministries rather than as a matter of formalized administrative communication-coordination procedure. Many civil observers of the policymaking process feel that all too often public announcements and communications aim at hiding rather than highlighting and explaining the true intentions of proposed regulations and policies.

Croatia

Score 4

The Prime Minister's Office is responsible for policy coordination and the communication of policy to the general public through the Public Relations Service. Under the Milanović government, contradictory statements by different ministries have increased, and the government has done little to streamline its communication policy.

Czech Republic

Score 4

While the Sobotka government has managed to prepare and put forward a series of important legal proposals and measures, it has largely failed to coordinate communication among different ministries, especially across the party lines. Coalition partners, especially ČSSD and ANO have been more than willing to express their different preferences and priorities, sharing these through the media. On a number of occasions, the general acceptance of government measures by the public has suffered as a result of contradictory statements about legislation from coalition partners.

France

Score 4

Government policy communication is usually subject to centralized control by the executive branch. One of the preoccupations of the executive branch as part of the Fifth Republic is to avoid disagreement or contradiction within the ministerial team, even when coalition governments are in power. There have been situations in which ministers expressing divergent views in the media have been forced to resign. Under the Hollande administration, the executive branch gave initially more leeway in this regard, as Hollande appears to prefer addressing differing views internally rather than have these differences of opinion be subject to external criticism. However in September 2014, the newly appointed prime minister made clear that he would not accept such public displays of dissent anymore, forcing the president to push out his dissenters.

The key problems with policy communication in France have come about as a result of the president and his administration's lack of strategic and decision-making clarity. The challenges that emerged a few months after Hollande's election called for policies (structural reforms, budgetary consolidation) which were not in line with his campaign pledges (and thus with his party's and voters' expectations). In this situation, the government failed to openly address these new challenges and to commit fully to the needed policy changes. Instead, poor communication of his budget-tightening measures led to much public criticism and the government was accused of "austerity" while no expenditure cuts were made. In the same way, it faced criticism of economic "liberalism" (an insulting term in French debates) when introducing prudent and gradual policy change. The President's high degree of unpopularity despite his rather timid reform approach can be explained, at least partially, by the awkward style and confusion found in the executive branch's policy communication. It was Prime Minister Valls, who came into power in April 2014, who had a more coherent and offensive vision on policy reform and budget consolidation. While it did provide a counter-example to Hollande's failures, this did not really resolve the lack of coherence of governmental communication.

Malta

Score 4

The Department of Information is responsible for providing public information on, among other things, government policies and plans. However, the department's communications approach is widely perceived as excessively partisan. Consequently, ministries employ their own communication officers with responsibility for public information assumed by individual ministries. On important policies, individual ministries occasionally engage public relations companies. Communication is also seen as a public relations exercise and in some cases the information released is of a superficial nature.

Romania

Score 4

The Ponta government has been only partially successful in its attempts to coordinate communication across ministries. Romanian media organizations have repeatedly reported contradictory statements issued by various ministers and the prime minister, undermining the coherence of the government's message. An extreme case was the legislation on increasing the pensions of members of parliament in June 2015. In order to shift the blame for the passage of this unpopular law to others, members of parliament and government officials alike have made contradictory statements regarding who has sponsored the law.

Cyprus

Score 3

The government's communications are channeled through the Press and Information Office, a department of the Ministry of Interior that hosts and offers logistical support to the government spokesperson. Liaison press officers are dispatched to line ministries. Long-standing problems of coherent communication or conflicting statements have persisted to some extent, but the current government has performed much better than its predecessor in this regard. Communication today takes place mostly through direct statements to the media. During the review period, the president and government suffered from frictions with state officials and other deficiencies that negatively affected the efficiency of their communication activities. The key role in presenting and explaining government decisions and policies was assumed by the president; however, this caused conflict with independent state officials. Individual ministers communicated plans and measures in their field of competence.

Greece

Score 3

Greece's improved fiscal status – manifest in the budget surplus for 2013 and 2014 – prompted the government to prematurely communicate optimism in the summer of 2014 that the country had successfully turned the corner in overcoming the economic crisis. However, by October 2014 it became clear that international capital markets were still a danger for the Greek economy, as the spreads on Greek state bonds were forbiddingly high. Greece needed and will continue to need an extension of credit from the Troika, as demonstrated by the protracted negotiations from January to July 2015 between the Syriza-ANEL government and the EC, ECB, ESM and IMF. During that period, statements by ministers were often contradictory or agnostic about the country's future. All available facts contradicted Syriza's electoral promises to abandon austerity policies and still keep the country within the euro

zone. The Syriza-ANEL coalition government, however, is clearly more innovative and more effective in strategic communication than preceding governments. While contradictions and incoherence prevailed, particularly in the beginning of Syriza-ANEL's term in power, the majority of Greeks would come to back the government in the aforementioned negotiations; more than six out of 10 Greeks accepted the government's position to reject the EC's second-to-last list of austerity reforms in the referendum of July 2015. Support of the government prevailed despite the fact that PM Tsipras made a U-turn after that referendum and promised to implement harsh austerity reforms. It was only in November 2015 that some protests started taking place against the government's plans.

Address | Contact

Bertelsmann Stiftung
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256
33311 Gütersloh
Germany
Phone +49 5241 81-0

Dr. Daniel Schraad-Tischler
Phone +49 5241 81-81240
daniel.schraad-tischler@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Dr. Christian Kroll
Phone +49 5241 81-81471
christian.kroll@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Dr. Christof Schiller
Phone +49 5241 81-81470
christof.schiller@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Pia Paulini
Phone +49 5241 81-81468
pia.paulini@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de
www.sgi-network.org