



Policy Communication Report

Coherent Communication

Sustainable Governance
Indicators 2017

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.

Canada

Score 9

The Liberal government has a more open communications policy than their predecessor, where communications were centralized in the PMO. One of the promises the Liberals ran on was to create an open and accountable government, and to date has been successful. Ministers are now responsible for coordinating communications between their own departments, the PMO and the Privy Council's office. As this process is still relatively new, the long-term effectiveness of this policy remains to be seen.

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. 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. For example, in 2011 the Dutch government decided to participate in the global Open Government Partnership.

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, Kabinet maakt werk van openheid (rijksoverheid.nl, consulted 9 November 2016))

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. It 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.

Australia

Score 8

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.

The current government has proven unable to public provide a clear sense of direction. In a range of policy fields (e.g. economic policy, foreign policy, climate change policy), the government has been unable to publicly communicate a coherent policy agenda.

Citation:

<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/walking-in-the-wrong-direction-malcolm-turnbulls-broad-retreat-on-climate-20160420-goat2p.html>

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. Even in one-party governments, like the current Lars Løkke Rasmussen government, different ministers may put emphasis on different aspects of a policy issue. However, one should expect fewer inconsistent statements from ministers in a one-party government than a multi-party government.

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.

Latvia

Score 8

The government office organizes coordination meetings of ministerial communication units. During 2015, 11 formal meetings were held. 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, at least at the beginning, 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 make the impression of unanimous decision-making.

Citation:

"Attributions." Le portal de l'actualité gouvernementale, www.gouvernement.lu/4021433/attributions. Accessed 21 Feb. 2017.

"Die acht größten Kommunikationsspannen der Regierung." Luxemburger Wort, 27 Apr. 2015, www.wort.lu/de/politik/nach-dem-ausrutscher-von-schneider-die-acht-groessten-kommunikationsspannen-der-regierung-553d34f80c88b46a8ce581f0. Accessed 21 Feb. 2017.

For further information:

"Service information et presse (SIP)." Le portal de l'actualité gouvernementale, www.gouvernement.lu/sip. Accessed 21 Feb. 2017.

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. It is also common for ministries to offer their opinion on issues – sometimes publicly –

which allows for the demonstration of differences of opinion across ministries regarding problems and their solutions.

Portugal

Score 8

The Costa government has been effective in terms of communication and coordination, despite being a minority government with an unprecedented parliamentary coalition. Indeed, its first year in office, it has been marked by a remarkable degree of stability, with its coherent communication contributing to this stability.

Citation:

Lei orgânica do XXI Governo available at www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/0-governo/lei-organica/lei-organica.aspx

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.

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.

Hungary

Score 7

The government tries to have coherent communication through drastic disciplinary measures at all levels. Coherent communication as the exercise of soft power appears initially in controlling agenda setting by launching new topics to divert the public attention from emerging problems in the media that can do harm to Fidesz politics. However, coherent communication sometimes fails at the top level because of the double-headed central communication scheme. On one side, the organization and supervision of the government and Fidesz party communication is in the hands of the ministry headed by Rogán. On the other side, PMO head Lázár has an important government press conference every Thursday, in which he often criticizes indirectly the Rogán-Habony group. Beyond this, confidential information has been increasingly leaked to the press from the closer Fidesz circles about the megalomania and luxury consumption habits of the new Fidesz aristocracy around Rogán and Habony. This information has usually been published in the tabloid press (Blikk and Bors) with high circulation. Supposedly, this confidential information has originated from the Lázár circle, their main rival, who thinks that Fidesz leaders should reduce corruption and act more moderately in general.

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 creation of Irish Water has been characterized by a serious lack of transparency and coherence. This problem persisted throughout 2016. 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 in 2015: "Eurostat considers that Irish Water is a non-market entity controlled by government and should therefore be classified within the government sector."

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. In 2013, representatives from several ministries wrote the “Governmental Cooperation Guide” in which they suggest guidelines for ensuring cooperation between ministries.

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

The Governmental Cooperation Guild – September 2013:

<http://ihaklai.org.il/Portals/0/Documents/articles/%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%93%D7%9C%D7%9C%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%A3%D7%A4%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%94%D7%91%D7%99%D7%9F%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%93%D7%99%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%9C%D7%94.pdf>

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: Multiparty Governance in New Zealand. *Policy Quarterly* 5:2 (2009), 51-59.

Spain

Score 7

Since his government took office in late 2011, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has received considerable criticism for not taking questions and for regularly appearing at press conferences via a TV feed. The government's sparse communications have 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, during the review period and coinciding with the elections, 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, were in charge of this communication strategy. At the administrative level, in 2016 the role of coordinating ministries' messages was given from to Deputy Prime Minister Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría to the new spokesperson, Íñigo Méndez de Vigo, who is minister of Education and Culture as well. 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. Though they do issue contradictory statements from time to time, 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

Noviembre 2016, El País: "Spain's new Cabinet suggests few changes to major policies" http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/11/04/inenglish/1478246610_894323.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 with respect to the government have recently recovered somewhat. Still, according to Edelman 2016, distrust is higher in Japan than elsewhere.

The LDP-led coalition started in 2013 with a massive and initially highly successful public-relations campaign in support of its policy agenda. 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. It also won the Upper House elections of July 2016, establishing a two-thirds majority in both houses. The LDP-led coalition has pushed through its policy priorities more assertively than earlier governments, while giving less consideration to dissenting opinions.

Citation:

Edelman, 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer - Japan, Slide presentation, 3 February 2016, <http://de.slideshare.net/EdelmanJapan/2016-edelman-trust-barometer-japan>

Werner Pascha, Overcoming Economic Weakness in Japan and the EU: The Role of Political Entrepreneurship and the Political Economy of Reforms, in: Jan van der Harst and Tjalling Halbertsma (eds.) *China, East Asia and the European Union. Strong Economics, Weak Politics?*, Leiden: Brill 2016, pp. 15-33

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, it was not able to achieve this goal by the end of its political term. 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 2012 to 2016 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.

Slovakia

Score 6

While Prime Minister Fico was able to capitalize on his uncontested position as party leader to streamline communication in the second Fico government, the situation has changed since the elections in March 2016. However, the positions of the members of the new coalition government on major issues in 2016 such as the EU presidency, the Brexit, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict or the refugee issue have been broadly similar, so that open conflicts have been confined to minor issues, such as license fees for public broadcaster Radio and Television Slovakia (RTVS). Keen on avoiding early elections, SNS and Most-Híd, the junior coalition partners, have been cautious to avoid engaging in open conflict.

United Kingdom

Score 6

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 government website (www.gov.uk) provides extensive information on government services and activities, and has been redesigned to be more user friendly. It is also a single gateway website, which aims to facilitate greater coherence in line with the government communications plan.

Government communication around the divisive issue of UK membership of the EU was deeply divided and this lack of coherence is still apparent as the government struggles to explain its stance to the public. Developing a clear government message will be a crucial task for the new prime minister, Theresa May.

Citation:

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

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. Government communication after the terrorist attacks on Paris, and then on Brussels, was more confused and less structured than typical. Occasionally, government ministers had near racist outbursts, in stark contradiction to the government’s official policy line.

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.

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. This tendency has increased in light of the upcoming elections in September 2017. Conflicts between the governing parties were widely and openly discussed with little evidence of a coherent communication strategy, particularly with regard to migration, but also with regard to motorway tolls and other policy issues. Given that the traditional political parties are confronted with the success of a new right-wing populist party, the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD), conflicts between the governing parties have increased and have become a burden for strategic and coherent governmental policy communication.

Iceland

Score 5

The government of Iceland generally speaks with one voice. However, in the so-called West Nordic administrative tradition, where ministers are responsible for institutions subordinate to their ministries, 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 2009-2013 cabinet proved to be an exception to this tradition since three Left-Green Movement parliamentary members withdrew from the governing party coalition. That brought the government close to the threshold of becoming a minority government and forced it to negotiate with the opposition on contentious issues. Despite this internal dissent, the cabinet coalition held together to the end of its mandated term.

Under the 2013-2016 center-right cabinet comprising the Progressive Party and the Independence Party the situation has reverted to the traditional Nordic practice. The leaders of the two coalition parties sometimes issued conflicting statements, but this did not result in any open conflict.

In early April, however, events took a dramatic turn following the publication of the Panama Papers, 11.5 million leaked documents that detail financial and attorney-client information for more than 200,000 offshore entities, exposing how wealthy individuals and public officials may use offshore bank accounts and shell companies to conceal their wealth or avoid taxes. On 3 April, the Icelandic state-run television

(RÚV) showed an interview with prime minister Gunnlaugsson (Progressive Party) on Swedish program “Uppdrag granskning” (mission investigation). He was asked about his and his wife’s ownership of an offshore bank account in the Virgin Islands. Gunnlaugsson denied ownership, but after having been confronted with the evidence, he walked out of the interview. On the second day after this incident he went to the president, without the knowledge of the leader of the Independence Party, to try to convince him to dissolve parliament and declare new elections. The president refused. Later the same day, Gunnlaugsson resigned as prime minister but continued as chairman of the Progressive Party. The vice-chairman of the party, Sigurður I. Jóhannesson, took over as prime minister and elections were announced for the autumn. At the party congress in early October, Gunnlaugsson lost the chairmanship to Jóhannesson. In addition to prime minister Gunnlaugsson, the names of the Independence Party leader (finance minister) and deputy leader (interior minister) were both found in the Panama Papers, as was the name of the President’s wife, the first lady. Thousands of protesters took to the streets in Reykjavík as in 2008, forcing the government to advance the upcoming parliamentary election by six months, from April 2017 to October 2016. These events starting with the world famous TV interview with the Icelandic prime minister at the beginning of April are the newest, and by far the most famous, example of open conflict in an Icelandic cabinet, earning the 2013-2016 cabinet the nickname “Panama government.”

Malta

Score 5

The Department of Information is responsible for providing public information on, among other things, government policies and plans. Each ministry has its own communications office to keep the public informed. Regular meetings of the permanent secretaries have enhanced communication procedures within government. Also the run-up to the EU Presidency has demanded better communication strategies and these have been adopted. On important policies, individual ministries occasionally engage public relations companies. Communication is also seen as a public relations exercise however, and in some cases the information released is superficial in nature.

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. Under former President Calderón, there was marked enhancement in the general quality of official communication, but Calderón had less feel for the news media. Even though President Peña Nieto was an effective campaigner, the current administration has generally failed to communicate the importance and implications of its far-reaching reform projects to the public, resulting in eroding

public support and low approval ratings. Too often its communication efforts have been limited to superficial promotional messages. In 2016, communication transparency and adequacy did not improve substantially but internal coherence improved.

Citation:

https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/10/opinion/enrique-krauze-mexicos-dubious-reforms.html?ref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FKrauze%2C%20Enrique&action=click&contentCollection=opinion®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=8&pgtype=collection

Poland

Score 5

Ministry communication is coordinated by the Government Information Center, a department of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. It regularly reports on government activities and connects to other ministries' press departments. However, the actual coordination of government communication has been low. Particularly, the Ministry of Economic Development and Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Affairs often put out contradictory statements. The information given by ministries has tended to be selective and highly propagandistic.

Romania

Score 5

Despite the technocratic character of the Ciolos government, its communication has suffered from a lack of coordination. For example in June 2016, Prime Minister Ciolos requested that Communications Minister Marius Bostan publicly apologize after making controversial statements about Romania's education system and teachers. Compared to previous governments, however, communication was more coherent.

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 and parliamentarians from the Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS), the second strongest party of the governing coalition, have sometimes publicly opposed policies proposed or adopted by the coalition.

South Korea

Score 5

President Park was seen as a leader lacking the ability to communicate her objectives and policies clearly to the public. Compared to previous presidents, she appeared far less in public and gave fewer press conferences, most of which additionally lacked any question-and-answer element.

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.

The Park Government on occasion announced vital policy decisions too suddenly and abruptly. News media reported allegations that Choi Soon-sil had influenced the agreement between South Korea and Japan on the comfort-women issue, as well as South Korea's decision to deploy the United States' Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile-defense system.

Citation:

JoongAng Daily 12 April 2010

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.

The minister of economy and the minister of finance have frequently expressed opposing views regarding macro- and microeconomic policies. For example, 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. This situation did not change with the governmental reshuffle when Binali Yildirim took over the prime minister's office. 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)

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Austria

Score 4

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. In 2016, the newly appointed chancellor tried to change the routine press conferences after cabinet meetings by organizing media briefings for himself only. The vice-chancellor responded by holding individual press briefings, indicating an increasing rift between the coalition partners. This was certainly a blow to coherent information by the two coalition parties governing Austria.

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.

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. Prime Minister Borissov's personal style of communication, which involves contradicting statements made by his ministers or representatives of other parties in the coalition, often complicates matters.

Czech Republic

Score 4 The Sobotka government 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 or governmental position 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 of the policy communication in France are the result of the President's 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.

Croatia

Score 3 The Prime Minister’s Office is formally responsible for policy coordination and the communication of policy to the general public through the Public Relations Service. However, the Milanović government did little to streamline its communication policy. Under the Orešković government, the two parties in government, HDZ and MOST, followed their own communication strategies and these were never reconciled.

Cyprus

Score 3 The government’s communications are channeled through the Press and Information Office (PIO), a department of the Ministry of Interior. PIO hosts and logistically supports the government spokesperson and has liaison officers to line ministries. Today’s over-mediated environment exacerbated, to some extent, long-standing problems of coherent communications. During the review period, the government’s communication continued to suffer from frictions with state officials and contradictions on competences or proposed actions that negatively affected its efficiency. The president assumed the key role of presenting and explaining government decisions and policies, with assistance from some individual ministers that communicated plans and measures in their field of competence.

Citation:

Our View: President to blame for lack of leadership in health battle <http://cyprus-mail.com/2016/06/14/president-blame-lack-leadership-health-battle>

Greece

Score 3 While Greece’s economic recovery is not really in sight, the fact that in the period under review the incumbent government finally agreed on the first review of the economic adjustment program with the country’s lenders, prompted government ministers, in particular the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Economy and Development and the government’s spokesperson, to make optimistic statements

about the Greek economy and reforms in 2016-2017. Such statements were not part of a well thought-out strategic communication plan. They rather reflected Syriza's reaction to the fact that for a large part of the period under review it trailed far behind the major party of the opposition in several opinion polls. Such government reaction was also owed to the fact that anti-government protests by different interest groups gained momentum in the same time period. Protests were fueled in most cases by the flagrant discrepancy between Syriza's pre-electoral plans and promises before it came to power and its actual government policies once it rose to power. In other cases, the disaffection of citizens, if not their gradual alienation from the government, stemmed from the fact that in specific policy sectors, such as taxation and education, the same minister or different ministers would publicly offer unclear information and incoherent statements, often contradicting each other.

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