



Policy Communication Report

Coherent Communication

Sustainable Governance
Indicators 2019

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 = Ministries are highly successful in aligning their communication with government strategy.
- 8-6 = Ministries most of the time are highly successful in aligning their communication with government strategy.
- 5-3 = Ministries occasionally issue public statements that contradict the public communication of other ministries or the government strategy.
- 2-1 = Strategic communication planning does not exist; individual ministry statements regularly contradict each other. Messages are often not factually consistent with the government's strategy.

Canada

Score 9

The Liberals have made good on their campaign pledge to adopt a more open communication policy compared to the previous Conservative government. Ministers are now responsible for coordinating communications between their departments, the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office. While the Trudeau government's media relations have arguably become more decentralized, the Prime Minister's Office has not fully abandoned control over ministers and departments. The PMO's objective is still to deliver coherent messages to the public. A recent paper on the communications strategy of both the current and previous governments concluded that considerable efforts are made to spin and frame government information. The prime minister now conducts a series of town hall meetings, which are open to Canadians across the country. These meetings are a sign of his willingness to engage and obtain feedback.

Citation:

Marland, Alex. (2017). Strategic Management of Media Relations: Communications Centralization and Spin in the Government of Canada. *Canadian Public Policy*. 43(1).

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 television 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; indeed, in some ways it may even have been too successful. Scholars and the media are increasingly objecting to problems in accessing ministers and other representatives of the governing parties. There is also increasing frustration with the GO'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).

Australia

Score 8

Australian governments have traditionally made considerable efforts to align their policy priorities with the messages that they communicate to the public. A number of factors have helped in these efforts: a tradition of very strong discipline across all the major political parties (perhaps the strongest among the Westminster democracies); a tradition of suppressing dissent within the parties (often by the threat of deselection 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.

However, governments have been relatively unstable since 2007, rendering coherent policy communication more difficult. The current government has proven unable to publicly offer a clear sense of direction, and has suffered from outspoken dissent by some members of government. 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.

Denmark

Score 8

Effective communication is increasingly important for policymakers, and communication strategies 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, but many ministries have upgraded and employ 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.

The nature of coalition governments, which are typical in Denmark, can occasionally 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. In the current government, the three coalition parties all feel a need to communicate their policy positions, even if the agreed government basis (regeringsgrundlag) will impose strict limitations.

Citation:

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

Jørgen Grønnegård Christensen et al., *Politik og forvaltning*. 4. udg., 2017.

Finland

Score 8

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 government parties. A conflict within the Finns Party in June 2017 almost led to dissolution of the government and new elections. The conflict was solved by the Finns Party parliamentary group splitting up into a radical group and a more moderate group (Blue Reform), the latter of which contained all of the party's ministers and remained in the government coalition. In addition, the National Coalition Party internally divided over the health and social care reform (SOTE), with the reform – having been postponed several times – only coming into force in January 2021.

The existence of an agreed-upon and fairly detailed government plan in principle serves to streamline communications; however, the present Sipilä government has demonstrated that different interpretations of the plan can certainly arise.

Latvia

Score 8 The government office organizes monthly coordination meetings of ministerial communication units, which are jointly known as Government Communication Coordination Council. During 2017, nine 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.

Citation:

Regulation of the Government Communication Coordination Council, Available at: https://mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/editor/vkkp_nolikums.pdf, Last assessed: 03.01.2019

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, at least on key priorities. 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. Communication of government policies is often dealt with by the line ministry responsible for the issue at stake.

Portugal

Score 8 Prime Minister António Costa's government showed itself to be mostly effective in terms of communication and coordination during the review period, despite being a minority government with an unprecedented parliamentary-support coalition.

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 to 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.

In 2018, two of the seven ministers announced that they would step down by the end of the year. Hence, parliament must replace these two ministers. These replacements are by their very nature a challenge for coherent communication of the federal administration.

France

Score 7

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.

Hollande's government communication was poor and messy. In contrast, Macron has defined a new strategy: precise indications about his program during the presidential campaign, a commitment to fully and speedily implement these policy measures, and strict control over the communication policy under the tight supervision of the Élysée staff. This has conferred a significantly higher degree of coherence on governmental communication. However, due to a lack of coordination between ministers, the presidential services and the political movement which supports Macron (LREM), the government's communication policy has been flawed, triggering changes in the organization of the Élysée communication unit. The Macron's distrust of the media has not helped, and the relationship between the media and the President's Office is far from optimal. The price has been a highly critical press, which tends to compete with social networks, and has prioritized form and style over substance. As communication is highly centralized and technocratic ministers often neglect the art of communication, the capacity of the executive to communicate with the public has been rather poor.

Hungary

Score 7 The government tries to maintain coherent communication by taking drastic disciplinary measures at all levels. Most Fidesz politicians avoid journalists. At public events, they do not give interviews, but confine themselves to reading out texts written by the Cabinet Office, which is headed by Antal Rogán. The government also seeks to control the agenda by launching new topics to divert public attention away from problems raised in the media that can reflect poorly on Fidesz. Government communication is coherent, but it is not designed to communicate information. It is instead an instrument of power politics aimed at bringing public discourse in line with the prime minister's and governing party's will. It uses fake news and manipulative strategies to achieve this goal.

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." In 2017, domestic water charges payable to Irish Water were abolished and money already paid to Irish Water was repaid.

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 presented guidelines to ensure 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. This trend of “open” government continued through 2016 – 2018, with greater emphasis placed on connecting government offices and services via online and computer services. This work has allowed for better communication and greater coherency in government work.

Citation:

Government ICT Overview of Activity 2018, ICT authority Website, 2018
https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/news/mabat2018/he/Tikshuv_Activity_06_singles.pdf

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).

Luxembourg

Score 7

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. At the end of the last parliamentary term, the prime minister similarly only sporadically held press briefings.

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 Luxembourg Ministry of the Interior does not respond to all inquiries from the press.

Citation:

“Der leise Abschied der Transparenz.” Luxemburger Wort, 25 July 2017. www.wort.lu/de/politik/pressebriefing-des-premiers-der-leise-abschied-der-transparenz-5969d4ada5e74263e13c4243. Accessed 23 Oct. 2018.

Netherlands

Score 7

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.

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 internet-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. But in 2017 the Dutch government was criticized for structurally misleading and insufficient communication on issues of animal disease and food safety due to prioritizing agricultural interests over public health. In general, government communication occurs in an increasingly challenging media environment in which competition, polarization, trolling and “fake news” represent major challenges. The line between government communication and information, and defending government policies is becoming more and more blurred.

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)

“We leren niks van de Q-koorts,” NRC.nl, 25 January 2017

“Onze gezondheid wordt bewaakt door de minister van boerenzaken,” Marc Chavannes, De Correspondent, consulted 12 October 2017.

New Zealand

Score 7

New Zealand has an unusual tradition of highly coherent and cohesive cabinets. The fact that the current government is a minority coalition of two parties with quite disparate policy objectives, supported by a third party with no history of government experience, means that there is a higher risk of incoherent communication among ministers and cabinet members (inside and outside of the government). That said, there is no systematic empirical evidence to suggest that the current government is less coherent in its communication compared to the previous one.

Spain

Score 7

A press office in the prime minister's entourage (Secretaría de Estado de Comunicación) and the government's spokesperson try to conduct coherent communication planning. Ministries tend to align their statements and press releases with government strategy. The conservative PP government (in office through May 2018) did not have a well-developed communications strategy. The management of the Catalan conflict was perhaps the best example of this problem, with unconvincing and contradictory statements released both internally and abroad. The PSOE government launched a more thoughtful political communications strategy after June, very much oriented towards the next elections. However, minor scandals linked to the previous behavior of the new ministers appointed, some policy reversals and interministerial disagreements (for example between the Defense and Foreign Affairs ministries regarding arms sales to Saudi Arabia) showed the limits of this strategy.

Citation:

September 2018, Politico, Sánchez's 100 days of commotion, <https://www.politico.eu/article/pedro-sanchez-spain-100-days-of-commotion/>

Austria

Score 6 Previous cabinets used occasional, informal policy-coordination meetings to define the general direction of government policies. Following such meetings, the government would hold press conferences to provide the public with information about what has been decided.

In the past, government communication was 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. As the new government is based – like the outgoing government – on two more or less equally strong coalition partners, this might not change in the future. However, these partners have – at least verbally – committed to a coherent communication strategy and in this regard have also agreed to use one press officer for both parties.

At the end of 2017, the coalition established a new style of centralizing political communication (“message control”). This has been a significant departure from the style of previous coalitions in which individual cabinet members communicated with the public directly. Now, communication is more or less centralized under the chancellor and deputy chancellor.

Chile

Score 6 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 governments of former president, Michelle Bachelet, and the current president, Sebastián Piñera, have shown a fairly high number of communication lapses. However, there is no reason to evaluate the coherency of the government's communication as significantly inferior to previous years.

Estonia

Score 6 Government ministries have remarkable power and autonomy. Ministers from different political parties sometimes make statements that are not in line with the general position of the government or not properly discussed by all coalition partners. For example, the idea of moving toward a universal health care system was proposed by the minister of health and labor in 2017. Similarly, at the end of 2018, the minister of foreign affairs publicly supported the U.N. Global Migration Pact, which led another coalition partner to publicly disagree with the minister.

Iceland

Score 6

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 make 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 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 2016, however, events took a dramatic turn following the publication of the Panama Papers in which 11.5 million documents were leaked. The documents detailed financial and attorney-client information concerning more than 200,000 offshore entities, and exposed the methods by which wealthy individuals and public officials used offshore bank accounts and shell companies to conceal wealth or avoid taxes. On 3 April 2016, the Icelandic state-run television (RÚV) showed an interview with Prime Minister Gunnlaugsson (Progressive Party) on a Swedish TV-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 new elections were announced for the autumn 2016. 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.”

An alleged breach of confidentiality and concealment led to the breakup of the Benediktsson cabinet (January 2017 – September 2017). After only eight months in power, the center-right three-party coalition collapsed when Bright Future announced that they were ending their coalition with the Independence Party. A two-sentence post on the official Facebook page of Bright Future stated: “The leadership of Bright Future has decided to end cooperation with the government of Bjarni Benediktsson. The reason for the split is a serious breach of trust within the government.” Here, they were referring to news, which had broken earlier that evening, that the prime minister’s father had provided a recommendation letter of “restored honor” for a man convicted of having raped his stepdaughter almost daily for 12 years. Benediktsson, despite having been informed about this by the minister of justice in July 2017, kept this matter to himself until a parliamentary committee compelled the ministry to release this information to the press. This affair reflects the pervasive culture of secrecy that permeates Icelandic politics.

The first year of the current Jakobsdóttir cabinet (November 2017 – present) passed without any notable public disputes.

Japan

Score 6

Policy communication has always been a priority for Japanese governments. Ministries and other governmental agencies publish regular reports on their work, including white papers and other materials.

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 has seriously undermined citizen trust in the government. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, the degree to which Japan’s public trusts the government has recovered somewhat since, but according to Edelman’s 2018 survey, the share of informed people reporting that they trusted the government has recently declined again, to 47 percent in 2017. For the public at large, this figure is only 37 percent, significantly lower than in many other countries.

LDP leaders occasionally make policy statements that are not fully in line with party positions, generally prompted by personal dissatisfaction with specific government policies. One recent example involved dissenting stances on plans to change the so-called peace clause of the constitution.

The LDP-led coalition has pushed through its policy priorities more assertively than earlier governments, while giving less consideration to dissenting opinions.

However, the confirmation of its two-thirds majority in the Lower House snap elections of October 2017 reflected the electorate's dissatisfaction with the opposition rather than approval of the LDP's policies, particularly on the issue of constitutional change.

Citation:

Ross Rowbury, Japan: Low Trust Challenges Forward Momentum, Edelman, 20 March 2018, <https://www.edelman.com/post/japan-know-trust-challenges-forward-momentum>

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

Abe's remarks on constitutional revisions inconsistent with LDP's intraparty talks, *The Mainichi*, 9 May 2017, <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170509/p2a/00m/0na/021000c>

Malta

Score 6

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 the government. Moreover, the run-up to the EU Presidency demanded improvements to the country's communication strategies. Today, individual ministers hold daily press briefings and occasionally engage public relations firms. Despite the apparent progress, no studies exist to assess the overall impact. Communication strategies are today formulated with a greater amount of expert input than was previously the case, and communication between ministries has been enhanced. In 2017, the government spent more than €2.5 million on social-media advertising. In 2018, the Malta Financial Services Authority spent €200,000 for communication-strategy advice, seeking to improve Malta's reputation with European institutions.

Citation:

How the Maltese government spend over 2.5 million in social media ads. *Malta Today* 07/11/17
Times of Malta 06/11/18 MFSA spends €210,000 for communications advice

South Korea

Score 6

President Moon Jae-in has emphasized the importance of cooperation among the relevant ministries for promoting sustainability. Significant agenda items requiring interministerial collaboration include the proposed energy policy, water-management policies and the smart-city creation project. In addition to communication with ministries, President Moon has placed a high priority on communication with citizens. He engages in more frequent press briefings than his predecessor, and holds public hearings where he is likely to have more opportunities to have direct

conversations with citizens. Moreover, as a symbol of efforts to reach out to citizens and promote communications with the general public, the government has begun allowing citizens and foreign tourists to drive or walk near the Cheong Wa Dae presidential office at all hours.

Citation:

KBS News. "Activate the ministerial meetings for better collaboration." July 28, 2017. (In Korean) <http://news.kbs.co.kr/news/view.do?ncd=3523871>

Czechia

Score 5 The Sobotka government largely failed to coordinate communication among different ministries, especially across the party lines. Coalition partners, especially ČSSD and ANO were more than willing to express their different preferences and priorities, sharing these through the media. Under Prime Minister Babiš, government communication has become less cacophonous. However, the streamlining of government communication reflects a bowing to Babiš by both the ANO ministers and the Social Democrat coalition partner rather than any coordination among equals.

Lithuania

Score 5 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 and the elections calendar. 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. Several ministers in the current government have little political

experience, making it more difficult for government to effectively communicate policies.

In its 2015 report, the OECD recommended that the core government rebalance its engagement with other institutions by emphasizing its role as a facilitator of exchange and dialog across government and with non-state stakeholders, rather than primarily focusing on top-down communication. However, the government of Prime Minister Skvernelis, composed mostly of non-partisan ministers (so-called professionals), also faced difficulties in coordinating their communications on policy priorities and reforms undertaken, in particular in 2018 as the 2019 municipal and presidential elections approached. The prime minister himself has increasingly been criticized, in particular, when he accused the Conservative party of conspiring with foreign services and when he unexpectedly sacked three ministers in late 2018, apparently without informing them in advance.

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.

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 outgoing President Peña Nieto was an effective campaigner, his administration 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. For example, the government's statements regarding the disappearance of 43 Ayotzinapa teaching college students was a disaster. It is expected that the communication skills of the new AMLO administration will improve.

Citation:

USA Today (2018). Mexico's unpopular president to leave behind troubled administration mired in scandal, controversy, Sep 12, 2018. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/09/12/mexican-president-enrique-pena-nieto-defends-unpopular-administration/1265941002/>

Poland

Score 5

Ministerial 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. Information provided by ministries has tended to be selective and highly propagandistic. The new government Center for Strategic Analysis is supposed to overcome this problem.

Slovakia

Score 5 The formation of a coalition government after the 2016 parliamentary elections has made it more difficult to streamline government communication. However, until the coalition crisis in August 2017, SNS and Most-Híd, the junior coalition partners, were cautious to avoid engaging in open conflict. In the 2018 government crisis, Smer-SD's coalition partners were initially demanding the resignation of the minister of interior, but as more was revealed, they pushed Prime Minister Fico to step down. Eventually, all coalition partners agreed to not hold early elections but continue in this government constellation with a new prime minister. Occasionally, the policy statements of individual ministers have deviated from the government strategy designed in the program manifesto.

Slovenia

Score 5 Ministerial communication with the public was more coherent under the Cerar government than under its predecessor. However, there were instances of contradictory statements. In particular, the ministers and parliamentarians from the Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS), the second strongest party coalition party, sometimes publicly opposed policies proposed or adopted by the coalition. The new Šarec government started its term with several public clashes over the appointment of ministers, who performed poorly in front of the parliamentary committees, and Damir Črnčec, the prime minister's new national security advisor.

United Kingdom

Score 5 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 (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.

On international measures, such as the Open Data Index or OECD government assessments, the United Kingdom scores well and there is clearly a strong push from

within the administration to enhance communication, for example with a strategic communications plan and a single communications budget.

However, while the mechanisms of communication are laudable, delivery can be criticized. Government communication around the divisive issue of UK membership of the European Union has been far from clear and this lack of coherence is still apparent as the government struggles to explain its stance to the public. So far, Theresa May has been unable to develop a clear message for a government which has seen an unusually high number of ministerial resignations. The division that marked the Brexit campaign has split the cabinet and resulted in intra-Conservative parliamentary quarrels.

Citation:

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

Belgium

Score 4

Maintaining coherent communication has proven difficult for the Michel I government, with each party seeking to make a display of its power to its voters, particularly as the new electoral cycle has approached (2018 local elections and 2019 regional, federal and European elections). For example, members of the Flemish Christian Democrats (CD&V), tasked with pleasing the party's center-right and center-left wings alike, have quite different views on immigration, inequality and taxation than do members of the more liberal-right N-VA. On some occasions, the prime minister's statements have even been publicly contradicted by other members of the government.

At the regional level, a series of scandals involving the abuse of public positions for private gain shattered the Walloon government coalition between the Socialists and the Christian Democrats. The Christian Democrats withdrew its confidence in the government, which provoked ill-managed negotiations to form a new government. During that phase, many pieces of information leaked to the public, with the government seeming losing any capacity to manage communication.

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. Under recent coalition governments, the lack of coherence is exacerbated by the lack of informal coordination between ministries. Moreover, all too often public announcements and communications aim to hide

rather than highlight and explain the true intentions behind proposed regulations and policies. A good case in point is the government communication about the Belene nuclear power plant. Whereas the government's initial announcements stressed that the project was re-activated due to interest from Chinese investors and Chinese construction companies without any Bulgarian commitments or finances involved, it has turned out later that Russian investors and companies, and Bulgarian public financing will also play a major role in the project.

Germany

Score 4

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.

After the 2017 general election and especially in 2018 once the new grand coalition was in office, conflicts between the governing parties were widely and openly discussed with little evidence of a coherent communication strategy. This was particularly apparent with regard to migration, but also with regard to other important policy issues, such as finding an appropriate way to deal with the rise of the new right-wing populist party, the AfD. In terms of coherent government communication, 2018 was a disaster for the federal government.

Italy

Score 4

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 had largely overshadowed the communication of other government bodies. Under the Gentiloni government, the prime minister and his press office have adopted a much less aggressive communication strategy. The prime minister intervened far less often and generally adopted a softer tone. Due to its dualistic political structure, with the two deputy prime ministers (i.e., the coalition party leaders, Di Maio and Salvini) overshadowing the prime minister, the Conte government has so far shown a rather incoherent communication "strategy."

Romania

Score 4 Both the Tudose and Dăncilă governments have lacked a unified and coordinated communications strategy, defaulting to a decentralized approach with individual ministries communicating new policy initiatives and programs. Under both governments, announcements of different ministers have occasionally contradicted each other. In an address to parliament in June 2018, Prime Minister Dăncilă emphasized the need for improving the government's strategic communication capacity, but left open the question of how to achieve this goal.

Turkey

Score 4 Policy coordination among central government institutions has traditionally been strong, but annual planning, monitoring and reporting of whole-of-government performance continue to be lacking. In spite of its centralized and hierarchical structure, Turkey's executive is poorly coordinated and rarely speaks with a single voice. Contradictory policy statements on the economy (role of the central bank), security (failure in security and safety provisions) or education (reform of the examination processes) are regular.

In addition, under state of emergency powers, the voice of the president is considered decisive. Yet, a coordinated "division of labor" has not been achieved. Following the April 2017 constitutional referendum, the government initiated a project to prevent confusion over overlapping ministerial authority, reduce the "bureaucratic oligarchy" and improve the effectiveness of administrative processes.

The government spokesman system did not work effectively due to the fact that the president, the prime minister (until July 2018) and individual ministers made contradictory public addresses – either contradicting each other or the government program.

The new presidential system metaphorically consists of a satellite system: a sun located at the center and two administrative satellites, five offices, nine councils, 16 ministries and several departments. The new government announced a 100-day performance program and is in the process of preparing an additional 100-day performance program to be announced in November 2018. The opposition leader criticized that the government for failing to deliver on most of its policy promises.

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“Kılıçdaroğlu’ndan Erdoğan’a ‘icraat programı’ sorusu: 100 gün doldu, ne oldu?” <https://www.demokrathaber.org/siyaset/kilicdaroglu-ndan-Erdoğan-a-icraat-programi-h109731.html> (accessed 13 November 2018)

United States

Score 4

Under normal conditions, politically appointed leadership in every agency means that executive agencies and departments will typically have coordinated their messages with those responsible for the White House communications strategy. Agency press releases and statements on politically salient matters may be specifically cleared with the White House but in any case will be planned for consistency with the president’s priorities and political strategy.

During the Trump presidency, the White House press office has been heavily engaged in defending or obscuring Trump’s many false claims and inconsistent positions. Using a rigorous definition of presidential lies, the New York Times found that President Obama had averaged approximately two lies per year. With repetition included and a broader definition, the Washington Post counted more than 4,200 false or misleading claims by late in Trump’s second years.

The most striking inconsistency between presidential and agency communications resulted from the administration’s late 2018 release of the National Climate Assessment, a collaborative product of thirteen federal agencies and 300 scientists that is required by law. The report strongly confirmed standard scientific findings indicating the need for urgent action to mitigate climate change. Trump simply declared that he did not believe the report’s findings. In the absence of such a large interagency process and legal compulsion to release the result, federal agencies have mostly avoided issuing statements that contradicted Trump’s positions or priorities.

Citation:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/14/opinion/trump-lies-obama.html>

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. In practice, however, ministries have followed their own communication strategies.

Cyprus

Score 3

Government communications are generally channeled through the Press and Information Office (PIO) and government spokesperson. However, in a context of increasingly intense media presence and interaction with the media, ministers and other officials have come to operate more independently in their communications. This has exacerbated, to some extent, long-standing challenges resulting from poor coordination of communication.

Following his reelection in February 2018, the president and his new government faced a variety of serious political issues, including with teacher strikes and the collapse of the Cooperative Bank. There was a cacophony of messages, lacking clarity and sometimes contradictory, which left the public in the dark or in confusion.

Citation:

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Greece

Score 2

In August 2018, the Third Economic Adjustment Program for Greece (the Third Memorandum, 2015 – 2018) was completed. The incumbent government considered the program's completion a successful final "exit of the Memoranda," though it had consented to a continuation of periodic performance reviews of the Greek economy in June 2018 (i.e., site visits by IMF and European Commission representatives every three months). While Greece's economy stagnated in the period under review, the prime minister, the government's spokesperson, the minister of finance and other ministers conveyed positive messages about future economic growth. Notwithstanding, private foreign investment is not forthcoming, businesses continue to close down or leave the country, and the flight of skilled labor ("brain drain") continues. The government has tried to divert attention from the economic stagnation by highlighting the decline in the unemployment rate and by emphasizing ideological differences between "left" and "right." For instance, the government has labeled the policy program of the New Democracy party, which has been leading in polls for more than a year, a return to neo-liberal austerity and has associated the party with the far right. There is little coherence in this communication strategy since the Syriza party has been governing in a coalition with the small ultra-nationalist, right-wing party ANEL since 2015 and has subscribed to and implemented all austerity measures envisaged in the aforementioned Third Memorandum. Overall, the government's communication strategy has become incoherent over time, focusing on short-term squabbles with the opposition rather than articulating what Greece's prospects are for the future.

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