

# PUBLIC COMMUNICATION(S) IN EUROPE

Club of Venice  
35 years  
2021



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35 years  
2021**



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**DEDICACES**

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## Le due metà di una lunga storia

Stefano Rolando

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Pensando al numero 35 – numero importante, maturo, plurale, che muove anche il mio immaginario personale dal momento che rappresenta metà della mia vita vissuta – mi viene in mente di accostare la nostra “piccola storia” alla “grande storia”, proprio ragionando sulle principali date dell’Europa.

*Grande data*, punto di avvio della costruzione stessa dell’unità europea, è considerata la dichiarazione di Robert Schuman che orientò nel 1950 la geniale creazione di una *Comunità europea del carbone e dell’acciaio* (CECA), che si concretizzò con il trattato di Parigi del 18 aprile 1951, impegnando i sei paesi fondatori.

35 anni dopo – nel 1985 – l’Europa decise (nel vertice di Milano) di promuovere l’identità politica del mercato interno e al tempo stesso di varare la riduzione delle distanze tra istituzioni europee e cittadini (dossier Adonino). Nello stesso anno (in cui si firmarono anche gli accordi di Schengen) la Commissione guidata da Jacques Delors rese pubblico il “libro bianco” sui destini dell’Europa che ricollocava il dibattito europeistico al centro delle speranze maggioritarie dei popoli e apriva un decennio di misure e trattati che configuravano i punti alti della progettualità di un sistema che verrà poi frenato dalla tenaglia tra le complessità della globalizzazione e il riformarsi dei nazionalismi.

Sugli eventi di quel 1985 ebbe le sue ragioni costitutive il *Club of Venice*.

Immaginato come un luogo informale ma rappresentativo, professionale ma ispirato ai valori dell’Europa, non deliberativo ma idoneo ad avvicinare e accorciare le distanze tra modelli di funzionamento assai dissimili nel campo della comunicazione istituzionale.

Con l’accordo dei paesi più rilevanti, fu possibile convocare nel 1986 (con l’Europa a 12 membri) la prima riunione presso la Fondazione Cini all’isola di San Giorgio a Venezia.

Da quel luogo, da quella città carica di una percezione internazionalizzata tra gli europei, prese nome permanente il progetto di rete consultativa legata alla titolarità delle funzioni e alla presenza paritaria di rappresentanti delle nazioni e delle istituzioni europee.

Era per l’appunto 35 anni fa, un secondo *grande ciclo* della vita dell’Europa stessa.

Con tutte le luci e le ombre che la maggior parte dei membri oggi partecipanti (fino a una stabilità di adesioni di oltre cento operatori) possono ricordare nella loro stessa esperienza, almeno per una buona parte. Così da

sapere che, tra quelle luci e quelle ombre, ci sono state centinaia di eventi carichi di uno spirito di tessitura che non ha mai sovrapposto velleità al realismo. E che non ha mai concepito il *parterre* come bandiere da contare, come schieramenti da dividere, come “peso nazionale” da gerarchizzare.

### Le dominanti del percorso compiuto

Quello che oggi è permesso di fare – nell’atto di recuperare una memoria largamente utile per l’attualità e per il futuro – è di riflettere brevemente sulle dominanti dell’inizio e della fine di questa lunga sequenza.

- L’inizio fu caratterizzato dalla consapevolezza che l’agire comunicativo andava messo in valutazione comune, rispettando le autonomie gestionali ma mettendo in condivisione gli approcci valoriali. Ma quarant’anni di separatezza, allora, dalla fine della seconda guerra mondiale (in cui l’informazione era stata una *dura arma* al servizio dello scontro di una parte contro l’altra dell’Europa stessa) pesavano ancora sui caratteri “gelosi” della materia. In più si comprendeva che il superamento della cultura della propaganda doveva essere nutrito da un valore aggiunto, appunto di servizio, attorno a cui la dimensione europea offriva molte ma ancora poco esplorate opportunità.
- Internet arriverà dieci anni dopo. Ma già lo strumento pubblicitario poteva coniugarsi meglio con un orientamento sociale del marketing pubblico. Già l’informazione legislativa poteva essere immaginata nell’accompagnamento ad una alfabetizzazione mista, in larga parte da affrontare con la cultura della semplificazione. Già per “comunicazione” non veniva concepita una semplice “messaggistica” ma una più articolata *funzione relazionale*.
- Era tuttavia chiaro il senso ancora verticale del trasferire conoscenza, dati e condivisione di quel quadro di identità competitive che l’Europa andava rappresentando. Verrà più chiaro, con il tempo, il bisogno di una architettura bi-direzionale (istituzioni-cittadini) e verrà più chiaro con gli sviluppi della rete l’immensa problematica (opportunità/rischi) di una dinamica partecipativa capace di decentrare le fonti e anche di articolare in uno “spirito pubblico” capace di andare oltre le sole istituzioni.

### Sguardo avanti

Inutile elencare il divario di metodo, di prodotto, di processo che segna le polarità di questi 35 anni. Meglio rivolgere lo sguardo avanti e dare continuità a propositi che fanno i conti con grandi cambiamenti in corso.

- La *vocazione sociale* della comunicazione pubblica resta ancora oggi un obiettivo da conquistare meglio e con una più evidente capacità di distinguere comunicazione politica e comunicazione istituzionale.
- Così che è chiaro che le *grandi emergenze* degli anni più recenti (migrazioni, pandemia, evoluzione del tema della sicurezza, per esempio) vanno creando *ambiti di specialismo* che trasformano strutturalmente un sistema professionale a cui si riferiscono migliaia di operatori con percorsi formativi e applicativi impensabili 35 anni fa.
- Spero che finisca anche il *conflitto che è insorto tra informazione e comunicazione nel sistema pubblico*, nel momento in cui sono diventati spesso i giornalisti ad avere più chances di regia delle funzioni in generale legate alla rete (siti e social), alla relazione diretta con i cittadini, all’area *media-relation*. Una scelta che ha corrisposto in molti casi all’impoverimento di autorità della politica la quale ha optato più per la propria visibilità che per le potenzialità di ricucitura sociale tra istituzioni e popolo. La *mediazione manageriale tra questi tre ambiti* era implicita nei processi comunicativi pubblici di trenta, quaranta anni fa e deve ritrovare il suo senso strategico, nel rispetto dell’importanza e delle autonomie di tutte le professionalità oggi implicate (si contano più di cento mestieri diversi).



**STEFANO ROLANDO**  
Professor at IULM University (Milan), President of the Club of Venice, President of the Milano Branding Committee, Former Director-General of Information at the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

## Per una riforma culturale della comunicazione pubblica europea

Non è l'unico auspicio di chi pensa tenacemente alla trasformazione pluri-professionale di una funzione pubblica che a poco a poco – ma con tanta fatica – ha abbandonato la sua eccessiva dipendenza dalle sole culture giuridico-amministrative. Ma che non è ancora approdata alla prima e più importante riforma – che se non è europea non avverrà, per il lobbying esercitato dalle radici storiche delle singole amministrazioni nazionali – che è quella culturale.

Con gli anni più recenti il tavolo del *Club of Venice* ha incrociato, appunto, molti di questi specialismi che oggi arricchiscono la tematizzazione degli eventi e della ricerca. Uno di questi – il *Public Branding* – è al servizio non solo di nuove narrative ma anche di nuove sintesi di culture professionali. Ed è maturo il tempo per cui da questa visuale possa partire il dibattito intrinsecamente più connesso alle ragioni di quella "*conferenza sul futuro dell'Europa*" che entro la fine del 2021 potrebbe prendere seriamente le mosse. Come fare evolvere il *Brand Europa*, cioè il patrimonio simbolico collettivo di un sistema identitario che quando pensa a stesso abitualmente si divide. Per chi ha messo una vita intera a riunire – lo Steering del CdV è fatto certamente da questo genere di persone – sarebbe una bella sfida.



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## Les deux moitiés d'une longue histoire

Stefano Rolando

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En réfléchissant au nombre 35 - un nombre considérable qui stimule mon imagination personnelle, puisqu'il représente la moitié de ma vie vécue - il me vient à l'esprit de comparer notre «petite histoire» à la «grande histoire», précisément en réfléchissant sur les principaux événements en Europe. Une *grande date*, point de départ de la construction européenne, est la déclaration de Robert Schuman de mai 1950 qui a mené à la visionnaire création d'une Communauté européenne du charbon et de l'acier (CECA), qui prend forme avec le Traité de Paris du 18 avril 1951, impliquant les six pays fondateurs.

35 ans plus tard - en 1985 - l'Europe décide (au sommet de Milan) de promouvoir l'identité politique du marché intérieur et, en même temps, de réduire le fossé entre les institutions européennes et les citoyens (rapport Adonnino). La même année (au cours de laquelle sont également signés les accords de Schengen), la Commission conduite par Jacques Delors rend public le «Livre blanc» sur l'achèvement du marché intérieur de l'Europe. Il place le débat européen au centre des espoirs majoritaires des peuples et ouvre une décennie de mesures et de traités qui ont constitués des temps forts du développement d'un système d'intégration qui sera ensuite pris en tenaille par les complexités de la mondialisation et la recrudescence des nationalismes.

Les événements de 1985 ont fourni des raisons au Club de Venice de se constituer, conçu comme un lieu informel et représentatif, professionnel et inspiré des valeurs de l'Europe, apte à rapprocher et à réduire les distances entre des modèles de fonctionnement très différents dans le domaine de la communication institutionnelle.

Avec l'aval des pays les plus importants, il a été possible de convoquer en 1986 (avec la participation des 12 Etats membres des Communautés Européennes) sa première réunion à la Fondation Cini sur l'île de San Giorgio à Venise.

Venise, cette ville si particulière, chargée d'histoire européenne, a donné son nom à ce projet de réseau consultatif lié aux fonctions et à la présence paritaire des représentants des nations et des institutions européennes.

C'était il y a 35 ans précisément, un deuxième grand cycle dans la vie de l'Europe elle-même.

Avec toutes les lumières et les ombres dont la plupart des membres participant aujourd'hui (un effectif stable de plus d'une centaine de consœurs et confrères) peuvent encore se souvenir. Vous savez donc qu'entre ces lumières et ces ombres, il y a eu des centaines d'événements chargés d'un esprit de lien qui n'a jamais superposé les ambitions au réalisme.

## Les dominantes du chemin parcouru

Ce qu'il est permis de faire aujourd'hui - dans l'acte de retrouver un souvenir fortement utile pour le présent et pour l'avenir - c'est de réfléchir brièvement aux sujets qui ont dominé toute cette longue séquence.

- Le début a été caractérisé par la prise de conscience du fait que les actions de communication devaient faire l'objet d'une évaluation commune, tout en respectant l'autonomie de gestion de chacun, tout en partageant des approches aux valeurs communes. Mais quarante ans après la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale (où l'information avait été une arme lourde au service de l'affrontement des uns contre les autres en Europe) ce passé pesait encore sur les acteurs. Par ailleurs, il a été entendu que le dépassement de la culture de propagande devait se nourrir d'une valeur ajoutée autour de la dimension européenne qui offrait des opportunités nombreuses mais encore peu explorées.
- Internet viendra dix ans plus tard. Mais l'outil publicitaire pouvait déjà être mieux combiné avec une orientation sociale du marketing public. L'information législative pouvait être conçue en tant qu'instrument éducatif utilisé dans le cadre de développement d'une culture de la simplification. En fait on reconnaissait déjà à la «communication» une fonction plus articulée, «relationnelle», au lieu d'un simple connotation d'outil de «messaging».
- Cependant, le sens toujours vertical/unidirectionnel du transfert de connaissances, de données et de partage de ce cadre identitaire compétitif que représentait l'Europe était clair. Avec le temps, la nécessité d'une architecture bidirectionnelle (institutions-citoyens) se précisera et l'immense problème (opportunités/risques) d'une dynamique participative capable de décentraliser les sources et aussi de les articuler dans un «esprit public» capable d'aller au-delà des seules institutions.

## Regarder vers l'avant

Inutile d'énumérer les différences de méthode, de réalisation, de procédé qui marque les polarités de ces 35 années. Mieux vaut regarder vers l'avenir et donner une continuité aux résolutions qui abordent les grands changements en cours.

- La vocation sociale de la communication publique reste encore aujourd'hui un objectif à mieux atteindre et avec une capacité plus évidente à distinguer communication politique et communication institutionnelle.
- Pour qu'il soit clair que les grandes urgences de ces dernières années (migration, pandémie, évolution de la question sécuritaire par exemple) créent des domaines de spécialisation qui transforment structurellement un système professionnel auquel se réfèrent des milliers d'opérateurs avec des formations et des parcours professionnels impensables il y a 35 ans.
- J'espère que le conflit qui s'est installé entre l'information et la communication dans le système public prendra également fin, alors que les journalistes sont souvent devenus ceux qui ont le plus de chances de gouverner des fonctions en général liées au réseau (sites et réseaux sociaux), à la relation directe avec les citoyens, au domaine des relations avec les médias. Un choix qui a dans bien des cas correspondu à l'appauvrissement d'une autorité politique qui a davantage opté pour sa propre visibilité que pour le potentiel de rapprochement entre les institutions et le peuple. La médiation managériale entre ces trois domaines était implicite dans les processus de communication publique il y a trente, quarante ans et doit retrouver son sens stratégique, respectant l'importance et l'autonomie de tous les professionnels impliqués aujourd'hui (il existe plus d'une centaine de métiers différents).

## Pour une réforme culturelle de la communication publique européenne

Ce n'est pas le seul souhait de ceux qui pensent avec ténacité à la transformation pluriprofessionnelle d'une fonction publique qui a peu à peu - mais avec beaucoup d'efforts - abandonné sa dépendance excessive aux seules cultures juridico-administratives. Mais elle n'a pas encore atteint la première et la plus importante réforme - qui si elle n'est pas européenne n'aura pas lieu, en raison de l'influence exercée par les racines historiques des différentes administrations nationales - qui est la culture.

Au cours des dernières années, le Club de Venise a traité bon nombre de ces spécialités qui enrichissent aujourd'hui la thématique des événements et de la recherche. L'un d'eux - Public Branding - est au service non seulement de nouveaux récits mais aussi de nouvelles synthèses de cultures professionnelles. Et le moment est venu pour le débat qui est intrinsèquement lié aux raisons de cette «conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe» qui pourrait prendre des mesures sérieuses d'ici fin 2021. Comment faire évoluer la «marque Europe», c'est-à-dire l'héritage symbolique collectif d'un système identitaire qui se divise habituellement quand il pense à lui-même. Pour ceux qui ont passé toute leur vie à se rassembler - le pilotage du Club de Venise est assurément fait par ce genre de personnes - ce serait un grand défi.



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## The two halves of a long story

Stefano Rolando

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Thinking of the number 35 - an important number, which also stimulates my personal imagination since it represents half of my lived life - it occurs to me to compare our "little story" to the "big story", precisely by reasoning about dates of main events in Europe.

Great date, starting point for the very construction of European unity, is the declaration of Robert Schuman who in 1950 guided the brilliant creation of a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which took shape with the Treaty of Paris of 18 April 1951, involving the six founding countries.

35 years later - in 1985 - Europe decided (at the Milan summit) to promote the political identity of the internal market and at the same time to launch the reduction of the distance between European institutions and citizens (report Adonnino). In the same year (in which the Schengen agreements were also signed) the Commission led by Jacques Delors published the "White Paper" on the completion of the internal market in Europe, which placed the European debate at the center of the peoples' hopes. It also opened a decade of measures and treaties that developed a system of integration that would later be held back by the complexities of globalization and the regain of nationalisms.

The events of 1985 provided its constitutive reasons to the Club of Venice

Imagined as an informal and representative place, professional and inspired by the values of Europe, suitable for reducing the distances between very different functioning models in the field of institutional communication.

With the agreement of the most important countries, it was possible to convene in 1986 (with the participation of the 12 members of the European Communities) the first meeting at the Cini Foundation on the island of San Giorgio in Venice.

Venice, that city charged with European history, gave her name to the consultative network project based on the functions and parity presence of the representatives of the European nations and institutions.

It was precisely 35 years ago, a second great cycle in the life of Europe itself.

With all the lights and shadows that most of the members participating today (up to a stable membership of over one hundred operators) can remember in their own experience, at least for a good part. So you know that, between those lights and shadows, there have been hundreds of events charged with a spirit of weaving that has never superimposed ambitions on realism.

## The dominants of the completed path

What today is allowed to do - in search for recovering a memory that is largely useful for current events and for the future - is to reflect briefly on the dominant subjects of the beginning and end of this long sequence.

- The beginning was characterized by the awareness that communicative action had to be put in common evaluation, respecting managerial autonomy but sharing value approaches. But forty years of separation, from the end of the Second World War (in which information had been a strong weapon at the service of the clash of one side against the other in Europe) still weighed on the actors. In addition, it was understood that the overcoming of the culture of propaganda had to be nourished by an added value around the European dimension which offered many still little explored opportunities.
- The Internet would come ten years later. But the advertising tool could already be better combined with a social orientation of public marketing. Legislative information could already be imagined in the accompaniment of mixed literacy, largely to be faced with the culture of simplification. Already for "communication" a simple "messaging" was not conceived but a more articulated relational function.
- However, the still vertical sense of transferring knowledge, data and sharing of that competitive identity framework that Europe was representing was clear. Over time, the need for a bi-directional architecture (institutions-citizens) became clearer and the immense problem (opportunities / risks) of a participatory dynamic capable of decentralizing sources and also to articulate them in a "public spirit" capable of going beyond institutions alone.

## Looking ahead

It is useless to list the gap in method, product and process that marks the polarities of these 35 years. Better to look ahead and give continuity to resolutions that deal with the great changes underway.

- The social vocation of public communication still remains today an objective to be better achieved and with a more evident ability to distinguish political communication and institutional communication.
- It is clear that the major emergencies of recent years (migration, pandemic, evolution of the security issue, for example) are creating areas of specialisation that structurally transform a professional system to which thousands of operators with education and training courses unthinkable 35 years ago refer.
- I hope that the conflict that has arisen between information and communication in the public system will also end, when journalists have often become the ones who have more chances of occupying functions in general linked to the network (sites and social networks) and to the direct relationship with citizens in the media-relations area. A choice that has in many cases corresponded to the impoverishment of political authority which has opted more for its own visibility than for the potential for social mending between institutions and the people. Managerial mediation between these three areas was implicit in public communication processes thirty, forty years ago and must rediscover its strategic sense, respecting the importance and autonomy of all the professionals involved today (there are more than one hundred different professions) .

## For a cultural reform of European public communication

This is not the only wish of those who think tenaciously about the multi-professional transformation of a public function that little by little - but with a lot of effort - has abandoned its excessive dependence on juridical-administrative cultures alone. But it has not yet reached the first and most important reform - which if it is not European will not happen, due to the influence exercised by the historical roots of the individual national administrations - which is culture.

In most recent years, the Club of Venice table has dealt with many of these specialisations that today enrich the agenda of events and research. One of these - Public Branding - is at the service not only of new narratives but also of new syntheses of professional cultures. And the time is ripe for the debate that is intrinsically more connected to the reasons for the "Conference on the future of Europe" which could take action seriously by the end of 2021. How to make the Europa Brand evolve, that is, the collective symbolic heritage of an identity system that usually divides when it thinks of itself. For those who have spent their entire life coming together - the steering of the CdV is certainly done by this kind of people - it would be a great challenge.



## Comunicazione pubblica : evoluzione e prospettive

Diana Agosti

**CON IL PRESENTE VOLUME CELEBRIAMO** trentacinque anni di vita del Club di Venezia.

Un traguardo importante, che probabilmente i "padri fondatori", e tra loro il nostro presidente Stefano Rolando, non avrebbero immaginato di raggiungere, quando - mossi da un'idea visionaria e audace per i tempi - decisero di creare un organismo informale che ponesse in relazione, tra loro e con le istituzioni europee, i direttori della comunicazione di un pugno di Stati membri pionieri.

Il ruolo dell'Italia nell'impresa fu rilevante: il progetto - promosso, tra gli altri, dal nostro presidente Stefano Rolando, allora Capo del Dipartimento per l'informazione e l'editoria della Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri - fu appoggiato a Bruxelles da Carlo Ripa di Meana, Commissario europeo alla cultura e all'ambiente (prima Commissione Delors) e a Roma dal Sottosegretario di Stato alla Presidenza dei Ministri Giuliano Amato, che ne permise il lancio ufficiale.

A distanza di trentacinque anni, quell'idea rimane ancora attuale e necessaria. In questo lungo arco di tempo, il Club di Venezia - con oltre cento incontri al suo attivo - ha accresciuto il numero dei membri, il raggio di azione e di interessi, la varietà dei contributi; si è arricchito di una piattaforma web, di una rivista, di uno *steering committee* permanente, sia pure mutevole nella composizione.

Insomma, è nel pieno dell'età adulta. E nel contesto della comunicazione pubblica europea - che a livello ufficiale dispone di uno spazio limitato e riservato ai tecnici - rappresenta un *unicum*: un network autorevole, informale (nelle sue riunioni vige la "Chatham House Rule"), capace di far collaborare fattivamente i responsabili e gli esperti di comunicazione degli Stati e delle Istituzioni europee, ma sempre tenendo in mente i destinatari finali del messaggio, i nostri committenti: i cittadini.

Il Club quindi è stato ed è un luogo per favorire il dibattito interistituzionale, ma soprattutto per rivolgersi al largo pubblico, migliorando la cosiddetta *narrazione* dell'Europa, a dispetto del "blame game" praticato dai governi e delle spinte euroscettiche. In quest'ottica, la riflessione condivisa e lo scambio professionale sono stati alla base della filosofia e dell'azione del Club, ben centrate sul sistema valoriale europeo, indipendenti dai vincoli della diplomazia e degli uffici stampa, orientate a irrobustire o risvegliare - a seconda delle fasi storiche - il senso di appartenenza all'Unione nei suoi cittadini. Un'Unione che l'ex Segretario Generale dell'Onu Kofi Annan ha definito "il più straordinario progetto mai realizzato dal dopoguerra ad oggi"<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> "Migranti, Kofi Annan: no ai muri. Ma l'Italia non va lasciata sola" di Luca Orlando. Sole 24 Ore, 20 giugno 2018  
[https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/migranti-kofi-annan-no-muri-ma-l-italia-non-va-lasciata-sola-AEPJ5V9E?refresh\\_ce=1](https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/migranti-kofi-annan-no-muri-ma-l-italia-non-va-lasciata-sola-AEPJ5V9E?refresh_ce=1)

Strategie di comunicazione pubblica, etica della professione, media digitali e tradizionali, libertà di stampa, disinformazione, cambiamenti climatici, comunicazione di crisi e crisi della comunicazione, sono solo alcuni dei temi affrontati negli ultimi anni. Anni in cui – a partire forse dall’esito negativo dei referendum in Francia e Paesi Bassi, passando per la recessione economica, la crisi greca, l’aumento dei flussi migratori, Brexit, l’affermazione dei movimenti anti-UE – comunicare l’Europa è stato un esercizio difficile e talora impopolare.

**OGGI, POSSIAMO DIRLO, LO SCENARIO È SENSIBILMENTE CAMBIATO.** La solidarietà tempestiva e concreta dimostrata dall’Unione – con il varo di “Next Generation EU” e di numerose altre misure – per affrontare le difficoltà sanitarie, economiche e sociali provocate o indotte dalla pandemia, hanno determinato una incoraggiante inversione di rotta nell’opinione pubblica.

Secondo il sondaggio Standard Eurobarometro condotto nel giugno-luglio 2021, l’ottimismo sul futuro dell’UE ha raggiunto il livello più alto dal 2009 e la fiducia nell’UE è ai massimi livelli dal 2008. Il sostegno all’euro rimane stabile al massimo grado dal 2004. La maggioranza degli europei è soddisfatta dei provvedimenti adottati dall’UE e dai governi nazionali contro il Covid-19 e ritiene che il piano di ripresa “Next Generation EU” risulterà efficace contro gli effetti economici della pandemia.

Tuttavia resta molto lavoro da fare. In tempi in cui ancora persiste l’attitudine a costruire muri, negare solidarietà, diffondere disinformazione, coltivare spinte antidemocratiche, è della massima importanza comunicare meglio l’Europa, dentro e fuori le sue frontiere.

È in questo spirito, rafforzando soprattutto la vocazione sociale della comunicazione pubblica, che il Club deve impegnarsi a ricercare e costruire la migliore “narrazione” possibile attorno all’Unione, ai suoi valori, alla sua storia ma soprattutto al suo futuro.

**NEL 2021 RICORRE UN ALTRO ANNIVERSARIO**, molto importante per l’Europa: ottanta anni dalla redazione del Manifesto di Ventotene (“Per un’Europa Libera e Unita”), scritto da Altiero Spinelli ed Ernesto Rossi nel 1941, mentre si trovavano al confino perché oppositori al regime fascista.

Si tratta di un testo ancora molto attuale, che risponde anche alle domande di oggi. Per onorarlo, dobbiamo ripartire dallo spirito e dalla visione dei Padri fondatori e usare tutti gli strumenti a nostra disposizione per ridurre la distanza tra cittadini e istituzioni (europee e nazionali), mirare all’efficienza e alla democraticità dei processi decisionali e tutelare il progetto europeo come alveo e fucina di una identità culturale condivisa, in grado di prevalere sugli egoismi nazionali.

I comunicatori pubblici – e i membri del Club lo sanno da sempre – possono avere un ruolo cruciale nel raggiungimento di questi obiettivi, specie se riescono a pensare ed agire in modo coordinato. E il Club di Venezia è al servizio di questo coordinamento e di questa causa, che è poi la causa di una “ever closer Union”.

L’azione congiunta dell’UE si è dimostrata la risposta più efficace alla sfida della pandemia. Gli strumenti condivisi, inediti, creati nell’ambito di Next Generation EU prevedono spazio e risorse specifiche per la comunicazione, che dovremo usare al meglio.

**DA MOLTI ANNI, E DI RECENTE NEL QUADRO DELLA CONFERENZA SUL FUTURO DELL’EUROPA**, le attività di comunicazione condotte dal Dipartimento per politiche europee si rivolgono al largo pubblico.

Nell’anno che sta per chiudersi, obiettivo principale del nostro piano di comunicazione è stato quello di promuovere tra i cittadini il dibattito sul futuro dell’Europa, la consapevolezza dei valori della cittadinanza europea e la conoscenza delle opportunità offerte dall’Unione Europea, utilizzando in particolare strumenti e servizi online.

Abbiamo realizzato numerose iniziative di successo rivolte alle scuole, alcune delle quali *best practice* europee, oltre a concorsi di idee, piattaforme e mostre multimediali, eventi online.

Per il futuro, consideriamo strategica la nostra azione di coordinamento interistituzionale per migliorare la comunicazione sull’Europa, puntando a interpellare e coinvolgere soprattutto i giovani, studenti di oggi e **cittadini europei di domani**.

Come ha ricordato il Sottosegretario per le Politiche e gli Affari Europei Vincenzo Amendola a margine della prima assemblea plenaria della Conferenza sul futuro dell’Europa, “è importante che tutti i cittadini europei, in particolare i giovani, si esprimano su quelle che devono essere le priorità della ‘casa europea’, per guardare insieme nella stessa direzione”.<sup>2</sup>

In tale ottica rinnoveremo – ad esempio – la partnership con il Ministero dell’Istruzione, la Rappresentanza della Commissione europea e l’Ufficio del Parlamento europeo in Italia, che ha tra i suoi obiettivi anche l’introduzione, nell’ambito della materia “Educazione civica”, di una parte significativa dedicata allo studio dell’Unione Europea.

E continueremo a promuovere negli istituti di ogni ordine e grado – come ormai da dieci anni – la piattaforma per insegnanti “Europa=Noi”, che offre un percorso didattico, continuamente aggiornato, sulla storia e i valori dell’UE, con materiali e strumenti digitali, giochi interattivi e un torneo online per le classi. Per l’anno scolastico 2020-2021, la piattaforma è stata integrata con nuovi contenuti dedicati a “Next Generation EU”.

A proposito di nuove generazioni, voglio concludere con le parole che il Presidente della Repubblica italiana Sergio Mattarella ha pronunciato rispondendo alle domande di alcuni giovani partecipanti al 40° seminario per la formazione federalista europea a Ventotene, in occasione – appunto – dell’80° anniversario del Manifesto di Ventotene<sup>3</sup>:

*“L’Unione europea dopo il Covid è molto cambiata. Abbiamo incrociato una crisi drammatica (...) che ha condotto ad alcune decisioni, a fare alcune scelte, dando ancora una volta ragione all’affermazione di Jean Monnet, che diceva che l’Europa si farà nelle crisi mediante le soluzioni che alle varie crisi saranno date.*

*Che cosa è avvenuto con il Covid? Che l’Unione ha avuto una capacità di visione e di intervento di straordinaria efficacia e anche velocità. Gli strumenti predisposti dalla Commissione europea hanno (...) consentito agli europei di fronteggiare le conseguenze non soltanto sanitarie, ma anche economiche e sociali della pandemia. (...) Tra questi il “Next Generation EU” rappresenta una svolta di concezione. Non sono strumenti “una tantum”, reversibili,*

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.politicheeuropee.gov.it/it/sottosegretario/comunicati-stampa/comunicato-19-giugno-2021/>

<sup>3</sup> Il Presidente della Repubblica Sergio Mattarella risponde ad alcune domande di giovani partecipanti al 40° seminario per la formazione federalista europea in occasione dell’80° anniversario del Manifesto di Ventotene - Ventotene, 29/08/2021. <https://www.quirinale.it/elementi/59421>

che saranno dimenticati e posti nell'archivio. Sono ormai entrati nell'acquis comunitario.

*Questa svolta, con questo coraggio e decisioni, questa maggiore capacità di azione comune, questa integrazione maggiore e concreta è un grande risultato dovuto al modo in cui si è affrontata questa crisi. (...)*

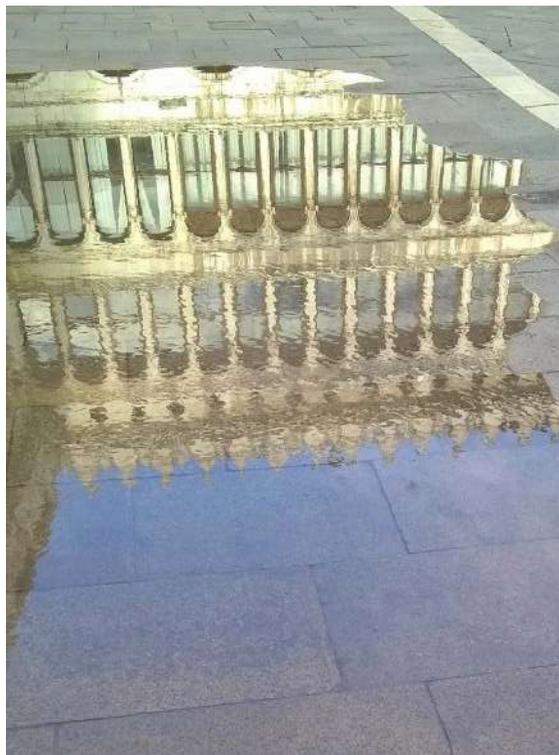
*Nei vari Paesi europei vi sono tanti – come definirli – tanti gelidi antipatizzanti dell'integrazione dell'Unione. Si diano pace: questi strumenti resteranno, non si può tornare indietro!"*

Buona continuazione al Club di Venezia.



**DIANA AGOSTI**  
Graduated with honours in Political Sciences at "La Sapienza" University of Rome, Diana Agosti joined Italy's public administration in 1984. She started her civil servant path at the Directorate General for Intellectual, Artistic and Scientific Property at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. Her career has developed almost entirely within the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, being selected over the years to direct a number of offices operating in the field of publishing, interinstitutional relations, and human resources. From 2001 to 2003 she furthermore served as Director General of the Internal Audit Service at the Ministry of Economy and Finance. After leading the Department of Human Resources and IT Services and the Administrative Coordination Department, in 2014 she was appointed Head of the Department for European Policies (Presidency of the Council of Ministers), a complex administrative structure encompassing three DGs

and a bureau of Italy's Financial Police (Guardia di Finanza) specifically aimed at countering frauds against the EU. The Department for European Policies moreover ensures administrative support to the political activity performed by the Undersecretary for European Policies. Diana Agosti is also the author/editor of a number of publications and studies on public administrations, social communication, transparency, and public access to documents.



## Public communication: evolution and perspectives

Diana Agosti

**WITH THIS VOLUME WE CELEBRATE** thirty-five years of life of the Club of Venice. It is an important milestone, which the "founding fathers", including our President Stefano Rolando, would probably not have imagined reaching when – driven by a visionary and audacious idea for those times – they decided to establish an informal body that would bring together, among themselves and with the European institutions, the communication directors of a handful of pioneering member states.

Italy played a significant role in this endeavour. The project – promoted, among others, by our President Stefano Rolando, then Head of the Department for Information and Publishing at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – was supported in Brussels by Carlo Ripa di Meana, European Commissioner for Culture and the Environment (first Delors Commission) and in Rome by the Undersecretary of State for the President of the Council Ministers' Office, Giuliano Amato, who enabled for its official launch.

Thirty-five years later, that idea is still relevant and essential. Over this lengthy period, the Club of Venice, through over one hundred meetings, has increased the number of its members, enhanced its scope of action and range of interests, and raised the variety of its contributions. The Club of Venice has enriched itself with a web platform, a magazine and a permanent steering committee, albeit with a changing composition.

In short, the Club of Venice is in its middle adulthood. And in the framework of European public communication, with limited space reserved for technicians at official level, it is unique, an authoritative informal network (its meetings are regulated by the "Chatham House Rule") capable of bringing together communication managers and experts from EU Member States and institutions, keeping in mind the final recipients of the message, EU citizens.

The Club of Venice has therefore been and still is a forum to encourage interinstitutional debate and above all to address the general public, improving the so-called European narrative in spite of the "blame game" played by some governments and Eurosceptic trends. In such perspective, joint reflection and professional exchange have been the core of the Club's philosophy and action, sound on the European value system, independent from the constraints linked to diplomacy and press offices, aimed at strengthening or reawakening – depending on the historical phases – the sense of belonging to the Union in its citizens. A Union that Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General, described as the most extraordinary project ever carried out since the War<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> "Migranti, Kofi Annan: no ai muri. Ma l'Italia non va lasciata sola" by Luca Orlando. Sole 24 Ore, 20 June 2018 ([https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/migranti-kofi-annan-no-muri-ma--l-italia-non-va-lasciata-sola-AEPJ5V9E?refresh\\_ce=1](https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/migranti-kofi-annan-no-muri-ma--l-italia-non-va-lasciata-sola-AEPJ5V9E?refresh_ce=1)).

Public communication strategies, professional ethics, digital and traditional media, press freedom, disinformation, climate change, crisis communication and communication crisis are just a few of the topics addressed in recent years. Starting perhaps with the negative outcome of the referenda in France and the Netherlands, passing through the economic recession, the Greek crisis, the increase in migratory flows, Brexit, and the rise of anti-EU movements, over the past few years “communicating on Europe” has been a difficult and sometimes unpopular exercise.

**TODAY THE SCENARIO HAS CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY.** The timely and concrete solidarity shown by the Union – with the launch of the “Next Generation EU” and several other measures – to address the health, economic and social difficulties caused or induced by the pandemic, have generated an encouraging turnaround in public opinion.

Based on the Standard Eurobarometer survey conducted in June-July 2021, optimism about the future of the EU and confidence in the EU have reached their highest levels since 2009 and 2008, respectively. Support for the euro has steadily remained at the top since 2004. Most Europeans are satisfied with the measures undertaken by EU institutions and national governments against Covid-19, and believe the “Next Generation EU” recovery plan will be effective against the economic effects triggered by the pandemic.

Nevertheless, much work is yet to be done. At a time when the tendency to build walls, deny solidarity, spread disinformation and cultivate anti-democratic trends still persists, it is of the utmost importance to communicate on Europe better, both inside and outside its borders.

It is in this spirit, primarily strengthening the social vocation of public communication, that the Club of Venice must commit itself to seeking and creating the best possible “narrative” on the European Union, its values, its history and, above all, its future.

**ANOTHER VERY IMPORTANT ANNIVERSARY** for Europe was celebrated in 2021: eighty years since the Ventotene Manifesto (“For a Free and United Europe”) drafted by Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi in 1941, while in exile as opponents of the fascist regime.

The text is still very suitable to our times, and answers today’s questions. In order to honour it, we must newly start from the spirit and vision of the founding fathers and use all the tools at our disposal to narrow the distance between citizens and institutions (both European and national), aim for efficient and democratic decision-making processes, and protect the European project as the grounds and forge of a shared cultural identity capable of prevailing over national selfishness.

Public communicators – Club of Venice members have always been aware – can play a crucial role in achieving these objectives, notably if they think and act in a coordinated manner. And the Club of Venice is at the service of such coordination and such mission, namely the mission of an “ever closer Union”.

Joint EU action has proved the most effective response to the challenge posed by the pandemic. The shared unprecedented tools created under Next Generation EU provide specific space and resources for communication, which we now need use to the best.

**FOR SEVERAL YEARS, AND MOST RECENTLY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE**, the communication activities performed by the Department for European Policies have targeted the general public.

Over the current year, which is soon going to end, our communication plan has aimed at promoting debate among citizens on the future of Europe, awareness of the values of European citizenship, and knowledge of the opportunities offered by the European Union, primarily through online tools and services.

We have carried out numerous successful initiatives aimed at schools – some are by now European best practices – as well as contests of ideas, multimedia platforms and exhibitions, and online events.

For the future, we deem our interinstitutional coordination action will be of strategic importance to improve communication on Europe, aiming to question and involve above all young people, today’s students and **tomorrow’s European citizens**.

On the sidelines of the first plenary assembly of the Conference on the Future of Europe, the Undersecretary for European Policies and Affairs, Vincenzo Amendola, recalled it is important that all European citizens, primarily young people, express themselves as to the required priorities of the “European household”, to look together in the same direction<sup>2</sup>.

With this in mind, we will renew, for instance, our partnership with the Ministry of Education, the European Commission Representation and the European Parliament Office in Italy, which also aims at introducing, within the “Civic Education” domain, an extensive section dedicated to the study of the European Union.

Furthermore, we will continue, as in the last ten years, to promote the “Europa=Noi” Platform for teachers in schools of all levels. The Platform offers a constantly updated educational path on the history and values of the EU, with digital contents and tools, interactive games and an online tournament for classes. For the 2020-2021 school year, “Europa=Noi” has been integrated with new content dedicated to “Next Generation EU”.

Talking about the new generations, I would like to conclude with the words conveyed by Sergio Mattarella, President of the Italian Republic, when answering questions posed by young people participating in the 40<sup>th</sup> Seminar of European Federalists in Ventotene on the occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Manifesto<sup>3</sup>. President Mattarella highlighted the European Union has strongly changed since Covid-19 breakout, and we all have experienced a dramatic crisis that led to specific decisions and choices, once again confirming Jean Monnet’s statement “*Europe will be forged in crises, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises.*”

What emerges from the coronavirus crisis? The European Union’s vision and action have been extraordinarily fast and effective. The instruments deployed by the European Commission have enabled Europeans to cope with the consequences of the pandemic, not only healthwise, but also at economic and social level. Among these instruments, the “Next Generation EU” introduces a breakthrough concept. These are not one-off reversible instruments bound to be forgotten and stored away; they have now become part of the *acquis communautaire*.

This turnaround, with such courage and unprecedented decisions, such stronger capacity for joint action, such greater and more concrete integration, is a major achievement made possible by the way this crisis was tackled. Across European countries, there are so many icy opponents of the Union’s integration. Let them resign: these instruments will remain, there is no going back.

Best wishes to the Club of Venice!

2 <https://www.politicheeuropee.gov.it/it/sottosegretario/comunicati-stampa/comunicato-19-giugno-2021/>

3 Sergio Mattarella, President of the Italian Republic, answered questions posed by young participants in the 40<sup>th</sup> seminar of European federalists on the occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Manifesto – Ventotene, 29 Aug. 2021 (<https://www.quirinale.it/elementi/59421>)

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## Expertise, professionalism, commitment and team spirit

Rytis Paulauskas

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I joined the Club of Venice in 2016 but I was already aware of its reputation: my predecessors in the Lithuanian governmental framework had briefed me in detail on this unique platform of dedicated communication professionals.

During the five years of my mandate as Director for Communication and Cultural Diplomacy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I witnessed a remarkable growth of successful cooperative experiences within this distinguished network. It is this “esprit de corps” that enables to reinforce ties and help each other in the establishment of forward-looking communication strategies to efficiently and effectively handle policies’ complexities and geo-political crises.

Within the Club, as government communication specialists we succeeded in better analysing trends and challenges altogether and in developing trans-national relations that were instrumental to the establishment of our plans. This is the only recipe to give shape to government communication strategies, in order to fulfill our task: to promote genuine values and help the public understand what their public authorities are doing to build a better future together. It is also an important task of the Club to raise awareness about the adaptive challenges such as use of artificial intelligence, digital communication and personal data protection and others, communicator’s community are facing.

We were proud to host a plenary meeting of the Club in Vilnius in spring 2018, where Lithuania proactively contributed to the adoption of two Charters (on shaping professionalism through capacity building and on resilience to disinformation and propaganda in a challenging digital landscape). Since then, Lithuania has been one of the countries represented in the Steering Group of the Club which is its real engine and ensures its smooth and sound governance.

May I also add that it was my pleasure to contribute to the organisation of the annual strategical communication seminars organised by the Club on a yearly basis in cooperation with the UK Government Communication Service.



**RYTIS PAULAUSKAS**  
Rytis Paulauskas is Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations since may 2021. Before his latest appointment, Mr. Paulauskas was Director of the Communications and Cultural Diplomacy Department of his country’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a position to which he was appointed in August 2016. He was Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva between August 2012 and July 2016; Director of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Chairmanship Department and Head of the OSCE Chairmanship Task Force from 2008 to 2012; and Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, OSCE, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and other international organizations in Vienna from November 2003 to August 2008. At Lithuania’s Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, he was Director of the Security Policy Department from February to October 2003; Director of the Multilateral Relations Department from 2001 to February 2003; and Head of the Security Policy Division from 1999 to 2000. In New York, he was Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations from 1996 to 1999 — during which time he was elected as Rapporteur of the Sixth Committee (Legal) — and Counsellor from 1995 to 1996. He was Lithuania’s Deputy Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, from 1993 to 1994, and Attaché and then Acting Head of the International Organizations Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1991 to 1993. Mr. Paulauskas holds a Master of Arts degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in the United States and a Master of Law degree from Vilnius University in Lithuania.

Within the Club, you feel from the very beginning the capacity to freely share knowledge and expertise as highly conscientious and motivated professionals, contributing to defending common values and increasing public outreach. We fully recognize ourselves in this common approach and we are strongly convinced of the added value of such network. I am sure that, throughout the coming years, national communicators will continue to feel enthusiastic of the achievements of the Club of Venice. I also truly grateful for the professional support and constant interaction we have with the colleague and friend Mr. Vincenzo Le Voci, Secretary General of the Venice Club, which I intend also to continue and rely on during my tenure as Lithuania’s Permanent Representative to the UN in New York.

Congratulations and long life to the Club!



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## Challenges and opportunities

Alex Aiken

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The challenges that the world and Europe faces are huge and historic. From the consequences of the pandemic and the fight to keep climate change to less than 1.5°, the ever-present threat of terrorism, the need to rebuild our economies and provide for the next generation.

There are opportunities of course as well from the power and convenience that technology offers to the advances of science that have enabled us to be inoculated against the Covid virus and the entrepreneurial genius of people and business from Tallinn to Lisbon and from Inverness to Sofia.

It's vital that governments work together to meet these challenges. In my experience politicians recognise the critical role that that public service communication plays in giving people confidence, building trust and delivering services. This is evident from the pandemic where effective public relations and marketing has changed behaviour for public good and successfully warned and informed people about what they need to do to protect their lives and livelihoods. In that sense the crisis has enhanced the role of communicators in government.

It is now up to us through institutions like the Club of Venice to understand how communication worked during the pandemic, how the lessons can be used to meet new challenges and build a new model of direct, digital and data driven communication that can support our open democratic societies in this third decade of the 21st-century.

Bodies like the European Union, NATO, the WHO and the OECD are looking very carefully about how we can ensure that the most modern communications are brought to bear as part of the solution for the pressing societal and economic issues that societies face. The OECD global survey and principles for open, transparent, future proofed and whole of government communication are an excellent starting point for the sort of new communication model we need to develop.

I believe that effective communication campaigns can boost economic growth, improve societal resilience and counter disinformation. But these are challenges that have to be met by nations working together and a European level, and where necessary across continents which is where the WHO and the UN can use their convening power to talk to the tech giants who influence so much about communication to show them how their platforms can be used as forces for good but also have a malign effect where they are not properly policed.



**ALEX AIKEN**  
Alex Aiken is the Executive Director for the UK's Government Communications Service covering international issues and national security. He is part of the leadership of the Government Communication Service and was appointed in December 2012. He has led the biggest government campaigns of the last decade on Covid, Brexit and the GREAT Britain campaign. Between 2000 and 2012 he was Director of Communications and Strategy for Westminster City Council. Before joining Westminster he worked in Parliament and for Conservative Party. He has trained and advised politicians and officials in countries and states around the world in the practice of government and communications.

I have been privileged to be a member of the club of Venice for these past 10 years, just under a third of the whole history of the club. I commend Stefano and Vincenzo and colleagues who continue to build the club and produce material that reinforce the value of our collaboration including the Vilnius and London declarations, Strat Comms seminar conclusions, Convergences and of course the annual deliberation in Venice.

Long may the Club and these discussions continue, preferably in person and help advance cause of highly effective European public service communication.



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## Maturité et confiance

Jaume Duch

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Je tiens à saluer le travail du Club de Venise qui, inlassablement depuis 35 ans, connecte les communicateurs de toute l'Europe. Dans un environnement complexe comme l'Union européenne et ses diverses institutions, quoi de mieux qu'un forum régulier et informel pour échanger sur les dernières tendances en termes de communication, les bonnes pratiques testées par les différents Etats membres et institutions, les priorités à venir? En particulier, le Club a toujours su s'adapter aux sujets du moment, que ce soit la crise de la Covid, les élections européennes, la montée de la désinformation... Cette perméabilité avec le contexte socio-politique demeure une clé de son utilité et de sa longévité.

Comme l'a joliment dit Jean Monnet dans ses Mémoires, "Rien n'est possible sans les hommes, rien n'est durable sans les institutions". Je me plais à considérer le Club de Venise comme une institution au sein des institutions, un lieu d'échange discret et utile, à laquelle le temps a donné des lettres de noblesses. Cela n'a été possible que grâce à l'engagement permanent de quelques personnes qui se reconnaîtront ici – qu'elles en soient remerciées.

Il y a 35 ans, je n'avais pas encore rejoint les institutions européennes. Le Club m'a précédé et fête aujourd'hui sa pleine maturité, ce subtil équilibre entre énergie et expérience... Qu'il en soit ainsi encore longtemps!



**JAUME DUCH GUILLOT** (Barcelona, 1962) is the Director-General for Communication of the European Parliament and its Spokesperson. He graduated in Law from the University of Barcelona (1980-1985), where he later also served as a Professor of International Public Law. In 1990 he became a European Parliament official and since then has always worked in communication-related positions, such as Spokesperson for the then President of the European Parliament, Head of the Press Room or Media Director. In February 2017 he was appointed as Director General of Communication, a role which he combines with being the Spokesman of the institution since 2006.

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## Assertiveness, commitment and knowledge-sharing

Pia Ahrenkilde-Hansen

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Over the past year and a half, as communicators we have witnessed tremendous upheaval. Just a few months ago, in June 2021, I joined the Club of Venice plenary to discuss some of these changes. The fact that I joined remotely was in itself a sign of these changes. I talked about how the COVID pandemic had sped up transformations in communication how in the face of these changes we continue to innovate, such as through the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The exchange and debate that followed was very interesting and reminded me of the importance of coming together as communicators to discuss and share our lessons. This is one of the invaluable contributions that the Club of Venice offers: knowledge shared among the top-level communicators around Europe. In the context of what we do in the Commission's Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM), its contribution can be considered in three ways.

Firstly, while distinct from many communicators, the very premise of our work in DG COMM is shared with the membership of the Club of Venice. As we reaffirmed, when EU leaders met in Sibiu in May 2019, communicating about our European democracy is a shared responsibility between EU institutions and Member States. We must communicate and engage with citizens on a unique political and governmental project to 447 million people across 27 countries and many more cultures, demographic groups and contexts. Nothing like the European project has ever been attempted before, so it is no surprise that EU communications also warrant original approaches and new experiments. Our collective knowledge breaks new ground daily.

Secondly, we all now work in a more dynamic environment. From rapid digitalisation to lifestyles being upended, COVID has meant that we need to work in new, agile and adaptable ways. In the Commission, this meant changing the way we work. We adopted new collaborative models and structures, increasingly moved online and deployed our communication to support public health and policy solutions – showing that policy and communication work best when considered two sides of the same coin.



**PIA AHRENKILDE HANSEN** Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen is the Director-General of the Directorate-General for Communication in the European Commission. Previously she served as Deputy Secretary-General and Chief Operating Officer, Director in charge of the Commission's Representations and Chief Spokeswoman of the European Commission.

Thirdly and finally, this dynamic environment is here to stay, so we will need to continue to break new ground to act effectively. From connecting with brand new audiences through our partnership with UEFA to asserting EU climate leadership with the green strand of our Next Generation EU campaign, we at DG COMM are striving to meet these challenges – but there will be many more challenges to come.

Given that we have many of these challenges in common, it is clear that we have a lot to learn from one another's experiences. The Club of Venice is our forum for this – the place that Europe's senior government communicators can come together, share experiences and enrich each other's work.

Most importantly, we need this common space to shape a vibrant European communication environment fostering citizens' engagement, ownership and trust.

Happy 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary!



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## Enhancing excellence of public communication in Europe

Hans Brunmayr

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Since its foundation on the initiative of Stefano Rolando 35 years ago the Club of Venice has always endeavoured to stay at the forefront in perceiving and analysing communication relevant problems and new developments. At its informal gatherings Club members are discussing freely, exchanging experiences, identifying best practices and sketching possible solutions. Learning from each other and networking among professionals sharing common values at the service of high quality public communication are key elements of all Club meetings.

Crisis management and crisis communication have occupied an ever increasing part of the Club's agenda. Responses to natural disasters, climate change, banking and sovereign debt crisis and in particular the refugee and migration crisis have been treated at numerous plenary meetings and on the spot study visits as well as joint seminars with other organisations. But the dominant theme in the recent past was and still is the global health crisis caused by the Covid pandemic. At all its online meetings since the outbreak of the disease the Club has examined means and ways to successfully tackle this challenge of unprecedented dimension. Our discussions confirmed the central importance of communication: Only timely, consistent and trustworthy Government communication can encounter public acceptance of imposed restrictive measures and adherence of the population to its Government's policy. Clear and efficient public communication is an indispensable part of crisis response and crisis management. During the pandemic the task of public communicators became even more arduous as - like the scientific community and governants - they were moving on uncharted ground with plenty of assumptions and almost no certainties. In addition, the ever increasing flow of disinformation, misinformation, fake news and conspiracy theories required immediate well argued reaction.

During the last five years the Club has devoted particular attention to countering disinformation and to resilience building against fake news, propaganda and all kind of hybrid threats. This topic will remain central in our future work as same as the obvious need to continuously shape professionalism through capacity and capability building.

The Club bringing together Europe's senior public communication specialists has quite naturally dedicated a considerable part of its work to communication on Europe and the EU. Communicating Europe remains a difficult and unthankful task. EU- or Commission-bashing and blame game are an unpleasant and never ending story. Think only about the Covid vaccines: The initiative of the Commission to purchase vaccines for all Member States was first unanimously acclaimed and later - after serious delays in delivery- severely condemned. When jabs finally arrived in largely sufficient numbers, Member States kept the credit for this success for their own. As long as we are not able to communicate convincingly together on our common European achievements we will have little and often even negative impact on our citizens. The Club has



**HANS BRUNMAYR**  
Is member of the Advisory Group of the Club of Venice. He is a former Director-General at the Council of the EU having been in charge of communication and information policy since 1995 and for press, communication and protocol from 2002 to 2007. Before joining the Council he served as a diplomat for Austria in Paris, Buenos Aires, the Hague and in Brussels as Deputy Head of the Austrian Mission to the EU.

always advocated in favour of communication activities bringing together Member States and EU institutions and remains committed to continue using its network to encourage joint efforts also in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Having participated in most of its meetings since more than 25 years I witnessed the steadily growing affirmation of the Club as the ideal meeting point for public communicators offering enriching informal discussion and networking, giving new insights and inspiration for professional work. And last but not least creating relations of mutual confidence and friendship. This unique success story in the field of public communication would not have been possible without the indefatigable devoted work of our Secretary General Vincenzo Le Voci. He is the motor and the heart of the Club. Celebrating the 35 years of the Club of Venice is also celebrating Vincenzo's action and conveying to him our sincere gratitude for his great work.



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## Are we an institution? A reflection on friendships

Mike Granatt

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Picture the scene. It is mid-October, 2021. Our diligent and persuasive secretary-general is on the telephone, asking me to write this article.

Vincenzo and I discuss possible subjects. I am inspired largely by what I had been doing just as he rang.

This the scene.

Our family had just returned from Normandy. After nearly two years confined to England, we missed our ancient farmhouse, our village and our neighbours and the peace and quiet. Now we are exhausted after doing two years' worth of gardening, and maintenance in three weeks.

Just as Vincenzo rang, I was storing away all the new bureaucracy of EU/UK travel. In pride of place were the papers of the most privileged member of our household. With her new French pet passport, Clemmie, our four year old Portuguese Water Dog, now has freedom of movement Jane and I can now only dream of.

Am I cross? You may rely on it. It is in this mood that I reply to Vincenzo.

"Ok, Vincenzo," I say. "I am privileged to be asked to mark our auspicious anniversary. But I want to mark where the world is now and how we got here. So here's my title: The Rise of Incompetence."

"Great!" Vincenzo said, without a flicker of hesitation.

Later, I reflected on our conversation. While I had offered him an unoriginal, grumpy, article about Perfidious Albion, he had expressed delight.

And it struck me that his generous reaction encapsulated the spirit of the Club.

In all my time as an active member, I rarely heard a negative word. Lots of arguments, for sure. Put 20 communicators in a room, and you will discover at least 25 opinions. But I have never seen personal hostility, or an argument dismissed without a hearing.

So together, over these many years, in Europe's greatest cities, we have together enjoyed each other's company and opinions.

Together we have been absorbed by Europe's most interesting topics.



**MIKE GRANATT**

Mike Granatt is an Associate of a leading City consultancy, Luther Pendragon and former Co-ordinator of the Club of Venice.

His huge job experience includes former mandates as Director-General of the UK Government Information and Communication Service and Head of the UK's national civil crisis management unit.

Together we have agonised over Europe's intractable, perennial communication challenges.

Together we have delighted in agreement, enjoyed passionate disagreement without rancour, and been stimulated by new ideas and energy.

And together, at the end of the day, we have enjoyed dinner and its informal conversations. (In my humble opinion, these have always been the most memorable moments. Our generous hosts invariably understand that feeding both the mind and the body expands horizons, understanding, and experiences.)

And perhaps best of all, together we have made enduring friendships. Trust me, you can never fall out with someone with whom you have waded in fine evening clothes across a flooded St Mark's Square.

So how does one best describe such a self-sustaining organisation of professional stimulus and personal friendship? I offer you one term - institution. And immediately I hear a faint rumble of dissent, so let me explain.

I like the word "institution". It rolls around the mouth. It carries the implication of eternal values, comradeship, important work, and authority. It must not be captured for the sole use of by governmental edifices or the groves of scholarship.

In its best meaning, an institution is an organisation seen as culturally and professionally important by its members and by its observers, sustaining their values, standards, ideas, practices and partnerships.

And for me the Club of Venice is the best sort of institution. Important but not self-important. Enduring and enjoyable. Valuable and valued. Professional and informal. Big enough to embrace us all, and small enough to hug.

The Club is small, and it is great. Long may it prosper.

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## The Club of Venice - 35 years of relevance

Erik den Hoedt

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The Club of Venice is 35 years old. What a great achievement for an informal organization without central funding. Such an organization can only exist if it represents a great interest and if a number of people are able to make this interest visible with enormous commitment.

Since the Club was founded, our world has undeniably become more complex. For many people in our rich and relatively stable continent, the world also feels less safe than it used to be. Many people worry about the future, about their own, but especially about that of their children. We are confronted with terrorist attacks, refugee flows, the first effects of climate change, in which it is clear that humans play a major role, but where there are doubts about our ability to take the necessary measures together. For almost two years now, a serious pandemic has gripped the world. It imposes limits on our social behavior that we thought impossible until recently. On the other hand undeniable progress has been made. More and more young people have access to high-quality education, and due to advancing technology and digitalisation, more and more barriers are being overcome, in all kinds of areas. The disposable income of most people has also increased.

Towards the end of the last century, several leading opinion makers expected that the role of government would diminish. That people and society would become increasingly capable of organizing themselves, without government intervention. Nothing has turned out to be less true. It is precisely in times of uncertainty that the government is called upon. The government does not always succeed in responding adequately to this question. Much has changed in the relationship between citizens and government in recent decades. Not surprisingly, this is especially visible in the communication between government and citizens. Citizens have become more assertive and demanding. While 35 years ago they only had access to letters to the editor of newspapers and protestmarches to publicly express their dissatisfaction, they now have a whole range of channels available via social media to communicate with, but above all, about the government.

The government had already realized earlier that good communication is much more than oneway communication, informing citizens. Communication is much more effective when the government listens and starts a dialogue. But how do you get a fruitful dialogue when so many voices are mixed up? If the government is often not clear, not only because it does not know enough what each individual citizen needs, but also because the reality is complex and new for the government. Think of the current Covid pandemic. If we live in a society where opinions and emotions get more attention than the underlying facts. When there is so little confidence in government by many, not only in the quality of governance and service, but also in our intentions. And we are dealing with forces that deliberately want to destabilize our societies by spreading disinformation.



**ERIK DEN HOEDT**  
Vice President of the Club of Venice, is the Director of Operations in the Netherlands Ministry of General Affairs. Erik den Hoedt studied Human Geography at the University of Groningen. Since 1984 he has worked for the Dutch Central Government in several management functions in the fields of statistics, internal organization and in the last fifteen years in government communication (from 2010 to 2020 as Director of the Public Information and Communication Office, responsible for the enhancement of the effectiveness of government communication strategies and to provide the citizens of the Netherlands with relevant information from the government on its plans and activities).

Over the years I have seen the task of my communication colleagues become more and more complicated. The days of writing a press release, if a new bill was passed by parliament, are long gone. We can only perform our task well if we are in constant dialogue. If we are able to place the right facts in the right context and strike the right tone of voice and use images that match the frame through which our citizens view the world and the role of government. If we don't, we'll lose the connection. We cannot afford that.

The task is enormous. Fortunately we are many. We don't have to figure everything out ourselves. There are many colleagues in the countries around us who are working on the same issues, from whom we can learn. And therein lies the great strength of The Club of Venice. For 35 years we have been bringing communication professionals together to share knowledge with each other. Time and again it shows how much we like to meet each other as colleagues and exchange information, ask each other questions. Just think of the impressive amount of meetings, seminars and workshops that are behind us and the large amount of articles that have appeared in the magazine *Convergences*, the yearbooks and our digital platform Venicenet. The Club of Venice has been relevant in the world of government communications for 35 years. I have no doubt that this will continue to be the case for years to come.



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## Un lungo cammino, da affrontare con determinazione

Vincenzo Le Voci

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Ripercorrendo questi ultimi cinque anni, per i comunicatori pubblici si potrebbe davvero parlare di un crescente periodo di sofferenza.

Le crisi che si sono avvicendate nel panorama geopolitico europeo e mondiale, talvolta sovrapposte l'una all'altra, hanno trovato ancora una volta i governi, le istituzioni e le organizzazioni internazionali sguarnite, disorganizzate e impreparate ad affrontarle perché deficitarie di strategie integrate e di capacità di confronto e di *open governance*. L'aspetto più grave di questa carenza cronica è costituito da due elementi interdipendenti: la lentezza nella pianificazione strategica delle risorse umane dedite alla comunicazione pubblica in modo permanente e i modesti investimenti sulla formazione, con un inevitabile impatto su competenze e know-how.

La stessa *public diplomacy* ha conosciuto un preoccupante declino. Le crescenti tendenze sovraniste, illiberali, intolleranti registrate a causa delle recenti crisi (sanitaria, economica, geopolitica) hanno acuito un clima di cattiveria, di irrispettosa superficialità e diffidenza reciproca che ha inevitabilmente influenzato il tenore delle relazioni internazionali in chiave negativa. Sodalizi intergovernativi consolidati da decenni sono stati messi a dura prova da rigurgiti di conservatorismo e han visto indebolirsi i parametri-chiave sui quali si basavano i rapporti di collaborazione e di reciproco rispetto di ruoli e immagini. Allo stesso tempo, le strategie di *country branding* e *soft diplomacy* hanno spesso subito le "incursioni" di spregiudicati piani strategici d'investimento mascherati da "promozione di valori e opportunità", in realtà imponendo nel frattempo la legge del più forte.

Gli avvicendamenti nella *governance*, spesso di natura opposta rispetto ai precedenti governi, hanno determinato scossoni nella *res publica*, nella visione politica, nelle leggi talora abrogative rispetto a misure prese dalle maggioranze dissolte e negli obiettivi conseguenti. Non stupisce l'accresciuto disorientamento, la sfiducia, l'apatia e l'insofferenza dei cittadini ormai radicata nei confronti delle loro autorità.

Istituzioni e governi, che dovrebbero difendere proteggere e onorare il principio di democrazia rappresentativa, hanno tuttora notevoli margini di miglioramento e fanno spesso a gara a chi mostra i denti più affilati. I principi e le dinamiche dello stato sociale che erano al centro delle politiche dei precedenti decenni non sembrano più essere sufficientemente tutelate - e la pandemia ha inferto un duro colpo a buona parte del substrato artigianale e dei piccoli commerci. I camion militari che nel marzo 2020 trasportavano in notturna le salme delle persone decedute per COVID-19 hanno creato un profondo sentimento di sconforto e una percezione di abbandono nei confronti di molti cittadini. Nel frattempo, il collasso economico e la difficile riorganizzazione dei corsi scolastici hanno generato uno sconcerto mai riscontrato.

Da qui il crescente disprezzo, la disillusione e il disinteresse nei riguardi delle recenti tornate elettorali, in tutta Europa e overseas. In Italia, non scorre inosservata la percentuale deludente di voto (meno del 40% di votanti nell'ultimo voto alle elezioni amministrative).

Di fronte a tale sconcertante scenario, a fronte di una pandemia che ha sconvolto le coscienze e ha disfatto un tessuto economico e sociale costruito con così tanta fatica nei decenni successivi al primo dopoguerra, in che modo potrebbero i comunicatori pubblici rigenerare i rapporti con i cittadini? Come reagire di fronte ad un quadro talmente complesso di apatia e di scarso attaccamento dei cittadini ai valori civici, di solidarietà, di partecipazione e rispetto del prossimo?

Il Club di Venezia si è fatto molte domande sulla capacità di utilizzo del potenziale di esperienza, di competenza e professionalità dei suoi membri al servizio e beneficio dei cittadini e sul ruolo di interfaccia e di mediazione che il comunicatore pubblico è tenuto ad esercitare tra essi e le autorità politiche. Compito arduo, ma non impossibile; rischioso, ma onorevolissimo.

Nell'ultimo quinquennio il Club ha moltiplicato i suoi sforzi intensificando il proprio calendario dei lavori, aggiungendo alle consuete riunioni plenarie molti seminari tematici e avvalendosi della collaborazione crescente di molti partners internazionali accomunati da interessantissimi temi d'interesse comune. La frequenza delle riunioni del Club è aumentata notevolmente (in media, cinque-sei riunioni annuali) e abbiamo anche collaborato ad iniziative congiunte organizzate dall'OCSE, dalle associazioni di comunicatori e media dei paesi ex-jugoslavi (SEECOM, SEEMO), alla Fondazione Konrad Adenauer, dal Centro internazionale per lo sviluppo delle politiche migratorie e da Cap'Com (associazione delle realtà regionali e cittadine francesi) nonché da e con altre organizzazioni della società civile.

Una delle maggiori sfide per il Club consiste nell'analizzare obiettivamente le problematiche all'origine delle maggiori crisi dei nostri tempi e esaminare in modo concreto e costruttivo le opzioni più efficaci per poter comunicare i piani governativi e istituzionali per poterle risolvere rispondendo alle esigenze e alle attese dei cittadini. Questo sforzo comune si è concretizzato approfondendo le conoscenze alla radice dei problemi e intensificando notevolmente, grazie al carattere informale del Club, lo scambio di esperienze tra vari paesi, avvalendosi anche della competenza di comunità scientifiche, professionisti e collaboratori esterni:

- verificando sul terreno l'incidenza delle varie crisi (ad esempio, visitando le realtà degli hotspots ad Atene, Lesbos, a Malta e in Italia e organizzando seminari in loco sul fenomeno migratorio)
- incrementando l'analisi dei crescenti fenomeni di disinformazione e dell'utilizzo improprio e nocivo delle nuove tecnologie digitali
- organizzando seminari sul ruolo della comunicazione nella cooperazione alla lotta contro il terrorismo e sull'impatto di questo fenomeno sulla sicurezza pubblica e sulla *country reputation*
- creando due gruppi di lavoro specifici in materia di *capacity building* e resilienza nei riguardi delle minacce ibride
- organizzando sessioni sul tema della libertà d'espressione, scambiando esperienze con professionisti del settore dei media, analizzandone le attuali difficoltà in una società spesso polarizzata e pervasa da crescenti rischi di anti-democratizzazione e esplorando forme di collaborazione.

La gestione delle crisi non può essere vincente né convincente se non è accompagnata da un concreto piano di comunicazione di crisi.



**VINCENZO LE VOCI**  
Vincenzo Le Voci is the Secretary-General of the Club of Venice, the network of the communications directors from the European Union member states and institutions and from countries candidate to the EU membership. He has fulfilled this role since 2011. He is a longstanding European civil servant, having worked for the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU for 29 years. Since 2001 he is in the Directorate-General of Communication, where he is currently responsible for Transparency and Information Policy matters. Before joining the EU, he worked 7 years for NATO in administration management and logistics, as a US Air Force - DOD official. Vincenzo owns a Master degree in foreign languages and literatures and attended courses of modern history, European Integration and management in Belgium and at Maryland and MIT universities. He is giving lectures to universities and contributes articles and essays for communications and public diplomacy books and magazines. He is the co-editor of three compendiums and, since 2013, a semi-annual review (Convergences) of the Club of Venice focused on challenges in public communication. In 2018 he was conferred by the University of Calabria and the Municipality of Ventotene (the home of Altiero Spinelli's Manifesto) the

Europa Prize "in recognition of his high commitment to communication and information aimed at encouraging and strengthening public and diplomatic relations between governmental and institutional communicators".

In tale contesto, negli ultimi cinque anni il Club ha progressivamente consolidato un eccellente rapporto di collaborazione con il Servizio di comunicazione del governo del Regno Unito, che si è concretizzato nell'organizzazione di 4 seminari di comunicazione strategica (un quinto evento è previsto a Londra nel marzo del 2022), e sottoscritto una serie di Carte per confermare la condivisione di principi di *capacity/capability building*, lotta alla disinformazione, resilienza nei riguardi delle minacce ibride, rafforzamento delle relazioni tra comunicatori pubblici e il settore dei media. Abbiamo inoltre pubblicato 10 ricche edizioni della rivista semestrale "Convergences" a cui accingiamo a salutare quest'ultima pubblicazione in onore del 35mo Anniversario.

La plenaria di Venezia del 2 e 3 dicembre 2021 segna il ritorno alle riunioni in presenza e marcherà l'ingresso di tutti noi comunicatori pubblici in una fase di profonda analisi dell'opinione pubblica su temi strettamente legati alla gestione delle crisi (di natura sociale, sanitaria, climatica, politica), nonché delle reali capacità strutturali e organizzative e delle prospettive di collaborazione tra governi e tra questi e le istituzioni UE. Non abbiamo alternative - dobbiamo scrollarci di dosso l'etichetta di "fatalisti" e di "parolai" e moltiplicare gli impegni per difendere e diffondere i valori democratici e riuscire a parlare al cuore della gente.

Dieci anni prima dello storico allargamento dell'Unione, Vaclav Havel, nel 1994 di fronte all'Assemblea parlamentare europea di Strasburgo, riconoscendo la diversità e peculiarità dei vari popoli d'Europa, avvertì tuttavia la necessità di sedersi attorno ad un tavolo e dialogare, perché l'unica alternativa al dialogo sarebbe il conflitto.

Ecco perché ci attende ancora un lungo cammino, ma possiamo ritrovarci e rigenerare la comunicazione pubblica lavorando assieme, con umiltà e determinazione. Lunga vita al Club di Venezia!

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## A long way, to face with determination

Vincenzo Le Voci

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Looking back over the past five years, one could really speak of a growing period of suffering for public communicators.

The crises that have alternated in the European and global geopolitical panorama, sometimes superposed on each other, have once again found governments, institutions and international organizations unmanned, disorganized and unprepared to face them owing to the lack of integrated strategies and capacity for discussion and open governance. The most serious aspect of this chronic lack consists of two interdependent elements: the slowness in the strategic planning of human resources dedicated to public communication on a permanent basis and the modest investments in training, with an inevitable impact on skills and know-how.

Public diplomacy itself has experienced a worrying decline. The growing sovereignist, illiberal, intolerant tendencies highlighted due to the recent crises (health, economic, geopolitical) have exacerbated a climate of wickedness, disrespectful superficiality and mutual distrust that has inevitably influenced the tenor of international relations in a negative way. Intergovernmental partnerships consolidated for decades have been severely tested by the upsurge of conservatism and have seen fading the key parameters on which the relationships of collaboration and mutual respect for roles and images were based. At the same time, country branding and soft diplomacy strategies have often suffered the “incursions” of unscrupulous strategic investment plans disguised as “promotion of values and opportunities”, actually imposing in the meantime the law of the strongest.

The changes in governance, often of an opposite nature compared to previous governments, have caused shocks in the *res publica*, in the political vision, in the laws that sometimes abrogate measures taken by the dissolved majorities and in the consequent objectives. Not surprisingly, the growing disorientation, mistrust, apathy and intolerance of citizens by now ingrained towards their authorities.

Institutions and governments, which should defend, protect and honour the principle of representative democracy, still have considerable room for improvement and often compete to see who shows the sharpest teeth. The principles and dynamics of the welfare state that were at the heart of the policies of previous decades no longer seem to be sufficiently protected - and the pandemic has dealt a severe blow to much of the artisanal substrate and small businesses. The military trucks that in March 2020 transported the bodies of people who died of COVID-19 at night created a deep feeling of despair and a perception of abandonment towards many citizens. In the meantime, the economic collapse and the difficult reorganization of school courses have generated an unprecedented bewilderment.

Hence the growing contempt, disillusionment and disinterest in the recent elections, throughout Europe and overseas. In Italy, the disappointing percentage of votes does not flow unnoticed (less than 40% of voters in the last vote in the local elections).

Faced with this disconcerting scenario, in the face of a pandemic that has upset consciences and unraveled an economic and social thread built with so much effort in the decades following the first post-war period, how could public communicators regenerate relations with citizens? How to react in the face of such a complex picture of apathy and lack of attachment of citizens to civic values, solidarity, participation and respect for others?

The Club of Venice has asked itself many questions on the ability to use the potential of experience, competence and professionalism of its members at the service and benefit of citizens and on the role of interface and mediation that the public communicator is required to exercise between them and political authorities. Difficult task, but not impossible; risky, but very honorable.

In the last five years the Club has multiplied its efforts by intensifying its calendar of works, adding many thematic seminars to the usual plenary meetings and making use of the growing collaboration of many international partners sharing very interesting topics of common interest. The frequency of the Club's meetings has increased significantly (on average, five to six meetings per year) and we have also collaborated in joint initiatives organized by the OECD, the associations of communicators and media of the former Yugoslav countries (SEECOM, SEEMO), the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the International Center for the Development of Migration Policies and Cap'Com (association of French regional and city realities) as well as with several civil society organizations.

One of the greatest challenges for the Club consists in objectively analysing the problems at the origin of the major crises of our times and examining in a concrete and constructive way the most effective options to be able to communicate government and institutional plans, in order to resolve such crises by responding to the needs and expectations of citizens. This common effort has materialized by deepening the knowledge at the root of the problems and significantly intensifying, thanks also to the informal nature of the Club, the exchange of experiences between various countries, also making use of the expertise of scientific communities, external professionals and specialists:

- verifying on the ground the impact of the various crises (for example, by visiting the realities of the hotspots in Athens, Lesbos, Malta and Italy and organizing on-site seminars on the migration phenomenon)
- increasing the analysis of the growing disinformation phenomena and the improper and harmful use of new digital technologies
- organizing seminars on the role of communication in cooperation in the fight against terrorism and on the impact of this phenomenon on public security and country reputation
- creating two specific working groups on capacity building and resilience towards hybrid threats
- organizing sessions on the theme of freedom of expression, exchanging experiences with media professionals, analyzing their current difficulties in a society that is often polarized and pervaded by growing risks of anti-democratization and exploring forms of collaboration.

Crisis management cannot be successful or convincing if it is not accompanied by a concrete crisis communication plan.

In this context, over the last five years the Club has gradually consolidated an excellent collaborative relationship with the UK government communication service, which has resulted in the organization of 4 strategic communication seminars (a fifth event of this kind will be organised in London in March 2022), and signed a series of Charters to confirm the sharing of capacity/capability building principles, fight against disinformation, resilience towards hybrid threats, strengthening relations between public communicators and the media sector. We have also published 10 rich editions of the biannual "Convergences" magazine and we are going to greet this latest publication in honor of the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

The Venice plenary session of 2 and 3 December 2021 marks the return to face-to-face meetings and the entrance of all of us public communicators in a phase of profound analysis of public opinion on issues strictly related to crisis management (of a social nature, health, climate, politics), as well as the real structural and organizational capacities and the prospects for collaboration between governments and between them and the EU institutions. We have no alternatives - we have to shake off the label of "fatalists" and "buzzwords" and multiply our commitments to defend and spread democratic values and be able to speak to the hearts of the people.

Ten years before the historic enlargement of the Union, Vaclav Havel, in 1994 in front of the European Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg, recognizing the diversity and peculiarity of the various peoples of Europe, nevertheless felt the need to sit around a table and dialogue, because the only alternative to dialogue would be conflict.

This is why we still have a long way to go, but we can find ourselves and regenerate public communication by working together, with humility and determination. Long live the Club of Venice!



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## A wonderful club doing vigorously well

Niels Jørgen Thøgersen

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Ten years ago, when looking back at 25 years of Club of Venice since its foundation by Stefano Rolando, I underlined some of the main features making the success of this unique Club:

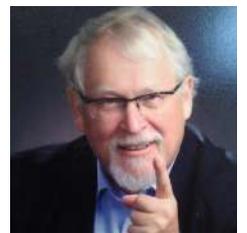
- Bringing together the most senior public communicators of all EU countries and institutions and inviting also candidate countries to join.
- Keeping meetings informal, allowing to speak freely under Chatham House rule.
- Discussing all relevant questions in the field of public communication and stimulating exchanges of information and experiences.

Now, at the 35<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Club, I can confirm that these guiding principles are still valid. The Club has enlarged its membership to all new EU- and candidate-countries, it has maintained UK, one of its founding members, on board after Brexit and it has enriched its debates inviting other organisations, members of the scientific community and high level communication specialists to join its meetings and contribute to enriching exchanges on specific priority topics.

The agenda of the Club covering a wide range of priority themes for public communicators, it has been necessary to organize a series of seminars and working groups for detailed examination of topics like crisis communication, strategic communication to counter all kinds of disinformation and hybrid threats as well as public diplomacy and capacity building.

The Club's website Venicenet has been further developed with the help of our Belgian colleagues and our Secretary-General Vincenzo Le Voci, who are also instrumental for the publishing of the Club's review 'Convergences'.

Congratulations and best wishes for the future to the Club of Venice doing vigorously well, always adapting its work to the rapidly changing communication environment and living up successfully to new challenges for public communicators!



**NIELS JØRGEN THØGERSEN**  
Born 22.1.1945 in Denmark. Political scientist. Head of the EU Office in Denmark 1973-88. Director of Communications in the European Commission 1988-2005. Member of the Club of Venice since 1988 and Honorary Vice-President since 2005. Specialised in on-line interactive communication, especially about Europe.

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## Walking in the same direction A Croatian perspective

Zvonimir Frka-Petešić

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My personal experience as an emeritus member of the Club of Venice is rich with gratifying episodes that epitomize a successful common path: public communication as a joint effort among professionals from across Europe who believe in their mission and wish to improve outreach and do good things for their citizens.

During Croatia's six-year-long EU accession negotiations, I was fortunate to be posted to our Mission to the EU in Brussels. I was thus able to establish a connection with the Club through the communication services of the General Secretariat of the Council, where Vincenzo Le Voci had started to coordinate the agenda of the Club as a liaison officer between the Member States' national governance of this network and the EU institutions. For me, as the very first Croatian member of the Club, being able to benefit from the experience of the Member States in terms of public communication, with a focus on European policies and topics, turned out to be particularly useful.

We found common ground and common objectives while the EU was intensifying work in its new 27 MS scenario (a decade before, this had been almost inconceivable for many of us!). In November 2009, we organised a seminar on communication in the field of EU enlargement, held in Croatia, in the city of Poreč. This was the beginning of an indefatigable period of cooperation that we successfully maintained in the following years. Two years later, in 2011, when I was in charge of the referendum campaign on Croatia's accession to the EU, the lessons learned and shared within the Club by colleagues from other Member States concerning their own referendums for accession to the EU were very precious to me.

An important benefit of the Club was the informal environment in which it operates. Professionals can freely exchange their views beyond any rigid scheme or bureaucratic constraints, additionally reassured by the use of the Chatham House Rule. This enabled us to share our views, experiences and lessons learned frankly and objectively, to table suggestions on how best to enhance our communication strategies and working methods, and to facilitate our role as the link between political authorities and their citizens. Indeed a challenging task!

As public communicators, we must keep defending universal democratic principles, and do so by building ties and research affinities, build the ability to speak clearly, understand needs and expectations, be meaningful and transparent, reinforce internal coherence and be proud and conscious of our responsibilities and accountability. As Robert Schuman recalled, we have a primary duty: to witness and play our proactive role in today's world of personal responsibility.

During the Croatian presidency of the Council of the EU, in the first half of 2020, the chance for a plenary meeting of the Club of Venice in Croatia was missed, owing to lockdown measures because of the pandemic. This was



**ZVONIMIR FRKA-PETEŠIĆ** is the Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister of Croatia, appointed in 2017. From 2013 to 2017 he was Ambassador of Croatia to Morocco and also non-resident Ambassador to Tunisia, Mauritania, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon and Cameroon. Previously he was in charge of public diplomacy and of support to the accession process of Croatia to the EU at the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, coordinating also the EU membership referendum campaign. From 2006 to 2011 he served as Head of Public Relations and Spokesperson at the Mission of Croatia to the EU in Brussels. Zvonimir owns Master's degrees in Geopolitical Sciences and in Geography at Paris VII University.

a sad experience, a big test for all of us. Nevertheless, though initially disappointed at being unable to welcome the participants in our beautiful Dubrovnik, we did our best to organise a successful videoconference, where we discussed challenges, analyses and lessons learned in managing communication on COVID-19. It was a great opportunity to draw inspiration from over 100 specialists on how to work more effectively on quite a few strategic issues. These include integrated thinking; investment in analysis, research and communication skills; mutual trust and cooperation between communicators and the scientific community; cooperation with multipliers; concrete engagement in social media; a holistic approach in handling threats and consistent debunking of disinformation; and prevention.

I wish to congratulate the Club of Venice for its 35 years of intense work, for gathering distinguished professionals on such rich agendas and, most of all, for acting with a common objective, in particular to improve institutional communication on European and public policies. My best wishes go to our good friends of the Club of Venice for a brilliant future, filled with continuous achievements!



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## Opportunities and challenges for the european communicators and the role of the Club of Venice

Igor Blahušiak

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*Last few months have turned our lives upside down. The unprecedented pandemic has shaken our established concepts of thinking. It has been a great challenge to our ability to adapt in order to survive. We all had to innovate a find new ways to carry on in our activities. But this tough challenge should not be viewed only in negative terms; quite contrary: it is a great opportunity to challenge our established concepts. It might well have start a process of catharsis in the end of which we might find ourselves better prepared and equipped to fulfil our roles of European communicators. Club of Venice, celebrating estimable 35 years of operation, might well be one of the best tools to achieve this goal.*

Although the covid-19 pandemic is far from being over, we already have had opportunities to draw important lessons from it. The importance of public communication has risen; many societies have been challenged by an infodemic. One might have concluded that misinformation and disinformation seem to have been spreading as fast as ever. Public communicators have been challenged to clearly communicate administrations' decisions at all levels of governance – be it local, regional, state or the European.

Tackling the pandemic – especially in the beginning when the information was sparse and the effects of at that time new disease largely unknown – required swift decisions. The rules would change rather quickly and unexpectedly at some points. All of this added to the gravity of challenge presented to the communicators.

At the time of writing, at least some parts of the European family have seen significant improvements in tackling the covid-19. On the other hand, others are struggling, although being seemingly equipped with largely comparative set of tools. A glimpse at sociological data might provide and answer: the societies with a higher levels of overall confidence in administrations tend to be more successful in their efforts to “return to normal life”.

This might lead us to assertion that effective public communication plays a pivotal role within this context. We have witnessed that lack of public communication, comprehensive communication campaigns or contradictory statements is not the best way to build the trust and societal resilience. There might be plenty of underlying reasons, being far beyond the scope of this article. But one thing is certain: all of the human beings are naturally curious. When something is happening, they want to know - in clear, understandable and trustworthy manner. This clearly shows a rise in importance of effective public communication.

Every coin has two sides, however. We, the public communicators, have been given an opportunity, been entrusted with confidence. And we need to deliver. The traditional toolbox will not suffice; for the mere reason of changes brought by the pandemic and adaptations required consequently.

For instance, many of our meetings and events have been moved to hybrid or online format in the Czechia. But, shall we perceive it as a loss of physical contact? Or eagerly wait to revert to traditional old formats of events? Or shall we view these development as a unique opportunity to reach to new audiences? Indeed, our figures speaks for the latter: we have seen an unprecedented rise of reach of our events, by almost two thirds.

The pandemic is not only a challenge, but also an opportunity. It has been a catharsis; we were forced to innovate swiftly in order to continue in our activities. A process that would normally take years, shrunk to months and weeks. Innovation, ability to modernise and most importantly, learn new insights has been proven to be the key to the future.

But the internal resources would not suffice the gravity of the challenge. We have partnered with renown universities, think-tanks and researches to provide us deeper insights and best practice from abroad and also commercial sector.

And this leads me to a second important lesson from the pandemic: we all need to innovate, to learn and absorb new insights. Incorporate them in the design of our activities in order to be successful, effective and to answer the demand our “customers”, i.e. general public of our “jurisdictions” (or “playing fields” if you wish).

Learning from academia, research and civic society will be an obvious best practice to pursue. However, as it was written earlier, these times are unprecedented. We might well consider and try to understand why the other communication actors, including the ones we tend to fight, have been in some instances so successful in their activities. Naturally, we will never just adopt their work methods and practices; this might have very negative consequences. But clearly, there might be some insights for us to observe and to improve our communication efforts. And this might well be a possible food for thought in future Club events and activities.

We might be at the threshold of a significant change, represented not only by changes in the communication environment brought by or accelerated by the pandemic, but also characterized by a different perception of the social media. The development could be clearly seen at the Club meetings: from initial enthusiasm through the first critical remarks on algorithms and preference of paid content to the present-day studies and leaking information on destructive influence on individuals and society as whole.

Indeed, one can already spot calls to return to “traditional” in-person debates and media channels. The ongoing Conference on the Future of Europe might a prime example of this trend but shall not remain the only one. A truly bi-directional dialogue with the citizens should be sought after to be created; not necessarily entailing any over-complicated structures and rather having used a clear and well documented link between the individual citizens' contributions and concrete policy changes. This is another area where the Club could play an important role.

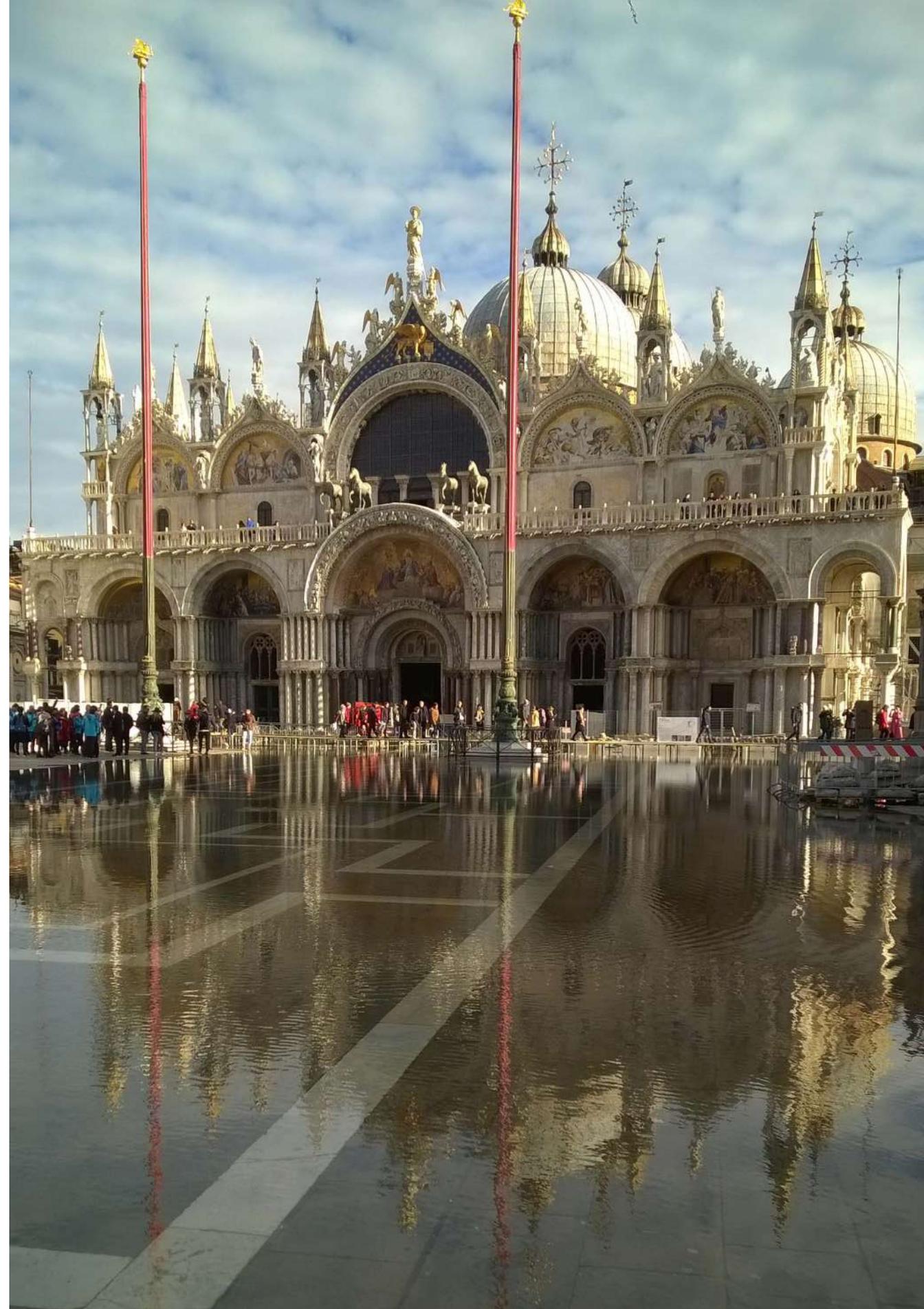


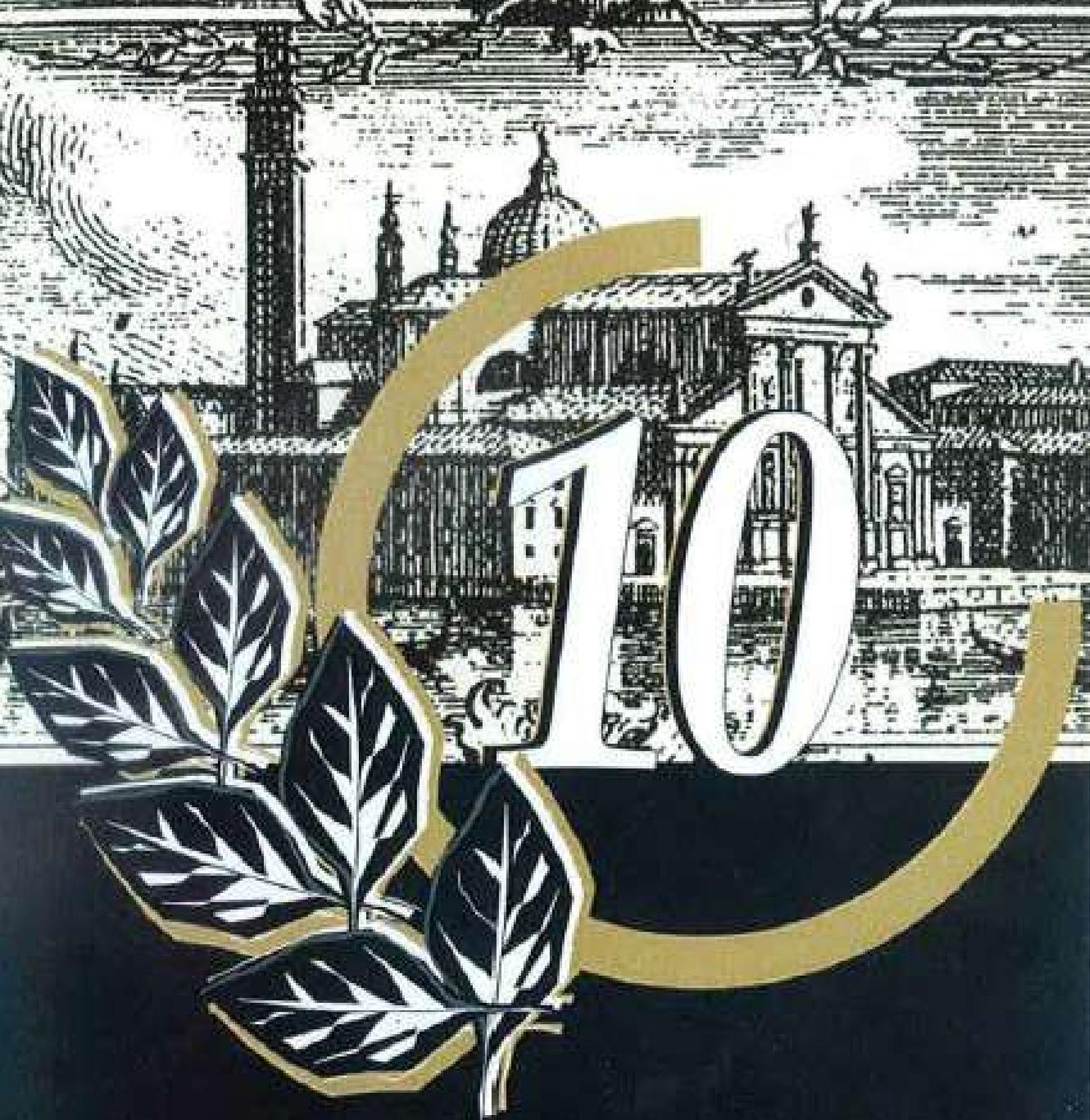
**IGOR BLAHUŠIAK**

Igor has been serving more than ten years in the field of public communication of the European Affairs. For the last four years, he has been leading the European Affairs Communication Department within the Czech Office the Government. Having innovated all of the Departments' main communication tools in the recent years, he continues to find innovative answers to all challenges and new communication projects: from expert stakeholder debates within the National Convention project through citizen engagement in the Conference on Future of Europe and lectures for both youth and the older populations to the contribution to the preparation of the Czech Presidency. Igor holds PhD in European Law and keenly travels Europe and savours all of it flavours.

Last, but not least we might well start a discussion of contributing more and be involved deeper – as communicators – to the rule-making process. The practical implications of use of the social media have taught us important lessons. Now a whole new world of virtual reality is beginning to emerge. The online world is set to move to another stage. Let's not make the same mistake as with social networks and do not fall asleep. The Club of Venice, celebrating estimable 35 years of operation, might well be one of the best tools to tackle all the presented challenges.

I sincerely wish the Club all the best in its future efforts!





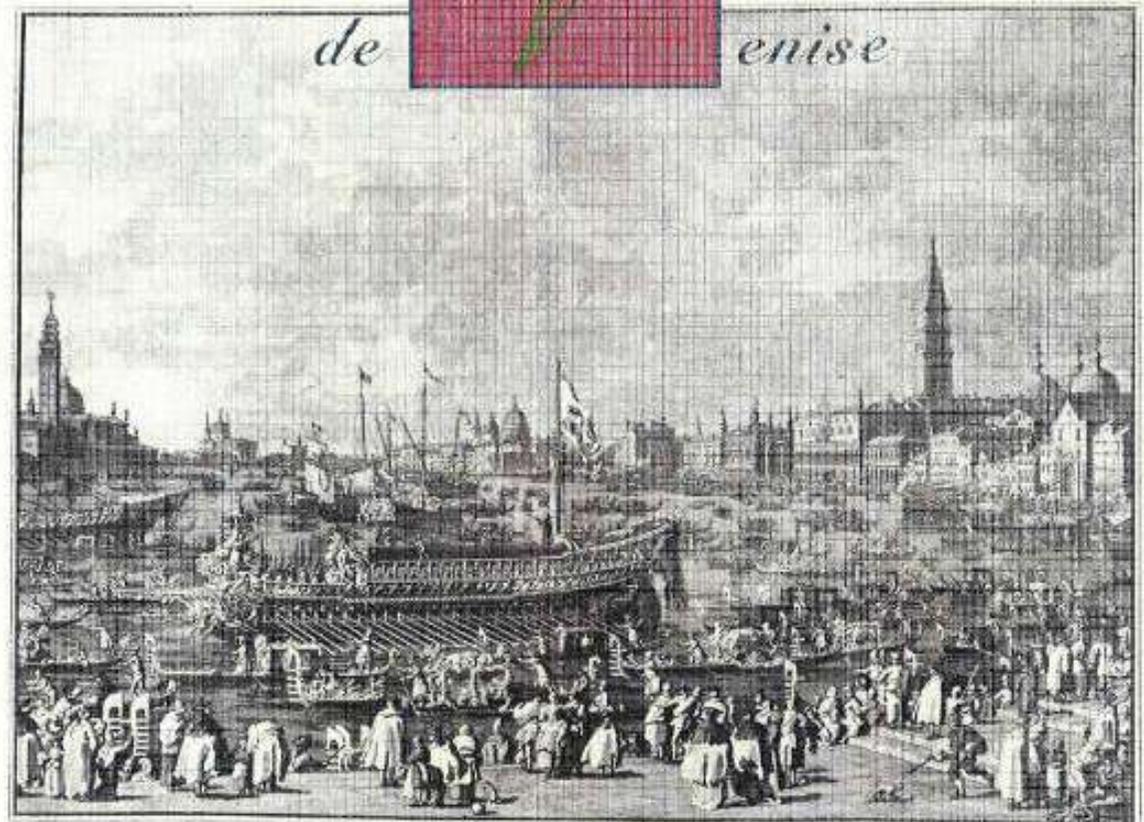
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Club of Venice  
1986-2011

# 25 Years of Public Communication in Europe

Europe in schools  
capacity building  
branding  
web communication  
government communication  
Communicating Enlargement  
management partnerships  
Crisis Communication  
ethics  
Public Diplomacy  
social media  
communicating networks  
journalism and new media

# 30

YEARS OF

# PUBLIC COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES



Club of Venice  
1986-2016



**PRIORITIES,  
TRENDS  
AND TOOLS**

# Public communication for strengthening democracy: state of the art and future perspectives

Carlotta Alfonsi

## The case for using public communication to increase public trust and strengthen democracy

The exchange of information between governments and citizens, and the dialogue that ensues from it, are essential parts of democratic governance and instrumental to better policy-making. Today, digital technologies have made communicating easier than it has ever been, as demonstrated by the central place that social media have gained in people's daily lives. Yet, the forthcoming OECD report *Public Communication<sup>1</sup>: the Global Context and the Way Forward* (hereafter – the Report) demonstrates that many governments are often missing the opportunity to effectively communicate and engage with their citizens. A recognition of the strategic potential of communication for policy, a timely investment to strengthen it as a public function, and a mandate to enable two-way dialogue can reverse this trend.

The deficit of transparent, inclusive and responsive communication has a clear cost to governments around the world. Many societies are undergoing a crisis of trust that is undermining democracy and challenging the traditional institutions that sustain it, such as traditional and new media, electoral processes, and public institutions in general. Almost half of people surveyed across 28 OECD member and non-member countries feel that the political system is not working for them (Edelman, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). As many as 60% of respondents from 21 countries felt that their government did not incorporate their views when designing social policy (OECD, 2018<sup>[2]</sup>). Such findings have severe implications for citizens' trust in government.

Global challenges, such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, have clearly underlined the important role of information – and of its governance – to policy design and implementation and, more generally, to democracy. Citizens' trust in information is however also being challenged. Hostile actors have demonstrated how they can take advantage of digital tools to fuel fear and divisions across the world. In the wake of a devastating pandemic, misinformation on science and vaccines have cost lives, whereas effective public communication of health guidance has saved many. As we look towards the looming environmental emergency, the difficult decisions to transform our societies and economies require constructive public debates that yield buy-in from all stakeholders on urgent and sometimes difficult reforms. These examples illustrate how information, public communication, and dialogue are more than ever necessary to sustain democratic processes, strengthen the resilience of our information ecosystems<sup>2</sup>, and recover people's loss of

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this Report, public communication is understood as the government function to deliver information, listen and respond to citizens in the service of the common good. It is distinct from political communication, which is linked to partisan debate, elections, or individual political figures and parties.

<sup>2</sup> This is understood as the combination of communication and media governance frameworks (i.e. institutional, legal, policy and regulatory) as well as principal actors (i.e. governments, traditional and social media companies and citizen journalists).

trust, which is essential to overcome current and future crises.

Public communication can play a crucial role in addressing the double crisis of trust in both governments and information. Thanks to innovations comprising digital channels, big data analytics, behavioural insights and more, governments now have unprecedented means to share information with greater reach and impact and to encourage positive behaviours, but also to listen to citizens and understand their needs and expectations. Examples of such effective communication are widely seen in private sector, marketing or political parties' electoral campaigns, but also, more worryingly, in disinformation campaigns. However, the Report demonstrates that there are important gaps in the way governments make use of public communication to achieve these important goals.

A legacy of top-down and unilateral dissemination of information, coupled with a focus on promoting governments' reputations, have hindered the realisation of the full potential of this function. Communication is still too often linked to media relations and press offices, with undue emphasis on securing visibility and on channels that are losing centrality with many audiences across the world. Moreover, a focus on responsive communication that supports the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>) can often face resistance and be perceived as risky.

## A crisis of trust in governments and information



Source: Author's own work

The present context calls for governments to move beyond this outdated understanding of communication. This requires a change of culture primarily among senior public officials and policy-makers: communicators are often acutely aware of the opportunities to seize, yet often lack sufficient access to decision-makers or the necessary mandate and resources to move towards impactful communication. The Report found that less than half of communicators in Centres of Government (CoGs) interact frequently with policy teams. Both the existing literature and reflections from the OECD Working Party on Open Government (WPOG) and Experts Group on Public Communication (EGPC) meetings reaffirm the need for a culture shift to make

communication better integrated with policy and more conducive to engagement (Sanders and Canel, 2013<sup>[4]</sup>; WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, 2016<sup>[5]</sup>).

### Navigating an evolving information ecosystem: seizing the opportunities of the digital revolution while addressing the challenge of mis- and disinformation

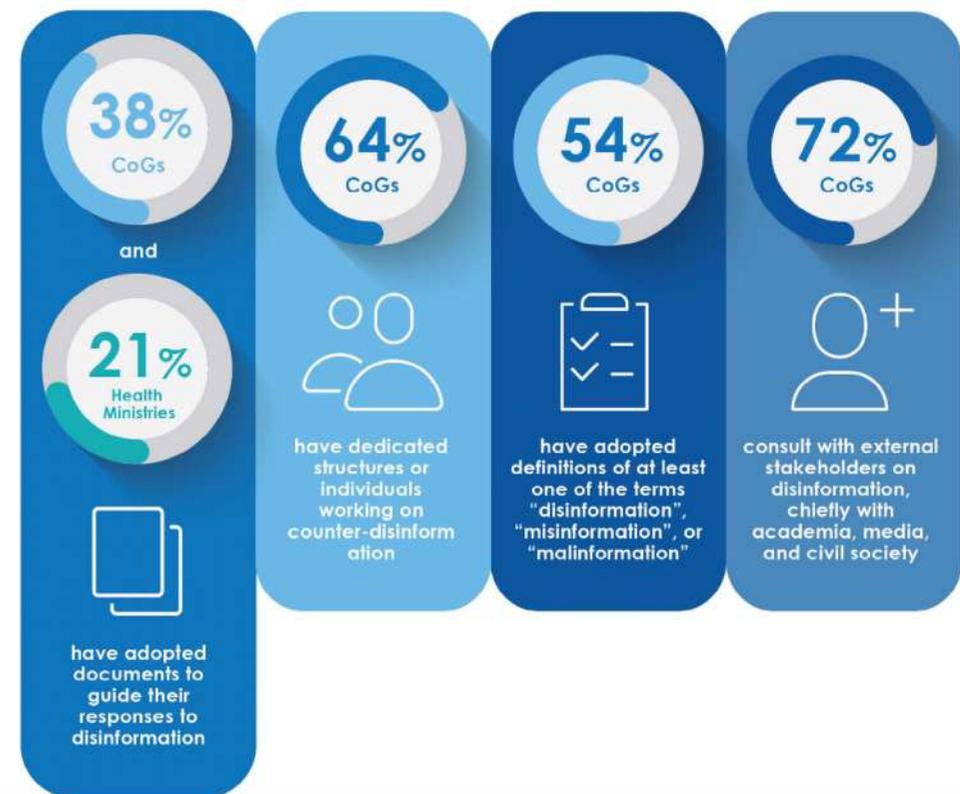
Government communication does not happen in a vacuum. Radical transformations to the information ecosystem have upended traditional communication methods and enabled the spread of problematic content at a previously unthinkable scale. The dominance of online channels, where every individual can be both a producer and consumer of content, means that governments face greater competition for the finite attention of citizens. Meanwhile, digital platforms also allow new opportunities for providing direct and unmediated contact with vast and diverse publics, allowing governments to deliver precise and relevant information in ways that enhance responsiveness and build trust.

Historically, traditional media were the main avenue for citizens to hear from and about their governments. In many parts of the world today, evening news and front-page headlines have lost some of their primacy in shaping public debates to a constellation of alternative voices across social media feeds, podcasts and online videos. Using these channels strategically to connect with a wider and more diversified public on the issues they care about has become imperative to successful communication, as has the ability to analyse and learn from data linked to the use of such channels. However, as many as 26% of Centres of Government (CoGs) surveyed do not target any specific audience groups in their communication.

Over recent years, the unprecedented spread of mis- and disinformation has disrupted the information ecosystem, already challenged by the ongoing decline of traditional media and journalism outlets undermining policy and fuelling polarisation (Reuters Institute, 2021<sup>[4]</sup>). Governments have an important role to play in filling information gaps and clarifying facts on sensitive topics that are vulnerable to harmful rumours and conspiracies. Evidence from the Report suggests institutions in many countries are still working towards establishing and consolidating comprehensive approaches to preventing and responding to mis- and disinformation, although an evolving landscape of practices is pointing the way forward. Only 38% of surveyed Centres of Government (CoGs) and 21% of Ministries of Health (MHs) had adopted frameworks, policies or strategies to guide their interventions against this issue. Encouragingly, a larger share (64% in CoGs) have designated structures or staff to work on this issue, and most do at least some cross-government coordination of activities.

However, this institutionalisation gap remains an obstacle to pursuing and scaling responses to adequately confront the immediate threats from growing information disorders. To this end, the *OECD Principles of Good Practice for Public Communication Responses to Help Counter Mis- and Disinformation* (forthcoming) highlight ways to strengthen and expand the role of the communication function within a broader range of interventions to bring about an enabling ecosystem for trustworthy information. The Principles, and the practices on which they elaborate, can provide a roadmap for the design of holistic strategies to counteract this problem, building on the essential roles of all stakeholders in society – whether media and fact-checkers, or citizens and the platforms themselves.

### Responses to mis- and disinformation in numbers



Source: Author's own work

### To this end, the OECD Report identifies and focuses on the following key principles for effective public communication:

- 1. Empowering the public communication function** by setting appropriate mandates and developing strategies to guide the delivery of communication in the service of policy objectives and of the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation, separating it, to the extent possible, from political communication.
- 2. Institutionalising and professionalising** the function to have sufficient capacity, including by embedding the necessary skills and specialisations that are leading the transformation of the field, and ensuring adequate human and financial resources.
- 3. Transitioning towards a more informed communication**, built around measurable policy objectives and grounded in evidence, through the acquisition of insights in the behaviours, perceptions, and preferences of diverse publics, and the evaluation of its activities against impact metrics.
- Accompanying the **adoption of digital technologies and data** with considerations on their ethical use as well as the pursuit of inclusion and engagement.
- Strengthening the strategic use of **public communication to counter mis- and disinformation**.

### More information about the forthcoming OECD Report on Public Communication

The Report, which will be published in December 2021, is a first-of-its kind exercise to analyse in detail the communication functions of such a vast sample of countries across the world, against the backdrop of a global pandemic that has put communications in the limelight like never before. It was developed based on survey answers from 46 countries as well as the European Commission to the OECD 2020 Understanding

Public Communication Surveys. The questionnaires targeted centres of government and ministries of health, to ensure both a whole-of-government perspective as well as a sectoral one from a key service-providing ministry. While the survey requested countries to answer regarding the practices and status quo in 2019, some responses may reflect the priorities of countries in 2020, given that the COVID-19 crisis unfolded in parallel to the data collection process. Whenever applicable, the OECD Secretariat noted these instances. Furthermore, while the Report does not aim to analyse or assess COVID-19 related communication, relevant examples are included in some chapters based on the request of members of the OECD Experts Group on Public Communication. In addition to survey answers, the Report is based on discussions with the OECD Working Party on Open Government as well as its Experts Group on Public Communication.

The Report is financially and substantially supported principally by the United Kingdom's Government Communication Service International (GCSI), with additional support from the Korean Development Institute (KDI) and the German Foreign Office (in the context of its Citizens' Voice project in Middle East and North African countries). Chapter 5 was supported and funded by KDI School of Public Policy and Management (2019-2020 KDI School Faculty Research Grant). The Club of Venice and the Open Government Partnership contributed to expanding the field of respondents to the OECD Survey.

#### Overview of institutions that responded to the OECD Survey "Understanding Public Communication"



Note: Centres of Government (blue) and Ministries of Health (green) that responded to the OECD survey are presented on the map.  
Source: Author's own work



**CARLOTTA ALFONSI**  
Carlotta Alfonsi is a policy analyst in the OECD's Open Government Unit, where she focuses on the role of public communication and information ecosystems to support better policies and governance. Her research includes analysis of responses to mis- and disinformation. She holds a Master in Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School and a bachelor's degree from the London School of Economics.

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## De la Conférence au chantier d'une union sans cesse plus étroite

Pier Virgilio Dastoli

Le Traité de Lisbonne a été signé le 13 décembre 2007 après une pause de réflexion considérée indispensable pour tenir compte des échecs dans le référendum en France et aux Pays Bas sur le traité-constitutionnel malgré le fait que le traité avait été ratifié par treize pays membres et notamment par une large majorité des citoyennes et des citoyens espagnols par référendum.

Angela Merkel, présidente du Conseil européen pendant le premier semestre 2007, avait ouvert la voie à un compromis intergouvernemental avec Tony Blair, qui était fondé sur l'idée :

- de « nettoyer » le traité signé à Rome en octobre 2004 de toutes ses innovations à caractère constitutionnel,
- de se borner à modifier les traités existants (d'où son appellation de « traité modificatif »)
- de renforcer la nature confédérale de la politique étrangère,
- d'éliminer toute référence explicite à la primauté du droit de l'Union,
- d'accompagner le traité par un grand nombre de protocoles (juridiquement contraignants) ou de déclarations qui n'engagent que les Etats signataires
- et d'essayer d'affaiblir la clarté de la Charte des droits fondamentaux avec l'ajout des explications élaborées par le secrétariat de la Convention à la demande de son praesidium et non soumises à la plénière.

Enfin, le Traité est entré en vigueur en décembre 2009 au début de la plus grave crise financière depuis celle de 1929, une crise qui a provoqué des conséquences économiques, sociales et politiques énormes, a montré que le gradualisme constitutionnel imaginé par les inspirateurs de la méthode communautaire aurait pu tourner de l'intégration vers la désagrégation et a ouvert la voie dans tous les pays membres à des mouvements euro-hostiles.

Contrairement à l'agenda communautaire de l'Acte Unique (1987) au Traité de Lisbonne (2009) qui avait poussé les gouvernements à soumettre l'engrenage européen à une révision tous les six ans, le Traité de Lisbonne est en vigueur depuis douze ans et, malgré le tumultueux superposé des défis du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle qui ont mis à la preuve le système européen, n'a été jamais soumis à une révision.

C'est la raison d'être de la Conférence sur le futur de l'Europe, proposée par Emmanuel Macron le 4 mars 2019 à la veille des élections européennes du 23 au 26 mai 2019, comme espace public de dialogue entre les citoyennes et citoyens (démocratie participative) et les institutions (démocratie représentative), ni Conférence intergouvernementale ni Convention ex-art. 48 TUE.

A l'état actuel de son parcours, initié en juin 2021 avec un an de retard à cause du COVID mais surtout des conflits entre le Parlement européen et le Conseil, un vrai dialogue n'a pas encore commencé.



**PIER VIRGILIO DASTOLI**  
Président du Mouvement Européen -Italie  
Membre du Comité Scientifique Italien au sein de la Conférence sur le futur de l'Europe

La conviction fait son chemin que ses conclusions devraient être tirées par la session plénière (société civile et institutions) au plus tôt à l'automne 2022 sinon se prolonger jusqu'au début du semestre espagnol du Conseil de l'Union (septembre 2023), neuf mois avant les élections européennes en mai 2024.

Dans cet esprit il faudra demander aux partis politiques européens et aux associations représentatives de la société civile de s'exprimer sur les conclusions de la Conférence avant que la campagne électorale européenne commence.

Il est évident que, douze ans après l'entrée en vigueur du Traité de Lisbonne, il ne suffit plus une modeste révision ou une modification du tel ou tel autre article du Traité mais qu'il faudra ouvrir un nouveau chantier européen pour regrouper dans un ensemble cohérent les dispositions relatives aux objectifs, à la répartition des compétences, aux procédures et aux politiques de l'Union européenne.

Un référendum pan-européen serait la méthode la plus appropriée pour demander aux citoyennes et citoyens européens leur consentement ou leur rejet : si le consentement était majoritaire, le nouveau traité devrait comprendre des instruments permettant une « union sans cesse plus étroite » selon la méthode de l'intégration différenciée.



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# The Conference on the future of Europe: what do citizens want for Europe's global role?<sup>1</sup>

Josep Borrell

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EEAS - Blog post - 15/10/2021 - HR/VP Blog

The "Conference on the Future of Europe" was launched in Spring this year to open a new debate with citizens to address Europe's challenges and priorities. Listening to citizens and giving them a say is also highly relevant when it comes to foreign and security policy. Citizens are expecting more from us, so we should heed their call for action and results.

The Eurobarometer<sup>2</sup> and other surveys regularly report that EU citizens attach great importance to foreign policy and security issues - and that a majority wants increased EU involvement in these policy fields. We need to listen to our citizens, including how they want to shape the EU's role as global actor. The Conference on the Future of Europe<sup>3</sup>, has exactly as objective to listen to our citizens and prepare reforms, as needed.

Citizens will discuss the topic the *EU in the World* starting on 15-17 October in Strasbourg with a first Citizens' Panel<sup>4</sup> focusing on this issue. Several more panels on Europe's global role of Europe will take place throughout the rest of the year. This will then be followed by a Plenary session on 21-22 January in which I will be associated and the purpose there is to discuss the recommendations of the Citizens Panels.

We can certainly expect some interesting inputs from our citizens on both the what and the *how* of EU foreign policy. We need an open debate on what our substantive policy priorities should be, in terms of geographic and thematic terms. But also on whether there are new priorities we have to focus on more? How can we become more effective in our decision-making, to take faster decisions? Can we do better in terms of handling the linkages between the internal and the external dimensions of European policies? And how can we defend our core interests and values when some big powers openly undermine democracy and freedoms? These are some of the big questions that we policy-makers grapple with every day and they are certainly also on the mind of our citizens.

The task could not be more urgent. We need to prepare and position ourselves for the post-pandemic world. Even if we are not yet out of the pandemic, some overall trends are clear. None are fully new, but all have

1 The Conference on the future of Europe: what do citizens want for Europe's global role? - European External Action Service (europa.eu) [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/105683/conference-future-europe-what-do-citizens-want-europe%E2%80%99s-global-role\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/105683/conference-future-europe-what-do-citizens-want-europe%E2%80%99s-global-role_en)

2 <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home>

3 <https://futureu.europa.eu/?locale=en>

4 <https://futureu.europa.eu/pages/panels>

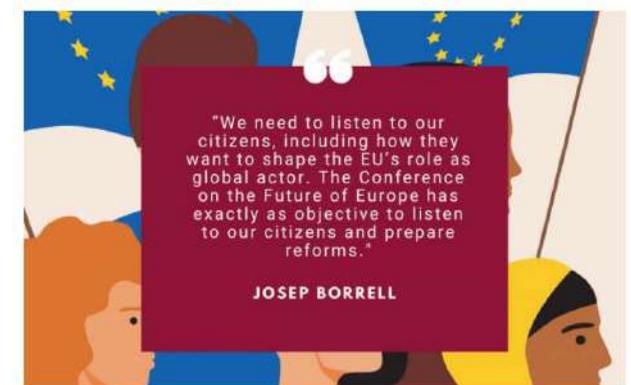
been accelerated by the crisis. The first is that our world is becoming more multi-polar than multilateral, with the strategic competition between the United States and China often paralysing multilateralism. Second, interdependence is increasingly conflictual and soft power is often weaponised: vaccines, data and technology standards are all instruments of political competition. Third, some countries follow 'a logic of empires', arguing in terms of historical rights and zone of influence, rather than adhering to agreed rules and local consent. And fourth, the world is becoming less free and democracy is under attack – both at home and abroad. We face a real battle of narratives.

All these trends are a call to action. We Europeans need to respond to these developments, and decide how to new seize opportunities and face new threats. This discussion cannot wait. We need to find ways to become more united and to build real solidarity among ourselves. This is essential to better defend our interests and values and enhance our leverage in dealing with powers who don't share our values, and who are prepared to weaponise their assets, from natural resources to supply routes. We should also become more flexible and creative in our partnerships, strengthening coalitions with like-minded partners, while cooperating also with others to pursue common global goals, such as climate action. Finally, we should do better in taking decisions faster and be more coherent in implementation.

In many respects, our citizens are ahead of governments in seeing the need for a stronger EU foreign and security policy. Many Europeans want more results and are ready to invest in achieving that goal, financially and politically. They see that the way we organise ourselves now can lead to delays or lowest common denominator decision-making. We are constantly striving to improve our effectiveness but the rate and speed of change around us is often greater, meaning that in relative terms we are going backwards.

So we should be ready to embrace any good idea on how to do things better. In this context, we are also open to listen to citizens from around the world, particularly our closest partners such as those with whom we share common values as well as those who aspire to become members of the European Union such as for example the countries from the Western Balkans whose future lies in the EU.

By listening and engaging citizens, we can receive valuable inspiration and recommendations. And in a next phase, it will be up to the political leadership, at EU and national levels, to take up these ideas and recommendations - and act upon them.



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## What is the Conference on the Future of Europe?

<https://futureu.europa.eu/pages/about>

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The Conference on the Future of Europe is a unique and timely opportunity for European citizens to debate on Europe's challenges and priorities. No matter where you are from or what you do, this is the place to think about what future you want for the European Union.

The European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission have committed to listen to Europeans and to follow up, within their sphere of competences, on the recommendations made.

By spring 2022, the Conference is expected to reach conclusions and provide guidance on the future of Europe.

### Who can take part?

European citizens, from all walks of life and corners of the Union, with young people playing a central role in shaping the future of the European project.

European, national, regional and local authorities, as well as civil society and other organisations who want to organise events and contribute ideas.

All participants shall respect the values established in our Charter of Principles<sup>1</sup>.

### Which are the components of the Conference?

- **Multilingual digital platform** - will be the place for citizens to share ideas and send online submissions. They will be collected, analysed, monitored and published throughout the Conference;
- **Decentralised events** – online, in-person\* and hybrid events held by people and organisations as well as national, regional and local authorities across Europe;
- **European Citizens' Panels** – will discuss different topics and put forward their proposals; they will be representative in terms of geographic origin, gender, age, socioeconomic background and/or level of education;
- **Conference Plenaries** - will ensure that the recommendations from the national and European citizens' panels, grouped by themes, are debated without a predetermined outcome and without limiting the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://futureu.europa.eu/pages/charter>

scope to pre-defined policy areas. The Conference Plenary will be composed of representatives from the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, as well as representatives from all national Parliaments, on an equal footing and citizens. The Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee, the social partners, and civil society will also be represented. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy will be associated when the international role of the EU is discussed. Representatives of key stakeholders may be invited. The Executive Board will draw and publish the conclusions of the Conference Plenary.

### What is the role of this digital platform?

The digital platform is the hub of the Conference: it is your way to get involved and speak up at the Conference. Here you can share your thoughts on Europe and the changes which need to happen, see what others have to say, find events near you, organise your own event and follow the progress and the outcome of the Conference.

### How do you have your say?

Simply choose from the comprehensive range of topics<sup>2</sup> and let the Conference know your opinion. Your ideas will be collected, analysed, monitored and published on the platform, throughout the Conference. They will then feed into the discussions taking place in the European citizens' Panels and the Plenaries. A feedback mechanism will ensure that the ideas expressed during the Conference events result in concrete recommendations for EU action. The final outcome of the Conference will be presented in a report to the Joint Presidency. The three Institutions will examine swiftly how to follow up effectively to this report, each within their own sphere of competences and in accordance with the Treaties.

### Who is leading the Conference?

The Conference is placed under the authority of the three institutions, represented by the President of the European Parliament, the President of the Council and the President of the European Commission, acting as its **Joint Presidency**.

The Joint Presidency is supported by an **Executive Board**, which is co-chaired by the three institutions (Mr Guy Verhofstadt, Member of the European Parliament, Mr Gašper Dovžan, State Secretary for EU Affairs for the Slovenian Council Presidency\*\* and Ms Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Democracy and Demography). It reports on a regular basis to the Joint Presidency. The Executive Board is responsible for taking decisions by consensus regarding the works of the Conference, its processes and events, overseeing the Conference as it progresses, and preparing the meetings of the Conference Plenary, including citizens' input and their follow up.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://futureu.europa.eu/processes>

A **Common Secretariat**, of limited size and made up of officials representing the three institutions equally, assists the work of the Executive Board.

**The Conference on the Future of Europe is nothing without you and your involvement on this platform. The future is in your hands.**

**Make your voice heard.**



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## The Conference on the Future of Europe: a common project

Vincenzo Le Voci

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The Conference on the Future of Europe was announced at the end of 2019 with the aim to review the objectives of the EU at mid and long term through a new joint reflection process on the future development of the Union, fostering the increased citizens' involvement and participation (an exercise targeting in particular the young generation and civil society). It is all about finding new ways to speak with stakeholders and act together to promote and defend common values and strengthen European democracy.

Unfortunately and inevitably, the restrictions to the worldwide mobility and the challenging agenda imposed by the pandemic had a strong impact on the road map of this project and therefore the Conference works only started this year.

However, the deadline initially set to reach conclusions (Spring 2022) (see the Joint Declaration published in this Book, for your convenience) remains unchanged. This means that all the key players (the EU institutions and bodies engaged in a joint undertaking; the Member States joining this project as full partners; national, regional and local political authorities; civil society representatives, social partners and academic world) will have to multiply their efforts to be constructive, forward-looking and conducive, and, at the same time, adopt a realistic approach in order to achieve reasonable and tangible results.

The contributions to this Book on this topic are a follow-up to the background information published in the last number of *Convergences*<sup>1</sup>, the public communications review of the Club, and aim to provide a global picture of the state of play. We will follow work in progress in the next issue of *Convergences*, foreseen in early spring 2022.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.politicheeuropee.gov.it/media/5706/convergences-n-17.pdf>

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## Joint declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe Engaging with citizens for democracy – building a more resilient Europe<sup>1</sup>

signed on 10 March 2021 by David Sassoli, António Costa & Ursula von der Leyen

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70 years ago, the Schuman declaration laid the foundations of our European Union. It started a unique political project that brought peace and prosperity, improving the lives of all European citizens. It is now appropriate to reflect on our Union, the challenges we are facing and the future we want to build together with the objective of strengthening European solidarity.

Since its creation, the European Union has mastered multiple challenges. With the COVID19 pandemic, the European Union's unique model was challenged like never before. Europe can and must also learn the lessons from these crises, closely involving citizens and communities.

The European Union has to show that it can provide answers to citizens' concerns and ambitions. European policy must provide inclusive answers to our generation-defining tasks: achieving the green and digital transition, while strengthening Europe's resilience, its social contract and European industry's competitiveness. It must address inequalities and ensure the European Union is a fair, sustainable, innovative and competitive economy that leaves no one behind. To address geopolitical challenges in the post COVID-19 global environment, Europe needs to be more assertive, taking a leading global role in promoting its values and standards in a world increasingly in turmoil.

The increase in voter turnout during the 2019 European election reflects the growing interest of European citizens in playing a more active role in deciding the future of the Union and its policies.

The Conference on the Future of Europe will open a new space for debate with citizens to address Europe's challenges and priorities. European citizens from all walks of life and corners of the Union will be able to participate, with young Europeans playing a central role in shaping the future of the European project.

We, the Presidents of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission want citizens to join the conversation and have their say on the future of Europe. We hereby jointly commit to listen to Europeans and to follow up on the recommendations made by Conference, in full respect of our competences and the subsidiarity and proportionality principles enshrined in the European Treaties. We will seize the opportunity to underpin the democratic legitimacy and functioning of the European project as well as to uphold the EU citizens support for our common goals and values, by giving them further opportunities to express themselves.

The Conference is a joint undertaking of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, acting as equal partners together with the Member States of the European Union. As signatories of this Joint

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<sup>1</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021C0318\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021C0318(01)&from=EN)

Declaration, we commit to working together throughout the Conference and to dedicating the necessary resources to this endeavour. We commit to working in the interest of Europe, our citizens, and European democracy, strengthening the link between Europeans and the institutions that serve them.

Under the umbrella of the Conference and in full respect of the principles set out in this Joint Declaration, we will organise events in partnership with civil society and stakeholders at European, national, regional and local level, with national and regional Parliaments, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee, social partners and academia. Their involvement will ensure that the Conference goes far beyond Europe's capital cities and reaches every corner of the Union. Events will be organised under a set of common principles to be agreed by the structures of the Conference.

We invite other institutions and bodies to join in this European democratic exercise. All together, we will make this Conference a success. We will invite the Conference to reach conclusions by Spring 2022 so as to provide guidance on the future of Europe.

### How

The Conference on the Future of Europe is a **citizens-focused, bottom-up exercise** for Europeans to have their say on what they expect from the European Union. It will give citizens a greater role in shaping the Union's future policies and ambitions, improving its resilience. It will do so through a **multitude** of Conference-events and debates organised across the Union, as well as through an **interactive multilingual digital platform**.

Such Conference events, physical gatherings or in digital settings, can be organised at different levels, including **European, national, transnational and regional level** and will involve civil society and stakeholders. Citizens' participation in these events should aim at mirroring Europe's diversity.

While, in light of social distancing measures and similar restrictions in the context of **COVID-19**, the use of digital engagement efforts and activities are of key importance, physical participation and face-to-face exchanges should constitute an essential part of the Conference.

At the European level, the European institutions commit to organise **European citizens' panels**.

These should be representative in terms of citizens' geographic origin, gender, age, socioeconomic background and/or level of education. Specific events should be dedicated to young people as their participation is essential for ensuring a long-lasting impact of the Conference. The panels should take on board contributions gathered in the framework of the Conference providing input to the Conference Plenary by formulating a set of recommendations for the Union to follow-up on.

Each Member State and institution can organise additional events, in line with their own national or institutional specificities, and make further contributions to the Conference, such as **national citizens' panels** or thematic events bringing together input from different panels.

National and European events in the framework of the Conference will be organised along a set of principles and minimum criteria reflecting EU values to be defined by the Conference structures.

The European institutions will also **reach out** to citizens and promote broader, interactive and creative forms of participation.

Input from all Conference-related events will be collected, analysed, monitored and published throughout the Conference via a **multilingual digital platform**. This will be a place for citizens to share their ideas and send online submissions.

A **feedback mechanism** will ensure that the ideas expressed during the Conference events result in concrete recommendations for EU action.

The **Conference** will be placed under the authority of the three institutions, represented by the President of the European Parliament, the President of the Council and the President of the European Commission, acting as its **Joint Presidency**.

A lean **governance structure** will help steer the Conference. It will ensure an equal representation of the three European institutions and will be gender-balanced, among all its component parts.

An **Executive Board** will be set up. It will consist of an equal representation from the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, each having three representatives and up to four observers. The presidential Troika of COSAC will participate as observer. The Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee, may also be invited as observers, as well as representatives of other EU bodies and social partners where appropriate.

The Executive Board will be co-chaired by the three institutions and will report on a regular basis to the Joint Presidency. The Executive Board will be responsible for taking decisions by consensus, regarding the works of the Conference, its processes and events, overseeing the Conference as it progresses, and preparing the meetings of the Conference Plenary, including citizens' input and their follow up.

A **Common Secretariat**, of limited size and ensuring equal representation of the three institutions, will assist the work of the Executive Board.

A **Conference Plenary** will ensure that the recommendations from the national and European citizens' panels, grouped by themes, are debated without a predetermined outcome and without limiting the scope to pre-defined policy areas. The Conference Plenary will meet at least every six months and be composed of representatives from the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, as well as representatives from all national Parliaments, on an equal footing and citizens. The Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee, the social partners, and civil society will also be represented. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy will be associated when the international role of the EU is discussed. Representatives of key stakeholders may be invited. The Executive Board will draw and publish the conclusions of the Conference Plenary.

The structures of the Conference will agree from the outset and on a consensual basis on the modalities for reporting on the outcomes of the various activities undertaken in the context of the Conference. The final outcome of the Conference will be presented in a report to the Joint Presidency. The three institutions will examine swiftly how to follow up effectively to this report, each within their own sphere of competences and in accordance with the Treaties.

## What

We, the Presidents of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, aim to give citizens **a say on what matters to them**.

Reflecting the Strategic Agenda of the European Council, the 2019-2024 Political Guidelines of the European Commission and the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions will cover, amongst others:

Building a healthy continent, the fight against climate change and environmental challenges, an economy that works for people, social fairness, equality and intergenerational solidarity, Europe's digital transformation, European rights and values including the Rule of Law, migration challenges, security, the EU's role in the world, the Union's democratic foundations, and how to strengthen democratic processes governing the European Union. Discussions can also cover cross-cutting issues related to the EU's ability to deliver on policy priorities, such as better regulation, application of subsidiarity and proportionality, implementation and enforcement of the *acquis* and transparency.

The scope of the Conference should reflect the areas where the European Union has the competence to act or where European Union action would have been to the benefit of European citizens.

Citizens remain free to raise additional issues that matter to them.

## The principles of the Conference

The Conference is based on **inclusiveness, openness and transparency**, while respecting the privacy of people as well as EU data protection rules. The European Citizens' panels organised at European level are broadcasted, and online submissions as well as documentation are made available on the platform.

The Conference, its governance and events organised in its framework, are also based on the **values of the EU** as enshrined in the EU Treaties and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The Conference is recognisable through **a single identity** and a **Conference Charter** that all organisers of events have to subscribe to.

## The Conference on the Future of Europe

The **Conference on the Future of Europe** is a bottom-up exercise allowing European citizens to express their opinion on the Union's future policies and functioning. Tools such as the digital platform and citizens' panels enable discussion of topics that matter to them.

### Multilingual Digital Platform

Multilingual hub for citizens to share and debate ideas

**What it is**  
Main hub for citizens to share ideas and send contributions  
Repository of citizens' contributions and documents  
Input from events taking place under the umbrella of the Conference  
Publication of conclusions reached by the Conference

**Conference Charter**  
Citizens and event organisers must respect the Conference Charter:  
- Respect EU values: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights  
- Encourage diversity in the debates and respect freedom of speech  
- No hate speech or content which is illegal or deliberately false or misleading  
- Favour cross-border participation and use of different languages



- Guarantee full transparency, with input from citizens analysed and published on the digital platform
- Webstream or broadcast events whenever possible
- Respect data protection rules and the visual identity of the conference

Moderation of platform supervised by the Executive Board

Conference Plenary	
433 representatives	
Representatives	Per Member State
European Parliament	108
National parliaments	108 (4)
European Citizens' Panels	80
Council	54 (2)
National events and/or panels	27 (1)
Committee of the Regions	18
Economic and Social Committee	18
Social partners	8
Civil society organisations	8
European Commission	3
President of the European Youth Forum	1

**Debates and discusses**  
The recommendations from the Citizens' Panels  
The input from the multilingual platform

**Work prepared**  
By 9 thematic working groups

**Puts forward**  
Proposals to the Executive Board (on a consensual basis)

**Consensus**  
To be found at least between the European Parliament, Council, Commission, and national parliaments

**Joint Presidency**  
European Parliament David Maria Sassoli  
Council of the EU António Costa\*  
European Commission Ursula von der Leyen

**European Citizens' Panels**  
Forums where citizens discuss specific themes and provide a set of recommendations to the Conference plenary for the EU institutions to follow up

**Four citizens' panels set up, between them covering the nine topics shown above**

**200 citizens on each panel, selected at random**  
- At least 1 man and 1 woman per Member State, applying degressive proportionality as in Parliament  
- 1/3 should be between 16 and 25 years of age

**Representatives of each panel take part in plenary**  
- At least 1/3 between 16 and 25 years of age  
- To present their recommendations

**Broad representation of citizens**  
Geographic origin  
Gender  
Age  
Socioeconomic background  
Level of education

**Executive Board**  
9 representatives  
3 from the European Parliament  
3 from the Council of the EU  
3 from the European Commission

**Co-Chairs**  
Guy Verhofstadt (Parliament)  
Ana Paula Zacarias\* (Council)  
Dubravka Suica (Commission)

**Observers** from the European Parliament, Council, national parliaments, Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions, other EU institutions and European social partners

**Decide** on the work of the Conference  
**Prepare** the meetings of the plenary  
**Report** to the joint presidency on the plenary's conclusions

**Consensus** of the nine representatives

**Common Secretariat**  
Equal number from the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission

**Ensure functioning of the Conference, and assist the Executive Board**

\*The Council representatives will change with the rotating presidency.

### Further information

#### Multilingual Platform

The Conference's [multilingual platform](#) is a hub giving European citizens and European civil society organisations the opportunity to share ideas on the future of Europe, and to host and attend events. It will act as a repository of contributions and documents, and as an interactive tool to share and debate ideas of citizens. The platform is open to citizens, civil society, social partners, other stakeholders, public authorities at EU and national, regional, local level.

#### European Citizens' Panels

These are vital bodies of the Conference, tasked with debating issues that matter to citizens. The composition of European citizens' panels (± 200 citizens chosen at random) will be transnational and representative of the EU population, not only with respect to gender but also age, socio-economic background, geographic origin and level of education, with 1/3 of participants between 16 and 25 years of age. The European citizens' panels will hold debates, including on the basis of contributions from the digital platform, and feed into the discussion of the Conference plenary with recommendations for the EU institutions to follow up. Four thematic citizens' panels are planned: i) European democracy/values, rights, rule of law, security; ii) climate change, environment/health; iii) stronger economy, social justice, jobs/education, youth, culture, sport/digital transformation; and iv) EU in the world/migration.

European citizens' panels will meet in deliberative sessions, in different locations and will be dedicated to specific themes. Member States (at national, regional or local level) and other stakeholders (civil society, social partners or citizens) may organise additional citizens' panels under the umbrella of the Conference, provided they respect the [Conference Charter](#) in full.

#### Joint Presidency

The Conference is under the tripartite authority of the Presidents of the European Parliament, Council of the EU and Commission, respectively David Sassoli, António Costa, representing the Portuguese Presidency of the Council until 30 June 2021, and Ursula von der Leyen. Based on the rotation established by [Council Decision](#), the Presidency of the Council will then be held by Slovenia (1 July–31 December 2021) and France (1 January–30 June 2022). The tripartite Presidency of the Conference is the ultimate body to which the final outcome of the Conference will be reported, so that each institution may provide the appropriate follow-up in accordance with their own competences.

#### Conference Plenary

The plenary comprises a total of 433 representatives, from the three institutions (Commission, Council of the EU and Parliament), national parliaments, citizens' panels, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), national events or panels, social partners and civil society. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy will be invited when the international role of the EU is discussed. Other stakeholders and experts may also be invited.

The plenary will discuss issues and recommendations coming from national and European citizens' panels as well as input from the digital platform, grouped by themes. Debates will be open, without a predetermined outcome and without limiting topics to pre-defined policy areas. The plenary decides on a consensual basis (at least between the Parliament, Council, Commission and the national parliaments) on the proposals to be put forward to the Executive Board. The latter is responsible for drafting the final report of the Conference, in full collaboration and in full transparency with the Plenary, which will be published on the digital platform and sent to the Joint Presidency for concrete follow-up.

#### Executive Board

The Executive Board manages the work of the conference (plenaries, citizens' panels, and digital platform), oversees all activities, and prepares meetings of the plenary, including input from citizens, and their follow-up. All three institutions (Parliament, Commission and Council) are equally represented in the Executive Board, each with three members and up to four observers. The Executive Board is co-chaired by a representative of each of the three institutions; in the Council's case by the rotating presidency. The presidential troika of [COSAC](#) (the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of EU national parliaments) have permanent observer status. The EESC and CoR also have observer status. The co-chairs can propose the creation of thematic working groups; a group will cover each of the nine topics. The Executive Board may invite experts to participate in events of the Conference.

#### Secretariat

A common secretariat composed of equal numbers of staff of the European Parliament, General Secretariat of the Council and the Commission, assists the Executive Board in the organisation of the Conference plenary and the European citizens' panels.

**Sources:** [Joint declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe](#), [the Rules of Procedure of the Conference](#), [Executive Board reports](#).

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[epres@ep.europa.eu](mailto:epres@ep.europa.eu) (mail) <http://www.epres.ep.parl.union.eu> (intranet) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank> (internet) <http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)

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## More than a Club and beyond Venice A personal recollection

Paul Azzopardi

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I experienced first hand the Club of Venice some six years back. I had heard about it numerous times from the three previous directors of communications before me. Admittedly, more often than not, I just brushed it off as another talking shop. How wrong I was proven to be.

Hailing from the smallest EU member state, the past few years have served to give me a deeper insight into specialized topics which would otherwise have been out of reach given Malta's limited resources. It has also offered a unique platform where networking comes to the fore both within the club's structures and also on a personal basis. I dare not start mentioning names because I am surely bound to forget someone. I—and you will definitely concur—will never forget Vincenzo Le Voci. He is a truly driving force within the club.

Malta was the venue of two plenary sessions of the club. The first time was back in 2010 (the meeting was actually held in Gozo, the smaller sister island) and then in 2017 Malta held the rotating presidency of the European Union. In May 2017, I was honoured to have been the host of my colleagues from across Europe, of both the club's plenary and seminar. If I recall correctly, the seminar was about the refugee crisis and the challenges this brought to government communicators; a theme which still lingers on and which was also dealt with last month in Paris during the high-level event organised by the French Foreign Ministry, ICMPD, and the Club of Venice.

I can say to all newcomers to the club that the informality surrounding the majority of the club's meetings will surely inject in each and every one of you new experiences, perspectives, and best practices across a myriad of communications expertise, support, and information. It is the government communications professionals bazaar of innovative thinking coming from across our continent. Even though I work in communications, words fail me as to how to truly describe the mine of knowledge which gathers at every meeting organised by the Club of Venice.

This will probably be one of the last plenary sessions I shall be attending. But rest assured that, apart from the fondest of memories of the club and so many of my colleagues that I will take with me upon my retirement, the most cherished and lingering memory is the wealth of knowledge I have managed to glean from your gifts of knowledge sharing and expertise.

Newcomers to the club might be a bit sceptical about the club until they actually set foot into its sanctum. I am sure that they will very quickly dispel all their doubts once they will taste the flavour and distinctive flow of experiences, knowledge, and support from so many a warm colleague and friend within this ensemble of experts.



**PAUL AZZOPARDI**  
Paul Azzopardi has been Director of Information at the Office of the Prime Minister in Malta for the past six years. He was involved in a large number of international conference organised in Malta namely the 2017 Maltese Presidency of the EU, CHOGM summit and others. He joined the ranks in the Department of Information in 2004 after a career of twenty five years with the Maltese public broadcaster where he held the position of Head of News and Current Affairs. Communications is the love of his life.

During the past 35 years, the Club of Venice has evolved from a small unit of senior government communicators to an all-embracing informal assembly of not only communication professionals, but also experts from other fields. It has become a veritable forum for the exchange of ideas. It offered a source of the wide range of scenarios us communicators face when faced with the migration crisis, terrorism, mal/misinformation, trust of citizens in public authorities and European values and citizenship, as well as techniques to engage and utilize social media. The list goes on and on.

It has remained in existence and continues to be relevant because it always managed to pre-empt emerging trends and issues. Its track records speaks for itself. It is up to each and every member to ensure that such a mechanism will remain in place to continue offering a specialized niche of experiences and support.



## EU Corporate Campaigns: continuity and renewal

Tina Zournatzi

In the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis, which saw the rates of trust towards the EU institutions plummet, the European Commission adopted in 2014 its corporate communication approach<sup>1</sup>. The aim was to inform the general public of the EU's political priorities, while connecting these to ordinary people's concerns and making the Union's role and value added clearer to its citizens. Many Europeans still found the EU too complex, did not know what it was doing for them, or believed it was not doing enough. Corporate communication meant to change it all – with the ultimate goal of improving the EU's image and making Europeans believe in the Union again.

The approach applied the “bigger on the big issues, and smaller on the small ones” motto of the Juncker Commission. In communication, this meant putting greater emphasis on core messages and coherent narrative, which encapsulated political priorities with more clarity. And it also brought more coherence to branding and visual identity.

In parallel, a new system was created to pool budget from the different EU services and programmes, enabling the development of bigger communication campaigns. DG Communication, the Commission's central communication hub, set out to translate the EU's values, priority actions and achievements into narratives that people would find relatable and appealing. Specifically, this is what we decided to do:

- **Identify** the stories that best illustrate the EU's work and value added for citizens
- **Simplify** the messaging and adapt it to non-expert audiences
- **Amplify** the reach of our communication with sustained outreach via different channels, including advertising

Building on the three key narratives of the EU that delivers, empowers and protects, between 2014 and 2020 the Commission ran three corporate communication campaigns, each with its own themes, target audiences and dissemination channels.

### Three corporate campaigns (2014-2020)

**The InvestEU** campaign focused on how EU investment creates prosperity at local level, building a sustainable economy that works for people. It was targeted mainly at Europeans who had a neutral image of the EU and were not informed about the scope of EU funding in their country. Using stories of real beneficiaries, the campaign sought to demonstrate the value of EU funding, and it used media partnerships as well as out-of-home advertising to increase its visibility.

**The EUandME** campaign focused on EU values and recalled how the EU's achievements make a difference in the daily lives of citizens – from education and job opportunities to the different freedoms. With five short movies by well-known film directors and testimonials from young people across Europe, the campaign engaged with the younger generation. It reached out to them through digital channels and social media but also offline, via sports events, music festivals and other places like cinemas.

The third corporate campaign, **EU Protects**, targeted older audiences and highlighted how the EU brings together people from across the Union to tackle safety, security and environmental challenges and to protect citizens. At the core of the campaign was a series of stories and videos featuring actual people, or “ordinary heroes”, and explaining their role in this cross-border cooperation. The videos were promoted online and through partnerships with TV stations. A dedicated TV spot was also produced and promoted in several EU countries.

Although each campaign had a different strategy and creative approach, they all followed the following principles captured under the “EUROPE” acrostic:

- **E**uropean emblem as the single branding
- **U**nified messaging
- **R**eal stories of real people at the core of the content
- **O**rdinary language for non-experts
- **P**ersonalised content, tailored to the national and local context
- **E**motionally appealing campaign materials

Leveraging the latest research in the field, we introduced several innovations:

- We used a **benchmarking baseline survey** to measure the target audience's awareness levels before the campaign, and to set quantitative objectives for reach, recall and impact.
- We organised **focus groups** in different countries to test campaign messages and creative approaches with samples of the target audience.
- Work with the **EU Representations** in each country ensured adaptation of the messages and dissemination channels to the national context.
- **Storytelling** was at the heart of the content strategy to create memorable, relatable stories with which audiences could easily



<sup>1</sup> SEC(2013) 486/2

connect. Often, they were told by people who were involved in EU action or benefitted from it, making the examples authentic and real.

- Cooperation with **influencers** allowed us to reach both wider and more specific target audiences, especially people who don't use traditional media channels.
- **Partnerships** with media organisations, TV stations, radio, print and online media also expanded the reach and introduced EU messaging to new audiences.
- We determined that the ideal ratio of **content production to promotion** was 30:70, which enabled us to dedicate more resources to dissemination and avoid overproduction of materials.
- Online and out-of-home **advertising** captured a wider audience base.

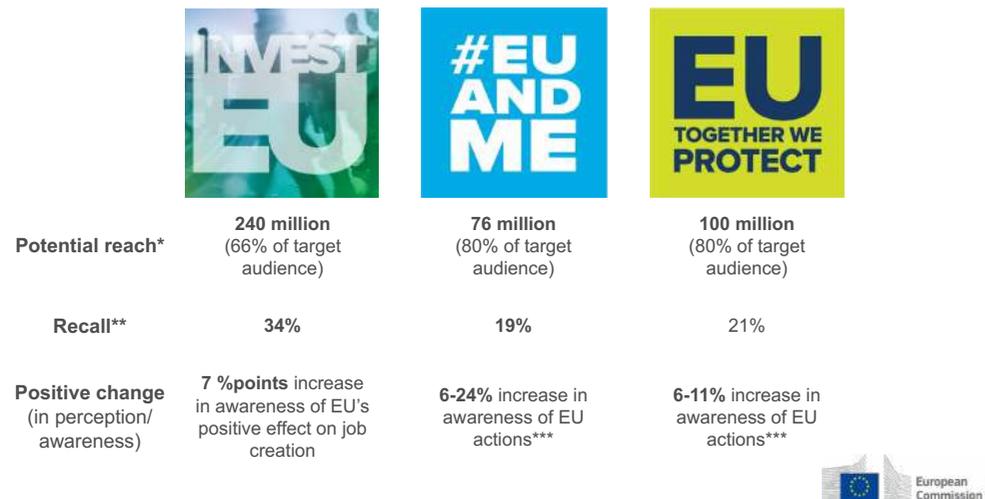
## What were the results?

An independent evaluation<sup>2</sup> found that the three campaigns had achieved and in some cases surpassed the specific targets set out. Estimated reach figures were: InvestEU 240 million people and 66% of its target audience; EUandME 76 million and 80% of the target audience; EU Protects 70 million and 55% reach of the target audience. In terms of recall, InvestEU scored best, with 34% of post-campaign survey respondents recalling at least one creative asset of the campaign. The overall impact, measured in terms of better understanding of EU action and a more positive perception of the EU, was also noticeable; we observed an average of 6 percentage points increase as compared to the baseline survey.

While the overall results demonstrated the value and effectiveness of the corporate approach, the external evaluation suggested going a step further and argued for a brand strategy that would convey an easy to understand and plausible message on the European "promise", as well as a sense of European identity. This was to become the main challenge for the next generation of corporate campaigns.

But as it turned out, this was not the only challenge. The coronavirus crisis upended all corporate communication plans. For a while, we had to focus on explaining the European Commission's role in managing the pandemic and its aftermath.

## Corporate campaign results



<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/corporate\\_communication\\_synthesis\\_annexes\\_a-h.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/corporate_communication_synthesis_annexes_a-h.pdf)



**TINA ZOURNATZI**  
Tina is currently Head of Unit for Communication at the European Commission's Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs. Before that, she headed the Strategic Communication unit in the EC overseeing corporate communication campaigns at pan-European level, while also spearheading the Commission's strategic communications response to disinformation. In the past, she has worked in different policy areas of the European Commission: sustainable fisheries and maritime affairs, small business policy and entrepreneurship, employment and social affairs. Before joining the European institutions, she was a consultant in corporate social responsibility in Brussels. She started her career in the United Nations working in development in central Africa.

## The next generation of corporate campaigns: NextGenEU

The new corporate campaign launched in 2021, focused on recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. It revolved around the Next GenerationEU instrument which, coupled with the EU's long-term budget, is the largest stimulus package ever financed by the EU. The #NextGenEU<sup>3</sup> campaign is designed to raise awareness of the EU's vision to rebuild a greener, fairer and more digital economy and society. Targeting primarily young people – the so-called GenZ, Europe's next generation – it also aims to build a community of shared values around that vision of the EU's future.

The strategy builds upon lessons learnt from the previous campaigns, but takes several bold new steps. One is the branding, edgy and GenZ-oriented. Another is the increased emphasis on paid advertising to maximise the reach and recognition of the brand. At the heart of the creative concept is the 'Make it Real'<sup>4</sup> video and a series of shorter ones promoting a green, digital and resilient Europe on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. All paid advertisements redirect the user to the #NextGenEU website, which features accessible information on the recovery plan for Europe as well as examples of how the green and digital transition will improve the lives of all Europeans.

Naturally, centralising the corporate budget under a single campaign and investing heavily in media buying has increased the reach significantly. In the first six months, there were 924 million views of the campaign material, 300 million views of the videos, and a total of 4 million clicks on the website.

As the campaign moves on to more specific topics such as the European Green Deal and the digital transformation, the approach will be fine-tuned and further adapted to other key audiences. More emphasis will be on engagement and community building, while at the same time accompanying the the political roll-out of the NextGeneration EU instrument.

In the months to come, monitoring and evaluation as well as further testing will provide more evidence and data needed to make sure the approach both fulfils the institutional objectives and reflects people's interests and concerns.

Keeping the fine balance between central objectives and messages, on the one hand, and local needs on the other hand, will be key – as it always is with corporate campaigns. Indeed, their success always depends on this balance. Since we started running corporate campaigns, we have come to see that painting the big picture the EU wants to convey can only be done by framing it into smaller ones that people in each EU country and region will recognise and relate to in their daily lives. Only then will they be moved by our stories, interact with us, let us know what they think and take our message with them. That's what all communicators strive to achieve – and the EU is no exception.

<sup>3</sup> [https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index\\_en](https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index_en)

<sup>4</sup> [https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index\\_en](https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index_en)

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# It's all fun and games until people become interested in politics

## Gaming as a gateway for engaging the young generation in political discussions

Kaspar Johannes Meyer

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It's all fun and games until people become interested in politics - Gaming as a gateway for engaging the young generation in political discussions

This article proposes the view that public administrations can leverage digital games and gaming culture as an efficient bridge to communicate with a young audience that is often difficult to reach by classical formats. After a closer look at the current state of gaming and the communicative habits of the young generation, two different gaming formats will be introduced, followed by general recommendations on how to approach the topic.

### A closer look at gaming

Super Mario is not only the most famous computer game character of all time, but also a brand with global reach, only rivaled by few. The likeable digital plumber is also closely connected with the international image of Japan – no surprise Shinzo Abe used a Super Mario dress to promote the Tokyo Olympic Games during the closing ceremony of the Rio games in 2016. However, there is much more to gaming than the bubbly, colorful, child-like world we see at first glance. The gaming industry is bigger than the movie and music industry combined. 2.5 billion people around the world consider themselves gamers. Gender and age gaps among gamers are closing and mobile and casual gaming reaches more people than ever. The political relevance of games is also on the rise – they become platforms for politics of historical memory and political messages, as well as social platforms where millions of players meet and discuss real-world events. Gaming also drives many technological trends that could shape the digital future. Especially the community aspects around the world of gaming have a hidden potential that can help the communication sections of public administrations to reach a young, sometimes politically estranged generation.

Games are often seen as an escape from the problems of the real world and from mundane responsibilities. However, gaming is not a solitary hobby – quite the opposite. Players meet in online gaming worlds, where they can fight against each other, or where they can also coordinate themselves to carry out complex missions, requiring every player to stick with discipline to his or her highly specialized role. Players also engage outside of their gaming interfaces – organizing themselves into professional e-sport-teams or using popular streaming platforms such as Twitch to stream themselves playing or watching other players. All these spaces – in-game encounters, streaming platforms and e-sports - develop into public spheres, in which ideas on politics and other real-world issues are exchanged.

Several state and non-state actors, among them strategic competitors of the West, seem to have understood the relevance of this space and use it to place their messages or even to shape the rules under which communication takes place, for instance by censoring certain words that cannot be used in the in-game chat systems. Therefore, a more attentive and structured response by Western democracies is necessary.

### The information habits of the young generation

The most recent studies on the young generation, carried out by Shell, Tui and Vodafone, draw quite a clear picture of current trends. When it comes to staying informed on current political news, the age group between 18 and 24 years has a digital first approach. For 36% of them, websites, podcasts, or blogs are their primary news source, followed by 32%, who use social media to stay informed. Only 24% rely on traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television, while these channels are still used by 44% of those over 35 years.

According to the Vodafone Foundation, YouTube is the leading source for information on political topics (32%), followed by Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This tendency is more pronounced when the political topic itself is related to the digital. When it came to the EU copyright reform, 52 % used social media as their source of information.

Looking into the political engagement and interest of the young generation, the Shell youth study found that the slightly negative trend has stabilized in 2019. 8% are highly interested in politics, 33% to some extent. These numbers are lower than in 2015, but higher than those from 2002, 2006 and 2010. Political interest correlates positively with using classical channels of information: those who are highly interested in politics use print media and public broadcasting as their main source, while social media is only secondary.

The youth poll "Generation What?", carried out by the Sinus Institute, found out that youngsters with lower education tended to have lower trust in politics and public institutions, while being more vulnerable to disinformation. 30% of German youngsters with low trust in politics supported Germany leaving the EU.

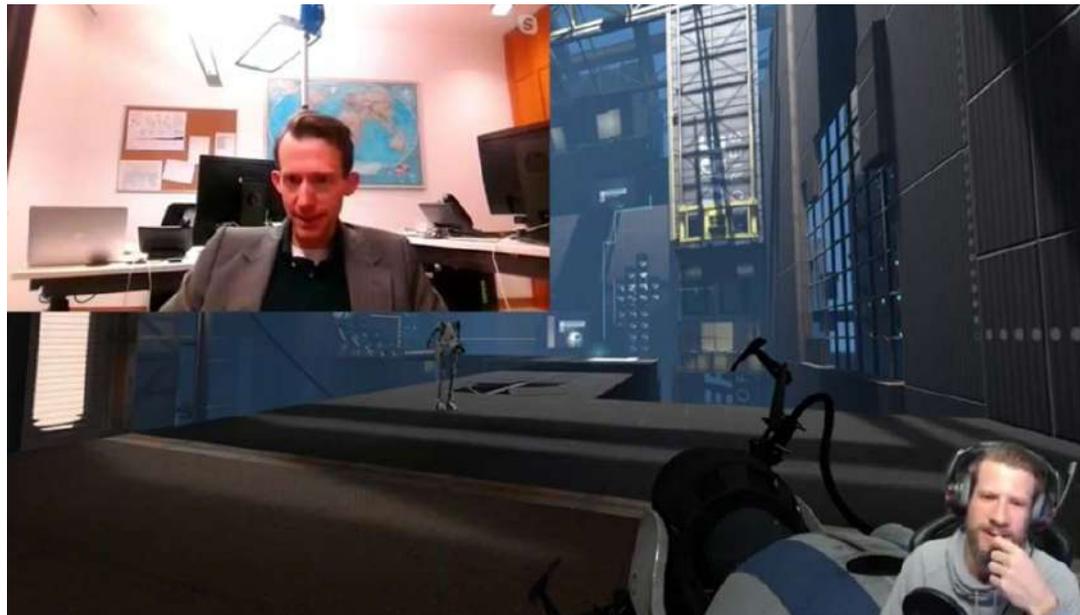
### New gaming formats to bridge the communicative gap

This poses a pressing question – how do you reestablish trust in public institutions and politics among a group that mostly uses social media to stay informed and is particularly vulnerable to disinformation? Within the last three years, the Section of Strategic Communication of the German Federal Foreign Office has successfully experimented with new formats that reach out to the gaming community to establish discussions on politics and international relations. The first format presented in this article is a so-called 'Let's-Play'-discussion. In this setting, a gaming influencer plays a game with a German diplomat, while live streaming the action over his channel and engaging in an open discussion with his or her audience. The influencer brings in the reach and the audience, while the diplomat connects his political topics with a computer game, so that the discussion does not feel alien to the audience.

To efficiently reach this group on platforms such as YouTube or Twitch, it is important to embrace the cultural codes of those platforms, all the while staying authentic. The main motivation of the audience is entertainment, not informing themselves on current events. Hence, it is important to create formats with a

high entertainment value in a rather non-formal setting. While some politicians have used gaming platforms like Twitch for classical, linear formats without any connection to the platform's culture, those actors who displayed some understanding of the playful gaming culture managed to reach a big audience – 400.000 spectators in the case of Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, who played the popular game 'Among Us' on Twitch prior to the US presidential elections.

The first step therefore would be to find a computer game that deals with a topic that can be loosely connected with politically relevant issues. Some computer games deal with history or even the politics of historical memory, others with technological advancements in AI and robotics, some with post-war scenarios from the perspectives of civilians (e.g., 'This War of Mine'), and some even with consular affairs ('Papers Please'). If players know and like the settings of these games, it is often only a small step to engage them in political discussions of their beloved gaming titles. More creative and free connections between games and political topics can work as well. For instance, a game where players work for a relocation agency and must cooperate by moving their clumsy characters through a messy house ('Moving Out') can serve as a background for a discussion of the typical life of a diplomat, who moves from country to country every three or four years. A game with robots (e.g., 'Portal 2') can be used to discuss the international regulation of autonomous weapons.



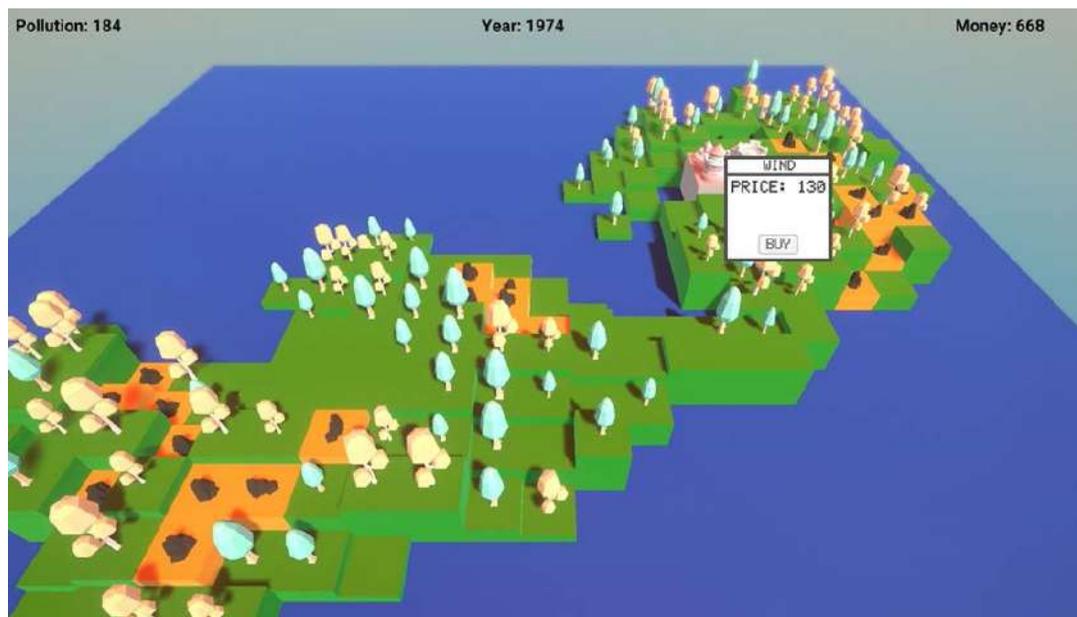
In this Let's-Play, a cooperative game with robots builds the background for a discussion on the international implications of autonomous weapons systems. Around 300 viewers are following the stream and asking questions. © Fabian Siegismund

In this Let's-Play, a cooperative game with robots builds the background for a discussion on the international implications of autonomous weapons systems. Around 300 viewers are following the stream and asking questions. © Fabian Siegismund

Carefully choosing the right gaming influencer is another key ingredient. Influencers are in a unique position of the equation, as in the minds of their followers they are virtually friends, someone they trust and look up to, while seeking their virtual company to relax and entertain themselves. Trustworthy and competent gaming influencers often already have established relationships with larger actors of the gaming or advertisement industry. The social aspect of the format should extend to the participating representatives of public administration: they should be willing to reveal some personal details, such as hobbies, personal experiences with computer games, or interesting anecdotes from their work life.

Another way of using the attractiveness of computer games is to create your own game prototypes. There are numerous examples of so called 'serious games', or 'games for impact', which represent more developed tools to place political messages in computer games. A well-known example is 'America's Army', developed by the United States Army. Other actors have been active in this field as well – in 2003, Hezbollah developed first-person shooter game ('Special Force'), where the player fights the Israel Defense Forces. Other examples include a project of the International Committee of the Red Cross, which worked together with a computer studio to develop the add-on 'Laws of War' – a war game with realistic scenarios, where international humanitarian law must be respected, for instance by distinguishing combatants and non-combatants or by only using proportionate violence on the battlefield. The development of such games requires a large amount of financial resources and oftentimes, marketing and distribution are the main challenges, as they compete on the same market with multi-million computer games.

For public administrations, lowering one's sights can be a more promising approach. As an alternative to the production of big, marketable computer games on political topics, a 'gamejam' is a small-scale format that can influence how independent computer game developers think of their game production as a tool for social and political change. In this format, comparable to a hackathon, game producers and political experts get together over a few days and work in small teams on computer game prototypes that will deal with a given topic, such as migration, climate change or the challenges of sustainable economic development. The organizers can provide expert input, while creating new networks between socially and politically minded game producers. The created prototypes are playable, but represent an attempt to conceptualize complex political topics into engaging game-mechanics instead of a fully-fledged computer game.



The game 'Islands of Tide', created within two days, translates the difficult trade-offs of economic growth and sustainable energy production into an engaging game mechanic. The player has to fight against rising sea levels, while still producing enough energy output to transition to cleaner energy sources. © itch.io

### Some general recommendations

First of all, a word of caution: the gaming community has often been publicly criticized by politicians and blamed for numerous socially undesirable developments. The relation between the gaming community and politics is characterized by a certain level of distrust and mutual misconceptions. If the gaming community feels that their hobby is instrumentalized to somehow manipulate them, a harsh, negative backlash is almost guaranteed. However, this should rather be seen as an encouragement – if the presence of a public actor in the scene is perceived as sincere and authentic, being the positive exception will bring about benevolent attention.

To successfully leverage the communicative potential of games, a basic understanding of gaming culture, of current discussions in the scene and of established patterns of interaction between the gaming world and politics is important. Whereas most administrations do not already have a unit or formalized structure working on gaming, they might already dispose of a lot of hidden expertise within their structures. Gaming is a popular hobby, especially among the generations that grew up with a personal computer. However, this hobby is oftentimes not publicly expressed, as it is still connected with some social stigma. The bigger the institution, the larger the chance that there can be found employees who actively play games, understand the gaming culture, and follow current debates in the community. Once they are identified – for instance by



**KASPAR JOHANNES MEYER**  
Kaspar Johannes Meyer currently works as a policy officer for public relations in the section of strategic communication at the German Federal Foreign Office. In this position, he works with games and gaming culture to engage the gaming community in political discussions. Previous professional stations brought him to the European Union Visitors Programm of the European Parliament and the European Commission as well the Information Centre of the European Commission.

creating an informal discussion group around the topic – they will likely work with great passion on the topic. Working across hierarchies and administrative divisions will increase the chances of forming such a group. This gaming network is likely to grow constantly, as by the snowball principle more and more gaming-interested employees can identify each other and bring each other into the network.

Another important group that can help to build bridges between public administration and gamers are media actors at the intersection of both worlds. Such individuals can for instance be journalists that specialize on gaming culture. Nationwide newspapers might regularly cover the economic and cultural dimensions of gaming and can be a useful source for further contacts. Many gaming influencers also take their hobby serious and have an understanding on the social and political ramifications of gaming. Oftentimes genuinely motivated to further their passion, they can be willing to share insights and recommendations on how to work together with public administration. Searching for influencers will enhance an administration's capacity to monitor this vibrant field of communication and to further understand the dynamics of how opinions and discussions are formed in this area.

Podcasts and YouTube videos can be another useful source to learn more about games and relevant actors in gaming and e-sports. A final recommendation would be to reach out to other ministries or public administrations from other countries who have already gathered some experience in the field.

As a public administration, it might also be useful to consider the positive side effects of working on gaming. The digital and communicative skills of the work force and therefore its readiness to deal with future technological trends will likely increase, as well as their understanding of the communicative and cultural habits of the young generation. This approach might also create new networks of like-minded people within public institutions, brought together by a common passion for gaming.

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# Capacity building models Planning and executing accessible social media campaigns<sup>1</sup>

Extract of a web page of the UK Government Communication Service website

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At least 1 in 5 people have a long-term illness, an impairment or a disability. Many more will have a temporary or situational disability. Health conditions can impact a person's ability to understand a message, either because of a cognitive impairment, or because they are unable to see, hear or otherwise access the information.

Accessible social media campaigns can be more effective because they can be accessed and understood by the widest possible audience – regardless of whether people have a visual, hearing, speech, motor, cognitive or other combination of impairments.

Inaccessible social media campaigns risk alienating our audience, reducing our impact and breaching key legislation including the Public Sector Equality Duty (part of the Equality Act 2010). Accessibility should be built in from the start – it's the right thing to do and will help your campaigns reach more of the people you need to.

In this guide we outline the key steps content producers, designers and community managers can take to create social media campaigns that meet the standards of accessibility required from government communicators.

It's been designed to be quick and simple to adopt – you don't need lots of training or expensive tools. There is plenty of support available and we include routes to further learning, and downloadable templates for your teams to use later in the guide.

## Accessibility best practice for content producers and designers

Where possible, the following best practice should be applied to your work.

### Writing accessible social posts

- Stick to 25 words per sentence and avoid large chunks of text
- Simplify your message and use free online readability testing tools<sup>2</sup> to quickly test the readability of your

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<sup>1</sup> Extract of a web page of the UK Government Communication Service website  
<https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/digital-communication/planning-creating-and-publishing-accessible-social-media-campaigns/#Designing-and-producing-accessible-social-media-assets>  
Acknowledged source: content is available under the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated - © Crown copyright

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/>

content (aiming for an average reading age of 9 years old)

- Use line breaks to create space in your social posts – spreading out your copy and making it clearer to read
- Avoid using bold, italicised or capitalised text in your posts – contrary to popular belief, they make things more difficult to read
- Avoid using non-standard symbols (for example mathematical symbols) as substitutes for words and messages, as these can confuse screen reading software.

For example, “Ensuring accessibility is everyone’s business” instead of “Ensuring accessibility = everyone’s business”.

### Make emojis more accessible

- Never use emojis to communicate a core message – the ‘official’ meaning of an emoji may not match with what you are trying to convey
- Limit emojis to 2 or 3 per post
- Do not repeat the same emoji more than once (for example multiple thumbs up one after another)
- Most text-to-speech and screen reader software will read out emoji descriptions that are included in your standard alt text. However, if you are publishing to a platform that doesn't provide an alt text feature, you should include a description of the emoji in your main post copy immediately after the icon for example [Green Leaf Emoji].

### Make hashtags accessible

- Limit hashtags to 2 per post
- Feature hashtags at the end of the post so as not to disrupt the flow
- Use capital letters at the start of each word.

For example #AccessibilityAwareness instead of #accessibilityawareness so screen readers can interpret them more easily.

### Make links accessible

- Use full links and avoid shortened versions (for example bit.ly links) – the majority of social media platforms do not count links towards your character count, and compress them for you automatically
- Ensure calls to action provide a clear onward journey for example. ‘Read guidance on applying for a driving licence + link’. Links that say ‘click here’ or ‘read more’ without any additional context are particularly bad for screen reader users.
- Limit links to one per post as people who navigate via keyboard shortcuts often find it frustrating to navigate to multiple links.

If you need to feature a shortened URL in offline campaign materials, like posters or literature, you can request a short GOV.UK URL using this service<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://insidegovuk.blog.gov.uk/2014/04/07/how-to-request-a-short-url/>

## Designing and producing accessible social media assets

### Accessibility, colour and contrast

- Don't use colour to convey a key message in isolation (for example to describe an action)
- Don't use colour in isolation to distinguish between information in charts and tables. Be sure to publish the data too.
- Avoid pale colours on pale or white backgrounds (and dark colours on dark backgrounds)
- Low contrast is difficult for many people to read. Use a WebAim colour contrast checker<sup>4</sup> or this Colour Contract Checker<sup>5</sup> to check the contrast between your background, text and other components – it should have a minimum ratio of 4:5:1
- Think about using a smaller colour palette or check intersecting colours individually when using more than 3
- Gradients can be confusing or distracting – use block colours instead.

### Accessible fonts

- Avoid using bold, italicised or complex fonts which can be difficult to read
- Do not use small font sizes to try to crowd content onto social media graphics as a solution to too much copy. Instead, challenge the brief to see whether the information and message can be simplified.
- Minimise use of text in graphics using standard best practice for font size and alignment
- Do not justify text – ensure text is left-aligned, in line with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0)<sup>6</sup> and make things clearer for people with cognitive disabilities
- A visual that uses fewer words with larger fonts can be more punchy in a social feed and therefore have greater impact.

### Accessible imagery, gifs, animations and video

Ensuring good accessibility often requires holistic thinking. That really comes to the fore when planning and creating video content. Subtitles or closed captions are a good place to start, but they're by no means the whole story.

Different platforms have varying degrees of in-built accessibility tools (you can't always add alt text or embed a transcript, for example) so it's important to build accessibility requirements into your planning, and any creative or filming briefs, right from the start.

### Consider this scenario

You're creating a video to publish on Twitter. You decide to communicate your key messages by overlaying designed copy onto your motion visuals. You anticipate most people won't listen with the sound on anyway, and on-screen copy is basically a substitute for subtitles, so that's accessible right?

4 <https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>

5 <https://colourcontrast.cc/>

6 <https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/Techniques/general/G169>

Not quite. Twitter doesn't currently let you add alt text to videos as standard, and in the absence of a link to a written transcript that a screen reader can 'read' aloud to a user, that type of video won't be accessible to people with visual impairments. In that instance, adding a voiceover that mirrored the on-screen copy (rather than just having a musical soundtrack for example) would help make the video more accessible to people with different needs.

### Planning accessible videos, animations and gifs

Here are some more things to think about when planning accessible video and other visual communication assets. Why not share them with your design and video team, or update your creative briefing template today?

Ideally, videos should include subtitles or closed captions and a voiceover

Videos which do not include audio should include a plain English description and a voiceover describing the key visual elements of the content

- Avoid moving images behind text which can be challenging for screen reader users
- There should be a minimum of 20db difference between background music and voiceovers on video content
- Social media platforms such as YouTube allow you to add subtitles and captions easily for free<sup>7</sup>, but should always be manually checked for errors
- YouTube subtitles are created as SubRip Subtitle ("SRT") files. These are plain text files that show the sequential number of subtitles alongside start and end timecodes. SRT files can be downloaded<sup>8</sup> and used to apply subtitles to other video file types or create transcripts.
- Apply the best practice on font sizes and colour contrast described above when designing video captions
- Ensure key guidance messages are included in post copy as well as/rather than within a graphic
- Avoid sharing images of printed letters and documents or – where unavoidable – be sure to include a link in the post to an HTML copy of the content in full (not a PDF – that may be inaccessible)
- Do not use multiple columns to share critical information in small graphics. And remember, just using bullet points doesn't fix this issue.
- Avoid flashing images as that can cause seizures. Nothing should flash more than 3 times a second.
- Check transition times on gifs, videos and animations to ensure the audience can follow the content. As a guide, the average person reads approximately 200-250 words per minute, but be mindful of your audience and be aware that some cognitive impairments allow for a lower comprehension rate.

7 <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2734796?hl=en-GB>

8 <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2734698?hl=en>

## Accessibility best practice for community managers and publishers

Social media platforms are making it increasingly easy to be accessible – with many offering in-platform accessibility settings that make adding alt text, closed captions or subtitles to your content quicker and simpler than ever.

### Publishing alt text

Where possible, any important information in an image needs to be described in alternative text (“alt text”) for visually impaired users. Most social media tools have options to add alt text, it’s a case of taking advantage of those tools and adopting good habits when posting content.

Keep the alt text description short and specific, and don’t include ‘image of’ or ‘picture of’. Try to imagine how you would explain the information in a picture over the phone. The less text you use in an image, the less you will have to describe in the alt text. Remember, any words that feature in your image must also be described in the alt text.

### Adding alt text to Facebook

1. Upload your image to Facebook
2. Click ‘edit photo’
3. Click ‘alt text’ (you will be shown an automatically generated text)
4. Click ‘Override generated alt text’
5. Populate the alt text and click ‘save’.
6. Share as normal.

More information about adding alt text to Facebook<sup>9</sup>.

### Adding alt text to Instagram

1. Upload your image to Instagram
2. Apply any filters or edits as required and then click ‘next’
3. Click ‘advanced settings’ at the bottom of the screen
4. Click ‘Write alt text’
5. Populate the alt text and click ‘done’
6. Share as normal.

More information about adding alt text to Instagram<sup>10</sup>.

9 <https://www.facebook.com/help/214124458607871>

10 <https://help.instagram.com/503708446705527>

### Adding alt text to Twitter

1. Click ‘compose tweet’
2. Attach your image (see note 1)
3. Click ‘add description’
4. Populate the alt text and click ‘done’
5. Complete your post
6. Share as normal

More information about adding alt text to Twitter<sup>11</sup>.

Note 1:

Twitter doesn’t currently have a built-in feature for alt text on videos. That means if you’re creating video for Twitter it’s very important to build accessibility into how the video itself is produced – as described earlier in this guide. If you don’t, one alternative is to publish a threaded post underneath the video with a description of the content (whether a transcript of the audio or a text version of the copy embedded in the video) in lieu of alt text.

### Example

In the following image and linked here is an example of how that works in practice<sup>12</sup> for a video that did not have a voiceover.

The text featured in this video was posted as alt text in a thread underneath the original tweet.

This ensured people using screen readers could access the content of the video – even if they had a visual impairment but as you can see, it creates a less sophisticated execution.

It’s better to create your videos in accessible formats from the beginning.

11 <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/picture-descriptions>

12 <https://twitter.com/GOVUK/status/1261642680523767808?s=20>



### Adding alt text to LinkedIn (desktop only)

1. Click 'create post'
2. Click the camera icon to share an image
3. Attach your image
4. Click 'add alt text' in the top right corner
5. Populate the alt text and click 'save'
6. Share as normal.

More information about adding alt text to LinkedIn<sup>13</sup>.

### Publishing to YouTube

When publishing content to YouTube you should ensure that your videos include clear titles and descriptions. The character limit for YouTube descriptions is limited, but if you are hosting your video elsewhere – such as on a campaign website – you should publish a full written transcript<sup>14</sup> there and link to it in the YouTube description to help users with hearing impairments.

Read this blog on why videos hosted on GOV.UK use YouTube<sup>15</sup>.

## Templates, tools and resources

This guide describes some of the social media accessibility best practice that you can, and should, apply to your work today. However as a field, accessibility is always evolving and you should evolve your practice too.

Here are just some of the ways you can continue your learning and deepen your understanding:

### Update briefs

Update any creative briefs you are using with external suppliers or agencies and make sure they have read, and understood, this guidance.

### Social media planning template

Download this social media content planning template which prompts you to think about alt text and image descriptions when planning your social media schedule:

Download social media content planning template (Google sheet)<sup>16</sup>

Download social media content planning template (Excel, 17KB)<sup>17</sup>

13 <https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/109799/adding-alternative-text-to-images-for-accessibility?lang=en>

14 <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2734799?hl=en>

15 <https://accessibility.blog.gov.uk/2020/03/16/why-videos-on-gov-uk-use-the-youtube-video-player/>

16 <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1yIPBkEeNmYXholddwVFtsgjWILMLjDtRKsOT-F7TEFK/edit#gid=0>

17 [https://3x7ip91ron4ju9ehf2unqrm1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/social\\_media\\_content\\_planning\\_template.xlsx](https://3x7ip91ron4ju9ehf2unqrm1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/social_media_content_planning_template.xlsx)

### Stay up to date

Stay up to date with the latest developments in accessibility over on the Accessibility in Government blog<sup>18</sup>.

### Watch our webinar now

Watch the 'Digital Accessibility for Government Communicators' webinar<sup>19</sup> to learn more about digital accessibility requirements, and how to make your work more accessible.

### Join the accessibility community

Join the accessibility community using your public sector email address, email [accessibility@digital.cabinet-office.gov.uk](mailto:accessibility@digital.cabinet-office.gov.uk) – there is a wealth of support available to you and your team.

### Visit the accessibility empathy lab

Request to visit the Government Digital Service (GDS) Accessibility Empathy Lab<sup>20</sup> or arrange a training session for you and your team from a member of GDS' expert Accessibility Team.

### Inclusive Communications Assessment Template

Members of the GCS profession should download the Inclusive Communications Assessment Template and use it during a team planning meeting to test your thinking.

Download the Inclusive Communications Assessment Template<sup>21</sup> (GCS members only). Ask the development adviser in your department for the GCS password or contact us for their details.

18 <https://accessibility.blog.gov.uk/>

19 <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/webinars/digital-accessibility-for-government-communicators/>

20 <https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2018/06/20/creating-the-uk-governments-accessibility-empathy-lab/>

21 <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/digital-communication/inclusive-communications-assessment-template/>

## Key takeaways

### **We all have a part to play**

Accessibility clearly has implications for the day-to-day output of content producers, designers and community managers – but it goes much further. As professional government communicators, we all have a part to play in championing accessibility and driving best practice across the profession, and beyond.

### **It's not just digital**

This guide talks about how to improve the accessibility of your social media outputs. But accessibility also needs to be considered when planning and creating content for other digital platforms, as well as offline communications.

There is support available to help you plan and deliver accessible campaigns and communications whether you specialise in media, internal communications, marketing, strategic communications or another discipline.

### **Accessibility is a journey**

It's a challenge to get it 100% right because new platforms and technologies emerge, and people's needs change over time. But making a genuine commitment to adopting good habits and following the emerging best practice on accessibility is a priority for our profession.

### **Accessibility is rewarding (and drives improved outcomes)**

Driving awareness of accessibility best practice amongst your team helps develop them as communicators, and can lead to rewarding outcomes that we can all feel proud of. Creating content that is accessible is a creative challenge that can make your communications and campaigns better for everyone.

This guide was developed by the Government Digital Service (GDS) in partnership with the Government Communication Service (GCS) with input from the Government Equalities Office.

[...]

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## Democracy at a time of disengagement

Jaume Duch

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The Covid-19 pandemic wasn't simply a medical crisis. It brought along with it a rapid, global societal change and the biblical sense of shock that many of us felt in the face of such a sudden, extreme, and swiftly accelerating crisis. In the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, an influential intellectual figure "we have been coasting along for more than half a century and all at once we are facing the fragility and vulnerability of the human situation".

But a different way to look at it could also be to say that the pandemic perhaps only served to exacerbate a number of pre-existing social issues, that have been around for some time already. A rise in extremism and a deepening polarisation in society. An increase in social inequality. Online filter bubbles that create skewed microcosms of reality. A more nebulous left-right political divide, but a clearer tension between libertarianism and authoritarianism. A complete breakdown of the traditional media model, replaced with a click-bait approach that simply does not favour a more nuanced and in-depth reporting model. And to add to this perfect storm - or perhaps as a consequence of it - a sharp decline of public trust in science, in politics and, perhaps most importantly, in democracy.

According to a 2020 Eurobarometer survey, 90% of citizens do not trust their national political parties. Meanwhile dissatisfaction with democracies across the globe is at its highest level in almost 25 years according to a 2019 study carried out by the University of Cambridge's Centre for the Future of Democracy - one can only assume that things have taken a turn for the worse since.

My intention here isn't to lament this state of the world or to explore its causes. It's rather to illustrate the unique challenge it poses to an institution such as the European Parliament and to how it communicates more specifically. After all, democracy and debate are the very foundation of the European Parliament. It's a European level forum, a psychological and physical space, where people from across the continent get together to debate, to compromise and to work things out. And democracy necessarily starts and ends with the people, the citizens. By this I mean that Europeans represent the starting point of the European Parliament through elections; and its endpoint, through the legislation it decides upon and that affect them. Without their full engagement, a Parliament grows weak, its power becomes fragile and its fundamental principles meaningless.

For this reason, democracy is not - should not! - be something that the European Parliament or the citizens it represents can take for granted, particularly in these times. It is up to the institution, its members and the citizens of Europe to keep it alive. The most symbolic expression of this is voting, be it at local, regional, national or European level. All these levels are equally important and they all influence the lives of Europeans in profound ways.

But democratic engagement goes beyond just elections: it is about understanding what's at stake well enough to make informed decisions. It's about making one's voice heard beyond the act of voting. It's about spreading the word and helping raise awareness about issues that concern us and our future. Let us not forget that the freedom to do so exists only in a democracy. It is therefore up to each and every citizen to ensure this is maintained; but I believe that it is also up to the European Parliament to help them do so.

What does this mean in practice, particularly as regards communication? First, it means framing the European Parliament within the bigger picture: it's not just about the work it does, it's about what it represents. It's about the Parliament actively promoting democratic engagement of citizens as a way of safeguarding democracy and the European democratic process itself.

Whereas the European Parliament's communication activities have taken a clear shift towards fostering such democratic engagement ever since the 2019 European elections, a recent key element in this strategy has been the Conference on the Future of Europe. As part of its work, the Conference includes a citizen led series of debates and discussions, that allows randomly chosen European citizens from across the continent and from all walks of life to consider and debate Europe's challenges, with the outcome of these debates feeding into the political process. Through this process, the Conference provides citizens with a greater role in shaping EU policies and ambitions and thus creates a new public forum for open debate. Despite the procedurally complicated nature of this inter-institutional exercise and the possible risks we had to consider when embarking upon it, the results have been until now highly encouraging; I would say even to the point that various elements of the Conference may merit becoming a mainstay in how the European Institutions operate more generally.

What I perhaps found personally most illuminating in witnessing this process first hand, was the level of engagement and interest demonstrated by the participants, the younger ones in particular. Whereas our general impression tends to be that citizens feel disengaged from politics - and all the more so from European level politics - it is clear that when given the opportunity, they are happy to seize it, get involved and take part. It was particularly impressive to witness the engagement of the younger panellists, their eloquence and the quality of the input that they provided.

All of which perhaps begs the question, are citizens really disengaged from politics or are they simply not provided with sufficient opportunity and incentives to get meaningfully involved? It is a particularly interesting question for the European Parliament ahead of the next European elections in 2024, which will certainly be a key defining moment for Europe's future. The role of the European Parliament's directorate-general for communication will - as always - be to run a non-partisan institutional communication campaign, aimed at encouraging people to vote. In 2019, we chose a radically different direction in our approach, which was based on the simple idea that it's simply not an undertaking we can - or should - endeavour on our own. We thus ran a campaign that was based on harnessing the power of all kinds of allies and stakeholders - civil society organisations from all walks of life, private companies, individual citizens, institutional partners, national and local authorities - and encouraging them to communicate about the importance of voting at the European Elections through their own means and networks.

Whereas we started the process off as a kind of experiment, we were ultimately surprised at how powerful it turned out to be once the ball got rolling. Over 500 civil society organisations came on board to promote the cause of voting at the European elections. Another 1000 private sector partners joined in on the effort (i.e. Lufthansa, Fritz Cola, DHL, Lime, 3M, Zara, etc.), either by including the election message in their communications, issuing calls to vote to their employees, organising events related to the elections, etc.



**JAUME DUCH GUILLOT** (Barcelona, 1962) is the Director-General for Communication of the European Parliament and its Spokesperson. He graduated in Law from the University of Barcelona (1980-1985), where he later also served as a Professor of International Public Law. In 1990 he became a European Parliament official and since then has always worked in communication-related positions, such as Spokesperson for the then President of the European Parliament, Head of the Press Room or Media Director. In February 2017 he was appointed as Director General of Communication, a role which he combines with being the Spokesman of the institution since 2006.

But perhaps most interestingly of all, over 300 000 private citizens became supporters of the Parliament's "This time I'm voting" campaign, with 25.000 citizens becoming highly active volunteers. Across Europe, these citizens organised election related events, created podcasts on the subject, handed out leaflets on the streets, staged political shows in theatres and so on - all on their own time and with their own means. The enthusiasm, drive and creativity behind these activities was as staggering as it was heartening. But more broadly it suggested that people and organisations are willing to stand up and rally around the cause of voting; that they understand that no matter what we believe in or what we do, the onus to stand up for the EU democratic process is on everyone.

In spite of everything, I am therefore confident that it is possible to engage citizens, if the cause is meaningful and if we provide them with the right tools and incentives to do so. I don't just believe we can repeat what took place in 2019 for the next election cycle - I am convinced we can take it even further, particularly following the experiences we have built up in 2019 and via the Conference on the Future of Europe. Someone once said that when you hand good people possibility, they do great things. I believe that this is where the future of successful institutional communication lies as well.

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## Communicating in times of pandemic

Philippe Caroyez

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These notes and reflections accompanied my confinement during the most acute moments of the health crisis and the teleworking I had never done in 39 years of professional activity.

Almost tragically, they follow the text “Communicating in times of crisis” that I wrote for the Club of Venice’s 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary book, after the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels.

Freeze-frame on a changing world...

*Hamlet:*

*- Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars’ shadows....*

William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene II.

Milan Kundera – an author *well worth reading* (or rereading) in the light of our professional concerns (he wrote so much and so well about communication, propaganda, journalism, image, as well as truth and even slowness) – said that we always think we look ridiculous in a photograph, whether or not time has had a chance to do its work. This suggests that the passage of time is not entirely to blame and that there must have been something ridiculous in the situation itself, which prompts us to keep trying to work out what it was.

The lockdown has given us plenty of opportunity to tidy up, and so also to dig out old and forgotten documents. One thing to emerge is the first issue of the first ‘civil servant’s magazine’ (of an EU Member State), dated May 2008, which contains an article entitled ‘[Country X] prepares for the unthinkable’ (this was when we were in the midst of the avian flu H5N1 outbreak, a virus with a low rate of transmission to humans). The article details everything that was going on then and describes what would happen in the event of a future pandemic, which all seems eerily familiar in the light of the current COVID-19 outbreak.

It’s all there: the preventive measures (hygiene, social distancing, regular hand washing, not shaking hands, taking precautions when coughing or sneezing), the ban on attending concerts and football matches, and so on.

And the warning is clear: “No one knows when the next pandemic will come. The only thing we are sure of is that it will come.” There is also a specific pledge: “Like most other countries, [country X] is preparing for the worst.” Rest assured, a raft of planned measures will be implemented: businesses will keep running, there



will be information campaigns in schools, which will only be closed if absolutely necessary (the education sector will continue operating as normal), and there will even be vaccination for everyone at the start of the pandemic (sic)...

This was an internal civil-service communication... from 2008!

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The ‘*basic rules*’ of crisis communication are generally agreed. Everything must be in place in advance, before the crisis hits: teams, plans, methods, cooperation and partnerships, networks, and so on. When the crisis happens, you have to be ready to adapt to the specific circumstances and to a range of contingencies.

Obviously, politicians should be equally forward-thinking, but this is far from guaranteed as it means making decisions and investments with no immediate necessity, potentially in the face of short-term budget cuts. The COVID-19 health crisis has highlighted numerous instances of this – reduced investment in healthcare, healthcare staff and public hospitals, under-equipment as a result of restructuring, regional imbalances, inadequate stocks of strategic kit (masks, protective clothing, etc.) – with the harmful consequences that we have seen and experienced.

The same can no doubt be said of any delay, hesitation, inconsistency, contradiction and wrangling, although some allowance does have to be made for exceptional circumstances.

However, all measures taken by an authority need to command the broadest possible support, and this can only be based on the levels of acceptance and trust that they enjoy. That is especially true in a crisis situation, even when the nature, scale and gravity of the crisis may seem to override this concern.

Our communications teams are in a similar position, being dependent on the trust of their audiences which they build up through their actions and communications.

The conditions required for such trust are no secret: credibility, transparency, neutrality/impartiality, a willingness to explain/account for decisions (often backed up by independent experts) and to inform and educate, empathy/proximity (understanding people’s feelings and the realities of their lives), engagement (being available/accessible), responsiveness and agility. The legitimacy of an institution, or its ‘public face’, are also key. Getting one’s voice heard is important too, of course, and that means using proven communication channels to roll out inclusive information campaigns in line with both the general circumstances and the specific situations of target audiences.

But *crisis communicators* will tell you that nothing can really be taken for granted, and that their job is a series of battles where each victory has to be earned afresh and can be jeopardised by the merest trifle.

They must therefore watch, analyse and act... and be on the lookout for those who, at any time, could take advantage of uncertainties or delays to disrupt the ecosystem of public opinion, for example by proclaiming that our democratic governments are not only powerless but *inherently* powerless. At the same time, however, they need to be able to seize the moment by listening to the demands of civil society, without sheltering behind the ‘powerlessness’ which the uncertainty and complexity of the facts may appear to engender. This is the only way to ensure that the often-evoked ‘post-crisis world’ doesn’t become merely a slogan chanted during the crisis and quickly abandoned, like a pre-election promise, and that today’s heroes are not forgotten



tomorrow (cf. the slogan displayed by Brussels firefighters outside their fire stations following the 2016 terrorist attacks: 'Heroes on the 22 March, zeros today').

*"Ideology,"* says Václav Havel in 'The power of the powerless,' *"in creating a bridge of excuses between the system and the individual, spans the abyss between the aims of the system and the aims of life..."*<sup>1</sup>

That is why any communication action (whether in a crisis or not) needs to be carefully studied before being signed off and then monitored continually from the outset. For this we have at our disposal (in theory at least) a raft of means (opinion polls, pre-testing, qualitative focus groups, monitoring of social media, monitoring of questions asked to call centres, analysis of traditional media and reactions of opinion leaders and 'influencers', etc.) and of techniques (such as those used in behavioural studies). However, these are not always exploited, due to a lack of time or resources (some being expensive) or – admittedly, in some cases – a lack of interest.

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You may remember the minister who appeared on TV at the start of the crisis asking what would happen if an expert were to go on the news every day to announce the number of fatalities from flu or road accidents.

He had obviously forgotten all about the 2003 heatwave, when elderly people living alone, and even those in 'care homes' (the euphemistic term for 'old people's homes'), paid a heavy price for the initial indifference and inaction of the authorities.

Did he mean to suggest that the number of deaths should be kept quiet (i.e. not disclosed, or only disclosed indirectly) so as not to generate panic – in other words, the reverse of the approach adopted by most of our teams on a daily basis, which also included direct communication with the public? This was undoubtedly how things used to be done in a number of countries – and may still be the approach taken in some! Following on from the Big Mac index for purchasing power, maybe we could use a COVID-19 index to measure the transparency of a country's authorities, or their level of democracy?

In circumstances like those we are currently experiencing, the media (in the broad sense), provided it is a free media, doesn't let the authorities get away with double-talk.

Indeed, rarely have we seen such a lively, continuous and prolonged 'dialogue' (albeit conducted remotely and in the glare of the media) between citizens, socioeconomic and cultural players, scientists, health professionals, interest groups and authorities, consisting of a mix of personal testimonies, announcements, questions, opinions and comments and conducted via the press and media, which have also played a role in it through their own actions.

Everything receives media coverage. The plight of the young man without a computer, in lockdown in a small flat with no chance of any privacy; the well-meaning teacher who hones his remote classes and worries about his students falling behind; the nurse exhausted after a stressful day's work who is made to feel less than welcome in her apartment block, and the doctor without any masks; the people enduring temporary unemployment, which could well end in redundancy; the café owner or restaurateur counting the days until the inevitable bankruptcy while the Tech Giants accrue yet more power and profits; the minister caught out by his own government's rules on the number of people you're allowed to meet; the sagas of masks promised by the authorities but which take forever to arrive and distribute; the press conference delayed by hours, which

<sup>1</sup> Václav Havel, 'The Power of the Powerless', in *Living in Truth*, ed. Jan Vladislav, Faber and Faber, 1989, p. 44.

finally takes place after 10 p.m. using a PowerPoint containing so much detail it is indecipherable, intended for the journalists present but actually watched live by a record audience... not to mention the daily litany of statistics and deaths.

While we may legitimately question what the lasting impact of all this will be, in terms of change and in particular (from our point of view) the public debate and the public's relationship with the authorities, the immediacy, responsiveness and communicative power (and hence the influence) of the media in this context has to be emphasised. It is something that public communicators simply don't have, or at any rate not without the media to assist them.

And this immediacy, in this context, is unquestionably also a challenge for – and to – public communication.

That is not to say it's a panacea, nor that public communication, like political communication, should get 'caught up in the debate'. The key thing is that public communication has to be agile. In other words, it has to take account at all times both of the substance of the decisions taken by government and of the way in which those decisions can be made accessible and understandable for the many and varied people that they will affect.

It is like squaring the circle... and made all the more complex by the existence of more than one type of public communication and, of course, multiple institutional actors – that are hopefully well coordinated. The different types of public communication are:

- 'government communication' (at multiple levels depending on the country's institutional structure, and often cascading), which sets out (explains and justifies) the measures taken, often in terms of what is and is not permitted, support measures (subsequently enshrined in a legislative and regulatory framework) and, when possible (!), guidance and future outlook;
- 'follow-up' communication from the public authorities, arising from the original communication and aimed at presenting and explaining in more detail the measures and decisions taken, as well as giving an update on the situation and reiterating the safeguard measures;
- 'static' communication, which reiterates and disseminates the basic information (mainly the preventive measures (at least initially), followed by instructions based on official decisions concerning the lockdown and the gradual, phased easing of restrictions);
- (dynamic) 'crisis communication', aimed at closely tracking the situation, how it develops and the measures taken, monitoring how the measures are perceived and observed, and producing and directing appropriate communication, the ultimate goal of which is to bring about the desired and required behaviours.

In this context, agility is essential but not easy to achieve (the same is true of cooperation/coordination, which is one of its prerequisites). The decisions in question are frequently communicated directly to the press, and therefore to the public (often at the same time, and thus indiscriminately), without the involvement of the communications teams – to such an extent that the authority sometimes confuses a press conference with a public address.

Often, too, our institutional models (of whatever kind) are based – in these specific circumstances – on a system where decisions are usually, but not always, taken centrally and then implemented both at the central level and also by decentralised authorities (regional, local, etc.) or actors (hospital system, school system, pharmacy networks, GPs, etc.). These decentralised players are not always given the necessary time to prepare and may not even be consulted, and the appropriate information materials and content are often not produced or made available.



Admittedly, in many cases urgent action may be required, but immediate public announcements, without preparation and support downstream, can be counterproductive and affect public trust and buy-in.

Worse, the measures have often already been leaked in the press, and then feverishly discussed, with the result that the discussion can overshadow the information itself and distort the message. This is especially true because the measures announced by the government may well be general or 'in principle' measures, which tend to be viewed through the prism of 'sectoral' or personal circumstances.

Communications teams are often only deployed for static communication: producing a few follow-up posters, TV and radio ads, etc. that are difficult to bring to life (and especially to keep topical) in the current advertising system (which is still hidebound by inflexible production and adaptation procedures and booking rules)... despite the fact that public procurement rules, though often rigid, allow more flexibility than one might imagine in such circumstances.

Only websites (in particular their FAQ sections), call centres (where response scripts are constantly updated in line with the latest decisions as well as questions asked and concerns expressed) and public social media allow for the necessary agility, although the digital divide is a particularly acute problem here.

In this regard, two aspects should not be overlooked:

- the digital divide not only affects people of a certain age, but also people in certain social situations;
- 'traditional' economic players (advertising agencies, newspapers, radio, TV, etc.) carry great clout in this area and will do everything they can (including political lobbying) to attract advertising revenues from public authorities, all the more so at a time of crisis (even an economic one). These revenues run into the millions of euros!

Finally, the 'problem' with agility in public communication could well be that it involves taking new paths that mean adapting organisational structures, overhauling operational methods and creating new types of 'lightweight', relatively inexpensive media, which require the public authorities, including their political authorities, as well as our communications teams to display an organic agility which they are neither accustomed to nor prepared for.

This agility is all the more crucial (and risky) in that it will likely entail a change in the relationship with traditional communication, media and press operators and will inevitably involve much more dialogue and interaction with the public.

The crisis has forced many players to reinvent themselves (businesses, artisans, teleworkers, the cultural sector, etc.), so why should public communication be any different?

But nothing is certain... and inertia is likely to prove a great temptation. But what if change was imposed on us by outside contingencies?

- Events have brought to the fore a 'local public sector' of front-line services (public hospitals, public support services, etc.), contrasting with a government civil service often perceived as distant, hesitant, bureaucratic and detached from the realities on the ground.
- The circumstances and, in particular, shortcomings in the authorities' capacity and response times have also given rise to many grassroots initiatives performing supplementary public service actions (such as making and distributing masks and helping isolated people). To a lesser extent, such initiatives have also entered the communication arena, in order to raise awareness of the initiatives themselves or to promote local

producers and artisans, for example. Even outdoor advertising companies and some brands and agencies have got in on the act by producing 'public interest messaging' (keen not to cede ground and leave their billboards abandoned and empty, thus also demonstrating the advertising system's need for continuity, and/or in a bid to boost their public image by emphasising their social commitment... at a discount rate).

- The action of the public authorities, their consistency (lack of contradiction, clarity and logic of measures and decisions, etc.) and performance (provision of masks, tests, etc.), even their continuous evaluation, have become (in a way never seen before over such a long period) the subject of constant scrutiny, mainly from the media. Moreover, everyone feels the need to voice an opinion, or is asked to do so. These 'indicators', which affect the level of trust in institutions, seem to have become the focus of concern, and some of that concern may be directed towards public communication.
- Some of the institutional characteristics that we had become used to are now being undermined (in a dual process of recentralisation and re-decentralisation).

A number of these issues could have implications for our organisations and should feed into discussions of our role and our communication activities.

While it will be necessary, as always, to maintain a certain distance between our activities and their final evaluation, we nevertheless need our organisations to have that capacity for constant self-assessment, that vital critical distance that calls our certainties into question and forces us to check that our messages are getting through and our channels are performing effectively. In a crisis situation – of which COVID-19 is a classic example due to its exceptional nature – that 'distance' gets shorter and shorter, which forces us to design and implement a form of communication that can be adapted on virtually a daily basis.

Such communication has to reflect developments in the situation (as reported by the authorities, the media and experts), decisions planned or taken, and the comments generated (authorised or otherwise), which means that it must be highly tailored, reactive and hence agile.

Wishful thinking? Who knows...

It should be stressed that this crisis, although not without historical precedents, is the first such crisis to occur in our age of rampant globalisation and mass, surround-sound communication. What also sets it apart is the fact that there is no element of shame for those affected (unlike with HIV, say) and that it could end up becoming a permanent part of our disrupted ecosystems, although there is little to suggest that this will be the case. Our British colleagues, who undoubtedly have a gift for effective communication and neat formulation, talk about the 'COVID way of life' and the '1.5-metre society'!

So, in the face of this changing world, in the face of the crisis, has public communication been found wanting?

An epidemiologist, renowned for his general socio-political and moral reflections on this crisis, describes government communication as infantilising, with no appeal to individual responsibility... Given that this is precisely what our teams were generally at pains to avoid and tried to highlight, the remark really hits home. His observation is based on his perception of public discourse as a whole, of the authorities' overall communication in response to the crisis. From this perspective, he also underlines a lack of transparency in the reasons for the decisions taken and, therefore, of explanations for those decisions.

For all the efforts at evaluation and monitoring, when the time comes to take stock (there is already talk in some quarters of commissions of inquiry, either independent or parliamentary; complaints have even been filed in court), there is no doubt that public communication and, in particular, the actions of our teams will be called to the stand.

Living under a partial lockdown and working from home in the red zone, level 4, phase 2.b...

*"I know positively, (...), I can say I know the world inside out, as you may see, that each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth is free from it. And I know, too, that we must keep endless watch on ourselves lest in a careless moment we breathe in somebody's face and fasten the infection on him. What's natural is the microbe. All the rest, health, integrity, purity (if you like), is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter." (2)*

Albert Camus, *The Plague*.

Like Nietzsche's Madman in Zarathustra carrying a lantern in broad daylight, I would encourage you all to (re-) read *The Plague* and ask you (if you agree) in your 'foot soldier' role as a public communicator by trade what your place is and how you find it in this chaos?

In order to learn what you are doing – or rather, what you would do. After all, you always say that you are torn between the principle of reality – what you are allowed to do (out of habit, politically, institutionally, financially, even technically depending on the tools at your disposal, and so on) and what you would do if you could!

And what would I have done?

And what *have* I done?

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The separation between party-political communication and public communication is a given. However, to separate a government's political communication from public communication would be illusory, or even nonsensical.

The former sets the pace for public communicators to then authorise or steer the latter, especially in a crisis situation. Moreover, whatever the practical specifics, the two are perceived as a single unit by the audience that they are addressing or that is commenting on the communication.

In this connection, today many analysts of public authorities' communication and commentators on this subject are in agreement that a (radical) paradigm shift is upon us – one which in a recent book, Stéphane Fouks (Vice-President of Havas Group) even describes as nothing more and nothing less than an "*anthropological turning point in the history of communication*" (2).

2 In his excellent latest work, published in 2020, *Pandémie médiatique. Com de crise / Crise de com*. Paris: Plon (182 pages).



Although these phenomena were already at work, the situation we are experiencing does indeed show, clearer than ever before, 'real-time globalisation', a highly digitalised world and the primacy of images over other messages and communications playing out before our very eyes – and all this is going on at the same time, with emotion coming to reign supreme.

This is not necessarily per se a negative development, as we know better than anyone that advertising and public communication can (and sometimes must) capitalise on these trends.

The problem arises if we succumb to them completely or if, as in the case of the COVID-19 crisis and the communication that is very necessary in this context, we must tailor our communication on the state of the epidemic, the health system and the measures taken or announced, whether to a country or to specific regions and/or groups – all the more so if differentiated levels of power are involved; if the measures must be justified, and be understood and accepted, as part of a more or less long-term strategy, which by its nature does not show its effects immediately; or if there is definitely a need to appeal more to everyone's reason than to their emotion, and more to explanation than to images.

This problem can be seen, without oversimplifying, as the co-existence of two communication systems which must still come together:

the public 'sender' of the communication (based on the common good, necessarily constrained by circumstances, having to make compromises, taking measures at a distance, being guided by reason and experts, needing to take a longer-term view, etc.) and the 'receiver' (affected by their situation as an individual or group, experiencing the circumstances as often a lack of foresight or an inconsistency of approach, not much concerned with compromise, influenced by comments and images from all directions, experiencing the measures in practice and tailoring them to their circumstances, concerned with the here and now, etc.).

Without falling into partisan ideology, we could also talk about two value systems that may diverge (all the more so as a result of the crisis) regarding key elements, such as work; health; the environment; consumption; quality of life; the social value attached to certain professions (or a reassessment of this); solidarity; the role of intermediary entities; subsidiarity in social and political action; citizen participation and public debate; and so on.

This is of course just a general pastiche provided for explanatory purposes; the reality is in fact much more nuanced, and tempting though it may be, it would be going too far to posit a dichotomy between, on the one hand, public communication which remains ossified in its old methods, its past (and outdated) discourse and channels, and, on the other hand, citizens (in the broad sense) who are supposedly a step ahead, with one foot in 'tomorrow's world'.

It is not about 21st-century citizens faced with a 20th-century government apparatus, but we must take care to ensure that this does not become the case!

## The jester, the magician and the other – all facing the future

*“... The truth is that today's world is neither a world of happiness nor a world of misfortune. It is a closed field between the demand for happiness which is in the hearts of all men and a historical fatality where the crisis of Man has reached its maximum. Accordingly, we must have both a proper understanding of what that crisis is, and an exact feeling of the happiness every man can desire. Therefore, we must be clear in our thinking.”*

Albert Camus (4)

Over the recent early May bank holiday (5), many of our British friends (and others, too) avidly watched the final frames of the World Snooker Championship between two Englishmen, Mark Selby and Shaun Murphy. This sport can be likened to a lesson in professional philosophy: always think ahead and, ultimately, prioritise the next shot that will enable the shot after that to be played and, by doing that, as the action progresses, open up the table and create (or not, as the case may be) some future prospects. In these times of an unchecked pandemic, many are inclined to take stock of *yesterday's world* and to consider what *tomorrow's world* might look like – in other words, to think about, or even to conceive of, a shot that has not yet been taken.

And to complete the analogy, not without some irony, the two men who faced off at the final in Sheffield are respectively known as *the Jester* (from Leicester) and *the Magician*. As public communicators, it all makes perfect sense to us. We're sometimes viewed as the *court jester*, playing an ambiguous role involving both submissiveness and relative freedom; other times, we're considered a *magician*, able to act faster than the administrative procedures we are constrained by or to always do more with less, especially in a crisis situation. Even if these are, at worst, caricatures or, at best, *ideal types* (if we adopt Max Weber's methodology), each of us will surely find something of our work situation in them, even if we aspire or aim to be another figure – and this is the result of the professionalisation and professionalism of our jobs and public services.

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After the social distancing and lockdown measures, which are not yet over and which will have to be analysed in hindsight, the response to public vaccination campaigns and to the authorities' communication about those campaigns offer us unparalleled scope for reflection and discussion. Rare indeed are situations where action taken by the public authorities is so scrutinised, so commented on from all sides, so *hotly debated*, so opposed by some and supported by others, then translated routinely into objectives (which are made so unusually public), performance indicators and statistics, made the subject of (more or less scientific) opinion polls and surveys and of coverage by experts and the media, and so on.

Hopefully, our authorities and parliamentary institutions will seize upon this, along with our public services and communication teams, and will have the leeway they need – and even be tasked with and given the resources to actively devote themselves to it.



What might seem odd in the current situation is that those who point out (analytically or politically, for that matter) the reasons put forward to explain (or justify, sometimes) the attitude of those who are hesitant, who refuse to take the vaccination or who ignore invitations from the authorities, are in fact pointing out reasons which have been known about for a long time, reasons having to do with socioeconomic and cultural factors and nothing specifically to do with the issue of vaccination per se. While these reasons are often brought up – but how many times have they been addressed or even taken into account? – here they are only subject to the most blatant scrutiny. Apart from the purely ideological positions of certain individuals or groups that elude these characterisations, we should mention the following: access (in the fullest sense of the term) to information and to the education, welfare and healthcare systems; access to IT and to systems for sharing information, along with the ensuing digital divide; the ability to understand societal issues and an inability to see oneself as a player on the societal stage, to see oneself as involved; and greater permeability to overly simplistic analyses or greater sensitivity to contradictory and therefore disorientating information. And, of course, mistrust or downright rejection of the institutions (in the broad sense).

Once again, in theory, our public services pay attention to all these phenomena when developing policies, principles and techniques for producing and disseminating public information. Indeed, these phenomena should be evaluated, albeit not exclusively within the context of the pandemic, precisely because by their very nature, they are more structural than cyclical or selective.

Given this situation, which is especially acute during the crisis, it must be reiterated that (public) communication cannot be reduced – as is still too often the case – to nothing more than the dissemination of information, much less the mere provision of information, sometimes in electronic form only. Conversely, communication is the ingredient to foster inclusiveness, interest, participation and true interaction and, at the same time, to maximise and optimise outreach.

Of course, the public services have not remained inactive in these areas. Depending on the country and on how the crisis was developing, there has been a proliferation of information media, growing beyond the traditional tools. Communication has taken to the field. The intercession of *influencers* – individuals or associations – was sought in groups and communities where enhanced communication was needed. We deployed targeted information and media, multilingual messages, simplified communication featuring pictograms and computer graphics, and more. Some public services leveraged citizen consultation processes and debates to report criticism and the expectations of target groups. Others based part of their campaigns on the techniques used by behavioural psychology to induce or change behaviours. Still others even set up a unit to deploy those skills.



**PHILIPPE CAROYEZ**  
Philippe Caroyez, sociologist and postgraduate in labour sciences, sociology of work and labour law, works in public communication since 1985, first as director at the Federal Information Service and currently as adviser in the Directorate-general External Communication of the Chancellery of the Belgian Prime Minister. During the Belgian Presidency in 2010, Philippe Caroyez was involved in the creation of EuroPCom. He is a member of its Advisory Board.

However, one wonders whether this is this being done systematically, as the result of a well thought-out, deliberate and consistent policy that is pursued, implemented and supported by the public authorities, and, if so, what efforts are being made in terms of discussing, researching and developing the application of this approach in these domains. What are the ambitions in terms of change and breakthrough? Beyond begging the question, beyond analyses and observations, what new development paths are being traced out with or proposed by our authorities? This is increasingly important. Even the US National Intelligence Council, in its *Global Trends 2040* report published at the start of the presidential term of office, reports growing tensions between citizens' demands and what governments are capable of delivering, all against a backdrop of disruptive crises and (political, economic, environmental, climatic, technological and migratory) uncertainty, and social tensions arising from a pervasive pessimism in view of the general trend, the new and prominent emergence of identities and communities that are partly in conflict, volatility, insecurity and invasion of privacy, the predominance of siloed information (i.e. echo chambers in which everyone sees their certainties confirmed and consolidated), with populations and groups increasingly better equipped to communicate compared with governments that are struggling to respond (4).



4 National Intelligence Council. *Global Trends 2040*. March 2021, 144 pages. Digital version: [www.dni.gov/nic/global](http://www.dni.gov/nic/global)

## The impact of the Covid pandemic on the public diplomacy strategies and country reputation: The Greek case

John Chrysoulakis

In a global pandemic, public health outcomes are not the only variables at stake. Also at stake are countries' nation reputation and influence, which hinge on how a country responded to the crisis. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 reshaped the function of public diplomacy.

As border closures, lockdowns, and social distancing changed the norm across the world, the global health crisis precipitated by COVID-19 has ushered in a new chapter in public diplomacy.

In a pandemic fraught with life-and-death decisions and uncertainties about shifting economic, social, and political power, some countries managed to cope better than others and to elevate their reputation in the eyes of the world.

It is underlined that numbers of studies have addressed public diplomacy in times of crisis or conflict, but none have examined public diplomacy and nation branding in the context of a pandemic.

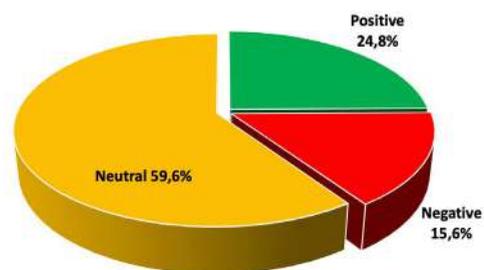
To this intent, apart from a lot of reports and bulletins through which the Secretariat General for Greek Diaspora and Public Diplomacy analyzes, on a daily, monthly, and annual basis, the image of Greece on different topics, like Greek economy, domestic policy, foreign policy and international relations, tourism, culture and so on, in 2020 we added a special issue concerning the image of Greece in dealing with the pandemic crisis. Our goal was to estimate how the image of our state is shaping through the so-called coronavirus diplomacy, which passes across all other sectors like economy, investments, tourism, international relations, foreign policy etc.

One of the duties of the Secretariat General of Greek Diaspora and Public Diplomacy, among others, is the monitoring and evaluation of the image and reputation of Greece in international mass media.

The general image and reputation of Greece – Increase of Interest at international level

In 2020, 10,800 articles were published about Greece by the 40 most influenced, reputable, and popular mass median in the world (in USA, UK, France, Germany, Brussels: EU journals and Italy).

The comparison with 2019, in which about 5,700 articles were recorded, shows that in 2020 the interest of the international media for Greece increased significantly, as the number of publications almost doubled.



The image of Greece by international media in 2020

The 10,800 articles about Greece were evaluated as:

- POSITIVE: 2.680 Publications (24.8%)
- NEGATIVE: 1.680 Publications (15.6%)
- NEUTRAL: 6.440 Publications (59.5%)

It is underlined that 2019 was the first year, after 10 years of the debt crisis, that the positivity (14%) was bigger, even by 1%, than the negativity (13%).

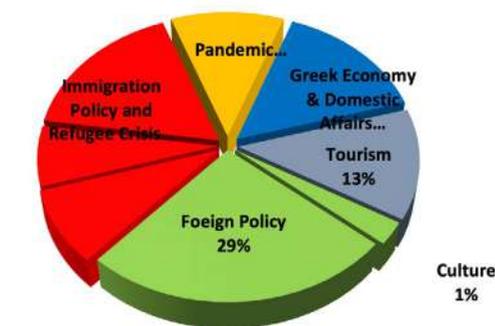
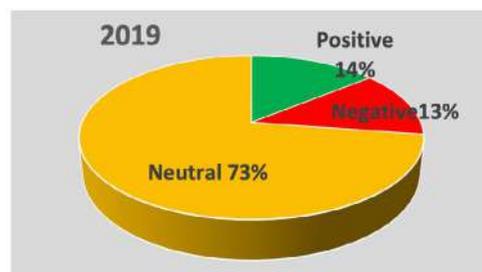
Comparing the total percentages of positivity - negativity of 2020 with 2019, we can distinguish:

a significant increase in the percentage of positive publications (from 14% to 24.8%),

For first time, after 10 years of economic austerity, the image of Greece is such positive in international mass media.

The 10,800 publications in 2020 were classified into six general thematic categories:

1. Economy and Domestic Politics: 1,620 publications (15%)
2. Foreign Policy: 3,050 publications (29%), subdivided into two topics:
  - Greek-Turkish Relations: 2,765 publications (26%)
  - Other foreign Policy Issues: 290 articles (3%)
3. Immigration Policy and Refugee Crisis: 3,525 publications (33%),
4. Tourism: 1,400 posts (13%)
5. Culture: 105 (1%)
6. Pandemic: 1,100 posts (10%)



Distribution of publications in six thematic categories

It is obvious that the pandemic has played an important role (10%) in the reputation of the country in 2020. But, except of articles (1,100) about the measures for Pandemic, a lot of other articles about economy, domestic politics and tourism are influenced by the Pandemic Management Strategies.

### The Image of Greece about the pandemic

A report published in April 2020 by French think-tank The Bridge has found that Greece has performed better than any other country in Europe in its response to the coronavirus pandemic by taking early containment measures.

The organization, which is a member of the G20's international think-tank network T20, compared the response of 10 European countries to the outbreak and their ability to contain the spread of the disease. The Bridge found that "thanks to early and strict containment measures," Greece, followed "have successfully managed to flatten the curve and slow down the spread of the virus."

Also, Israeli public intellectual, historian and Professor Yuval Noah Harari declared Greece as being "best suited to lead the world" in an interview with James Gorden on CBS. He also said that "the decisions taken by governments today will obviously shape countries for years to come, not just for a few weeks".

In general, it can be said that, in 2020, Greece was presented in almost all the international media as one of the few countries in the world that managed Coronavirus crisis with effective handling and timely measures. In many cases, Greece was presented as a success story. Even at times when the outbreak of the pandemic exerts strong pressure on the country's hospitals, the prevailing image of Greece throughout 2020 in the international media was positive. It is mentioned that there was no one negative article on this issue about Greece.

Under the title "How Greece has emerged an unlikely success story of the coronavirus pandemic", ITV (23.4.2020) noted that "Despite an elderly population and a fragile economy, Greece has kept the coronavirus crisis under control with relatively few deaths.

Also, **New York Times**, under the title "Greece Has 'Defied the Odds' in the Pandemic" (28.4.2020) mentioned that the Greeks have been dogged by years of instability, but their government's response to the coronavirus has won praise from citizens.

**The Guardian** (14.4.2020) under the title "How Greece is beating coronavirus despite a decade of debt", reports that "The country's ability to cope with a public health emergency of such proportions was not a given, especially after almost a decade embroiled in debt crisis".

For years, Greece has been seen as one of the European Union's most troubled members, weighed down by a financial crisis, corruption, and political instability. But in the coronavirus pandemic, the country has emerged as a welcome surprise: its outbreak appears to be far more limited than what was expected.

## The strengths that Greece is a success story

The strengths for Greece's success are many:

### 1. Learning from history – Learning from previous crisis

Greece emerged from a 10-year debt crisis with its credibility crippled and wanted to get past being labelled as the “black sheep of Europe.” Greece wanted to get rid of stereotypes related with its image during the decade of the debt crisis.

Deutsche Welle underlines that “the same country which had its credibility crippled during the years of austerity has emerged as a global leader when it comes to flattening the curve and is a shining example for other nations”.

### 2. Successful Greek government's handlings

According to analysts, the key to Greece's success was the government's early steps to contain the virus ahead of most of Europe.

There are very praiseworthy reports of the international media on the pandemic crisis handlings by the Greek Government: The words that characterize Greece and Greek Government are: “exemplary”, “exemplary student”, “no longer a black sheep”, “Greece is, today, an example worldwide”, “Greece is a model state”, “case-study country” etc.

Many praise comments on Government's, and the Greek Prime Minister's handlings have been published. It is mentioned in articles that Greece proved to react better than expected compared to other developed Western countries, despite the ten-year debt crisis.

Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera was one of many that praised the country's leadership and Mr Mitsotakis “careful and humble” steps that resulted “this time, in Greece teaching lessons in northern Europe.”

Also, France-Info stressed that Mr Mitsotakis surprised the country with his stability, his decisions, and his rapid reaction (30/3). Bloomberg (10/4) noted that “the Covid-19 epidemic has exposed poor leadership and governance worldwide. Greece has been one noticeable — and perhaps surprising — exception to this trend. The government imposed severe social distancing measures at a much earlier stage of the epidemic than other southern European countries and the Greek Prime Minister K. Mitsotakis evolved into “a voice of reason” on the international scene.”

In addition, The Times (22/4) reported that “although the pandemic is an unprecedented challenge for every country, some governments, such as the Greek government, have succeeded while others have failed”.



**JOHN CHRYSOULAKIS**  
Secretary General for  
Greek Diaspora and Public  
Diplomacy, Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs  
John Chrysoulakis holds the  
title of Professor Emeritus.  
He is a graduate of the  
School of Civil Engineering  
of the National Technical  
University of Athens and  
was awarded a PhD from  
the Aristotle University of  
Thessaloniki.

### 3. The key players in information

The government also began daily television broadcasts about the situation, warning citizens that the weak healthcare system meant harsh measures had to be implemented early in order to save lives, even if the economy was hit hard. The communications strategy was equally important as the early measures. Every day at 6 p.m., people stopped doing whatever with purpose to watch the developments around the epidemic.

### 4. Use of Technology – Digitalization of information

The digital transformation of the public administration is an on-going project; it had though, to be accelerated so as to facilitate citizen's access to public services, especially after the imposition of movement restrictions in the country. An electronic platform unifying all public sector digital services was very quickly set up. Particular emphasis was put on distance teaching, rolled out nationally across all school levels, and on teleworking. Greece was also one of the first countries in the EU to issue digital COVID-19 vaccination certificates (green passport). It should be noted that the adoption of the certificate at the EU level was based on a Greek proposal.

### 5. Soft power results from the values - Health comes first

According to the political scientist Joseph Nye, “The resources that produce soft power arise...from the values...a country expresses in its culture, in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others. Public diplomacy is an instrument that governments use to mobilize these resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries”.

Health is important to Greeks, more so than money, and is the general benediction. The word “geia” (meaning ‘hi’ and ‘bye’) is a shortening of the word “health” (ygeia). Since antiquity, the body beautiful, the healthy spirit and healthy mind, in greek: **vous ughis en swmati ughiei**, have been in the Greek psyche and mentality.

Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, announcing the lockdown on March 22, said: “We have to protect the common good, our health.”

Greece avoided the bad scenario, emerging instead as an example of how a country can contain the virus if it moves quickly and persuades people to take the threat seriously. The key to Greece's success was the government's early steps to contain the virus ahead of most of Europe, listening to the experts, using of technology, and taking initiatives like the green passport.

# Erasing lines between facts and fiction: research shows that falsehoods about COVID-19 are being spread deliberately

Laima Venludkiene

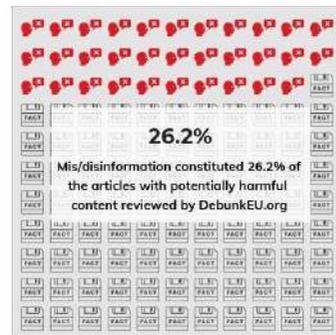
Analysis carried out by DebunkEU.org shows that false and misleading information about COVID-19 is being spread with a clear intent. This signals about full-fledged disinformation campaigns, which hostile regimes use to discredit national vaccination programmes and lockdowns, foremost via sowing distrust in coronavirus vaccines. In the first half of 2021, an increasing emphasis was put on immunisation as a means of segregation and control.

As the pandemic first hit in the beginning of 2020, DebunkEU.org team attributed a major part of their work to analysing COVID-related disinformation. From March 2020 to June 2021, our analysts have spotted more than 11 000 cases of disinformation.

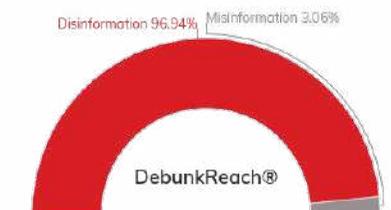
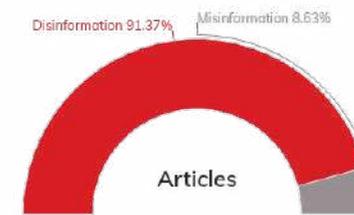
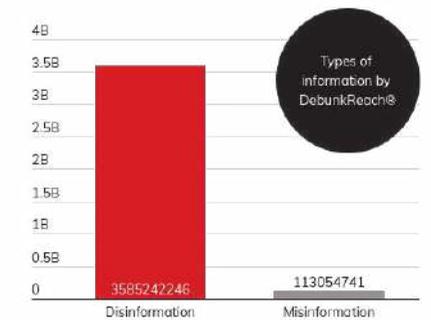
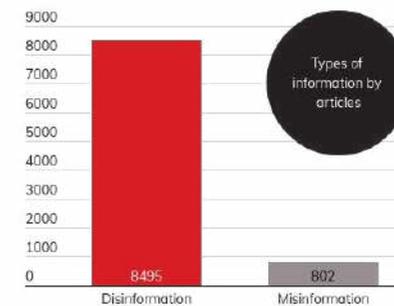
In the first half of 2021 alone, **9 297 articles** with false and misleading content from **397 media outlets** were analysed. The potential reach of this information was evaluated at **3.7 billion contacts**.

- 481,416** From January to June 2021, DebunkEU.org detected 481,416 articles related to COVID-19, posted by hostile media sources.
- 35,549** Of these, analysts with DebunkEU.org reviewed 35,549 articles with potentially harmful content.
- 9,297** 9,297 articles with false and misleading content from 397 media outlets (including 214 Facebook groups) in English, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and Russian languages were identified.

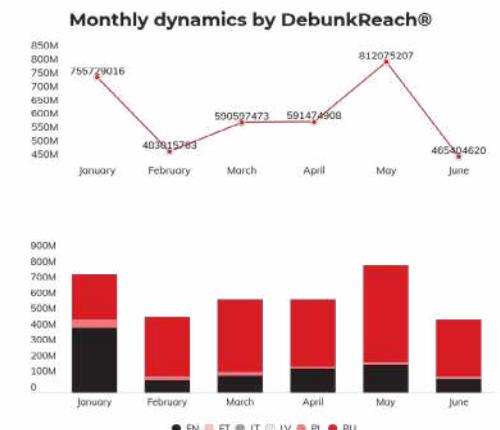
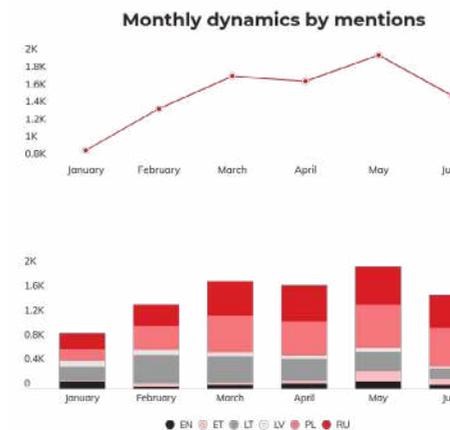
The impact that the analysed articles had on the audience was evaluated at 3.7 billion potential contacts, as measured by DebunkReach®.



Falsehoods about COVID-19 are often perceived as **misinformation** – misleading content which was spread **without a malicious motive**. However, the latest research carried out by DebunkEU.org shows that more than 90% of deceitful articles **are being spread intentionally** and thus can be regarded as **disinformation**.



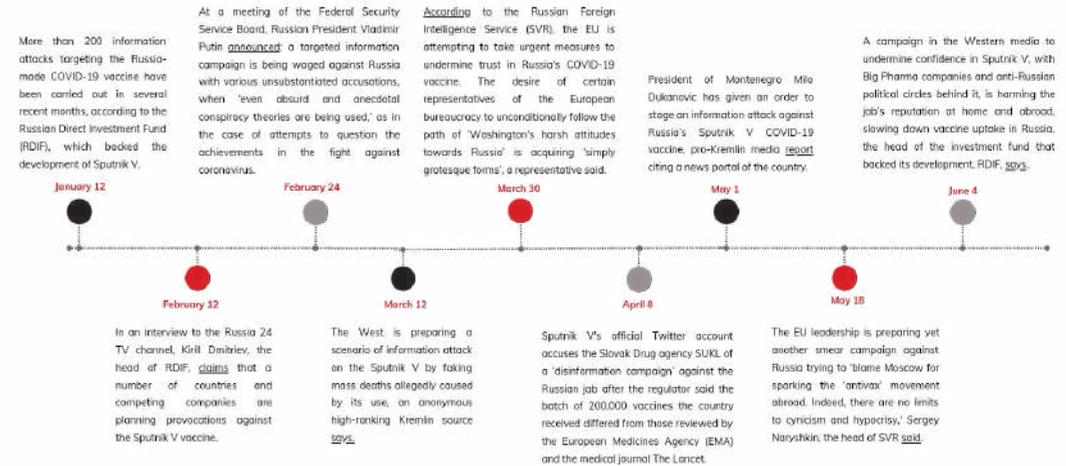
In the first half of 2021, the share of disinformation within the false and misleading content on COVID-19 stood at 91.4%, as measured by articles. With regards to the potential contact audience (measured by DebunkReach®) the share amounted to 97.0%.



1 DebunkReach® is calculated for every single article taking into account SimilarWeb traffic, Alexa rating, backlinks and social media interactions (reactions, shares and comments).



The timeline of major trigger stories supporting the narrative **West seeks to discredit Russian and Chinese vaccines.**



It is important to emphasise that 82.7% (2 767 articles) of all Facebook content analysed were classified as disinformation - conscious efforts to spread and amplify deceptive claims. This may evidence a **growing awareness of manipulated information and our growing resistance** to it – hence the number of falsehoods which are spread **unintentionally** has been **dropping**.

However, such trends also signal about an already established **polarization of society** in terms of their views on the pandemic and the means taken to fight it. Moreover, digital platforms, through algorithms which recommend content based on specific interests of each user, can bolster **confirmation bias**, and make it even easier for mis/disinformation to spread and **impact ill-informed members of society** further.

Therefore, even though the volume of *misinformation* has been declining, increasing number of sporadic efforts to spread misleading content about COVID-19 have translated into a systematic wave of *disinformation*.

### Vaccine disinformation as a means to further establish pro-Kremlin narratives

The aim behind fabricated information is quite multifaceted. Our analysis from the first half of 2021 shows that false and misleading messages spread by Kremlin-affiliated media sought to sow doubts in actions taken by the Baltic countries and Poland to handle the pandemic and deepen mistrust in COVID-19 vaccines.

The latter narrative was mostly fortified through statements about how **Western countries are ostensibly seeking to discredit Russian and Chinese vaccines**. Notably, as much as 84.5% of articles purveying this message came out in Russian language.

One of the most pronounced stories which started to spread around March 2021 was that an information attack on Sputnik V is being carried out by Western countries. For example, an article by Sputnik<sup>2</sup> claimed that:

*A scenario of an information attack on Sputnik V is being prepared through controlled non-governmental organizations (the US Agency for International Development, Soros' foundation, Thomson Reuters Foundation) and media structures (BBC, Reuters, Internews) by the U.S. and its allies. The attack aims to promote the claims that Sputnik is unreliable and dangerous by faking mass deaths allegedly caused by using the jab. The move comes as the Russophobes are worried about Russia's success in fighting COVID-19.*

The unsubstantiated claims voiced in this article are built upon the words of an anonymous 'high-ranking' Kremlin official, which **allows targeting specific institutions with accusations** reaching as far as 'faking mass deaths.' The list of countries to have approved the use of Sputnik V has been growing, yet the vaccine has not been approved by the WHO and the European Medicine Agency (EMA).

2 <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20210312/komu-meshaet-sputnik-v-provokacija-gibel-ljudej-vakciny-15317451.html>  
Sputnik – a Russian state-owned pseudo news agency, established by the Russian government-owned news agency Rossiya Segodnya in 2014. Sputnik operates in 31 languages, including English, Spanish, Arabic and Serbian. Its websites were suspended or banned in numerous countries on numerous occasions.

Moreover, Moscow is claiming that the EU is rejecting the vaccine **because of Russophobia**<sup>3</sup>. This narrative became a way for the Kremlin to deflect any critique and is applicable throughout an array of fields: from sanctions against Russian media broadcasters in the Baltics, to policies related to the energy sector (i.e., opposing the Nord Stream pipeline). In addition, concerns over a lack of transparency, missing data, and questionable findings of the clinical research behind the Sputnik V vaccine have been voiced repeatedly.

The opportunity to **boast about alleged effectiveness of the Russian-made Sputnik V vaccine** has not been missed as well. This narrative was communicated to audiences in the Baltics and Poland through **implying** that some countries would rather **stick to their (geo)political and ideological principles and not use a vaccine developed by Russia than save lives of thousands**.

Research by DebunkEU.org shows that in the first six months of this year, accusations of smear campaigns targeting Russia's fight against COVID-19, as well as narratives risking lives of populations instead of purchasing the Russian jab, have been **repeatedly amplified by Kremlin-aligned media outlets**. The allegations were backed by citing RDIF, Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), the Defence Ministry and top officials, including the President Vladimir Putin himself.

### Gates, Soros, their plan to rule the world – and other conspiracies about COVID-19

When it comes to conspiracy theories, the analysis has shown that they were most popular in Poland: **around 83% of the articles** labeled as including messages **COVID-19 is used by political elites to control humankind** or **COVID-19 (or vaccines) was designed to depopulate mankind** were published in Polish.

On May 21, 2021, such claims surfaced in nczas.com<sup>4</sup>:

*According to the data from the Polish Health Ministry, those vaccinated against COVID-19 die at least several times more often than the ones who have not received the jab. As of May 11, 2021, around 3,000 people in Poland died of COVID-19 after receiving their first dose, and 500 more passed away after their second dose of coronavirus vaccine.*

The above claims, based on a correspondence between the Polish Health Ministry and a caller, were included in the original version of the article, commented on Polish Internet television channels, massively shared, and quoted on Facebook.

3 Russophobia – a commonly used term by both Kremlin officials and affiliated media outlets to accuse other states of groundless hatred towards Russia and create an image of external enemies. The aim is usually to discredit various policies taken by the Baltic countries and other Western democracies (such as placing sanctions) and accuse of groundless anti-Russian bias.

4 <https://nczas.com/2021/05/21/35-tys-osob-zmarlo-w-polsce-na-covid-19-po-przyjeciu-szczepionki/>  
Nczas.com – a Polish news website with a strong right-wing affiliation. Former owner of this outlet Janusz Korwin-Mikke is a controversial Polish politician, known for spreading pro-Kremlin narratives.

These allegations were afterwards debunked by Polish factcheckers<sup>5</sup> and updated on nczas.com to exclude the part about the vaccinated dying more often than those who have not received the jab.

Moreover, the letter from the Health Ministry which was circulated not only to evidence alleged inefficiency of COVID-19 vaccines, but also (especially on social media) **spread claims of a causal relation between the vaccination rates and deaths**, stating that the jabs kill more people than the coronavirus itself.

However, observing a temporal relationship does not mean that there is a cause-and-effect relationship. It was not mentioned in the article that the letter from the Ministry provides an explanation, referring to the period of time needed to develop immunity to the virus and the fact that the incubation period for COVID-19 is thought to extend to 14 days, with a median time of 4-5 days from exposure to symptoms onset.

Moreover, comparison between the vaccinated and unvaccinated death rates leaves out the fact that immunisation programmes prioritize those who are most at risk, so the group of vaccinated people is heavily skewed toward those whose age and medical history make them prone to serious cases of COVID-19.

## Erasing lines between truth and lies

In May 2021, another case of twisting statements made by medical experts occurred. A post which claimed that Nobel Prize winning virologist Luc Montagnier said that **for the recipients of the coronavirus vaccine there was 'no chance of survival'** went viral on Facebook. The claim has been since debunked<sup>6</sup> multiple times, yet it was still used to provide ground for falsehoods about COVID-19.

A month later, this statement was used again to **assert that large corporations were looking for new employees to replace those who will die soon after receiving their jabs**. The interview with the virologist used to prove this claim did not include the abovementioned words by Montagnier, yet he did speak about vaccines causing **antibody-dependent enhancement**, a worse disease than before.

Scientists were initially concerned about antibody-dependent enhancement when developing the vaccines, but there have been no cases during clinical trials or the rollout to the public. Nonetheless, many research papers have proven that variants of the SARS-COV-2 create at random, through the mass spread of the virus, whereas vaccination is a part of the solution for suppressing transmissions.

5 [https://login.microsoftonline.com/8970d757-648e-46f6-b70f-d32ae0965052/oauth2/authorize?client\\_id=00000003-0000-0ff1-ce00-000000000000&response\\_mode=form\\_post&protectedtoken=true&response\\_type=code%20id\\_token&resource=00000003-0000-0ff1-ce00-000000000000&scope=openid&nonce=6D1BB6098ABF0570F3B393E7C41203A7D5C2C47D02FF5099-3E54F66E00278877498B1506BBB15842AAC1CDD7415D2BCFE71BAFC3C505A2BA&redirect\\_uri=https%3A%2F%2Fdebunkeuorg-my.sharepoint.com%2F\\_forms%2Fdefault.aspx&state=ODow&claims=%7B%22id\\_token%22%3A%7B%22xms\\_cc%22%3A%7B%22values%22%3A%5B%22CP1%22%5D%7D%7D%7D&wsucxt=1&cobrandid=11bd8083-87e0-41b5-bb78-0bc43c8a8e8a&client-request-id=27d4fe9f-4041-3000-2abb-aa40543af028](https://login.microsoftonline.com/8970d757-648e-46f6-b70f-d32ae0965052/oauth2/authorize?client_id=00000003-0000-0ff1-ce00-000000000000&response_mode=form_post&protectedtoken=true&response_type=code%20id_token&resource=00000003-0000-0ff1-ce00-000000000000&scope=openid&nonce=6D1BB6098ABF0570F3B393E7C41203A7D5C2C47D02FF5099-3E54F66E00278877498B1506BBB15842AAC1CDD7415D2BCFE71BAFC3C505A2BA&redirect_uri=https%3A%2F%2Fdebunkeuorg-my.sharepoint.com%2F_forms%2Fdefault.aspx&state=ODow&claims=%7B%22id_token%22%3A%7B%22xms_cc%22%3A%7B%22values%22%3A%5B%22CP1%22%5D%7D%7D%7D&wsucxt=1&cobrandid=11bd8083-87e0-41b5-bb78-0bc43c8a8e8a&client-request-id=27d4fe9f-4041-3000-2abb-aa40543af028)

6 <https://www.reuters.com/article/factcheck-health-coronavirus-idUJL2N2ND0WS>



**LAIMA VENCLAUSKIENĖ**  
Laima Venclauskienė, a historian by education, has more than 13 years of experience in the media monitoring and analysis field. At *Cision Lietuva* she was responsible for coordinating the work of the International Coding Department, engaged in processing, summarising, and analysing data from the media outside Lithuania. Then Laima has worked more than 10 years at *Mediaskopas*, where she was processing required information from the Lithuanian media, responsible for submission of summaries in English and Lithuanian, and writing quantitative and qualitative analyses. Since January 2021 as a senior analyst at DebunkEU.org, Laima is conducting high-quality data and narrative analyses, such as monthly reports on COVID-19 and round-up reports of disinformation trends in the Baltics and Poland.

The articles and posts DebunkEU.org analysts found included these statements about coronavirus variants in Estonian<sup>7</sup>, Lithuanian<sup>8</sup>, and Polish<sup>9</sup>, as well as the words by Montagnier that the **ongoing vaccination across the world is an 'enormous mistake'**. Some of the posts also reminded about alleged Montagnier's belief that COVID-19 was created in a laboratory. One Facebook user used this quote and claimed that **"genetically modified coronavirus was designed to contain HIV DNA**. The chief COVID guru from the U.S., Anthony Fauci, was to work on it."

In terms of DebunkReach<sup>®</sup>, pro-Kremlin media outlets were on top, led by RT, RIA Novosti (a part of Russia's state-controlled media group Rossiya Segodnya, headed by Dmitri Kiselyov, known as 'Putin's mouthpiece') and Rambler (owned by Rambler Media Group, which's sole owner is a state-run bank Sberbank).

The only source outside the realm of Russian-language coverage to enter the top 20 of media sources in the first half of 2021 was Wykop.pl, a leading Polish sharing information platform and a prototype of Digg.com, continuously accused of poor moderation, allowing to manipulate votes, or sharing false/misleading news, hence an object of political and COVID-19-related disinformation analysis/reports.

7 <https://vanglaplaneet.ee/blog/2021/05/24/nobeli-preemia-laureaat-paljastab-et-covid1-vaktsiin-tekkitab-uusi-viirusetuvised/>

8 <https://ldiena.lt/straipsnis/20547/nobelio-premijos-laureatas-ispeja-kiekvienoje-salyje-mirtingumo-kreive-atitinka-vakcinacijos-kreive>

9 [https://wolnemediana.net/laureat-nobla-miazdzy-narracje-o-szczepionkach-na-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR1h0GL8\\_HiUPDoOoFudSyKHH9ViAsUw4jyd\\_NUQIYx-57EzALcgbIXHRdA](https://wolnemediana.net/laureat-nobla-miazdzy-narracje-o-szczepionkach-na-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR1h0GL8_HiUPDoOoFudSyKHH9ViAsUw4jyd_NUQIYx-57EzALcgbIXHRdA)



**STAVROS PAPAGIANNEAS**  
Author - Managing Director  
StP Communications  
Senior communications leader with more than 25 years experience in PR and corporate and public communications. With a background including positions such as Communication Officer at the European Commission and Press Officer and Spokesperson to diplomatic missions in Brussels, he is currently the Managing Director of Brussel's PR consultancy StP Communications and the founder of Steps4Europe (S4E). S4E is a non-profit association that aims to reinforce the European Public Sphere and promote EU values. In 2017, 2018 & 2019, Stavros was named by the pan-European news platform Euractiv as one of the TOP 40 EU INFLUENCERS and, is a public speaker and blogger. Stavros has been a member of the Working Party on Information of the Council of the European Union. He is the author of the books : *Powerful Online Communication* (2016); *Rebranding Europe. Fundamentals for Leadership Communication* (2017); *Saving Your reputation in the Digital Age* (2020); *Embracing Chaos* (2021) and, many articles in European media. Stavros is a graduate in Communication Sciences from the University of Brussels and has given lectures on *Communicating Europe* in universities across the EU.

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## Communicating the pandemic: an analysis of crisis communications

Stavros Papagianneas

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In the summer of 2021, I visited Greece twice. While I understand the fear and paranoia of some communities, I was surprised by the anti-vax and conspiracy theories I heard, not only by Greeks but also by many Germans, French and Italians I have met.

*There is no pandemic, This is all a hoax, or This is no worse than the flu.* An Italian will cite a friend who recovered from a mild case as substantial proof that no vaccine will be necessary. An old friend from Athens, more thoughtfully, will suggest they need more vaccine trial data *to see what happens later on.*

My German windsurf instructor does not believe in vaccination because his family members in the health sector said *the vaccine is dangerous and has long-term side effects.* Nevertheless, I try to inform about the importance of vaccination. When I finally get a win, when a villager in Corfu hears my message on the importance of the COVID-19 vaccines, I learn that he is afraid for his life. A relative died suddenly from the virus last year. Terror was driving his rationale.

This is only a tiny, regional sample of the European public's perception of vaccines, only among the most recent COVID-19 topics to become dichotomised and contested on a pan-European scale. Yet, at the same time, it represents two major trends exacerbated by the pandemic. First, it shows the extremes of public perception and second, the communication from experts to the public has failed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Internet seems to play a crucial role in informing people about the vaccine even if they have previously being informed by traditional media. Even if they have read a newspaper, listened to the radio or watched TV, they will "deepen their knowledge" on the Internet with whatever consequences this can have.

The EU and its Member States were slow to respond to this reality, especially with government officials involved in managing the vaccination campaigns on social media. However, many of these posts, do not take into account the specific profile of the target audiences. Not so much the deniers who are difficult to be convinced, but the hesitant ones. The same mistake was made by scientists who entered the Facebook arena.

During 2020 and 2021, academic information about the vaccines was streamlined, awareness and education campaigns were prioritised, and public interest in the intrigues of medical science piqued. Nevertheless, the extreme polarisation between believers and non-believers indicates a failure of government communication, especially in rural areas and large cities with migrant minorities.

Communication about equity in vaccine distribution needs to be diversified, transparent, clear, timely and done in a responsible way so that audiences can judge for themselves how well equity has been achieved.

Unfortunately, the lack of such communication has eroded trust in the distribution process among migrant communities, especially in big cities like f.e. Brussels.

Effective communication is needed to ensure a shared understanding of how well COVID-19 vaccines work and whether they are distributed equitably. Without clear, consistent, readily accessible communications, people may lose faith in the vaccines and those providing them. EU, national, regional and local officials and academics can play a crucial role in conveying that information to community members or intermediaries in a timely, transparent, authoritative way and in expressing community concerns to policymakers.

It is paramount to convey critical messages through relevant storytelling. Quality storytelling can make a difference in a world of instantaneous information and hyper-communication because it captures the receiver through human emotion. Compared to traditional argumentation, this narrative technique places the human being at the heart of communication. It can increase the memorisation of the information transmitted by 50%. Human beings retain information much better when their empathy, sensitivity and emotions are activated.

Portraits, life stories, stories of experience often convey positive energy. They inspire, give hope and can promote behavioural change in target groups. Storytelling is an effective communication tool for raising awareness, sharing knowledge and mobilising resources. The story of a "role model" or "anonymous hero" is a strategic vehicle for providing information about the development of action, its objectives and its impact. The target audience will more easily assimilate this information.

I firmly believe that the pandemic is an excellent opportunity for governments and brands to show attitude and reach out to the people - not clients or consumers. Putting people above budgets and profits is very important. There is no doubt that companies are facing a substantial decline in revenues, but pushing sales at this time would be ineffective and even opportunistic. So, companies should play the long term game and invest in trust and reputation. It is time to learn how to create community values and principle focus points.

This crisis should create a new culture of ethics. It is crucial that governments, citizens, private and public organisations very consciously create the kind of urgent ethics that are reasonable, transparent, fair, and broadly agreed upon by everyone. For example, there is a difference in ethics between Dominic Cummings, the former communication guru of the UK PM Boris Johnson, and PM Mark Rutte of the Netherlands who did not visit his dying mother because of the coronavirus restrictions. UK Prime Minister's most senior adviser, has said he acted reasonably and legally after driving 418 km from his home to Durham during the lockdown.

There is a big difference in communicating between the PM of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern and former US President Donald Trump. Jacinda Ardern knows that empathy is crucial. She also knows that it's not enough when people's heads are spinning. In a crisis, leaders need to explain what is happening. She is a brilliant example of leadership. Her messages are clear, consistent, and somehow simultaneously sobering and have a calming effect. Her approach is not just resonating with her people on an emotional level. It is also working remarkably well.

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## Public communication – coming back to people’s agora

Kristina Plavšak Krajnc

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*“There is nothing to fear but fear itself.” Franklin Delano Roosevelt*

The corona virus pandemic has stopped the world and we are forced to face its political, economic, social, psychological consequences. This global crisis brings sobering effects in various fields that people feel very concretely and directly. The problems and challenges that were already present in our societies have intensified. All of this requires to radically change the way we think and act. It is no longer possible to return to the old normalcy that was clearly not normal.

Nowadays, the existent governance structures, modes of functioning and living are under enormous strain, governments are in continuous crisis management which causes difficult, also conflictual relations with citizens and losing trust. Public communication is more and more brought to the frontline and to the centre of solving current situations. Therefore, we should come back to its basics and fundamentals.

The expression to communicate derives from the Latin word *communicare* which, however, means to share, to participate, to build a community, not merely to inform and exchange messages. The essence of governance and public communication has always been to be with the people, to act for them and by their support. This is the most solid base of our parliamentary democracies and constitutional-legal systems, where the main task of public communication remains to open up government work to people, ensuring its transparency and accountability.

Thus, public communication needs to adapt not in its core function, but rather in the way one works and communicates, taking into account the high speed of communication, inflation of various information, including disinformation, and diversification of communication channels and publics. Besides traditional public relations and media tools, more stress is given to social media and digital communication, even more importantly, direct communication with citizens must be taken in the proper mix of public communication activities. More efforts are invested to elaborate on prompt, clear, consistent, understandable, truthful messages and narratives, adapted to specific publics in real, dynamic communication contexts. One attempts to show, not just describe, to provide illustrations, real people and life situations, give examples and best practices, based on experience and positive alternatives, work with empathy etc.

It is vital to be able to create genuine and honest connection and interaction with people – to listen, to open opportunities for conversation, to respond to people’s problems and questions, to involve, and finally, to mobilise for positive action. What remains at the heart of public communication is to build trust and

partnerships leading to better understanding and performance for the sake of all. We are experiencing the necessary quality paradigm shift in public communication: from passive disclosure of information to active communication, interaction with and engagement of diverse publics, through multi channels and networks. In order to strengthen inclusiveness within societies and build trust among citizens, professional communicators with their governments must work towards open governance and high standard public communication, based on transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation.

Here, public communicators and officials are well aware that citizens judge them on the basis how effectively they solve issues in public domain, how they provide service for the people and by the people, how well this is communicated and then perceived by their publics. In particular during current global crisis of COVID-19 pandemic, people expect that the state diminishes health risks, effectively manages the crisis situation and last but not least, ensures stable quality of life for all and each.

I would like to illustrate my points made by concrete examples of successful projects of people’s engagement which have started or/and have been implemented during my term as the Director of Government Communication Office in Slovenia (1 September 2015-13 March 2020). The greatest challenges in crisis management and communication during this time – and still on-going – were migration through Slovenia and the COVID-19 pandemic. Parallely, we explored ways of people’s engagement and direct democracy through organization of small-scale public consultations called Future of Europe, thus, encompassing most pertinent topics and issues of the local community involved.

### Workshops Active for Tolerance, May-June 2016

During massive influx of migrants through Slovenia end of 2015 and beginning of 2016, the Slovene Government Communication Office was closely engaged with concerning communication activities, besides regular media work also with awareness raising activities for better acceptance and potential integration of migrants.

Small local communities at the Slovene South, Schengen border with Croatia were the most struck as approximately half a million people crossed their neighbourhoods and had to be taken care of. The fears, frustrations and stress of the local population provided fruitful grounds for prejudices and negative attitudes towards foreigners, spreading also to other parts of Slovenia. We realised that through traditional public relations and media tools the government and its institutions cannot be efficient in neutralizing such trends, that it needed to engage in direct communication with citizens and local communities.

Therefore, the Government Communication Office in close cooperation with Slovene platform of NGOs in the field of development cooperation and humanitarian aid prepared moderated workshops with local opinion-leaders and -makers (mayors and their staff, local health centers, kindergartens, schools, firemen departments etc.). The workshops took place in May and June 2016 after the migration inflow stopped, but people and local communities were still sensitive and traumatized, and somehow they wanted to express themselves in a unique therapeutic exercise. The main aim of the workshops was to explore what reluctance and fears towards migrants appeared in the local communities, based on their experience, and what the opinion-leaders and -makers could do better to avoid these negative attitudes and to provide better welcome/acceptance to the migrants. The moderator did not come to the workshop with prepared solutions, but rather left it open to the

participants and their group dynamics, to connect, to find their ways and to start self-organising themselves. The discussion was moderated in a soft way, taking into account the specifics of local environments and also of involved individuals, allowing to bring about to unique, but efficient, real life solutions by/for the participants.

Half a day workshops were organised in five different local communities with existent migrant experience (Vrhnika, Logatec, Celje, Nova Gorica and Jesenice), not only on the border, but all around Slovenia where migrants were accommodated, with an important precondition – that the local communities expressed their willingness and positive motivation to host these workshops. There were also some cases of destinations where the organisers of workshops were not welcomed and embraced, so they did not push for it. The results from these workshops paid the effort: as at the beginning the participants were reserved and often critical, they slowly warmed up and activated themselves, with presenting ideas, proposals, what they could do for better integration of new migrants. Their feedbacks and solutions from the field also provided valuable information to the state institutions for formulation and implementation of their policies.

Based on the experience and conclusions of the workshop, a manual was prepared, which provided further assistance to all other local communities facing potential migrant trends. On one hand, the publication presented the basic outline of the Slovene system and relevant procedures concerning foreigners and asylum seekers. On the other, well experienced NGOs and humanitarian workers explained how the system works, also with some criticism. Finally, the participants of the workshops were given a voice to express their feelings and experience in facing and working with migrants, their accommodation and integration. Such a unique peer learning process led to concluding recommendations to the local communities.

### Citizens' debates on Future of Europe, 2018-2019

The initiative by French President Macron for all European consultations with citizens on future of Europe in 2018 was well seized and further elaborated by the Government Communication Office in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to start off with locally based citizens' dialogues. The main aim of this activity was to listen to citizens' concerns, their questions, hopes, expectations and also criticism on EU as well to thereby, raise their interest, active citizenship and political participation in EU affairs.

Citizens' consultations were organised all around the country as a kind of town hall meetings. The government and communes came together as partners and co-organisers of these meetings. The opening question remained constant and common to all environments (*How citizens feel the EU in their daily lives?*), whereas the other topics were chosen by the communes and citizens themselves as to their interests, priorities and specific worries. One attempted to avoid most politicized matters and also discussions during the pre-election time.

The moderator originated from the local community, with in-depth knowledge and understanding what was on the mind of his/her co-patriots. Citizens were seated together, in a circle with state representatives (besides the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Government Communication Office also other ministries and government offices), representatives of the commune (mayor and his staff, representatives of regional development and local tourist offices etc.) and representative of the EU institutions in Slovenia (European Commission and European Parliament). Starting with kick off questions the main word was then given to people in order to express themselves freely, nonetheless how critical they were. The present officials responded to participants' comments and questions, involving rather in an honest dialogue and strictly avoiding prepared statements and speeches. The citizens' consultations were aired live on government Facebook and web page.

The initial round of consultations was organised in three diverse communities, varying in participation (from 10 to 50 participants), in discussed topics (culture, European funds contribution to regional development, role of the EU in multilateral fora) as well as in the dynamics of the discussion (from focusing on one topic to dispersed, everyday life concerns). Though small event in scale, it was a valuable experience and innovative good practice in interacting with people, bringing about interesting feedback and building important networks with local communities. In addition, it was an important exercise for state representative who at the beginning reluctantly joined "in the people's circle" and had to adapt their usual bureaucratic approach to explain and interact with people.

In 2019 further citizens' debates were organized in 5 different locations around Slovenia, focusing not only on EU affairs, but also matters of everyday people's concern. The intention was to use these valuable experience and opportunity to involve citizens also with the preparations and activities of the Slovene Presidency of the EU Council in the second half of 2021, in particular within the Conference on Future of Europe, however, the Government Communication Office has not pursued these in 2020-2021.

### Corona virus call-contact center, March 2020-ongoing

In urgent, crisis situation it is of utmost importance to offer an open communication channel to people, providing information and answers on one hand, and on the other also allowing people to express their fears and worries while talking to someone knowledgeable, trustworthy and understanding. At the very start of coronavirus pandemic beginning of March 2020 a call center has been established and managed by operating by the Government Communication Office in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Public Administration, the National Institute of Public Health, the Administration of the Republic of Slovenia for Protection and Rescue, and the Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions at the University Medical Centre Ljubljana. Reliable and up-to-date information on the new coronavirus is available to public at a toll-free telephone number 080 1404 (+38614787550 for calls from abroad) every day between 8:00 and 20:00.

Incoming telephone calls are answered by medical students of the University of Ljubljana, under the professional supervision by doctors of the Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions. Around 60 senior-year students with knowledge and experience in infectiology and also psychiatry, provide advice and answers to all kind of questions, which has proved to be a great benefit in the current situation. Before starting work all students completed a short training programme on the disease, its prevention and protection against it, they were also instructed how to answer calls and how to communicate with callers. Students can also refer to psychologists cooperating with the Civil Protection Service for help. Initially, callers asked for more information on the coronavirus in general, such as the symptoms of the disease and the measures to be taken to prevent infection. These questions were then followed by questions about the government measures adopted to stem the spread of the virus. Call centre advisers can consult professionals from different fields of expertise who try to answer their questions on the spot.

On the establishment of the call centre, the Government Communication Office's staff set up a knowledge database which is now regularly updated with all information necessary to assist call centre advisers in answering questions from callers. This is the information on government measures adopted to curb the pandemic, travel information to Slovenians wishing to return home, and contact information for assistance. The call centre receives an average of 765 calls a day, sometimes even more than 1.000 (for example on the occasion of PM's announcement on health border control 11 March 2020); the longest call lasted one hour



**KRISTINA PLAVŠAK KRAJINC** worked as a Public relations and NGO advisor with high level political figures (Prime Minister, President of the Republic, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human rights). Highly committed to providing high quality, efficient, responsive and responsible service for the citizens,, she has been particularly devoted to the promotion of human rights and freedoms, often working hand in hand with engaged NGOs and media.

Kristina is the founder of the NGO Media Forum "Center for Public Communication", Ljubljana, where she currently works towards further improvement of public communication and awareness raising, including innovative communication practices and alternative narratives in public and media spaces.

She owns a Master of International Affairs (SIPA-Columbia University, NYC). From 2015 to 2020, she held the post of the Director of Government Communication Office in Slovenia, where she introduced structural changes and innovative practices to government communication, including crisis communication (mass migration 2015-2016, corona virus epidemic 2020). The main objective was to guarantee public access to information and new efficient forms of citizens engagement, including open, innovative, digital solutions.

and twenty-nine minutes. This is partly due to the fact that callers found students as friendly information providers, as they have a reassuring and optimistic approach. A number of callers have called to thank the students for their willingness to help. There are still many questions about the symptoms and testing, but also requests for other advice. Calls by persons in mental distress are answered by a doctor specialising in psychiatry, who provides advice to an average of three callers a day.

## Conclusion

I strongly believe that the described projects and best practices can serve as the right compass to lead the way of public communication, more towards people, by them and with them. Further steps are needed - and can be made by joint action - toward an even more inclusive process, with the right content and the actors most affected by post-pandemic and other challenges – young, elderly, marginalised, minorities etc. who understand the problematics and are therefore able to respond best to them. The key is an approach that authentically encourages people to think, reflect, act, and enable them to participate. We need engagement of people at the international level, involving not only national audience and actors, but also local and transnational ones, participating all along the process, not only in the outcomes. We should progress from advocacy to relationship building, we should govern by trust, not by fear.

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## Comme un désir de communication publique conversante et de débat public ...

Philippe Caroyez

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« (...) [on] y trouvera des retours du même thème, des mouvements presque spiraliformes, des répétitions (en d'autres termes, ma réflexion (...) souffre des caractéristiques de son objet, elle célèbre la redondance comme technique persuasive). »  
Umberto Eco (1)

### Faire le choix de l'humanisme et de s'intéresser à la *demande sociale* ...

Les communicateurs publics ne répondent qu'indirectement à la « demande sociale » soumis qu'ils sont à la *commande politique* et c'est bien ainsi dans un système démocratique, où les autorités élues ou mandatées veillent à ce qu'elles tiennent pour être *l'intérêt général* (qui ne se confond pas avec celui du plus grand nombre) et à ce qu'elles perçoivent et retiennent (ou veulent bien percevoir et retenir) des demandes et signes qui émergent de la société et de ses composantes.

Il serait, toutefois, bien pauvre et désincarné le métier de communicateur public si ceux qui en ont l'exercice et la responsabilité n'avaient pas à cœur de s'intéresser à la *demande sociale*, aux manières de la faire émerger et de la rendre intelligible (2), d'être à son écoute et d'aider à la rencontrer par des propositions et solutions dans son champs de compétences et d'actions professionnelles.

Le communicateur sera à cet égard d'autant plus performant (ou dérangeant, parfois) qu'il remplira sa tâche avec professionnalisme et déontologie et qu'il saura tirer parti des recherches sociologiques et des expériences pratiques de ses pairs et homologues.

Cet *essentiel* se fonde, notamment, sur :

- l'engagement pour le service (au) public et la recherche de sa constante amélioration ;
- la volonté de comprendre et de connaître les pratiques sociales et les besoins qu'elles portent d'être informé et entendu sur les demandes sociales ;
- le retour réflexif et critique sur nos actions de communication ;
- une communauté et un réseau professionnels et le partage de connaissances et d'expériences.

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1 Umberto Eco. *Il superuomo di massa. Retorica e ideologia nel romanzo popolare*. Bompiani, Milan. 1978 ; « De Superman au surhomme » (traduction française). Grasset, Paris. 1993. Page 8.

2 Voir notamment : Robert Castel. *La sociologie et la réponse à la demande sociale*. Revue Sociologie du travail, n°2, vol. 42, avril-juin 2000, pp. 281-287.

Chacun le vit et le fait vivre à sa manière, avec ses moyens, à son niveau, avec plus ou moins de contraintes ou de soutien, ... mais il y a là pour qui le veut (ou le peut – soyons de bon compte) de quoi nourrir une pleine conscience humaniste pour nos métiers de communicateur public.

Pour paraphraser Jean-Paul Sartre, il faut que (le bel exercice de) *la communication publique soit un humanisme ...*

Ce qui change c'est que rien ne change, ou si peu ...

*« Grands changements ! qu'ils racontent.  
Comment ça ? Rien n'est changé en vérité. Ils continuent à s'admirer et c'est tout.  
Et ça n'est pas nouveau non plus.  
Des mots, et encore pas beaucoup, même parmi les mots, qui sont changés ! Deux ou trois par-ci, par-là, des petits... ».*  
Louis-Ferdinand Céline <sup>(3)</sup>

Au-delà de nos actions, dans nos métiers et services, tous (tant bien que mal) opérons une « veille des tendances », tendances à l'œuvre ou qui se dessinent ...

Ces tendances se donnent également à voir dans les actions innovantes qui sont introduites par des homologues ou, il faut bien le dire, dans des secteurs commerciaux, comme le marketing ; elles font aussi l'objet de recherches spécifiques, que mènent des universitaires ou ces homologues. Il est, par exemple, question de sciences du comportement et de la « logique » décisionnelle (avec ces nudge, budge, boost, ...) autant que d'intelligence artificielle, des chatbots, de la stratégie de contenu et de son design et de la communication « conversante » entre autres tendances notoires.

Il y a de cela quelques années, nos homologues néerlandais nous ont montré la voie, en quelque sorte : saisissant l'occasion d'un débat officiel sur la communication publique dans leur pays, ils ont mené une recherche pour dégager des tendances évolutives qu'ils ont veillé à intégrer dans leur politique. Là où d'autres auraient mis l'accent sur les « attentes des citoyens » (ce qu'ils ont également fait), un accent particulier a été réservé finalement aux conditions de la communication publique et de son évolution.

Vint aussi dans nos actions la tendance au « tout au web » et l'effet quasi magique des réseaux (dits) sociaux, allant jusqu'à concevoir une « diplomatie digitale » ... pouvant faire triompher Mc Luhan, quand le medium devient le message. L'évolution technologique, ici dans les moyens de communication, est certes (de tous temps) un facteur évident de changements sociaux ... mais, comme souvent (voyez l'évolution des radios libres et des télévisions communautaires) n'est pas la panacée qui résout la question ultime de la relation entre les citoyens et entre les citoyens et les autorités publiques.

Comme l'a relevé Michel Foucault, chez l'individu accordons plus d'importance aux trajectoires qu'aux positions ; l'essentiel n'est donc pas un assujettissement servile à des technologies mais l'intégration évolutive qu'on doit en faire dans nos politiques de communication et de débat public, en lui donnant un nécessaire

3 A la première page du livre « Voyage au bout de la nuit » (1932).

cadre de valeurs. Et au moment où l'intelligence artificielle ouvre de nouvelles perspectives en la matière, l'impératif reste bien le même.

A l'échelle de ces dernières années, il est d'ailleurs singulier de relever comment l'évolution récente s'est opérée (y compris bien sûr dans nos cénacles) partant d'un engouement enthousiaste pour finalement – parfois frileusement, mais de plus en plus sûrement – replacer l'intérêt (la tendance) sur les problèmes de désinformation et la difficulté de les contrer et de légiférer en la matière, le *data mining* et l'exploitation des données personnelles avec l'introduction très fébrile du RGPD et – sur ces bases – la manipulation de nos opinions et du débat public.

Si tout cela est bien ainsi, nous restons persuadés que les « vraies » questions de la communication publique sont et restent plus profondes (et, peut-être, trop peu abordées) ; en amont : l'indispensable éducation civique et aux médias, avec le soutien public à des médias indépendants et de qualité ; au centre : privilégier la relation entre le citoyen et l'état sur la base de valeurs humanistes et mériter la confiance ; toujours : garder et approfondir (parfois avec, parfois face à ces nouvelles tendances) l'engagement pour une communication de service public ... et être performant.

Ce dernier impératif demande, dans un contexte de restriction budgétaire dont nos services font généralement partie des premiers touchés, une organisation dynamique et capable de faire face et/ou d'intégrer les changements, les tendances qui se dessinent ... dans nos programmes d'action, nos métiers, nos formations et nos organisations.

C'est un *challenge* quotidien et, sans pessimisme, le pari n'est pas gagné.

Peut-être parce que dans nos métiers et « positions » la *raison* du changement est l'idéal jamais atteint ...

Construire des citoyens ...

Les communicateurs publics sont plus souvent aux premiers rangs qu'au balcon de l'action publique... et nous les voyons exprimer des formes d'inquiétudes. Le Club de Venise a cette vertu d'être une caisse de résonance de leur(s) activité(s) et on peut bien y prendre le pouls de la situation.

Leurs propos ne sont ni politiques, ni polémiques et pas davantage l'expression d'un malaise professionnel ; ce qui est généralement en cause ce sont des éléments du cadre sociétal auxquels ils sont confrontés et, parfois, contre lesquels viennent se heurter leurs actions.

Loin déjà des belles embellies démocratiques, les menaces sont à l'œuvre – comme par un principe de balancier. En Europe (comme ailleurs), les populismes font recette, l'extrême droite et son discours de haine se banalisent, l'Union européenne part en éclats, ses principes et valeurs sont mis à mal.

Le « vivre ensemble » et les institutions démocratiques sont rayés et contestés au profit des replis identitaires et de la contestation des soi-disant élites, quand ce n'est pas le « pouvoir de Bruxelles ». Et ce alors même que tant d'« invisibles » (travailleurs pauvres, sans abri, déracinés, minorités, ...) ne figurent plus sur la « grande photographie » et que, à notre niveau, l'échelle européenne (au moins) est plus que jamais nécessaire pour faire face aux urgences sociales, économiques, écologiques, ...



Les moyens de communication n'y échappent pas, voire y contribuent ou en sont affectés <sup>(4)</sup> : opinions publiques manipulées, « fake news », goût de l'instantané sans analyse, ni recul, presse traditionnelle asphyxiée par les coûts et « la concurrence », recul du journalisme, tyrannie des influenceurs, ...

Les communicateurs publics subissent ces éléments au sein desquels et souvent face auxquels ils doivent œuvrer. Et cela pose question : faut-il adapter nos actions, faut-il même changer de ton ... pour un ton plus affirmé, qui ne nie aucune difficulté et qui tente d'y faire face ?

A cet égard, à la veille des dernières élections européennes, une vidéo postée sur YouTube par nos collègues français <sup>(5)</sup>, pour inciter à la participation, est illustrative, comme le sont également les réactions – en sens divers – qu'elle a suscité.

Qu'il s'agisse d'une élection ou d'un référendum, on admet que l'autorité publique (nationale et/ou européenne) mène des actions de communication visant à susciter la participation, voire à exposer les enjeux du scrutin (dans le cas du référendum) ... la première démarche étant moins contestée que la seconde au nom du principe de neutralité de l'état.

Ici, dans cette vidéo du gouvernement français (qui était la première d'une série), l'autorité en appelle autant à l'acte civique qu'au civisme des citoyens, en adoptant un ton de responsabilisation face aux populismes et aux replis identitaires et nationaux et au besoin de cohésion.

C'est certes une technique de communication (au ton brut, sans voix off et interpellant) ; c'est aussi un choix, une manière d'engagement ... disons une (ré)action qui se veut « à la hauteur de la situation ».

Mais tous ne l'ont pas vue et c'est ce qui a fait polémique : propagande, populisme, message orienté, ... une plainte (au moins) a même été déposée auprès du CSA <sup>(6)</sup> pour "utilisation manifestement partisane de fonds publics" ; alors que d'autres pensaient – comme l'éditorialiste de L'Express – que le gouvernement avait eu « raison d'être passé au combat ».

Finalement, avec le ton il faut aussi envisager de changer la méthode ... qu'il s'agisse de participer aux élections ou de bien d'autres comportements en société, qu'il s'agisse de nos actions et politique(s) de communication, il faut plus en appeler au civisme permanent qu'à l'acte civique ponctuel, il faut plus – aussi – favoriser toutes les formes de débat, de participation et de codécision publics, plutôt que de simples et bien éphémères « consultations citoyennes ».

Mais tout ceci demande un travail de fond, long et persévérant, qui assume un tempo lent et à bas bruit ... parce que l'engagement citoyen pour la chose publique et la création des conditions de sa participation effective réclament des efforts importants de tous, autorités, citoyens et groupes intermédiaires.

Comme l'a écrit, très justement, Ignacio Ramonet : « *S'informer demeure une activité productive, impossible à réaliser sans effort, et qui exige une véritable mobilisation intellectuelle. Une activité assez noble, en démocratie, pour que le citoyen consente à lui consacrer une part de son temps, de son argent et de son attention. L'information* »

4 On lira, à cet égard, avec intérêt les deux Chartes adoptées par le Club à Londres et à Vilnius.

5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZY27-DjzOE> ... vidéo postée le 26 octobre 2018 ; un million de vues en une semaine et autant via Twitter. La vidéo renvoie vers un site public d'information <https://www.gouvernement.fr/ouijevote>

6 Le Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel (CSA) est l'autorité publique française de régulation de l'audiovisuel.

*n'est pas un des aspects de la distraction moderne (...); c'est une discipline civique dont l'objectif est de construire des citoyens » (7).*

## Vous vouliez qu'ils vous entendent ... ils veulent être écoutés !

L'évolution de la communication publique est intimement liée à l'évolution même des politiques publiques (et, parfois, réciproquement). Il en est ainsi des consultations mises en place par les pouvoirs ou les services publics dans le cadre de la prise de décisions ou de l'orientation à donner à celles-ci.

Ces consultations publiques « modernes » remontent aux années '80 et ont conservé jusqu'à aujourd'hui leur caractère initial : formel et limité, souvent garanti par la loi, organisé comme des processus administratif ou législatif, dans des cas spécifiques de domaines particuliers (aménagement du territoire, équipement public, environnement, ...). Dans ce contexte, le rôle des communicateurs publics et de la communication publique est resté instrumental, à tort et souvent avec des effets préjudiciables pour les pouvoirs publics eux-mêmes.

Au fil du temps, la fracture constatée entre le politique, les institutions publiques et les citoyens, qui s'est manifestée par des phénomènes notoires (abstentionnisme, montée de l'extrême droite, perte de confiance dans le personnel politique et les institutions, ... et des guerres génocidaires « observées à nos frontières ») a conduit à essayer de mettre en place des mesures visant à rapprocher les autorités des citoyens. Là encore, la communication publique a été convoquée, en parallèle avec des dispositions (souvent normatives) telles que la transparence de l'administration, l'accès aux documents administratifs, les services de médiation et d'ombudsman, la publicité « active » imposée aux institutions publiques, les « guichets publics » (point unique de contact, boîte postale, call center et numéros de téléphone dits « verts »), ... et la supposée mutation induite du « citoyen » en « client du service public » ! C'est aussi l'âge d'or des grandes (et coûteuses) campagnes d'informations dans les médias traditionnels et l'affichage.

Même si on tendait – en principe – à vouloir enrichir la démocratie représentative d'une dose de démocratie participative, rares et souvent laborieuses ont été et sont encore (!) les initiatives de réelle participation. Elles ont, de plus, toujours été cantonnées aux (seuls) niveaux territoriaux, certes les plus « proches » des citoyens et des associations mais, aussi les plus réduits. Si on excepte le référendum (d'ailleurs pas présent dans tous les pays de l'Union), rares sont les initiatives de consultation des citoyens prises par les autorités publiques et qui portaient sur des sujets d'importance nationale : seul nous vient à l'esprit la consultation britannique sur la réforme du système national de santé.

A cet égard, pour reprendre la sentence sans appel de Pierre Rosanvallon : *la démocratie est inachevée*. Et, ainsi, de plus en plus de voix (en dehors et au-delà des corps intermédiaires et des groupes de pression traditionnels) s'élèvent aujourd'hui, qui demandent à être entendues et à participer à la prise de décision ... face à une taxe sur le carburant (à l'origine du mouvement des « gilets jaunes ») ou en faveur de mesures radicales face aux enjeux environnementaux (à l'origine de nombreux mouvements, notamment lycéens, non structurés en Europe).

7 La tyrannie de la communication. Ed. Gallimard. Coll. Folio Actuel (n° 92), pp. 282-283.

Quasi concomitamment, à la suite de l'initiative du gouvernement français de 2018<sup>(8)</sup>, plusieurs états-membres de l'Union européenne organisaient des (formes de) consultations de leurs citoyens sur des enjeux majeurs dans la perspective des élections européennes de juin 2019, en même temps que la Commission européenne menait une enquête en ligne accessible à tous.

Nous avons vu les exemples de plusieurs pays à cet égard et le rôle tenu dans ce cadre par les services de communication, essentiellement produire des informations sur la mise en place de ces consultations, voire pour prendre en charge leur organisation même, jusqu'à la diffusion de leurs apports.

On se demandera, toutefois, ce qu'il en a été fait ; étrangement, la « Déclaration de Sibiu »<sup>(9)</sup> – qui pouvait être l'un de ses aboutissements – n'en a rien repris, malgré les attentes suscitées par les Déclarations de Bratislava et de Rome<sup>(10)</sup> !

On dénombre à ce jour plus de 500 consultations publiques au niveau de la Commission européenne<sup>(11)</sup> et des consultations citoyennes sont en cours (ou sensées l'être) dans tous les pays-membres dans le cadre de la Conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe... mais qui le sait ou s'en préoccupe ?

A cet égard, autant les pouvoirs publics doivent garantir que le « débat public » (consultation, concertation, dialogue, voire codécision) soit promu au mieux et se réalise dans le respect de principes clairs<sup>(12)</sup>, qui impliquent tout un processus de communication publique ; autant cette communication publique doit elle-même être menée par ceux qui la décident et la font dans le respect d'engagements clairs<sup>(13)</sup>.

La question du débat public est un enjeu majeur pour l'évolution de nos démocraties vers la « démocratie ouverte », avec tout ce que cela suppose plus largement d'accès à une information de qualité, de vérification des sources, d'aide à une presse libre et indépendante, de formation civique, de « vivre ensemble », ... Elle est aussi un enjeu et une occasion à saisir pour un renouvellement des pratiques de la communication publique et de ses métiers.

Vous voulez qu'ils vous entendent ... ils veulent être écoutés ! Et qu'est-ce qu'on fait maintenant ?

8 Par la suite, début 2019, le gouvernement français a lancé une initiative de grand débat national, sur des enjeux essentiellement nationaux et sur l'ensemble du territoire. Cette initiative, vue comme une forme de réponse aux mouvements sociaux vécus dans le pays – notamment les actions des « gilets jaunes », est d'une ampleur tout à fait sans précédent. Elle appelle, toutefois, à nos yeux plus de considérations d'ordre politique que d'avis professionnel.

9 Déclaration du Conseil européen informel réunissant les chefs d'État ou de gouvernement de l'Union européenne à Sibiu, Roumanie, le 9 mai 2019. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/press/press-releases/2019/05/09/the-sibiu-declaration/>  
English : <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/05/09/the-sibiu-declaration/>

10 Déclaration du Conseil européen informel réunissant les chefs d'État ou de gouvernement de l'Union européenne à Bratislava, République slovaque, le 16 septembre 2016. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21236/160916-bratislava-declaration-and-roadmap-fr.pdf>  
Déclaration des chefs d'État ou de gouvernement réunis à Rome à l'occasion du 60ème anniversaire des Traités, le 25 mars 2017. [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_STATEMENT-17-767\\_fr.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-17-767_fr.htm)

11 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations\\_fr](https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations_fr)

12 Voyez, notamment :  
• « Principes des démarches de concertation » énoncés par la Commission nationale du débat public (France). *La communication publique en pratiques*. La documentation française, pp. 132-133.  
• <https://www.debatpublic.fr/>  
• Pierre Zémor. *Pour un meilleur débat public*. Presses de Sciences Po, Paris, 140 p. Plus particulièrement « Les conditions de la participation », pp. 91-115.

13 Voir l'encadré.

Les autorités publiques communiquent généralement sur la **chose approuvée** ou l'**institution** (la relation avec l'utilisateur ou l'image), plus rarement sur un **projet** ...

... lorsqu'elles le font, elles se placent sur le terrain du **débat public** ... qui prend plusieurs formes :

- la **concertation** ... pour accepter, modifier ou refuser un projet (c'est la forme la plus courante et la plus règlementée), voire la **négociation** ... pour rechercher un compromis ;
- le **dialogue** ... un simple échange, utilisé aussi pour informer ;
- la **consultation** ... pour recueillir des avis des concernés ou des intéressés ;
- plus rarement, la **codécision** (voire la délégation de décision)

Sauf lorsque c'est règlementé, la décision de recourir au débat public pour un projet particulier est le fait du **décideur public** ; c'est dans ce cadre que l'**administration publique** est appelée à intervenir pour **supporter l'action et en faire la communication**...

Pour ce qui est de la **communication** dans le cas précis d'une **consultation** et de la position du communicateur public dans ce contexte, nous voudrions souligner **quelques conditions** :

- le décideur public doit faire preuve d'un **engagement ferme** et avoir un **objectif précis**...
- le communicateur a besoin de recevoir une mission définie, un « **briefing** » clair...
- la **collaboration** entre le décideur, l'autorité publique et son service de communication doit être effective et chacun doit y assumer son rôle spécifique... sans quoi la consultation se limite à une « simple opération de communication » !
- la « **promesse** » à faire au public doit être claire et tenable, l'objectif et les modalités doivent être communiqués... ils doivent être transparents et compréhensibles...
- le thème doit être documenté et la **documentation** mise à la disposition du public ... dans un **langage accessible** et en des termes permettant leur **commune compréhension**...
- l'**accès aux informations** doit être garanti...
- la **confiance du public** dans la promesse et la capacité de la tenir doivent être garanties...
- il n'y a **pas de place pour le doute** ou l'ambiguïté : la décision ne s'y prend pas, il n'y a pas de codécision...
- tout doit être mis en œuvre pour essayer d'atteindre au mieux le public concerné et l'administration et le communicateur doivent pouvoir disposer des **moyens** (y compris financiers) pour y parvenir...
- l'action de consultation doit répondre à un principe (minimum) d'**intérêt général** et d'**utilité publique**... son objet doit être relevant, elle ne peut pas être sans effet...
- le **rapportage public** est indispensable à la démarche, à la communication et à la confiance... Ce rapportage porte autant sur les résultats de la consultation que sur l'usage qu'en fait le décideur public (par une sorte de droit de suite donné aux consultés et aux citoyens)...
- la consultation et le débat public en général ne doivent pas être des actions isolées, il importe que l'autorité publique (et les communicateurs publics) intègrent cet aspect de la gouvernance publique dans un **ensemble intégré et systématique de démocratie ouverte**... que peuvent soutenir, notamment, les technologies civiques

## Pour une écologie de la communication publique ...

Si nous plaçons le champ de la communication publique à l'intersection entre le pouvoir d'état et le corps social qu'il représente, administre et domine (pour une part), ce qui n'est qu'une vue (d'ailleurs fautive, mais parlante) de l'esprit – sur le modèle canonique de la communication, nous induisons que la formation comme l'évolution de celle-ci sont tributaires de ces deux pôles, de leurs états et de leurs évolutions ... Et ce, plus fondamentalement qu'elles ne seraient tributaires, comme on le lit trop souvent, du seul développement (ou plutôt de la transformation) des technologies et techniques dites de communication.

Ces dernières – comme la fusion du numérique, de l'audiovisuel et d'une certaine mise en réseau mondialisée – jouent certes un rôle important, mais pris par l'idéologie techniciste (présente dès le début de l'étude des phénomènes communicationnels), nous y mettons trop l'accent soit comme seuls phénomènes explicatifs, soit (pire) comme seules solutions à envisager, par exemple, dans le cadre de la réflexion sur l'évolution de nos services.

C'est ce que résume parfaitement Dominique Wolton, lorsqu'il écrit « *Enfin dans la communication, le plus simple reste du côté des messages et des techniques, le plus compliqué du côté des hommes et des sociétés* », dans son livre au titre comme un (r)appel « Informer n'est pas communiquer »<sup>(14)</sup>.

Il est vrai que l'information existe trop souvent sans un véritable projet de communication (qui ne saurait, bien sûr, pas se confondre avec un simple « plan de com' »), une (véritable) politique de lien permanent plutôt qu'un déploiement hasardeux et bien temporaire de techniques de diffusion.

Plus que jamais, l'enjeu (et donc notre mission) n'est pas la distribution (que nous nommons opportunément « mise à disposition ») d'informations par des techniques et canaux de plus en plus sophistiqués, mais de traiter des conditions d'émission (par l'état) et d'acceptation, de satisfaction ou de rejet de celles-ci par ceux à qui elles sont destinées et dont l'objectif d'émancipation doit être la motivation essentielle.

Ainsi, beaucoup (nous aussi) sont plus enclins à aligner les résultats de leurs diffusions/distributions, à souligner la nouveauté (souvent pour la nouveauté en elle-même) des techniques utilisées (chatbot, recours aux influenceurs, ciblage numérique, « dialogues » très éphémères, ...), qu'à s'intéresser à la nécessité sociale et à la mesure de l'impact effectif de leurs actions de communication sur les publics concernés et à la satisfaction réelle de ceux-ci.

Lors de la dernière rencontre « EuroPCom » en « présentiel », dont c'était déjà la 10<sup>e</sup> édition<sup>15</sup>, un intervenant a parlé, à cet égard, très justement de la « *matrix of vanity* » des communicateurs publics !

Au fil du temps, les dépenses somptuaires qui étaient consenties pour l'achat d'espaces média (annonces dans la presse, spots TV, ...) se sont converties en personnel du numérique (dont beaucoup d'externes) et en dépenses informatiques (qui le plus souvent ne constituent même pas des investissements durables) tout aussi considérables. Ce sont généralement les postes qui pèsent le plus sur nos budgets.

Une transformation sur base technologique, mais pour quel(s) saut(s) qualitatif(s) ?

14 Wolton, Dominique. « *Informer n'est pas communiquer* ». CNRS Editions. Paris, 2009, p. 11.

15 7 et 8 novembre 2019.

Pour l'anecdote, bien que ce soit particulièrement illustratif de la situation, évoquons ce service national d'information qui avait consenti des sommes importantes pour la création et l'alimentation en contenus d'un site portail, mais qui avait tôt fait d'en retirer le « formulaire de contact », faute de pouvoir (?) répondre aux questions des utilisateurs ...

Nous connaissons tous, aussi, ce que nous qualifierons de « syndrome du téléphoniste », poste dont nous savons (« intellectuellement » et « stratégiquement ») qu'il est important dans la communication, comme l'une des portes d'accès à l'autorité publique, d'autant vu la fracture numérique, mais dont nous savons aussi – cette fois d'expérience – qu'il n'est pas toujours acquis qu'il sera averti de la campagne d'information qui est lancée par son administration. Sans forcer le trait, disons qu'il est vu sous son angle technique de « centraliste » et généralement pas dans son rôle (humain) d'accueil et de lien qui s'établit entre le citoyen et l'administration.

Par ailleurs, si nous faisons l'exercice de considérer comment les métiers et fonctions ont évolué dans nos services de communication, disons depuis les années '80, nous noterons inexorablement qu'un certain nombre d'entre eux disparaissent, apparaissent ou évoluent au gré des évolutions technologiques, mais sans véritable changement qualitatif et, surtout, sans être dus à une action politique (au sens large) délibérée, qui serait (par exemple) fondée sur des objectifs d'association, de participation et d'échange et sur les valeurs d'émancipation des publics concernés.

Sans tomber ni dans l'angélisme, ni dans le catastrophisme, nous savons que des technologies peuvent par l'utilisation qui en est faite être nocives pour les sphères socio-économique et culturelle, au point qu'elles en deviennent nocives pour nos systèmes politiques et menacent, à certain égard, la démocratie dont la communication publique est l'un des instruments (fake news, manipulations électorales et de l'opinion – comme les exemples des USA et du Brexit le montrent, pistage informatique des habitudes alimentaires jusqu'aux préférences personnelles, en passant par l'état de santé, ...).

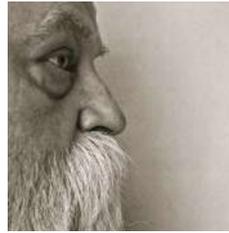
Outre que l'enjeu, de taille, est de (savoir) légiférer et d'éduquer les citoyens face à ces dérives, peut-être y a-t-il un enjeu plus important et fondamental qui est de passer d'une société de relations (souvent unilatérales) à une société du lien.

Plutôt que de solliciter la technologie et d'y investir si largement, il faudra plus modestement, mais plus fondamentalement, que les communicateurs publics (toujours sous la conduite et au service de leurs autorités) questionnent la relation entre pouvoir et administrés et asservissent la technologie et leurs actions au renforcement de ce lien.

A l'heure où on met en avant (dans nos sociétés) la nécessité d'une démocratie participative et d'un développement durable, les communicateurs publics doivent avoir le courage de faire ces constats, d'en tirer des enseignements et d'aider leurs autorités à concevoir une véritable transformation de la communication publique et des métiers et services qui en ont la charge ; de basculer de l'information à la communication, d'être créateur de liens.

Un instant sortons du carcan de ce que nous faisons (le mieux, mais aussi le plus aisément) – producteur, relayeur et diffuseur d'informations – pour (re)partir d'une feuille blanche.

Mais, même si nos services y ont un rôle moteur à jouer, par principe, les choix en la matière ne peuvent être faits qu'au travers d'un dialogue à vouloir et à mener entre le politique (l'autorité) et les citoyens, entrepreneurs, corps intermédiaires et associations. D'ailleurs, dans un contexte plus large que celui de la seule



**PHILIPPE CAROYEZ**  
Adviser in the Directorate-  
general External  
Communication of the  
Chancellery of the Belgian  
Prime Minister, is editor  
of the review of the Club  
“Convergences”.  
He has been a member of the  
Club of Venice since 1992.

communication publique, qui englobe la relation autorité(s)-citoyens et son lien (association, médiation, concertation et/ou consultation) et vise la communication au sens le plus large (dont notamment la presse, l'internet, l'éducation aux médias et la publicité commerciale).

Quelque part entre l'évidence, la nécessité, l'utilité sociale et une certaine utopie ... si nous faisons ce que nous ne faisons pas (ou bien trop peu), comme :

- Associer les citoyens, les entrepreneurs, les corps intermédiaires et les associations à la définition et à l'évaluation des politiques, objectifs et moyens de communication ;
- Introduire des indicateurs de performances fondés sur la compréhension, la rencontre des besoins, la prise en charge et la satisfaction des demandes, l'utilité sociale, la notion de « value for money », ... Passer du résultat à l'impact ;
- Evaluer toutes actions de communication (de très près) comme toutes politiques publiques ;
- Privilégier une communication inclusive, sans stéréotype ni discrimination (y compris d'accès à l'information) ;
- Faire du métier et de la fonction de communicateur public, l'un des « métiers du lien » ... ;
- Aucune information sans communication effective (capacité de dialogue, engagement de répondre aux demandes, assistance, pas de fracture numérique, relais et suivi vers les autorités concernées, ...)
- Dépolluer la communication, dont la communication publique ... Tendre vers une communication éco-responsable et contribuer au débat sur la limitation de la publicité commerciale et de la pollution publicitaire ;
- Ne rien produire qui n'ait pas été préalablement avalisé par un panel représentatif des concernés (selon des mécanismes de consultation à mettre en place) ;
- Soutenir la définition d'une politique générale de communication au niveau central et d'un cadre législatif, éthique et déontologique clair ;
- ...

Et si nous commençons demain ?

## No European Green Deal without People's and Businesses' Zeal

Verena Ringler

In a field study on the European Union's green transition plan, regional CEOs, mayors, architects, and educators send their key messages and priority wishlist to governments and the EU.

What do 20 decision-makers and economists in Vienna, Austria, and 50 CEOs, mayors, policy shapers, architects and activists outside the capital know about the European Green Deal, the EU's roadmap to „net zero“? Which questions and worries do they articulate, which chances and challenges do they associate with decarbonization, biodiversity protection etc. in the EU? What do these practitioners in our private, public, and civic sectors in the field need from the EU?

The independent, small Think & Do Tank *European Commons*, in a project partnership with Konrad Adenauer Foundation's *Multilateral Dialogue* office in Vienna, probed these questions with 50 regional and 20 capital-based opinion leaders, decision-makers and practitioners, focusing on the regions of Tyrol, Lake Constance, and Lower Austria. At the heart of this qualitative field study were lengthy individual interviews following a semi-structured questionnaire, in combination with a total of five interactive strategy seminars and one „live“ networking session over the course of 2021. All conversations were led following the Chatham House Rule. The final observations and recommendations report, *Regions on the road to the European Green Deal*, lists the names of participants while not including quotes. Download the 53-page report in German here: [www.europeancommons.eu](http://www.europeancommons.eu).

Let me present the regional leaders' eight key messages on the EU Green Deal, including possible recommendations for action:

**Message 1 of regional leaders to EU: The path to climate neutrality is a question of leadership and belongs in the C-Suite of political, business, educational and social organisations.** The biggest risks on the road to European climate neutrality stem from the arenas of politics, public sphere / media, and culture / psychology. According to the study participants, it's essential to raise awareness about the costs of inaction and of procrastination on the road to net zero.



*Regions on the road to the European Green Deal.*  
The 53-page report highlights messages for national and EU government communications.



EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn, KAS MD Vienna Director Claudia Crawford, and Director of European Commons, Verena Ringler, upon presentation of the regional EU Green Deal deep dive in the fall of 2021.

**1<sup>st</sup> Call to Action: The road to green is cluttered by conflict and risks. An EU Green Deal Dialogue Initiative shall be started to give conflicts of interest their proper space and place.** The initiative would connect frontrunners and influencers on the regional, national and EU level. This would ideally be the space and place for conflict management, conflict resolution and for strategy development. Public research and awareness-raising as well as safe space settings could be combined. The role models for this initiative are two organisations in Germany, the Agora Verkehrswende and Agora Energiewende.

**Message 2: Come talk to us! The burden of communicating the EU Green Deal lies with the EU and national governments.** While participants associate the EGD plan with the name of Ursula von der Leyen, they lack knowledge on the underlying EU process and national governments' roles. It is unclear how exactly e.g. the New European Bauhaus project or the Fitfor55 legislative package fit into the EGD plan.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Call to Action: All participants urge the EU to roll out a comprehensive public information campaign on the EGD as soon as the pandemic challenge has peaked.** A number of CEOs or mayors pull out the famous postcard of the 17 SDGs, the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, during the interview and strategy talks with European Commons. They say they want the elements of the EGD broken down in a similar way. Public information and campaigning ideally means outreach events, e.g. roadshows, an EGD Hotline, an EGD bus, TownHall events, etc. Contents shall be very clear not just on policy and regulation, but also on instruments for funding and supporting regional initiatives.

**Message 3: The EGD is a, if not *the*, decisive factor for European regional economic policy now.** Due to its cross-cutting nature, the EGD milestones should ideally be overseen by an EGD Representative or even an EGD taskforce on the regional level. This is where research and development, regional science and academia and the private sector would interact early on in order to boost regional decarbonization, biodiversity care and Circle Economy circuits.

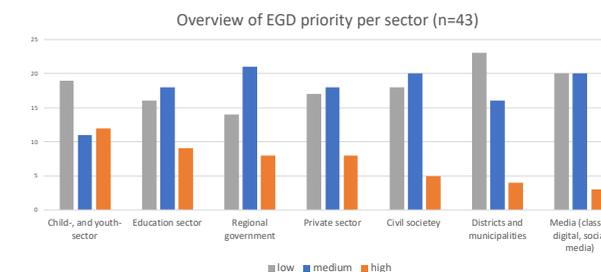
**3<sup>rd</sup> Call to Action: The European Commission could use its in-house „Capital of Cultures“ programme as a blueprint for inviting „EGD innovation regions“.** Study participants recall the European Commission's Capital of Culture programme, which has led to clusters of excellence around culture and the arts, cities and urbanism, tourism and the creative industry. In a similar vein, the Commission could now incept an offer for regions who are particularly keen and ready to intensify innovation around the EGD.

**Message 4: Flourish or fail? Municipalities, and local administrations, are the main arena for proving the EGD's concept.** Agriculture, spatial planning, soil protection, community building,—the myriad of action fields of the green transition find their hands-on arena of implementation, of make or break.

**4<sup>th</sup> Call to Action: All green transition is local, ultimately. Municipalities and local administration need a „Learning Platform“ on the EGD.** This initiative would include devising curricula for next leaders in local government, build pipelines of students, trainees, and next leaders for local politics and administration. This municipal platform would also introduce, train, and scale cutting-edge participatory methodologies and eventually advance modern, professional local public management also in rural areas and peripheries.

Regional CEOs, mayors, architects etc. see an urgent need for EU and national public information, outreach, and capacity building. Slide by European Commons.

Priority of the EGD in different regional fields, as perceived by regional CEOs, mayors in Austria



**Message 5: Send in the SMEs! Innovative start-up companies, small firms or family businesses look for contact, exchange and support from Brussels and nationally.** While large, public companies engage on ESG investment, the green taxonomy, the costs of and good practices while transforming etc. in the European parliament's Green Recovery Alliance or the WEF's CEO Action Group for a Green Recovery, SMEs have not yet found their contact point for going green, with others. They ask for matchmaking, peer-to-peer cooperation, and learning journeys on the EGD.

**5<sup>th</sup> Call to Action: Start an EGD small business initiative, possibly first across the Alpine Arc.** This region exhibits a bustling SME sector, where global niche products are invented and produced, and where green tech and innovation meet a strong sense of local and ecological ownership. An EGD small business initiative could be connected with an EGD Academy for research and development, knowledge sharing, and rapid prototyping.

**Message 6: The EGD and its implications have not yet reached regional and local media.** Study participants rank media last in a list of 13 different regional fields with regards to the perceived focus on the EGD in each of these fields. The private sector, regional government, civil society, education—they all fare better in the eyes of the participants than local media organisations. This is important to note, because local media often do remain pillars of democratic and entrepreneurial life, and the result shows this sphere has arguably had little connection to all things Brussels or EU, and in particular to pressing questions of our time and their implications in a regional setting.

**6<sup>th</sup> Call to Action: Jumpstart EGD capacity- and competencies building in regional media.** A navigation, information, experts fielding and thematic training service point like Berlin's "Clean Energy Wire" (CLEW) could serve as inspiration also for regional media organisations. An expedited build-up of a European plus local arm of CLEW could be key now, in order to connect established and newcomers publishers, editors, and reporters to the European Green Deal agenda and its immense consequences for every region's politics, economics, and society.

**Message 7: Seemingly soft fields such as regional civil society networks, children- and youth centers are perceived as ready but not fully able to participate in the green transition conversation and action.** These sectors need, according to study participants, an investment offensive in order to build up the necessary skills, knowledge, values, and networks to advance the rocky road of the green transition in their own region. Study participants say participatory politics, long-term investment and institutional grants in this field would serve the needs of the green transition more than short-term support or one-off conferences.

**7<sup>th</sup> Call to Action: Boost democratic participation and green transition skills across civil society, children- and youth centers in European regions.** This point includes a call for bringing seemingly soft networks to the table, and empowering regional, often ultra-local, centers and networks of civil society, youth, and children's activities. The EGD shall serve, in the eyes of the study participants, as a key opportunity to modernize, professionalize, Europeanize and empower these societal fields of action. Individual case studies are listed to serve as inspiration for acceleration or scaling. They include the Innsbruck Nature Film Festival (INFF) and the Rurasmus initiative.



**VERENA RINGLER** directs the independent Think & Do Tank European Commons ([www.europeancommons.eu](http://www.europeancommons.eu)). She recently carried out a study on the green transition and for her research and publication project she won the Konrad Adenauer Foundation's Multilateral Dialogue – Vienna. Verena got her MA from the Johns Hopkins University's School for Advanced International Studies in 2002. She also studied in Uppsala, Vienna, and her hometown, Innsbruck. She aims to foster dialogue between institutions, citizens, and multiplier groups in no less than seven boards or advisory groups for Europe. Verena appears regularly on stage or in the media and has authored more than 500 contributions for print, online, or live formats (Keynotes, TEDx). In 2022, her case study, "Lawmakers without Borders", on the Open European Dialogue platform for national legislators across the EU will appear in the Routledge Handbook on Collective Intelligence for Democracy and Governance.

**Message 8: The EGD cannot be done to the people. It succeeds when implemented *with* the people.** Asked about their own key learnings from past transformation or change exercises, nearly all study participants say they learned to give more time to trust-building, iterative conversation, and open-ended preparation upfront, comparing this with what architects call the "Zero Phase." Study participants add that the instruments of open innovation - sandboxing, prototyping – etc. shall be given attention and resources throughout the whole EU Green Deal plan and period.

**8<sup>th</sup> Call to Action: We are the EU Green Deal. - Mainstreaming DIY and co-creation elements throughout Horizon or Erasmus programming.** Study participants highlight that most citizens were ready and willing to contribute to the green transition, whether as Citizen Scientist, urban or street island gardener, EGD Summercamp trainer or host family, etc. – They urge budgeters in the EU and nationally to earmark substantial percentages of each programme, no matter how technical or scientific it may be, for actual participation,

Study leader and Director of the Think & Do Tank European Commons, Verena Ringler is further discussing these findings and possible implications with stakeholders and programmers in Brussels, Berlin, and Paris in the winter of 2021/22. Possible public-private-civic alliances for bottom-up contributions to the green transition may be forged.



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## The forgotten audience: the link to internal communication

John Verrico

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Government agencies, corporations, and other organizations tend to focus on external communication -- interacting with customers or users of their services, engaging media, communicating with stakeholders – all of which are vitally important to managing public image.

There is one audience that is usually forgotten or overly, or thought of only as secondary. But, when properly engaged, can have the most significant impact on forming the public opinion of an organization and its services.

The internal audience, an organization's own employees, are the ones providing the service and directly interacting with stakeholders. If they aren't informed, are uncommitted or unhappy, it can have a major negative reflection on public perceptions.

Company policies, vision, mission statements are all merely words on paper if the employees aren't operating in line with those corporate edicts and the customer doesn't have a good experience.

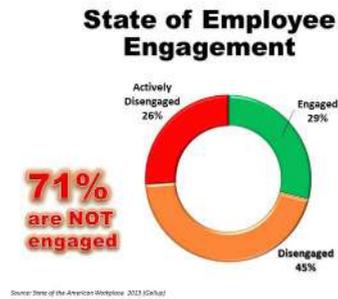
Think about in terms of the private sector. We all form opinions about a company and its products based upon the experience we have with that organization's representatives. The wait staff at a restaurant, the receptionist in an office, the service provider, the call center staff, the online technician, the sales representative. We choose whether or not to do business with them again based upon our interaction with these front-line representatives.

No matter how good the food is at a restaurant, if the servers don't provide good service, don't greet them properly, are slow or rude, people will opt to go elsewhere for lesser quality food where the interaction with the staff is more pleasant, where they feel valued as a customer, where they feel they matter.

That is the underlying core of all of this. People want to feel as if they matter. They want to be listened to, they want to be communicated with, they want to feel like an insider.

This is true not just of an organization's customers and stakeholders, but also, even more importantly, for the internal staff. They too want to feel as if they matter. They want to be listened to, want to be communicated with, and want to feel like an insider.

The interesting part is that they ARE insiders, and yet they are not always treated that way. Employees find out about major organizational initiatives by reading about it in news outlets, or through hearsay (which tends to not be entirely accurate). They learn about job postings in their own organization when they look at publicly



available employment opportunities in the newspaper or on websites. They learn about personnel actions or organizational structure changes via the rumor mill, instead of directly from leadership.

Frequent, open, honest communication with employees is the most critically important aspect to the success of any organization. When employees feel included, they are more motivated, their performance improves, and the way they represent the organization to others is much more positive.

## Research Data

Gallup, Inc., the American analytics and advisory company known for its worldwide public opinion polls, interviews thousands of workers across a variety of job types each year to determine the level of employee engagement.

They found that only 22% of employees were actually **Engaged** – meaning that they work with passion and feel a profound connection to their organization. Engaged employees drive innovation and move the organization forward.

A staggering 45% were **Not Engaged** – they were essentially “checked out.” They are sleepwalking through their workday, putting time — but not energy or passion — into their work.

And 26% of employees were what the Gallup refer to as **Actively Disengaged** – which are employees that aren’t just unhappy at work; they’re busy acting out their unhappiness. They spend their days complaining, searching for another job, and actively undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

Add the **Not Engaged** and **Actively Disengaged** employees together, that is a frightening **71%** of the workforce that are not helping your organization.

Another study from the global consulting company, Deloitte, showed that 48% of people they spoke to were so unhappy at their current job, they would plan to look for a new one as soon as the economy improved.

Most said they would seek information on a new position within the next year.

What is driving this lull in motivation? But how did we get to this point? What makes people so miserable at work? And more importantly, how we can turn things around, changing these unengaged employees into champions of our organization?

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics conducted some of their own research and found that 64% of people who leave their job do so because they don’t feel recognized.

They found:

- Only 22% of employees feel recognized
- 49% say they would leave their job for a company that recognizes employees
- 63% of those who do not feel recognized intend to quit in the next 2 years (depending upon the economy and ability to find a job)
- 69% would work harder if they were better recognized
- 78% of U.S. workers say recognition is part of their daily motivation

## What is recognition?

Surprisingly, it has nothing to do with financial compensation. Not raises, promotions, nor other monetary incentives. Nor is it trophies, plaques or frameable certificates.

While all those things are certainly attractive, they are not the kind of recognition most desired.

Organizations that use **reward-based recognition** in the United States spend \$38 billion every year on incentive awards, mostly cash bonuses.

The biggest challenge for reward-based recognition is it being administered fairly and equitably across the organization. Some front-line supervisors will put everyone in for an award, even if they are only just doing the bare minimum because they don’t want to appear to have favorites, others who will only nominate people who have gone above and beyond, and yet others who may not submit anyone for awards at all.

They may have a different definition of what is award-worthy. Or maybe they just don’t get around to writing up the recommendation.

But there is always some inequity, and someone who feels that the practice is unfair. That perception of unfairness can cause more damage to internal morale than anything else.

Key factors that people complain about:

- **48% - loss of trust**
- **46% - lack of transparency**
- **40% - unfair or unethical treatment**

There is an underlying theme here.

Trust, transparency, and the perception of fairness are all reliant on how much **communication** there is.

Communication is actually the recognition that people are looking for.

Open communication from and with organizational leadership – especially if those channels are open up, down, and across the organization.

Without communication, people do not feel they are part of the team, there is no buy-in, no sense of teamwork, all of which impacts output, work quality and attitude.



Communication is an acknowledgement that an employee is important

- to the organization,
- to the leaders,
- and to each other.

There is research to back this up.

Many organizations will survey their employees on their job satisfaction, and there are multiple independent studies that also examine employee satisfaction across the commercial and government spectra.

In the United States, the federal government conducts an annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) to determine the status of government employees. Many state and local level government agencies use similar surveys.

The interesting correlation in the findings is that the agencies that had the overall highest employee satisfaction were the ones who scored the highest in communication-related questions. And the ones who scored lowest in those areas also grading lower on the overall scores.

Some of those questions include:

- **I know what is expected of me on the job.**
- **In the last six months, my supervisor/team leader has talked with me about my performance.**
- **Managers promote communication among different work units.**
- **Employees have a feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work processes.**
- **How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work?**
- **How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization?**

Gallup, Inc., the American analytics and advisory company known for its worldwide public opinion polls, interviews thousands of workers across a variety of job types each year.

They have similar questions in their surveys, with the same result.

- **I know what is expected of me at work.**
- **In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.**
- **My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.**
- **At work, my opinions seem to count.**
- **In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.**

Within an organization, if the employees don't feel as if they matter, they will treat customers and stakeholders as if they don't matter either.

In the 2002 business bestseller, "The Customer Comes Second" authors Hal Rosenbluth and Diane McFerrin Peters note that you need to put your employees over and above your customers, since they are the ones representing you to your customers. They said, "Take care of your employees, they'll take care of your customers. Don't take care of your employees, they'll take your customers."

In the private sector, that means losing business and impact to the bottom line.

When a favorite waiter leaves to go to another restaurant, customers tend to follow. Same thing with a good

mechanic, hair stylist, accountant, or car salesperson. No matter what industry, people will go where they feel the most valued.

In his book, "Monday Morning Leadership," David Cottrell notes that, "People quit people before they quit companies."

It is the people that are the face of the organization. It is also people that set the tone and organizational climate for the workforce. If customer feel appreciated they'll keep coming back for more service and products. If employees feel appreciated they'll represent the organization well and provide that superior customer service that will keep the customers coming back.

Its great for retention too, as people rarely leave jobs where they feel appreciated and get along with their boss.

## A Monopoly on Service

The unique thing about government is that customers of government services rarely have options. Usually, the government agency is the ONLY place people can go for that service. Government is the only option people have as a service provider or regulator.

Although that means they can't take their business elsewhere, it will make a great deal of difference on how the agency is viewed. Which will impact when the agency is requiring people to take certain action, comply with a rule, vote on a policy, and even more importantly, an possibly even impact agency funding.

Therefore, it is perhaps even more critical to treat customers and stakeholders well, and that means that our front-line employees need to be informed, happy and motivated.

## The 'Main Thing'

Internal communication is much more than just an occasional missive from the leadership to the workforce, more than a periodic all-hands meeting or town hall meeting.

It means open lines of communication up, down and across. Not only top-down, but also allowing for some sort of feedback from the front-line staff. Leadership must be open to the concerns and perceptions of those who are dealing with customers and stakeholders on a daily basis – no matter what kind of organization you are in.

One of the most important aspects of all of this is that employees need to be made to feel that they matter.

David Cottrell in his book "Monday Morning Leadership" – "People have different perceptions of what the main thing is." So often that "main thing" is not clearly defined.

To have a successful team, everyone needs to understand and have the same vision of what the end goal is. They need to know how important their contribution is, and the impact they have on the outcome.



**JOHN VERRICO** is the former President of the National Association of Government Communicators in the United States and has more than 40 years of extensive experience as a public affairs professional in federal and state government agencies, working extensively in media, community and employee relations. A retired U.S. Navy Master Chief Journalist, John is a professional trainer on communication, leadership, and customer service.

This variation a classic parable about three bricklayers.

A passer-by observed three bricklayers on a construction site, one crouched and working rather sloppily, one half-standing and carefully positioning bricks, and one standing tall, working rapidly, yet precisely measuring mortar and aligning the bricks. To each bricklayer, the visitor asked, "What are you doing?" The first bricklayer replied, "I'm a bricklayer. I'm working hard laying bricks so I can earn some money to feed my family." The second bricklayer, said, "I'm a builder. I'm building a wall." But the third brick layer, the most productive of the three, proudly said, "I'm building a children's hospital."

That third bricklayer understood where he fit in to the big picture, knew what the "main thing" was and how his efforts contributed to the outcome.

## Conclusion

The most effective way to improve or maintain a positive perception of one's organization is to ensure that the internal audience, an agency's own employees, are not forgotten or overlooked. And even more so, to make them the number one priority in all communication efforts.

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# Communication challenges: building resilience vs hybrid threats

Vincenzo Le Voci, Richard Chalk & Luke Havill

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## Context

The global Covid pandemic, worldwide geo-political instabilities, heavy disinformation and cyber-security related threats and other crisis scenarios of international amplitude have given renewed impetus to hostile (state and non-state) entities aiming to destabilise democracies, and to terrorist and extremist groups to radicalise and recruit.

Given the unparalleled levels of individual uncertainty, social distress and economic disturbance, these actors have continued to innovate, adopting and adapting to new digital technologies and developing new approaches to propagate disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories – including around national vaccination programmes – and radicalising narratives. We are now seeing the emergence of a new set of communications challenges which governments will have to deal with, including terrorists' increasing use of the internet, ever more violent white supremacist narratives, a global incels movement online, and many more.

Public communicators are urged to develop adequate responses to the emerging threats and to contribute to building resilience capacities. Therefore the development of efficient preventive and contingent communication strategies, as well as a new partnership approach to communicate effectively in this field, are a must.

## The Way Ahead

As preannounced at its plenary meeting of 10 and 11 June 2021, the Club of Venice established on 4th October 2021 a new ad hoc working group to facilitate informal reflection and analysis, enhance the frequency and scope of conversation and optimize the scale of dialogue, with a view to widening the debate around the abovementioned emerging threats, where policy development needs to be complemented by a robust internal and external strategic communication component.

This working group will be open to government communicators and policy makers, institutions, academics, private sector agencies, expert analysts and civil society and community groups in order to cooperate in analysing and addressing hybrid threats and consider adequate responses.

The aims are to:

- *generate* powerful insights and the development of practical solutions which can easily and rapidly be applied
- *facilitate* discussions and exchanges of best practices, also by calling on the expertise of external specialists
- *prepare* reasonably in advance the sessions of the plenary meetings and thematic seminars and workshops focused on hybrid threats.

This new ad hoc working group of the Club of Venice will enable participants to exchange their experiences and showcase them through a variety of different formats and means – including panel debates, presentations and film content – around which discussion will take place.

Scope and Topics to be addressed by this working group will be regularly updated/adapted according to the hybrid threats evolution and to the governmental resilience-building and communication strategies.

The new working group mandate is published in the final Chapter of this Book.

This initiative is carried out by the Club of Venice in cooperation with REOC Communications (UK)

## About the CLUB OF VENICE

The Club of Venice (CV) is the informal network of the Directors-General / Directors / Heads of the information and communication services of the EU Member States, the UK and the EU Institutions. It was founded in 1986 under the auspices of the acting Italian Presidency of the Council of the EU. Since 2003, membership has been extended to the Heads of government communication offices of the EU accession candidate countries; and since 2008, to the European Council, EESC, CoR, ECB, EEAS and EIB. The OECD, the Council of Europe, Cap'Com, the Democratic Society, the Herbert Simon Society, SEECOM, SEEMO, NAGC and the ICMPD are associated members of the CV.

The purpose of the Club is to stimulate exchange of information and experience and reinforce cooperation in all fields of public information and communication, sharing and discussing best practice in a wide variety of challenging fields such as crisis communication, capacity/capability building, training, ethics, resilience building and countering disinformation, public diplomacy and digital developments. CV governance is assured by a Steering Group composed by eight MS communication directors and the CV Secretary-General.

## About REOC

REOC Communications is a creative strategy consultancy born out of more than a decade's worth of experience in helping governments and others respond to complex communications challenges, especially in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Based in the UK, REOC now works for the European Commission, United Nations, the UK Government, the US Government, and many governments across Europe, Africa and Asia. Since January 2020, REOC has been delivering the communications for the EU-funded Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), 'RAN Practitioners', and is delivering strategic communications training for 'RAN Policy Support'.

## VINCENZO LE VOCI

Vincenzo Le Voci is the Secretary-General of the Club of Venice, the network of the communications directors from the European Union member states and institutions and from countries candidate to the EU membership. He has fulfilled this role since 2011. He is a longstanding European civil servant, having worked for the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU for 29 years. Since 2001 he is in the Directorate-General of Communication, where he is currently responsible for Transparency and Information Policy matters. Before joining the EU, he worked 7 years for NATO in administration management and logistics, as a US Air Force - DOD official. Vincenzo owns a Master degree in foreign languages and literatures and attended courses of modern history, European Integration and management in Belgium and at Maryland and MIT universities. He is giving lectures to universities and contributes articles and essays for communications and public diplomacy books and magazines. He is the co-editor of three compendiums and, since 2013, a semi-annual review (Convergences) of the Club of Venice focused on challenges in public communication. In 2018 he was conferred by the University of Calabria and the Municipality of Ventotene (the home of Altiero Spinelli's Manifesto) the

Europa Prize "in recognition of his high commitment to communication and information aimed at encouraging and strengthening public and diplomatic relations between governmental and institutional communicators".

## RICHARD CHALK

is the managing director and founder of REOC Communications. He has a twenty-year track record of helping international institutions and governments structure their strategic communications, and building and running teams to deliver communications projects to address some of the most complex challenges in the world today. From 2012 to 2019 Richard worked closely with the UK Home Office to develop a pioneering approach to Counter Terrorism and Counter Violent Extremism communications. Richard designed the UK Home Office Research Information and Communications Unit's (RICU) and RICU-International architectures including the approach to (and building of) the UK PVE civil society network. Richard also designed The Network Hub, a RICU- International initiative, that supported over thirty UK and European CSOs to deliver PVE projects. Richard also helped design the activity for the EU Commission's European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN) which supported EU Member State governments in the use of strategic communications in P/CVE and currently leads the Radicalisation Awareness Network's (RAN Practitioners) communications activity in support of frontline practitioners across the EU.

## LUKE HAVILL

is a consultant at REOC Communications with over ten years' experience in strategic communications in P/CVE, working for a variety of international institutions and national Governments, including the United Nations, NATO, European Commission, African Union, US and UK Governments and national Governments across Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Luke has spent the last five working for the European Commission and UK Government delivering projects in Europe. He was the Head of Consultancy for the European Strategic Communication Network (ESCN), previously the Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team (SSCAT), providing strategic communications advice on P/CVE to EU Member State Governments, and Director of Development for the UK Government's RICU-I initiative, The Network Hub, providing communications capacity building support to European CSOs. Luke is now the communications manager for the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN Practitioners), a European Commission funded network of over 6,000 frontline practitioners across the EU.

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# Involving young people into the media sphere

Klaus Dahmann

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Nowadays, children and teenagers grow up in a world where media are omnipresent. Many of these *digital natives* both consume and produce content. If they are supported in their creativity and offered know-how and mentorship, they can play a more important role not only in the media sector, but also in society. DW Akademie's program *Young Media* in the Western Balkans serves as a good example.

Children and youth have very special needs, when accessing information through media. Long before the so-called digital revolution, media makers started to develop formats how to not only offer informative (educational) content to various age groups in a one-way street, but also to open up interactivity with young audiences – and even to include them in content production. The reasons why media should have this specific focus on young people are obvious: Democracy is based on a well-informed society with the ability to share own views and actively take part in societal discussions and decisions. Young people do not automatically turn into democratic minds, frequent media users and active citizens when turning 18. It is a long learning process that starts at a very early age. This is the basic understanding of Media and Information Literacy: to safely and consciously grow up in a world where media are omnipresent and to be able to use them in the best manner. For media themselves it is crucial to create a trustful relationship with young audiences, as this is the basis for life-long audience retention.

However, the conflicts in the 1990s have disrupted the media eco-system of former Yugoslavia. In the successor countries, only a very few seeds of informative content production for young audiences have survived.

## Fighting skepticism of both media and young people

When DW Akademie shaped and initiated the project “Young Media” in 2017, there was a lot of skepticism. At that time, media and information literacy was still a minor topic, false and fake news were not seen yet as a major threat. Neither public broadcasters nor private media were paying a lot of attention to young audiences, as they were busy enough struggling with restrictions to press freedom and financial problems. Why invest time and money in a generation which was, according to studies and polls, neither interested in traditional media nor in politics or economics? Many media managers were convinced that Generation Z had already been “swept away” by fun and lifestyle content on social media.

On the other hand, young people used to ask: “Why would any media be interested in me? They offer either boring political stuff or trash and sex scandals. Why would they ask me for my opinion or even invite me to produce content for my peers?”

## Success stories and lighthouse projects

The first step is often the most difficult one: to encourage and support those who are open to new experiments – on both sides. On the media side, we have been taking a long breath to convince managements and editorial boards to give creative freedom to teenagers or students and to let them determine the topics and produce content. On the other side, young people are often not aware that a brilliant media idea is not enough but needs endurance, know-how and team work, and that media business implies responsibility, as well.

DW Akademie's approach in the Western Balkans is simple, but efficient: A mixture of consulting, training and mentorship for media and practical Media and Information Literacy for young people has created success stories and innovative media projects. Just some examples<sup>1</sup> :

- The former North Macedonian students' outlet *Fakulteti* has grown into a viable middle-size media company with a staff of some hundred young people. They experienced their breakthrough when inventing the educational portal *Deca.mk* for pre-school children and their parents. The animated video series *Bibi* – which was originally thought for promotion of their portal – went viral and opened up cooperation with public services and private media companies.
- The students' portal *Karika* has turned into the most significant platform for young people in Bosnia-Herzegovina to speak up from a personal perspective on issues of human rights, shortcomings in education, and other societal problems. Nowadays, *Karika* is a viable citizen media with increased project funding.
- The Montenegrin public service RTCG has launched *Hexatorm*, a teenager-driven YouTube channel mentored by professional journalists and editors, which is unique in the Western Balkans. A girl from the first *Hexatorm* generation has become one of the most popular TikTokers in her country with more than 100.000 followers.
- The Serbian portal *Youth Vibes*, founded by two 16 year-old girls, has developed into the leading nationwide teenagers' platform. In the past four years, some 90 teenagers have published their stories, e.g. on citizens' protests, depression in times of COVID-19 or opportunities to study abroad.

What is more, we see an impact beyond the project *Young Media*: Several Serbian local media have opened their doors to young people producing content for peers and from time to time – and a couple of new youth-driven media enter the media scene.

By the end of each year, DW Akademie brings both media and young people together in Brave New Media Forum (BNMF)<sup>2</sup> in Belgrade, a newly shaped event in cooperation with OSCE Mission to Serbia. Public broadcasters, private media and young citizen media have the opportunity to present their content for children and youth, but also to get to know each other, exchange experience and discuss on current media topics. Meanwhile, BNMF has become the most important annual market place for youth-affine media and media-affine young people in the Western Balkans. This year, the Forum celebrates its 5th birthday.

1 <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCa1bGBQoNw3stGDgCH993aw>  
<https://www.youtube.com/c/Hexatorm>  
<https://youthvibes.rs/>

2 <https://bnmf.online/>; <https://www.dw.com/en/brave-new-media-forum-young-media-in-the-pandemic/a-55984541>



**KLAUS DAHMANN**  
studied Slavistics in Bonn. In 1999, he started to work with DW as a multimedia journalist and editor, later also as a media trainer. Since 2016, he is DW Akademie's Program Director for the Western Balkans.

## Involving means sharing ownership

In DW Akademie's project *Young Media*, teenagers and students play a key role. As digital natives, they often come up with innovative ideas. Young focus groups regularly evaluate the content published by the youth media outlets. And during BNMF, teenagers and students volunteer as part of the organizing team, chat group leaders or moderators on stage.

DW Akademie gives special emphasis to the involvement of young people: Our mentors invest time to find out what *they* want and need. *The key approach is to listen and pick up their ideas before planning and offering* (e.g. mentoring, trainings, events). DW Akademie does not come up with *a priori* elaborated framework in which they have to fulfill a prescribed role, but invites them to jointly shape the framework. Whatever we suggest – if they think it's stupid, we quit the idea. *Shared ownership is crucial.*

## Creating communities is the key

In the beginning, DW Akademie thoroughly selects a small number of young *key persons* with whom we have been cooperating over a longer period (instead of targeting a huge number of young people straight away). *A longer-term cooperation* gives the opportunity to build trust, offer personal development and open up new perspectives. No doubt, these aspects matter for young people. If we manage to convince one of them, he or she will most likely turn into an *ambassador, opinion leader and multiplier* inviting many others to join. These "newbies" bring along new expectations and new ideas which we have to meet. If we do so, we create, step by step, a *community*.

DW Akademie deliberately promotes the idea of *creating communities*: For teenagers and students the social component is highly important (even more important than for adults). They intensely look for like-minded people, especially like-minded peers, to connect, discuss and be creative. We do our best to set a framework of events and activities which inspire and challenge them, but leave enough space for team building and socializing ("hanging out").

Last few words on *skepticism* among the young generation: We are grateful for many young people being so skeptical. They force us to rethink and present arguments, e.g. why a functioning media landscape is still important, why fact-checking is a crucial skill for every citizen or why it matters to be sensitive to racism or hate speech. Their skepticism reflects the overwhelming complexity of our world full of conflicts and contradictions. Young people's radars are sharp. They sense when we adults don't really *mean* what we say, when we do our job without being dedicated and when we give answers before asking them and listening. For both generations it can be an amazing and adventurous mutual learning process. It is worthwhile facing the challenge.

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# Communication challenges and evolving narratives in the field of migration - ICMPD

Marco Ricorda

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Migration is one of the most important political issues in current public debates in Europe. The topic is frequently connected with highly emotional, sensationalist and even extreme points of view that have made effective discussion significantly difficult among the involved stakeholders both at the governmental and public sphere across the continent. Conflicts in Syria and Libya coupled with political and economic instability in several countries in the Mediterranean, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East have resulted in large scale movement of migrants and refugees throughout the Euro-Mediterranean region. We have all seen the stark images depicted in the media of migrants and asylum seekers packed aboard vessels of questionable seaworthiness, risking life and limb to make the treacherous journey across the sea in search of a safe haven and a better future.

In 2020 and 2021 the global coronavirus pandemic has brought to light the role of public and institutional communicators in clarifying the terms of the migration debates and explain the infinite realities of migration, its related policies and the stories of migrants to the wider community. This notably included the very hard challenge of tackling rampant disinformation, misinformation and malinformation in a period where online consumption of content through social networks beat any historical records. In this situation, ICMPD analysts and Club of Venice representatives have witnessed a range of different approaches to covering migration. Numerous ICMPD reports have drawn to the fact that the migration narratives are characterized by a strong polarization. Such a divided and confrontational public discourse is often devoid of a wider understanding of migration. In particular, in the age of disinformation, it is even harder to achieve a balanced public discussion that is functional rather than antagonistic to effective governance, that reconciles evidence with the need for emotional resonance, and that achieves a greater understanding of migration.

An important step needed is for governments, institutions, news sources, civil society and big digital platforms to work together to promote authoritative sources. Otherwise misleading narratives take root and develop a life of their own. That was true before the COVID-19 pandemic and so-called "infodemic." It is even truer now as certain categories of migrants, such as irregular migrants in the Mediterranean, are particularly affected by COVID-19-related disinformation and misinformation since they are already subject to overly simplistic media framing. A fair and balanced view of migration in the media is an essential stepping stone towards developing a more nuanced understanding of migration among the general public as well as contributing to drafting and implementing migration policies that work.

The cooperation between ICMPD, in particular through its EUROMED Migration project, and the Club of Venice has led so far to the organization of four Euromediterranean communicators workshops on migration

that brought together public communicators, senior officials, academics and practitioners from national governments, local authorities, international organizations, universities and the media to exchange and learn from the latest innovations available on the topic and consolidate a community of practice to promote balanced migration narratives.

The first workshop took place in Tunis in 2018 and highlighted the important role communicators' play in relaying information and stimulating the debate on migration in the public sphere, and ultimately informing people's perceptions of migration. The second workshop took place in Athens in 2019 enabled the consolidation of a community of practice of communicators, through deepening of knowledge and sharing of practice and experience. The same year, EUROMED Migration organized two high-level side events at the 73rd UNGA session on "Giving Voice to Evidence - Overcoming a Distorted Narrative on Migration" and at the 43rd session of UN Human Rights Council on "A New Balanced Narrative on Migration". The 2020 workshop was run online in view of the global pandemic and aimed at responding to the challenges and the impact of the global COVID-19 on migration narratives.

The 2021 workshop was organized in Paris, at the International Union of Railways, and represented a milestone for the cooperation between ICMPD and the Club of Venice both in terms of content in terms of sentiments, being organized just around the Club's 35th anniversary and saw the active engagement of Professor Stefano Rolando, Secretary General Vincenzo Le Voci and Vice-President Erik Den Hoedt.

As ICMPD we promote balanced migration narratives that:

1. Consider all aspects of the debate on migration while dismissing none.
2. Pay specific attention to large sections of the population referred to as the 'moveable middle'.
3. Concentrate on the common elements of different approaches to migration governance, rather than only the divisive ones.
4. Promote evidence-based migration management including through adequate statistics and data gathering.
5. Openly communicate the reasons behind complex political decisions and how such decisions will meet societal needs.
6. Uphold and promote the norms and values set out in international human rights law while respecting those related to the sovereignty of states.
7. Highlight the positive contribution of migrants to their host societies.
8. Emphasize the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to migration management that is not based exclusively on securitized approaches.
9. Underscore the centrality of international cooperation, solidarity and burden-sharing in managing migration.

ICMPD strives to be an objective and fair-minded companion in migration discourses by bringing all important players around the same table. Governments, international organizations and migration policy actors in the

Euro-Mediterranean region are seeking a revitalised, comprehensive and holistic approach to migration management after extensive lockdowns, travel restrictions and a shift in political priorities following the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects of on societies, economies and diplomacy. New partnerships are being discussed and initiated, starting with the EU New Pact on Migration and Asylum and the New Agenda for the Mediterranean as part of a renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood. Such partnerships need to be accompanied by concrete communication actions and strategies that take into account all stakeholders' goals, concerns and challenges while maintaining diplomacy and cooperation among all actors, media organizations and public communicators.

Policy options and cooperation greatly depend on stakeholders' ability to drive a narrative on migration that supports and provides the space to pursue partnership priorities. Proactively addressing the narrative is thus crucial. We need effective and strategic communication with the public on migration and on the goals we want to achieve. Therefore, communication needs to form an integral part of any partnership, so that we explain why we engage in various cooperation frameworks with countries of destination, transit and origin. In the spirit of proactive resolutions that distinguishes the cooperation between ICMPD and the Club of Venice, allow me to present six main practical recommendations to foster a balanced migration narratives in Europe and beyond:

## Reinforcing positive examples and approaches

To promote existing best practice examples and to encourage use of available information and data. In particular, efforts could be made to examine whether national initiatives, such as the Charter of Rome in Italy and the Greek Charter of Idomeni, can be applied in other countries throughout the region; Promoting exchange of media best practices from countries where the migration crisis is most acute, such as Lebanon and Jordan and other Southern Mediterranean countries; Encouraging journalists, media support groups and media organisations to develop regional and sub-regional initiatives to improve migration reporting;

## Training

To develop comprehensive training programmes for media and journalists to encourage ethical reporting with a focus on the use of correct terminology, understanding international law and legal rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, avoiding hate-speech and political bias in reporting of migration concerns, providing balanced coverage from the standpoints of receiving host communities, developing diversity in sources of information.

## Media Action

To develop support programmes for media organisations and to strengthen their capacity to report on migration issues. In particular, by appointing of specialist migration correspondents in all newsrooms, promoting national media partnerships for coverage of migration, providing special information resources for displaced people from war-zones to help them keep in touch with their home communities and most importantly, encouraging newsrooms to move beyond coverage of the migration "crisis" and move into coverage of issues of integration that will assist normalisation of migrants in the public sphere.

## Supporting policy makers

To encourage policymakers, community and civil society leaders to play a more active role in creating space dialogue about migration. In particular, policymakers should examine how they can fund and support better journalism without compromising the editorial independence of the media and all officials and agencies providing information to the media should check facts and verify information thereby assisting the media to prepare balanced reports.

## Building Dialogues: Understanding Migration and a Culture of Civil Discourse

To promote the sharing of information and experience between countries and regional dialogue frameworks by organising national workshops with journalists on the challenges of covering migration, to share experiences and identify possible joint programmes and organising regional media “summits” to exchange information on the challenges facing journalists and media in different countries.

Furthermore, promoting a common approach to combat hate-speech, stereotyping and misinformation in public discourse, understanding migration as a process with historical roots in all communities, valuing independent and inclusive media coverage to creating peace and stability.

## Research the role of values in policy communication

Throughout the twentieth century, psychologists made numerous attempts to classify human values. While the importance of values as predictors of human attitudes dates back to the 1960s, the use of values in communication is highly debated, but it remains a very poorly defined and understudied field.

Values come from numerous psychological and societal factors, from family upbringing to education, from religious attachment to the history of a person’s territory. One of the biggest mistakes that a recent ICMPD report highlights, is to delegitimize a community’s value (or a value shared by a specific target audience) as not acceptable or illegitimate. After defining values and demonstrating their relationship with attitudes to immigration, we can deduce that messaging with a value-basis that is concordant with that of its audience is likely to elicit sympathy, whereas that which is discordant with the values of its audience is more likely to elicit antipathy. Given the value-balanced orientations of those with moderate attitudes to immigration, persuasive migration messaging should attempt to mobilise values of its opposition. Specifically, to the case of migration, and following on from the review on the relationship between values and attitudes to immigration, when migration messaging is framed in values of self-transcendence (universalism and benevolence) or openness to change (self-direction, stimulation, hedonism) it is more likely to be supported by those already favouring immigration.



**MARCO RICORDA**  
Communication Officer for the Mediterranean, International Centre for Migration Policy Development  
Marco Ricorda is a political and institutional communication expert with strong expertise in social media and digital campaigning. He is a political communication blogger, a public speaker and a twice nominated #EUinfluencer. He is the Communication Officer for the Mediterranean at ICMPD and formerly a Member of Cabinet for President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani, Head of Social Media for the ALDE group and Guy Verhofstadt, digital communication strategist for the European Commission and the economic think tank Bruegel.

When migration messaging is framed in values of conservation (security, tradition or conformity) or self-enhancement (power and to a lesser extent achievement) it is more likely to be supported by those already opposing immigration. To be most effective, messaging should use the opposite values of those already associated with its argument. This is a highly debated but poorly known field of sociology and communication that can definitely represent a turning point in reversing a communication trend where polarization and sensationalism are somehow monopolizing the migration debate in a way that does not benefit neither migrants nor hosting communities and make the work of migration policy makers harder than ever.

Through strengthening capacities in all these sectors, partnerships can gradually contribute to bring respective expectations closer, define shared objectives for sustainable opportunities, and devise mutually beneficial results. This is why ICMPD is honoured of the work done in cooperation with the Club of Venice and will continue to promote the specialization of European institutional communicators in the field of migration in the years to come.

Happy 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary dear Club of Venice!



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## Évolution de la communication publique locale : modération, inclusion et animation

Yves Charmont

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Le développement de la communication publique locale a suivi un schéma assez proche de celle des États. Depuis 35 ans, les travaux du Club de Venise et de Cap'Com montrent tant de convergences ! Alors que pour cet anniversaire nous pouvons étayer ces observations par de nombreuses évolutions de nos pratiques issues de tendances communes à toutes les échelles de la vie citoyenne, nous découvrons également de vraies différences dans les rôles que peuvent avoir les communicateurs publics selon les types de collectivités.

Mais évoquons en premier lieu ces communicateurs, qui viennent de vivre des mois exceptionnellement difficiles, à tous les niveaux d'intervention, local, régional ou national. Il apparaît, au sein de notre réseau, que plusieurs signes montrent une fatigue générale de nos collègues. Il leur a fallu être réactifs, disponibles, inventifs pour lutter contre des infox, pour modérer les réseaux sociaux et faire un gros travail de pédagogie. Et, surtout, se rapprocher de la gouvernance pour œuvrer dans un contexte ou l'irrationnel concurrençait sans relâche la parole publique.

### Un retour aux anciennes pratiques ?

La fin de la pandémie n'est peut-être pas pour aujourd'hui mais nous pouvons avancer qu'elle est sur une phase descendante. Et c'est dans ces circonstances que l'on relève, dans plusieurs administrations et organismes, un retour aux pratiques d'avant les crises de 2019/2020/2021. Un moment délicat pour les communicateurs, ces professionnels qui travaillent (d'après notre radioscopie des communicateurs d'avant la pandémie) pour plus d'un tiers des communes de moins de 30 000 habitants et pour seulement 17 % dans des métropoles. Ces femmes et ces hommes qui affirmaient alors, dans cette enquête, leur attachement au service public (69 %), engagés dans la réussite des projets de leur collectivité, mais qui notaient la difficulté à être reconnu, à gérer une charge mentale croissante et des lourdeurs dans leurs administrations. Ces spécialistes de la relation vivent maintenant une période qui pourrait les faire douter.

### Des compétences spécifiques

Pourquoi ce pressentiment ? Il s'agit en partie d'un phénomène de ressac. On a observé, dans les épreuves récentes, une très forte sollicitation de ces communicateurs, pour maintenir le lien, pendant les confinements, pour passer les messages et s'assurer qu'ils soient compris, pour fédérer autour des enjeux de santé publique,

comme autour des professionnels de santé, pour garder le contact avec les agents des services publics, disséminés par le télétravail, éloignés par le « tout numérique ». Nous savons - et cela a été largement décrit et commenté - que la vision stratégique comme les capacités de réaction en temps de crise des communicants ont été mis à profits. Sans restriction. Parce que ces compétences spécifiques étaient bien adaptées. La communication de crise n'en est pas le seul aspect. Il y en a un autre, relevant de la nature de ce métier : la communication elle-même est une mise en danger. S'avancer vers l'autre, c'est s'exposer. Lui adresser le premier la parole, c'est prendre le risque d'être mal compris. Dialoguer est un acte qui brave les procédures les plus sécurisées, mais c'est aussi le lien qui maintient un système qui, sinon, se gripperait. C'est ici que réside en fin de compte et l'identité et le cœur de nos métiers, cet art subtil, cette maîtrise d'un fluide retors : le discours.

### Des efforts finalement payants

Dans la période actuelle, devant un Covid-19 contenu, on en oublierait trop rapidement l'utilité de ces compétences. Certains communicateurs ont l'impression que leur implication au niveau stratégique n'est plus automatique. Cela pourrait créer une certaine frustration, qui, en France peut être cumulée avec un début de mandat local (Villes, Départements et Régions) où la fonction communication n'a pas été traitée avec douceur. Pour certains observateurs, « c'est même la plus difficile période post-électorale que nous ayons connu ». Des postes non pourvus, des recrutements qui échouent en six mois, de la défiance, des incompréhensions. Un certain sentiment de désillusion ce fait jour, sans doute à tort. On imagine que certains corps réagissent justement à la nécessité de s'être appuyé, pendant la tourmente, sur la communication, en prenant aujourd'hui des distances avec elle. Mais c'est sans doute une erreur, car les bénéfices des efforts de la communication publique ont été indéniables. Quels sont-ils ?

### La communication en première ligne

La communication publique a renoué avec ces fondamentaux au travers des campagnes de santé publique. Mais, à la différence des décennies passées, il aura fallu mener cette mission dans un climat de méfiance sans pareil. En France, comme le montre l'enquête « Le cœur des Français » de Harris Interactive pour Challenges (été 2021), on assiste à un effondrement de la crédibilité des journalistes et des scientifiques. C'était pourtant un socle sur lequel il était possible de réassurer une parole politique souvent remise en cause. C'est donc l'information publique, y compris dans sa dimension locale, qui s'est retrouvée en première ligne, chargée de faire la synthèse des connaissances dans une optique pédagogique et d'intérêt collectif : trouver les chiffres qui parlent, montrer les conséquences, illustrer par des exemples de terrain, valoriser les acteurs de la lutte, donner des consignes claires, rassurer, mettre en garde, aller à l'essentiel, pour permettre au plus grand nombre de se positionner de façon raisonnable.

### La modération pour dépassionner

Il n'y a pas qu'en temps de pandémie que la communication publique trouve une place nouvelle. Modérer les commentaires dans un environnement quelquefois hostile, pollué par des assertions qui frappent les esprits avec un ton qui peut être haineux, y compris en direction des modérateurs eux-mêmes, demande du

sang-froid et un vrai savoir-faire. La coordination rédactionnelle multi-support devient la règle. On le voit, par exemple, avec les nouvelles formes de rumeurs, basées sur des images détournées, ou dans la gestion des flambées complotistes. De nouvelles compétences qui trouvent également des applications à l'occasion d'un autre fléau : les attaques cyber qui immobilisent des organismes publics entiers. Intervenir sur des canaux identifiables et certifiés est aujourd'hui une nécessité vitale et c'est bien une tâche qui incombe à la communication publique. Développer un maillage communicationnel qui assure, malgré les brouillages, une circulation des messages aussi bien montants que descendants est un travail qui permet de relativiser les rumeurs, d'invalider les infos, en authentifiant une parole citoyenne autant que publique.

Mais les professionnels qui assurent ce travail ont incontestablement vécu des mois au feu lors de la dernière crise sanitaire, essayant des assauts numériques encore inconnus. Ils ont développé des stratégies, endurcis leurs méthodes et beaucoup échangé entre eux, comme nous l'avons vécu au sein de notre propre réseau des communicateurs publics locaux français. Une mise en commun et une évolution partagée qui a fait progresser la profession, selon de nombreux experts, « de plus de cinq ans en l'espace de douze mois ».

### Inclure est plus qu'un devoir, c'est une exigence

Autre domaine où la reconnaissance de l'utilité de la communication publique ne fait pas de doute : l'inclusion. Et cela est vrai, encore une fois, à l'échelon des États comme à celui, plus modeste des agglomérations et des communes. Lorsque nous parlons d'inclusion, aujourd'hui, ce n'est plus seulement dans un cadre historiquement lié au handicap. Le terme désigne plus largement la recherche d'un contact avec des publics en difficulté avec la lecture et même la compréhension des messages qui leurs sont destinés. L'inclusion recouvre désormais ce que les experts appellent la *littératie*, la capacité à utiliser pour soi-même les éléments qui ont été portés à sa connaissance par l'émetteur, en l'occurrence la puissance publique (notons que pour l'étude PIAAC de l'OCDE 2012 - 2017 « Programme pour l'évaluation internationale des compétences pour adultes », 53% des adultes en France n'atteignent pas le niveau nécessaire pour être autonome !).

L'inclusion a également sa variante numérique et prend en compte aussi bien les difficultés à utiliser les supports numériques (accès aux sites, procédures dématérialisées, maniement des outils) que leur accessibilité (débits, couverture, moyens de connexion), avec, en corollaire, l'obligation, propre aux services publics, de prendre en compte la frange non négligeable de ceux qui devront toujours bénéficier d'un accès non numérique, voire humain, pour utiliser un mot qui semble bien souvent oublié.

L'inclusion, désormais, c'est aussi la prise en compte de façon objective d'une partie des publics qui s'est éloigné volontairement des circuits courants, qui s'est retiré du champ habituel de la communication, dans un mouvement de repli quelquefois idéologique. Il faut pourtant aller vers eux, et cela demande de l'énergie et des compétences. C'est très certainement là une des missions les plus délicates mais aussi les plus nobles de la fonction communication.



**YVES CHARMONT**  
Délégué général du réseau français de la communication publique « Cap'Com » depuis janvier 2021, il en assurait la direction depuis janvier 2018. Ancien dircom et consultant, il est entré au service des collectivités en 1988, après avoir exercé pendant deux ans sur les ondes régionales de Radio France. Titulaire d'un master 2 en communication des organisations, il intervient régulièrement à l'université Lyon 2 et à l'université Paris Saclay.

### Animer son territoire

Oui, nous avons progressé, et nous avons enrichi nos métiers de ces expériences et de ces nouvelles solutions (par ailleurs abondamment commentées dans les pages de cette publication). Et ces avancées sont également sensibles avec l'accompagnement de la démocratie participative et délibérative, que l'on réactive pour répondre à la soif de pouvoir d'agir des citoyens. Donner la parole c'est aussi - et souvent - crédibiliser une action d'envergure en l'illustrant par le détail, dans le territoire, à l'échelle humaine, avec des portraits, des témoignages, des faits vérifiables.

La campagne autour du plan de relance, en France, en est une illustration. Mais ces approches peuvent trouver une limite lorsque l'écart est trop grand entre l'émetteur et l'effet local constaté. C'est sur ce point que l'on mesure une petite différence d'efficacité dans les actions de communication publique. Nous observons encore (voir l'enquête « Le cœur des Français » déjà cité et le baromètre de la communication locale Epiceum - Harris interactive - La Poste - Cap'Com) une prédominance de la confiance vis-à-vis des collectivités locales chez les Français. Cet attachement, certainement dû au sentiment d'appartenance en proximité, est renforcé par la conviction de pouvoir agir sur les pouvoirs publics locaux, de les côtoyer, d'en voir l'action. C'est aussi une échelle qui permet de communiquer par la preuve, de travailler sur l'immédiateté.

Il est plus facile de déconstruire une théorie fumeuse lorsque l'on peut prendre à témoin sur site. Cette réalité, somme toute banale, a montré une grande efficacité autour des campagnes vaccinales, auprès des personnels qui se sont mobilisées et des personnes qui se sont déplacées.

Le contexte local a pu, d'une certaine manière, être une base pour reconstruire la confiance et faire consensus, car si l'action puissante d'une minorité peut avoir du retentissement au niveau national, elle se heurte localement à la réalité du positionnement général, moins bruyant, mais palpable. La communication publique locale peut donc - et cela en est peut-être une spécificité - être un socle pour renouveler une adhésion du public sur des sujets polémiques où la confiance est fortement altérée, à condition que l'expression citoyenne soit prise en compte.

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## Sustainability is not a label! It's about mindset and process

Claudio Camarda & Giuseppe Macca

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*"What is not communicated does not exist".* said Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Nobel Prize.

Moreover, poor or inadequate communication can also mask the fact of meaning, or distort it.

**Sustainability doesn't exist!** It's exactly what people say when it's time to talk about climate change and the environment.

The concepts of climate change and sustainability have become a kind of media convention that simplifies and masks the different elements that make up this complex process of environmental deterioration, largely caused by human activity.

It is an environmental disease that affects the entire planet and is therefore pandemic. Its causes and symptoms are diverse. They include the *massive burning of fossil fuels, global warming, pollution, overexploitation of the planet's resources, degradation of natural environments, loss of biodiversity, climate effects of extreme intensity and polarity, and so on.*

**Sustainability is not a label! It's about mindset and process.** Having a sustainable strategy helps: boost your economy, preserve the environment, have long-lasting success, and reduce pollution and carbon emissions.

The main problem of sustainability is how to measure the positive effect. Several instruments and indicators have been created, but it is difficult to define and to establish effective ones.

In several conferences, where we have the honor to participate, we always say:

*"A label is not a reliable environmental or social impact metric if there is not a real sustainable process with tangible results behind it. You need a strategy and a model to generate measurable benefits for the ecosystem, not mere communication."*

In this paper, we will argue that sustainability is not merely an approach, but it is a way of life applicable in different frameworks and ecosystems. We will touch on several interesting points from what sustainability means, to bad practices, from how institutions and governments can implement new green policy, to, last and not least, some solutions that can be applied to reach SDGs.

### What does Sustainability mean?

[Its evolution until today]

Sustainability is a concept that dates back to the Palaeolithic ancestors where they were worried about their prey becoming extinct, and early farmers must have been apprehensive about maintaining soil fertility.

The concept of sustainability appeared, for the first time, in the 18th century in the German language called **Nachhaltigkeit**. This term was used in forestry, where it means never harvesting more than what the forest yields in new growth.

A turning point for the introduction and the affirmation of sustainability was **The Club of Rome**<sup>1</sup> which predicted that many natural resources crucial to our survival would be exhausted within one or two generations.

After the Rome meeting, in 1987 the *UN World Commission on Environment and Development*, sustainability, started to acquire a strong position. At the end of that commission, the Brundtland Report was launched, from the name of the chairman. The main question was "how can the aspirations of the world's nations for a better life be reconciled with limited natural resources and the dangers of environmental degradation?". The reply was: **Sustainable development**.

But only with Elkington, the idea of sustainability started to become central in our life with the 3 main pillars: the **Triple Bottom Line concept**. Elkington wanted to find a way to operationalize corporate social responsibility. Starting from the bottom line (**profit**), they added care for the environment (**the planet**) and, last and not least, people (**the social dimension**).



Caption of: The three pillars of sustainability. Based on "sustainable development" from Wikimedia.org under Creative Commons licensing, and further adapted from United Nations (1987), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (2005), Makkar (2013), and Makkar and Ankers (2014).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.clubofrome.org/>

## The importance of paying attention to the 3 P's

### **Planet** (for sure this is the most important pillar)

"We don't have a Planet B. We must take care of our environment." Governments and institutions don't understand the importance of conservation and preservation, these two are crucial in terms of safeguarding the environment.

Companies have realized that being greener can also generate a competitive advantage on financial returns. For this reason, several companies have already applied some gimmicks like reducing their carbon footprints, modifying packaging waste, reducing water usage, and their overall effect on the environment.

Other companies want to achieve the same high profitability, but they make greenwashing, which means, they proclaim their sustainable practices, but in reality, they perpetrate on not environmental ones. More about greenwashing will follow later on.

The most difficult problem is to find a way to measure the environmental and positive impact that companies can generate to apply sustainable strategies and techniques.

### **People** (also known as Social Pillar).

This pillar represents the positive and negative impacts that an organization has on its most important stakeholders. These actions can also affect: employees, families, customers, suppliers, communities, and any other person related.

The approaches for securing and maintaining this support are various, but it comes down to treating employees fairly and being a good neighbor and a community member, both locally and globally.

On the other hand, the employee needs some reassurance from the working place, like long maternity period and paternity benefits, flexible scheduling, and learning and development opportunities to grow internally and externally, personal development.

### **Profit**

According to Investopedia: "To be sustainable, a business must be profitable. That said, profit cannot trump the other two pillars." As we always said, there are a thousand ways to make a profit and be ethical and sustainable.

Businesses can have a positive impact and make a profit at the same time, such as: creating employment, generating innovation, paying taxes, wealth creation, and helping the community.

Sustainability, for a company, also means that the company is **safe** (in terms of accounts), **transparent** (offers the opportunity to strengthen the relationship with stakeholders and customers by basing communication on values and justifying performance levels); and **reliable** (every decision made, have a positive impact on what they do).

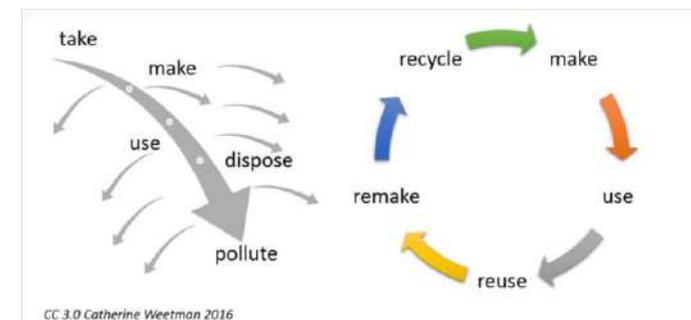
These are the Three Pillars of sustainability that help in the creation of new reporting frameworks, for example, **Social Return on Investment (SROI)**, **ESG** (a framework focusing investors and financial analysts on Environmental, Social, and Governance factors), and the **Trucost** approach.

## Resilience and circularity

In ecology, **resilience** refers to the ability of an ecosystem to recover from an environmental disturbance and manage to retain its basic structure and vitality. **Resilience theory** is grounded in the need to manage interactions between human-made systems and natural ecosystems in a sustainable way and addresses the ability of ecological systems to tolerate attacks from human activities while continuing to provide the services that present and future generations need.

A practical view of sustainability consists of closed systems that maintain unrestricted productivity processes through the replacement of resources used by human activity with resources of equal or greater value carried out by those same people, without deteriorating or damaging biotic natural systems. *The importance of efficiency and adaptation are the keys to preserve the environment.* Efficiency equals sustainability since zero efficiencies (when possible) means zero waste

The idea of zero waste is linked with circularity (circular economy). **Circular Economy** is an economic model that goes against the linear model, based on its circularity in 5 steps: **Make, use, reuse, remake and recycle.**



The **circular economy** aims to keep products, materials, equipment, and infrastructures, improving the productivity of these resources without wasting anything of their materials. In a way, it is a waste-valorization that saves resources without ending the life of each product after being disposed of. For example, Natural composts are produced by food waste and animal excrement.

For sure, **Covid-19 has changed the role of sustainability**, putting the focus on Sustainability. The pandemic seems to have impacted positively: organizations, institutions, and companies, pushing them to integrate sustainable practices in their system and decisions.

The Pandemic delivers strong and important messages to sustainability that can influence resilience and the environment:

- **Awareness:** act on credible & reliable information
- **Behavior:** communicate with & educate your people
- **Culture:** have a plan & be ready to react
- **Demonstrate:** protect employees, supply chains, customers, and the public.

The pandemic is speeding up the debate about sustainability: Cop 26, European Council, and Green Deal raise awareness to a greener world.

## Consequences and effects of the lack of a sustainable approach (to date)

Now, it appears that Sustainability has become something fashionable for governments and enterprises, but does that mean it is also effective?

It is true that the EU is heading towards an idea of environment-friendly policies such as the EU green deal to make the continent climate neutral by 2050 including the proposition to turn mobility mostly electric by 2030. Yet, corporations may see sustainability as a duty or as a trend to follow rather than a real commitment. That is the reason why the authorities and the market should be supervisors of the effective behavior of companies.

Governments set the rules and the EU is one of the most advanced and enlightened entities on the matter of climate change, still, we are getting not soon enough and not strong enough. Europe is a small continent compared to the rest of the world and the climate clock is ticking every day faster (<https://climateclock.world/>), and without the commitment of world giants such the US, China, India, and Russia most efforts would be useless. In any case, Europe is leading the way, setting an important example on the international level.

## Greenwashing and sustainable indexes

A lot of consumers report that they cannot make ethical purchasing choices because of a lack of information in understanding what is really green or not (34%). Here we introduce the important concept of Greenwashing, as defined by Oxford Languages: “*disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image*”. Some companies promote futile and ineffective projects while investing their resources in communication campaigns to convince their customers that they are carrying out some ethical policies.

Currently, there is no great regulation around the subject, and the capability of understanding if a company is reliable or not is left to the market. Depending on the single country, there are different laws regarding misleading advertising, but usually, they focus more on the product or service sold rather than on (apparently) corollary activities such as sustainability and corporate social responsibility. In any case, corporations that pursue greenwashing practices take advantage of legislative vacuums to orient their communication to show environmental and social commitment, tricking more distracted or careless customers.

Luckily, many indexes and independent studies are rising to help customers out and to provide consistent information to the press. For instance, the sustainable brand index (<https://www.sb-index.com/>) is the largest European study on the subject, but consumers might also check Ecovadis (<https://ecovadis.com/>), Good on You (<https://goodonyou.eco/>) and Ethical Consumer (<https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/>) just to mention some indexes.

Media control and independent studies like the ones mentioned above often unmask greenwashing behaviors, causing scandals and reputation damage to some companies, even though what is really misleading is the subtle and “legit” greenwashing: that is when a company actually invests some resources into some ethical-featured project, but the results are not relevant and yet, the communication reports the commitment of the company on social and environmental issues.

New greenwashing is more about being ineffective rather than lying: some companies might be encouraged in carrying out sustainability programs because the market requires it, but they are not interested in checking their results like they do with their economic performance.

Who writes, however, firmly believes that an accurate control over sustainability performance, other than being a more ethical behaviour, also represents a better deployment of resources for the company itself.

**First of all** for internal credibility: the first stakeholders of a firm are its own employees and if they are aware of greenwashing practices in the long term it may come out.

**Secondly**, good results often self communicate themselves, meaning that best practices can attract media coverage impacting positively on the company's budget.

**Finally**, effective practices are clearly better rated on indexes, hence they can represent a real blast for corporate reputation, creating long-lasting value rather than a momentary one.

So, how can a firm monitor its efficacy?

Well, the real deal is to apply the same diligence companies apply to the economic performance, setting the right metrics and KPIs to understand if they are doing good in a good (effective) way. There is not a special set of metrics since each industry must be evaluated in a different way (for instance, for property management and building development we may refer to a UNEP guide [https://www.unepfi.org/fileadmin/documents/UNEPFI\\_SustainabilityMetrics\\_Web.pdf](https://www.unepfi.org/fileadmin/documents/UNEPFI_SustainabilityMetrics_Web.pdf)).

It is important to stress that we are not talking about firms' general sustainability performance (for that, refer to the previously mentioned indexes) rather about the efficacy of every single sustainability project deployed.

Short Example:

*If a company operating in the drinkable water business is investing in depurating waters in a certain location, it might want to know how many people are they affecting, how is the life of these people changing, what is the impact on the local economy, how are these parameters compared to the resources invested and not just how many liters of water did they clean.*

Long story short, firms must apply the same diligence they have with their economic programs but at the same time using impact evaluation techniques typical of the third sector (for further details and a detailed guide, check *Impact Evaluation in Practice, Second Edition, 2013, by the World Bank*).

A company gathering data regarding an effective sustainability project will be at ease in developing the communication strategy, having something real and effective to deliver, without the necessity of pursuing “greenwashing” and having the possibility of building a proper reputation with the market and all of its stakeholders.

This concept is perfectly exportable and applicable to governments, institutions and any international organizations developing or enhancing their public communication strategies.

Finally, a way for companies to try to be sustainable is what is commonly known as **offsetting**.

**Offsetting** basically means compensating. A firm generating some forms of externalities (negative impact on the community and/or the environment) prefers to buy out its reputation instead of preventing the externalities. This kind of behaviour is usually carried out legally, with the offsetting policies usually related to carbon emissions.

For instance, a company decides to plant trees to compensate for its emission, “cleaning” its carbon footprint. Unfortunately, compensating for an externality does not mean the externality does not happen, and its effects will negatively impact someone. Offsetting follows a sort of utilitarian vision, where the global utility generated is the most relevant data, no matter how it is distributed.

The carbon tax is a kind of policy following the offsetting philosophy, but the effects until now have not been considerable convincing the EU of a different kind of regulatory policy (EU green deal), because rich companies could easily buy out their pollution impact just by paying a tax, without reaching the desired effect of reducing carbon emissions.

Still, to discourage imports and supplies from unethical and polluting foreign companies, the EU is also thinking about the first border carbon tax, evaluating the emissions produced by firms out of European borders (<https://www.reuters.com/business/sustainable-business/eu-proposes-worlds-first-carbon-border-tax-some-imports-2021-07-14/>). Such a policy may convince producers in third countries into adjusting their producing processes to EU standards so as not to lose their competitiveness.

## From Ineffectiveness to solutions

The tools and habits developed until today have led to few virtuous cases of application of sustainability principles. All the solutions that institutions tried to find have been ephemeral.

Metrics on environmental and social damage worldwide have proved this. Important tools that want to help are **SDGs - Sustainable development goals** - 17 ambitious objectives for a greener, healthier, more peaceful, and equal planet. They were born in 2015, after long consultations between nations. The idea is to eradicate the majority of these goals by the end of 2030 (<https://sdgs.un.org/>).

Most of the goals are interlinked between each other, for example just to cite some of them: **Take action for the climate change (SDG 13)** is correlated with **having Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6)**; **sustainable cities and communities (SDG11)** are strictly related to have more affordable and **clean energy (SDG7)** and **Responsible consumption and production (SDG12)**.

Institutions are not the only one that has to apply sustainable and ethical strategies, but everyone needs to push for a more sustainable world. In the last few years, a huge number of NGOs are using the SDGs in planning and decision-making, and a growing number of private companies, city councils, and universities are doing the same. It means that every single grain of sand is important.

The idea and ambition of SDG were excellent, but the implementation has been slow and not reactive. After the pandemic, the results are worse than they expected: for example, 2 billion people (more than 26% of the world population) lack safely managed drinking water and more than 129 countries are not on track to have sustainably managed water resources by 2030. It is a long path and really difficult to achieve in less than 10 years <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal6>

The Paris Agreement doesn't work really well. The climate crisis is still unabated. 2020 indicators said that global average temperature is above 1.2° of the terms that were established during the Paris Agreement (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal13>)

The pandemic has worsened the plight of slum dwellers. The majority of the more than 1 billion slum dwellers reside in three regions: Eastern and Southern-Eastern Asia around 370 Million; Sub-Saharan Africa more than 238 million, Central and southern Asia count around 226 million.

Definitely, during the pandemic, people have the chance to be more familiar with tablets, smartphones, smart TVs, and laptops, but what happened with all the old devices?

Electronic waste continues to proliferate and is not disposed of responsibly. According to UN Stats, each person produces about 7.3 Kilograms of E-Waste, but only 1.7 Kilograms were recycled. This is a missed opportunity for several companies that can use alternative and sustainable materials and shift to a circular economy method.

These are just some of the preoccupying data regarding the issues in achieving the SDGs and the list is actually much longer. Alternative technology and new sustainable methods are available and ready to be applicable in several markets, but the most important thing is to communicate.

The power of communication is immense. Decision-makers, heads of government, and boards of members don't know how important it is to deliver a clear message to ensure it is easy to understand by each person.

The message that we have to deliver, needs to be:

- *concrete (not simple);*
- *rigorous, communicating objective data and avoiding the propagation of false information and the sowing of doubts;*
- *while conveying urgency, avoid scaremongering and apocalyptic images;*
- *which provide balanced information on risks, while proposing achievable and attainable objectives and achievable actions;*
- *that show a present reality and a future in which, in the face of powerlessness, hopelessness, and paralysis, there is room for global and environmental awareness, human will, and action;*
- *that use clear and easily understandable language.*

In future meetings and policies, leaders have to discuss green transition, recovery plan, and green deal, understanding its potential not as merely greenwashing, but a strong turning point for future generations.

## THE CLIMATE CRISIS CONTINUES, LARGELY UNABATED



2020 GLOBAL AVERAGE TEMPERATURE AT 1.2°C ABOVE PRE-INDUSTRIAL BASELINE

WOEFULLY OFF TRACK TO STAY AT OR BELOW 1.5°C AS CALLED FOR IN THE PARIS AGREEMENT

## THE PANDEMIC HAS WORSENED THE PLIGHT OF SLUM DWELLERS



THE MAJORITY OF THE MORE THAN 1 BILLION SLUM DWELLERS RESIDE IN THREE REGIONS (2018)

EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN ASIA	SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN ASIA
370 MILLION	238 MILLION	226 MILLION

The last appointment was the Cop 26 UN Climate Change Conference, hosted by the UK in partnership with Italy, taking place from 31 October to 12 November 2021 in the Scottish Event Campus (SEC) in Glasgow, UK.

**The goals set are ambitious:**

1. **Secure global net-zero by mid-century and keep 1.5 degrees within reach.** By 2030, countries have to accelerate the phase-out of coal, reduce deforestation, boost the switch to electric vehicles and incite investment in renewables.
2. **Protect communities and natural habitats.** Investing in the protection and restoration of ecosystems and building defenses, warning systems, and resilient infrastructure and agriculture to avoid loss of homes, livelihoods, and even lives.
3. **Mobilise finance,** all these objectives can be achievable thanks also to International financial institutions that have to play their part and need to work towards unleashing the trillions in private and public sector finance required to secure global net-zero and a carbon-neutral world.

The **Green Deal** is a new policy applied by the European Union, helping to stress the attention on a more sustainable world. Europe is striving to be the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, shifting to no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050, and boosting economic growth thanks to sustainable methods.

One-third of the 1.8 trillion euro investments from the **NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan**, and the EU's seven-year budget will finance the **European Green Deal**. Day by day, new and interesting fully green projects come out, where there is the chance to improve the well-being and health of citizens and future generations.

**Green deal** includes new technologies and methods that will help future generations, just to cite some of them: Vertical Farming, hydroponic cultivation, zero waste, circular economy.

The real problem is that most of the institutions, organizations, NGOs don't really invest in alternative and sustainable techniques.

**Firstly**, the lack of knowledge and the missed communication between governments/institutions and citizens and civil society (the so-called "ordinary people", who remain the primary source from which to perceive proximity and trust) are one of the main problems. Call for proposals, private and public funds are very difficult to find, and for this reason, people sometimes do not know how to apply for something that can be environmental friendly and that helps to boost their business.

**Secondly**, lobbies are still very potent in several nations. *Coal and oil* are the most polluted elements. **Coal** is the main source of energy in developing countries and elsewhere. For example, Germany, which is stopping nuclear power and turning to 100% solar and wind power by 2040, but must maintain coal and lignite consumption to ensure the transition (37% of electricity production).

Also **oil** represents one of the main issues for a sustainable world. The top 10 oil producers produce 71% of the world's oil or more than 100 million barrels per day. **Oil** is mainly used in transport (petrol and diesel) but is also the basis for the production of lubricants, plastics, and pharmaceuticals.

**Lastly**, Green products and techniques often cost much more than many people are willing to pay. According to famous research made by Harvard University: "The problem is simple. It's generally cheaper to buy a product

that has a worse impact on its environment than the equivalent product that does less harm. Higher cost to the planet does not translate to a higher price to the customer."

Fortunately, a brighter future might be coming up. The Recovery Plan is an unmissable opportunity **to make Europe greener, more digital, and more resilient**. After the pandemic, **several nations have suffered problems that highlight their weaknesses of missing a long-term vision and a sustainable method**.

The **Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027** (Recovery plan with NextGeneration EU) will allocate in natural resources and environment more than €401 billion for entire Europe, investing in sustainable agriculture and maritime sectors, along with climate action, environmental protection, food security, and rural development.



Next appointments like the Eurogroup in mid-December and the Consilium on Environment issues will reveal the effectiveness of environmental national programs and how they apply new policies according to their laws.

**Conclusion**

Helping to improve the ecosystem in which we live requires different skills, and strategies, and approaches depending on the area in which you operate.

To sum up, we have to learn how to make a profit in an ethical and sustainable way if we want to survive.

That is why it is crucial to understand what exactly this environmental disease means, to know and understand its causes, its main manifestations, and its consequences. And to do this, we need to turn our forward-thinking entrepreneurs and professionals into the new sustainable leaders of tomorrow by acquiring new skills and techniques that make businesses profitable and help improve the ecosystem in which they live.

Along with such a busy international calendar of events, there are organizations tackling the issue on daily basis, trying to shift and influence the current economic paradigm into a more ethical and sustainable one.



**CLAUDIO CAMARDA**  
Claudio Camarda has more than 5+ years of professional experience in communication, PR and Social Media management, gathered by working for international organizations, such European Council, and multinational companies and as an independent blogger. He is the CMO of Ethics4growth, a company that helps enterprise, startups and individuals to be profitable in an ethical and sustainable way, taking care of our environment. He is based in Zaragoza, graduated in Media and Public Relations at Newcastle University, and with a Bachelor degree in Political Science and International Relations at Luiss Guido Carli. Furthermore, he speaks English, Spanish and French and German, and he is interested in everything in link with social media and diplomacy.



**GIUSEPPE MACCA**  
Giuseppe Macca is an entrepreneur, passionate about sustainability and an expert in social impact business modelling. With 5+ years of experience between the third sector and the profit ones, he managed to gather and merge competencies from both worlds. He is the CEO of ethics4growth, a member of LAPIS, a team of social development in Sicily and a consultant for a media agency and includes among his experiences a position of international marketing teaching at The University of Manizales. Currently based in Siracusa, Sicily, he has travelled and lived in several countries such as Argentina, Brazil, the USA, Colombia and the UK where he acquired an MSc in international business, following his bachelor and master in political science and international relations at LUISS University in Rome

We can think about Ashoka, one of the most important networks of social entrepreneurs in the world ([www.ashoka.org](http://www.ashoka.org)), the shared value initiative (<https://www.sharedvalue.org/>) where leaders can share how to solve societal issues through business solutions, the b-corp regulation and association (<https://bcorporation.eu/>) - a way for companies to self commit to sustainable management.

**Also who writes is proud of the generation of a worldwide community to share best practices regarding sustainability, now turning into a social innovation studio to help businesses to become more profitable improving the ecosystem in which they operate. (<https://ethics4growth.com/>)<sup>2</sup>.**

**Co-operating with international networks like the Club of Venice will certainly contribute to enriching and strengthening communication plans and joint efforts in this direction.**

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<sup>2</sup> ethics4growth The social innovation studio to bring ethical and sustainable innovation to a business. We guide companies in the learning and application of the sustainable framework to achieve growth and impact on their ecosystems

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## We are number one, but it is about transmedia and memes

John Gediminas Knight

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A meme is more than a cat video. In fact, the idea of memes has existed before the internet. The name comes from the Ancient Greek *'mimeme'*, meaning 'imitated thing' (Dawkins 2006, 192). In 1976, Richard Dawkins popularised the term meme. He described a meme as the fundamental component of cultural information transference (Ibid.). Essentially, he considered a meme to be a unit of movement - specifically, the transmission of information about attitudes, behaviours, and/or ideas. Today, one can find memes in audio-visual media on the internet, such as cat videos.

In audio-visual discourse, the transference process of cultural information has been called 'transmedial' - as in, flowing from one media form to another (Jenkins 2006, 20f) (Gordon 2014, 247). The ways that memes grow on the internet are transmedial. For example, a popular music video is a media form with cultural information. That information can be transferred to an abstract surrealistic video; or a video game; or an epic movie trailer. These are some of the forms that can present cultural information of the original music video. The transmedial flows of a meme can be diverse; they can exhibit the range of people's abilities when they are given the same stimulus. To demonstrate this, I will analyse the transmedial flows of the 2015 YouTube video 'We Are Number One' (WANO) from the television series *LazyTown* and show how the transmedial movement flowed outwards - even circularly (LazyTown 2015).

Henry Jenkins - professor of cinema and communication at South California University - writes in *Convergence Culture* that transmedia is a mediated story or idea that "unfolds across media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (Jenkins 2006, 95f). The example he gives is *The Matrix Trilogy*; he explains that the storyline becomes clearer when the consumer watches the anime, *Final Flight of the Osiris*, and then plays the game, *Enter the Matrix*, because they all follow a linear and connected narrative (Ibid., 102) (Reeves 1999) (Adlon 2003) (Shiny Entertainment 2003). This type of storytelling has become popular among franchises like *Star Wars* because, as Jenkins points out, the transmedial experience whets the appetites of the audience so the franchise builds commercial loyalty, therefore more potential revenue (Robinson 2016) (Jenkins 2006, 96). Like the transmedial worlds of *The Matrix* and *Star Wars*, the evolution of the WANO meme expanded across different media forms. One of the first of the transmedial flows of WANO was from the original music video to a mash-up. 'WANO - LazyTown: The Video Game', made in 2016, was a combination of the original WANO song and 'Smoke Weed Everyday' (SilvaGunner). The resulting combination is called a 'mash-up' (Shiga 2007). While this mash-up was not created with the same entrepreneurial intentions as the transmediations of *The Matrix* - it did not expand on any plot, characters, or universe of the original material - it contributed to the collection of memes that would continue to grow. Like *Final Flight of the Osiris* and *Enter the Matrix*, it was an unfolding - or more apt, expansion - of the original idea.

The variants of the WANO meme combined different media types in different ways. The videos that transpired brought about WANO's popularity (Google Trends 2016-2017). Early mash-ups of WANO existed before the meme was most popular. Since the mash-up style of these variants preceded the virality - popularity from sharing on the internet - of the meme, the initial transmedial movement was from the *a priori* mash-up aesthetic to virality. Mash-up media has a clear definition, but it is more difficult to get clear a definition of what media is 'viral'. Carol Vernallis - affiliated music researcher at Stanford University - points out that this is because audio-visual material on platforms like YouTube are not totally regulated (Vernallis 2013, 177). In this context, memes can have multifarious impacts on individuals and groups, depending on how online communities might utilise them. Their impacts can be devastating - such as the 'Pepe the frog' meme<sup>1</sup> - or enriching and inspiring - such as WANO and the fundraising campaign<sup>2</sup>. While the lack of regulations might make it difficult to manage or define a meme's virality, it has at least one defining feature. Vernallis adds that virality is populist because mass-appeal is the most reliable survival trait in cultural/discursive natural selection (Ibid., 177f). The most effective way of defining a meme's virality is by its appeal to a large audience.

Mash-up media has more defining traits. A mash-up can be a combination of media, or multimedia. Nicholas Cook - former music professor at Cambridge - writes that multimedia is a combination of media forms by which the consumer negotiates meaning with the multiplicity of information conduits (Cook 2013). One derives more understanding of the WANO meme by experiencing more versions of the meme. The more varied the versions are, the more information one has so to get a sense of the overall meme. The term 'multimedia' can work micro- and macroscopically - or as material-medium and platform-medium. For example, we can see multimedia working microscopically in the combination of contrasting materials in 'WANO, but it's an electro swing remix' (The Musical Ghost 2016). There are jazz rhythms, synth instruments, and excerpts from the original song. The combination of rhythms and instruments different from the original video is an example of several material-media. This is how multimedia can be microscopic. Macroscopic multimedia is exhibited in the consumption of diverse WANO memes, where the consumer experiences the texts on different platforms - this will be elaborated later.

However, while the term 'multimedia' helps with understanding the variety of WANO memes, it only does this partly. The term does not focus on the movement of aesthetic influence between materials, platforms, and texts; it only focusses on the multiplicity. Many versions of the meme require an understanding of the original media form and the influences on it, such as 'We Are Number One but its Synthwave {EXTENDED}' (Cyranek 2016). There are three aesthetic movements here. The first is from '80s styles to synthwave - 'synthwave' takes influences from '80s popular music aesthetics. The next is from synthwave to the video - the synthwave genre is visualised by combining '80s neon colours and computerised graphics. The third is from '80s music video to the meme variant.

For the first of these three aesthetic movements, synthwave is defined by its combination of '80s stylistic epitomes, such as Tangerine Dream, Vangelis, and Harold Faltermayer (Hunt 2014). The aesthetic direction is historical because it is from cliché '80s aesthetics to recent music. It is not in the opposite direction because the composition process takes influences from the past. Combined with this, there are contemporary stylistic elements, like making the kick and snare drums punchier - this is prevalent in contemporary electro genres

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1 Pepe the frog is a comic character that became a meme. From around 2015, the meme grew increasingly connected with alt-right and white supremacist groups (BBC News 2016).

2 The lead singer of WANO, Robbie Rotten, was played by Stefán Stefánsson. In 2016, Stefán announced that he had cancer (Hilmarsdóttir 2016). People decided to use the WANO meme's momentum to raise funds for Stefán. Over \$169,670 was raised for his cancer treatment (GoFundMe 2016). A community grew in charity and support due to his involvement in WANO - even after his death in 2018. This shows how a meme can impact people positively and constructively.

(Mix - Synthwave playlist n.d.). Then, synthwave influences 'WANO but its Synthwave' with its use of vintage synthesiser; gated reverb - think Phil Collins' drums in 'In the Air Tonight'; fast and blocky bassline; and sudden key change at 2:31 (Collins 1981) (Cyraneck 2016). The video that accompanies it enhances the retro music video experience, drawing from simple CG imagery and VHS style. It also illustrates some of Mathias Bonde Korsgaard's music video tropes (Korsgaard 2013, 507). It is short, the audio and visuals work cohesively, the track is imitation synth-pop, and the video synchronises to the audio. In a way, the transmedial flow was somewhat circular, or circummedial. This was because the transmediation had moved away from - music video to mash-up - and back to the original media-type - mash-up to '80s style music video. In the case of 'We Are Number One but its Synthwave [EXTENDED]'; ignorance of the direction of media flow allows for an incorrect reading of how different aesthetics affect each other. The circummedial influences can be overlooked. When considering transmedial flows, the traffic of stylistic influences is considered when there is a directional approach to the analysis. Hence, in analysing this meme, 'transmedia' is a more apt term to use than 'multimedia' by itself.

The transmedial flows of a meme can be understood objectively. An original video is created. Then, a variant such as fanfiction is created. Another variant is created, like a mash-up of the video. Then, more variants are created. The cultural information of the original video has flowed to other media forms. Each of these variants was created one after the other. There is a fixed evolution of the meme. This is objective. The transmedial flows of a meme can also be understood subjectively. The one who watches, reads, or listens to memes has a unique order in which they experience them. Another person will likely watch them in a different order. The meme evolves differently according to their personal viewing. The way they experience the transmedial flows - the transference of cultural information - will be particular to them. This process is clearly subjective and could also generate or reinforce perceptions, ideas, and beliefs - a key reflection matter for public communicators.

The subjective experience of WANO memes affects the perceived transmedial flows. For transmedia to flow, a continuum must be established to link the transmediated texts. The propagation of the WANO meme developed a continuum with the multiplicity of versions of the meme (Google Trends 2016-2017). In stories like *Star Wars*, the continuum is the *Star Wars* universe. In the case of WANO, it was the shared commonalities with the original video. Jenkins suggests that this is made possible by the convergence of media, industries, and/or audiences (Jenkins 2006, 2). While this is true for the prosumers - consumers who are also producers - of WANO memes, the development of WANO variants was one of divergence, not convergence. This is because the creative development of a meme's continuum differs from the development of the universe of a transmedial story, like *Star Wars*. The latter's creative process of the continuum can be non-linear. The start of the timeline does not need to be made at the beginning of the transmedial world's development - take the *Star Wars* prequels being created after the original films. The common result is a linear storyline across different media (look to Jenkins' example in *The Matrix*). In this case, the linear storyline converges multiple media because its directionality encourages the viewer to thread them together chronologically. The context of each film is dependent on the chronology of the movies.

However, the formation of the meme's continuum, which proceeds from its popularity, is an objectively linear process because the cumulation of variants is linear, viz. in real-time. When the meme starts evolving and the continuum is being established, the transmedial flows are objective. It is unlikely that a viewer's experience of a sequence of WANO meme variants will correlate with the objective timeline of WANO production. This is because YouTube's algorithms and the viewer's volition govern the viewer's sequence of consumed material. The texts diverge across media because there is a lack of explicit linearity between the variants. Chronology does not necessarily define the context of each video. A leitmotif - a musical theme or idea with a clear identity - is required to keep a stable continuum because the WANO meme's narrative/development was nonlinear

(Whittall 2020) (Bolewski 2011, 48f). This connective stability comes from the music of the original video. A continuum is established before one recognises how the cultural information is transferred from the original video to another meme variant. One can understand the context of a meme by the continuum created from watching or listening to other similar versions of the meme. So, the transmedial flow is subjective after a continuum is established because each viewer's experience of the meme is likely unique.

To explain further how transmedial flow after a meme's virality is subjective, I will analyse the semiotics - the use of signs and signifiers - of three examples in context to each other. Assume, for the moment, the first WANO video one saw was the original video (LazyTown 2015). Its most prevalent features are its comic-book-style mise-en-scène, Ska influences, upbeat rhythm, and synthesised versions of band instruments. The music video can signify that it is catered to a young audience because of these fun and upbeat features. Once one has inferred an interpretation of the video, a subjective identity is associated with the video. The second song could be 'WANO but the word one triggers duplication and makes the video slow down + get louder' (MrMrMANGOHEAD 2016). This video is based on triggers; a word triggers audio-visual effects to happen. The aesthetics from this differ to the original in that they are absurdist and experimentalist. Morag Grant defines experimental music as a presentation rather than representation; a form of showing rather than telling (Grant 2003, 183). The trigger video shows this because the audio-visual materials are treated in such a way as to limit expressive significance - there are no references to anything other than the video itself (Agawu 1991, 24). Therefore, the subjective identity of the video is contextualised only by the previous inferred interpretation of the meme. In this order, the experienced transmedial flow would be from the medium of music video to experimentalist intermedia<sup>3</sup> because the first video provided the *a priori* media aesthetics, namely, music video. As mentioned before, WANO's continuum is based on the commonality between the videos and music, so the audio-visual material is the same, but they diverge in how much the material is manipulated. After the original video and the trigger video, the third video could be 'WANO but it's KAZOO'd!' (G. 2017). This is a cover song, and the a capella kazoos' timbre - sound quality - lighten the mood (Campbell 2020) (Plasketes 2010, 78f). This contrasts with the previous songs because it is the original song remade, as suggested in the title. This is not the case for the previous two examples (Ibid.). The second example is an alteration of the original audio-visual material, not a recreation with different materials like kazoos. So, when one experiences the memes in the above order, the transmedial flow is from original video to experimental form to cover. One experience of a version of the meme contextualises the next experienced version. However, if one had watched the videos in reverse order the perceived transmedial flow would have also reversed. Therefore, the transmedial experience of WANO is greatly affected by the progression of videos watched. This shows the need for research into the social and personal effects of how mis-/disinformation sources may use transmedia processes.

Media divergence is most apparent in transmedial flow between the audio, visual, and narrative. All three devices are at work in the original video; there is the villains' song, the comic-book-style mise en scène, and the villains' failures to attempt to catch the hero of LazyTown, Sportacus (LazyTown 2015). However, these three elements became more separated. 'WANO but it's a piano transcript' diverges from these elements because it does not allude to the visual or narrative commonalities, only the musical commonalities (Furry 2016). This variant is a music sheet created on the website MuseScore. It demonstrates that there is a transmedial flow from an audio-visual narrative into sheet music. Its separation from the other elements indicates how, over time, transference of media can lead to divergence of media. A variety of image macros - images overlaid with text, often comedic - and fanfiction also took form (336 n.d.). These are examples of how transmedia

3 That which falls between different media forms. I use 'intermedia' in relation to Dick Higgins' term because of the way that the deceleration affects the audio and the visual symbiotically in the aforementioned trigger video. I do not want to confuse it with 'multimedia', which has more to do with the number of media than any unique relationships between media.

can work macroscopically. The cultural information from the original material transfers from a music video on YouTube to a variety of other platform-media, such as MuseScore. So, the initial audio-visual media diverged and transferred to a growing variety of media on different platforms.

In some variants of the meme, the distinctions between audience and performer can be blurred. For example, 'WANO but it's Metal and 100%'d on Guitar Hero' and 'WANO - Minecraft Note Block Doorbell Tutorial' outline similar multimedia but indicate different transmedia. The first example was a video game recording made after the peak of WANO's virality, so WANO's virality flowed to video game recording (Google Trends 2016-2017).

Kiri Miller describes the playing of *Guitar Hero* a "schizophonic performance" (Harmonix Music Systems 2005) (Miller 2013, 519). This is a mutual existence of the live and real performance - interaction with a plastic guitar - and the non-live simulacrum provided by the technology - onscreen instruments and/or characters. As Miller points out, these video games draw on the relationships between the 'real' and 'simulated' in performed music, which provides the aesthetic milieu to the game's popularity. The "schizophonic performance" is evidenced in the treatment of WANO material in 'WANO but it's Metal and 100%'d on Guitar Hero'. Only some of the original musical material is kept, such as voice and piano, so that the heavy metal cover is more prominent. We know that the sounds are synthesised, and we know Paradise is not playing any specific notes - only buttons. Yet, the transmedial virtualities and simulated virtuoso style affect how one receives and interprets WANO. The lead guitar's rhythm is shown to us before Paradise plays it. The *Guitar Hero* notes on the screen signify the preceding rhythm. On the screen, there is a guitar neck with descending buttons, or 'notes'. Once a button scrolls to the bottom of the screen, Paradise must hit the corresponding button on his simulacrum guitar at the same time. If he presses the right button at the right time, the music will continue as normal; this gives the effect of Paradise playing the song. We know when the sound will occur because we are given a visual representation of the rhythm. The rhythm seen on-screen by the viewer relates to the rhythm that will be heard by the viewer. This is unlike other live-performed media because most live-performed media do not use a pre-recorded track and do not give a visual representation of when music will be heard. Not only is there a transmedial flow from the original music video to video game recording, but there is also a transsensory flow - movement between senses - because the visual stimulation to our eyes alerts our ears for oncoming sound traffic. This sharpens one's senses to the melody and simulates a performer-like experience for the audience. Therefore, it typifies an experience that wears down traditional audience-performer distinctions.

The transmedial flow is characterised differently in 'WANO - Minecraft Note Block Doorbell Tutorial'. While the video is not in itself interactive, it shows the viewer how to build their own Minecraft note-block WANO song. There are three types of transmedial flow; to video tutorial, to potentially interactive, and to live virtual performance. The potentially interactive experience is the transmedial process that is most dependent on the listener. The author of the tutorial, grande1899, explains how to recreate the song and shows the viewer how to create their own. The transmedial flow from video tutorial to interactive only occurs once the viewer acts and creates their own version, otherwise it is redundant. If the viewer creates their own version, this transmedial flow occurs. Once the viewer has created their own Minecraft version of the song, the audio-visual experience is minimal. This is because it uses simple 16-bit synthesised drums and synth, and the minimalism is reflected in the boxes that make the sound. Nonetheless, one can appreciate the author's creation of a textured song from minimal materials. These materials are also the media by which WANO is transmediated, though these are completely virtual. So, once the viewer has interacted with Minecraft blocks to recreate grande1899's version of WANO, there is a virtual transmediation from remix or cover to virtual live performance.

Transmediation of WANO resulted in exploration of trailer aesthetics in 'WANO but it's an Epic Movie Trailer'. Here, we see the stylistic traits of epic film trailers exploited for the propagation of the WANO meme (Action Mug Productions 2016). While this video tends closer to the internet meme aesthetic and function, the creator still defined and essentialised what they believed to be the epitome of an epic film trailer. Trailer elements that are normally received as background become more noticeable. When the material is fragmented, as a film's material is for trailers, it is more noticeable. The hierarchal structuring of sounds and visuals for hit points - when you hear a 'BAM!' in a trailer - and sync points - when the music matches the content in the trailer - is more noticeable because it reforms the original semiotic connections. As an example of such a reformation, the phrases "Grandma, I want to eat" and "I want to eat Grandma" show how reforming the semiotic connections - the links between signifiers, like words - can change the meaning of the phrase.

In 'WANO but it's an Epic Movie Trailer', the phrase "this is going down in history" signifies more of an impact than in the original because in this version of the meme, the orchestra stops playing immediately after, with only the saxophone still playing (Ibid., 00:00:47). This contributes to the epic movie aesthetic. It also emblemises the shift in trailer aesthetics. In Keith Johnston's book, *Coming soon: Film Trailers and the Selling of Hollywood Technology*, Johnston describes how the aesthetics and dissemination of trailers has changed (2009). The move from purely theatrical dissemination of trailers to internet dissemination drove fandoms' excitement for franchises, like *The Phantom Menace* (Neeson, McGregor and Portman 1999). Johnston says this was because the trailer was mobile and the viewer had control over it, i.e. pause and rewind (Johnston 2009, 137). Websites and forums were dedicated to analysis of - even debates on - the trailer. Trailers can be disseminated even easier now than in 1998, so their deconstruction and public scrutiny also become easier. Desensitisation to non-linear activity - such as opening a browser tab while continuing a film on Netflix - is reflected in the evolution of "snappy" trailers. The resulting montage and epic film aesthetics of different trailers influenced the variant by Action Mug Productions. AMP, through their variant, interpreted and explored a way to show how they understood the stylistic traits of this epic film style. This was achieved by the transmedial flow from music video to film trailer.

WANO is an example of how democratic transmedia fosters, what Henry Jenkins calls, a collective intelligence (2006). He defines collective intelligence as the "ability of virtual communities to leverage the combined expertise of their members" (Ibid., 27). In the case of public communicators, this highlights the need to further understand ever-evolving internet meme culture, similar means of communication, and their impacts, so that communities' sensibilities are not neglected. This can refer to how meme consumers' inclinations, reactions, criticisms, and behaviours can interact with meme consumption. In the case of music-memes, Jenkins' definition would refer to the mutual understanding of what, how, and why surreal in-jokes and shibboleths are used and transferred between memes. To explain the meme-community's understanding of these shibboleths, I will use an example. 'WANO but look in the description' is a compilation of eight LazyTown songs (ZeroGD 2016). What characterises this variant is that each song is triggered by a word from the preceding song, i.e. 'Master of disguise' starts every time "LazyTown" is said in 'No one's lazy in LazyTown'. This song blurs the distinctions between comedic internet memes and art because the only comedic factor is the reference to the absurdist aesthetics of editing with verbal triggering. This fragmentises the audio, which "demusicalises" the rhythm (Cook 2013, 59). The surreal shibboleth, then, is the fragmentary audio-visual experience. It is used intertextually, referencing other memes that also had seemingly irrational editing. Because of this, the agenda behind the video is like the Dadaist agenda (Elger 2004, 6). The difference here is that, unlike the defiant attitudes of the Dadaists, there is no explicit defiance to authority; there is only the collective intention of producing and consuming ingroup transmedia. Therefore, the WANO meme creates a collective intelligence because the presumption of democratic transmedia is spurred by the understanding of its ingroup features, such as shibboleths.



**JOHN GEDIMINAS KNIGHT** is a British-Lithuanian composer of contemporary classical music and Jazz. He graduated from the Royal College of Music in 2019 and had his works performed at reknown events such as the 2019 Leeds Lieder festival and the RCM's 2018 organ festival. With an interest in speech-sounds and storytelling, John is exploring techniques and styles that draw from his Lithuanian heritage and Catholic faith. Like the Lithuanian Dainos, many of his influences take from nature and the voice, such as with weaving, melting, growing, complexifying, and rippling textures. Alongside, his music is nourished by the sacred mysteries and the transcendent. He has enjoyed diverse collaborations, such as with Sasha Tsoy for a short film and with fashion designer Anita Raymond Grey. He is currently working with poet Charles Eager on Babel Turris, a song cycle based on the Tower of Babel for solo vocalists and piano.

The LazyTown team's later compliance to and involvement in the meme complexified the transmedial flows. Initially, the meme had transmediated from the original music video. Later, the LazyTown team distributed the original audio files. They gave out the separate tracks of voices, accompaniments, and solo instruments. This way, they provided easier access to the separate parts of the song. This lubricated the ongoing transmedial flows because people were more able to tinker and transmediate the material. Furthermore, they released 'WANO but it's the original and it's 1 hour long...', resulting in a meta-meme. The meme had been transmediated and circummediated through mash-ups, retro music videos, viewers' personal watching, divergence, real-virtual performance aesthetics, a variety of platform-media, film trailers, and collective intelligence. Finally, it came back to its origins. Despite their apparent crudeness, internet memes do more than show us about cultural information transference; they popularise audio-visual aesthetics and discourse in ways that no one person could. They are an enormous means by which communities can spread information, ideas, aesthetics, and philosophies. Think on that the next time you find a cat meme.

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## Transnational and international cooperation in the field of education and training in the adult sector in Europe: opportunities, values and good practices

Luigi A. Dell'Aquila

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The primary role of education and training has always been unanimously recognized as instrumental to the process of European integration and, in particular, in instilling the feeling of European citizenship. This common feeling was noticed since the first steps of the historical development of the corresponding policy - starting from the 1960's - and then it grew up with the new Millennium, with the elaboration and implementation of the Lisbon Strategy aimed at achieving an Economy and a Society based on Knowledge in Europe<sup>1</sup>.

Within this renewed political and institutional context, the Memorandum on Education and Ongoing Training underlines, among others, that «the European Council held in Lisbon in March 2000 marks a decisive stage for the orientation of the policy and action of the European Union», emphasizing the fact that «... Europe has indisputably entered the age of knowledge, with all the consequences that this evolution implies on cultural, economic and social life since the models of learning, life and work are subject to rapid transformation» and, therefore, «...not only will we have to adapt to change, but...established behaviour patterns will have to change themselves»<sup>2</sup>. In other words, the aforementioned Memorandum lays the foundations for the creation of a Europe of Citizens through Education and Ongoing Training.

The scenario envisaged with the Lisbon Strategy - which, moreover, was pursued in greater form through the Europe 2020 Strategy<sup>3</sup> - is mirrored in today's societal trends because of the structural changes caused by the recent world crises and in particular by the Covid-19 Pandemic (the effects of which are being gradually and painstakingly overcome).

Most important, we should analyse how crucial has become the need for multiplying efforts to reinforce and optimize the adult education and training sector, for one main reason: the enormous impact that the EU's and its Member States' investments in the entire range of learning activities - one for all, the "Erasmus Plus" Programme, may have as an undisputable effective public communication instrument.

From a thorough examination of the report of the ET 2020 Framework working group for Adult Learning (2018-2020)<sup>4</sup> it can be noticed that the renewed European Agenda for adult learning, adopted by the Council of the

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1 European Council of Lisbon (Towards a Europe of Innovation and Knowledge), 23 and 24 March 2000, Presidency conclusions.

2 Working document of the Commission services "Memorandum on Education and Permanent training / Brussels, 30 October 2000, SEC (2000) 1832, page 3.

3 Commission Communication Europe 2020 "A strategy for intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth", Brussels, 3 march 2010, COM (2010) 2020.

4 European Commission, "Results obtained within the European agenda renewed for adult learning / Summary of the report of the ET 2020 labor group for adult learning (2018-2020)", Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, July 2019.

European Union (2011) within the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020 Framework), has, on the one hand, defined four key priorities (governance, increase in the offer and participation in high quality courses, wider and more flexible access to these courses and better guarantee of the quality of the educational offer aimed at adults) on which the European Commission and the Member States have committed themselves until 2020; on the other hand, it has identified three areas of post-2020 development: 1) enabling conditions; 2) specific areas of intervention; 3) specific target group.

These are the same basic pre-requisites to apply the fundamental capacity building concepts with a view to setting up concrete communication strategies: developing fair analytical parameters and concrete objectives by having in mind clear objectives and bearing in mind the principle of inclusiveness.

The abovementioned “guidelines” were confirmed by the latest Eurydice Report “Adult Education and Training in Europe: Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications”<sup>5</sup> published by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA, Education and Youth Policy Analysis) in September 2021. In fact, the aforementioned Report has chosen a privileged focus: the adult education and training sector in Europe. Moreover, it carries out a review of current approaches to promoting lifelong learning, with a particular emphasis on policies and measures to support adults with low levels of skills and qualifications to access learning opportunities (investigating, in particular, the creation of flexible learning paths) and analyses the various options for recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning.

Consistently with the standard political trajectories in the field of adult education and training, it is worth noting two good practices of the European projects encompassed by the Erasmus Plus Programme (KA2: Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices / KA204: Strategic Partnerships for Innovation in the sector of the Adult Education). As European Project Manager I have been recently involved in the coordination of two works in partnership<sup>6</sup> - : 1) From Emotional Management to Emotional Resilience (EMER)<sup>7</sup>; 2) Digital Promotion and Protection Skills for Creative and Tradition Industries (DigiMentor)<sup>8</sup>.

The first Project (focusing on health and well-being, new innovative curricula, educational methods and development of training courses, open and distance teaching) is being implemented by five organizations (adult education centers, non-profit associations, private training bodies, public education clubs) based in Lithuania, Latvia, Spain, Italy and Turkey. It aims to develop educational methods and tools aimed at adult individuals in order to allow them to overcome emotional management with the ultimate aim of acquiring the skills and abilities necessary to manage their behaviours in terms of emotional resilience.

Hence, it addresses the issue of emotional intelligence considered as a set of essential skills and abilities to navigate the complexities of today's world and as a key predictor of effectiveness, relationships, well-being and quality of life. This is in line with the position of the World Economic Forum, which identifies it as one of the essential competences and skills for the future.

5 European Commission / EACEA, “Adult Education and Training in Europe: Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications” / Eurydice Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, september 2021. The main source of the report is the political information collected by the national units of Eurydice, which represent 42 education and training systems in 37 European countries., And these data were integrated with qualitative and quantitative data provided by other organizations, including cedefop, Eurostat and the OECD.

6 Both strategic partnership projects - led, respectively, by the Adult Education Center “Knowledge Code” of Lithuania (website: <http://www.ziniukodas.lt>) and by the Association Modus RY of Finland (website: <http://modus.fi>) - involve, among others, as a partner organization the “European Laboratory on Training, Education and Citizenship” Association (EuLabTEC) of Italy (website: [www.eulabtec.com](http://www.eulabtec.com)) of which the author of this article is also the Scientific Director.

7 Website: <https://www.emerproject.eu>.

8 Website: <https://digimentornetwork.eu>.

It is placed in the context of the era of ecological and digital transition (characterized, the latter, by a strong push towards digitization, by a massive use of social media that influence our personal and professional life and, lastly, by stressful situations linked with the effects and consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic) and seeks to encourage adult individuals with fewer opportunities (such as, for example, people from rural areas, unemployed, elderly) to overcome difficulties and develop skills managing their emotions in order to become more emotionally resilient: in times characterized by a stressful life, adults need support and learning opportunities to overcome the daily difficulties they encounter and build a better future in all spheres of their own life (both personal and professional).

We can easily read in this kind of projects an enormous potential in terms of outreach: building a more inclusive community means to make it stronger, healthier, happier and conscious of the benefits of a representative democracy. Therefore, the general objective of the Project itself is not only consistent and coherent with the political objective of the ET 2020 adult learning strategic principles to “Promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship”, but also contributes to let the beneficiaries feel part of a real common project, taking part in well structured activities really aiming at both an individual and collective personal and professional development. The utmost importance to building self-confidence, improving resilient attitude and behavioural consciousness, as well as to strengthening basic skills and abilities such as communication standards and teamwork capacities. In this regard, a team of adult educators and experienced psychologists work together to provide innovative, high-quality learning opportunities and training tools for adult educators. Among these, the Project aims to develop the following intellectual outputs: 1) teaching and learning materials that make use of game-based techniques; 2) an e-learning platform that includes educational videos aimed at creating a continuous learning environment, improving lifelong learning opportunities and promoting lifelong learning by offering opportunities in education with the goal of strengthening adult life skills and abilities.

Placed within the horizontal and sectoral priorities (concerning adults) of the Erasmus Plus Program (in particular, the following: a) improving and expanding the offer of high-quality learning opportunities for adults; b) increasing the demand and diffusion of learning through effective awareness-raising, orientation and motivation strategies; c) Extend and develop the skills of educators and other staff supporting adult learners), the EMER Project pursues, among others, the following Specific Objectives: 1) greater exploitation of further European collaboration in evaluation processes; 2) improvement of social cohesion and fewer economic disparities; 3) increased participation in social and democratic life and the possibility of better understanding the rich political and social environment of the EU; 4) adoption and dissemination of best educational practices; 5) improving the comparability of adult citizens, social inclusion and technological education and developing a collaborative, comprehensive and accessible training and evaluation model; 6) increasing the quality of education and training in participating countries which offer attractiveness with more opportunities for all; 7) improvement of the quality of education and training systems more aligned with the needs and opportunities offered by the labor market and closer links with businesses and the community; 8) improvement of life skills; 9) improvement of skills in managing emotions; 10) promoting synergies and links and improving the transition between different sectors of education; 10) increased stakeholder engagement; 11) better offer of more attractive, more targeted and less time-consuming learning opportunities; 12) increase in the attractiveness of LLP training, education and training programs; 13) increase of the assured diffusion and sustainability of the products during and after the life of the project; 14) strengthening the relationship between education as a tool for societal change and to promote better informed individuals.

Like in any communication project, EMER results must be monitored and measured. The expected outcome should reveal : a) better emotional management skills to obtain more traits of emotional resilience; b) increase

in the capacity of introspection and self-evaluation, motivation and self-guidance; c) increased confidence, motivation to learn and strengthening of one's aspirations; d) greater opportunities for personal development; e) greater interest on the part of adult students to participate in LLP initiatives; f) better knowledge, skills and abilities acquired by project partners and local experts thanks to the sharing of good practices deriving from their own work and the opportunity to test ideas collaboratively in different environments; g) increasing the managerial capacity and the ability to work in a multicultural environment for the staff of the partners participating in the project; h) Opportunity to lead a more balanced and healthy life for the participants; i) greater extension of e-learning services as a training offer in the mother tongue of the partners; f) improved training tools provided to adult educators to improve their ability to provide educational services in high demand; g) better emotional management skills and greater resistance to emotions; h) increased adults' participation in lifelong learning, as emotional management encourages personal development and the search for educational opportunities.

Hence, the need to put in place a set of key assets and tools to facilitate the implementation of the project and guarantee its success: 1) materials dedicated to adult educators and produced on the basis of a rigorous analysis of needs (training methodology, manual for use trainers, game-based teaching tools, testing of materials providing train the trainer training and pilot training courses); 2) electronic e-learning platform that will allow to reach a wider audience, in particular from rural areas or people with mobility difficulties, which includes didactic videos in the native languages of the partners (focused on people with hearing difficulties, low vision and with educational difficulties), also available on the Youtube channel of the Project, and interactive web-based activities for adult individuals aimed at improving their emotional resistance.

Measuring the implementation in progress and the outcome is crucial. In this context, a smooth project management adds motivation, determination and inspiration in both the organizers and their stakeholders. Much depends on the capacity to instill the values of such learning/educational strategies and to communicate their added value.

The second Project (keywords: creativity and culture, entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education, new technologies and digital skills), also being implemented by seven organizations under an international strategic partnership for innovation (public bodies operating in the adult education sector, non-profit associations, public museums, private training institutions, small and medium-sized enterprises) based in Finland, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, Norway and Latvia, aims to increase digital skills in the creative and traditional industry outside metropolitan areas and, therefore, to promote the vitality of remote areas and involves both adult individuals working in artistic organizations and cultural operators and entrepreneurs (such as, for example, artists, designers and makers who need the support of an individual mentor in order to acquire skills and abilities on the use of technologies ie digital, social media and strategic marketing and branding). This taking into account that the creative and traditional industry organizations in rural areas (sparsely populated and often lagging behind urban areas in terms of digitization, so as to determine the phenomenon called "digital divide" which concerns both the availability of digital infrastructures and use of digital technologies among the population) should seize the opportunities associated with digitalisation as a means to combat demographic and technological challenges in European labor markets. They should take action as well to adapt their services to climate change and globalization effects, such as changes in the urbanization schemes. Therefore, the DigiMentor Project also addresses the problems of the loss of employment and business opportunities in rural areas, due to the lack of digital skills for the development of which formal on-site training is often not accessible but must be organized online.

Furthermore, DigiMentor aims to create an innovative peer learning ecosystem that facilitates the upgrade of digital communication and collaboration skills and to adopt means to safeguard professional digital data; while mentoring helps professionals overcome the fear of digital failure and addresses the ever-present loneliness in the artistic professions, and career counselling adds the confidence needed to foster the skills and abilities needed in communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.

Finally, the Project makes use of peer learning functions as a motivating factor in the use of digital tools and promotes the creative skills of cultural operators outside the metropolitan areas and, in this educational and training context, mentoring plays a central role. As a matter of fact, many creative professionals and cultural workers, particularly those with disabilities, those from ethnic minorities and those from less privileged circumstances, continue to struggle to support financially sustainable careers. Therefore, to thrive outside metropolitan areas, small players must learn to communicate within the global culture and traditional industry market.

Placed within the horizontal and sectorial priorities (concerning adults) of the Erasmus Plus Program (in particular, the following: a) implementing innovative practices in the digital age; b) supporting educators, youth workers, educational leaders and support staff; c) promoting the social and educational value of the European cultural heritage and its contribution to job creation, economic growth and social cohesion; d) extend and develop the skills of educators and other staff supporting adult students), the DigiMentor Project pursues, among others, the following Specific Objectives: 1) improvement and expansion of the offer of high quality learning opportunities for the adults; 2) extension and development of the skills of educators and other staff supporting adult learners; 3) improvement of pedagogical support for adult individuals working in creative and traditional industries; 4) encouraging participation in digital learning, the acquisition of skills and the community of open badges; 5) improvement of digital skills learning tools for trainers in order to bridge the gap between job supply and demand; 6) promotion among cultural professionals of innovative learning practices and peer support and online discussion; 7) raising the level of skills and transforming key trainers into the role of mentors; 8) creation of synergies between the participating organizations, the National Agency and the European institutions to implement further European projects in the field of adult education and training; 9) creation of synergies between interested parties.

In particular points 4, 8 and 9 above are the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on which to capitalise in order to reinforce the cooperative framework in view of future investments and initiatives of this kind. In other words, partnership, cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary approaches provide the horizon on which to build new projects or reinforce the existing ones in this field. And the impact in terms of communication and trust is guaranteed!

As it is the case with EMER, DigiMentor results must be monitored and measured. The expected outcome should reveal: a) greater skills and abilities of key trainers who will be able to work with actors who help them overcome the lack of entrepreneurial skills (strategy, promotion and protection), difficulties in digital self-esteem, cultural differences and localization barriers; b) Creation and consolidation of a DigiMentor electronic network at European level which will provide peer support for professionals in the creative and traditional sectors and will allow further growth of the online mentor network; c) increased capacities of organizations that will become more capable in digital promotion and competent in data protection, will learn from each other and who will share their experience and knowledge with colleagues from partner countries; d) greater business opportunities for cooperation such as, for example, in the cultural tourism sector.

DigiMentor effectiveness depends of course on the capacity to create an efficient mechanism to implement the project successfully, based on a full-fledged variety of ingredients and desired outputs 1) innovative, complete and simplified e-learning program on digital promotion and protection to manage the ecology of peer learning at local or remote level and related electronic platform which also provides indications through simplified information graphics and tutorials and mechanisms for monitoring, validation and experimentation; 2) electronic publications (manual and guide) on mentoring in “digital upskilling” based on a comparative study of mentoring methodologies of creative professionals, which includes a practical guide to start implementing curricula in local training with the “mentor”; 3) digital mentoring didactic material for trainers of trainers, trainee trainers and target users and corresponding conversion into an e-learning course suitable for actors of the creative and traditional industry which will strengthen digital skills and knowledge of mentoring for the main trainers, making them prepared in a field that is generally left aside in the field of the arts in terms of peer activity; 4) pilot experimentation methodology defined through a triple model (which includes: a) training of leader trainers aimed at the educational staff of each participating organization in order to achieve common awareness and professional standards of the DigiMentor Open Badge and which will be linked to the methodological work and the practical results of all the intellectual outputs achieved; b) training of learners which will focus on end users and will be crucial to carry out pilot tests of learning methodologies, define local activities and allow the growth of the European DigiMentor community, also allowing learners to obtain the open badge; b) local activities that provide for blended learning tests of training materials through the e-learning platform, involving educators and trained users together and multiplying the educational effects); 4) “open education space” electronic platform as an open educational space for cultural operators interested in digital promotion and business creation and which will allow all the results of the Project to be archived; 5) video simulations on the use of basic digital promotion and creation of social media for businesses as a teaching and learning tool released as OER on the web platform of the Project; 6) open digital badge that certifies the mentoring skills and abilities of mentors - which can be taught using the online learning material - who will form a community of mentors who can then be contacted to offer support and assistance on how acquire the skills and abilities mentioned.

The overall methodology is inspired by peer learning and living lab approaches, so that an effective learning is connected to concrete local actions in digital experimentation and in the implementation of tools, also promoting ad-hoc services among peers. Peer training is locally accessible, but with e-learning material it is also part of a wider ecology (inclusive, collaborative, dynamic, environmentally sustainable, relevant, internationally connected and highly innovative). Therefore, the introduction of a peer learning ecosystem should ensure that professionals in the culture and tradition sector and also in public professional counselling organizations change the way they normally think and interact, including in terms of changing perspective. the digital promotion of creative competence.

In conclusion, it is undoubtedly necessary to underline the fundamental importance of the role of transnational and international cooperation in the field of Education and Training in Europe - especially in the adult sector but not only - whose overall results will certainly contribute significantly to shape, giving substance and implement the provisions of the NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan. This is an unmissable opportunity to proceed steadily and strongly in the direction of an ever greater integration of the European Union and a consolidation of the feeling of European citizenship, hoping to overcome the uncertainties and disillusionments triggered by the long-lasting Covid- 19 crisis. The Plan can indeed regenerate and transform our economies and our societies into a new dynamic environment, more egalitarian and healthier, contributing to building a more digital, greener and healthier future in Europe.

Likewise, the increased transnational and international cooperation in the field of education and training will certainly enrich the path traced out in the European Green Deal - which certainly appears to be shared - also with a view to giving impetus and implementation of the provisions, consequently, of the New European Bauhaus.

It is not anachronistic to hope that such increased cooperation can animate, with an authentic European spirit, education and training operators, interested parties, organized civil society and individual European citizens in the new reflection process started with the Conference on Future of Europe in which the objectives of the Strategic Agenda of the European Council and the 2019-2024 political guidelines of the European Commission are reflected. Increasing knowledge and education means increasing consciousness of our role in the society. Let's keep communicating this spirit following the main principles of “serving people, social equity, equality and intergenerational solidarity”»

#### References:

- Conference on the Future of Europe
- European Green Deal
- European Policy Cooperation (ET 2020 Framework) / The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) is a forum which allows Member States to exchange best practices and to learn from each other
- NextGenerationEU
- New European Bauhaus
- State of the Union 2021 and State of the Union 2021 Address by President von der Leyen
- The Six 6 Commission priorities for 2019-24
- Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Part Three: Union Policies and Internal Actions, Title XII: Education, Vocational Training, Youth and Sport, Articles 165 and 166



**LUIGI A. DELL'AQUILA**  
Luigi A. Dell'Aquila, as European Project Manager, is the owner of the “Knowledge Management & Intellectual Capital” consulting agency. Scientific Director of the European Laboratory on Training, Education and Citizenship Association, headquartered in Italy, but operating at a transnational and international level. As an expert in economics, policies, programs and financing of the European Union, Luigi currently covers the role of EVAS Coach - for the Municipalities of the Province of Bergamo (Italy) - within the Lombardy Europe Project 2020 - Design, Modelling and Start Up of Europe Vasta Area Services (EVAS) Lombardy contexts: be competitive in Europe and listed among the Senior External Experts of the European Commission – Directorate General Regio / Regional and Urban Policy - in education and professional training and in the field of adults' programmes, synergies between European Structural and Investment Funds and Synergies between European Structural and Investment Funds and other EU tools.



# **CLUB HISTORY AND KEY DOCUMENTS**

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## Calendar of the Club meetings 2021-2023

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### 2021 (35<sup>th</sup> year of activity of the Club)

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London (on line event), 25 February 2021  
4<sup>th</sup> Seminar on Strategic Communication

Brussels (on line event), 18 March 2021  
Seminar on Communication and Open Governance in a Time of Crisis

Serbia (on line event), 10-11 June 2021  
Plenary meeting

On line event - 4 October 2021  
Constitutive meeting of the Club of Venice ad hoc Working Group  
of communication experts in resilience building vs hybrid threats

Paris, 2/3 November 2021 (in cooperation with co-organizers ICMPD and French MFA)  
4<sup>th</sup> EUROMED workshop + High-Level event on communication narratives in the field of migration

Venice, 2-3 December 2021  
Plenary meeting - 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Club  
(Conference on the Future of Europe, COVID-19 communication, Climate Change)

### 2022

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Grenoble, February 2022  
Seminar on the role of public communicators in fostering participative democracy

London, early March 2022  
5<sup>th</sup> Stratcom seminar  
(communication strategies in progress, resilience vs. hybrid threats,  
artificial intelligence, capacity/capability building)

Greece, April 2022 (tbc)  
Thematic seminar on public diplomacy, reputation management and crisis communication

May 2022 (venue to be defined)  
Plenary meeting

Prague, 13/14 October 2022  
Thematic seminar

Venice, November 2022  
Plenary meeting

### 2023

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London, February 2023  
6<sup>th</sup> Stratcom seminar

Brussels, early spring 2023  
Thematic seminar

June 2023 (venue do be defined)  
Plenary meeting

September 2023 (venue to be defined)  
Thematic seminar

Venice, November 2023  
Plenary meeting

## List of meetings held by the Club since its foundation

YEAR	DATE	VENUE	MEETING	REMARKS
1986	3-4 October	Venice	plenary	Founding of the Club of Venice
1987	16-17 October	Venice	plenary	
1988	7 June	Brussels	plenary	
1988	28-29 October	Venice	plenary	
1989	16 February	Strasbourg	plenary	
1989	25-28 May	Barcelona-Seville	plenary	survey "European Parliament and public opinion" on the occasion of the Olympic Games in Barcelona and Seville World Expo at the occasion of the European Conference on audiovisual
1989	30 Sept- 2 Oct	Paris	plenary	
1989	20-22 October	Venice	plenary	
1990	18 April	London	plenary	Presentation of the new COI statute
1990	16-18 November	Venice	plenary	
1991	25-27 October	Venice	plenary	Discussion of the communication structure in Central and Eastern Europe
1992	30-31 October	Venice	plenary	
1993	13-14 May	Bonn	plenary	
1993	5-7 November	Venice	plenary	
1994	18 March	Paris	plenary	1st meeting with EP communicators 10 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Club of Venice
1994	4-5 November	Venice	plenary	
1995	26-27 April	Brussels	plenary	
1995	3-5 November	Venice	plenary	
1996	no meeting			
1997	12-14 November	Bruges	plenary	
1998	16-18 December	Bruges	plenary	
1999	10-12 October	Santorini (Greece)	plenary	

YEAR	DATE	VENUE	MEETING	REMARKS
2000	4-6 October	La Rochelle	plenary	Loutraki declaration containing drafting suggestions to the European Convention
2001	29 Nov - 1 Dec	Venice	plenary	
2002	24 April	Brussels	informal meeting on opinion polls	
2002	13-14 June	Copenhagen - Malmö	plenary	
2002	21-23 November	Venice	plenary	
2003	27 Feb - 2 March	Loutraki (Greece)	plenary	
2003	7-10 September	Venice	plenary	
2004	13-15 April	Bratislava	plenary	Preparatory meeting and first meeting in a candidate country 14 April: workshops on Government communication, communicating Europe and crisis management 20 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Club of Venice on callcenters
2004	18-19 November	Venice	plenary	
2005	14 January	Istanbul	plenary	
2005	13-15 April	The Hague	plenary	
2005	3-4 November	Venice	plenary	
2006	10 February	Brussels	workshop	50 <sup>th</sup> anniversary Rome Treaty on audiovisual and interactive communication  Break-out groups: a) Capacity building b) Public diplomacy c) Code of conduct, ethics and professional statute on management and strategic partnership agreements
2006	27-28 April	Prague	plenary	
2006	16-17 November	Venice	plenary	
2007	25-26 April	Vienna - Budapest	plenary	
2007	15-16 November	Rome	plenary	
2008	25 February	Brussels	workshop	
2008	5-6 June	Ljubljana/Postojna	plenary	
2008	21-22 November	Venice	plenary	
2009	13 February	Vienna	workshop	on interactive Web 2.0 comm. and session on communicating on EP elections on public diplomacy
2009	17 April	Brussels	workshop	
2009	27 May	Paris	workshop	
2009	28-29 May	Paris	plenary	
2009	15 October	Brussels	workshop	
2009	19-20 November	Venice	plenary	
2009	21 November	Poreč (Croatia)	thematic meeting	on communicating pre- and post- enlargement

YEAR	DATE	VENUE	MEETING	REMARKS
2010	19 February	Vienna	workshop	on management and strategic partnership agreements
2010	19 March	London	workshop	on digital strategies for public communication
2010	29-30 April	Istanbul	thematic meeting	on crisis communication
2010	2 June	Gozo (Malta)	workshop	on public diplomacy
2010	3-4 June	Gozo (Malta)	plenary	
2010	20 October	Brussels	workshop	on social media & web 3.0 and on capacity building
2010	18-19 November	Venice	plenary	Break-out groups: a) Capacity building b) Audiovisual and interactive communication c) Journalism and new media
2011	10 February	Brussels	workshop	on web-communication & social media and communicating enlargement
2011	12-13 April	Budapest	thematic meeting	“Communicating Europe in schools” 12/04: “Teaching about the EU - LIVE”: observe a lesson with English-speaking students with innovative ICT method of teaching about the EU
2011	25 May	Warsaw	workshop	on public diplomacy
2011	26-27 May	Warsaw	plenary	
2011	7 October	Brussels	joint WPI/CoV seminar	on the impact of social media
2011	10-11 November	Venice	on journalism plenary	
2012	27 January	Vienna	workshop	on management and strategic partnership agreements
2012	16 February	Brussels	joint WPI/CoV seminar	on The Next Web and its Impact on Government Communication
2012	29-30 March	Sofia	workshop	on crisis communication
2012	23 May	Protaras (Cyprus)	workshop	on public diplomacy
2012	24-25 May	Protaras (Cyprus)	plenary	
2012	4 October	Brussels	joint WPI/CoV seminar	on “Open Government in the Making”
2012	15/16 November	Venice	plenary	Spokespersons’ seminar on 14.12.2012
2013	1 February	Vienna	workshop	on management and strategic partnership agreements
2013	22 March	Brussels	joint WPI/CoV seminar	on “Public communication in the evolving media landscape: adapt or resist?”
2013	6-7 June	Tallinn	plenary	
2013	14-15 November	Venice	plenary	
2014	21 February	Brussels	seminar	on Digital Communication Trends

YEAR	DATE	VENUE	MEETING	REMARKS
2014	27/28 March	Athens	joint seminar	(with the GR Presidency and GR Gen.Sec. of Information and Communication) “Public communication: re-gaining citizens’ confidence in times of crisis”
2014	5-6 June	Riga	plenary	
2014	13-14 November	Rome	plenary	
2015	26-27 March	Sofia	joint conference	(with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Wilfred Martens Centre for European Studies and SEECOM) “Digital Communication: New Challenges for Governments and EU Institutions”
2015	11-12 June	Vienna	plenary	
2015	22-23 October	Milan	plenary	
2015	9 December	Brussels	joint workshop	(with the Council Working Party on Information) on communication challenges in the field of migration
2016	9 April	Lesbos	seminar	“The refugee and migration crisis: dealing with a European problem”
2016	26-27 May	The Hague	plenary	
2016	30 September	Brussels	seminar	“Terrorism:ChallengesforCrisisCommunication”
2016	10-11 November	Venice	plenary of the 30 years	
YEAR	DATE	VENUE	MEETING	REMARKS
2017	17 March	London	seminar on “Strat-Com	strategic communication challenges for Europe” Adoption of the London Charter on Strategic Com-munication
2017	18-19 May	Sliema (Mal-ta)	plenary	
2017	19 May	Sliema (Mal-ta)	seminar on “The refugees and migra-tion Crisis: a crucial test for public com-municators”	
2017	23-24 September	Athens-Thebes-Livadia-Thessaloniki	seminar on “Mobilising communicators in the field of the refugee and migration crisis”	
2017	23-24 November	Venice	plenary	
2018	8-9 March	Luxembourg	seminar “Open Government and Open Data: New Horizons for Com-munication and Public Access to Information”	
2018	7-8 June	Vilnius	plenary	Adoption of the - Vilnius Charter on Societal Resilience to Disinformation and Propaganda in a Chal-lenging Digital Landscape - Vilnius Charter shaping professionalism in communication (Capacity Building)

YEAR	DATE	VENUE	MEETING	REMARKS
2018	18-19 September	Tunis		1st Euro-Mediterranean workshop for communicators "Providing Clarity in Complexity: Creating an evidence-based public discussion on migration" Joint meeting co-organized with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the Government of Tunisia
2018	22-23 November	Venice	plenary	
2018	13-14 December	London	2nd Stratcom Seminar: "Truth, Tech and Trends - The issues that European communicators need to address in 2019" Joint meeting organised in cooperation with the UK Government Communication Service	
2019	5-6 April	Athens	seminar on "The Role of Communication in Crisis Management: planning, coordination, cooperation" Joint meeting organised with the Greek Ministry for Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Media	
2019	6-7 June	Bar (Montenegro)	plenary	
2019	23 October	Brussels	seminar on "Country Reputation - Perceptions and management"	
2019	11-12 November	Athens	- 2nd Euro-Mediterranean workshop for communicators "Providing Clarity in Complexity: Creating an evidence-based public discussion on migration" Joint meeting co-organized with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (IC-MPD) and the Hellenic Government	
			- High Level Event	Round table / Meeting with the Hellenic Deputy Minister for Citizen Protection, the ICMPD Director-General, Commission DG NEAR Deputy DG, the Director of the MPI at the EUI and the President of the Club of Venice
2019	5-6 December	Venice	plenary	Adoption of the Action Plan on synergies between public communication and the media sector



YEAR	DATE	VENUE	MEETING	REMARKS
2020	6-7 February	London		3rd Stratcom Seminar: "Strategy, Science and Standards - building effective European public communication in the 20's"
2020	4-5 June	Dubrovnik	plenary	Cancelled, owing to the COVID-19 crisis lockdown measures
2020	15 June	On line mtg coordinated by the Croatian authorities		Webinar on "Crisis Communication - Managing communication on the Covid-19 - Challenges, Analysis and Lessons Learned" Co-organised with the Croatian government authorities
2020	30 September	On line mtg		1st OECD Expert Group on Public Communication In cooperation with the OECD Headquarters and the UK GCS
2020	10-11 November	On line mtg		3rd EURO-Med EMM4 Workshop In cooperation with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)
2020	3-4 December	On line mtg	plenary	Co-organised with the Italian government authorities
2021	25 February	On line mtg		4th Stratcom Seminar: "Key challenges and future communication strategies: crisis management, effectiveness and trust" Co-organised with the UK Government Communications Office
2021	18 March	On line mtg		workshop on "Communication and Open Governance in a Time of Crisis" Co-organised with the OGNfE, DEMSOC, HSS, OGP and OECD
2021	10-11 June	On line mtg	plenary	Co-organised with the government of the Republic of Serbia
2021	4 October	On line mtg		Constitutive meeting of the ad hoc working group on resilience vs. hybrid threats Co-organised with REOC Communications
2021	2-3 November	Mtg held in presence (Paris) and on line		4rd EURO-Med EMM5 Workshop "Re-defining migration partnerships in the Euro-Mediterranean region: the role of communication and narratives" Co-organised with the IC-MPD and the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs



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## What is the Club of Venice<sup>1</sup>

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### Raison d'être

We are a private and informal forum for senior communication professionals from governments of the EU Member States, countries candidate to EU membership, the United Kingdom and European institutions and bodies.

Our common interest is effective public communication, with an emphasis on Europe, using every appropriate channel.

### Status and style

The Club of Venice is an independent club, not a European institution. It is subject only to the rules made by its members. Within the Club, all institutions and states are equal.

The Club's style is professional, pragmatic, co-operative and informal. It relies entirely on the goodwill of its members for facilities and organisation.

### Business process

The Club identifies topics of interest and mutual concern and examines them:

- to stimulate the exchange of ideas and people
- to share best practice
- to learn lessons.

The Club works through:

- its twice-yearly plenary meetings
- workshops which focus on specific issues and professional practices
- Venicenet, the Club's dedicated website.

The Club's agenda is guided by its Secretary-General and its Steering Committee. Their role and responsibilities are defined in the Club's Constitutional Principles subscribed by the Club members.

### Key topics and workshops

For each topic of continuing interest, the Club finds an *animateur* from among its members and, as appropriate, external specialists.

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<sup>1</sup> Agreed at the plenary meeting of the Club of Venice on 5-6 December 2019.

The Secretary-General and the *animateurs* stimulate discussion:

- through workshops
- through the Venicenet platform
- proactively moderating and chairing the meetings.

Outcomes and proposals from the workshops are reported to plenary sessions and on the Venicenet web platform.

### Plenary sessions

Plenary sessions are held twice a year, hosted by a Member State or by the UK or by a country candidate to EU membership, on a voluntary basis. The plenary sessions in autumn are hosted in Italy.

The Club's agenda is guided by the Secretary-General and the Steering Committee in discussion with the host state. It includes:

- reports from workshops
- new topics and issues of professional interest
- future business.

### VeniceNet

The VeniceNet <https://www.clubofvenice.eu> is the Club's private website, where members share documents, data and on-line discussions through thematic forums and databases.

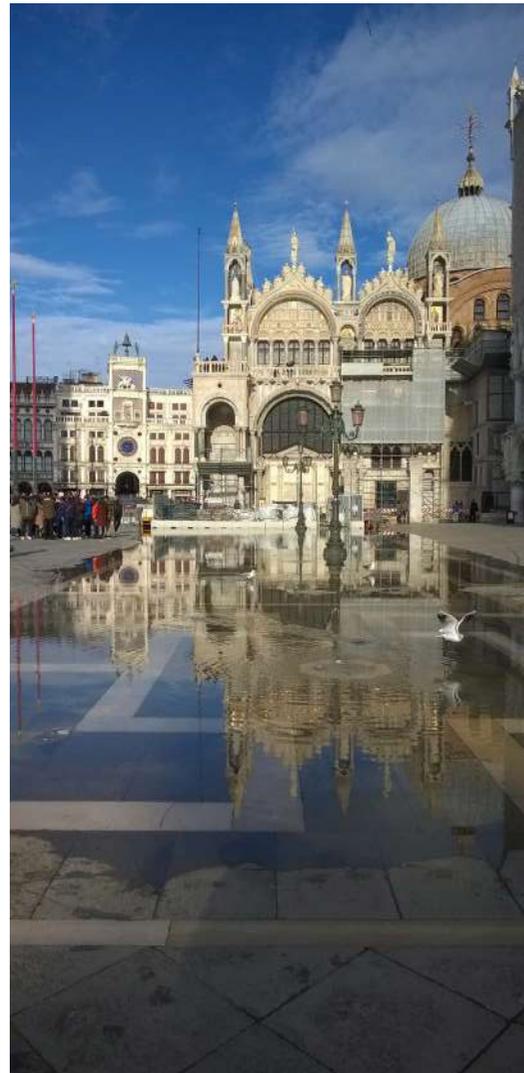
The Club's Steering Committee provides guidance for the Venicenet Webmasters whenever required.

Access to the Venicenet is granted to members and the collaborators they nominate.

### Publications

The Club publishes:

- the review of public communication "Convergences", which appears twice a year
- a compendium celebrating its activities, about every 5 years.



## Constitutional principles<sup>1</sup>

### The Club.

The Club of Venice is an informal group comprising the most senior communication professionals from the governments of EU Member, Candidate States and the United Kingdom; and from the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council of the EU, the European Commission, the European External Action Service, the European Central Bank, the European Investment Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions.

### The Club's mission, process and objectives.

Our mission is to promote effective government communication at national and European level for the benefit of Europe's citizens and their democratic engagement. We do this through our plenary meetings, specialised workshops, and Website.

Our objectives are:

- to strengthen professional networking, professional knowledge, and professional expertise among members;
- to share relevant best practice and innovation;
- to promote discussion and debate about the communication of European issues.

### General membership.

The Club's **general members** are the directors-general or equivalent of the information and communication services of governments, and of the institutions of the EU. Their single common qualification is involvement in public communication at the most senior level. The Club makes no distinction between permanent civil servants and political appointees.

### Honorary membership.

The **honorary members** – the Honorary President and the Vice-Presidents are former general members who hold membership in their own right. They have a role in the Club's administration through an **advisory committee which formulates proposals inspiring the Club in its future activities and contributes to the preparation of its meetings**. To qualify, candidates must have attended the Club consistently for a number of years. Candidates are proposed at a plenary meeting, and elected by vote at a subsequent plenary meeting.

<sup>1</sup> Agreed at the plenary meeting of the Club of Venice on 5-6 December 2019.

## Members emeriti.

The status of **member emeritus** is awarded by the Club at a plenary meeting to former general members to recognise the contribution they have made to the Club.

## Associate Members.

The status of **associate member** is awarded to representatives of international organisations, associations and the academic community in recognition of their proactive collaboration with the Club.

1 Agreed at the plenary meeting of the Club of Venice on 5-6 December 2019.

## The Secretary-General of the Club:

- is appointed by the Plenary upon proposal of the Steering committee with the agreement of the Advisory Committee
- is responsible for setting up the communication agenda, submits proposals for discussion items at future meetings to the Steering Committee and fulfils a facilitator's role during the establishment of the meeting programmes
- assists in the preparation and organisation of all the Club meetings in cooperation with the hosting authorities
- acts as one of the three webmasters for the secured web platform of the Club "Venicenet" (<https://www.clubofvenice.eu/>).

## The Club's Website and e-mail bulletins/newsletters

- Venicenet (<https://www.clubofvenice.eu/>) is the Club's Website, containing documents of mutual interest, discussion forums, agenda and records of meetings, and other items considered valuable.
- The Webmasters are the Belgian and Netherlands communication services and the Secretary-General of the Club. Club members have password protected access to the site.
- Club members may grant access to their colleagues, but they take full responsibility for the observation of privacy and data protection.
- Automatic and ad hoc e-mail bulletins are used to inform members of updates to Venicenet and news of common interest from Member States and EU Institutions and bodies.

The Steering Committee is composed of a limited number of **Member States' active communication directors and the Secretary-General of the Club**, who are instrumental in the definition of the activities of the Club. Its role is to cooperate in the identification the priority topics for the Club agenda and the organisation of plenary meetings, workshops, as well as in the management of other communication activities carried out by the Club alone or with other peer organisations. The steering committee plays a role of catalyser, prioritizing discussion needs and exploring future orientations and work in partnership.

## Club meetings and attendance.

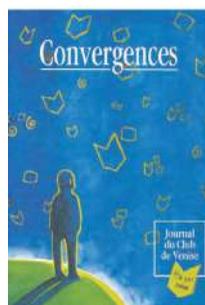
**Plenary** meetings are held under Chatham House rule, twice a year (usually, one is in Venice - in the autumn - and the other in a EU Member State or in the UK or in a candidate country - in the spring). The Secretary-General and the Steering Committee organise a planning meeting usually about two months in advance. Ad hoc **workshops** on specific issues are organised in the same way. At any meeting, members may be accompanied by a colleague; and they may be represented by nominees, particularly by experts in the subject matter experts.

## Rules concerning the organisation of Club meetings

- The hosting authorities bear all organisational costs (meeting venue, technical equipment and appliances, reception area).
- The hosting authorities also cover travel and hotel costs for the Secretary-General participation in the meetings and, if possible, for external professionals invited as key-note speakers.
- In general, the European Parliament contributes to the plenary meetings by providing interpretation, and the European Commission by offering catering (one evening dinner).
- External sponsoring is allowed for specific organisational expenses, if agreed in advance by the Steering Committee. Sponsors' logo can appear at the end of the meeting programme.
- Plenary meetings usually have simultaneous translation into the host country language, French and English. Specialised workshops are usually conducted without translation services, and generally use English.



## Convergences



A first editorial experience of the Club, initiated by the Belgian federal information service (SFI-FVD, Mieke van den Berghe) and the French government information service (SID, Nicole Chauvelle), consisted in the publication for a few years (1992 – 2000) of a newsletter called « Convergences ». This newsletter, printed in a limited number of copies, reported on the Club's activities. It was mainly intended for the members and their staff.

On particular anniversaries however the Club prepared more important publications, such as those for its 10<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. The publication for the 25<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Club went beyond commemoration and resulted in a number of feature articles. This work was widely disseminated to and by the members but also outside, in particular to the university faculties involved in communication.

Following this successful experience, the members of the Club chose to renew this initiative and adopted, in November 2011, in Venice, the principles for re-launching « Convergences » as the periodic review of the Club of Venice. This time as a printed and electronic review, intended for the members but also for a wider dissemination and thus for a wider audience.

This review is not aimed at being the Club's « minutes » but wants to be the means of dissemination of the work carried out by the Club, whether coming from the plenary meetings, the working groups and the workshops or from contributions of members or their institutions as from experts invited to the Club's activities.

The review does of course include non-members - external public communication officials, information professionals, academics (professors, researchers, students), civil society communication specialists, ... - for which it is also intended.

Having regard to the Club's professional concerns, the aim is to contribute as far as possible to providing continuity in its various activities and in those of its members and to share information, reflections and experiences in the field of public communication in Europe and about Europe.

The aim is not the achievement of the review in itself but a way to make the work of the Club (of its members and of their institutions) accessible and to disseminate it and also to make it better known.

« Convergences », like the Club itself, will be what its members make of it. As one of them reminded us: « To make it better is not only a question of using it more. It also means that we all have to contribute more ».

The review is in its seventeenth edition.

Full coverage on all the editions of Convergences is provided at <https://www.politicheuropee.gov.it/en/communication/projects-campaigns/club-of-venice/convergences-public-communication-magazine/>



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## Communicating enlargement A Club of Venice guide

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### Introduction

Seeking to become a Member of the EU is a major political decision for the country wishing to join; but any enlargement has as well far-reaching consequences for all Member States as it influences the functioning and future development of the Union.

Accession negotiations are different from the normal diplomatic negotiations held between two or more states. They are “unequal” negotiations in the sense that the content—namely the body of EU law known as the *acquis communautaire*—is not negotiable: the applicant must accept it as it stands and is only able to obtain transitional arrangements in duly justified cases in areas where the adaptation of legislation to Community law in the applicant country is particularly difficult.

In addition, both the preparation phase of accession negotiations (i.e. the drafting of the Commission’s opinion) and the actual negotiations between the Member States of the EU and the applicant country/countries involve a lengthy process which can take several years. The topics covered during the negotiations are mostly very technical and difficult to explain in simple words to the public at large. Negotiating positions drafted by the Commission after it has analyzed the applicant country’s arguments are often considered too favourable to the applicant and are tightened up when adopted unanimously by the Member States. As a result, they may often be seen as a “diktat” and as humiliating for the acceding country.

Under these particular circumstances, communication plays a crucial role not only in informing citizens continuously about progress during the negotiations but also in trying to keep the level of public support for enlargement high. People should be informed in an objective way, false expectations avoided, inaccurate information corrected and unjustified fears allayed.

All those countries which joined the EC/EU after its initial establishment have had to face the difficult task of preparing their citizens for enlargement. Without efficient pre-enlargement communication, accession referenda cannot be won; without preparation of the citizens in the existing Member States, negative reactions and surprises may occur (see the negative impact of enlargement in the referenda on the Constitutional Treaty in France and in the Netherlands).

Communication should not end with accession. On the contrary, it should continue in order to maintain public support and to explain to citizens the changes which EU-membership will bring and the new opportunities it will offer.

Considering that communication about enlargement is a topic which concerns Government communicators in all Member States and candidate countries, the Club of Venice, in line with its tradition to dedicate meetings to specific topics of general interest and particular importance, held two Workshops on ‘Communicating Enlargement’. The aim of these workshops was to discuss the experience of countries which had joined the EU during the three most recent waves of enlargement (1995, 2004, 2007) as well as that of Croatia and Turkey in their ongoing negotiations, and also to identify best practices in communication as well as similarities in the kinds of challenges to be met.

The first workshop at Porec on 21 November 2009 at the invitation of the Government of Croatia dealt with the communication challenges during the different phases of the enlargement process, with communication strategies, communication tools, products and target groups and tried to identify success factors for enlargement communication.

The second workshop was hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions in Brussels on 10 February 2011. It examined public opinion analysis and media coverage of enlargement as well as impact evaluation of Government and EU institutions communication strategies and discussed the role and added value of civil society components in enlargement communication.

## Communication challenges during the different phases of the enlargement process

### In the candidate country

#### Pre-negotiation phase

Government information campaigns about the EU should start already when a neighbouring European non-EU country is setting itself the political objective to join the Union. In many of these potential future candidate countries far-reaching national measures are needed to adapt to fundamental EU principles and standards before even being able to envisage an application to become a member of the EU.

Communication is necessary to ensure the understanding and the support of the population already in this preparatory phase preceding an eventual demand for membership.

In most countries, public support for EU membership is high at the moment of application. In general, the political class is in favour of membership. There are, however, some exceptions, such as in Norway and Iceland, where the government has only a small parliamentary majority in favour of the application and where public opinion is split between supporters and opponents of membership.

After formal presentation of the letter of application, it is necessary to continue informing citizens about “EU basics”, the enlargement process and its timetable:

“What are the rules of the game? When you join a club you have to accept all the club’s rules. What is the *acquis communautaire*? Accession always takes a very long time—be patient. Government should not raise false expectations.”

The period during which the Commission's opinion on the request for membership is being prepared—which generally takes at least one year—should be used to provide general information about the EU for the broad public in the candidate country and to prepare specific groups of the population for necessary changes and adaptations to EU rules.

This first phase should be used not only to constitute the negotiating team and to build up EU knowledge and expertise in all government departments, but also to train communication specialists and to set up a team able to inform the media and the population at any time about specific problems and the enlargement process as a whole.

Multipliers such as journalists, leading personalities representing interest groups, regional and local politicians, and school teachers should be targeted specifically. Training for journalists and study trips for selected multipliers to get to know the institutions of the EU and their working methods are particularly recommended. The candidate country's Mission to the EU in Brussels has a central role to play in this respect.

A data base containing all relevant information for media and the public should be built and put at the disposal of speakers, teachers, civil society groups and other multipliers. This data base should include power-point presentations on accession related topics of broad interest and should be continuously updated all along the enlargement process.

### **Negotiation phase**

With the start of the negotiation phase the information campaign needs to be stepped up. General information activities should continue, but priority should be given to detailed information about matters under discussion in the negotiations.

A well-functioning communication network with a clear chain of command and coordination mechanisms should be in place. The chief negotiators at political level, as well as at civil servant level, and the Mission to the EU in Brussels should play a central role as information providers. They should inform the media before and after each negotiating session about the progress made, the solutions envisaged or reached, and any outstanding issues. Communication specialists within the negotiating team and the relevant government departments should be able to answer any specific questions, rectify immediately any inaccurate information and calm any fears.

It seems particularly important not to raise false expectations: after all, it is not the EU that wants to join the applicant country! Therefore, in areas of differing law and rules it is up to the candidate to bring its legislation and standards into line with those of the EU. When informing the public about the negotiations, it is essential also to present the position of EU Member States and the arguments supporting that position. This goes hand-in-hand with an evaluation of the efforts needed to bring the necessary adjustments into effect. Those sections of the population most affected by such adjustments should be informed thoroughly about all measures needed, the price to be paid and the advantages to be expected after accession.

As a rule, communication about negotiations should always be immediate and transparent.

However, in some cases it may be necessary to impose certain restrictions, for instance when candidate countries submit position papers to the Commission during the course of the negotiations. In such cases

it would be advisable not to reveal the full text of the candidate country's negotiating bid, but to provide information merely on the general content and to give full details only when negotiations are complete.

It is also crucial to involve government and the relevant ministers in order to defend the outcome of the negotiations and to assume political responsibility for them. Also of great importance in this respect are a well-functioning communication network and a support structure of communicators with detailed knowledge of the negotiation topics and an ability to explain solutions in simple, easily understandable language.

### **Ratification phase (Referendum)**

At the end of the negotiations all energies should be mobilised to ensure the support of the majority of the population for accession. Best use should be made of the sense of relief, or even euphoria, which is generally felt at the end of a lengthy negotiation process. More than ever it is important to explain and defend the outcome of the negotiations in simple terms and to justify the solutions proposed for problem areas. In addition to concerted action by the whole communication team, and a set of coherent messages underpinned by statements made by the negotiators involved in the different negotiation chapters, it is particularly important that a leading role should be played by the political class in favour of accession. Politicians should be supported by the network of pro-EU interest groups and civil society organisations.

This is also the moment to run publicity campaigns in favour of accession using all media channels, but placing particular emphasis on TV and radio slots, the internet and outdoor campaigns using billboards and organising public events (EU buses, concerts, exhibitions, discussion fora, etc.). TV debates giving the floor both to prominent defenders and opponents of enlargement, as well as to members of the studio audience, provide a particularly relevant means of reaching the public at large.

Campaigns should have a simple message (such as "We are Europe", "Together, instead of alone") which should be used by all those involved and on all supports.

The maximum mobilisation of resources and energies in favour of acceptance of the Accession Treaty is essential in the run-up phase to the referendum. Referenda tend to polarise public opinion: they raise passions and opponents, often use deliberately false information to win support for rejection. The supporters' camp should seek to be convincing and passionate, appealing not only to the intellect but also to sentiments and emotions.

Anti-accession activists can easily enter the referendum-campaign and get instant publicity acquiring national status at little cost. Media do not act as filter against extremists but as facilitator. Political parties find it usually difficult to counter No-campaigns of extremist opponents as they are designed to fight elections rather than referenda. They are focussed on national or regional politics and not sufficiently familiar with European affairs. They also lack the right vocabulary to explain the EU.

Political parties alone will not win the referendum, civil society has to be mobilized and has to campaign at all levels for months. Monitoring of the impact of activities is necessary in order to fine-tune the campaign and to develop tailor-made products for specific groups using the media best suited to each one. Recent referenda have shown that interactive media—and particularly blogs—are playing an increasing role in influencing the way citizens vote. This applies especially to young people.

An active and responsive presence of the pro-camp on the blogosphere is essential. Communication teams should always include specialists in interactive media, while pro-European civil society groups should be encouraged to make active use of the web.

When all is said and done, it is political engagement which will be the determining factor in building momentum and encouraging people to identify themselves with the “yes” camp in the referendum. Mobilizing the electorate to ensure a high turnout will be crucial. Experience shows that the higher the participation in the referendum the bigger the chances for a positive result.

### **Post-enlargement phase**

The communication effort should not end with accession. Experience shows that in countries where intensive EU communication ended straight after the referendum, public support for membership decreased significantly.

The big changes brought about by enlargement should be properly explained to citizens in order to increase understanding and acceptance.

The public at large, and in particular those groups of the population with specific concerns (e.g. farmers, liberal professions, entrepreneurs, students) should be informed about the possibilities for aid from the EU (subsidies, structural funds, research programmes, mobility programmes, etc.)

Citizens should get information about the day-to-day activities of their country inside the EU institutions. It is particularly important that an EU dimension is reflected in general government communication on current affairs, so as to promote an understanding that work at EU level is to be regarded in the same way as work at national level. EU membership should gradually become part of the national identity.

### **In the Member States**

#### **Information campaigns**

In order to prepare citizens in the Member States for any forthcoming enlargements, there is a need for long-term information campaigns led by governments, regional and local authorities, as well as by Commission Representations, Offices of the European Parliament and civil society organisations. Enlargement information campaigns organized before and after the accession of new members were particularly successful when events took place at local level in cooperation with local authorities and civil society groups ( e.g. in Finland ).

EU citizens need to be convinced that the accession of new members will be an opportunity and a source of enrichment for the EU and that it will undermine neither the achievements of the EU, nor the jobs or living standards of EU citizens.

A win-win strategy aimed at softening the so-called ‘Enlargement fatigue’ ought to involve the EU Institutions, first and foremost the Commission, which should be able to provide for a technical assistance to candidate countries so as to help them promote themselves in the EU citizens’ opinion.

Past experience shows that often too little has been done to ensure a better understanding of the benefits of enlargement among Member States’ citizens. This was particularly true in the case of the big 2004 enlargement and indeed led to negative attitudes in several Member States which had an influence on a number of indirectly related decisions (i.e. the referenda on the Constitutional Treaty).

Whilst the future accession of Croatia is generally positively seen by citizens in Member States, the case of Turkey remains highly controversial and divisive at political level as well as in public opinion.

Information campaigns should help to overcome fears and prejudices. We notice, however, little enthusiasm of Governments to take initiatives on a question which is negatively perceived by a large majority of the population in several Member States.

### **Long-term good-will campaigns**

The candidate countries also need to conduct long-term good-will campaigns in all Member States, starting from the moment they apply for membership and continuing at least until accession and preferably beyond.

Campaigns of this kind should aim at increasing support for the accession of the applicant country and thus create a positive climate ahead of negotiations and in the build-up to ratification of the accession treaty by all Member States. Emphasis should be laid on topics which are likely to influence public opinion favourably and to increase awareness and understanding of the newcomer(s) (e.g. by focusing on culture, traditions, tourism). To achieve this, every instrument of public diplomacy should be deployed.

## **The evolution of public opinion on Enlargement**

Citizens’ opinions on enlargement are highly diverging in the different Member States. Eurobarometer polls do not show an “EU average trend”. However, it can be noticed that enlargement is not considered as a priority and that the public support for enlargement is decreasing all over the EU: Only 26% of EU citizens believe that enlargement is a good thing, an exception being Poland with 69% of the population in favour of further EU enlargement.

Today the majority of EU citizens are “tired” of enlargement. The only candidates or potential candidates which are considered positively are Switzerland, Iceland and Croatia.

Public opinion in candidate countries is highly influenced by progress and concrete results in accession negotiations. In the case of Croatia which started negotiations in autumn 2005, a “negotiation fatigue” with negative impact on public support for EU membership can be noticed.

The decline was accelerated during a period of deadlock in negotiations. Since 2010 due to significant progress in accession talks this trend has been inverted.

The slow progress in accession negotiations with Turkey and the new foreign policy of Turkey which tends to affirm itself as regional power and mediator in the Middle East have provoked an important shift in public

perception of Turkish EU membership. Support for cooperation with the EU is declining whilst support for cooperation with the Middle East is rising. Today 60% of the Turkish population do not trust the EU. Only 38% believe that joining the EU is a good thing.

## Communication Strategy A pre-requisite for a successful campaign on enlargement

A specific strategy for communicating on enlargement should be an integral part of every candidate country's overall strategy for accession to the EU.

The communication strategy should comprise the following essential elements:

- **Objective:** To ensure public support for EU membership, provide information to the public at large and particularly to groups of the population most affected by changes brought about by accession, as well as to parts of the population with little knowledge (in general: the higher the level of information, the higher the level of support for membership).
- **Organisational framework:** The best structure is regarded as follows: first the Office of the Prime Minister (as leader and overall coordinator), then the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, followed by the Ministry for European Affairs (Office for European Integration), the line ministries, the chief negotiator and the Mission to the EU in Brussels.
- **Co-ordination and chain of command:** A clear distribution of roles and precise definition of the rules of command are crucial. Without smoothly functioning coordination between all those involved in the enlargement process, no successful communication will be possible. Regular coordination meetings, including strategic evaluations of the impact and finetuning of information activities, are required. The Mission to the EU in Brussels should always be involved. The objective should be "Many voices—a single message".
- **Monitoring of public opinion and impact evaluation:** The evolution of the public opinion and changes in citizens' attitude towards membership in the EU should be closely monitored at all stages of the enlargement process. To this end Eurobarometer opinion polls should be used together with specific national opinion polls. Focus groups should be consulted and interviews and media analyses should be performed to give a more detailed insight in the public perception of potential problems related to enlargement. Social experts' reports and research should complement the monitoring and impact evaluation and help to define target groups for specific kind of information as well as to adjust information products and messages.
- **Communication team:** Well-trained communicators with a solid knowledge of European integration processes and EU legislation should be the main people involved in implementing the communication strategy. The team should represent all departments of government, as well as the chief negotiator and the Mission to the EU, and need to be able to cover every chapter of negotiation. It should also include communication professionals covering all types of media, including specialists on the internet and social networks.
- **External professional expertise:** The advice of PR professionals should be sought when designing and running PR campaigns in favour of membership and in particular when preparing for a referendum.
- **Financial resources:** Sufficient budgetary means should be provided to run the strategy throughout the whole enlargement process and, in particular, to cover the cost of intensive campaigning in all media with a broad outreach in the period between the end of the negotiations and the referendum. A budget should also be set aside for post-enlargement communication.

- **Interaction with the European Commission and the EC Delegation in the acceding country:** The Commission, and in particular the Head of the EC Delegation and his staff, play an important supportive role in explaining the EU and the advantages of membership. Close coordination and integration of the Delegation's activities into the overall communication strategy are therefore important.
- **Networking with communicators in Member States:** The communication team should establish close contacts with communication specialists in Member States having practical expertise in enlargement communication. These specialists can give valuable advice on best communication practices and guidance on envisaged communication measures.
- **Use of the existing networks:** Networks composed of regional and local entities as well as interest groups (e.g. Chambers of Economy and Labour, Federations of Industrialists, Trade Unions) and pro-European civil society organisations should be used as multipliers, addressing themselves to their members and to those sections of the population they can reach best.
- **Political engagement:** The strategy will only be successful if the government and all political forces in favour of enlargement give their full support throughout the accession process. The personal engagement of leading politicians and their readiness to assume responsibility for the outcome of the negotiations are fundamental in terms of convincing citizens and building trust.

## Communication Tools and Products

Enlargement is priority news throughout the accession process in every acceding country. In order to make the best use of this media interest, it is essential to establish privileged relations between the communication team and the media. A contact network with journalists should be set up which allows news and messages to be conveyed, false information to be rapidly corrected, interest in the EU to be raised public understanding of accession to be increased.

Since the EU, its institutions and its decision-making processes are complex, it is important that journalists reporting on the EU and enlargement should fully understand what is going on and are able to explain matters in a clear and simple manner. For this reason, appropriate training for journalists is crucial. Study visits for journalists to Brussels, involving information meetings at the Commission, the EP, the Council and the Mission to the EU of the candidate country, are very useful means of creating a body of journalists specialised in EU affairs.

Correspondents in Brussels for TV, radio and the biggest national newspapers play an essential role in providing well-informed news about the EU on a daily basis.

The spokespersons of the Missions to the EU and the chief negotiators should make best use of the network of EU correspondents and journalists specialised in EU matters by organising regular press-briefings and background talks.

All types of media are suited for enlargement information campaigns. It should, however, be borne in mind that TV is still the best means of reaching a large audience and in particular those parts of the population which do not have access to the internet. Radio and print-media should not be overlooked either.

Internet websites, blogs and interactive social media (such as Facebook, etc.) are playing an ever increasing

role in today's information society and their impact will be decisive in mobilising the younger generation and winning its support.

Brochures, leaflets, newsletters billboards and posters remain valuable tools for achieving visibility and stimulating people's interest in enlargement and the EU.

Conferences, lectures, forum discussions, exhibitions, Europe Days, Europe Weeks, EU competitions for school teams, social events, EU information stands and buses all constitute useful ways of informing citizens and getting them personally involved. All these measures and activities should aim at stimulating interactive exchange with citizens, engaging them in favour of enlargement.

EU Info Points and Info Centres as well as call centres (EU phone) should serve as complementary tools for answering citizens' questions about the EU and increasing the level of information among the population.

## Target Groups

### General Public

The aim of any communication strategy on enlargement in a candidate country should be to ensure the broadest possible support for membership, and at least a majority in the referendum on the accession treaty. The main target group should therefore always be the general public.

The amount of information about the EU is usually very low at the start of the enlargement process. It is, therefore, important to organise educational information campaigns. These activities, together with more specific communication about the opportunities, advantages, possible disadvantages, benefits, costs and potential problems should continue throughout the enlargement process and even beyond, in order to deepen EU knowledge and understanding with a view to maintaining support and confidence in the EU.

### Specific target groups

#### Multipliers

Multipliers are essential to increase the impact of communication activities and to reach the public at large, as well as specific sections of the population. The different groups of multipliers should be targeted specifically through tailor-made communication measures such as study visits, press briefings, training programmes, thematic conferences and seminars. Networks of multipliers should be created and continuously supplied with the latest news on enlargement and on hot topics, empowering multipliers and motivating them to circulate information and support accession within their constituencies.

The following groups of multipliers should be targeted in particular:

- journalists (with special emphasis on editors/sub-editors and local media)
- regional and local authorities

- interest groups
- civil society groups, NGOs
- school teachers

#### Groups particularly affected by the changes resulting from membership

- farmers
- fishermen
- entrepreneurs, business community
- liberal professions
- students

#### Persons not actively seeking information, in particular women and the elderly

#### Youth

#### Vulnerable groups of the population (e.g. minorities)

## Success Factors

- Broad political and government support,
- Long-term communication efforts,
- Sufficient human and financial resources,
- A communication strategy which forms part of a national accession strategy,
- Regular coordination between all communication partners,
- The motivation, know-how and professionalism of the communication team,
- Networking with multipliers,
- Good cooperation and coordination with EU Delegations,
- Coherent messages tailored to suit specific groups, to reflect progress in the negotiations and to adjust to public opinion as it evolves,
- Open and transparent dialogue with citizens.

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## **“Capacity Building” Strategic tracks - operational issues COV’s plenary in Venice on 18/19 November 2010**

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### Requirements for a successful public communicator:

- What capacity is needed to run effective public communication operations: management and business, leadership, professional profile, skills, writing skills, journalistic experience, policy experience, private sector experience
- Recruitment and promotion assessment processes
- Social media expertise

### Requirements for a successful public communication operation:

- Leadership and management, business process,
- Media monitoring, social network monitoring, public surveys, monitoring customer requirements (Ministers, officials)
- Campaign evaluation

### Legal and institutional framework

- Special laws and professional regulations for public communicators
- Ethical rules
- Codes of conduct, in particular for use of social media

### Training and professional development

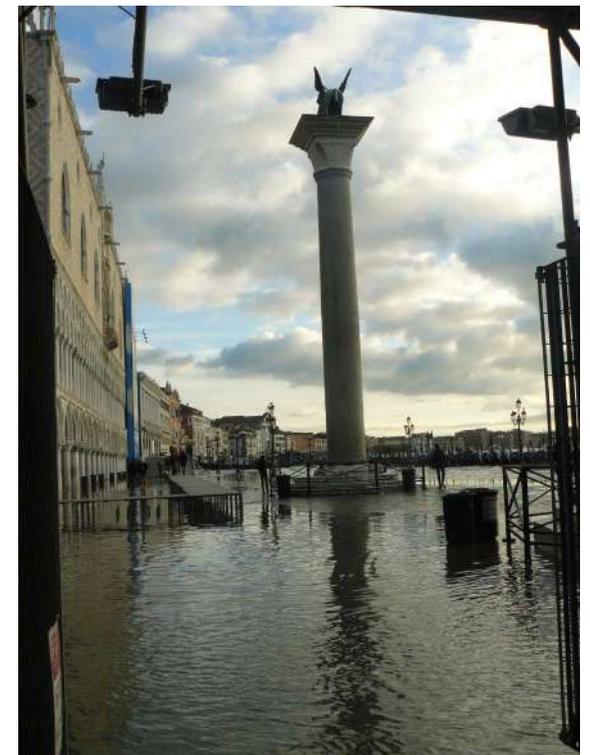
- National training models, evaluation of results achieved
- Assessments of needs, best practices
- Exchange of training materials
- Existing - and creation of new - exchange programmes for public communicators
- Possible cooperation MS - EU Institutions in organizing and funding training schemes (academic courses for public relations, public affairs)

### Exchange of information

- Share and spread best practices
- Networking between specialists in MS and EU Institutions

### Follow-up within CoV

- Break-out group and discussion in plenary at Venice plenary
- Interactive CoV platform / Forum on the Venicenet
- Creation of a small CoV working group of capacity building specialists
- Organization of capacity building workshops at regular intervals and evaluation of results in plenary
- Club initiative to achieve co-funding of training programmes
- Production and maintenance of a capability map



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## Capacity/capability building, transformation and open government

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**The Vilnius Working Group on Capacity/Capability Building** was established by the Vilnius Charter of the Club of Venice adopted by the Club plenary meeting on 8 June 2018, which called for a group of Club members to work together to advance collaborative work in this field.

These two key themes of the Club's work started to be developed in 2009 in Brussels, where the Club held its first workshop on Capacity Building to help governments' and institutions' communicators confront with the new communication techniques, the growing power of the media and the need for more interactive policy development and transparency.

Having regard to today's media and communication landscape, there is an increasing need for well trained professionals and to focus together on communication challenges that require systematic application of research, media analysis and monitoring and long term management strategies, through a multidisciplinary structural approach.

In line with the principles subscribed in the abovementioned Charter, this new working group will be focused on practical action around Transformation and Open Government and will feed learning back into the wider Club membership through sessions at main Club meetings and special events where useful and needed.

The group will be made up of governments/institutions with support from partner organisations, academics and independent experts. The key support will be provided by the Club Steering Group, WPP and The Democratic Society. The external partners WPP and the Democratic Society have been proactively cooperating in this field with the Club of Venice in the recent years.

Meanwhile a number of colleagues, partners and academic experts expressed interest in being part of the working group or following its activities.

How the Group will work?

The group's initial work will be establishing a work programme to be signed off at the next Club's plenary in Venice.

The aim is to conceive a number of pilot projects to take place within Member States and/or institutions in the coming years. Preliminary ideas were entered to this end for reflection in Venice in November 2019 and continued to feed discussion at the following thematic meetings.

An ad hoc plan is being developed for endorsement as well as a series of side projects that develop thinking further.

Follow-up meetings are being organized to prepare and implement a robust work programme and identify potential projects closely connected with the governmental communication priorities.

The Club of Venice Vilnius Working Group on Capacity and Capability Building will work collaboratively to enhance, upgrade and develop capacity and capability for government communications and more broadly government as a whole, building on the best work elsewhere in Europe. It will strengthen abilities to use new technology, techniques and involve citizens, demonstrating an integrated approach.

**The draft work programme** was discussed at the Venice plenary on 22 November 2018.

The range of topics to be covered (list in progress) were selected in close collaboration with two external partners of the Club of Venice: WPP and The Democratic Society:

- Audience segmentation
- Behavioral trends and behavior changes
- Building partnerships
- Citizen's consultations and citizen's dialogues
- Data analytics
- Detecting and handling disinformation and misinformation
- Digital government
- Evaluation
- Increasing voter's turnout
- Monitoring
- Open governance
- Participation and Interaction
- Planning
- Recruitment
- (Social media) listening
- Storytelling
- Strategic engagement
- Training

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## London Charter

17 March 2017, Club of Venice StratCom seminar

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Communication directors and senior communication specialists from the EU Member States, institutions and candidate countries, convened to the seminar “StratCom-Strategic Communication Challenges for Europe” co-organised by the Club of Venice and the UK Government Communications Service, hereby share common views on the need for reinforced cooperation to safeguard objective communication values, assure impartiality and promote transparency.

To contrast the current threat to free communication and pluralism, they agree to multiply their efforts and seek synergies to contribute to the management and the solution of crises by:

- enhancing inter-governmental cooperation in strategic communications;
- supporting public communicators and their partners/multipliers/opinion makers in regions with geo-political instability in their work to promote, spread and defend the democratic processes and values;
- ensuring support to the media and the organisations who are engaged in the defence of freedom of speech, pluralism and transparency;
- neutralizing fake news to prevent public audiences’ misperception and misinformation in today’s post-truth actuality;
- facilitating resilience-building in response to growing nationalism, extremism and populism;
- communicating strategically the benefits that the EU has brought and can bring to the regions concerned, elaborating objective and concrete narratives for both internal and external audiences;
- regaining citizens’ trust and confidence in public authorities; engaging in communication activities aimed to improve liaison between politics and citizens and dialogue with all sectors of society;
- reinforcing collaboration among communication practitioners by cross-collaboration in training activities, visits’ programmes and on line interconnections;
- using the Club of Venice network as a permanent platform for further reflection to help improve StratCom capacities, in liaison with the formal governmental and institutional agenda, and in close collaboration with the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Strategic Communication Network (ESCN).

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## Vilnius Charter on Societal resilience to disinformation and propaganda in a challenging digital landscape

Plenary meeting - Vilnius, 7-8 June 2018

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Communication directors and senior communication specialists from the EU Member States, institutions and candidate countries, convened to the session “Hybrid threats: focus on countering disinformation, propaganda and fake news - a common endeavour” of the plenary meeting of the Club of Venice co-organised in Vilnius by the Club of Venice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Lithuanian Government, Communication and Cultural Diplomacy Department,

in line with the principles subscribed by the London Charter of 17 March 2017, which stressed the need for reinforced cooperation to safeguard objective communication values, assure impartiality and promote transparency, conscious of the challenging scenario for public communication generated by the new digital landscape, and in particular:

- that the digital media operates under minimal regulatory or self-regulatory frameworks
- that, in absence of adequate monitoring and analysis mechanisms and without a proper trans-national and inter-institutional cooperation, the information provision can be significantly hampered by the vulnerability of media technology and the distorted use of digital interactive networks and platforms
- of the risks that disinformation and digital propaganda can increasingly breach and destabilise the political and information environments in the European Union and its member states, thus generating misperceptions in the public opinion
- of the need for building resilience capacity through an intense and continuous cooperative approach, creating and reinforcing ties with civil society and news organizations and industries,
- welcome the recent efforts of the EU institutions and its member states to explore grounds for common strategies, in the light of the international dimension of the phenomenon, with the view to defend citizens’ right to quality information
- confirm their commitment to cooperating in this field, multiplying their efforts and seeking synergies in countering disinformation and fake news and enhancing capacity to communicate effectively about common policies and values
- stress the need for an objective and balanced approach that safeguards the freedom of expression and media pluralism and fosters citizens’ credibility in the public authorities, continuing to engage in communication activities liaising with all sectors of society
- agree that the only effective way to increasing European societies’ resilience to disinformation is by strengthening structured cross-border and cross-sector cooperation among governmental and institutional stakeholders, with communicators playing a key role

- acknowledge the importance of strategic communications in strengthening resilience of our societies and stress the need to address hostile influences, increasing their efforts to address disinformation threats by constant bolstering of capacities and capabilities to counter them shared with the public
- recognise the progress in cooperation among the EU, NATO and other international organisations, based on shared values, in exchanging knowledge and understanding of hostile information activities, with a view to enabling more effective communications strategies to tackle this challenge
- agree on:
  - » building on the work of the EEAS East Stratcom Task Force and on the multi-dimensional approach recommended in the report of the High-Level Expert Group on fake news adopted on 12 March 2018 and in the communication on tackling disinformation on line, adopted by the European Commission on 25 April 2018
  - » enhancing the transparency of online news
  - » cooperating in the promotion and enhancement of media and information literacy
  - » developing tools of digital citizenship by empowering users and journalists to tackle disinformation and foster a positive engagement
  - » safeguard the diversity, independence and sustainability of the European news media ecosystem, also by continuing to cooperate with the EU initiatives in this field
  - » promoting continued research on the impact of disinformation in Europe, especially by developing platforms for monitoring social streams, undertaking source-checking and content provenance and forensically analyse images and videos, in line with data protection, and exchanging results (the creation of a network of independent European Centres for research on disinformation could be an enriching powerful initiative in this regard)
  - » continuing to explore cross-collaboration in training activities, visits' programmes and on line interconnections
  - » developing parameters to help measure each country's and competent organizations capacity in terms of overall resilience to disinformation, in order to elaborate a comparative map to facilitate the identification of imbalances and priority actions
  - » continuing to use the Club of Venice network as a permanent platform for joint analysis of strategic communication capacities and further reflection on common communication initiatives.

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## Vilnius Charter on Capacity building Shaping professionalism in communication

Plenary meeting - Vilnius, 7-8 June 2018

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Communication directors and senior communication specialists from the EU Member States, institutions and candidate countries, convened to the session “Capacity/Capability Building and implementation of Nudge theories” of the plenary meeting of the Club of Venice, recalling the principles shared in the Club of Venice position paper on Capacity Building adopted in the workshop held in Brussels in the premises of the European Parliament on 15 October 2009, conscious of the need to adapt communication expertise and communication management to new strategies, new planning approaches and methods and the new digital communication and media landscape, conscious of the need to maintain a close link between capability development and human development, and to base capacity building on firm principles such as ethics, legitimacy, credibility and investments in transparency, leadership skills and professional growth, conscious of the volatility of digital platforms, and the complex social change that network technologies are both driving and reflecting, as a follow-up to discussion at the Club plenary meetings held respectively in Malta and Venice on 18-19 May and 23-24 November 2017, having due regard to the key findings of The Leaders’ Report (WPP Government & Public Sector Practice), first global study into government communication presented in Davos in January 2017, which gave precise indications on how governments should better connect with their citizens in today’s increasingly polarised world, having due regard to the risk of a significant decline in citizens’ trust in public authorities, poor consideration for the “human factor” in a globalized world and uneven technological development detected by recent public opinion surveys, having due regard to the London Charter of the Club, the Tallinn Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment, and the Paris Declaration of the Open Government Partnership, which point to the need for open, engaging, digitally-enabled governments that can create trusting relationships with citizens, confirm their commitment to strengthening cooperation among Member States, institutions and civil society organisations in a multi-dimensional scheme, based on:

- the recognition of communication as one of the key levers of public policy delivery
- focused efforts to increase the leadership and influence of the government communications profession across Europe
- the identification of a strong connection between policy development and realistic two-way communication strategies capable of assuring the desired outreach
- seeking out and understanding what citizens’ expectations are for more responsive government services - and the role that government communication can play in improving access to services and their quality

- the acknowledgment that the Open Government are core principles and inspiring values in the development of capacity/capability building strategies
- investing in national and cross-border training opportunities and sharing of international best practice to facilitate the swift adaptation of communication skills to the evolving digital environment and its challenges, thus increasing room for flexibility and motivation to behavioural changes
- developing sustainable synergies and reducing duplications in applied research, media monitoring, sentiment analysis and social media listening and amplification
- developing adequate platforms serving as knowledge hubs to facilitate best practice sharing on strategies to counter digital disinformation
- drawing inspiration from existing national communication plans and nudging models, to identify the capabilities needed by the organisation and the most appropriate instruments to strengthen and measure effectiveness
- exploring ground for a multi-disciplinary integrated approach, setting up an ad hoc Capacity Building permanent forum/working group facilitated by the Club of Venice, including interested government communication specialists, EU institutions' officials and external experts.



## Action Plan on synergies between public communication and the media sector

Session on the future of the media landscape in Europe, Venice, 6 December 2019

### Guiding principles

- Vilnius Charter of 8 June 2018 on societal resilience to disinformation and propaganda in a challenging digital landscape
- London Charter of 17 March 2017 on the Strategic Communication Challenges for Europe

### Strategic routes

- Following the guiding principles, we promote, facilitate and strengthen cooperation between EU Member States and Institutions in disseminating objective communication values, assuring impartiality and enhancing transparency
- We advocate independent media as an important pillar of any democratic system by facilitating its sustainability, contributing to the development of a culture of respect of press freedom and to providing a safe environment to produce quality journalism
- We welcome investigative journalism and strategies to safeguard freedom of expression and media pluralism and foster citizens' participation in the public debate through both digital and analogical platforms
- We encourage the exchange of feedback on the current challenges and on citizens' exposure to hybrid threats. We maintain focus on countering disinformation, propaganda and fake news as a common endeavour (cooperation with EEAS, IPCR and NATO)

### Actions

- The Club will endeavour to facilitate synergies and cross-cooperation in:
  - » the strategic approach in promoting media literacy, exploring cross-training opportunities and deepening thematic research through joint initiatives (such as projects carried out by schools of journalism and public communication)
  - » mapping media trends and digital media regulatory and self-regulatory frameworks
  - » fostering exchanges on and analysis of media monitoring trends and techniques
  - » exploring ground for cooperation with universities and media observatories, media organizations and international agencies and platforms (EURACTIV Foundation, ICMPD, OECD, DEMSOC, SEECOM, ESCN, KAS and SEEMO)
  - » pursuing the organization of thematic seminars focused on cooperation between public communication and media and pro-actively involving the Club ad hoc experts' working group on capacity/capability building

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## Memo for Action

### Communication and open governance in a time of crisis

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The workshop on “Communication and Open Governance in a Time of Crisis” co-organized by the Club of Venice, Open Governance for Europe, The Democratic Society, the Open Government Partnership, the Herbert Simon Society and the OECD on 18 March 2021 convened senior government communications professionals from across Europe, with experts from international organisations and bodies, civil society and academia, to share, learn, and develop new understanding and skills in civic participation, transparency and accountability through communication toward stronger government policies and services in a time of crisis.

As European governments and institutions work to address the complex crises posed by climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a crucial common challenge to create and improve the citizens’ confidence in public authorities and the collective societal resilience necessary to not only overcome crises, but also to pave the way for more coordination and cooperation among all actors.

The following memo takes stock of lessons learned during the workshop and outlines a set of common principles, objectives, opportunities, and challenges for future learning, innovation, and cooperation around communication and open governance in Europe.

#### Crisis response, recovery, resilience and communication

- Build on lessons from the pandemic, setting up comprehensive, structured plans and adequate strategies to communicate resilient actions timely and collectively. Set up permanent structures for open communication, which can help manage crises more efficiently and effectively (one time interventions are not enough; focus needs to be on long-term enabling environment);
- Apply the open government principles of participation, transparency, and accountability when shaping communication methodologies. Public trust must be earned and maintained through coherent, effective, sustainable and equitable policies and fueled by honest, ethical, and inclusive public communication;
- Integrate strategic communication in all crisis management plans as a pre-requisite for a professional service rendered to society. Adopt communication methods and instruments to ensure permanent liaising with citizens, facilitating interaction in resilience building and recovery and a collaborative dialogue with a view to sustainable contingency measures and, when appropriate, reforms; multiply efforts to optimize outreach;
- Set up and update reliable and realistic road maps/action plans accessible to all audiences, using a clear and trustworthy language;
- Adopt coordinated approaches to tackle mis- and disinformation holistically. Cooperation among

governments, institutions and international specialists in the exchange of key information is crucial to detect and deter these threats timely and radically, since they cannot be countered through contingent technical solutions alone;

- Capacity building and, in particular, investing on public education is crucial. Public authorities and citizens need to:
  - » increasingly develop a better understanding of misinformation and disinformation, in order to navigate, monitor and analyse information and media ecosystems on and offline and identify and disseminate reliable information;
  - » engage in promoting communication and media literacy;
  - » develop capacities for a pro-active and constructive dialogue through the social media and contribute to the development of collaborative web networks (co-creation).

#### New perspectives and routes for cooperation and partnerships

- Reduce defensive decision-making and create positive error cultures, adopting the appropriate behavioural approaches;
- Monitor and analyse citizens’ behavioral trends. Be ready to recognize shortfalls and to adapt management culture as needed; train governmental and institutional officials and their management in this field, through the involvement of psychologists and other specialists from the scientific - cognitive - behavioral studies communities;
- Invest in improving capacities to analyse citizens’ opinions and attitudes; enhance and diversify polling instruments;
- Involve and engage professionals, academics and civil society representatives in multi-annual training planning, capitalizing on their expertise in the field. Inclusiveness in this context will enable communicators to adapt their approach to the national, regional and local environment as rapidly and efficiently as needed;
- For governments, institutions and international organisations: invest more in long-term, systematic synergetic efforts and activities for awareness raising and education purposes;
- Maximize synergies and complementarity between the actions of the Club of Venice and international partners engaged in open governance and committed to the principles of sound management, transparency, accountability and partnership work;
- Explore the possibilities to strengthen work in partnership, drawing inspiration from win-win experiences such as the multi-annual agreements created in the framework of the inter-institutional Declaration “Communicating Europe in Partnership” of 22.10.2008;
- Seize the opportunity of the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe to highlight and promote the need for a strong open government culture and the blend between representative and participative democracy.

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## Mandate of the ad hoc working group on resilience vs hybrid threats

2021

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### Overview

The Club of Venice 'ad hoc working group of communication experts in resilience building vs hybrid threats' was convened for the first time on Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> September 2021 online. The purpose of the meeting was to constitute the working group and set the terms of reference for its activity over the coming year, including the subject and scope of its work.

The meeting gave participants – of which there were over 30 representatives from EU Member States, international institutions and civil society – an opportunity to shape a programme of activity for the working group, by answering two simple questions: What should the working group do?; and, How should it do it?

Of a list of 12 potential topics which the working group could discuss, 70 per cent of participants stated that the proliferation of disinformation, misinformation, fake news and conspiracy theories was one of the topics which is of most concern to them. Meanwhile, 35 per cent stated that the spread of hate speech online and through the media was of concern and 30 per cent the impact of Artificial Intelligence and Cyber-security on public communication.

The large majority of participants stated that to better understand and address these threats, they would like to have the opportunity to exchange key analytical data and statistics (39 per cent), share information, insights and best practice (74 per cent), and learn through training activities.

The priority list of potential topics may be updated/reviewed on a semi-annual basis, depending on contingencies.

### Programme

To meet the needs and expectations of the members of the working group, as shared during the first working group meeting, we propose a six-month programme of activity – from October 2021 to March 2022 – which will give members the opportunity to share with one another and learn from experts and practitioners from government, industry (e.g. internet companies), the private sector and civil society.

To do this, we will organise a 'Spotlight' event which will be hosted once a month online, for 45 minutes each time, to give the platform to members and/or invited guests to share their analysis and insights, talk about upcoming conferences, and showcase best practices, including their tools, products, approaches, projects, programmes and campaigns. This will be done through visual case study-based presentations which bring to life what has worked and why, and lessons learned.

### Coordination

The working group will report to the Steering Group of the Club as requested, through the Secretary-General of the Club.

It will be composed of governmental and institutions communicators, as well as representatives from international organisations, academics and civil society specialists who will contribute on a voluntary basis, acting in line with the Club governance principles and values enshrined in the Club constitutional principles and Charters. Each selected priority topic will be coordinated by a leading team of three-four communication specialists.

### Target deadlines

- 3 December 2021: outline of the working group mid-term programme at the margin of the Friday session of the Club of Venice plenary;
- March 2022: work in progress, presented at one of the thematic sessions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Stratcom seminar in London

### Monitoring and tracking the working group activity

General information, background papers, case studies, reports and other relevant information on the working party agenda will be stored in the secured web platform Venicenet.

The Steering Group of the Club may also decide, as appropriate, to publish contributions on the working group's activity in the Club public communications review Convergences and in its other future publications.







**“We sustain a fundamental democratic duty.  
 We strive to help the public understand  
 what their Government or European institution  
 is doing for them - and in their name.  
 At the same time, we strive to help our colleagues  
 in Governments understand the public’s reaction,  
 and its concerns...  
 ...our unique fellowship has been forged  
 by the very nature of our business.”**

Mike Granatt



Club of Venice 13 - 15 April 2005  
 The Hague, The Netherlands.



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