

# convergences

Public communication in Europe | Communication publique en Europe



## FOCUS ON

### Venice plenary, December 2024

Post-EU elections cooperation on communicating Europe,  
Countering disinformation on public health and climate change,  
Digital trends and AI impact on governmental communication

### Dublin plenary, June 2024

Digital innovation, AI and storytelling, measuring audiences' sentiment,  
Strengthening communications infrastructures, narratives on climate changes,  
lessons learned from the European elections communication campaign

### Strasbourg Venice Club / Cap' Com seminar, May 2024

Spotlight on disinformation challenges and media literacy

### Brdo seminar, April 2024

Tackling disinformation threats and communicating the EU enlargement

### London 7th Stratcom seminar, March 2024

Recipes to optimise strategic communication:  
suggested models for European governments and institutions,  
the role of government communication  
in protecting democracies and their citizens

### Venice plenary, November 2023

The future of public communication:  
framing challenges and turbulences, building resiliencies,  
investing in capacity building and digital infrastructures



Club of Venice | Club de Venise



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Claus Hörr, in memoriam

# Claus

In deep sorrow and sadness the Club of Venice is mourning our friend and colleague Claus Hörr, communication director at the Federal Chancellery of Austria, who passed away unexpectedly far too early.

Claus and I met first in January 2005 in Istanbul. He had just been appointed to his functions and participated in his first Club meeting. It was the beginning of a friendship which lasted almost twenty years. Claus immediately took keen interest in the Club's work and, as excellent communication professional, not only always gave his most valuable advice but also helped shaping and defining the Club meetings' agendas. We all appreciated particularly his critical spirit full of humour which contributed to streamline our debates concentrating on the essentials. Claus rapidly became a pillar of the Club, one of the most active and influential members of our Steering Committee in these two decades, assisting and supporting our Secretary-General Vincenzo, moderating many meetings and, in addition, also hosting plenaries in Vienna in 2007 and 2015 as well as a series of Club workshops.

Our friendship was not limited to the meeting room. We established the tradition to continue around a glass of beer or pinot grigio, to have interesting discussions, having fun and to enjoy life. I shall never forget the good time we had in Venice in our favourite bar near San Marco and the wonderful moments walking across the empty piazza in the middle of the night.

Claus perfectly represented the spirit of the Club of Venice and gave an example for its raison d'être: Exchange experience at high professional level, learn from each other, anticipate new challenges and build cooperation and partnership. But Claus also showed us that continuing our discussions after the meeting even more informally was an integral part of the magic and the success of our Club. In this way colleagues became friends and our network became even closer and stronger.

Lieber Claus, Dear Claus, we miss you terribly. Your wonderful person will remain close to our hearts and your example will continue to inspire and guide the Club of Venice.

Hans Brunmayr



# Mais de quoi la communication publique est-elle le nom ?

Par Philippe Caroyez et Vincenzo Le Voci

*En respectueux hommage à notre ami et collègue Claus Hörr, trop tôt et trop vite disparu, nous avons voulu ces « remarques » critiques, nourries de nos expériences, réflexions et échanges sur nos activités, pratiques et métiers et de notre attachement au service public.*

*A l'image de Claus, engagé, passionné et toujours joyeux.*

**« Et ceux qu'on voyait danser étaient jugés fous par ceux qui ne pouvaient entendre la musique »  
Attribué<sup>1</sup> à Fr. Nietzsche**

Il y a, à coup sûr, communication *publique* et « communication publique »<sup>2</sup>.

A l'Université de Laval (Canada), peut-être la seule à proposer aujourd'hui un baccalauréat en communication publique, la communication *publique* est définie comme « l'ensemble des phénomènes de production, de traitement et de diffusion des discours publics relatifs aux débats et enjeux publics. Ces discours sont non seulement le fait des médias, mais aussi des institutions, entreprises, mouvements et groupes qui interviennent sur la place publique »<sup>3</sup>.

Dans ses publications académiques « *Etudes de communication publique* »<sup>4</sup>, alors qu'elle collabore entre autres avec la Sorbonne et l'Université libre de Bruxelles, elle insiste d'ailleurs « (...) particulièrement à l'intention [des] lecteurs-trices européen-ne-s, [sur le fait] que la communication publique (...) ne se limite pas à la communication des institutions publiques, mais désigne plus largement l'ensemble des discours publics relatifs aux affaires ou aux enjeux publics, quelles que soient leur origine (institutions, entreprises, groupes, individus) et leur visée (persuasion, information, éducation, divertissement, etc.). »<sup>5</sup>

La « communication publique » que pratiquent nos services, serait donc à considérer comme une partie de LA communication *publique* ; ou, encore, la communication *publique* serait pratiquée par plus d'un corps social, celle que nous pratiquons ayant la particularité d'être le fait des institutions publiques.

Nous souscrivons bien sûr à cela, tant du point de vue de la pédagogie (la formation académique des futurs

communicateurs publics ou la formation continue de ceux qui le sont devenus) que de celui - déterminant - qui voit la « communication publique » et sa pratique comme creuset multidisciplinaire et nourrie de diverses sources au service de l'autorité publique.

La chose est établie de longue date, on parle aussi de « communication sociale », mais le développement (d'ailleurs récent) de la communication *publique* des institutions publiques en « communication publique », avec son institutionnalisation et sa professionnalisation, peut nous conduire à le négliger, alors que c'est une dimension consubstantielle nécessaire à son analyse et à sa compréhension.

Outre qu'elle marque son histoire, elle imprègne sa réalité. Et ainsi, la recherche progressive et la constitution d'une *identité* (institutionnelle, organique et professionnelle) et d'une *spécificité créée* ne peuvent pas et ne doivent pas masquer l'hybridité de ce qu'elle recouvre.

La « communication publique » « (...) est isomorphe aux organisations publiques, tout en étant plus proche des logiques managériales et de professionnalisation »<sup>6</sup>.

Elle navigue entre la communication politique, gouvernementale et d'intérêt public ou général ; elle chavire, parfois, entre politique et administration.

Sa proximité avec le journalisme, la presse et les médias n'est plus à souligner.

Il en est de même avec les techniques de publicité *commerciales*, les agences prestataires et leur monde.

Elle ne bénéficie toujours pas (complètement) d'une importance relative suffisante et d'une reconnaissance académique qui en ferait une formation diplômante.

Le métier de « communicateur public »<sup>7</sup>, toujours mis en avant, relève plus d'un rôle, d'une fonction ou d'un statut qu'il ne concerne – au sens propre – une profession<sup>8</sup> ; et si cet usage générique est nécessaire, il ne recouvre pas moins pour autant une multitude de métiers et professions... qui s'hybrident en s'appliquant tant à la fonction publique qu'à l'exercice de sa communication. Nous ajouterons que la relative jeunesse du métier et des conditions de son apparition et de ses évolutions, elle-même dans des services relativement récents et en constant développement, induit une hybridation des statuts

1 Apparemment de manière répétée mais erronée. Il s'agirait d'un proverbe ancien.

2 Par convention, nous noterons : communication publique au sens large et « communication publique » (comme syntagme nominal) au sens de nos activités professionnelles.

3 <https://www.flsh.ulaval.ca/communication/recherche/publications/etudes-de-communication-publique>

4 <https://www.flsh.ulaval.ca/communication/recherche/publications/etudes-de-communication-publique>

5 C'est nous qui soulignons.

6 Bessières D. L'hybridité : une composante ancienne mais aujourd'hui démultipliée de la communication publique. Recherches en communication, n°47. Novembre 2018, pp. 5-21.

7 Aussi appelé « communicant public » ou, plus anciennement, « fonctionnaire d'information ».

8 « Une profession se professe alors qu'un métier se pratique (...) ». Entretien avec Jacques Marpeau, docteur en sciences de l'éducation. Blog Le Café pédagogique.



professionnels (avec généralement plus d'agents contractuels que de fonctionnaires statutaires) et, conséquemment, des modalités de leurs recrutements (avec généralement plus d'engagements *ad hoc* que sur concours)<sup>9</sup>.

Nos services mêmes sont multiscalaires, de l'état central et ses institutions aux différents niveaux de pouvoir (région, ville et autres)... au point de même fonder une « communication publique (et) territoriale ». Ils sont aussi polymorphes : par leur statut, leur position dans (l'organigramme de) l'appareil d'état et institutionnel, par le cadre réglementaire ou légal qui les régit et contraint (ou pas), par les missions qui leur sont assignées et confiées et qu'ils remplissent avec des effectifs et des budgets souvent incomparables... mais surtout par la nature de leurs statut et missions dans les registres (plus ou moins appuyés) de l'imperméabilité par rapport à la politique partisane, de la démarcation claire entre les communications d'intérêt général, de service public, gouvernementale et politique, du rejet de la propagande et des techniques de manipulation, de la neutralité et du caractère universel du service public.

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Lorsque ce professeur d'université demandait à ses étudiants à quand remontent les origines du droit, il s'en trouvait toujours quelques-uns qui s'évertuaient à proposer un acte fondateur ou, si pas une date, au moins un règne. Alors que la réponse, précisée dans le syllabus (et rappelée avec malice en chaire) était : « les origines du droit remontent à la nuit des temps » !

Si la « communication publique » devait être ce qui émane d'une autorité (nous y reviendrons), nous pourrions être tentés par la même datation...<sup>10</sup>.

Plusieurs s'y sont toutefois risqués, bien sûr pour des temps plus modernes : 1939<sup>11</sup> ou 1946<sup>12</sup> au Royaume uni<sup>13</sup> ; 1949 en Allemagne (fédérale)<sup>14</sup> ; 1940 ou 60-61 en Belgique<sup>15</sup> ou de 1950 à 1960 au Congo belge ; aux Pays-Bas, la « communication publique » telle qu'elle est aujourd'hui remonterait directement

10 On pourra lire avec délice et étonnement, pour nous surprendre sur le caractère ancien de nos préoccupations « modernes » et leur côté universel, l'intéressant article de Claudia Moatti. *La communication publique écrite à Rome, sous la République et le Haut Empire*. In *Rome et l'État moderne européen*. Collection de l'École Française de Rome. Année 2007, n°377, pp. 217-250. Dans le registre de la communication publique non-verbale, en des temps plus lointains, mais pas sans rappeler une part de nos activités événementielles de commémoration, on lira de Christian Jeunesse. *Pierres dressées et mâts-totem : le pilier comme vecteur de communication publique dans les sociétés pré-littéraires*. In Collectif. *Signes et communication dans les civilisations de la parole*. Édition électronique du CTHS (Actes des congrès des sociétés historiques et scientifiques), Paris, 2016, pp. 88-97.

11 "The Ministry of Information (MOI) came into existence on Sept. 4, 1939, the day after Britain's declaration of war on Germany". British Government Information and Propaganda: Collections at the British Library and Elsewhere. British Library, Authored by Jennie Grimshaw.

12 "Central Office of Information was established in 1946 after the demise of the wartime Ministry of Information, when individual government departments resumed responsibility for information policy" <https://web.archive.org/web/20100619203002/http://coi.gov.uk/aboutcoi.php>

13 McKenna. *100 Years of Government Communication*. HM Government (Ed.), Open Government Licence, 2018. 155 pages.

14 Le Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, en abrégé Bundespresseamt, a été créé par Konrad Adenauer le 16 septembre 1949, le lendemain de son élection à la Chancellerie. Ses fondements constitutionnels figurent dans la *Grundgesetz* (Loi fondamentale) du 23 mai 1949.

15 En 1940, l'Office belge d'information et de documentation (Inbel) est créé comme bureau d'information, chargé de la diffusion des informations sur la Belgique dans les territoires non-occupés. Après la guerre, l'organisation est transférée au Congo belge, préfigurant la création, en 1950, du Centre d'information et de documentation du Congo belge (CID). En 1955, ce CID est devenu l'Office de l'information et des relations publiques pour le Congo belge et le Ruanda-Urundi (Inforcongo). Cette même année, la Sous-Commission pour la coordination des campagnes de publicité et de propagande belge à l'étranger est créée par le Comité économique interministériel ; elle est chargée de la promotion de la Belgique à l'étranger et de la participation à des bourses et des expositions. En 1960, la Sous-Commission et Inforcongo sont transformés en asbl : l'Office belge d'information et de documentation (Inbel), avec le statut d'institution d'utilité publique. Elle est chargée à la fois de l'information en Belgique et de fournir des informations sur la Belgique à l'étranger. Du point de vue institutionnel, Inbel n'échappe pas à la réforme de la structure fédérale de l'État belge et est rebaptisé Service fédéral d'information (SFI) en 1994. [https://archives.africamuseum.be/agents/corporate\\_entities/225](https://archives.africamuseum.be/agents/corporate_entities/225) Le SFI a été dissout le 1er avril 2003 et ses activités ont été reprises par la Direction générale Communication externe au sein du Service public fédéral Chancellerie du Premier ministre.

9 C'est un élément qui a joué un rôle dans la constitution des associations professionnelles et la "quête de la professionnalisation". C'est aussi une situation à prendre en compte lorsqu'il peut être question de "sensibilité" à l'intervention (du) politique.



au 17<sup>e</sup> siècle et serait liée au commerce maritime<sup>16</sup>, on peut aussi avec eux avancer 1920, 1934 ou les effets de la démocratisation en Europe<sup>17</sup> ; fin des années 1980 en France (à propos de qui notre consœur Dominique Mégard introduit ainsi en 2017 l'un de ses livres : « *La communication publique reste, quelque 30 ans après ses débuts, largement méconnue (...)* »<sup>18</sup> ... mais que d'autres font remonter 10 ans en arrière (dans l'ouvrage collectif publié en 2008 au titre éclairant : « *Bleu, blanc, pub : trente ans de communication gouvernementale en France* »<sup>19</sup>)<sup>20</sup> ; ...

Nous ne parlerons, bien sûr, pas du *Minitrue* (« Ministry of Truth ») imaginé par George Orwell, en « 1984 »... critique acerbe et intelligente de la propagande sur le modèle du ministère britannique de l'information<sup>21</sup>...

Nous pourrions multiplier les situations et les références, voir aussi comment *l'histoire* s'écrit en ce domaine dans les anciennes dictatures européennes (Espagne, Grèce, Portugal et les pays dits de l'Est) ; ce qui importe c'est de souligner ce qui s'y lit plus qu'en filigrane.

Un lien évident avec des situations historiques *particulières* et comme une réponse *politique et institutionnelle* (dans l'action publique et la création d'organes publics) de l'autorité publique gouvernementale à ces situations : la guerre (première ou deuxième, la neutralité en temps de guerre<sup>22</sup> ou la reconstruction institutionnelle d'après la Seconde Guerre<sup>23</sup>), la colonisation et la décolonisation, la démocratisation (en Europe et la chute du mur de Berlin)...

Un lien, cette fois plus subtil, avec l'évolution sociopolitique de nos sociétés : le « *welfare state* », la pratique des consultations réglementaires et des concertations, les crises et

les changements qu'elles induisent, les transformations dans la relation des autorités avec les citoyens et les attentes de ceux-ci, une certaine moralisation de la politique, en parallèle avec une modernisation des administrations publiques et de leurs pratiques, la *bonne gouvernance* et la recherche de l'efficacité, un souhait de démocratie plus participative... mais aussi, au fil du temps, la « *société des loisirs et du spectacle* », le développement des médias (de masse), l'évolution de la presse et des médias publics et sociaux...

Nous devons aussi à la vérité de dire que la communication et son institutionnalisation en organes et services a été une composante de cette modernisation autant qu'elle a contribué à en faire la promotion, pour relégitimer l'administration publique, sujette à de fréquentes et justifiées critiques sur sa relation aux citoyens, son peu d'accessibilité et une certaine absence d'efficacité.

Ainsi faut-il voir la naissance de nos services modernes non comme une évolution de l'administration publique, dont ils seraient une *émanation en son sein*, mais comme – par « *débordement* »<sup>24</sup> – le résultat (voulu par le politique) d'un processus d'institutionnalisation de la « *communication publique* » qui se traduit par l'émergence de structures, placées sous l'autorité gouvernementale et chargées, principalement, de l'information sur l'activité gouvernementale, de l'information du gouvernement (études d'opinion, agenda...) et/ou d'activités événementielles de promotion, protocolaires ou commémoratives pouvant mettre en avant le gouvernement et ses membres.

Nous devons voir la création de nos services actuels et leur(s) évolution(s) dans ce contexte et donc passant par des phases successives de développement... non encore achevé !

Il n'est pas nécessaire de parler de l'évolution des techniques et supports de diffusion, qui accompagnent ces développements autant qu'elle les entraîne parfois ou les rend possibles.

Pensons plutôt à la transformation de la nature même des activités en cause depuis la Seconde Guerre mondiale (ou plus

16 "The origins of government communication in Netherlands, as we know it today, can be found in the seventeenth century". Katus J. Government communication: development, functions and principles. In Government Communication in the Netherlands, page 21. Sdu Uitgevers, The Hague, 2000.

17 Katus J. Op. cit, page 22 : "In 1920, a former journalist was appointed press officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs", " (...) a Government Press Service was set up in 1934"

18 Mégard D. La communication publique et territoriale. Dunod, 2017, page 7 et 4<sup>e</sup> de couverture.

19 "Bleu, blanc, pub : trente ans de communication gouvernementale en France". Ouvrage collectif sous la direction de Jean-Marc Benoit et Jessica Scale. Editions du Cherche midi, Paris 2008. 221 pages.

20 On pourrait aussi retenir 1963 avec "la création du Service de liaison interministérielle pour l'information (SLII) rattaché au ministère de l'Information. Ses missions : coordonner l'information et expliquer l'action gouvernementale. (Loi de finances rectificative no 63-778 du 31 juillet 1963)". Wikipédia, histoire du Service d'information du gouvernement (SIG, France).

21 Le "Moi" (Ministry of Information), qui en 1939 avait installé son quartier général dans l'imposant Senate House de l'Université de Londres ... le temps de l'historique "KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON".

22 Cas, par exemple, des Pays-Bas lors de la première guerre mondiale.

23 Cas de l'Allemagne fédérale.

24 Jacques Gerstlé, dans la communication politique en France, voit la *communication gouvernementale* du Président, du Premier ministre et des ministres "déborder" en un processus d'institutionnalisation de la communication publique qui se traduit par l'émergence de structures, diverses au fil du temps jusqu'au SIG actuel, placé sous l'autorité gouvernementale et chargé tant de l'information sur l'activité gouvernementale que de l'information du gouvernement. Tout en indiquant qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une situation isolée, il y note un risque de communication gouvernementale plus politique (notamment par la persuasion) qu'institutionnelle ou éducative et d'exploitation individuelle par les décideurs des bénéfices obtenus grâce à la mise en jeu de ressources collectives. Gerstlé J. *La communication politique*. Armand Colin (Ed.), collection Compact civis. Paris, 2004. 297 pages. Chapitre 5. *La communication, l'information et l'exercice du pouvoir*, pp. 175-210.



tard pour certains pays) : propagande (assumée), service de presse (communiqué et conférence de presse) et de revue de presse, relations publiques (principalement avec les journalistes ou dans un contexte diplomatique), rédaction de documents pour diffusion promotionnelle, réalisation et diffusion de films documentaires et d'expositions, publications et diffusion de documents administratifs, documentation publique, photothèque et filmothèque, diffusion d'informations d'intérêt général, diffusion à la presse et aux mandataires publics des décisions des autorités publiques, constitution de bases de données, guichet unique d'information (boîte postale et/ou centre d'information public et/ou call center), mise à disposition de bases de données et publication d'ouvrages de référence (comme les répertoires des administrations publiques), organisation de campagnes d'information à grande échelle (principalement dans la presse et les médias audiovisuels), large diffusion de brochures et folders thématiques, activités événementielles, site(s) internet, plateforme électronique publique, chatbot...

Au-delà de ce qui pourrait paraître anecdotique, on peut le noter dans l'évolution de la dénomination de certains de nos services<sup>25</sup>, que nous pouvons voir comme les phases de « cristallisation » successives de leur institutionnalisation, par exemple : Office d'information et de documentation (INBEL), suivi du Service fédéral d'information (SFI, dissout en 2003) pour devenir Direction générale Communication externe, en Belgique ; du Service d'information et de diffusion (SID) au Service d'information du gouvernement (SIG) en France ; du Central Office of Information (COI, dissout fin 2011) au Government Communication Service (GCS, qui se présente comme une communauté de professionnels), au Royaume-Uni ; du Ministère des Médias (« Ministry of Mass Media », dans la version en anglais) au Secrétariat général de la communication et de l'information (« communication and media », dans la version en anglais), en Grèce ; ...

Le « cas » allemand est singulier dans la mesure où le Bundespresseamt<sup>26</sup> écrit de lui-même que « La forme abrégée courante de l'Office de presse et d'information du gouvernement fédéral, à savoir « l'Office de presse fédéral », est trompeuse car l'Office de presse fédéral n'est pas un organisme qui réglemente de quelque façon que ce soit la presse, voire la contrôle ».

Nous noterons, toutefois, que beaucoup restent dédiés à l'information (versus la communication [publique]<sup>27</sup>, et à la presse et aux médias (bien sûr sans les contrôler<sup>28</sup> !).

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Depuis plus de 30 ans, nos services bénéficient, tout en y contribuant, de l'ouverture de l'administration<sup>29</sup> et de ce qu'elle a engendré dans les esprits, les pratiques et la législation, selon les cas : gouvernance publique et cadre de valeurs éthiques et déontologiques, recherche d'efficacité (simplification administrative, évaluation des politiques publiques), transparence, accès aux documents administratifs, obligations de publicités passives et actives, politique (parfois contestable) du citoyen « client » ou « utilisateur des services publics », motivation des actes administratifs, installation d'ombudsmans, traitement et registre des plaintes... renforcement et modernisation des services d'information et de communication, recours massif aux technologies de l'information...

Dans ce cadre de modernisation des services publics et de développement de nos services, il n'est pas inutile de s'attarder sur la moralisation intervenue de la vie politique. Durant trop longtemps, jusqu'au années 1980 et plus parfois, la classe politique a constitué un obstacle et, donc, un frein à la constitution de services d'information et de communication dégagés de son emprise. Il ne s'agit bien sûr pas de concevoir qu'un service d'information et de communication puisse être totalement indépendant du mandataire politique qui en a l'attribution dans ses compétences et des mandataires politiques qui exercent un contrôle légitime sur lui. Mais, il s'agit de garantir dans la législation et les faits que le rôle de chacun et la relation soient précisés et clairement délimités, sans interventionnisme et sans pression ou sollicitation partisans... sans « faiblesse », aussi, de nos services à ces égards.

Il n'est malheureusement pas acquis qu'il en soit toujours ainsi, malgré les textes et les déclarations de principe ; pensons aux situations encore rencontrées où des cadres d'un service d'information et de communication changent en fonction du mandataire politique en charge (ministre, maire...), pensons à l'attitude parfois questionnable du porte-parole du mandataire politique envers nos services et plus généralement à la relation

25 "Les services d'information gouvernementaux de l'union européenne. Missions et organisation". Brochure bilingue (français-anglais) du Club de Venise, Octobre 2000. Publication du Service d'information du gouvernement, Paris. 108 pages.

26 <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/bundesregierung/geschichte-und-aufgaben-454036>

27 Dominique Sellier faisait déjà ce constat en 2006, en se fondant sur l'analyse comparée des services membres du Club de Venise, dans son ouvrage *La communication gouvernementale en Europe. Analyse comparative*. Paris, Éd. L'Harmattan, coll. Inter-National, 2006, 102 pages.

28 Si nous nous en tenons à nos démocraties modernes ... et aux temps actuels.

29 La fameuse "openbaarheid van bestuur" aux Pays-Bas.



cabinet-administration qui n'est pas toujours exempt de flou particulièrement en matière de communication, pensons simplement à la communication interne qui est parfois déficiente, à l'absence habituelle d'intégration de la dimension informative dans la prise des décisions, à l'absence fréquente de politique générale concertée et coordonnée en matière d'information et de communication ou à la nouvelle tendance des consultations dites « citoyennes » qui restent souvent sans lendemain...

Nous devons pourtant, en le démontrant, dire que les communicateurs publics ont été dans l'évolution positive des administrations publiques et des services au(x) public(s), si pas exemplaires, du moins remarquables et à l'origine de plus d'une initiative, qui ont pu avoir un rôle moteur et d'entraînement. La liste en est longue - souvent en termes de revendications, heureusement régulièrement en termes d'acquis - pensons à tout ce qui touche à la professionnalisation, de la formation à la définition de profils de métiers, au positionnement et au renforcement des services de communication dans l'organisation et l'accompagnement des décisions et politiques, aux dispositifs législatif et règlementaire qui les fondent ou cadrent leurs actions (des chartes et codes déontologiques aux lois sur l'information des utilisateurs des services publics et la communication des autorités et administrations), à la recherche de l'efficacité et à l'évaluation des actions, à la mise en réseau des fonctionnaires chargés de communication, à la mutualisation de ressources (contrats avec les diffuseurs, call center, guichet unique), au recours précoce aux dites *nouvelles technologies*, à la diffusion et à la mise à disposition de données publiques, à l'accessibilité, à l'inclusion... Bien sûr avec des fortunes diverses dans le temps et selon les pays, mais néanmoins de manière assez répandue.

Les raisons de cette situation, finalement très spécifique et quasi unique<sup>30</sup> peuvent être analysées par celles et ceux qui l'ont vécue. Au-delà de ces 30 ans, à l'échelle d'une cinquantaine d'années, les plus anciennes d'entre nous retiendront - avec autant d'ironie que d'une certaine fierté : l'esprit des pionniers, parce qu'il y avait à définir et à bâtir la *version moderne* de nos services ... et surtout à l'imposer !

Nous avons, certes, bénéficié des effets de la moralisation de la politique et de l'administration et de leur modernisation, certains parlent aussi de « *l'ambiance communicante des années 80* »<sup>31</sup> - qu'il ne faut pas négliger, mais il faut remarquer une certaine ténacité à réussir des communicateurs publics,

comme l'attestent les groupements d'intérêts professionnels (de défense, pour une part, et, plus largement, d'échange) qu'ils ont mis en place et qui restent particulièrement actifs et suivis : Club de Venise (1986), Communication publique (France, 1989), Cap'Com (France, 1988<sup>32</sup>), Associazione Italiana della Comunicazione Pubblica e Istituzionale (1990), Kortom (Belgique néerlandophone, 2000), WBCOM' (Belgique francophone, 2004), SEECOM South East Europe public sector communicators association (2012)...<sup>33</sup>

Et cela révèle ce qui en est sûrement la *raison profonde* et que plusieurs recherches académiques et universitaires viennent corroborer<sup>34</sup>, à savoir (dès les années 1980 et avec persistance) une véritable « *quête de la professionnalisation* », à entendre comme un objectif de performance et de reconnaissance propre, les deux tant pour les acteurs, leurs fonctions et leurs pratiques que pour les services, leurs activités, leur statut et leurs rôles.

C'est aussi une question de distinction. On se souviendra qu'alors la définition de la « communication publique » se faisait quasi toujours *a contrario*, par ce qu'elle n'est pas ou ne veut pas (plus ?) être et ainsi en dessinant en creux ce qu'elle est ou veut être : surtout pas de « journalisme » et encore moins de communication politique, à distance et loin des techniques et pratiques de la communication publicitaire et commerciale, certainement pas de la propagande et rien de bureaucratique<sup>35</sup>.

32 En 1981 se constitue l'association Collectivités locales et communication qui donnera naissance au Forum Cap'Com en 1988, salon annuelle de la communication publique. À partir de 2010, Cap'Com devient le réseau national de la communication publique et territoriale.

33 Comme souvent, nous manquons de vue sur le monde hors Europe. Notons, au moins, le même phénomène outre-Atlantique : Association des communicateurs municipaux du Québec (1978), Forum des responsables des communications du gouvernement du Québec (dès 1988) devenu le Forum des communicateurs gouvernementaux du Québec (2011) ; Government Information Organization (1971) aux États-Unis, devenu National Association of Government Communicators (1976).

34 Brève revue d'articles :

- Bessières D. La quête de professionnalisation des communicateurs publics : entre difficulté et stratégie (pp. 39-52). Revue française de Sciences sociales, n°108 " Les processus de professionnalisation", Octobre-décembre 2009.

- Bessières D. La professionnalisation de la communication publique : des normes de la législation du métier à la constitution d'identité disciplinaire (7 pages). In Actes du XVIIe Congrès de la Société des Sciences de l'information et de la communication. Dijon, 23-25 juin 2010.

- Lasfar A. et Leroux P. L'institutionnalisation des communicateurs publics : vers une légitimation de ce groupe professionnel. In La communication publique en tension, Pyramides n°24. Revue du Centre d'Études et de Recherche en Administration Publique, Université Libre de Bruxelles, octobre 2013, pp. 239-260

- Monseigne A. et Guilhaume G. *La mutation du métier de communicant public*. Revue Communication et organisation, n° 41, 2012, pp. 5 - 11.

35 Au sens non wébérien du terme, nous y reviendrons.

30 Peut-être avec les actions publiques nées dans les domaines de l'environnement et de l'égalité des sexes et genres.

31 Deljarrie B. Aux origines de la communication territoriale. in Revue Les Cahiers. Un an de communication publique et territoriale. N°1. Cap'Com (Ed.), Lyon, 2019. 138 pages.



Un comble quand on se penche sur les origines professionnelles ou la formation de la plupart des « fonctionnaires d'information » d'alors : le journalisme, les agences de publicité, les cabinets politiques, les partis, l'administration elle-même...

Et de plus, à coup sûr, un *mythe agissant* – que nous avons tous admis comme nécessaire et fondateur – qui veut ainsi faire de la « communication publique » un *précipité chimiquement pur*, débarrassé de toutes influences – comme le résultat d'un processus de grande « *transfiguration méliorative* »<sup>36</sup>, alors qu'on peut postuler à l'inverse le fait que la « communication publique » soit née de tous ces éléments et qu'ils ne cessent, à des degrés divers (acceptés ou rejetés, parfois – consciemment ou non – occultés), de la parcourir, de l'affecter et finalement de la constituer.

S'en suit une conception essentiellement d'extraction professionnelle (un modèle idéologique partagé et projeté) en partie fausse, ou à tout le moins partielle et orientée, qui fait de la « communication publique » et de ses acteurs, professionnels et représentants de la profession, la *main tendue* (hautement professionnalisée, nourrie de déontologie et pleinement désintéressée) de l'autorité et de l'administration publiques vers les citoyens administrés. Elle serait ainsi portée par la demande d'informations des citoyens ou leur *besoin* de celle-ci, sans autre intérêt politique que l'*intérêt général* et légitimée par le *citoyen récepteur*<sup>37</sup> lui-même.

Elle se nourrit aussi, il ne faut pas le négliger, de l'engagement sincère et quasi militant de certains de ses acteurs qui le voient comme une action primordiale des services publics et un service essentiel rendu au public, si pas – comme nous avons pu l'écrire déjà – comme une forme d'*humanisme* ou d'*écologie (sociale)*, en leur sens moral – si pas politique<sup>38</sup>.

36 Le sociologue Jacques Le Bohec introduit ce concept qu'il limite toutefois à la « transfiguration méliorative de la propagande en "communication" », in *Les rapports presse-politique*, Paris, L'Harmattan. 1997, p. 52. Sur la logique publicitaire et la « communication publique », autre « transfiguration méliorative » (ou présentée comme telle), on lira avec intérêt : Berthelot-Guiet K. et Ollivier-Yaniv C. « Tu t'es vu quand t'écoutes l'Etat ? ». Réception des campagnes de communication gouvernementale. Appropriation et détournement linguistiques des messages (pp. 155 – 178) in *La confiance*. Revue « Réseaux », JLE Editions, 2001/4 no 108, 226 pages.

37 Nous en débattons plus loin à distance sur la base du « texte référence » de Pierre Zémor.

38 Voir : Caroyez Ph. *Comme un désir de communication publique conversante et de débat public ...* in *Public Communication(s) in Europe*. Club de Venise (Ed.), Bruxelles, 2021, pp. 129 – 138 et Revue Cap'Com, octobre 2022. *Comme un désir de communication publique "conversante"*. <https://www.cap-com.org/actualite/C3%A9s/comme-un-desir-de-communication-publique-conversante> Baechtel A.-C. *La communication publique est un humanisme*. Blog LinkedIn, 11 juin 2019. <https://fr.linkedin.com/pulse/la-communication-publique-est-un-humanisme-anne-catherine-baechtel>

Contre cette conception qualifiée d'« indigène », une nécessaire sociologie critique élargit la *question* et le *champ social* et en vient à analyser « l'espace professionnel de la communication politique institutionnelle comme un « monde » multiple, hiérarchisé, traversé de tensions et concurrences diverses et, articulé à d'autres mondes (médias, lobbys, défenseurs de causes, experts, etc.) investis dans les affaires publiques ». Elle met au jour « les rapports institués et négociés mais aussi les interdépendances qui se nouent entre ces mondes. (...) ces situations donnent à voir l'agencement des univers de discours, de pratiques et de relations où se produit la « communication publique » »<sup>39</sup>.

Il faut y voir les « mondes » politique (partisan, gouvernemental et des corps intermédiaires), médiatique et économique (des agences publicitaires et des vendeurs d'espaces et supports de communication), si pas celui plus diffus de l'« opinion publique ».

D'avantage que dans les « définitions », nous le vivons dans nos pratiques.

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S'agissant d'information ou de « communication [publique] », sans rechercher des *signes* à tout prix, nous notons à tout le moins une évolution terminologique (si pas nécessairement sémantique), par exemple quand le professeur J. Katus et notre confrère W.F. Volmer coéditent en 1994 l'ouvrage « *Government Information in the Netherlands* »<sup>40</sup> qu'ils actualisent et prolongent en 2000 sous le titre « *Government Communication in the Netherlands* »<sup>41</sup> ou quand les ouvrages fondateurs (en langue française) du regretté Michel Le Net ont au fil du temps comme titre : « L'État annonceur. Techniques, doctrine et morale de la communication sociale » (1981), sous sa direction « La communication gouvernementale » (1985) – par ailleurs actes du premier symposium international sur le sujet et « Communication publique » (1993).

39 *Les mondes de la communication publique : légitimation et fabrique symbolique du politique*. Ouvrage collectif sous la direction de Ph. Aldrin. Presses universitaires de Rennes. Collection "Res Publica". Rennes, 2018, 189 pages.

40 Katus J. et Volmer W.F. (Ed.). « *Government Information in the Netherlands* ». Koninklijke vermande, 1994. 154 pages.

41 Katus J. et Volmer W.F. (Ed.). « *Government Communication in the Netherlands* ». Sdu Uitgevers, the Hague, 2000. 286 pages.

Si on se réfère à la terminologie en usage dans la littérature scientifique<sup>42</sup>, des chercheurs<sup>43</sup> font un constat identique et notent une forme de basculement entre « information » et « communication » lorsqu'ils comparent les écrits des années 1970 avec ceux des années 1980. Ils s'accordent d'ailleurs pour dire que dans le domaine de la recherche scientifique en la matière on est - largement et de manière établie - passé (comme *objet*) d'« information » à « communication ».

Ce n'est toutefois pas la panacée, dans la mesure où la diffusion<sup>44</sup> et l'usage à tout va, dans le langage commun et notamment les médias, du concept de « communication(s) », pour qualifier quantités d'activités dans divers domaines, a contribué à en faire une notion polysémique, et donc floue.

Pour ce qui est de nos services à cet égard et, plus particulièrement, de leur *statut* et *rôles* dévolus (au sens de la sociologie générale classique), aussi bien que pour la recherche, comme l'indique l'universitaire Dominique Bessières<sup>45</sup> : « Bien que le concept [de communication] soit flou (...) il est *heuristiquement opératoire* avec le qualificatif public »<sup>46</sup>.

On en arrive ainsi à lexicaliser une suite de deux mots, une *unité syntaxique*, qui trouve et prend sens comme *unité lexicale autonome*. En adoptant ce *syntagme nominal*<sup>47</sup>, par association de deux concepts que nous pouvons reconnaître comme *flous* (« publique » n'étant pas moins polysémique que « communication »), par facilité ou nécessité de consensus (professionnel ou académique), nous devons bien accepter que nous avons créé (en termes de qualification) une *fiction régulatrice*<sup>48</sup>.

Et, pour revenir à notre première remarque, et dans les mêmes termes, nous parlons bien ici de « communication publique » et pas de (LA) communication publique ...

Dans « communication publique »... « publique » (malgré la polysémie du terme) tient, bien sûr spécifiquement, au fait que

la communication émane de l'autorité publique, puisque c'est elle qui est dite publique et pas la communication... du moins pas au point de la qualifier et de la particulariser, du fait que par nature la plupart de LA communication est publique. C'est par contre sa caractéristique essentielle, son essence même, de tirer sa légitimité de celle du pouvoir dont elle émane.

Non pas qu'elle relèverait *primordialement* de l'intérêt général (notion discutable bien que souvent mise en avant<sup>49</sup>) dont l'autorité publique serait la garante<sup>50</sup>, mais bien du fait qu'*essentiellement* elle est un acte de l'un de ses organes<sup>51</sup> et donc de cette autorité même...

Sur le plan ontologique, la « communication publique » n'a donc pas d'autres spécificités (au regard de toutes les formes de communication avec qui elle partage tout) que celle de sa légitimité qu'elle tire de la légitimité propre de son émetteur, l'autorité publique. C'est sûrement, par ailleurs, ce qui la rend moins aisément « détachable » de l'une de ces formes, à savoir la *communication politique* et sa forme hybride qu'est la *communication gouvernementale*<sup>52</sup>.

Etrangement, à cet égard et à nos yeux, Pierre Zémor - qui a le mérite de se pencher sur la question de la *légitimité* de la « communication publique » dans le cadre de sa définition - attribue celle-ci au « citoyen » et écrit : « Dès lors qu'elle tient sa légitimité du récepteur, la communication publique doit être une vraie communication, authentique et pratiquée dans les deux sens avec un citoyen actif »<sup>53</sup>.

Pour s'en référer au schéma canonique de la communication, celle-ci étant relation (impliquant un émetteur et un récepteur), le débat sur ce point peut sembler de très peu d'importance, d'autant qu'il n'est pas difficile de s'accorder sur la *nécessité* de principe d'une « vraie communication ».

42 Il s'agit ici principalement de la littérature scientifique en langue française.

43 Bessières D. "La définition de la communication publique : des enjeux disciplinaires aux changements de paradigmes organisationnels" (pp.14-28). Revue Communication & Organisation, n°35 "Repenser la communication dans les organisations publics", 2009.

44 Sur ce sujet, voir Neveu E., *Une société de communication ?* Montchrestien (éd.), collection clefs politique, Paris 2006, 160 p.

45 Créateur et ancien responsable du master de Communication de Sciences Po Lille.

46 Bessières D., op.cit., page 14. C'est nous qui soulignons.

47 C'est également le cas de "communicateur public".

48 Au départ de Friedrich Nietzsche, "*einer regulativen Fiktion*" in *Le Gai savoir*. Livre cinquième, paragraphe 344. Il faut souligner l'expression dans la langue d'origine, puisqu'on la trouve improprement traduite par "*artifice de régulation*". Notamment : *Œuvres complètes de Frédéric Nietzsche*, vol. 8, p. 301. Traduction par Henri Albert. Mercure de France, Paris, 1901.

49 Pierre Zémor n'en est que l'un des exemples pour qui "*L'intérêt général marque la nature de la communication publique*" (p. 6) et "*Le domaine de la communication publique se définit par la légitimité de l'intérêt général*" (p. 5) in *La Communication publique*. Presses universitaires de France. Collection "Que sais-je ?". Paris, 2005 (3e édition), 127 pages.

50 Singulièrement, Pierre Zémor, op. cit. prolonge son assertion et ajoute "*Le domaine de la communication publique se définit par la légitimité de l'intérêt général. Il s'étend au-delà du domaine public pris au strict sens juridique*". On doit donc entendre que l'intérêt général - comme c'est le cas - peut être porté par d'autres corps sociaux que l'état et on en arrive en voulant ainsi spécifier la "communication publique" à l'élargir à LA communication publique.

51 Jusqu'au fonctionnaire agissant.

52 Certains le règlent en "signant" de manière différenciée leurs messages : "Communication du gouvernement", "Communication des autorités publiques" ; mais il n'est pas moins vrai qu'il y a là matière à s'interroger et à être vigilant, d'autant que les citoyens sont rarement en capacité de faire la différence, et nos services de la marquer.

53 Zémor P. op. cit., page 21. C'est nous qui soulignons. Par ailleurs, l'auteur utilise l'expression citoyen "*récepteur*" (page 13).





Toutefois, relevons d'abord qu'il n'y a pas équivalence entre les termes et les positions qu'ils précisent et que cette asymétrie, liée au pouvoir d'injonction et d'influence<sup>54</sup>, n'est pas insignifiante.

Soulignons ensuite qu'il faut de plus y voir par nature une forme de *domination* de l'émetteur sur le récepteur, qui - s'agissant de « communication publique » et de sa *légitimité* - nous renvoie à la théorie classique de la sociologie politique et générale de Max Weber et à sa typologie des formes de dominations légitimes. D'autant qu'il précise que « *Toute domination se manifeste et fonctionne comme administration. Toute administration a besoin, d'une manière ou d'une autre, de la domination (...)* »<sup>55</sup>.

Cela semble encore plus vrai de la domination rationnelle-légale et son administration de type bureaucratique (au sens sociologique du terme)<sup>56</sup> qui sont ici en cause.

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Au sens de cette typologie (largement admise) la « communication publique » pourrait dès lors, peut-être plus justement, être requalifiée en *communication bureaucratique*... mais la signification de ce mot à pris quelques détours peu flatteurs qui peuvent le disqualifier au-delà du monde de la sociologie<sup>57</sup>.

Disons de suite, pour ne pas le laisser penser, qu'il ne s'agit pas que de ce qui pourrait vite apparaître comme du verbiage sociologique mais que cela doit solliciter et mobiliser notre entière conscience de communicateur public sur les plans pratiques, mais aussi moraux, déontologiques et, osons-le, politiques.

Tout ceci d'autant qu'à cette asymétrie et à cette domination s'ajoute le fait que la communication publique est, comme le remarque Dominique Bessières, « *très majoritairement à sens unique, avec d'un côté des gouvernants qui disposent en permanence de moyens d'action communicationnels*

*institutionnels et d'un autre côté des gouvernés qui n'expriment leur volonté que sporadiquement (élections, consultations)* ».

Nous y ajouterons, encore, et ce n'est pas moins important - comme le fait Pierre Bourdieu, principalement dans la communication politique et gouvernementale, mais aussi dans la « communication publique », cette autre asymétrie qu'autorise « *aux autorités gouvernementales et à l'administration* » : « *le monopole de l'information légitime - des sources officielles notamment* » et « *la capacité de définir (...) l'ordre du jour* »<sup>58</sup>.

Et si pour des raisons pratiques, de diffusion dans le langage commun, et principalement idéologiques, de modernité, de « *sacre du citoyen* » ou de renforcement des « *institutions invisibles* » (autorité, confiance, légitimité)<sup>59</sup>, voire de « *distinction* » et de reconnaissance professionnelle et statutaire, nous avons adopté la « communication publique » (pour nos activités et le cœur de nos métiers), et si nous convenons de l'évidence du fait que la communication suppose nécessairement un échange réel (plus que la possibilité de celui-ci), nous accepterons sans difficulté sous l'angle organisationnel et des activités menées, que nous pratiquons en moyenne davantage l'information (sa constitution et sa mise à disposition passive ou sa diffusion active) que la communication effective.

C'est en ce sens que nous convenons de les nommer génériquement : *services (publics) d'information et de communication*.

A cela fait écho le titre de l'essai de Dominique Wolton, lancé comme un cri : « *Informer n'est pas communiquer* »<sup>60</sup>, pour qui l'information et sa multiplication se sont imposées en accentuant l'idée fallacieuse et mythologique d'une communication automatique et le « (...) *pouvoir pas seulement une question d'information, mais de valeurs et de communication humaine* »<sup>61</sup>.

Arrivés à ce stade, sans le vouloir *a priori*, il nous semble avoir en quelque sorte dépouillé l'enfant de ses plus beaux habits ... mais la lucidité, sans complaisance, nous semble être à ce prix.

C'est ainsi qu'une certaine « *tristesse bureaucratique* » peut apparaître quand le travail quotidien concret n'épouse pas les objectifs *idéalement* assignés à la « communication publique » ! C'est aussi ainsi qu'il y a des conquêtes à renouveler chaque jour et qui font le sel de nos métiers...

54 Robert Dahl l'a suffisamment souligné dans ses théories sur le pouvoir et la démocratie.

55 Weber M. *La domination*. Editions La Découverte. Paris, 2013, page 52. La première version de la sociologie de la domination est de 1911-1913.

56 Pour Weber, il s'agit de « *la domination légale avec un appareil administratif bureaucratique* » dont il précise qu'il s'agit là de la « *forme spécifiquement moderne de l'administration* » (page 223) in Weber M. *Économie et société*. Tome premier. Plon, coll. Recherches en sciences humaines. Paris, 1971, 650 pages.

57 Outre que "communication publique" s'est imposé, contrairement à plusieurs auteurs et chercheurs, nous ne souhaitons pas davantage retenir "communication institutionnelle", qui serait la communication des institutions (publiques), quand il est généralement admis de définir la communication institutionnelle comme étant la communication des institutions *lato sensu* (organisation, entreprise, institution publique, association) à propos de leurs activités et de leur image. Il y a donc une "communication publique" institutionnelle.

58 Bourdieu P. *Sur la télévision, suivi de L'empire du journalisme*. Raisons d'agir Editions. Paris, 1996, pp. 82-83.

59 Ces expressions sont de Pierre Rosanvallon.

60 Dominique WOLTON, *Informer n'est pas communiquer*. Paris, CNRS Éd., coll. Débats, 2009, 147 pages.

61 Wolton D. op. cit., page 61.

# But what is *public communication* all about?

By Philippe Caroyez and Vincenzo Le Voci

Since much of the discussion revolves around terminology, the authors would like to point out that the original text was written in French.

*As a tribute to our friend and colleague Claus Hörr, who passed away too soon, we wanted these critical 'remarks', based on our experiences, reflections and discussions on our activities and working practices and inspired by our devotion to public service, to be like Claus himself – committed, passionate and always upbeat.*

***"And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music"***

***Attributed<sup>1</sup> to Friedrich Nietzsche***

There is *public communication* and then there is 'public communication'.<sup>2</sup>

At Université Laval in Canada, possibly the only university currently offering a bachelor's degree in public communication, *public communication* is defined as "all aspects of the production, processing and dissemination of public discourse on public issues and debates. Such discourse originates not only with the media, but also with institutions, companies, movements and groups active in the public arena."

Moreover, in its academic publications *Études de communication publique*,<sup>3</sup> reflecting its collaboration with the Sorbonne and the Université Libre de Bruxelles among others, it emphasises "(...) especially for European readers, that public communication (...) is not limited to communication by public institutions, but refers more broadly to all public discourse relating to public issues or affairs, whatever its origin (institutions, companies, groups, individuals) or purpose (to persuade, inform, educate, entertain, etc.)."<sup>4</sup>

According to this view, the 'public communication' performed by our services should therefore be seen as part of a broader category: *Public Communication*; or, to put it another way, *public communication* is practised by more than one social group, and what sets ours apart is the fact that it originates with public institutions.

We would endorse this, of course, both from the educational perspective (the academic training of future public communicators and the continuing training of those already doing the job) and from the – vital – perspective that sees 'public

communication' and its practice as a multidisciplinary melting pot, drawing on a variety of sources in the service of public authorities.

This has been the case for a long time (the term 'social communication' is also used), but the relatively recent development of *public communication* by public institutions into 'public communication', with its institutionalisation and professionalisation, may lead us to overlook the fact, even though it is an inherent dimension that is key to analysing and understanding such communication.

This dimension has not only shaped the history of public communication, it also permeates its reality. And so the progressive search for and formation of an *identity* – institutional, organic and professional – and a *created specificity* cannot and must not mask the hybrid nature of what that identity encompasses.

'Public communication' "(...) is isomorphic to public organisations, while being closer in spirit to managerialism and professionalisation".<sup>5</sup>

It navigates between political, government and public- or general-interest communication, and sometimes capsizes between politics and administration.

Its proximity to journalism, the press and media needs no further highlighting.

The same goes for *commercial* advertising techniques, marketing agencies and *their world*.

It still does not enjoy (or at least not fully) the relative importance and academic recognition needed for a degree course.

Despite its consistently high profile, the job of 'public communicator'<sup>6</sup> is more akin to a role, function or status than a profession in the proper sense of the term;<sup>7</sup> and while this generic usage is necessary, the result is nonetheless that it covers a multitude of jobs and professions... which are become hybridised since they apply both to the public service and to the way it communicates. Moreover, the fact that the job and the conditions under which it has emerged and is developing are relatively new, within teams or departments that are

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1 Repeatedly but wrongly, it would seem. It is apparently an old proverb.

2 By way of convention, we will use *public communication* when referring to such communication in the broad sense and 'public communication' (as a noun phrase) to refer to our line of work, i.e. public sector communication.

3 <https://www.fish.ulaval.ca/communication/recherche/publications/etudes-de-communication-publique>

4 Emphasis added.

5 Bessières D., 'L'hybridité : une composante ancienne mais aujourd'hui démultipliée de la communication publique', *Recherches en Communication*, No. 47, November 2018, pp. 5-21.

6 Also known by the older term 'public information officer'.

7 "Une profession se professe alors qu'un métier se pratique (...)" [loosely translated: A profession implies a body of knowledge and usually lengthy training, whereas with a job the emphasis is on doing]. Interview with Jacques Marpeau, Doctor in Education Sciences. Blog, Le Café pédagogique.



themselves relatively recent and constantly evolving, leads to a hybridisation of professional statuses (with generally more contract staff than permanent employees) and hence of recruitment methods (with generally more staff hired *ad hoc* than by competitive examination).<sup>8</sup>

Our services themselves operate on multiple scales, from central government and its institutions to the different levels of power (regions, cities, etc.). This has even given rise to the concept of 'public (and) territorial communication'. They are also polymorphous: in terms of their status, their position in (the organisational chart of) the state and institutional apparatus, the regulatory or legal framework that governs and constrains them (or not), their remit, which they fulfil with often widely varying staff numbers and budgets... but above all in terms of the nature of their status and tasks in relation to a range of factors (given varying degrees of emphasis): imperviousness to party politics, the clear demarcation between general-interest, public-service, government and political communication, the rejection of propaganda and manipulation techniques, neutrality and public service universality.

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Whenever this university professor asked his students "When did the law begin?", there were always a few who would try hard to come up with a founding act or, if not a date, at least *a reign*. Whereas the answer specified in the syllabus (and proclaimed with mischievous glee by the professor) was: "*The origins of law go back to the dawn of time*"!

If 'public communication' were taken to mean *that which emanates from an authority* (we will come back to this), we might be tempted to give the same answer...<sup>9</sup>

However, some brave souls have attempted to pinpoint a date,

obviously in relation to more recent times: 1939<sup>10</sup> or 1946<sup>11</sup> in the United Kingdom;<sup>12</sup> 1949 in the Federal Republic of Germany;<sup>13</sup> 1940 or 1960-61 in Belgium<sup>14</sup> and 1950 to 1960 in the Belgian Congo. In the Netherlands, 'public communication' as we know it today goes back, it is claimed, directly to the 17th century and was linked to maritime trade;<sup>15</sup> other suggested dates there are 1920 and 1934, linked to the effects of democratisation in Europe.<sup>16</sup> In France, the late 1980s has been proposed (thus our fellow practitioner Dominique Mégard wrote the following in an introduction to one of her books in 2017: "*Some 30 years after its inception, public communication is still largely unrecognised*"<sup>17</sup>), while others go back 10 years earlier (in the 2008 edited volume with the enlightening title: *Bleu, blanc, pub : trente ans de communication gouvernementale en France* [translated into

10 "The Ministry of Information (MOI) came into existence on Sept. 4, 1939, the day after Britain's declaration of war on Germany." British Government Information and Propaganda: Collections at the British Library and Elsewhere, British Library, authored by Jennie Grimshaw.

11 "Central Office of Information was established in 1946 after the demise of the wartime Ministry of Information, when individual government departments resumed responsibility for information policy." <https://web.archive.org/web/20100619203002/http://coi.gov.uk/aboutcoi.php>

12 McKenna A., *100 Years of Government Communication*, HM Government (publisher), Open Government Licence, 2018, 155 pages.

13 The Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, or Bundespresseamt for short, was established by Konrad Adenauer on 16 September 1949, the day after he was elected Chancellor. It has its constitutional basis in the Grundgesetz (Basic Law) of 23 May 1949.

14 The Office belge d'information et de documentation (Inbel) was set up in 1940 with the task of disseminating information about Belgium in non-occupied territories. After the war, the organisation was transferred to the Belgian Congo, foreshadowing the creation of the Centre d'information et de documentation du Congo belge (CID) in 1950. In 1955, the CID became the Office de l'information et des relations publiques pour le Congo belge et le Ruanda-Urundi (Inforcongo). That same year, the Sub-Commission for the Coordination of Belgian Publicity and Propaganda Campaigns Abroad was set up by the Interministerial Economic Committee; it was responsible for promoting Belgium abroad and participating in trade fairs and exhibitions. In 1960, the Sub-Commission and Inforcongo were converted into a non-profit organisation: the Office belge d'information et de documentation (Inbel), with the status of a public service institution. It was responsible both for information in Belgium and for providing information about Belgium abroad. From an institutional perspective, Inbel was renamed the Service fédéral d'information (SFI) in 1994, as part of the reform of the Belgian State's federal structure. [https://archives.africamuseum.be/agents/corporate\\_entities/225](https://archives.africamuseum.be/agents/corporate_entities/225) The SFI was dissolved on 1 April 2003 and its activities were taken over by the Directorate-General for External Communication within the Federal Public Service Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

15 "The origins of government communication in the Netherlands, as we know it today, can be found in the seventeenth century". Katus J., 'Government communication: development, functions and principles', in: *Government Communication in the Netherlands*, Sdu Uitgevers, The Hague, 2000, page 21.

16 Katus J., op. cit, page 22: "In 1920, a former journalist was appointed press officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs", "(...) a Government Press Service was set up in 1934".

17 Mégard D., *La communication publique et territoriale*, Dunod, 2017, page 7 and back cover.

8 This factor has played a role in the formation of professional associations and the 'drive for professionalisation'. It is also a situation that needs to be borne in mind when considering 'sensitivity' to political intervention.

9 For a delightful and surprising insight into the ancient and universal nature of our supposedly 'modern' concerns, see the interesting article by Claudia Moatti, 'La communication publique écrite à Rome, sous la République et le Haut Empire', in: *Rome et l'État moderne européen*, Collection de l'École Française de Rome, No. 377, 2007, pp. 217-250. In the register of non-verbal public communication, and going back even further in time, although still with some similarity to our own commemorative events and activities, see Christian Jeunesse: 'Pierres dressées et mâs-totem : le pilier comme vecteur de communication publique dans les sociétés pré-littéraires', in: *Signes et communication dans les civilisations de la parole*, Édition électronique du CTHS (Actes des congrès des sociétés historiques et scientifiques), Paris, 2016, pp. 88-97.





English as: *Liberty, Equality, Publicity: 30 Years of Government Communication in France*]<sup>18</sup>].<sup>19</sup>

We will not, of course, be talking about George Orwell's *Ministère de la Vérité* ('Ministry of Truth') in 1984, an acerbic and intelligent criticism of propaganda on the model of the British Ministry of Information...<sup>20</sup>

We could go on citing situations and references, as well as looking at the history of this area in Europe's former dictatorships (Spain, Greece, Portugal and Eastern European countries); the important thing is to highlight the more explicit aspects here.

There is an obvious link with particular historical situations, and public communication emerges as a political and institutional response (in the form of government action and the creation of public bodies) by governmental public authority to these situations: war (First or Second World War, wartime neutrality<sup>21</sup> or post-Second World War institutional reconstruction<sup>22</sup>), colonisation and decolonisation, democratisation (in Europe and the fall of the Berlin Wall), and so on.

There is also a link, more subtle this time, with the socio-political development of our societies: the welfare state, statutory consultations and dialogue, crises and the changes arising out of them, transformations in the relationship between authorities and citizens and in public expectations, a certain raising of ethical standards in politics, alongside a modernisation of public administrations and their practices, good governance and efficiency drives, a desire for more participatory democracy, and so on, as well as the evolving 'leisure and entertainment society', the development of (mass) media, the changing nature of the press and public and social media, etc.

It is also true to say that communication and its institutionalisation in bodies and services/teams has been as much a component of this modernisation as it has helped to promote it and to re-legitimise public administration, which is

subject to frequent and justified criticism about its relationship with citizens, its inaccessibility and inefficiency.

Thus, the birth of our modern services should be seen not as an evolution of public administration, as an *emanation from within*, but – by a process of 'spillover'<sup>23</sup> – as the (politically desired) outcome of a process of institutionalisation of 'public communication', resulting in the emergence of structures under the authority of the government and responsible, principally, for relaying information about government activity as well as for informing government (opinion polls/surveys, agenda, etc.) and/or for promotional, ceremonial or commemorative events showcasing the government and its members.

We should see the creation and evolution of our current services in this context and therefore as passing through successive phases of development... with more still to come!

There is no need to discuss the changes in communication techniques and media which accompany – and sometimes drive and enable – these developments.

Instead, let us consider how the very nature of our activities has been transformed since the Second World War (or later in some countries): (assumed) propaganda, press offices (press releases and conferences) and media monitoring services, public relations (mainly with journalists or in a diplomatic context), drafting of documents for promotional distribution, production and distribution of documentary films and exhibitions, publication and distribution of administrative documents, public documentation, photo and film libraries, distribution of information of general interest, distribution to the press and public representatives of decisions by public authorities, creation of databases, one-stop information services (PO boxes and/or public information centres and/or call centres), provision of databases and publication of reference works (such as directories of public administrations), organisation of large-scale information campaigns (mainly in the press and audiovisual media), widespread distribution

18 *Bleu, blanc, pub : trente ans de communication gouvernementale en France* [English version: *Liberty, Equality, Publicity: 30 Years of Government Communication in France*], edited by Jean-Marc Benoit and Jessica Scale, Éditions du Cherche Midi, Paris, 2008 [English version: 2010], 221 pages.

19 Another possible date would be 1963 with the "establishment of the *Service de liaison interministérielle pour l'information (SLII)* [Interministerial Information Liaison Service] within the Ministry of Information. Its remit was to coordinate information and explain government action. (Loi de finances rectificative [Amending Finance Act] No. 63-778 of 31 July 1963". Wikipedia (French-language version), history of the Service d'information du Gouvernement (SIG, France).

20 The Ministry of Information (Moi), which set up its headquarters in the University of London's imposing Senate House building in 1939, around which time it came up with the now-famous slogan 'Keep Calm and Carry On'.

21 The Netherlands during the First World War, for example.

22 The Federal Republic of Germany, for example.

23 With regard to political communication in France, Jacques Gerstlé sees the government communication of the President, Prime Minister and ministers 'spilling over' into a process of institutionalisation of public communication, resulting in the emergence of structures that have taken various forms over time. The latest of these is the current SIG, which is under the authority of the government and is responsible for both relaying information about government activity and for informing government. While pointing out that this is not an isolated case, he notes that there is a risk of government communication being more political (particularly through persuasion) than institutional or educational, and of policymakers as individuals exploiting benefits obtained through the use of collective resources. Gerstlé J., *La communication politique*, Armand Colin (publisher), collection: Compact civis, Paris, 2004, 297 pages, Chapter 5, 'La communication, l'information et l'exercice du pouvoir', pp. 175-210.



of thematic brochures and leaflets, event activities, websites, public electronic platforms, chatbots, and so on.

Moving beyond what may appear anecdotal, this process can be traced in the changing names of some of our services,<sup>24</sup> which can be seen as a series of phases 'crystallising' their institutionalisation. In Belgium, for example, the Office d'information et de documentation (INBEL) became the Service fédéral d'information (SFI, dissolved in 2003) and is now the Direction générale Communication externe (Directorate-General for External Communication). In France, the name changed from Service d'information et de diffusion (SID) to Service d'information du Gouvernement (SIG). In the UK, the Central Office of Information (COI, dissolved at the end of 2011) was succeeded by the Government Communication Service (GCS, which presents itself as a community of professionals), while in Greece the Ministry of Mass Media became the General Secretariat for Communication and Media.

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Germany is an unusual case in that the *Bundespresseamt*<sup>25</sup> writes of itself as follows: "The shorter designation "Federal Press Office" is frequently used when referring to the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, but this can be somewhat misleading: the Federal Press Office does not regulate the press, let alone supervise it."

Note, however, that many services remain dedicated to information (as opposed to [public] communication),<sup>26</sup> and to the press and media (without supervising them, of course!<sup>27</sup>).

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For more than 30 years, our services have benefited from, and contributed to, the opening up of government<sup>28</sup> and the resulting changes in mindsets, practices and legislation. Examples include public governance and ethical frameworks, efficiency drives (administrative simplification, public policy evaluation), transparency, access to administrative documents, passive and active disclosure requirements, the (sometimes questionable) policy of the citizen as 'customer' or 'public service user', justification of administrative acts, setting-up of

ombudsmen, complaint handling and recording, strengthening and modernising of information and communication services, widespread use of information technologies, and so on.

In the context of this modernisation of public services and the development of our services, it is worth taking a closer look at the raising of ethical standards that has taken place in political life. For too long, up until the 1980s and sometimes even later, the political class was an obstacle to, and therefore a brake on, the development of information and communication services free from its control. Of course, this is not to say that an information and communication service can be totally independent of the political representative under whose remit it falls and of the political representatives who exercise legitimate supervision over it. Rather, it is about ensuring in the legislation and in fact that everyone's roles and the relationships between them are specified and clearly delineated, without interventionism and without party-political pressure or solicitation... and without any 'weakness' on our part in these respects.

Unfortunately, this is not something that can always be taken for granted, despite all the legislation and declarations of principle. Think of the situations we still encounter where the management team of an information and communication service changes according to the political representative in charge (minister, mayor, etc.). Think of the sometimes questionable attitude of the political representative's spokesperson towards our teams and, more generally, of the relationship between ministerial private office and administration, which is not always clear-cut, particularly when it comes to communication. Think simply of how inadequate internal communication can be, of the habitual failure to integrate the information dimension into decision-making, of the frequent absence of an agreed and coordinated general information and communication policy, or of the new trend towards so-called 'citizen' consultations, which often end up going nowhere...

However, we are justified in saying that public communicators have played, if not an exemplary, at least a prominent role in the positive development of public administrations and public services, spawning a number of initiatives that have acted as a driving force. The list is a lengthy one, including many demands (unmet or ongoing) but also, fortunately, plenty of achievements: all aspects of professionalisation, from training to the definition of job profiles, the positioning and strengthening of communication services in organising and supporting decisions and policies, the legislative and regulatory provisions that underpin them or frame their actions (from charters and codes of conduct to laws on information for public service users and communication by authorities and administrations), efficiency drives and the evaluation of actions, the networking of communication officers, the pooling of resources (contracts

24 The Government Information Services of the European Union. Role and Organisation. Club of Venice bilingual brochure (French-English), October 2000. Published by the French Government Information Service, Paris, 108 pages.

25 <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/federal-government/federal-press-office/history-and-tasks-470504>

26 Dominique Sellier already made this observation in 2006, based on a comparative analysis of the member services of the Club of Venice, in *La communication gouvernementale en Europe. Analyse comparative*, L'Harmattan, collection: Inter-National, Paris, 2006, 102 pages.

27 At least in our modern democracies... and in these current times.

28 The Dutch principle of *openbaarheid van bestuur* (open government or freedom of information).

with broadcasters, call centres, one-stop shops), the early adoption of *new technologies*, the dissemination and provision of public data, accessibility, inclusion, and so on. Of course, the successes have varied over time and from country to country, but have nonetheless been fairly widespread.

The reasons for this highly specific and almost unique<sup>29</sup> situation can be analysed by those who have lived through it. Looking beyond the past 30 years to the past half century or so, the oldest among us will recall, with irony as well as a certain pride, the spirit of the pioneers who had to design and build the *modern version* of our services... and above all to impose it!

Admittedly, we benefited from the effects of the modernisation of politics and administration and the raising of ethical standards. Some also point to the "*communication-friendly atmosphere of the 1980s*",<sup>30</sup> which indeed should not be overlooked, but even so, public communicators showed quite some tenacity, as demonstrated by the professional interest groups they set up (for advocacy and, more broadly, discussion/exchange), which remain highly active and supported. These include the Club of Venice (1986), Communication publique (France, 1989), Cap'Com (France, 1988<sup>31</sup>), Associazione Italiana della Comunicazione Pubblica e Istituzionale (1990), Kortom (Dutch-speaking Belgium, 2000), WBCOM' (French-speaking Belgium, 2004) and SEECOM (South East Europe public sector communicators association, 2012).<sup>32</sup>

And this points to what is surely the *underlying reason*, which a number of academic and university studies corroborate,<sup>33</sup> namely a genuine '*drive for professionalisation*' (persistently from the 1980s onwards), with the objective of bolstering performance and gaining recognition, both for the actors, their functions and practices and for the services, their activities, status and roles.

It is also a question of differentiation. It will be remembered that back then the definition of 'public communication' was almost always *a contrario*, based on what it was not or did not want to be (or no longer wanted to be?) and thus drawing out by implication what it was or did want to be: above all not 'journalism', still less political communication, far removed from the techniques and practices of advertising and commercial communication, certainly not propaganda and in no way bureaucratic.<sup>34</sup>

This is somewhat ironic given the professional background or training of most of the 'public information officers' at the time: journalism, advertising agencies, ministerial private offices, political parties, the administration itself, etc.

Moreover, it is undoubtedly an *operative myth* – one that we have all accepted as necessary and foundational – which seeks to make 'public communication' a *chemically pure precipitate*, free of all influences, and the outcome of a process of *great 'ameliorative transfiguration'*,<sup>35</sup> whereas, on the contrary, it can be argued that 'public communication' was born of all these elements and that, to varying degrees (whether accepted

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29 Perhaps along with public initiatives on the environment and gender equality.

30 Deljarrie B., 'Aux origines de la communication territoriale', in: *Les Cahiers. Un an de communication publique et territoriale*, No. 1, Cap'Com (publisher), Lyon, 2019, 138 pages.

31 The association Collectivités locales et communication [Local Authorities and Communication] was set up in 1981. It organised the first Forum Cap'Com, an annual gathering for the public communication industry, in 1988. From 2010, Cap'Com became the national network for public and territorial communication.

32 As is often the case, we lack a view of the situation outside Europe. That said, the same phenomenon can be seen on the other side of the Atlantic: Association des communicateurs municipaux du Québec (1978); Forum des responsables des communications du gouvernement du Québec (from 1988), Forum des communicateurs gouvernementaux (2011) and now Forum de la communication gouvernementale; the Government Information Organization (1971) in the United States, now the National Association of Government Communicators (1976).

33 Here is a quick overview of articles:

- Bessières D., 'La quête de professionnalisation des communicateurs publics : entre difficulté et stratégie', *Revue française de sciences sociales*, No. 108 'Les processus de professionnalisation', December 2009, pp. 39-52.
- Bessières D., 'La professionnalisation de la communication publique : des normes de la législation du métier à la constitution d'identité disciplinaire' (7 pages), in: *Actes du XVIIe Congrès de la Société des Sciences de l'information et de la communication*, Dijon, 23-25 June 2010.
- Lasfar A. and Leroux P., 'L'institutionnalisation des communicateurs publics : vers une légitimation de ce groupe professionnel', *Pyramides. Revue du Centre d'Études et de Recherche en Administration Publique*, No. 24 'La communication publique en tension', October 2013, Université Libre de Bruxelles, pp. 239-260.
- Monseigne A. and Guillaume G., 'La mutation du métier de communicant public', *Communication & Organisation*, No. 41, 2012, pp. 5-11.

34 In the non-Weberian sense of the term (see below).

35 Sociologist Jacques Le Bohec introduces this concept, but limits it to the "ameliorative transfiguration of propaganda into 'communication'", in *Les rapports presse-politique*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1997, page 52.

On the advertising perspective and 'public communication', another 'ameliorative transfiguration' (or one presented as such), the following makes interesting reading: Berthelot-Guiet K. and Ollivier-Yaniv C., '« Tu t'es vu quand t'écoutes l'Etat ? ». Réception des campagnes de communication gouvernementale. Appropriation et détournement linguistiques des messages', in: *La confiance, Réseaux*, 2001/4 No. 108, JLE Editions, 226 pages, pp. 155-178.





or rejected, and sometimes – consciously or unconsciously – concealed), they continue to run through it, to affect it and ultimately to constitute it.

This results in a conception that is essentially professional in its derivation (a shared and projected ideological model) but partly false, or at the very least partial and biased, which makes 'public communication' and its actors, as professionals and representatives of the profession, the *outstretched hand* (highly professionalised, reared on professional ethics and wholly disinterested) of public authorities and administrations towards the citizens who are subject to these authorities/administrations. As such, it is seen as driven by citizens' demand or *need* for information, with no political interest other than the *general interest*, and legitimised by the *receiving citizens*<sup>36</sup> themselves.

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It also nourished by, and this should not be overlooked, the sincere commitment, bordering on activist engagement, of some of its actors, who see it as a core mission of public services and an essential service rendered to the public, if not – as we have already written – as a form of humanism or (social) ecology, in the moral if not political sense of these terms.<sup>37</sup>

In opposition to this what might be termed '*indigenous*' conception, critical sociology necessarily takes a broader look at the issue and its *social context*, analysing "*the professional space of institutional political communication as a multiple, hierarchical 'world', traversed by various tensions and competitions and linked to other worlds (media, lobbying, advocacy, experts, etc.) involved in public affairs*". It highlights "*the established and negotiated relationships but also the interdependencies that are forged between these worlds. (...) these situations reveal the configuration of the universes of discourse, practices and relationships in which 'public communication' takes place*".<sup>38</sup>

These 'worlds' must be understood as encompassing politics (political parties, government and intermediary bodies), the

media and business (advertising agencies and sellers of advertising space and media), if not the more diffuse world of 'public opinion'.

However, this is something to be experienced more in our day-to-day work than in '*definitions*'.

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When it comes to information or '[public] communication', without looking for *signs* at any cost, we can at the very least note a terminological (if not necessarily semantic) evolution. For example, Professor J. Katus and our fellow practitioner W. F. Volmer co-edited *Government Information in the Netherlands*<sup>39</sup> in 1994, which they updated and extended in 2000 under the title *Government Communication in the Netherlands*.<sup>40</sup> Also, it is interesting to note the progression over time in the titles of the fundamental and seminal works (in French) by the late Michel Le Net: *L'état annonceur. Techniques, doctrine et morale de la communication sociale* [The Announcing State: Techniques, Doctrine and Morality of Social Communication] in 1981, followed by *La communication gouvernementale* [Government Communication] in 1985 (also the proceedings of the first international symposium on the subject) and *Communication publique* [Public Communication] in 1993.

Looking at the terminology used in scientific literature,<sup>41</sup> researchers<sup>42</sup> have observed a similar trend, noting a shift from 'information' to 'communication' when comparing works from the 1970s with those from the 1980s. They agree, moreover, that in scientific research in this area, there has been a widespread and established move from 'information' to 'communication' (as a research topic).

However, this in itself raises issues, as the dissemination<sup>43</sup> and widespread use of the term 'communication(s)' in everyday language, particularly in the media, to describe a wide range of activities in various fields, has helped to make it a polysemous and therefore vague concept.

As far as our services are concerned and, more specifically, their *status* and *roles* (as understood in terms of traditional

<sup>36</sup> We discuss this below, based on the 'reference text' by Pierre Zémor, albeit at one remove (i.e. in the absence of the author).

<sup>37</sup> See: Caroyez P., 'Comme un désir de communication publique *conversante* et de débat public', in: *Public Communication(s)* in Europe, Club of Venice (publisher), Brussels, 2021, pp. 129-138, and Cap'Com website, October 2022: 'A desire for "conversational" public communication'. <https://www.cap-com.org/actualite/C3%A9s/desire-conversational-public-communication>  
Baechtel A.-C., 'La communication publique est un humanisme', LinkedIn blog, 11 June 2019. <https://fr.linkedin.com/pulse/la-communication-publique-est-un-humanisme-anne-catherine-baechtel>

<sup>38</sup> *Les mondes de la communication publique : légitimation et fabrique symbolique du politique*, edited by Philippe Aldrin, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, collection: Res Publica, Rennes, 2018, 189 pages.

<sup>39</sup> Katus J. and Volmer W. F. (eds), *Government Information in the Netherlands*, Koninklijke Vermande, Lelystad, 1994, 154 pages.

<sup>40</sup> Katus J. and Volmer W. F. (eds), *Government Communication in the Netherlands*, Sdu Uitgevers, The Hague, 2000, 286 pages.

<sup>41</sup> This mainly concerns scientific literature in French.

<sup>42</sup> Bessières D., 'La définition de la communication publique : des enjeux disciplinaires aux changements de paradigmes organisationnels', *Communication & Organisation*, No. 35 'Repenser la communication dans les organisations publics', 2009, pp. 14-28.

<sup>43</sup> On this subject, see Neveu E., *Une société de communication ?*, Montchrestien (publisher), collection: Clefs politique, Paris, 2006, 160 pages.

general sociology), as well as for research purposes, academic Dominique Bessi res<sup>44</sup> notes that: "*Although the concept [of communication] is vague (...) it is heuristically operative with the qualifier 'public'*".<sup>45</sup>

A two-word sequence, a syntactic unit, is thus lexicalised and thereby acquires meaning as an *autonomous lexical unit*. In adopting this *noun phrase*<sup>46</sup> formed by combining two concepts that are acknowledged to be *vague* (the word 'public' being no less polysemous than 'communication'), whether out of convenience or the need for (professional or academic) consensus, we have to accept that we have created (in terms of qualification) a *regulative fiction*.<sup>47</sup>

And, to return to our opening remark, and in the same terms, we are indeed referring here to 'public (sector) communication' and not *public communication* more widely...

In 'public communication', the word 'public' (despite its polysemy) relates of course specifically to the fact that the communication emanates from a public authority, since it is the public authority that is referred to as public and not the communication... at least not to the extent of qualifying and particularising it, since by nature most communication is public. On the other hand, its essential characteristic, its very essence, is that it derives its legitimacy from that of the power from which it emanates.

That is not to say that it is *primarily* defined by the *general interest* (a questionable idea, although one that is often put forward<sup>48</sup>) of which the public authority is *supposedly* the guarantor,<sup>49</sup> but rather that *essentially* it is an act of one of the public authority's bodies<sup>50</sup> and therefore of the authority itself.

In ontological terms, then, 'public communication' has no other specific characteristic (compared with all the other forms of communication with which it has everything in common) than that of its legitimacy, which it derives from the legitimacy of the sender, namely the public authority. This is surely, moreover, what makes it less easily 'detachable' from one of these forms, namely *political communication* and its hybrid form of *government communication*.<sup>51</sup>

In this regard, it seems strange to us that Pierre Z mor, who to his credit examines the issue of the *legitimacy* of 'public communication' in connection with its definition, attributes this legitimacy to the 'citizen', writing: "*Since it derives its legitimacy from the receiver, public communication must be real, authentic and two-way communication with an active citizen.*"<sup>52</sup>

In terms of the canonical schema of communication as relationship (involving a sender and a receiver), the debate on this point may seem of very little importance, especially as it is not difficult to agree on the *necessity in principle* of 'real communication'.

However, let us first note that there is no equivalence between the terms and the positions they specify and that this asymmetry, linked to the *power* to enjoin and the power to influence,<sup>53</sup> is not insignificant.

Next, it should be stressed that, by its very nature, this situation entails a form of *domination* of the sender over the receiver, which, when it comes to 'public communication' and its *legitimacy*, takes us back to Max Weber's classic theory of political and general sociology and his typology of forms of legitimate domination. In particular, he states that "*Every domination both expresses itself and functions through administration. Every administration, on the other hand, needs domination (...)*".<sup>54</sup>

This seems even truer of the rational-legal domination and its bureaucratic-type administration (in the sociological sense of

44 Founder and former head of the Master in Communications at Sciences Po Lille.

45 Bessi res D., op. cit., page 14. Emphasis added.

46 This also applies to 'public communicator'.

47 Based on Nietzsche's expression '*einer regulativen Fiktion*' in *The Gay Science*, Book Five, Section 344. It is important to note the term in the original German as it has been incorrectly translated into French as *artifice de r gulation* [regulatory artifice], most notably in: * uvres compl tes de Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 8, p. 301, translated by Henri Albert, Mercure de France, Paris, 1901.

48 By, among others, Pierre Z mor, who writes: "*The general interest shapes the nature of public communication*" (p. 6) and "*The field of public communication is defined by the legitimacy of the general interest*" (p. 5) in *La Communication publique*. Presses Universitaires de France, collection: "Que sais-je ?", Paris, 2005 (3rd edition), 127 pages.

49 Interestingly, Pierre Z mor (op. cit.) takes this further, adding: "*The field of public communication is defined by the legitimacy of the general interest. It extends beyond the public domain in the strict legal sense.*" This leads us to understand – as indeed is the case – that the general interest can be represented by social entities other than the state, and we end up wanting to broaden 'public communication' to encompass *public communication* more generally.

50 Or someone acting in an official capacity.

51 This is sometimes dealt with by 'signing off' messages in subtly different ways, e.g. 'Communication from the government', 'Communication from the public authorities'; but even so, this is a questionable approach and one that requires vigilance, especially as citizens are rarely able to tell the difference, and our services are rarely able to convey it effectively.

52 Z mor P., op. cit., page 21. Emphasis added. Note also that the author uses the expression '*receiving*' citizen (page 13).

53 Robert Dahl has highlighted this well in his theories on power and democracy.

54 Weber M., *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, Bedminster Press, New York, 1968, page 948. The first version of the sociology of domination dates from 1911-1913.



the term)<sup>55</sup> that are at issue here.

Within the meaning of this (widely accepted) typology, 'public communication' could therefore, perhaps more accurately, be renamed *bureaucratic communication*... although this word has acquired some unflattering connotations which may disqualify it beyond the realm of sociology.<sup>56</sup>

In case anyone is thinking that this is just a question of sociological verbiage, which it could easily appear to be, let us say straight away that it is more than this, that it must challenge and mobilise our entire conscience as public communicators in practical terms, as well as morally, ethically and, dare we say it, politically.

This is all the more important given that this asymmetry and domination is compounded by the fact that public communication is, as Dominique Bessi res points out, "*overwhelmingly one-way, with on the one hand those in power who permanently have institutional means of communicative action at their disposal and on the other the governed who only sporadically express their will (elections, consultations)*".

Just as importantly, there is also another asymmetry, as Pierre Bourdieu notes, mainly in political and government communication but also in 'public communication', whereby "*government authorities and the administration*" have "*a monopoly on legitimate information – from official sources in particular*" and "*the ability to set (...) the agenda*".<sup>57</sup>

And if there are practical reasons, i.e. using language that everyone understands, and above all ideological ones – modernity, the '*sacre du citoyen*' [empowerment of the citizen], strengthening '*invisible institutions*' (authority, trust, legitimacy),<sup>58</sup> or as a token of 'distinction' and professional and statutory recognition – why we have adopted the term 'public communication' (for our activities and core business), and if we agree on the obvious fact that communication necessarily presupposes an actual exchange (rather than just

the possibility of one), we will not have any problem accepting, from the perspective of organisation and the activities carried out, that on average our job is more about information (i.e. informing, in the sense of compiling information and passively making it available or actively disseminating it) than actual communication.

It is in this sense that we agree to call them, generically, (public) *information and communication services*.

This is echoed in the exclamatory title of Dominique Wolton's essay *Informing is not communicating*,<sup>59</sup> which argues that the prominence and multiplication of information has heightened the mythical fallacy of automatic communication and that "*power is not just a question of information, but of values and human communication*".<sup>60</sup>

Having arrived at this conclusion, we feel as though, without originally intending to, we have as it were stripped away all the finery... but this seems to us the price to be paid for lucidity and a lack of complacency.

And so a touch of '*bureaucratic sadness*' may creep in when the reality of our day-to-day work fails to match the objectives *ideally* assigned to 'public communication'! But then again, having new challenges to overcome each day is precisely what makes our job so special...

<sup>55</sup> Weber refers to this as "*legal [domination] with a bureaucratic administrative staff*", which he calls the "*specifically modern type of administration*" in Weber M., *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, Bedminster Press, New York, 1968, page 217.

<sup>56</sup> Leaving aside the fact that 'public communication' is now the established term, we do not wish to follow a number of authors and researchers in using '*institutional communication*' to mean communication by (public) institutions, since the generally accepted definition of institutional communication is communication by institutions *lato sensu* (organisations, companies, public institutions, associations) about their activities and image. There is therefore an institutional 'public communication'.

<sup>57</sup> Bourdieu P., *Sur la t l vision, suivi de L'empire du journalisme*,  ditions Raisons d'Agir, Paris, 1996, pp. 82-83.

<sup>58</sup> These are Pierre Rosanvallon's terms.

<sup>59</sup> Wolton D., *Informing n'est pas communiquer*, CNRS  ditions, collection: D bats, Paris, 2009, 147 pages.

<sup>60</sup> Wolton D., *op. cit.*, page 61.



# Club of Venice plenary meeting

Venice, 5-6 December 2024



## Provisional agenda – as of 21 November 2024

Palazzo Franchetti, San Marco 2847, Venezia

### Thursday, December 5<sup>th</sup>

9:00

#### Opening session

Welcome statements - representatives from the hosting Italian authorities and from the European Institutions

- Laura CAVALLO, Director-General, Department for European Affairs, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Italy
- Fabrizio SPADA, Head of the Institutional Relations Department, European Parliament Information Office in Italy
- Elena GRECH, Acting Head of the European Commission Representation in Italy
- Representatives from the regional/local authorities

9:45

#### Key address

- Stefano ROLANDO, President of the Club of Venice

10:15

#### Plenary session I – round table

Strengthening cooperation in public communication: new plans, enhanced strategies and narratives to regain citizens' trust, support policies and consolidate resiliencies

- Public opinion trends: reliability and interpretation of facts and figures
- The EU institutions' new mandate and the impact on policy priorities and on cooperation with national authorities
- Capacity and capability building: from communication contingencies to structural communication investments
- Reinforcing cross-ministerial coordination and inter-governmental cooperation in the field of communication
- Reinforcing cooperation with civil society, the academic world and the media sector

##### Moderators:

- Kristina PLAVŠAK KRAJNC, Slovenia, Senior Advisor on Strategic Communication, Minister's Private Office, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
- Vincenzo LE VOICI, Secretary-General of the Club of Venice

##### Keynote speaker:

- Erik den HOEDT, Manager and communication expert for the Government of the Netherlands, Vice President of the Club of Venice

##### Panellists:

- Katarzyna SZARAN, Poland, Deputy Director, Department for Strategic Communication and Countering Foreign Disinformation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Paul GLEESON, Ireland, Director of Communications, Department of Foreign Affairs
- Christian MANGOLD, European Parliament, Director-General of Internal Policies and Acting Director-General for Communication (tbc)
- Sophia ERIKSSON-WATERSCHOOT, European Commission, DG Communication, Deputy Director-General and acting Director of Directorate A - 'Political Communication and Services'
- Giuseppe ZAFFUTO, Head of Public Visibility, Analysis and Research Division, Directorate of Communications, Council of Europe
- Laure VAN HAUWAERT, Executive Director EU Institutions & Belgium, WPP - The Government and Public Sector Practice

## Plenary session II<sup>1</sup>

Disinformation challenges in the field of public health and climate change: navigating science communication at the nexus of information, social and security issues

SESSION IIa – Building strategic communication for science and health: clarity, accuracy and reliability of the information environment level

### Moderator:

- Anna Hedin EKSTRÖM – Institute for Future Studies, Sweden

### Keynote speaker:

- Prof. Alberto MANTOVANI, Comm. OMRI, Scientific Director of Istituto Clinico Humanitas, President and Founder of the Humanitas Foundation for Research, State University of Milan (tbc)

### Panellists:

- Elena SAVOIA, Principal Scientist, Co-Director, Emergency Preparedness, Research, Evaluation and Practice (EPREP) Programme, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, USA
- Roderick CARUANA, Malta, Director of Information, Prime Minister's Office
- Francesco MARAGLINO, Italy, Director, Office for Communicable Diseases Prevention and International Profilaxis, Ministry of Health
- Andrea LIEBMAN, Sweden, Senior Analyst, Psychological Defense Agency
- Katie ATTWELL, Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences, Political Science and International Relations, University of Western Australia
- one representative from the World Health Organisation (WHO) (tbc)
- Fabiana ZOLLO, Associate Professor of Computer Science, CA' FOSCARI University, Venice
- Marco MAGHERI, Secretary-General, Associazione Italiana Comunicazione Pubblica e Istituzionale (Com-pubblica)
- Alessandro LOVARI, Associate Professor of Sociology of Communication, University of Cagliari
- Christopher VOEGELI, Behavioural Scientist, Health Information Integrity, Team Lead, Division "Comm. Science and Services Office of Communications", Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)
- Dr. Cesare BUQUICCHIO, University of Pisa, CRESP Project (social media infodemics and impact on public health)

SESSION IIb – Building strategic communication in the field of CLIMATE CHANGE: evidence and causes, vision and credibility

### Moderator:

- Carlotta ALFONSI, Policy Analyst, Open Government, Civic Space and Public Communication Unit, Open and Innovative Government Division, Public Governance Directorate, OECD

### Keynote speaker:

- Anna PIRANI, Italy, senior research associate of the Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Climate Change (CMCC) research division "Risk assessment and adaptation strategies"

### Panellists:

- one communications representative from the French SIG or the Ministry for the Environment
- Aedín DONNELLY, Ireland, Communications Manager, Government Information Service, Department of the Taoiseach
- one communication representative from Croatia
- Paolo CARIDI, European Commission DG CLIMA, Head of Unit
- Verena RINGLER, Director, AGORA European Green Deal
- Giuseppe MACCA, ESG specialist and Founder of Ethics4growth
- Anthony ZACHARZEWSKI, Founder and President of The Democratic Society

## First day summing-up - issues emerged

(Club Steering Group representative)



<sup>1</sup> This session is developed in collaboration with the Harvard Chan School EPREP Programme and supported by the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme, the Swedish Contingency Agency and Psychological Defense Agency in Sweden.

9:00

## Plenary session II

### Communicating Europe

National initiatives: contributions by the steering group members of the Club of Venice:

- Caroline JORIS, Belgium, Director of External Communication, Chancellery of the Prime Minister
- Maira MYROGIANNI, Greece, Secretary-General for Greeks Abroad and Public Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

EU institutional approach:

- Mark GRAY, European Commission, Head of Unit, DG International Partnerships (INTPA), Political Strategy and Communication
- Dr. Silke TOENSHOFF, Head of Unit, Events and Local Dialogues, European Committee of the Regions, Directorate for Communication

### Capacity building in Artificial Intelligence, with focus on digital trends and threats and investments, including impact on crisis communication

- Artificial Intelligence systems and investments in progress: an outlook into transparency and complexities, ethical and security implications
- Governments' and institutions' communication strategies and investments:
  - Setting priorities and identifying mid- and long-term resources and readiness capacities
  - Reinforcing a culture of digital developments in communication: planning, building know-how, leading and coordinating changes, measuring engagements
  - Regulatory challenges in a world of AI-generated disinformation and manipulation
  - Liaising with crisis comm networks, civil protection, prevention centres and analytical experts

**Moderators:**

- Marco INCERTI, Advisor to the Secretary-General, European University Institute, Firenze-Fiesole (Italy)
- Danila CHIARO, Senior Governance Expert, Regional Office for the Mediterranean, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)

**Keynote speaker:**

- Simon PLATEK, Director, New Imagination Lab, UK

**Panellists:**

- Susanne WEBER, Austria, Head of Digital Communication, Federal Chancellery
- Fiona SPEIRS, Head of Academy, UK Government Communication Service (GCS)
- Dr. Siniša GRGIĆ, Ambassador of Croatia to Sweden
- Ing. Antonio Maria TAMBATO, Director, Digital Innovation and Transition, Agency for Digital Italy (AgID)
- Luca KADAR, Head Of Division of Global Communications, International Cultural Relations and Public Diplomacy, European External Action Service (EEAS)
- Yves STEVENS, Spokesperson, National Crisis Centre, Belgium, Chair of the EU IPCR Crisis Communication Network (CCN)
- Maja MAZURKIEWICZ, Co-Founder & Head of StratCom, Alliance for Europe, Former Counsellor for the Polish President
- Virginia PADOVESE, NewsGuard, Managing Editor & Vice President, Partnerships, Europe, Australia and New Zealand
- Dr. Mario SCHARFBILLIG, European Commission Joint Research Centre, Unit S2: Science for Democracy and Evidence-Informed Policymaking
- Daniel HÖLTGEN, Director of Communications, Council of Europe
- Viktoras DAUKŠAS, Lithuania, Head of DebunkEU.org

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12:45

## Closing Session

- Reflections on the issues emerged during the plenary meeting
- Planning for 2025 key-events:
  - 8th Stratcom seminar (in cooperation with the UK GCSI) - London, 12-13 March 2025
  - Spring 2025 plenary (May 2025, venue to be defined)
  - Seminars: Greece (spring 2025) and Poland (autumn 2025)
  - Work in synergy with international partner organizations (OECD, ICMPD, SEECOM, SEEMO, DEMSOC, CAP'COM, Harvard/Ca' Foscari, Council of Europe, HSS...)

15:00

## Social event organized by the hosting Italian authorities

Guided visit to the Fortuny Museum, San Marco 3958, Venice



# Club of Venice plenary meeting

Dublin, 20-21 June 2024



## Programme

Department of Foreign Affairs, Iveagh House, 79-80 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland

### Thursday 20 June

9:15

#### Opening Session

Welcome statements - representatives of the hosting Irish authorities and the European Institutions

- Joe HACKETT, Secretary General of the Department of Foreign Affairs
- Fionnuala CROKER, Head of the European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland

9:45

#### Key address – objectives of the plenary

- Stefano ROLANDO, President of the Club of Venice (video message, introduced by Vincenzo LE VOCl, Secretary-General of the Club of Venice)

10:00

#### Plenary session I

"Digital innovation and storytelling: challenges and opportunities for governmental and institutional communicators"

##### PART ONE

- Landing our messages in a saturated online marketplace: how do we engage audiences across the most popular platforms?
- The likely impact of Artificial Intelligence on governmental and institutional communication strategies
- Telling our stories globally and fighting disinformation in an era of social media
- Measuring public audiences' sentiment through social media sentiment analysis: trustworthy sources
- Fighting disinformation

##### Moderator:

- Paul GLEESON, Director of Communications, Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland

##### Panellists:

- Representatives from the tech / social media industry
  - Claire DILÉ, X, Director for Government Affairs for Europe
  - Lara LEVET, Meta, Public Policy Manager for EU Affairs
- Emilija KILINSKAITĖ, Lithuania, Acting Head of StratCom, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Aude MAIO-COLICHE, Director, Strategic Communications and Foresight, European External Action Service (EEAS)

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11:30

## PART TWO - Break-out panels:

### PANEL a)

- Capacity building: strengthening governmental and institutional infrastructures
- Digital innovations' impact on crisis management and crisis communication

### Moderator:

- Simon PIATEK, Head of Digital, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

### Panellists:

- Jessica CUPELLINI, Italy, Head of the StratCom Unit, Department for Public and Cultural Diplomacy, Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
- Paula REJKIEWICZ, Head of the StratCom Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Poland
- Ewelina JELENKOWSKA-LUCA, Head of the "Communication" Unit, European Commission DG CNECT
- Yves STEVENS, Belgium, Chairperson, IPCR Crisis Communicator's Network, National Crisis Center
- Laure VAN HAUWAERT, Director, European Institutions, WPP

### PANEL b)

- Cooperation with independent platforms and scientific communities
- Investing in education: enhancing cooperation with IT experts, researchers and advanced media
- Ethical and behavioural principles in on line communication

### Moderator:

- Vincenzo LE VOICI, Secretary-General of the Club of Venice

### Panellists:

- Virginia PADOVESE, NewsGuard, Managing Editor & Vice President, Partnerships, Europe, Australia and New Zealand (on line)
- Carys WHOMSLEY, Digitalis, Director, Digital Risk; Head of Research and Thought Leadership
- Nikos PANAGIOTOU, Professor at the School of Journalism and Mass Communications, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (on line)
- Christian SPAHR, Founder and Steering Committee Member of the South East Europe Public Sector Communication Association (SEECOM)

14:15

## Plenary session II

Opening/Welcoming remarks by

Mary KEENAN, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach

"Communicating against mis- and disinformation surrounding the climate agenda"

- Climate change in progress, environmental turbulences and loss of biodiversity: state of play
- Countering misinformation and disinformation around the green agenda in an increasingly polarised society: re-building public trust
- The effectiveness of pre-bunking and inoculation
- Role of governments, media and non-governmental actors
- Setting and communicating realistic goals (UNCCC COP-28: addressing and interacting with citizens ex-ante and ex-post)

### Moderator:

- Carlotta ALFONSI, policy analyst, open governance, civic space and public communication unit, innovative, digital and open governance division (INDIGO), Public Governance Directorate, OECD

### Panellists:

- Paolo CARIDI, Head of the Communication Unit, European Commission DG Climate Action
- Dr. Eileen CULLOTY, Assistant Professor in the School of Communications and deputy director of the DCU Institute for Media, Democracy, and Society
- Tom SHELDON, Senior Press Manager, Science Media Center, United Kingdom (on line)
- Laura CAVALLLO, Italy, Director-General, Department for European Affairs, Presidency of the Council of Ministers
- Matt ANDREWS, Head of Communications - Climate Change, Rural Affairs, Welsh government
- Dr. Cesare BUQUICCHIO and Dr. Francesco GESUALDO, University of Pisa, CRESO Project (social media info-demics and impact on public health)
- Elena SAVOIA, Deputy Director, Preparedness and Emergency Response Learning Center, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, USA
- Verena RINGLER, Director, AGORA European Green Deal (on line)

Q&A session

16:15

## First day summing-up - issues emerged

(Club Steering Group member + Irish representative)

9:30

### Plenary session III

ROUND TABLE on "Lessons learned from the communication strategies and information campaigns for the European elections 2024 and the way forward"

- First ex-post assessment of the effectiveness of the EU institutions and Member States communication campaign for the European Parliament elections: what worked well and room for improvement
- Public opinion and media monitoring: ex-ante expectations vs. concrete figures: the role of the key actors: analysis of interaction, media's responsibilities, liaisons with civil society organisations; the role of multipliers
- Analysing the added value of new technologies and the involvement of young people during the communication campaign

#### Moderator:

- Vincenzo LE VOCl, Secretary-General of the Club of Venice
- Key-Note speaker:
- Philipp SCHULMEISTER, Director for Campaigns, European Parliament, DG Communication

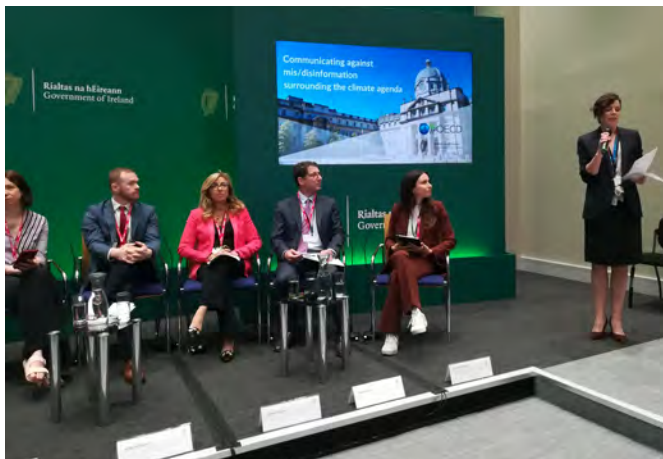
#### Panellists:

- Art O'LEARY, CEO, Electoral Commission, Ireland, former Secretary-General to the President
- Alessandra DE MARCO, Italy, Director-General of the Public Information and Communication Office, Department for Information and Publishing, Presidency of the Council of Ministers
- Paula REJKIEWICZ, Head of the StratCom Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Poland
- Jens MESTER, Head of Unit, interinstitutional relations, corporate contracts and EDCC and communication coordinator for the European elections 2024, European Commission DG COMM
- Paula GORI, Secretary-General and Coordinator of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) (on line)

12:30

### Closing Session

- Reflections on the issues emerged during the plenary meeting (Club of Venice and hosting Irish authorities)
- Planning for 2nd semester 2024 - 1st semester 2025 key-events:
  - Seminar on public diplomacy and country branding /country reputation (in cooperation with the Belgian Government) (tbc)
  - Autumn 2024 plenary (Venice, 5-6 December)
  - 8th Stratcom seminar (in cooperation with the UK GCSI) - London, March 2025 (dates to be defined)
  - Spring 2025 plenary (dates and place to be defined)
  - Work in synergy with international partner organizations (OECD, ICMPD, Council of Europe, SEECOM, SEEMO, DEMSOC, CAP'COM, Harvard/Ca' Foscari, HSS...)





# Summary of discussions

**Navigating capacity building challenges : coping with digital innovation and optimizing storytelling and outreach techniques; detecting, measuring and analysing social media sentiment trends; governmental sustainable investments in Artificial Intelligence and impact on public communication strategies and on crisis communication. Communicating against mis- and disinformation surrounding the climate agenda. Climate change in progress, environmental turbulences and loss of biodiversity; countering misinformation and disinformation around the green agenda in an increasingly polarised society: re-building public trust and testing the effectiveness of pre-bunking and inoculation. Ex-post analysis of the EU campaign for the European elections 2024: lessons learned.**



On the eve of the plenary meeting, the participants visited Google Headquarters and were addressed by their management on the historical steps leading to the establishment of the major web industries in town and latest developments on cooperation in the field.

The plenary was the first meeting ever organised by the Club in Ireland.

After a warm welcome statement of the hosting Irish Government authorities from Joe Hackett, Secretary-General of the Department of Foreign Affairs, and an institutional welcome address from the Head of the European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland Fionnuala Crocker, in his introductory speech Professor Stefano Rolando, President of the Club, recalled the pillars of the public communicators' mission: listening and understanding citizens' concerns, from as many different sectors of civil society as possible; prioritizing campaigns based on real expectations from public audiences; investing in promoting literacy; using as a wide variety as possible of communication tools in order to increase outreach and comprehension; facilitating citizens' inclusiveness and active

participation; reinforcing the measurement and evaluation doctrines.

The opening session on 20th June was focused on challenges and opportunities for governments and institutions dealing with the rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence in a digital landscape already largely dominated by social media platforms, and its possible impact on national information and communication strategies. Guest speakers representatives from X and Meta shared their thoughts on the ongoing cooperation with public authorities in the implementation of the code of conduct on countering disinformation and on possible room for expanding analytical work.

Stefano Rolando's address gave the start to the thematic session, moderated by Paul Gleeson, Director of Communications at the Department of Foreign Affairs, who moderated the debate on digital innovation and storytelling with two abovementioned representatives from the social media industry, joined by two strategic communication managers, respectively from the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from the StratCom and Foresight Division of the European External Action Service (EEAS) who outlined the very challenging period faced by EU governments and institutions and the importance of acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills and invest in digital capacities.

The focus areas covered by the plenary part and the following break-out panels touched upon the key operational areas for governmental and institutional communicators in this field:

- Training requirements to enhance individual knowledge and capacities to interact through the most innovative digital platforms.
- Cooperation with researchers to study the consumption of information and to understand what we need to do to improve the communication system.
- Open dialogue with IT companies in order to communicate findings and to ask for transparent products.
- Open dialogue with the media industry in order to help improve transparency practices.
- Media literacy activities for kids, students, adults and the elderly.
- Digital innovations' impact on crisis management and crisis communication, with AI's opportunities and threats for crisis communication.

Key expressions used during the discussion were:

- **The more uncertain the future, the more future thinking is needed**

- "New technologies/innovations are like a toolbox. Technology can be an inspiration but it not always the solution for all problems; we need to use the right tools that work for your organization
- **Pick the right tool for the right job**
- **Pick the right people for the right job** (Hire people with the right technical profile)

Organization fit:

- **Sometimes the most appropriate solution is a low-tech solution** (example: a poster was the most appropriate communication channel during the flood)
- Do we want an innovative or a stable government?
- Encourage staff members to play with new technologies/innovations
- **There's no innovation without experimentation**
- Focus on the impact, not on the potential

The European Commission representative from DG CNECT outlined the ongoing institutional activities, highlighting the mobilisation of an internal network set up to tackle disinformation - and in particular a Subgroup on Elections - to follow workflow on information sharing & response and the increased data exchange between "detection" teams of the institutions in this framework.

In this regard, a joint assessment was followed by decision on required action:

- Flag content to platforms and / or fact checkers
- Alert national authorities through: Rapid Alert System, European
- Cooperation Network on Elections, Council formations, crisis mechanisms (IPCR)
- Strategic communication (e.g. awareness raising, pre-bunking).

The panels also discussed the need for mapping actions to step up prevention & response:

- Awareness raising: campaigns, training, toolkit for teachers, increased social media accounts security
- Monitoring, detection & response (the Commission contribution also focused on key steps covered during the European election preventive campaign such as cooperation with fact checkers, clear reaction protocols, reporting by Cyber Crisis Task Force, deployment of DSA attachés in EC Representations, publication of DSA election guidelines, tabletop exercise, exchange of alerts through RAS, tripartite

meetings, activation of EU CyberCOM informal network, election stand by team & crises permanence).

At the end of the discussion on this challenging topic it was agreed that governmental and institutional communicators need to intensify their efforts in Increasing cooperation with independent platforms engaged in monitoring disinformation threats worldwide and facilitate data exchanges with scientific communities and with IT experts, researchers and media mobilised in pre-bunking and inoculation.

The discussion on **tackling mis- and disinformation with regard to the mobilisation on the climate agenda** was quite intense and supported by a wide variety of contributions. The session, moderated by Carlotta Alfonsi, OECD senior policy analyst, was introduced by Aedín Donnelly from the Irish Department of the Taoiseach.



The main issues emerged from the debate reflect the main concerns and the main "TO DO" list for the great majority of governments and institution in this field:

- Need to constantly leveraging social listening and media monitoring to enhance institutional health communication
- After over nine months of study and observation on social media and traditional media, we can observe something that, starting from vaccines, provides interesting insights to be used for institutional communication on the climate crisis:

1. As highlighted in the contribution from Italy (Cesare Buquicchio), doubts and requests for clarification from citizens far outweigh the spread of misinformation
2. Such informational gaps did not receive adequate

responses from the main health institutions, which mainly fuelled misinformation

3. The presence of disinformation and distorted narratives is often of low intensity, but is constant and insistent (COVID-19, influenza, dengue, measles) and ends up intersecting with the citizens' requests for information
4. Traditional media can still fill the informational gaps but do not have the consistency that public communication might have.
5. Citizens' health-related choices and attitudes population still needs to be better investigated, but all vaccinations are in sharp decline. This should induce both political and communication authorities to reflect on the possible consequences should new pandemic or similar crisis scenario spark again...

The European Commission contribution focused on climate-related disinformation as intentional malicious act aiming to threaten and undermine trust in science as well as democracy, weakening public support for climate action and hindering policy implementation and international cooperation on climate change.

The Commission DG CLIMA is leading the conversation with positive narratives and providing reliable information to the public about climate change and EU climate action through a wide range of on line information (website, social media or through stakeholders' networks). The Commission anticipated a communications action being organised for autumn 2024 whereby DG CLIMA partners with a range of influencers from a selected number of EU countries to communicate specifically on climate action topics.

At the end of the debate, the importance of setting up and empower multidisciplinary teams, maintain constant observation of work in progress and a closer and more consistent connection between recommendations and institutional communication initiatives was also stressed.

As regards the **ex-post analysis of the recent European elections communication/information campaign(s)**, the round table moderated by Vincenzo Le Voci, Secretary-General of the Club started with a comprehensive presentation by Philipp Schulmeister, Director for Campaigns at the European Parliament, who focused of the massive mobilisation implemented by that institution to motivate the electors to go vote and centred on the need to support the EU during these worldwide challenging times.

Contributions from national authorities (Italy, Poland) focused on the opportunity to investigate the reasons for not voting

and identify key reflection clusters; on the need to develop one strategy and unique creative projects delivered on a multichannel base with native contents for different targets and media; on the need to start the campaign(s) as early as possible, and, last but not the least, on the need to evaluate the impact of campaigns in progress, in particular when multiple actions and initiatives are to be cross-monitored.

The European Commission representative, Jens Mester, Head of the Institutional Relations Unit in DG COMM, outlined its preliminary factual info on post-EU elections outputs and results and shared some first reflections for the future, among which:

- examples of networks activation (Europe Direct centres), local councillors of the BELC network, the InformEU network of communication officers, the "Green Spiders Network" European Climate Pact Ambassadors, the Young Energy Ambassadors network, and several additional multipliers
- the disinformation awareness raising campaign (ECERGA) with several TV and radio channels broadcast and the mobile citizens' campaign

The panel stressed the need to always recognise the elections as a common communication priority. It is not only about the future and legitimacy of a single institution, but about strengthening European democracy altogether. It also drew the attention to some elements closely connected to it such as continuity in communicating the EU achievements and fighting disinformation/FIMI, and finally empowering and engaging staff.



# Club of Venice/Cap'Com seminar on disinformation and media literacy

Strasbourg, 23 May 2024

## Programme

*Les défis de la communication publique européenne:  
synergies dans la lutte contre la désinformation, éducation aux médias<sup>1</sup>*

Thursday 23 May 2024 and Friday 24 May 2024,  
Eurométropol Hémicycle, Strasbourg (France)

### Thursday 23 May

10:00

#### Opening plenary session

- Welcome speech by Yves Charmont, délégué général Cap'Com
- Address by a regional representative on the 2024 European elections, participatory democracy and disinformation challenges and risks
- Inaugural speech by Professor Stefano Rolando, President of the Club of Venice

10:45

**Session 1**, moderated by Kristina Plavšak Krajnc, founder of the Media Forum, Center for Public Communication, Ljubljana

#### Public communication and capacity building

- Current geo-political tensions and the impact of disinformation on public opinion
- Cooperation in progress : shared communication strategies (ad hoc and preventive) and knowledge sharing in a polarised society
- Analysis, planning and monitoring : mobilisation at European, national regional and local level
- Cooperation with the platforms managed by scientific, academic and civil society communities
- The impact of advanced digital (artificial intelligence) on communication and transparency: challenges and opportunities
- Options for strengthening work in partnership and increasing monitoring of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Code of Conduct

#### Speakers:

Expert (Key-note): Karine Badr, Senior Policy Analyst, OECD (on line)

- a representative of the communication service from a EU Member State
- Caroline Grand, member of the Steering Committee of Cap'Com and member of the European Higher Education communicators network (EPRIO)
- Christophe Rouillon, President of the Socialist Group at the European Committee of the Regions, Mayor of Coulaines (France)
- Rosa Cavallaro, National Communications Authority (AGCOM) (on line)
- Marco Magheri, Secretary-General of the Italian Association of Public Communicators (COMPUBLICA) (on line)

<sup>1</sup> This meeting will take place under 'Chatham House' rule.



13:45

## Session 2

### The manipulation of information in a world of illiteracy

- The manipulation of information and the dangers of disinformation in a context of lack of skills and poverty of learning
- Education to the media and to trustworthy information sources
- The mobilisation of the European Union institutions and other international players in view of the 2024 European elections
- Cautious progress or metamorphosis ? The urgency of investments in education : a case-study
- Techniques for monitoring and neutralizing sources of fake news : examples of national and territorial interactive platforms
- Raising awareness of structured research and permanent cooperation

#### Speakers:

Expert (Key-note): Erik den Hoedt, Vice-President of the Club of Venice, Director of communication, Ministry of Economy and Climate Policy, The Netherlands (on line)

- Klimentini Diakomanoli, Expert in disinformation, author of "Fake news: Que fait l'Europe?"
- Virginia Padovese, Newsguard, Managing Editor & Vice President, Partnerships, Europe, Australia and New Zealand) (on line)
- Carys Whomsley, Digitalis, Director of Digital Risk; Head of Research and Thought Leadership, UK (on line)
- Francesco Marchionni, Vice-President of the National Youth Conseil, Italy
- Giulia Giacomelli, senior strategic communication analyst, GDG Inspire, Founder and Chief Consultant (on line)
- Viktoras Dauksas, Director, DebunkEU.org, Lithuania (on line)

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15:45

## Session 3 - Round table, moderated by Vincenzo Le Voci, Secretary-General of the Club of Venice

### The key-roles in the reinforcement of fight against disinformation

- governance at European national, regional and local level
- risk monitoring
- perspectives for the reinforcement of cooperation with civil society and scientific communities
- connecting with training institutes and promoting interaction and inclusiveness
- evaluating debunking strategies

Expert (Key-note): Simon Piatek, Head of Digital, London Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Diseases

#### Speakers:

- Raffaele Festa, Counsellor, Permanent Representation of Italy to the Council of Europe
- Intervenant 3: Natalie Maroun, Director-General, RUN-Concept, France
- Saman Nazari, Open Source intelligence-disinformation analyst, Alliance4Europe
- Max Stearns, Head of Design, The Democratic Society
- Pier Virgilio Dastoli, President of the European Movement-Italy, President of the Scientific Committee of the Italian Association of Public Communicators (COMPUBLICA), (on line)

17:30 - 18:00

## Summing up and recommendations

- Philippe Lancelle, member of the Steering Committee of Cap'Com
- Vincenzo Le Voci

## Friday 24 May

9:00

### Welcome briefing

9:15 - 11:00

### Guided tour to the premises of the Council of Europe

## CONCEPT for the MAY 23-24 MEETING

In an era where disinformation campaigns destabilize democracies, fuel violence, undermine public health efforts, and threaten international security, the importance of a united front among international organisation cannot be overstated.

As a follow-up to the first joint seminar on public communication challenges co-organised in Toulouse in February 2022, the Club of Venice and Cap'Com decided to pursue their cooperation in the field of public communication by organising a new thematic seminar on disinformation trends, convening in Strasbourg to share new knowledge on this crucial topic.

We foresee a deep exchange of views on updated best practices in this framework, tabling suggestions on how to strengthen cooperation in building and reinforce societal resilience.

Communication experts from governments, institutions and representatives from scientific communities, dedicated platforms debunking fake news, academic specialists and civil society will join the three-sessions debate that the Club and Cap'Com consider as another crucial appointment to analyse and discuss challenges and threats, exploring innovative approaches and multiplying opportunities for collaboration.

This new seminar of the Club of Venice and Cap'Com foreseen in Strasbourg on 23 and 24 May aims to look ahead, fostering the ideal comprehensive understanding of the digital development and the consequences of the continuous disinformation challenges on public communications.

In this context, investing in literacy and education to the media is of primary importance for governments and institutions as well as for all public audiences.

The Club of Venice and Cap'Com look forward to this new seminar, hoping that the foreseen debate will trigger an increased level of trust and determination and that it will be possible to contribute to setting up the necessary flexible and agile structures to counter disinformation effectively.

The solution lies in going hands in hands with sensitising the communication authorities to a structured and consistent research and to a permanent cooperation.





# Lutter contre la désinformation, une priorité pour protéger les démocraties européennes

Par Philippe Lancelle, membre du Comité de pilotage de Cap'Com

## Les défis de la communication publique européenne : synergies dans la lutte contre la désinformation, éducation aux médias

Strasbourg, 23-24 mai 2024

Désinformation, fake news, intelligence artificielle, éducation aux médias... tels sont les principaux thèmes abordés par la vingtaine d'experts européens de la communication réunis à l'Eurométropole de Strasbourg par Cap'Com et le Club de Venise le jeudi 23 mai dernier.

Deux ans après un premier séminaire international commun sur le rôle de la communication publique locale dans les différents pays de l'Union européenne organisé à Toulouse en 2022, Cap'Com et le Club de Venise se sont donné à nouveau rendez-vous le jeudi 23 mai à l'Eurométropole de Strasbourg. Le thème retenu portait cette année sur les « synergies dans la lutte contre la désinformation et l'éducation aux médias ».

A deux semaines du scrutin pour le Parlement européen, et en vue de la prochaine réunion plénière du Club de Venise prévue à Dublin les 20 et 21 juin 2024, le Président du Club Stefano Rolando a situé d'entrée le sujet de la journée comme « un défi à l'échelle européenne », se focalisant sur deux enjeux essentiels : l'analphabétisme et la désinformation.

**« Il ne faut plus croire aux contes de fées »** Les participants (experts gouvernementaux, institutionnels, académiciens et membre de la société civile européens) ont d'abord dressé sans concession le constat de la situation à l'aide de mots très forts, dans le contexte convivial qui caractérise les échanges ouverts du Club dans son cadre informel. Le Président Rolando a évoqué « un danger immense », rappelant que « l'information est devenue l'une des principales armes dans les conflits généralisés d'aujourd'hui, dont deux guerres aux portes de l'Europe. » D'après lui, 1/3 des informations diffusées relèveraient de manipulations politiques.

Les experts ont évoqué les menaces, les risques et les attaques liées à la désinformation ainsi que les instruments disponibles pour assurer un monitoring constant des développements en ligne à cet égard ainsi que la nécessité croissante de joindre les efforts et renforcer la coopération intra- et inter-nationale afin d'amplifier les capacités de communication et de résilience. Vincenzo le Voci, secrétaire général du Club de Venise a parlé d'infodémie, tandis qu'Yves Charmont, délégué général de Cap'Com s'inquiète d'un risque de « tsunami ».

Pour Christophe Rouillon, Président du groupe socialiste au Comité européen des Régions, « la désinformation représente un risque démocratique ». Le néerlandais Erik den Hoedt, vice-président du Club de Venise a confirmé pour sa part « qu'il ne fallait plus croire aux contes de fées » et Karine Badr, de

l'OCDE a insisté sur les résultats des sondages menés par cette organisation pour ce qui est des difficultés des gouvernements de concrétiser une approche stratégique en la matière. Pour elle, « la démocratie est en danger ! ».

Tout d'abord, nous faisons indéniablement face à une prolifération des fausses informations et à une montée en puissance de la désinformation dans le paysage médiatique contemporain, comme l'a décrit Karine Badr. Celles-ci proviennent de plusieurs sources : médias traditionnels, supports numériques, réseaux sociaux... à l'échelle locale comme à l'échelle internationale. De nombreux exemples récents ont eu un impact significatif sur les processus démocratiques et sur la société dans son ensemble.

Le réseau social Tik Tok a été décrié à plusieurs reprises et Christophe Rouillon a expliqué pourquoi son utilisation était maintenant proscrite au Comité européen des Régions, comme dans d'autres institutions et administrations publiques. En raison de la nature virale et du format court des vidéos, les fausses informations peuvent s'y répandre très rapidement. Des plateformes telles que TikTok ont aussi été critiquées à cause de l'absence d'un véritable mécanisme robuste de vérification des faits et de leur influence très souvent néfaste sur les jeunes utilisateurs, qui peuvent manquer de compétences critiques pour évaluer la véracité des contenus diffusés.

En outre, le développement de l'intelligence artificielle (IA) a également un impact significatif sur la montée de la désinformation. « Il est difficile de faire confiance à l'intelligence artificielle, qui a des capacités vertigineuses » a souligné Caroline Grand, membre du réseau européen de communication des établissements d'enseignement supérieur. Enfin, pour Kristina Plavsak Krajnc, fondatrice du Forum-Centre de communication publique à Lubiana, « l'intelligence artificielle fragilise la confiance publique et scientifique en générant des contenus trompeurs, les fameuses « deepfakes » qui paraissent extrêmement réalistes ou en amplifiant la désinformation via les bots sur les réseaux sociaux, qui propagent des contenus de désinformation à grande échelle, créant l'illusion d'une forte adhésion et augmentant leur visibilité ».

**Seule l'éducation permettra de se protéger des risques et de renforcer l'esprit critique.**

Même si la lutte contre ces différents phénomènes paraît complexe et souvent en retard par rapport à leur accélération, plusieurs pistes de solutions ont été proposées. Certaines relèvent d'idées encore à développer, d'autres sont déjà mises en œuvre et démontrent que la situation n'est pas inéluctable, loin de là.

Tous les experts semblent d'accord sur la nécessité d'agir vite et en collaboration étroite. La première piste est sans nul

doute celle du renforcement de l'éducation aux médias dès le plus jeune âge et peut-être également pour certains parents victimes d'analphabétisation numérique et les décideurs publics. « L'éducation est au centre des débats pour les enfants, les étudiants et le grand public. » « Il faut former les enseignants et les chercheurs » : « Seule l'éducation permettra de se protéger des risques et de renforcer l'esprit critique. »

Le deuxième grand chantier à engager serait celui de la promotion de la littéracie numérique, afin de renforcer les compétences numériques des citoyens européens et de savoir mieux utiliser l'intelligence artificielle. Deux films à destination des jeunes diffusés en Lituanie ont montré comment les réseaux sociaux permettent de manipuler l'information et comment différencier une fausse d'une vraie information.

Le troisième sujet sur lequel il semble urgent de se pencher est celui du renforcement des partenariats entre les institutions politiques, éducatives, les médias et la société civile, notamment à l'échelle locale, comme l'a rappelé Christophe Rouillon. L'exemple du Conseil national des jeunes en Italie (intervention de son vice président Francesco Marchionni) a été éclairant sur ce point.

#### **Des avancées à partager en matière de recherche et d'innovation**

La recherche et l'innovation enregistrent déjà de grandes avancées, afin notamment de mieux identifier et comprendre les canaux et les méthodes utilisés pour diffuser des Fake news, vérifier les faits et mettre en place des contre-attaques. Plusieurs expériences en ce sens ont été présentées, comme des centres de réfutation dans plusieurs pays. Ces travaux ont été décrits en particulier par Klimentini Diakomanoli, autrice du livre « Fake news : que fait l'Europe ? » paru en France le jour du séminaire. Virginia Padovese, vice-Présidente du Newsgard, a présenté ses recherches en matière d'analyses manuelles, tandis que Carys Whomsley, directrice des risques digitaux chez Digitalis, a décrit les travaux engagés en Angleterre et Saman Nazari (Alliance4Europe) et Max Stearns (Democratic Society) ont partagé les points forts des activités de deux plateformes engagées dans le dialogue en ligne en matière de sauvegarde des valeurs démocratiques et de mobilisation des jeunes dans les communautés locales. Rosa Cavallaro a illustré les activités de l'autorité nationale italienne de régulation des communications (AGCOM).

Certains réseaux sociaux mériteraient un renforcement de leur réglementation à l'échelle européenne, et en cas d'irrégularités, d'autres pourraient être purement et simplement interdits.

Finalement, une des pistes évoquées par le Président Rolando serait celle du dialogue entre la communication institutionnelle

et les services publics de radio et de télévision. Pour lui, « l'heure est à la chute des murs entre la communication institutionnelle et la communication politique, entre les médias et le monde éducatif. » Indéniablement, même si le travail reste immense et le sujet loin d'être clos, la compréhension des systèmes de désinformation avance à grands pas et chacun des acteurs s'y engage avec enthousiasme.

La deuxième journée du séminaire s'est déroulée au siège du Conseil de l'Europe, où les participants ont été accueilli par le service du porte-parole et ont interagi avec Patrick Penninckx, chef du département Société de l'information à la Direction générale des droits de l'homme et de l'État de droit (en 2024 le Conseil de l'Europe célèbre son 75<sup>me</sup> anniversaire).

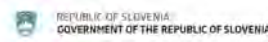
Le forum Cap'Com qui aura lieu du 9 au 11 décembre prochain à Lille, sera l'occasion de revenir sur cette question, à travers un Grand Angle spécifique, en partenariat avec le Club de Venise.



# Club of Venice seminar

## on the challenges of communicating the EU enlargement and the progress in countering disinformation

Slovenia, 25-26 April 2024



### Programme

Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia

#### Thursday, April 25, 2024

18:30 - 21:00

##### **Welcome reception** Brdo Kongress Centre, Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia

Welcome speech and presentation of the seminar

- Petra Bezjak Cirman, Director of the Government Communication Office of the Republic of Slovenia
- Vincenzo Le Voci, Secretary-General of the Club of Venice

#### Friday, April 26, 2024

9:00 - 9:15

##### **Introductory address by**

dr. Emilija Stojmenova Duh, Minister of Digital Transformation, Slovenia

9:15 - 9:35

##### **Key-Notes: 'Joining energies to counter disinformation: the media landscape, EU legislative trends, digital interconnections'**

- Paula Gori, Secretary-General, European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)
- Virginia Padovese, NewsGuard, Managing Editor & Vice President, Partnerships, Europe, Australia and New Zealand
- Sara Ahnborg, Coordinator, Disinformation pole, Spokesperson's Unit, DG COMM, European Parliament

9:40 - 10:40

##### **Round table Panel 1: Digital Service Act and Media Freedom Act: work in progress and perspectives**

Moderator: Marco Incerti, Director of Communications, European University Institute, Florence

##### **Speakers:**

- Lenart Kučič, Media Adviser to the Minister for Culture, Ministry of Culture, Slovenia
- Balint Kata, DSA Case Handler Officer, DG CNECT, European Commission
- Prof. Mariya Petyova Yurukova, Strategic Policy Expert, Advisor to the President of Bulgaria on Domestic Policy and Civil Society
- George Surugiu, Senior Communication Advisor, Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Romania
- Borut Mekina, journalist of the weekly political and current affairs magazine Mladina, Slovenia



11:00 - 12:00

## Round table Panel 2: The role of the government communicators and responsibility of the media

Moderator: Siim Kumpas (Estonia, EEAS, Head of Policy, Strategy & Global Priority issues Team (FIMI))

### Speakers:

- Jens P. Linge, European Commission, Joint Research Centre, "Text and Data Mining" Unit
- Vesa Kekäle, Senior Specialist, Department for Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland
- Klaus Dahmann, Deutsche Welle Akademie's Program Director for the Western Balkans
- Rosana Aleksoska, Program Manager Fighting False News Narratives, Most (NGO), Republic of North Macedonia
- Ivan Fischer, AFP Croatia

12:00 - 13:00

## 'Cooperation among International Partner Organisations in addressing and building resilience against disinformation'

Moderator: Zoran Potič, Strategic Communications, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Government Disinformation Working Group, Slovenia

### Speakers:

- Karine Badr, Senior Policy Analyst, OECD Headquarters, Open Governance Division (online)
- Susanne Weber, Head of the Digital, Federal Chancellery, Austria
- Nahoko Shindo, WHO, Unit Head a.i. Biosecurity and Health Security Protection, Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness and Prevention, Health Emergencies Programme
- Tim White, Journalist/Documentary maker, Ukraine specialist, Data expert and media trainer, UK
- McKenna Black, NATO, Information Environment Assessment Analyst, Stratcom Unit, Public Diplomacy Division (PDD)

14:10 - 14:15

## Presentation of the afternoon program – Communicating the Enlargement of the EU

Petra Bezjak Cirman, Director of the Government Communication Office of the Republic of Slovenia and a representative of the Club of Venice

14:15 - 14:30

## Address by

Borut Pahor, former President and Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, former Member of the European Parliament and former national Member of the Slovenian Parliament, Director of the Institute "Friends of Western Balkans"

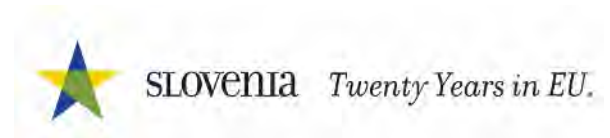
14:30 - 14:50

## Introduction to the EU Enlargement round tables: 'Communicating Enlargement in the EU and Candidate Countries': challenges and impact on reputation

### Key note speakers:

- Maja Kocijančič, Foreign Policy Advisor, Cabinet of the President of the European Council
- Peter Grk, Head of Department for the Bled Strategic Forum, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Slovenia





14:50 - 15:50

### **Round table Panel 1: At EU and Member States level - the 'Acquis Communautaire' and public opinion on the EU "enlargement capacity"**

Moderator: Kristina Plavšak Krajnc, founder of the Media Forum, Center for Public Communication, Ljubljana

**Speakers:**

- George Surugiu, Senior Communication Advisor, Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Romania
- Gregor Krajc, former Director of the Government Communication Office of Slovenia (2003) and State Secretary for Public Relations in the PM's cabinet (2004)
- Katja Šare, Head of Sector, Public and Cultural Diplomacy, Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs, Croatia
- Vuk Vujnovic, Press and Information Officer, EU Delegation in Montenegro, former Secretary-General of SEECOM

16:05 - 17:05

### **Round table Panel 2: In the Candidate Countries - 'From euphoric expectations to apathy' (round table)**

Moderator: Vincenzo Le Voci, Secretary-General of the Club of Venice

**Speakers:**

- Anna Vezyroglou, Deputy Head of Unit, Western Balkans Policy & Regional Strategy, European Commission DG NEAR (online)
- Ivana Đurić, Serbia, Head of Communications, Ministry for European Integration
- Darija Ramljak, Assistant Director, Division for Integration strategy and Policies, Directorate for European Integration of Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Oliver Vujovic, Secretary-General of the South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)
- Nikolina Lakić, Spokesperson, Ministry of Finance, Montenegro

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17:05 - 17:15

### **Conclusions of the Seminar**

- Vincenzo Le Voci, Secretary-General of the Club of Venice
- Petra Bezjak Cirman, director of the Government Communication Office of the Republic of Slovenia

17:20 - 19:00

### **Visit of Ljubljana, with guided tour and degustation of Slovene wines**

# Summary of discussions

The conference began with welcome remarks from Petra Bezjak Cirman, Director of the Government Communication Office of the Republic of Slovenia and Vincenzo Le Voci, Secretary-General of the Club of Venice, highlighting the importance of the seminar's discussions. They were followed by introductory remarks from Emilija Stojmenova Duh, Slovenian Minister of Digital Transformation, who emphasised Slovenia's governmental focus on combating disinformation, celebrated the adoption of the EU's AI Act, and highlighted the UNESCO AI conference that took place in Slovenia. She underscored the importance of equating online legality with offline legality and the critical need for better digital literacy to enhance public awareness.

## Key-Notes:

### 'Joining energies to counter disinformation: the EU legislative trends, digital inter-connections'

Paula Gori from EDMO outlined the challenges posed by AI and traditional disinformation tactics like mis-contextualized images, especially during elections. Drawing attention to the existing information gaps, to the risks of inconsistencies and the need for increasing and updating communication skills, Gori stressed the dangers of emotional manipulation and the erosion of trust. She then emphasized the necessity of sharing resources among organizations engaged in detecting and fact-checking disinformation, advocated for responsible media practices that avoid fearmongering, and highlighted the importance of media literacy.

Virginia Padovese from NewsGuard discussed the rise of AI-driven content farms, noting the proliferation of over 800 such entities that mimic legitimate local news sites to spread disinformation. She stressed the importance of AI training to use reliable sources and identify disinformation narratives, as well as the need to recognize and financially de-incentivize these problematic content farms.

Sara Ahnberg from the European Parliament focused on the specific challenges of disinformation in the context of EU elections, the role of public communications, and the misrepresentation of real EU documents, such as the 'barb wire incident'. She called for a unified effort involving citizens, teachers, and journalists to combat disinformation without entering political debates, outlining best practices such as situational awareness, prebunking and debunking, fostering cooperation and partnerships, providing training, and raising awareness through extensive informational material.

### Round table Panel 1: Digital Service Act and Media Freedom Act: work in progress and perspectives

During the roundtable discussion on the Digital Service Act (DSA) and Media Freedom Act (MFA), participants explored the implementation and impact of these regulatory frameworks on disinformation and media freedom. DSA is categorizing disinformation as a systematic risk; therefore panellists discussed how platforms should assess and address these risks, especially before elections. There were in-depth discussions about the need for clear guidelines for platforms to effectively mitigate disinformation, and the European Commission's role in monitoring compliance.

The conversation also touched upon the challenges of adapting these directives into national laws and the difficulties in regulating content that blurs the line between traditional and new media. Concerns were raised about the declining number of journalists and the increasing responsibility placed on traditional media to moderate content, including comments on social media, which presents a competitive disadvantage compared to unregulated platforms.

The roundtable highlighted the evolving nature of media consumption, the rise of 'fake media', and debated the role of the state in defining what constitutes legitimate media. Overall, the discussions underscored the need for ongoing education of citizens to foster informed decision-making and the importance of maintaining quality and trustworthy information within a complex media landscape.

### Round table Panel 2: The role of the government communicators and responsibility of the media

A panel discussion on "The Role of Government Communicators and Responsibility of the Media" provided a comprehensive exploration into the dynamics of media influence and governmental communication strategies. The participants discussed the use of AI in detecting disinformation narratives related to global issues such as the Ukraine conflict and climate change (one of the main key priorities on the agenda of the next plenary meeting of the Club of Venice foreseen in Dublin on 20-21 June 2024), emphasizing the role of persuasive communication techniques in shaping public opinion.

Specific examples included insights from Finnish experiences with NATO-related narratives, where strategic communication and media trust played key roles in prebunking potential misinformation. Discussions highlighted the challenges faced due to sophisticated disinformation efforts from foreign powers, underscoring the need for increased local expertise and media literacy initiatives to educate the public on these threats.

The panelists also discussed detoxifying information ecosystems, which involves understanding and adapting to how different demographic groups consume information. The necessity of protecting journalists and ensuring the integrity



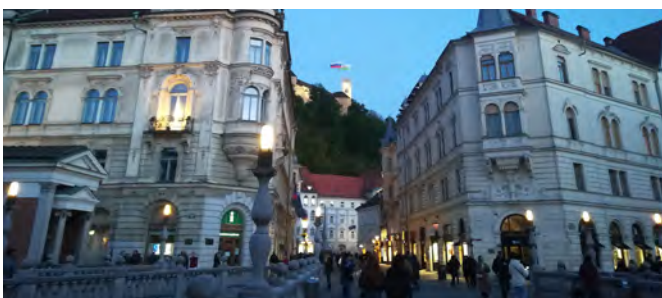
of factual reporting was emphasized as crucial for maintaining a functioning democratic media environment. This highlighted the limited effectiveness of fact-checking alone, advocating for broader protective measures and support systems for media professionals facing threats due to their work. Overall, the discussion affirmed the integral role of strategic, well-informed communication in sustaining democracy and countering disinformation.

### **'Cooperation among International Partner Organisations in addressing and building resilience against disinformation'**

A panel discussion on 'Cooperation among International Partner Organisations in Addressing and Building Resilience Against Disinformation' brought together experts from various sectors and organizations to share their strategies and insights. The panellists emphasized the importance of factual accuracy, advocating for educational initiatives to teach children fact-checking skills and stressing the necessity for publishers of reliable information to issue corrections and apologies. They highlighted the role of strategic communication in enhancing transparency, accountability, and public awareness to strengthen information integrity without tipping into censorship.

The discussion also focused on the need for building resilience within both the public and governmental structures. This involves integrating disinformation awareness into broader communication strategies and fostering societal approaches that enhance cooperation among member states, NGOs, and civil societies. Utilizing influencers and monitoring communication strategies were noted as effective methods to engage broader audiences and ensure alignment with organizational priorities.

Furthermore, the panel addressed the challenges posed by the 'infodemic' accompanying the pandemic, noting how disinformation was specifically targeted to undermine public health efforts. The concept of 'infodemiology' was introduced, emphasizing the need to listen to public concerns and adapt messaging strategies to combat disinformation regarding critical issues like vaccines effectively. Overall, the discussions underscored the collaborative efforts required across international bodies and between governmental authorities and scientific communities to mitigate the impacts of disinformation on global scales and address public audiences more timely and efficiently in times of crisis.



### **Address by Borut Pahor, former President and Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, former Member of the European Parliament and former national Member of the Slovenian Parliament, Director of the Institute "Friends of Western Balkans"**

In his speech, Borut Pahor addressed the disparities in enthusiasm towards EU enlargement, noting a higher passion within the EU compared to candidate countries, underlining an imbalance in expectations. He pointed out that while Brussels is eager for enlargement, member states exhibit caution, a sentiment exacerbated by the war in Ukraine which has significantly influenced the EU's stance but less so the member states'. He highlighted a general lack of confidence and safety concerns, acknowledging that the past two decades have shown limited results and a minimal display of political will for enlargement. Pahor emphasized that current circumstances, particularly the changes brought about by the conflict in Ukraine, necessitate a renewed will for enlargement and reform to align and advance these efforts.

### **Introduction to the EU Enlargement round tables: 'Communicating Enlargement in the EU and Candidate Countries': challenges and impact on reputation**

Maja Kocijančič emphasized the fleeting nature of the current windows of opportunity for enlargement. She stressed the importance of EU member states managing expectations accurately by neither overpromising nor underdelivering on what can be achieved through enlargement efforts.

Peter Grk addressed the significant communication challenges involved in changing the mindsets of both the political elite and civil society, who are crucial drivers of change and reform. He urged the necessity to seize the moment – describing it as “the train” that must not be missed – to ensure successful enlargement and integration of candidate countries into the EU.

### **Round table Panel 1: At EU and Member States level - the 'Acquis Communautaire' and public opinion on the EU “enlargement capacity”**

Under the Chatham House Rule, a panel discussion at the EU Enlargement roundtable focused on the 'Acquis Communautaire' and public opinion concerning EU enlargement. The panel showed insights from speakers involved in communication and public diplomacy from Romania, Slovenia, Croatia, and the EU Delegation in Montenegro.

The discussions underscored the high support for the EU project at both the EU and national levels, albeit with varying trust levels influenced by new international challenges and evolving policy priorities. Speakers noted that effective communication and public outreach are essential for maintaining momentum and fostering an understanding of EU policies and their impact on citizens' daily lives. They highlighted the need for continuous



engagement and transparent dialogue to ensure that EU citizens and stakeholders can actively contribute to the EU discourse.

The panel also addressed the complexities of the EU enlargement process, emphasizing the importance of consistent communication efforts to counteract misinformation and build support for enlargement among candidate countries. The discussion touched upon the need for a collaborative approach among EU member states to act cohesively on the global stage and to support the integration of candidate countries effectively.

Overall, the panelists agreed on the necessity of sharing good practices among communication experts and identifying flagship projects that bridge the gap between EU institutions and its citizens to support a well-informed electorate and facilitate active participation in EU processes.

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#### **Round table Panel 2: In the Candidate Countries - 'From euphoric expectations to apathy'**

A roundtable discussion titled "From euphoric expectations to apathy" examined the shifting dynamics of public sentiment in candidate countries regarding EU enlargement. The session included perspectives from key communicators and policymakers across Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, as well as a representative from the European Commission DG NEAR and the South East Europe Media Organisation.

Participants discussed the complex challenges and strategic necessities of maintaining strong public support and engagement during the lengthy EU accession processes. They underscored the initial high expectations and subsequent decline to apathy among the public in candidate countries, highlighting the need for effective communication strategies to manage and align these expectations realistically.

The panel emphasized the importance of inclusive and transparent communication to foster a well-informed public that remains supportive of the EU integration goals. Speakers shared insights into the best practices for sustaining public engagement, including leveraging media, governmental communication, and civil society collaboration. The discussion also reflected on the critical role of consistent and positive messaging throughout the negotiation phases to prevent misperceptions and build trust in the EU enlargement process.





# Club of Venice 7<sup>th</sup> StratCom seminar

Recipes to optimise strategic communication suggested models  
for European governments and institutions

London, 14-15 March 2024



HM Government

## Conference Agenda

*Institute for Civil Engineers, 1 Great George St, London SW1P 3AA, United Kingdom*

**Thursday, March 14, 2024**

**18:30 - 19:00**

### Opening remarks

- Alex Aiken, Executive Director, UK Government Communications Service
- Vincenzo Le Voci, Club of Venice Secretary-General
- H.E. Stefan Gullgren, Ambassador of Sweden to the United Kingdom
- Bartosz Wisniewski, Deputy Ambassador of Poland to the United Kingdom
- Carmen Romero, NATO HQ Deputy Assistant Secretary-General for Public Diplomacy

**19:30 - 20:15**

### Introductory panels:

**Strand 1: Establishing best practice strategy and strategic communication and its critical role in Government Communications**

**Strand 2: Setting the expectation for effective strategic communications: the role of Governments' communication in protecting democracies and their citizens**

Moderator: Camilla Monckton, GCSI and Harvard Fellow

#### Speakers:

- Senior National Cyber Security Centre representative
- Katarzyna Szaran, Poland, Deputy Director, Press Office, MFA
- Typhaine Morillon, Public Relations and Press Officer, European Parliament Liaison Office in the United Kingdom

**20:15 - 20:30**

### Closing remarks

Alex Aiken, Executive Director, UK Government Communication

**Friday, March 15, 2024**

**9:00 - 9:15**

### Opening remarks

Contribution from Simon Baugh, Chief Executive, UK Government Communication

**9:15 - 9:45**

### Plenary Strand 3

a) Credibility in the decision room, how senior communicators have effect - making the case to ministers

#### Contributions from:

- Alex Aiken, Executive Director, UK Government Communication Service
- Erik Den Hoedt, Director of Communications, Netherlands, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate, Vice President of the Club of Venice

b) Making effective use of trustworthy data to inform decisions

#### Contribution from the UK Government Communication Service Profession

- Angela Kellett, UK, Head of Insight GCS International

9:45 - 10:45

## Strand 4:

Using behavioural science effectively as part of your insight toolkit (Wall of Belief case study)

Co-Moderators: Joao Infante, Strategic Communications Lead, UK, GCS International and a Club of Venice rep.

- Professor Riccardo Viale, Behavioural Insight at Milan Bicocca University, Italy
- Moira Nicolson, UK Government Communication Service Behavioural Science Unit
- Helene Legay, Strategic Communications Lead, UK GCS International

## Strand 5:

Preparing for a crisis: communication toolkits and focus on enhancing cooperation with scientific communities

Moderator: Jamie Sutherland, Strategic Communications Lead, UK, GCS International

- Francien Machielse, Communications specialist at National Coordinator for Counter-terrorism and Security (NCTV) and the National Crisis Center (NCC)
- Professor Elena Savoia, Co-Director Emergency Preparedness Research Evaluation and Practice Program (EPREP), Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
- Joseph Palasz, UK Cabinet Office Strategy and Planning Team Lead – Crisis Communications

10:45 - 11:00

## Section 1 reflections and key learnings

Discussions in groups - moderated by the UK GSCI and the Club of Venice

11:15 - 12:00

## Plenary Strand 6

c) Digital by default - ditch the press release and start telling real digital stories

**Contributions from the UK Prime Minister's Office Deputy Head of Digital**

d) The added value of synergies between governmental and external digital platforms

**Contributions from:**

- Viktoras Dauksas, Director, DebunkEU.org and Laura Šerite, Head of Projects, DebunkEU.org, Lithuania <https://www.debunk.org/> (joining remotely)
- Carys Whomsley, Digitalis, Director of Digital Risk, Head of Research and Thought Leadership

12:00 - 13:00

## Strand 7:

Influencers and Influence, in modern digital campaigns

Moderator: Joao Infante, Strategic Communications Lead, UK, GCS International

- Chyaz Buffett, Head of Brand at GREAT campaign
- Emilija Kilinskaitė, Strategic Communications Specialist, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lithuania
- Paolo Caridi, European Commission DG CLIMA, Head of Unit, DG CLIMA E2 - Comms, Civil Society Rels & Climate Pact

## Strand 8:

PITCH - The effective practice of public diplomacy

Moderator: Jamie Sutherland, Strategic Communications Lead, UK, GCS International and Kristina Plavšak Krajnc, Founding Member, Media Forum, Center for Public Communication, Ljubljana

- Alice Preedy, Head of Strategy, Planning and Priority Campaigns, UK GCS
- Paul Gleeson, Ireland, Director of Communications, Department of Foreign Affairs
- Luca Kadar, EEAS HQ, Deputy Head of Division of Strategic Comms
- Tobias Nilsson, Head of Group Public Diplomacy, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Stockholm

13:00 - 13:15

## Section 2 reflections and key learnings

Discussions in groups - moderated by GCS International and the Club of Venice

14:30 - 15:30

## Strand 9:

New frontiers - AI, machine learning and innovation in communication

Co-Moderators: Jamie Sutherland, Strategic Communications Lead, UK, GCS International and a Club of Venice representative

- Robin Atwood, Applied Data & Insight
- Professor Andrea Baronchelli, City University of London and Alan Turing Institute.
- H.E. Siniša Grgić, Ambassador of Croatia to Sweden
- Simon Piatek, Head of Digital, London Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Diseases

## Strand 10:

Responsible government in the new technology era - the ethics of telling your story

Co-Moderators : Danila Chiaro, Governance Specialist, ICMPD and Joao Infante, Strategic Communications Lead, UK, GCS International

- Ross Burley, Executive Director, Centre for Information Resilience
- Eleanor Mace, Information Environment Assessment Officer, NATO HQ
- Mykola Balaban, Ukraine, Deputy Director, Govt StratCom Center (online) <https://spravdi.gov.ua/en/>
- Ruslan Deynichenko, Ukraine, Co-founder of Stopfake.org (online) <https://www.stopfake.org/en/main/>

15:30 - 15:45

## Section 3 reflections and key learnings

Discussions in groups – moderated by UK GCS International

16:00 - 17:15

## SECTION 4 – Measuring capacities and room for cooperation

e) Group discussions and commitments - what does government communications look like in your system and how will you keep measuring it?

- Stephen Bagley, UK, GCS International Insights & Evaluation team
- Reinis Grāvitis, Latvia, Deputy Head of Communications, State Chancellery

f) Feedback to the room - commitments and identified areas of help and cooperation

- Maia Mazurkiewicz, Co-founder & Head of StratCom, Alliance4Europe <https://alliance4europe.eu/>
- Karine Badr, Senior Policy Analyst, Open Governance Division, OECD HQ, Paris (on line)

17:15 - 17:30

## Final remarks

Contributions from:

- Alex Aiken, Executive Director, UK Government Communications Service
- Vincenzo Le Voci, Club of Venice Secretary-General

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# Summary of discussions

**Recipes to optimise strategic communication: Suggested models for European governments and institutions, the role of government communication in protecting democracies and their citizens; establishing best practice, preparing for a crisis, cooperation with scientific communities and use of behavioural science; explore synergies between governmental and external digital platforms**



The seminar started on 14 March evening with welcome statements from the hosting authorities of the UK Government Communication Service, followed by welcome speeches from H.E. Stefan Gullgren, Ambassador of Sweden to the United Kingdom, Bartosz Wisniewski, Deputy Ambassador of Poland to the United Kingdom and Carmen Romero, NATO HQ Deputy Assistant Secretary-General for Public Diplomacy.

The two subsequent introductory panels focused on the role of strategic communication in government communications and on how to capture the civic audiences' opinion and expectations when there is an increased need to reinforce in particular the protection of democratic values and citizens' safety and security.

The full day session on 15 March was opened by **Alex Aiken**, Executive Director at the UK Government Communication Service and **Vincenzo Le Voci**, Secretary-General of the Club of Venice.

The key note speech was given by **Simon Baugh**, Chief Executive Director of the UK GCS, who focused on the need to explore solutions to work in synergy and help governments and institutions optimize their existing communication models. Discussion on the key topics can be summarised as follows:

## Trust building: People, Skills and Expertise

a. Credibility in the decision room, how senior communicators have effect - making the case to ministers

b. Making effective use of trustworthy data to inform decisions

Panel members considered how communicators can build credibility by contextualising data, with reflections on the value of data visualisations as well as the need to be transparent about the limitations of data, for example where it isn't robust or accurate.

The panel discussed the UK approach for data in a crisis, bringing together data from a range of sources, including those that target a younger audience, to understand both what is trending and the sentiment surrounding it. The debate also highlighted the credibility that communicators must acquire and hold by understanding the DNA of crisis, as well as the credibility of their profession in general as a vital policy instrument that can build trust.

c. Using behavioural science effectively as part of your insight toolkit

(Including a "Wall of Belief" case study concerning the publication of a guide to understand false beliefs and develop effective debunking counter-disinformation strategies. This framework aims to support political authorities and communicators most exposed to fake news and suggests practical measures to tackle them promptly and efficiently. It is also drawing attention to the importance of tailoring the language and channels used to reach minority communities when countering misinformation).

The debate was sparked by Professor Riccardo Viale, who presented on the behavioural toolbox available to communicators against misinformation, which includes three categories of behavioural interventions: Nudges, Boosts and Refutation strategies.

d. Preparing for a crisis: communication toolkits and focus on enhancing cooperation with scientific communities

Discussion focused on several components of crisis communication operating models on how to prepare, respond and recover from a crisis: mobilising a crisis response team, establishing terms of Reference for responding to short notice requirements, defining standards for preparedness through accurate checklists, testing plans and ensuring that communications are connected to the wider crisis management framework and that credibility within the decision room is being considered at each stage of a crisis, how to "prepare" society and make it more resilient, setting up a comprehensive strategy working closely alongside with the scientific community, and understanding how risks are developing and how is the resilience developed against the threats.

Key elements recognised in this framework are timeliness, transparency, coordination, consistency, accountability,



scientific clarity free from political influence, responsiveness, equity and trustworthiness.

## Structures, frameworks and processes

e. Digital by default - ditch the press release and start telling real digital stories

f. The added value of synergies between governmental and external digital platforms

g. Influencers and Influence, in modern digital campaigns

h. PITCH - The effective practice of public diplomacy

Panellists recalled the crucial need for creating new synergies and reinforcing the already existing cooperative frameworks. They also shared examples of influencer campaigns they have delivered or admired, noting the range of outcomes that can be achieved and reflected on the balance between allowing influencers freedom to develop more creative content and controlling the messaging and delivery to manage reputational risk, both to the organisations concerned and to the influencers themselves.

The UK GCSI presented the UK's PITCH framework and explained how this model can be applied to focus on international communications. It also outlined opportunities for national state bodies to partner and collaborate on shared issues and challenges through communications.

The panel also shared a few examples of achievements such as the GREAT Campaign in the UK and the GLOBAL IRELAND as successful examples of cohesive branding experiences, and the EEAS work with a network of young influencers.

## Innovation and technology

i. New frontiers - AI, machine learning and innovation in communication

j. Responsible government in the new technology era - the ethics of telling your story

The debate focused on quite sensitive issues: challenges for social media when AI is involved; content production using AI that can easily flood the already crowded content space; crisis having forced humans to digitise and risks to lose connection with factual reality and to rely into "mere perception".

Attention was also drawn to the need for respecting regulatory frameworks such as GDPR and to avoiding overregulation in order to avoid falling into a censorship / self-censorship risk.

Panellists also focused on opportunities and risks with generative AI, on the impact of decentralised data networks & federalization and growing range of ambient data that could support crisis communication, and on ways and means to develop secure AI tools for governments together with a series of training models.

The strand on the importance of upholding transparency and trust building whilst harnessing technology and AI enabled the panel members to discuss the range of technology and AI used by hostile actors to create fake audio and video and to amplify messages to specific audiences. This also included a reflection

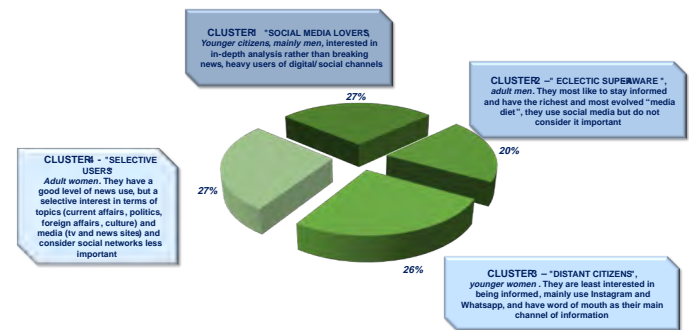
on 1) the constant development in the use of AI such as "deep-fakes" and on the necessary technology to detect it; 2) the need for citizen education to detect AI generated content, building on the existing resilience of younger audiences; 4) the need for increasing cooperation with the web industries in order to build resilience and prevent the spread of disinformation, but also with civil society and the media sector, to ensure people have access to trusted sources of information.

## Measuring capacities and room for cooperation

k. What does government communications look like in your system and how will you keep measuring it?

l. Commitments and identified areas of help and cooperation (feedback to the room).

These topics were developed in a workshop-type test organised by the UK GCSI Academy team.



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### Extract of a presentation from Italy

The seminar was concluded with joint contributions by a representative from the OECD, the UK GCSI and the Club of Venice, who reminded the future meetings foreseen in Brdo (Slovenia) (seminar on communicating enlargement and countering disinformation, in April 2024) and in Dublin (first time for the Club in Ireland), in June 2024 (plenary meeting with fresh analysis of the European election communication campaign and communication in the field of climate change, in view of the UNCCC COP-29 foreseen in November 2024).



# Club of Venice plenary

Venice, 30 November – 1 December 2023

**Framing challenges and turbulences, building resiliencies, supporting policies and delivering trustworthy narratives. Synergies in the campaign(s) to communicate the European elections. Building capacities to cope with digital world in progress: Acknowledging AI potential impact.**

Almost one hundred professionals from over twenty countries, the main EU institutions, the EEAS and the Council of Europe, OECD and NATO gathered in Venice to share their views on the wide range of communication challenges that are emerging as consequences of the EU's and its Member States institutional, political, technological and professional developments. Coherent and concrete communication planning and strategic approaches based on trustworthy narratives on the main policy priorities were the transversal theme of the new plenary.

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The meeting started with a round table focused on the future of public communication in Europe and on the EU institutions and Member States mobilisation in this field while approaching the European elections of June 2024 – a real test to measure citizens' knowledge, their trust and their expectations from their governances. The European Parliament outlined its comprehensive communication strategy, aiming to involve the other institution in a massive cooperative effort and to avail of the added value of civil society, the entrepreneurial world and trustworthy influencers.

Against an increasingly worrying global scenario (democratic processes in decline worldwide – not just in terms of voting, but also in respect for the rule of law, petitioning, protesting, civic engagement, free speech, fair trials, respect for human rights, democratic rights erosion on a harmful scale – the EP also referred to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index having recorded in 2022 a higher number of autocratic states than authentic democracies), the need for reinforcing inter-governmental cooperation in the field of communication, sharing knowledge of winning models and work in partnership with international organisation has been one of the central themes of the session.



Contributions to the debate also included key factual indicators of work in progress, in particular during the very rich round table on the increasing Artificial Intelligence' dominance in today's information landscape (for instance, an excellent contribution warning on how AI can transform society, elections and our lives (risks of influencing decision-making, "democratisation of disinformation", threats to Search Engines by disrupting the existing information landscape and creating a completely new information environment...) from Simon Piatek (Head of Digital at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine) on Microsoft announcing 10 billion USD investment in OpenAI; Google announcing similar-type mobilisation, fearing that ChatGPT could threaten Google's place as a go-to source for information; Meta having released Llama 2, an open-access language processing model that competes with GPT-4; Sam Altman (CEO of OPEN AI) starting advocating for the governance of superintelligence, arguing that superintelligence poses "an existential risk" and "we can't just be reactive" and proposing creating an international watchdog organisation similar to IAEA to oversee AI systems).

The increasing impact of technology, the increasing need for government and institutional officials to get involved in the social media dialogue and in particular the increasing introduction of artificial intelligence in information flow and pro-active communication, was at the centre of the discussion on capacity and capability building owing to the high risk of manipulation, disinformation and consequent polarisation of the debate (regardless to the presence an on line moderator's role).

The debate covered a wide range of organisational topics such as

- How good practice principles for public communication, and in particular when endeavouring to provide responses to Mis- and Disinformation threats, are being implemented. How national governments and EU institutions have drawn inspiration from surveys and global reports (OECD, WPP and others) to enhance their infrastructures and to invest in educational efforts to enrich knowledge and competence of their communication workforce. Key references provided in the comprehensive key note by Amanda Svensson (UK) including the European Commission's 2021 proposal for a Council Regulation (that led to the Council's adoption of the EU Intelligence Act<sup>1</sup> in June 2024), the Bletchley Declaration<sup>2</sup> on AI safety cooperation signed by 28 countries at UK summit

1 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L\\_202401689](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401689)

2 <https://www.export.org.uk/insights/trade-news/bletchley-declaration-on-ai-safety-cooperation-signed-by-28-countries-at-uk-summit/#:-:text=The%20Bletchley%20Declaration%2C%20now%20the,%2C%20even%20catastrophic%2C%20harm%E2%80%9D>



held on 2 November, 2023 ; and the White House Blueprint<sup>3</sup> for an AI Bill of Rights of October 2022

- How governments have been transposed their strategic aims to optimise communication: increasing planning and analytical skills, updating visual identities, acquiring higher performance devices to strengthen the dissemination of information and to draw the audiences' interest on key topics (such as the capacity building focus in Ireland through its Government Communications Network), with focus on public health measures, green transition and climate action (emphasising shared values such as positive change, fairness and collaborative approach)
- How to take on board the recommendations stemming from the analysis of the OECD global surveys, investing in a reinforced public interest driven approaches, future-proofing and training, evaluation of professionalisation and enhancing transparency, timeliness, prevention, and new partnerships.
- How to enrich competencies to communicate evidence-based governmental/institutional decisions, emphasising inclusiveness and collaboration through a whole of society, facilitating a constructive and continuous wider engagement of scientific communities and civic audiences (in particular liaising with as many platforms as possible in monitoring and neutralising malicious information sources).

Such key issues will feed the debate in the 7<sup>th</sup> StratCom seminar foreseen in London in March 2024, as usual in close cooperation with the UK Government Communication Service, and at the spring plenary of the Club that will be organised in Dublin in close cooperation with the Irish Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs.



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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ostp/ai-bill-of-rights/>



# EuroPCom 2024 – Engage Europe

**EuroPCom<sup>1</sup>** is the largest annual European conference for experts in public communication.

This event is organised by the European Committee of the Regions in close cooperation with the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Investment Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Club of Venice and the VUB.

The 15th edition of EuroPCom will take place **online** on **5 December 2024**.

Under the theme “**Engage Europe. Communicate strategically in the new institutional cycle**”, this year’s focus will be on new tools and techniques transforming public communication.

From AI to digital platforms, EuroPCom 2024 will explore how communicators can use these innovations to connect with citizens, counter disinformation, and build trust. **Communication experts will share insights, best practices and strategies to foster forward-looking communication in an increasingly complex and digital world.**

## Programme

Session 1 - The public voice: breaking through the noise. Guidance for policy communicators

Session 2 - Automated and generative tools and techniques for a futureproof communication

Session 3 - Trends in policy communication

Thematic Forum on 'Regions and cities leading the AI transition - Smart strategies to enhance public engagement'<sup>2</sup>

The event language is English. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in French and Italian.

On Friday 6th December 2024, 2nd day of its autumn plenary meeting, the Club of Venice will hear from Dr. Silke Toenshoff, Head of the “Events and Local Dialogues” Unit at the Directorate for Communication of the European Committee of the Regions a debriefing on the EuroPCom conference deliverables.

1 <https://cor.europa.eu/en/plenaries-events/flagship-events/europcom#toc-conference-for-public-communication>

2 <https://cor.europa.eu/en/podcasts/communicating-democracy-europcom-podcast-public-communication>



## 15<sup>th</sup> edition of EuroPCom

### ‘Engage Europe: Communicate strategically in the new institutional cycle’

5 December 2024, 10:00-12:30 (CET)

Online (physical presence at the CoR premises for CoR members only)

Interpretation: EN-FR-IT

## Programme

10:00 - 10:50	<p><b>Session 1: The public voice: breaking through the noise. Guidance for policy communicators</b></p> <p>Focusing on the challenges <b>policy communicators</b> face in today’s crowded information space, experts will share strategies for <b>effectively amplifying messages</b> using data-driven approaches, innovative tools, and targeted messaging to build <b>trust</b> and <b>engage</b> diverse audiences.</p> <p><b>Video pill:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Orsolya Gulyás</b>, PhD researcher, Brussels School of Governance</li></ul> <p><b>Moderator:</b> <b>Andrew Gardner</b>, Press Officer, European Committee of the Regions</p> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Elena Simperl</b>, Professor of Computer Science, King’s College London, and Director of Research, Open Data Institute</li><li>• <b>Hervé Paques</b>, Strategy director, Ogilvy Belgium</li><li>• <b>Zermina Toghey</b>, Director of Strategic Communications and Media, C40 Cities</li></ul>
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10:50 - 11:40	<p><b>Session 2: Automated and generative tools and techniques for futureproof communication</b></p> <p>This panel will explore how <b>AI-driven tools</b> are transforming public communication. Experts will discuss their benefits as well as challenges and ethical considerations, and offer <b>practical insights</b> on integrating these technologies to increase efficiency, personalisation, and outreach to citizens.</p> <p><b>Video pill:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Ann Nowé</b>, Head of the Artificial Intelligence Lab, Vrije Universiteit Brussel</li></ul> <p><b>Moderator:</b> <b>Silke Toenshoff</b>, Head of the Events and Local Dialogues Unit, European Committee of the Regions</p> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Sasha John</b>, Researcher &amp; Public Engagement Manager, Digital Futures Lab</li><li>• <b>Tomas Lehtinen</b>, Head of Data, City of Helsinki</li><li>• <b>Third speaker TBC</b></li></ul>
11:40 - 12:30	<p><b>Session 3: Trends in policy communication</b></p> <p>This panel will discuss how policymakers can best embrace <b>upcoming communication trends</b>, influenced by digital transformation, new platforms, and changing public expectations. How to successfully engage with the citizens of tomorrow?</p> <p><b>Video pill:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Tom Moylan</b>, Director of Moylan Communications</li></ul> <p><b>Moderator:</b> <b>Tony Lockett</b>, Head of the Communication Unit, European Commission’s Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD)</p> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Nic Newman</b>, Senior Research Associate, Reuters Institute</li><li>• <b>Daniela Späth</b>, Deutsche Welle Lab Coordinator</li><li>• <b>Michael Donaldson Carbón</b>, Chief Innovation Officer and Director of the BIT Habitat Foundation, Barcelona City Council</li></ul>





## EuroPCom thematic forum on 'Regions and cities leading the AI transition - Smart strategies to enhance public engagement'

5 December 2024, 14:30-16:00 (CET)

Online (physical presence at the CoR premises for CoR members only)

Interpretation: EN-FR-IT-SE

In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative power, sparking unprecedented changes in the planning, design and management of smart cities. Many cities are starting to test AI concepts and exploring AI use-cases across urban sectors, from improving public transport to public safety, healthcare services and city governance. More and more regions are investing in AI as a major pillar of their innovation strategy.

CoR members and other local and regional leaders will discuss how cities and regions can use AI to address major challenges while ensuring they are responsive to citizens' needs and respect their fundamental rights.

### Programme

14:30 - 14:35	<b>Opening by the moderator</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Marco Montorio</b>, Deputy Head of the Excellence in Artificial Intelligence and Robotics Unit, European Commission's Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG Connect)</li></ul>
14:35 - 14:40	<b>Setting the scene</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Alberto Cirio</b>, President of the Piedmont region and CoR rapporteur for the opinion on 'Opportunities and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence in the Public Sector: Defining the Role of Regions and Local Authorities'</li></ul>

	<b>Spotlight on cities and regions</b>
14:40 - 14:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Nadia Pellefigue</b>, Vice-president of the Occitania region and CoR member</li></ul>
14:45 - 14:50	<b>Interaction with the audience</b>
14:50 - 14:55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Jaromír Beránek</b>, Member of Prague City Council and CoR member</li></ul>
14:55 - 15:05	<b>Q&amp;A round</b>
15:05 - 15:10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Dialekti-Athina Voutyrakou</b>, Member of Athens City Council and member of the CoR's Young Elected Politicians Programme</li></ul>
15:10 - 15:15	<b>Beyond Europe</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Beatriz Cano Buchholz</b>, Programme Manager (Europe), Centre for Public Impact (CPI)</li></ul>
15:15 - 15:55	<b>Q&amp;A round</b>
15:55 - 16:00	<b>Conclusions by the moderator</b>



# Comunicazione pubblica

## e nuove competenze professionali nell'ecosistema mediale in trasformazione

Di Leda Guidi - Presidente Associazione Italiana della Comunicazione pubblica e istituzionale

Vi sono elementi di approfondimento e valutazione fondanti da considerare quando si riflette su quanto si è consolidato nello sviluppo della comunicazione pubblica in questi oltre trent'anni, a cominciare dalla diffusione del WWW (web 1.0), da parte della comunità accademica e della ricerca, della formazione, dal mondo delle professioni sul campo, nelle istituzioni.

**Un approccio trasversale** ai diversi ambiti è utile e necessario per trarre beneficio dalla condivisione - anche prospettica - da parte dei protagonisti, delle loro esperienze plurali, sui temi emergenti che mobilitano oggi la comunicazione pubblica e istituzionale, in particolare nelle sue relazioni sfidanti con la trasformazione digitale.

Per schematizzare un discorso potenzialmente articolato sulle competenze delle comunicatrici e dei comunicatori pubblici oggi, rispetto a quelle delineate allo "stato nascente" della disciplina e della professione all'inizio degli anni Novanta, può essere utile coagulare il ragionamento attorno ad alcune parole-chiave, parole che in alcuni casi sono l'evoluzione e la risignificazione di concetti/principi fondanti - anche normativi - che hanno dato forma e sostanza alla comunicazione pubblica dal 1990 in poi, in altri casi invece sono state prodotte da discontinuità tecnologiche, sociali e culturali - anche dirompenti - che hanno affermato su scala globale nuovi modelli e paradigmi comunicativi e di relazione, generati nella/dalla rete.

Le milestones più significative e impegnative per la comunicazione pubblica e per la sua capacità di adattamento ai mutamenti sono state segnate, dal punto di vista tecnologico e mediale, da fenomeni/dispositivi quali: gli applicativi del Web 2.0, flessibili, dinamici e conversazionali; i social network e gli ambienti di condivisione, orizzontali e policentrici, potenzialmente collaborativi e partecipativi; i dispositivi mobili smart e la connessione seamless, una sorta di nuova dimensione ubiqua; le intelligenze artificiali generative che stiamo imparando a conoscere (e a temere) dal novembre 2022 in poi. Ambienti e dispositivi digitali e ibridi che hanno influenzato - e progressivamente allargato - il perimetro d'azione della comunicazione pubblica, dei suoi obiettivi "nativi", delle strutture organizzative e delle funzioni istituzionali, del suo lessico e della sua sintassi e - di conseguenza - delle competenze necessarie per la professione, così come sono stati declinati nel corso del tempo dalle norme istitutive, dalle numerose riforme della PA sollecitate dalla trasformazione digitale, dai principi deontologici e dalle carte etiche.

Questo insieme di competenze consolidate e nuove - teoriche e pratiche - oggi sono sempre più diffusamente orientate a finalità e linee progettuali riconosciute e promosse da organismi internazionali quali l'OCSE, l' UNESCO, e normate dall'Unione Europea, quali: apertura inclusione, partecipazione,

collaborazione civica con le comunità di riferimento, rendicontazione, trasparenza, protezione dei diritti e dei corpi digitali, sostenibilità sociale e ambientale, gender digital gap, innovazione digitale con al centro le persone.

Per questo quadro complesso e promettente sono necessari nuovi saperi teorici e nuove pratiche professionali, in ambito tecnico-linguistico-espressivo, mediale, organizzativo e manageriale, giuridico di dominio, ed inoltre relazionale e progettuale, skill nuovi o riposizionati in grado di gestire in modo adeguato i mutati contesti comunicativi. I saperi e le competenze sempre più necessarie alle professioni della comunicazione pubblica e istituzionale sono:

- **Capacità di visione, di immaginazione** di scenari e di pianificazione di strategie comunicative trasversali alle organizzazioni.
- **Cultura visiva e domestichezza con linguaggi e forme espressive multicanale e multimediali**, dai dati (data visualization e storytelling), ai testi alle immagini per presenze istituzionali digitali accessibili, attrattive e "parlanti", anche in relazioni a temi complessi o verticali come i bilanci e le relative declinazioni (sociale, ambientale, di genere...), la pianificazione urbana, il governo della mobilità, la gestione del welfare, la transizione ecologica, il contrasto alle disuguaglianze e alle nuove marginalizzazioni.
- **Approccio multidisciplinare e disponibilità alla sperimentazione dei diversi ambienti e canali collaborativi/partecipativi** che complementarizzano i portali istituzionali con dimensioni *onlife* di comunità e di prossimità, in un'ottica di sussidiarietà e di Amministrazione condivisa. Ambienti fisici (laboratori di quartiere, focus group, civic assembly,...) e digitali comunitari (media civici, non social proprietari...), nei quali la comunicazione pubblica si confronta in modo diretto con la comunicazione dei gruppi formali e informali attivi, attività connettive accomunate dall'obiettivo di produrre valore pubblico e relazionale. Le tradizionali superfici di contatto con i cittadini, quali Uffici Relazioni con il Pubblico/ Front Office, contact center, sportelli fisici e virtuali, ecc. si proiettano su territori e comunità, e con essi anche le funzioni di comunicazione che devono sviluppare adeguati strumenti di ascolto, dialogo, monitoraggio, narrazione.
- **Attitudini relazionali e conoscenza degli strumenti e dei processi** di community building e di facilitazione delle interazioni e dell'engagement on line e off line, in contesti che sono una sorta di estensione della PA che si arricchisce del capitale sociale diffuso e nell'interazione cambia i propri modelli di funzionamento.
- **Conoscenza delle potenzialità**, dei limiti e delle criticità per gli obiettivi di comunicazione delle PA dei diversi dispositivi e ambienti digitali emergenti, in particolare di quelli proprietari

"over the top", basati su modelli di business estrattivi e monopolistici (vedi framework normativo europeo). Le tecnologie non sono neutre: design, funzionalità, programmi e "codici" dei dispositivi riflettono gli obiettivi e il pensiero dei progettisti / investitori.

- **Consapevolezza quindi delle implicazioni etiche e deontologiche** delle scelte comunicative e tecnologiche programmate e capacità di leggerne e misurarne gli impatti sociali. Servono competenze per la valutazione di impatto e per la costruzione di indicatori ex ante e ex post delle strategie e delle campagne messe in campo. I committenti dei comunicatori pubblici sono i cittadini e la rendicontazione trasparente delle attività e delle politiche pubbliche è doverosa. E' imperativo un costante aggiornamento sulle norme europee che costituiscono il quadro (molto dinamico) entro il quale si muove la comunicazione digitale (pubblica e non).
- **Competenze organizzative, manageriali e di leadership** per interagire in modo appropriato all'interno e all'esterno della PA. Significa anche avere capacità per negoziare con i fornitori (molte attività oggi sono esternalizzate), soprattutto degli strumenti tecnologici, attività in genere delegata ai tecnici informatici: redigere un capitolato e definirne regole e condizioni per un servizio, una attività, uno strumento o ambiente digitale non è un lavoro meramente amministrativo o solo "da tecnici", ma una competenza che ci guida nel mercato delle opzioni e evidenzia stili comunicativi consapevoli e approcci non subalterni all'offerta.
- **Cultura su policies e pratiche di "amministrazione aperta", di governo aperto**, dagli open data agli applicativi open source (anche AI aperta), dai contenuti agli algoritmi come bene comune, dai processi produttivi di informazioni e servizi ai percorsi partecipati e collaborativi.
- **Competenze linguistiche e comunicative evolute** per dialogare con le intelligenze artificiali e utilizzarle al meglio (prompt, fonti certificate, affidabilità...) in modo consapevole e critico (conoscenza dei sistemi aperti e awareness rispetto alle black box) anche per la comunicazione, a cominciare dai chatbot e dagli assistenti digitali adottati dalle PA, applicativi strumentali che vanno adeguatamente configurati e governati, fino alla familiarizzazione con ambienti più complessi che simulano - e già sostituiscono - il "pensiero cosciente/umano" in molti campi (ChatGPT-4° e i numerosi altri in inarrestabile perfezionamento.... ). Chi si occupa di comunicazione pubblica ha il dovere di maneggiare con cura questi dispositivi, sapere come sono stati prodotti per capire se sono eticamente progettati, con quali dati sono stati allenati, quali bias riflettono, quanto sono opachi gli algoritmi che li fanno funzionare.

**Ad esempio, dispositivi complessi come i "gemelli digitali"** di città o territori, alimentati da dati e informazioni raccolti, anche in tempo reale, sono in grado di supportare processi decisionali tramite funzioni avanzate di analisi e previsione (AI e algoritmi), e di co-evolvere con le "controparti" reali. Sono infrastrutture civiche al servizio delle persone e delle comunità, che permettono di sperimentare risorse tecnologiche all'avanguardia per far fronte ai cambiamenti climatici, alle disuguaglianze sociali ed economiche, per potenziare la sanità territoriale, per sviluppare nuove forme di partecipazione e migliorare la qualità della vita dei cittadini. Chi si occupa di comunicazione pubblica dovrebbe avere le conoscenze di base e le curiosità per capirne le potenzialità anche per il proprio lavoro; per sapere come comunicare ai cittadini innovazioni che influiscono sulla loro vita; per raccogliarne feedback significativi per il miglioramento del sistema e per finalizzarne il positivo impatto sulle persone; e soprattutto per portare nei gruppi di lavoro - oggi prevalentemente tecnici e deterministici - il valore delle *humanities* e per non "subire" l'approccio soluzionistico e tech/media driven troppo spesso dominante a discapito di una auspicabile visione olistica e human centred.





# Public communication

## and new competences in the evolving digital media ecosystem

By Leda Guidi

There are some core elements that have to be taken into consideration when we try to focus on what has been consolidated and assessed in the field of public communication - from the perspective of research/academic community, from the training and education theories and practices evolutions, and from the professionals points of view - during the last decades, starting from web 1.0.

**A transversal approach through the different fields** is useful also in order to take benefit by sharing plural experiences conveyed by various protagonists, on the emerging themes that activate and are of interest both for public opinion and Public institutions communication activities today, in particular in its challenging relationships with digital transformation. To outline a wide discussion on the skills for public communicators today, compared to those envisaged in the "nascent state" of the discipline and profession at the beginning of the nineties, it may be helpful to target the reasoning on some key words, that in some cases are the evolution and re-signification of founding concepts/principles /values - including regulatory ones - which have given shape and substance to public communication from 1990 onwards. In other cases, however, they were produced by technological, social and cultural discontinuities - even disruptive - which have designed new communication and relationship models and paradigms on a global scale, generated in and by the network dynamics. The most significant and demanding milestones for public communication and its capacity to adapt to changes have been mainly marked by technological and media phenomena as: Web 2.0 applications, flexible, conversational and easy to use; social networks and sharing environments, horizontal and polycentric, potentially collaborative and participatory; smart mobile devices and seamless connection in a kind of ubiquitous dimension; the generative artificial intelligences that we are learning to know (and fear...) since november 2022 onward. Digital and hybrid environments and devices have influenced and expanded the scope of action and have widened the boundaries of public communication, its objectives, vocabulary and syntax, channels and formats, and - consequently - the skills required for the profession, as they have been declined over time. Also changes in organizational structures and functions, bounding regulations/laws connected to the PA modernization developments, especially the ones led by digital transformation, have affected the professional profiles, their ethical principles and deontological charters too. This set of consolidated and new skills - theoretical and practical - are today increasingly oriented to general goals set by OECD, UNESCO, EU,...such as: openness, inclusion, participation and civic collaboration with the communities, accountability and transparency, protection of digital rights, social sustainability, user/citizen centred digital innovation, digital gender gap. For this complex and promising framework, new theoretical

knowledge and professional practices are needed: technical-linguistic-expressive and medial, organizational and managerial, related to legal and regulatory domains, relational and planning attitudes that could support the new communication contexts adequately. The following capacities are - and will be - more and more mandatory:

- **Ability to vision and imagine** scenarios and plan communication strategies across organisations.
- **Visual culture and familiarity with multi-channel and multimedia languages and forms of expression**, from open data and their use (data visualization and data storytelling), to texts and images for accessible, attractive and meaningful digital institutional presences, also in relation to complex or vertical themes such as: budgets and their related different declinations (social, environmental, gender...); urban planning; governance of mobility; environmental management; ecological transition (green deal); urban transformations; fights against inequalities and new marginalizations....
- **Multidisciplinary approach and flexibility to experiment with different collaborative and participatory platforms and channels** which complement the traditional institutional portals with on-life community and proximity dimensions, with an open view to subsidiarity and shared administration potential. Physical spaces (neighbourhood workshops, focus groups, civic assemblies,...) and community digital spaces (civic media, not only social media...), in which public communication is directly confronted with the multifaceted ways of communication activated by formal and informal groups in producing public value. The traditional surfaces of contact with citizens, such as front offices, contact centers, physical and virtual one stop shops, etc., are projected onto territories and communities, and with them also the communication functions and narratives which must develop adequate tools for listening, dialogue, monitoring activities.
- **Relational attitudes and knowledge of the tools and processes** for community building and facilitation of online and offline interactions and engagement, in contexts that are a sort of extension of the PA that is enriched by widespread social capital.
- Knowledge of potentialities, of the limits/risks and critical issues for the PA's communication objectives of the various emerging digital devices and environments, in particular over-the-top proprietary ones, based on extractive and monopolistic business models (see European Regulatory Framework). Technologies are not neutral: devices design, functionalities and software codes reflect the goals and way of thinking of the designers and the investors.
- **Awareness of the ethical and deontological implications** of the planned communication and technological choices and



ability to foresee and measure their social impacts. Skills are needed for outcomes assessment and for the construction of ex ante and ex post indicators for the evaluation of strategies and campaigns implemented. The “clients” of public communicators are citizens and transparent reporting of public activities and policies is a must. Moreover, a constant update on the European standards and goals which constitute the very dynamic framework within which digital communication (public and otherwise) moves is mandatory.

- **Organisational, managerial and leadership skills** to interact appropriately within and outside the PA. It also means having the ability to negotiate with suppliers (many outsourced activities, often not presided over properly), especially with regard to technological tools and systems, generally delegated to ICT people: drawing up specifications and defining rules and conditions for a service, an activity, a tool or a digital platform is not a merely administrative or just “technical” job, but a necessary skill that can guide among the many – and always new – options given by the market and that can highlight conscious and aware communication styles and non-subordinate approaches to the often overwhelming offer.
- **Culture on policies and practices of open administration, open government**, - from open data to open source applications, from contents to algorithms as a “common good”, from information and **service co-design methodologies** to participatory and collaborative processes.
- **Advanced linguistic and communication skills** to communicate with various artificial intelligences and use them in the best possible way (prompts, certified sources, reliability...) in an informed and critical way also for communication, starting with chatbots and digital assistants adopted by PAs, applications that must be adequately configured and governed, up to the familiarization with more complex environments that simulate – and already replace – “conscious/human thought” in many fields (ChatGPT-4o and others). Knowledge of open systems and awareness with respect to black boxes are due.

**Public communicators involved have the duty “to handle these devices with care”**, to know how they are made to understand if they are ethically designed, with what data they have been trained, what biases they reflect, how opaque the algorithms that make them work are. For example, super computing systems such as the “digital twins” of cities or territories, powered by data and information collected from data bases, archives, on line sources even in real time, are able to support decision-making processes through advanced analysis and forecasting functions (AI and algorithms), and co-evolve with

real counterparts. They are new powerful civic infrastructures at the service of people and communities, which allow to experiment with cutting-edge technological resources to deal with climate change, social and economic inequalities, to strengthen local healthcare and welfare, to develop new forms of participation and improve the quality of life of citizens. The professionals involved in public communication should have the knowledge and training to understand the potential for communication work and to know how to promote among citizens innovations that affect their lives, also in order to collect significant feedbacks for the improvement of the infrastructure and to finalize its positive impact on people. And last but not least, they have the crucial task to bring the value of humanities into predominantly technical and deterministic work groups so as not to be conditioned by the solutionist, deterministic and tech driven approach that is too often dominant.



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# A new push for European democracy

## Follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe

By Richard Kühnel

The Conference on the Future of Europe was an unprecedented exercise in participatory and deliberative democracy at European level. What made this project truly unique was the direct involvement of citizens. The European Citizens' Panels (ECP) and the digital interactive platform were the key features of the Conference and could not have been a success without the citizens' commitment and their concrete recommendations. Despite coming from different countries and speaking different languages, people from all walks of life managed to deliberate and work together to shape the future of the European project.

Given this success, it is with no surprise that one of the concrete proposals coming from the Conference was to advocate for a stronger involvement of citizens in EU-policy making also in the future. As a follow-up, the Commission issued the Communication "Putting vision into concrete action"<sup>1</sup> of 17 June 2022. The communication is a guide for the better inclusion of citizens in designing and making policies at the European level. In addition, President von der Leyen stated the Commission commitment to embed participatory and deliberative processes in key moments and areas of its policymaking during her State of the Union speech in September 2022. She noted that ECP should become a 'regular feature of our democratic life'. Soon after that, the European Commission organised three ECP of this 'new generation'. The new ECP took place from mid-December 2022 to the end of April 2023

But why is citizen engagement important? The idea of bringing citizens closer to policymaking connects to notions of open, transparent, and participatory governance.

### A democracy fit for the future

In a world with changing habits of information, communication and involvement, citizens expect that more is done to make the democracy in the EU fit for the future. While representative democracy is at the core of our political system, there is a need to engage and empower citizens. We can use new ways of engagement that complement representative democracy by allowing citizens to provide their recommendations, suggestions, and views at different moments of the policy cycle.

### Added value of Citizens input

Citizen participation is about including the views of the final addressees of policies, who are the ones that feel the impact of these policies. To ensure high quality policies it is necessary to involve and engage with citizens directly. Citizens can provide useful insight in different phases of the policy cycle, from strategic planning and policy preparation to implementation and evaluation.

During 2022, the new generation of ECP targeted the preparatory phase of policymaking. These are the phases most in line with the role of the European Commission in EU policymaking. Nevertheless, this does not exclude that in the future, ECP could take place also in other phases of the policy cycle.

### European Citizens' Panels: What's Different This Time?

The new generation of ECP were organised solely by the European Commission, which invited around 150 randomly selected citizens, representative of the EU's diversity (with a slight overrepresentation of youth), to discuss three concrete policy topics. Panellist worked in plenary and in working groups.

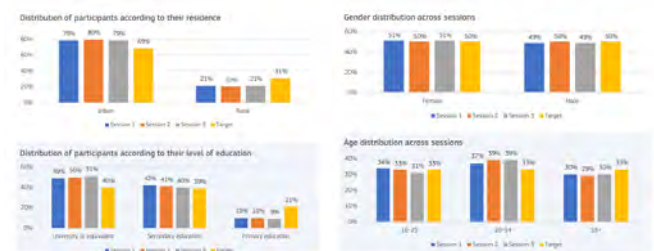


Figure 1. Distribution of participants according to residence, level of education, gender and age in the ECP on Food Waste (source ECP on Food Waste – Final Report)

The panels were composed based on three key considerations:

"who participates": diversity and representativeness are key. This is possible through random selection of citizens and the support for those, who would have difficulties to participate without assistance. Diversity ensures that all views are part of the process.

"how citizens participate": the methodology puts special focus on design, moderation, facilitations and knowledge sharing through the different phases of the ECP (figure 2) Dialogue needs to take place in a constructive way allowing all participants to speak and share their knowledge based on the expertise and information provided in advance to the ECP. It is important to work towards consensus but allowing disagreements if they take place. The aim is to co-develop and collectively own the recommendations.

"multilingualism": Not everyone is comfortable using English to express complex political ideas. To be truly inclusive, the Commission is committed to ensure that panellist can express themselves in their own language and that they can understand any provided information relevant for the debate.

<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A404%3AFIN&qid=1655752361844>

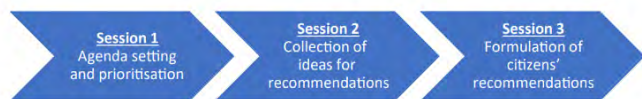


Figure 2. Overall methodological flow of the panel sessions (source ECP on Food Waste – Final Report)

Recommendations from the citizens proved of value to the relevant Directorates-General in a wide range of different legislative acts: a directive in the case of food waste, a Council recommendation in the case of learning mobility and a communication in the case of virtual worlds.

The Commission learnt from experience and adapted the methodology of the new generation of panels. For instance, a better framing, focusing on topics directly linked to a concrete (legislative) proposal of the Commission, better information available to the citizens to feed their discussions via knowledge management with the help of a Knowledge Committee and inputs from experts and improved facilitation. Furthermore, the panel sessions are being followed by feedback events taking place at the end of this and the beginning of next year.

## Takeaways From the Three First Panels

### Addressing Food Waste

The first of the new generation of ECP addressed food waste. As households account for over half of the food waste generated in the EU, citizens are essential actors in tackling this issue. In this context, the participants in this first ECP were invited to create a list of recommendations on how-to step-up action to reduce food waste in the EU. Throughout three sessions running from 16 December 2022 to 12 February 2023, citizens, with the help of experienced facilitators and experts, put forward 23 concrete recommendations. The recommendations were included as a Citizens' Report<sup>2</sup> to the Commission's legislative proposal setting legally binding food waste reduction targets to be met by the Member States by the end of 2030. The recommendations present 3 lines of action:

1. Strengthen the cooperation in the food value chain;
2. Encourage food business initiatives;
3. Support consumer behaviour change.

Some of the recommendations are to ensure cooperation and solidarity to facilitate the redistribution of surplus food to those in need, further encourage research on innovative and sustainable packaging as well as promote the role of education to build understanding and appreciation of the

value of food. In addition, recommendations indicate points for future consideration, such as taking measures to forbid the destruction of safe, surplus food and the need to improve outreach and engagement with citizens across the EU on these issues, by the EU and Member States.

Importantly, the outcome of the Panel will serve as a guide to help Member States in achieving the targets. It is the first concrete and structured contribution by citizens to the development of European political and legislative initiatives, resulting from an exercise in participatory democracy. Citizens, Member States, academia, NGOs, and the Commission met on 7 November to discuss the follow up of the recommendations in the first feedback event from the new ECP.

### Citizens' Set the Roadmap for Desirable and Fair Virtual Worlds

For the second panel, citizens were invited to deliberate on a topic which brings both unprecedented opportunities and risks that need to be addressed. The Commission convened an ECP to deliberate and make recommendations on actions to be taken by Member States, citizens and public and private stakeholders, to guide the development of desirable and fair digital environments in emerging **virtual worlds** based on the Declaration on European Digital Rights and Principles<sup>3</sup>. This panel followed a unique process, which not only allowed rich deliberations between citizens, but also a possibility to experience virtual and augmented reality at first hand. The second online session of this ECP was held in an actual virtual world with participants interacting as avatars.

At the end of the process, which took place between 24 February to 26 April 2023, citizens came up with 23 concrete recommendations. Recommendations were annexed to the Citizens' Report<sup>4</sup> and presented to the College as part of the proposal for the Communication "An EU initiative on Web 4.0 and virtual worlds: a head start in the next technological transition".

The outcome of the panel will support the overarching work of the Commission, recommendations were incorporated in the communication and can also serve as a guide to help Member States in developing policy actions related to virtual worlds. According to the Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, the work carried out by citizens is a precious source of inspiration and relevant input for the years to come and will feed into their work and policy proposals.

<sup>3</sup> <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/european-declaration-digital-rights-and-principles>

<sup>4</sup> [https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/virtual-worlds-panel\\_en](https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/virtual-worlds-panel_en)

<sup>2</sup> [https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/european-citizens-food-waste-panel\\_en](https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/european-citizens-food-waste-panel_en)

## Promoting Learning Mobility for Everyone

With the final panel, the European Commission wanted to hear the citizens' perspective on how to expand learning opportunities abroad to everyone. It follows the decision of the Commission to put forward a policy proposal for a Council recommendation with the objective of promoting learning mobility in the European Education Area. In this context, the Commission invited participants to answer the following question: 'How can we make opportunities for learning mobility a reality for everyone?'.

With 21 final recommendations, the Citizens' Report<sup>5</sup> pointed out key areas for improvements and prioritised solutions to increase access and participation to learning experiences abroad, regardless of age and educational field, from school education to vocational education and training, as well as higher education, adult learning, and non-formal learning settings.

Several recommendations highlight the importance of inclusive education and training systems and the need for all actors concerned to play their part in ensuring that everyone can enjoy the benefits of a borderless Europe, regardless of their age, level of education, background, and financial means. Other recommendations give significant importance to improving language learning, including through new technologies, as a key enabling factor for learning mobility.

Furthermore, the panel's recommendations highlight the importance of further awareness of opportunities and to encourage the participation of people with fewer opportunities. They also outline opportunities and challenges brought by digitalisation and explore sustainable solutions to reduce the environmental impact of mobility. The citizens' recommendations were incorporated in the EC recommendation and will guide the work of the Commission on this matter as it may be used as guidance for the Member States.

## Citizen Engagement – Going Beyond

It is now clear that there are serious benefits in the organisation of ECPs. Not only because of legislation and policies gain on quality with the input and knowledge of citizens, but because of the added value that the panels have for EU democracy.

As a result, the Commission is now considering further ECP during 2024. Key topics will be announced by the end of 2023 and will be discussed early in 2024, before the European

Elections in June 2024. A key innovation is that the panels will be accompanied by a digital platform, the Citizens' Engagement Platform (CEP) as part of the new Have Your Say Portal (HYS). HYS will be an online "one-stop-shop" for citizens' engagement in policymaking, which will also comprise the current public online consultations and the European Citizens' Initiative forum.

The digital platform responds to a growing demand for digital democracy tools and can contribute to bringing European Institutions closer to EU citizens. Going beyond the provision of relevant information, the CEP allows the Commission's services to host participatory and deliberative processes, on a variety of topics, either as a purely online tool or as a support to on-site participatory formats.

In practice, citizens will be able to make contributions, comments or to endorse those made by other citizens on the topics open for discussion. The platform will allow citizens to use their languages and then the system will translate their contributions. These will be analysed and fed into the ECP's discussion.

Another innovation to mainstream participatory methods across the Commission is the publication of the internal *Corporate Guidance on Citizen Engagement*. The objective of the Corporate Guidance is to establish a reference toolbox that identifies and categorises different formats of citizen engagement, from the fully-fledged Citizens' Panels at EU level to other co-creation and exploratory formats.

Participatory democracy has come to stay. The ECP as well as other formats will continue to develop and improve as a key tool for citizen engagement and democratic innovation.

<sup>5</sup> [https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/learning-mobility-panel\\_en](https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/learning-mobility-panel_en)





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In 2004, Richard Kühnel joined the European Commission as Member of the Cabinet of the EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner. Between 2008 and May 2014, he was Head of Representation of the European Commission in Vienna, Austria, and later on, he held the same function in Berlin, Germany, until August 2019.

Before joining the European Commission, Richard Kühnel served in the national diplomatic service of Austria. He served at the Austrian Embassy in Tokyo and at the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations in New York. In 2003, he returned to Vienna, first as an advisor to the Director-General for Development Cooperation and then as a member of the Cabinet of the Foreign Minister.

Richard Kühnel is a lawyer by training, with an emphasis on international and European law.



# Disinformation in a changing online information landscape

By Carys Whomsley

The online information landscape has long been dominated by tech giants including Google, Meta and Twitter. But in recent years, a new generation of information platform has gathered momentum. As people increasingly turn to short-form video via the likes of TikTok and YouTube Shorts, and use generative AI platforms such as ChatGPT to search for information online, the shape of the information landscape has changed – bringing with it new opportunities and threats.

TikTok has revolutionised the way younger generations access information online: they are now more likely to turn to the videos and voices of those they consider as peers than written articles from traditional media outlets<sup>1</sup>. And the meteoric rise of AI-powered chatbots such as OpenAI's ChatGPT marks a further shift in the information landscape, as people seek more accessible and immediate responses to search queries.

In response, the incumbent search engines are competing to become more relevant and user-friendly, developing at a rapid pace and incorporating chatbots to generate complete answers to user queries using content pulled from across the internet. Social media platforms are similarly responding to the changes in user preferences, with many now enabling creators and advertisers to create AI-generated content directly within the platforms themselves, making it easier than ever to push professional-looking content out to audiences.

But despite the ease of use of chatbots, and the entertainment value of short-form video and social media, these platforms are prone to producing incorrect or misleading answers to search queries – a phenomenon acknowledged by the platform creators themselves. Nevertheless, the development race continues as tech companies battle to maintain and grow their user bases, and the rise of social media and chatbots as information sources looks set to continue.

Such rapid growth of platforms that are prone to publishing misleading information presents the online space with new risks. In the realm of democracy and civil society, these risks centre on the synthetic and convincing content that continues to infiltrate the platforms, and its capacity to mislead, disinform, and polarise at scale.

## AI's role in persuasive propaganda

AI-generated content, be it written, audio or visual, has the power to mislead at scale, and synthetic voices, videos and images have become almost entirely indiscernible from the real thing – a phenomenon that carries alarming implications in the context of political and social propaganda and conspiracy theories. A recent study by Stanford University<sup>2</sup> found written content

generated by GPT 3.0 was nearly as persuasive for US audiences as content from real foreign covert influence campaigns – with human-machine teaming strategies producing even more convincing results.

With an audio-deepfake appearing to have influenced votes in Slovakia's election in September last year, and right-wing extremist networks<sup>3</sup> adopting LLMs to create harmful and hateful content, many of the risks posed by the rising use of these platforms have already materialised. In addition, social media platforms have been unable to prevent the creation of automated botnets in the world of fraud, and a wave of AI-generated conspiracy theory content has flooded mainstream social networks.

Already, GPT 3.0 has been superseded by two even more capable models, with the potential to be used to display large volumes of content conveying a particular narrative to a targeted audience, and to create ostensibly authentic infrastructure (such as fake social media accounts and news outlets) to reach a wider audience and evade detection.

## Monetising disinformation

Adding to the risks surrounding the new online information landscape is the potential for disinformation to be disseminated at scale and monetised through social media platforms' content creator programs.

X's monetisation of posts through its Twitter Blue subscription service is reported to have fuelled disinformation<sup>4</sup> on the platform. Twitter Blue allows paying some subscribers with over five million tweet impressions (views) per month to earn a share of advertising revenue<sup>5</sup> from their post threads. Social media disinformation experts have warned that this provides an economic incentive<sup>6</sup> to amplify emotionally-charged content that will generate views, even when this content is fake or misleading. The proliferation of disinforming posts relating to the Israel-Hamas conflict<sup>7</sup> that has recently appeared on the platform adds weight to this claim.

In response, Elon Musk has announced that content creators whose posts on X get amended by the Community Notes<sup>8</sup> feature, a crowd-sourced fact-checking programme where X's users can flag posts that may contain disinformation, will no

1 <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/fewer-people-trust-traditional-media-more-turn-tiktok-news-report-says-2023-06-13/>

2 <https://academic.oup.com/pnasnexus/article/3/2/pgae034/7610937>

3 <https://gnet-research.org/2023/06/07/redpilled-ai-a-new-weapon-for-online-radicalisation-on-4chan/>

4 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66113460>

5 <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-x/creator-ads-revenue-sharing>

6 <https://fortune.com/2023/10/11/israel-hamas-disinformation-twitter-x-incentivized-elon-musk-algorithm/>

7 [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/x-twitter-blue-monetization-musk-israel-palestine-misinformation-fake-news\\_n\\_652554cde4b0102e6963882b](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/x-twitter-blue-monetization-musk-israel-palestine-misinformation-fake-news_n_652554cde4b0102e6963882b)

8 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maryroeloffs/2023/10/29/musk-x-users-wont-make-money-off-corrected-tweets/>

longer be able to monetise those posts. But some question whether this is a case in which prevention would be better than cure, calling for stricter measures to ensure disinformation doesn't get published in the first place.

Similarly, Media Matters has reported that TikTok's Creativity Program, which enables creators with high followings to be paid for 60-second videos they generate on the platform, may have led to an increase in conspiracy theory<sup>9</sup> content that performs strongly in engagement-driven algorithms and can be highly profitable. According to Media Matters researchers, this may be encouraging financially-motivated users to exploit the platform's ability to support the creation of AI-generated material at scale, leading to increased volumes of AI-generated content relating to conspiracy theories reportedly reaching tens of millions of views on TikTok.

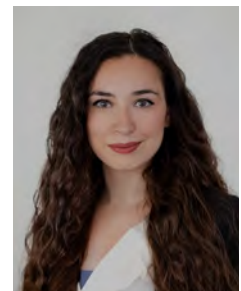
## Emerging technologies as a force for good

In an attempt to curb the misuse of their generative AI services, OpenAI, Google, Meta, Anthropic and other key AI platform developers have been placing restrictions<sup>10</sup> on the use of their platforms to create political content. Google has barred its chatbot from returning responses for certain election-related queries, while Meta has banned political advertisers from using its generative AI ad tools. Furthermore, a voluntary pledge<sup>11</sup> was recently signed by 20 technology companies, including TikTok, X and Microsoft, to use actions including collaboration on detection tools to help prevent deceptive AI content from disrupting voting in 2024 elections.

But while social media and AI chatbots have had a disruptive impact on democracy and social stability, they can present governments and civic society groups with positive ways to level the playing field in digital outreach strategies. The ease of use, high output quality and low cost can enable campaign groups to produce engaging content for diverse audiences at scale, to improve civic engagement, communicate key messages, and support consultation campaigns with citizens. In particular, LLMs are adept at providing translations and generating content with nuances in tone, which can be maximised to support productive dialogue between policymakers and disenfranchised audiences.

As the new online information landscape of social media and AI chatbots becomes established, it will be vital for the platform owners to maintain the integrity of the platforms that people are using to gather and share information. Failing to do so carries significant risks spanning the social and political

spheres, as disinformation threatens to disrupt democracy and civil society. Meanwhile, organisations looking to distribute positive messages must evolve, embracing the opportunity to adopt the platforms as important vehicles for content sharing. With the new information landscape here to stay, the good news is that they can now share positive agendas and reach out to audiences in new ways, at low cost and at speed.



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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.mediamatters.org/tiktok/tiktok-has-ai-conspiracy-theory-problem>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/16/technology/ai-elections-defense.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://securityconference.org/en/aielectionaccord/>



# Naviguer dans des eaux turbulentes : communiquer l'UE à l'ère de la désinformation, du populisme et de la fragmentation<sup>1</sup>

Par Michaël Malherbe

Comment l'UE adapte ses messages et ses stratégies d'engagement pour répondre à la convergence de facteurs redéfinissant le paysage de la communication ?

- Montée des réseaux sociaux et fragmentation des écosystèmes médiatiques traditionnels
- Prolifération de la désinformation, des « fake news » et des ingérences étrangères dans les processus démocratiques
- Émergence de nouvelles formes de populisme, souvent alimentées par les technologies numériques et de mouvements radicaux
- Tendance générale à la désinstitutionnalisation des sociétés et érosion de la confiance dans les institutions traditionnelles et les connaissances expertes

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Bien que l'UE ait fait des progrès significatifs dans l'adaptation de ses approches de communication à ces nouvelles réalités, elle continue de lutter avec la tension fondamentale entre storytelling centralisé et nécessité de s'adresser à des contextes nationaux diversifiés et à des publics de plus en plus fragmentés.

## Paysage de communication évoluant et stratégies adaptatives de communication de l'UE

### 1. Lutte contre la désinformation et les ingérences étrangères

Les dernières élections du Parlement européen ont vu des niveaux sans précédent de campagnes de désinformation, souvent liées à des acteurs étrangers. L'UE y répond avec de nouveaux outils, comme l'East StratCom Task Force, démontrant une prise de conscience accrue de la menace posée par la guerre de l'information. L'« Approche européenne pour lutter contre la désinformation en ligne » marque un changement significatif vers un engagement proactif avec le problème avec des initiatives de vérification des faits.

### 2. Réponse aux nouvelles formes de populisme

L'émergence du « populisme numérique » présente un défi significatif aux efforts de communication de l'UE. Les narrations populistes simplifient souvent les processus complexes de l'UE.

Le passage du langage technocratique à une communication plus émotive et basée sur les valeurs dans les messages de l'UE peut contribuer à répondre aux messages simplistes des populistes. De même, l'émergence de mouvements de jeunes à la fois d'extrême droite (le mouvement identitaire) et d'extrême gauche (par exemple, l'activisme climatique) crée de nouveaux défis pour l'engagement autour de l'UE avec des mouvements qui s'engagent souvent intensivement dans la politique, même si les formes de participation traditionnelle restent limitées.

### 3. Rebâtir la confiance institutionnelle face à la post-vérité

Les données Eurobaromètre montrent une baisse de la confiance dans l'UE de 57 % en 2007 à 43 % en 2022, reflétant une tendance plus large d'érosion de la confiance dans les institutions traditionnelles. Cela présente un défi fondamental à l'autorité et à la légitimité de l'UE. Les initiatives de transparence accrue, telles que le Registre de Transparence de l'UE, visent à reconstruire la confiance dans les institutions de l'UE, avec un succès limité, plaidant pour un besoin de réformes des structures de gouvernance de l'UE.

Le concept de « déclin de la vérité » progresse où les faits jouent un rôle décroissant dans la vie publique au profit d'une tendance à l'emphase croissante aux appels émotionnels. L'UE adopte une approche hybride, combinant la communication basée sur les faits avec un storytelling narratif reposant sur de vraies histoires personnelles. L'utilisation de l'humour pour démystifier les idées fausses pourrait engager davantage par rapport aux communications traditionnelles de l'UE.

<sup>1</sup> Ces trois contributions, parues dans le site web <https://www.lacomeuropeenne.fr/a-propos/> sont republiées comme agréé par leur auteur, Michaël Malherbe. À Michaël les remerciements du comité éditorial de Convergences.



# Défis technologiques et efforts de communication de l'UE

## 1. Contraintes de cadrage

Les médias nationaux privilégient encore le cadrage national des questions de l'UE, limitant la portée des messages centralisés de l'UE, rendant la restitution du processus de prise de décision de l'UE le principal défi de communication.

## 2. Dilemmes technologiques et éthiques

L'utilisation de l'IA et des big data dans les stratégies de communication soulève des préoccupations en matière de confidentialité et de manipulation de données personnelles. Équilibrer le besoin de réponse rapide avec l'assurance de l'exactitude et de la nuance demeure crucial pour l'exemplarité de la communication.

## 3. Besoins diversifiés des publics

L'UE doit mieux connaître la diversité des niveaux variés de connaissance et d'engagement des citoyens envers l'UE, au-delà des seules différences générationnelles ou des habitudes de consommation des médias, qui complexifient les stratégies de communication.

# Approches innovantes pour les futures stratégies de communication de l'UE

## 1. Prévision Participative

Impliquer les citoyens dans des exercices de planification de scénarios pour l'avenir de l'UE pourrait augmenter l'engagement et créer une co-construction et une propriété partagée des narratifs de l'UE. Des programmes pilotes pourraient tester cette approche.

## 2. Gamification des processus de l'UE

Développer des jeux éducatifs immersifs, des serious games, simulant la prise de décision de l'UE auraient le potentiel d'augmenter la compréhension des processus de l'UE, en particulier parmi les jeunes, même s'il faut éviter la simplification excessive des questions complexes.

## 3. Réseaux de communication décentralisés

Autonomiser les influenceurs locaux et les organisations de la société civile en tant que communicateurs de l'UE pourrait augmenter la confiance et la pertinence des messages de l'UE. Un programme « EU Local Voices » pourrait former et soutenir ces nouveaux créateurs de contenus.

## 4. IA Éthique dans la communication publique

Développer une personnalisation des communications de l'UE basée sur l'IA avec des algorithmes transparents pourrait permettre une dissémination plus ciblée et pertinente, équilibrée avec le besoin d'un discours public partagé et la nécessité de prendre en compte les préoccupations en matière de confidentialité des données.

Les défis de communication de l'UE reflètent des tendances sociétales plus larges de fragmentation, de méfiance et de surcharge d'informations. Bien que l'UE ait fait des progrès significatifs dans l'adaptation de ses stratégies de communication à cette nouvelle réalité, le succès futur dépendra de la capacité de l'UE à :

- Favoriser une véritable sphère publique paneuropéenne tout en respectant les diversités nationales ;
- Utiliser la technologie de manière éthique pour améliorer l'engagement sans exacerber les divisions sociales ;
- Équilibrer la communication basée sur les faits avec des narratifs convaincants qui résonnent émotionnellement avec les citoyens ;
- S'adapter aux paysages médiatiques en évolution rapide tout en maintenant les valeurs démocratiques fondamentales.

Une communication efficace ne concerne pas seulement l'amélioration de l'image de l'UE, mais aussi le maintien de la légitimité démocratique du projet européen lui-même à une époque de défis sans précédent pour la communication européenne.



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# « Storytelling Shift » : évolution des stratégies de communication de l'UE entre 2019 et 2024

Par Michaël Malherbe

Face au défi permanent de communiquer efficacement ses priorités, actions et valeurs à un public diversifié de plus de 400 millions de citoyens répartis dans 27 États membres, la communication de l'Union européenne est définie dans les documents stratégiques les plus importants : les agendas stratégiques du Conseil européen rédigé avant les élections européennes et les lignes directrices politiques de la Commission européenne rédigées par la nouvelle présidence. Quelles évolutions des stratégies de communication de l'UE peuvent être déduites en comparant deux ensembles de documents pivotaux : les agendas stratégiques du Conseil européen pour 2019-2024 et 2024-2029, et les lignes directrices politiques de la Commission européenne présentées par Ursula von der Leyen en 2019 et 2024 ? Ces documents ne définissent pas seulement la direction politique de l'UE, mais révèlent également comment les institutions cadrent leurs messages et prévoient de s'engager avec les citoyens dans un paysage géopolitique en constante évolution.

En une phrase, notre analyse révèle un changement significatif dans les stratégies de communication, reflétant l'adaptation de l'UE aux nouveaux défis mondiaux et aux attentes changeantes du public. L'UE se dirige vers une approche de communication plus affirmée, axée sur la sécurité et l'engagement des citoyens, tout en s'efforçant de maintenir ses valeurs fondamentales et son unité dans un monde de plus en plus complexe.

## 1. Changement des cadres narratifs : le passage d'un récit d'aspiration à un récit de nécessité et d'urgence

Le changement le plus frappant dans la communication de l'UE est le passage d'un récit d'aspiration à un récit de nécessité et d'urgence. En 2019, les lignes directrices de von der Leyen étaient encadrées autour du concept d'une Union qui « aspire à plus », mettant l'accent sur l'ambition et le progrès. L'agenda stratégique de 2019 se concentrait également sur « la construction de notre avenir ensemble ». En revanche, les documents de 2024 encadrent les actions de l'UE en termes de force, de souveraineté et de sécurité. L'agenda stratégique de 2024 s'ouvre sur une évaluation sévère des défis mondiaux, soulignant la nécessité d'une « Europe forte et souveraine ». Ce changement reflète une reconnaissance de la réalité géopolitique modifiée à la suite d'événements comme la pandémie de COVID-19, la crise énergétique et l'invasion de l'Ukraine par la Russie.

Le Pacte vert pour l'Europe, une pièce maîtresse de l'agenda de 2019, était initialement encadré principalement en termes de protection de l'environnement et d'opportunité économique.

En 2024, bien qu'il reste une priorité, il est de plus en plus encadré en termes d'autonomie stratégique et de compétitivité, soulignant la nécessité pour l'Europe de diriger les technologies vertes pour assurer la sécurité économique.

## 2. Évolution des Messages clés : un passage vers une communication plus affirmée sur le rôle de l'UE dans la garantie de la sécurité

La sécurité et l'autonomie stratégique sont devenues des thèmes centraux en 2024, reflétant une évolution significative par rapport à 2019. Bien que la défense et la sécurité aient été mentionnées dans les documents de 2019, elles n'avaient pas la même importance. L'agenda stratégique de 2019 mentionnait brièvement la nécessité de « prendre une plus grande responsabilité pour notre propre sécurité et défense ». En revanche, l'agenda de 2024 consacre une section entière au « Renforcement de notre sécurité et de notre défense », détaillant des plans pour augmenter les dépenses de défense, les achats conjoints et le développement des capacités industrielles de défense de l'UE. Ce changement indique un passage vers une communication plus affirmée sur le rôle de l'UE dans la garantie de la sécurité de ses citoyens et sa place sur la scène mondiale.

## 3. Stratégies de ciblage et d'engagement du public : un engagement citoyen plus soutenu et significatif pour construire la légitimité et le soutien

Les deux ensembles de documents montrent une importance accrue de l'engagement direct des citoyens, mais les documents de 2024 vont plus loin, reflétant les leçons tirées d'initiatives comme la Conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe. En 2019, von der Leyen envisageait la Conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe comme un moyen de donner aux citoyens une voix dans les priorités de l'UE. Les lignes directrices de 2024 semblent avoir plus d'ambition, s'engageant à « faire de la participation des citoyens une pratique régulière dans l'UE », y compris des dialogues annuels avec les commissaires. Cette évolution suggère une reconnaissance de la nécessité d'un engagement citoyen plus soutenu et significatif pour construire la légitimité et le soutien aux actions de l'UE.

## 4. Communication de crise et résilience

Les documents de 2024 montrent une augmentation marquée autour de la préparation aux crises et de la résilience, reflétant les expériences de l'UE depuis 2019. Bien que les documents de 2019 mentionnent la nécessité d'une réponse aux crises dans des domaines spécifiques comme la migration, l'agenda stratégique de 2024 appelle à « une approche plus robuste et agile » de la gestion des crises dans tous les domaines, des urgences sanitaires aux cyberattaques. Ce changement indique une tentative de rassurer les citoyens sur la capacité de l'UE à gérer les crises futures, tout en justifiant une intégration accrue dans des domaines comme la santé et la cybersécurité.

## 5. Équilibre entre unité et diversité

Les deux ensembles de documents luttent avec le défi de promouvoir l'unité de l'UE tout en reconnaissant la diversité des États membres. Cependant, les documents de 2024 montrent une approche plus nuancée de cet équilibre. L'agenda stratégique de 2019 mettait l'accent sur « l'unité dans la diversité » comme une force. L'agenda de 2024, tout en continuant à promouvoir l'unité, reconnaît plus explicitement les circonstances nationales différentes, en particulier dans des domaines comme la transition verte et la politique migratoire, reflétant les changements des forces politiques élues lors des élections du Parlement européen. Cette évolution suggère une tentative de répondre aux préoccupations concernant l'empiètement de l'UE tout en promouvant une action collective.

Ces changements dans les stratégies de communication de l'UE ont plusieurs implications :

- 1. Légitimité et perception publique** : Le passage à une communication plus affirmée sur la sécurité et l'autonomie stratégique peut aider à justifier une intégration accrue de l'UE dans ces domaines. Cependant, cela risque également d'aliéner ceux qui sont méfiants vis-à-vis de l'expansion des pouvoirs de l'UE.
- 2. Positionnement mondial** : Le ton plus affirmé positionne l'UE comme un acteur mondial plus fort, mais peut également créer des tensions avec les alliés, partenaires, concurrents et rivaux systémiques internationaux.
- 3. Engagement des citoyens** : L'accent accru sur la participation directe des citoyens est une promesse durable, mais son efficacité dépend toujours de la mise en œuvre et de la capacité de l'UE à démontrer que l'apport des citoyens influence réellement la politique.

Notre analyse révèle que les institutions de l'UE adaptent leurs stratégies de communication à un environnement plus complexe et difficile. Le passage à une communication plus affirmée sur la sécurité et l'autonomie stratégique, couplé à un accent accru sur l'engagement des citoyens, représente une tentative de construire un soutien pour une UE plus intégrée et globalement influente, tout en ne négligeant pas la nécessité de respecter la diversité des États membres et de répondre aux préoccupations des citoyens concernant la souveraineté. À l'avenir, les stratégies de communication de l'UE devront probablement devenir encore plus agiles et intégrées entre les institutions pour relever le défi de maintenir un message cohérent tout en s'adressant à des publics nationaux diversifiés et à des situations mondiales en évolution rapide.

Alors que l'UE continue d'évoluer en réponse aux défis mondiaux, sa capacité à communiquer efficacement ses actions, valeurs et vision aux citoyens sera cruciale pour façonner son avenir et sa place dans le monde.

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# Bulle médiatique bruxelloise : influence croissante de Politico Europe

Par Michaël Malherbe

Au cours de la semaine écoulée<sup>1</sup>, plusieurs mouvements dans les rédactions de médias européens manifestent l'influence croissante de Politico Europe et de sa maison mère, Axel Springer – une tendance inquiétante – dans le paysage médiatique bruxellois. Cette évolution soulève des questions importantes sur la diversité des voix couvrant les affaires de l'UE...

## Les faits clés :

- **Claus Strunz**, ancien rédacteur en chef de BILD (Axel Springer), est nommé nouveau PDG et directeur de l'information de Euronews, une double fonction surprenante, remplaçant Guillaume Dubois dans un mouvement surprise. Cette nomination suscite des inquiétudes dans divers médias : tandis que Lyon Capitale décrit Strunz comme un « journaliste controversé », Le Monde note que son profil suscite des inquiétudes parmi certains employés et Mediapart craint qu'Euronews puisse devenir « un CNews bis ».
- **Matthew Karnitschnig**, correspondant en chef de Politico Europe, est nommé nouveau rédacteur en chef de Euractiv, à partir de 2025. Le communiqué de presse d'Euractiv<sup>2</sup> sur la nomination de Karnitschnig adopte un ton positif, soulignant son engagement envers « un esprit inlassable de professionnalisme et de camaraderie » et sa dévotion aux « meilleures traditions d'une presse libre et indépendante ».
- **Jakob Hanke Vela**, ancien auteur de la newsletter quotidienne Brussels Playbook pour Politico, devient le chef du bureau bruxellois de Handelsblatt en 2025.

Ces récits contrastés mettent en lumière la nature complexe et potentiellement conflictuelle de ces changements de direction dans le paysage médiatique bruxellois. Ces mouvements de haut niveau signalent une « Politico-isation » croissante des médias bruxellois, avec des postes clés dans des médias influents désormais occupés par des journalistes ayant des liens avec Politico ou sa maison mère.

## Quelques conséquences potentielles

- 1. Homogénéisation de la couverture médiatique** : Avec plus de médias dirigés par des individus ayant des parcours issus d'un même média, l'un des plus importants à Bruxelles, il existe un risque d'approche plus uniforme de la couverture de l'UE.
- 2. Changement de focus éditorial** : Politico est connu pour une approche qui privilégie la politique plutôt que les politiques publiques, contrairement à Contexte, ce style pourrait de plus en plus influencer la manière de traiter les affaires de l'UE par plusieurs médias européens.
- 3. Préoccupations sur l'indépendance** : Avec l'influence croissante d'Axel Springer, des questions se posent sur les éventuels conflits d'intérêts et la capacité de ces médias à maintenir leur indépendance éditoriale.
- 4. Impact sur la diversité journalistique** : La concentration du pouvoir entre les mains de quelques groupes médiatiques pourrait limiter la diversité des perspectives et des voix dans la couverture de l'UE.
- 5. Changement du paysage médiatique** : Cette tendance pourrait redessiner l'écosystème médiatique bruxellois, marginalisant potentiellement les derniers plus petits médias indépendants.

Bien qu'il soit important de noter que les journalistes individuels maintiennent leur intégrité professionnelle, des implications plus larges de ce changement méritent une attention particulière.

Alors que l'UE fait face à des défis critiques, un paysage médiatique diversifié et indépendant est crucial pour tenir le pouvoir responsable et informer le public.

À mesure que cette tendance à la politico-isation de la sphère médiatique se développe, observateurs, institutions de l'UE et citoyens devront surveiller de près son impact sur la qualité et la diversité du journalisme politique européen. La santé de notre démocratie européenne en dépend.

<sup>1</sup> Article daté du 21 octobre 2024

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/about-euractiv/matthew-karnitschnig-appointed-editor-in-chief-of-euractiv/>



# Reputation Management in the Age of AI Misinformation

By Stavros Papagianneas



Trust matters and rules brand image. When you trust someone, you give them the benefit of the doubt. And if this person gets in trouble, you will hear their side of the story before making conclusions.

Organisations seek to build the same benefit of the doubt among their stakeholders. Without a strong reputation, brands risk not having a receptive audience for their story when they need one the most.

The imperative to build a solid reputation to benefit from the doubt is paramount in high-risk sectors. However, every company has risks and can obtain a competitive advantage by building a reputation they can draw on in times of crisis.

Building a strong and positive reputation requires strategic efforts, consistent actions, and effective communication. It takes time. Nevertheless, it can be easily damaged. Consistency, authenticity, and a genuine commitment to delivering value are crucial to building a strong and lasting reputation.

AI can offer numerous benefits for improving brands and client experiences, optimising operations, and enhancing communication. However, like any tool or technology, AI can pose risks if not used responsibly or if its capabilities are exploited in negative ways.

AI-generated misinformation/disinformation could significantly threaten reputation management in today's digital age. With the advancements in AI and natural language processing, it has become increasingly easy to create content that appears legitimate and real but is false or misleading.

That viral image of the pope in a puffy coat? The "photo" of former President Donald Trump being arrested? The "video clip" of President Joe Biden rapping? Or Jordan Peele who uses deepfake technology to simulate a speech by Barack Obama<sup>1</sup> as an ironic warning against the rise of deepfakes.

Those were all deepfakes — computer-generated media of realistic yet entirely fabricated content. And those deepfakes fooled many of us. AI does an incredible job of creating counterfeit content that looks like the real deal. And it's only getting better.

This can seriously affect individuals, organisations, and even entire industries. Here's how AI misinformation can impact reputation management:

**Spread of False Information:** AI-generated content can mimic human writing styles and produce seemingly credible articles, news stories, reviews, and social media posts. This content can spread rapidly online, potentially damaging the reputation of individuals, businesses, or public figures by disseminating false or damaging information.

**Difficulty in Detection:** AI-generated misinformation can be challenging to identify, significantly, as the technology improves. Traditional methods of detecting misinformation, such as fact-checking, might be less effective against well-crafted AI-generated content. This makes it easier for false information to circulate and tarnish a reputation before corrective action can be taken.

**Damage to Trust and Credibility:** Once false information gains traction, it can erode trust and credibility in the eyes of the public. This can harm relationships with customers, partners, investors, and the general public, damaging a person's or organisation's reputation.

**Virality and Amplification:** Misinformation, especially sensational or scandalous content, spreads more quickly and widely than accurate information. AI-generated content can tap into this virality, amplifying the potential damage to a reputation.

**Legal and Ethical Challenges:** Addressing AI-generated misinformation requires careful consideration of legal and ethical implications. Depending on the jurisdiction, defamation, libel, and intellectual property laws need to be navigated to address false content and restore a reputation.

**Resource Intensity:** Managing and mitigating the effects of AI-generated misinformation can demand significant time, effort, and resources. Responding effectively might involve legal action, public relations efforts, online content takedowns, and corrective messaging.

AI-generated misinformation can be a serious threat to reputation management. By staying vigilant, having a well-prepared response plan, and fostering open and trustworthy communication, individuals and organisations can better navigate the challenges created by AI-generated falsehoods.

AI truly transforms the communications landscape, just like social media started changing the profession in the early 2000s.

<sup>1</sup> <https://youtu.be/cQ54G0m1eL0>

# Rhetoric around AI overblown?

By Stavros Papagianneas

Today, being able to have an intelligent conversation about social media's role in a communication strategy is part of being a professional communicator. AI is following the same track.

By understanding AI's strengths, its potential and its numerous limitations, we can then bring our very human communications expertise and judgment to bear on the issue of AI-generated misinformation.

One of the most valuable things communication leaders bring is a strategic mindset. That frequently means asking difficult questions and thinking about what nobody else considers.

Some questions worth asking are:

- How effective is your organisation at monitoring its reputation and spotting misinformation/disinformation?
- Do staff and key stakeholders know how to recognise misinformation, AI or otherwise, and discern between fact and fake?
- How are other functions and disciplines in your organisation thinking about AI? Your IT, sales or legal colleagues may have very different and valuable perspectives on the technology. It is worth taking time to understand them.

Furthermore, proactive monitoring, quick response and transparency are needed. Building a reputation for transparency and honesty in your communication can help establish credibility that can be leveraged during a misinformation/disinformation challenge.



In April 2018, I published a blog post trying to answer whether AI is truly a blessing as it's presented itself to be - or a curse?

The question doesn't arise from the scepticism on whether machines will become too intelligent or learn to the point of a robot takeover. While AI is fascinating, its emergence also raises many concerns, especially in its applications.

A few months ago, Geoffrey Hinton - a computer scientist known as 'the godfather of AI' - stepped down from his role at Google and is warning about the potential dangers of a future in which artificial intelligence surpasses human intelligence.

Hinton believes that it's conceivable that this kind of advanced intelligence could take over from us. Meaning the end of people. Maybe Skynet, the fictional artificial neural network-based conscious group mind and artificial general super intelligence system that wants to take over the human world in the Terminator movies is now preparing for the takeover of the planet.

We could focus too much on the apocalyptic scenario, and that takes us away from the risks that we face here and now, and opportunities to get it right here and now. Let's see some blessings and curses.

## AI as a blessing:

**Advancements in Technology.** AI has brought significant progress in various fields, including healthcare, finance, transportation, and entertainment. It has the potential to solve complex problems and improve efficiency in numerous industries.

**Automation and Efficiency.** AI can automate repetitive tasks, increasing productivity and allowing humans to focus on more creative and meaningful endeavours.

**Medical Breakthroughs.** AI can analyze vast amounts of medical data, leading to improved diagnostics, personalized treatments, and potentially curing diseases once considered incurable.

**Safety and Security.** AI can enhance security measures, detect fraud, and help prevent crimes by analyzing patterns and identifying potential threats.

**Education and Learning.** AI can revolutionize education by providing personalized learning experiences and adapting to individual student's needs, making education more accessible and effective.

## AI as a curse:

**Job Displacement.** As AI and automation become more prevalent, there are concerns about job losses, especially in industries that heavily rely on repetitive tasks.

**Bias and Discrimination.** AI systems are only as good as the data they are trained on. If the training data contains biases, the AI can perpetuate and even exacerbate existing societal prejudices. The risks include instances where AI adopts human biases and reinforces discrimination.

**Privacy Concerns.** The widespread use of AI raises concerns about data privacy and the potential misuse of personal information. Those risks include privacy breaches, misinformation and fraud.

**Ethical Dilemmas.** The development of autonomous AI systems raises ethical questions about accountability, decision-making, and the potential consequences of AI actions.

**Lethal Autonomous Weapons.** The development of AI-powered weapons raises concerns about the potential for deadly autonomous weapons, which could lead to uncontrollable and devastating consequences in conflicts.

Ultimately, the impact of AI will depend on how society, governments, and organizations approach its development and regulation. Responsible AI development, and appropriate policies and ethical considerations, can help maximize its benefits while mitigating potential negative consequences. All stakeholders must together harness AI's potential while minimizing its drawbacks.

An example of good legislation is the EU's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act which aims to regulate the impact of AI in Europe. It focuses primarily on strengthening rules around data quality, transparency, human oversight and accountability. It also wants to address ethical questions and implementation challenges in various sectors ranging from healthcare and education to finance and energy.

Here are some critical elements of the proposed regulation:

**Risk-Based Approach.** The regulation adopts a risk-based approach, classifying AI systems into four categories based on their potential risk: unacceptable risk, high risk, limited risk, and minimal risk.

**High-Risk AI Systems.** The focus of the regulation is on high-risk AI systems, such as those used in critical infrastructure, healthcare, transport, and law enforcement. These systems will be subject to stricter requirements, including conformity assessments, technical documentation, and oversight by notified bodies.

**Prohibited Practices.** The regulation prohibits certain AI practices that are considered unacceptable and pose significant risks to individuals' rights and safety. These include AI systems that manipulate human behaviour, exploit vulnerabilities of specific groups, or use subliminal techniques to control individuals.

**Transparency and Explainability.** The regulation emphasizes the importance of transparency and explainability in AI systems. AI developers must provide clear and accessible information about the system's capabilities, limitations, and potential biases. Users should be able to understand the logic and decisions made by AI systems.

**Data Governance and Quality.** The proposed regulation also addresses data governance, requiring high-quality training data and ensuring compliance with data protection rules, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

**Supervision and Enforcement.** The regulation proposes a coordinated European AI Board and national competent authorities to oversee the implementation and enforcement of AI rules. Non-compliance can result in significant fines and penalties.

This year in June, changes to the draft Artificial Intelligence Act were agreed on, to now include a ban on using AI technology in biometric surveillance and for generative AI systems like ChatGPT to disclose AI-generated content.

However, in an open letter signed by more than 150 executives, European companies from Renault to Heineken warned of the impact the draft legislation could have on business.

"In our assessment, the draft legislation would jeopardize Europe's competitiveness and technological sovereignty without effectively tackling the challenges we are and will be facing," the letter to the European Commission said.

While good legislation can play a crucial role in mitigating the bad use of AI, it may not be able to completely eliminate all potential negative consequences. Effective legislation can certainly set clear boundaries, establish ethical guidelines, and provide accountability measures to regulate the development and deployment of AI systems. However, it's important to understand some of the challenges and limitations associated with relying solely on legislation to address AI's potential negative impacts:

**Rapid Technological Advancements.** AI technology evolves

rapidly, and legislation may struggle to keep up with the pace of innovation. New AI applications and use cases could emerge before appropriate regulations are put in place.

**Global Nature of AI.** AI operates on a global scale, and regulations are often limited to specific jurisdictions. It can be challenging to enforce laws across borders, especially when AI applications are developed and deployed by multinational corporations.

**Unintended Consequences.** Crafting legislation to govern AI requires a deep understanding of the technology and its potential applications. Poorly designed regulations could have unintended consequences or hinder innovation in beneficial AI applications.

**Enforcement Challenges.** Even with robust legislation, enforcement can be challenging. Identifying and addressing bad actors may require significant resources, international cooperation, and advanced technical expertise.

**Ethical Considerations.** AI often involves complex ethical dilemmas. While legislation can set ethical guidelines, it might not be able to address all the nuanced ethical questions that arise in various AI contexts.

**Balancing Regulation and Innovation.** Striking the right balance between regulation and fostering innovation is essential. Overly strict regulations could stifle AI development and limit its potential positive impacts.

While good legislation is a critical component of managing the impact of AI, it should be part of a broader, dynamic approach that includes education, public-private collaboration, ethical guidelines, international cooperation, continuous review and adaptation to address the challenges and potential risks associated with AI effectively.



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With a background including positions such as Communication Officer at the European Commission and Press Officer and Spokesperson to diplomatic missions in Brussels, Stavros Papagiannenas is currently the Managing Director of PR consultancy StP Communications & the founder of Steps4Europe. This non-profit association aims to reinforce the European Public Sphere & promote the values of the EU.

He is a senior communications leader with more than 25 years' experience in corporate & public communications, public affairs, PR, digital & social media. 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 & 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: Rebranding Europe; Powerful Online Communication; Saving Your reputation in the Digital Age and, many articles in EU media like Euractiv, New Europe, Euronews, Europe's World, L' Echo, De Tijd, Communication Director, Irish Tech News & Research Europe.

Stavros is a graduate in Communication Sciences from the VUB University of Brussels and has given lectures in universities across Europe: University of Cantabria, University of Vilnius, University of Brussels (VUB), Institute of European Studies (IES), Thomas More University, Université Paris 1 Pantheon Sorbonne.



# Next gen EU: between threats and opportunities. An Italian perspective

By Giuseppe Macca, Caterina De Benedictis and Claudio Camarda

A famous Italian poet, Tonino Guerra, used to say "*L'ottimismo è il profumo della vita*" - *optimism is the scent of life*. And now these words resound hard while facing such a challenging time, yet we believe we must stay positive.

2022 could have been the year of redemption and of a new start after the Covid-19 crisis, but the Ukraine war started, marking a crucial moment for a world that had to suddenly change its priorities forgetting for a while about the climate crisis and the environmental hazard upon us.

The geopolitical situation, the uprising of far-right movements, the economic crisis spreading around the world connected to the energetic issue, inflation, and so on and so forth do not picture a pleasant scenario for the present and future generations.

The depth and breadth of recent crises have changed socioeconomic patterns, calling for alternative solutions adequate for the new challenges.

We firmly believe that there are tools and strategies that can help us divert from this perilous road: sustainability, democracy, innovation and responsible AI, community engagement and capacity building, ideas spreading, and Europe. These may seem only a set of keywords, but they evoke fundamental principles to which we must anchor not to wreck.

When we talk about ideas spreading, the one we focus on is the concept that an evolved and ethical economy is achievable. An organization like ethics4growth believes that a way to get global improvements would be to take local commitments and incentivize business activities that can demonstrate, numerically speaking, a real impact (social and environmental) and promote the use of technologies in an ethical way.

In this paper, we will go against the tide, in a moment where everything seems blurred, we try to think positively wishing to shape a better world. We will present our way (one way) of how it could be done if we do start acting. First, we will give a little context though, and then we shall focus on some crucial fractures in our society. Finally, it will be time for proposals.

## PNRR, next generation, and sustainability, what are they?

Never like these times, Europe has the opportunity to become again the engine of a new revolution. People's trust in this institution is rising in the last years creating an opening for more cohesion and development.

In 2021, **one European out of two trusted European institutions (49%)**, after a 6-point increase since the Standard Eurobarometer of summer 2020. It is the highest level registered since the spring of 2008. Trust in national governments was around (36%) and national parliaments (35%) have lost ground, though both remain at a higher level than in autumn 2019.<sup>1</sup>



The sense of community has flourished against a common enemy that put a strain on the politics and policy of Europe and its members.

Communicators as well as decision-makers, heads of government, and boards of members have an important task: **deliver a clear message easy to understand for all. The message has to be transparent and comprehensive, avoiding alarmism and fake news.** Still, clarity must not mean a banalization of reality.

For example, after the covid-19, concepts like 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 and so forth.

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_1867](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_1867)

Sustainability helps to boost our economy, preserve the environment, have long-lasting success, and reduce pollution and carbon emissions. Long story short, having a sustainability global strategy means having the plan to keep existing in the future.

**The main challenge of sustainability is how to measure the positive effects, especially in the short run.** Several instruments and indicators have been created, but it isn't easy to define and establish effective ones and it is hard for politicians to claim results following their political business cycles. It is well known that young generations don't vote, that's why are others who must act courageously.

Funding and tenders linked to the concept of sustainability are widely being released both on a European and National level but they still represent a niche in private and public investments. When money is missing, is not to be undervalued **the power of ideas** as a way to demand strategies and commitment by institutions in sensitive fields.

## The UN 2030 Agenda and the EU Recovery Plan

### Challenges and opportunities for the South

Undoubtedly, the action put in place with the EU Next Generation and the goals endorsed by the UN member countries with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development constitute an extraordinary opportunity for both civic and economic growth. One year after the publication of the first notices, however, it is fair to wonder whether, and how, this opportunity is being seized or not by the territories of our country and, specifically, by the territories of Southern Italy.

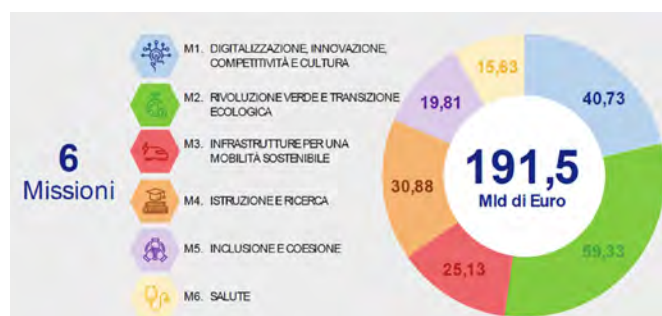
The 17 "goals" of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provide a formidable set of goals -those relate to the paradigm of economic, social and environmental sustainability. Moreover, in this list of goals and actions, designed primarily for the South (or for "the Souths" of the world), it is surprising how some of them adapt perfectly to the situation of Southern Italy. While this on one hand stands as a confirmation of the persistent gap between the North and the South of our country, on the other hand, it highlights the effects of the liberalist economy, amplified by modern globalization. **Everywhere in the world, even within the so-called "rich countries," it appears the accentuation of diversity and internal inequalities, with areas of strong economic development and depressed areas, which**

**increasingly resemble each other despite their latitude sharing dramatic consequences for the populations.**

Hence, it happens that the 6 goals of the 2030 SDG's Agenda that are most markedly oriented to social sustainability - *overcoming poverty (1), overcoming hunger (2), ensuring health (3), ensuring quality education (4), promoting gender equality (5), reduce inequality (10)* - are a perfect fit to the Southern Italian regions. They define that target set of minimum conditions of life quality standards necessary in order for investments to produce lasting benefits in the target population.



And if it is clear that the future development of the South cannot otherwise be sustainable, what is the contribution that the PNRR, or Recovery Plan, can offer to this end? Without going into the document's details, it can be stated that all 17 goals of the 2030 Agenda can find support in the **6 "Missions," or strategic goals, of the Recovery Plan and the 16 Components into which they are divided.**



Indeed, the opportunity offered by the PNRR can only be transformed into an opportunity if the territories of the South

do not fall into what Carlo Borgomeo, in one of his important writings, has called "The Misunderstanding of the South."

It would be vain, and even counterproductive if one believed that the South could "restart" thanks only to substantial, albeit indispensable, public funding (and consequent private investment private), without building actions for the growth of civil society, the strengthening of the social and human capital in the territories and the effort of making its public institutions more efficient.

**The existence of social capital is indeed an indispensable element for growth**, including the economic one of an area, and that is why we need to build more resilient communities. Not only because no enterprise lives and thrives alone, but because there can be no economic growth without social growth. The growth of a society is highly dependent on its ability to build networks of cooperation and trust within itself, keeping in mind that the healthy growth of a society must be collective and inclusive.

This process must get along with structural improvement of citizenship services and citizenship rights, especially in those areas of the South where compared to the North, the gap on many indexes is huge (*such as poverty, schooling dropout, full-time education, kindergartens, as well as in regard to university endowments, the spending on sports and cultural services, public transportation, the right to housing, social services, health care spending, the provision of water and electricity, the timing of justice and bureaucracy, gender equality, spending on municipal services, efficiency of public administrations.*)

There are many studies that show that these data are not subordinate effects of the lack of GDP growth, rather they are among the principal causes of it.

In the past, all policies for the South have been mainly inspired by the overcoming of the GDP "gap" between the North and the South, making it a merely *quantitative* goal. Rather the focus should have been on achieving and ensuring acceptable conditions of the *quality* of life and essential rights of citizenship.

This approach has been endorsed by previous EU cohesion policies, based on the idea of overcoming income gaps exclusively by extraordinary programs of "additional" spending. For these marginal territories, Europe got synonymous with "European funds", not with the core values of culture, civil growth and rights.

In addition to that, such association contributed to an approach based on supply rather than demand, meaning on the ability to intercept available resources rather than elaborating dedicated

strategic visions and plans of long-term development. The result was the creation of a distorted effect not only on the relationship between public institutions, citizenship, and political representation but also regarding the economic increasing gap of the concerned populations.

Unfortunately, today we are facing the risk of replicating such a model, considering that the PNRR system does entail territories' involvement and engagement in the expenditure planning, going again with the *supply* rather than *demand* system.

In addition, political and media communication to date has focused entirely on the number of resources available and the money spent and deployed (*quantity*). Hardly ever a public debate is on the efficacy of the actions and the actual effect generated (*quality*). For politicians, it may be easier to disclose the money allocated because it is something voters will directly connect to them at the precise moment of the statement. Results must be collected over time and the time of information is known to be extremely fast with the attention and focus on topics shifting rapidly. Hence, collecting results must be an obligation, not only a political commitment.

The PNRR does not follow the principle of collecting results because it has one main obligation: **spending a certain amount of money in a set (fast) time frame (by 2026)**. No private entity would ever apply such principles without considering the outcome of the money invested. Money that is on loan. If a household would manage their domestic finance as this anyone would easily condemn it as irresponsible. And this is family money, future families', and future generations'.

A concrete proposal concerns the passage from a model of mere economic and financial reporting to a model of actual assessment of both the economic and socio-environmental impact of the actions implemented thanks to European funds (cf. SROI). Meaning, what are we doing with the money? (apart from spending them!).

These are elements that must arouse attention if the mistakes of the past are not to be repeated, at the dear price of a debt that will in any case fall on the following generations.



## Conclusions

It has been said that legislative reforms and funding must be done along with an investment in the social capital of marginalized territories in order to foster actual development rather than inefficiencies and inequalities.

Following up, if the decision-making and the funding come from a "top-down" approach, it is the communities that must gather and push for a bottom-up movement to claim their actual necessities. It has been studied that such movement is unlikely to be spontaneous, so it is local administrations and local third sector and private organizations who have the duty to manage this organic growth and sensibilization.

**The goal should be to stimulate the above institutions to involve local communities in all of its parts (public, profit, non-profit) in the construction of the strategic plans and the development of the aid funds.** It is important that local communities renounce mere welfarism and take a proactive role in the co-planning of the strategic development plans.

Clearly, this is hard to happen overnight, and that is why it is important that public administrations and organizations work to create a more aware population indeed from the bottom with constant dissemination and training activity, especially for the younger generations.

We would like to present the example of Camporotondo, a project we are directly involved in, in Sicily.

The aim was to regenerate an asset confiscated from the mafia in **Camporotondo Etneo**, giving it back to the community as a training centre for designing micro-entrepreneurial ideas. The concept was to bring together aspiring **young entrepreneurs and start-ups** from the Catania area who wanted to develop projects capable of creating an impact on their towns. Our role is to support the build-up of these ideas and coach them along their path in order to become real organizations.



The project offered all-around support to young people and start-ups, accompanying them free of charge in all phases of pre-incubation, incubation, and post-incubation of the business. We created dedicated actions and services, from marketing consultancy to the drafting of a business plan.

There have been more than 10 ideas presented, with 3 start-ups selected to work in this confiscated house. The winner of the challenge is fully monitored by a team of experts to launch its proposal on the market, contributing with their ideas to the development of their territory.

*Along with the start-up side, we have also been thinking about the local community and how this project can contribute to having a positive impact in the place where they live, helping the center to be an active and lived place after the end of the project.*

We are trying to do this in two ways.

First, there are **the Future labs**. During these events, people can learn how the future is actually a discipline to study, and not just something that "happens". Thanks to our experts, we draw and helped local communities to understand how the future can be imagined and designed, and we will put into the picture the importance of sustainability in the matter.



*It is precisely from these local brainstorming that great ideas are born in the connection between the various public and private bodies and citizenship.*

Hence, it is not we who decide what this center will become, yet we support the community in building it according to their needs and ideas. And here it comes action number 2: the **Youth school of business**. We are active in a local high school to spread the ideas and values of social entrepreneurship, trying to help students to become an active part of their communities and also engaging them in the future labs, bringing them out of school and to the center of their community indeed.

**The power of communication is immense.** For this reason, it is critical to be careful to deliver a clear message to ensure it is easy to understand by each person. Communicators along with trainers have the responsibility to share ideas and values, and we believe that by working with local communities for a social and sustainable economy we might reverse the downgrading path our world is taking.





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, Giuseppe 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.



Caterina De Benedictis holds a degree in Sociology and Methodology, Organization, and Evaluation of Social Services from the University of Trento.

She is a research assistant at EURICSE and is attending a Ph.D. in social sciences at Kore University of Enna.

She worked with SVIMEZ concerning reuse for social purposes of goods confiscated from organized crime and is active in Southern Italy with several organizations of local development. In e4g she carries out future labs and is responsible for the community engagement and development area.



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.

Claudio 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.

# Guiding engagement around AI for Scotland

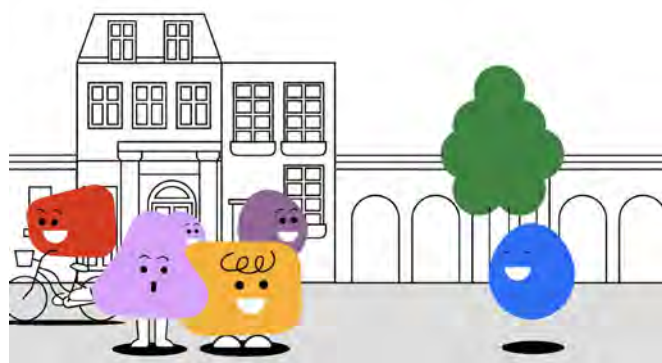
By Max Stearns

At the Scottish AI Alliance<sup>1</sup>, we hold a vision to make Scotland a leader in the development and use of artificial intelligence which is trustworthy, ethical and inclusive. A big part of that is to work with the people of Scotland to boost public awareness and understanding of AI and how it impacts their lives, and to actively seek new voices from groups who are under-represented and marginalised in Scottish society.

To deliver our public and community engagement in a way which is trustworthy, ethical and inclusive we wanted to be guided by strong principles which meet the needs of various publics and communities. To ensure that these principles were representative of and responsive to the people of Scotland, we commissioned DemSoc to deliver a series of workshops with participants drawn from communities across the country.

The report *Principles to Guide Engagement Around AI For Scotland*<sup>2</sup> details the process and insights from co-design work carried out by Democratic Society through Winter 2022/23.

Here is an extract of the "Principles":



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max is a deliberate and caring designer, artist, and strategist with proven experience crafting participatory systems change. He is currently Senior Design Manager with Democratic Society, where he leads the team's research and design team, advancing Demsoc's service-centred approach to supporting cities, fostering digital democracy, and enhancing democratic infrastructures.

max leverages a background in design research and strategy as well as in community organising, legal studies, educating, and the arts to steward ambiguous, cross-disciplinary challenges into carefully-honed questions and actionable, innovative steps forward.

His work has been showcased at NYCxDDesign: Design Week, the Paris Design Summit, Feedback Summit, and the Allied Media Conference, as well as featured in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, BloombergCities, and Common in Design. max holds a BA in political science and economics from Ohio State University as well as an MFA in Transdisciplinary Design from Parsons School of Design — The New School.

1 The Scottish AI Alliance is a partnership between The Data Lab and the Scottish Government and is led by a Minister-appointed Chair and overseen by Senior Responsible Officers from The Data Lab (CEO) and the Scottish Government (CDO).

2 <https://www.scottishai.com/news/engagement-principles>

#### 4.3 What does “engagement” and “the public” mean?

Participants definition of “engagement”:

- Engagement is about listening to people in rural and urban areas, and knowing that they’re both just as important
- It’s communicating with people at their own level and in different ways, keeping an open mind
- It’s connecting with everyone in an engaging environment
- Lots of conversations involving different people
- Exchanging ideas and information in an accessible and attractive format
- Collaborative decision-making
- There should be a spectrum of engagement
  - using different engagement techniques suited to different audiences
- Ensure there is trust in the process and not a predetermined outcome
- Tailor engagement to different regional areas, understanding the differences and engaging with people in an appropriate way
- Participants definition of “the public”:
- The public is everyone, it is inclusive of age, ability, access to technology, level of education, language, etc.
- Specific groups who are often unheard should be specifically targeted with public engagement projects
- Any public project should be open and transparent
- It should not be a private company or organisations, but individuals who make up a community

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#### 4.4 Different scenarios of AI & Exercise on the scenarios and AI engagement in general

The “day in the life” scenarios sparked lots of questions and conversation between participants, who explored how individuals should be informed about the AI they are interacting with, how much impact (positive or negative) the different examples of AI could have, and how people could engage more fully with the AI process. These conversations were used as a thought-provoking tool before moving onto the design tree.

In all of the scenarios, participants listed several actors and individuals who should be engaged in the process of adopting an AI system. Those who are immediately and directly impacted by the introduction of the AI such as the staff working in the factory that uses AI, and the students whose grades will be graded by an AI and their parents

In short, an engagement process designer can begin by using the *Approach Database* to familiarise themselves with various ways their engagement process could be designed. Then, the designer can select an approach, method, and/or tool which seems fit-for-purpose for the topic and publics they are interested in engaging.

Next, the designer can use the *Decision Tool* to reflexively execute the Principled Actions - independently, as a design team, and with public participants - to ensure the engagement approach they've selected is, actually, fit-for-purpose and adapted to the particular nuances of the topic and publics the designer aims to work with. An engagement Process designer may find it helpful to go back to the *Approach Database* as they're working through the *Decision Tool* in order to reselect more informed, alternative approaches. In this way, these tools can be used in a back-and-forth sort of way. This kind of use enables adaptive design and facilitation of engagement processes which align with the principles set forth by the Scottish Public.

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## Reflections

The takeaways of the workshops are closely linked to the principles and the scenarios that were introduced to participants.

*“Go to where people are already clustered and meeting together.”*

Discussions about AI bring about different emotions and values in participants: some were very sceptical and concerned of AI and its implications while others were more open and interested in the future developments of AI.

There needs to be a holistic approach of engagement and on the implementation of AI techniques: understanding the implications of an AI development in the wider scheme and context (e.g. driverless vehicles. What is the implication of this AI development on the manufacturing industry, traffic safety at schools, and design of future roads and communities?). In some cases, engagement should only involve specific individuals with lived experience and experts, in other cases, engagement should involve both those with lived experience and the wider public to bring issues to the policy level. And making individuals understand the impact of AI on their lives but also on the lives of other people. Hence, the participants found the scenarios of the use of AI as useful and valuable to their understanding of the different types of AI and how it impacts everyday life. Some participants indicated that AI is not even appropriate in some situations thus there is no need for engagement.



Previous experiences of engagement are important and can impact on participants' attitude and undermine their confidence in the process if in previous experiences peoples' inputs were not taken into account. Some participants mentioned that trust is important when engaging the public or users in topics of AI. Adopting respect, inclusivity and representation when engaging with the public, and accommodating and understanding their different life experiences and needs is crucial. Participants stated that the implementation of AI and engagement depend on the existing culture of an entity. Has the entity previously engaged people in their practices and do they inform people well of new developments? If yes, then engagement on AI development is feasible.

Participants often mentioned the design of AI when discussing engaging people with AI. They emphasised the need to involve both designers and users of AI in the design process. Hence, engagement on AI strategy also means that individuals have a say in the design of that AI before engaging on specific strategies. In addition, participants wanted evidence and reviews that the public's input has been incorporated into developments.

Participants also made it clear that the public has to have the ability to make and guide real choices about AI Techniques. For participants, it is critical that publics' informed consent evolves with the AI techniques used by the Scottish Government.

*"Trust – are you conveying to the public that this is an actual question, or have you already decided on the outcome? Initial conversation."*

Another report, Public Engagement Report<sup>3</sup>, concerns a series of online workshops carried out by The Democratic Society with a range of people – families, individuals, young, old, experts, newbies, urban, rural – from across Scotland. This is a report of the rich and insightful conversations in these workshops, in which participants shared their hopes, concerns, and aspirations for AI in Scotland.

From the Executive Summary:

"Democratic Society was commissioned by The Data Lab and Scottish Government to design and deliver a public engagement programme to inform the development of Scotland's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy. Originally scheduled to take place in person, the COVID-19 pandemic required most of this work to be carried out online. While this came with its own challenges, it also led to the adoption of new workshop formats that enabled rich, meaningful, and insightful conversations.

This report shares the findings from our workshops and outlines the hopes, concerns, and aspirations of participants for AI in Scotland. Given the scope of the project, these are clustered to reflect the themes of four working groups – Skills and Knowledge; Developing

AI; Ethical and Regulatory Frameworks; Data Infrastructure; and are ultimately brought together in Joining the Dots.

The discussions reveal that participants are largely optimistic about the potential of AI to improve their lives and positively transform a range of sectors, such as education, in Scotland. However, there remain concerns about issues, such as bias, and trade-offs, such as privacy, that currently accompany the use of AI. This does not signify that participants do not see a place for AI in Scotland's future. On the contrary, they believe that there exists a distinct opportunity for Scotland to become a global leader in ethical AI.

Emphasis is placed on AI for public good, which is understood to mean for the benefit of wider Scottish society. Along these lines, it is underlined that people – not solely profit – be kept at the heart of the AI Strategy. For this to happen, participants suggest that AI be developed in a trustworthy and transparent manner shaped by a diversity of expertise and perspectives. Just as importantly, they strongly urge that the benefits and opportunities afforded by AI be equally accessible to everyone, including and especially those in rural areas.

To raise awareness about rights and risks and help people make informed decisions, participants call for more open and honest conversations about AI, akin to the kind they shared during the workshops.

<sup>3</sup> [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dc00e9e32cd095744be7634/t/5f76eba726898761b50d3d40/1601629105144/DS\\_The+AI+Of+The+Possible+-+Engagement+Report.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dc00e9e32cd095744be7634/t/5f76eba726898761b50d3d40/1601629105144/DS_The+AI+Of+The+Possible+-+Engagement+Report.pdf) "The AI of The Possible: Developing Scotland's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy, Public Engagement Report"

# Le fake news come problema pubblico E il ruolo della comunicazione istituzionale<sup>1</sup>

By Alessandro Lovari

Uno dei problemi più urgenti sollevati dalla pandemia da Covid-19 è stata la diffusione di *fake news*, un'espressione inglese entrata anche nel gergo comune italiano, che ha forti implicazioni in ambito di comunicazione pubblica istituzionale. Le *fake news* sono state definite come "informazioni fabbricate che imitano i contenuti dei media nella forma ma non nel processo organizzativo o nell'intento" (LAZER et al. 2018, p. 1094). Si utilizza questo termine per indicare notizie prodotte da fonti che inventano del tutto informazioni, disseminano contenuti ingannevoli e distorcono in maniera esagerata le notizie vere. Un termine un po' abusato che ha portato la comunità accademica a privilegiare l'espressione 'disordine informativo' (*information disorder*) che sembra cogliere con maggiore efficacia la diversità delle pratiche comunicative che tendono a creare turbolenze nel sistema informativo, e che possono aumentare la tossicità degli ambienti digitali e social nei quali circolano con maggiore frequenza (BENTIVEGNA – BOCCIA ARTIERI 2021).

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Si tratta di un fenomeno multiforme e complesso, al vaglio di numerosi studiosi e studiose di tutto il mondo (GIGLIETTO et al., 2019; JACK 2017; VENTURINI 2019) da ormai molti anni. La diffusione di informazioni false, di rumors e non accurate ha infatti accompagnato l'umanità fin dalle sue origini (KAPFERER 2012) e si lega anche a fenomeni sociali e psicologici come il *bias* di conferma (*confirmation bias*), cioè quel processo cognitivo per il quale le persone tendono a muoversi entro un ambito delimitato da convinzioni acquisite e quindi sono portate a ricercare, selezionare, interpretare e diffondere informazioni che confermino le proprie convinzioni e ipotesi (VELTRI – DI CATERINO 2017). La circolazione di informazioni fuorvianti si è sviluppata prima attraverso l'oralità e successivamente si è articolata e diffusa con maggiore portata grazie ai media di massa. Uno dei primi casi di *fake news* è stato considerato quello della "Guerra dei Due Mondi", radiodramma di Orson Welles trasmesso il 30 ottobre del 1938, dall'emittente americana CMS, e scambiato da circa un milione di radioascoltatori – su un totale di sei – per una vera e propria invasione degli alieni negli Stati Uniti, con conseguenti comportamenti dettati dal panico (BENTIVEGNA – BOCCIA ARTIERI 2019). La diffusione di dicerie, informazioni false e non attendibili su persone, politici, istituzioni e organizzazioni ha continuato a svilupparsi con la crescita dei sistemi medialità e del digitale, evidenziando come "la mente del pubblico viene modellata in gran parte attraverso processi che si svolgono nei media" (CASTELLS 2009, p. 157). Ma la disinformazione ha raggiunto maggiore visibilità grazie allo sviluppo di Internet e dei social media, da intendersi, come abbiamo già scritto nel Capitolo I, non sono come canali di veicolazione di messaggi,

ma come ambienti nei quali si definiscono pratiche inedite di comunicazione e relazionalità.

L'*information disorder* è un fenomeno che si è alimentato delle trasformazioni della società contemporanea e che ha trovato terreno fertile nella crisi di fiducia nei sistemi esperti e nelle istituzioni (come i governi, le amministrazioni e i media) (EDELMAN 2017; 2022), nelle trasformazioni degli ecosistemi informativi e nel prosumerismo comunicativo dei cittadini abilitato dalle piattaforme 2.0. Un fenomeno che è esploso con la pandemia da Covid-19, collegandosi con la cosiddetta 'infodemia' (*infodemic*). L'Organizzazione Mondiale della Sanità ha usato questo termine per definire la condizione di "sovrabbondanza di informazioni – alcune accurate e altre no – che rende difficile per le persone trovare fonti e indicazioni affidabili quando ne hanno bisogno" (PAHO 2020). Infatti lo stato di grande incertezza determinato da un virus sconosciuto come il SARS-CoV-2, ha infatti alimentato nei cittadini il bisogno di rassicurazione, e quindi di conoscenza e di informazione. A questi bisogni è stato complesso dare risposte, considerata l'inevitabile mancanza di certezze eziologiche sul virus, la forte distonia tra voci mediatiche e flussi comunicativi istituzionali, e l'opportunità colta da molteplici attori di speculare sull'interesse verso la tematica inondando il web e i media di contenuti creati *ad hoc* per accrescere il disordine informativo, la spettacolarizzazione e la polarizzazione politica attorno al tema (BOCCIA ARTIERI – FARCI 2021; LOVARI 2020b; PEDRONI 2020). In questo flusso infodemico, proprio quando maggiore era il bisogno di informazioni chiare e di fonti affidabili, le *fake news* hanno proliferato, mettendo a repentaglio la salute dei cittadini, ma anche la loro fiducia nelle istituzioni (BELARDINELLI – GILI 2020).

Questi fenomeni di diffuso disordine informativo presenti della società digitale contemporanea possono assumere diverse forme e non è sempre immediato identificare le diverse pratiche all'interno degli spazi digitali. In particolare, gli studiosi hanno distinto tra diversi tipi di cattiva informazione (GIGLIETTO et al. 2019; JACK 2017). Tra queste distinzioni, una importante è quella tra *misinformation* (misinformazione) e *disinformation* (disinformazione). Mentre la *misinformation* indica notizie false o ingannevoli diffuse involontariamente (per esempio, da giornalisti che non verificano adeguatamente le loro fonti), la *disinformation* si riferisce alla creazione e alla circolazione deliberata di notizie false con l'intenzione di ingannare chi si esporrà al messaggio. La disinformazione può essere ulteriormente distinta in disinformazione basata su ragioni politiche (per esempio, propaganda politica) o economiche (per esempio, una testata giornalistica che pubblica notizie false esclusivamente per trarre profitto dalle visite dei lettori sul proprio sito web). Un altro concetto correlato è quello di 'malinformazione', che si riferisce a notizie basate sulla

1 Estratto – Capitolo 7.2 della pubblicazione 'Comunicazione pubblica – Istituzioni, pratiche, piattaforme', di A. Lovari e G. Ducci, ed. A. Mondadori Università – Mondadori Education, 2022.

realtà che vengono utilizzate per infliggere danni a persone e organizzazioni. Per includere tutti i tipi di informazioni false o imprecise che possono comportare conseguenze sociali dannose, è stato suggerito da Kim e de Zúñiga (2020) di adottare il concetto più generale di 'pseudo-informazione'.

Le *fake news* e il disordine informativo sono oggi temi presenti nel dibattito pubblico, non solo in quello specialistico del mondo accademico e dei media: sono divenuti cioè dei veri e propri problemi pubblici. Ma cosa intendiamo con questa espressione? Il riferimento è al lavoro del sociologo americano Gusfield (1984) che, nel volume *The Culture of Public Problems*, aveva analizzato criticamente come alcune situazioni specifiche (per esempio: il *drinking driving*, l'alcool, la sicurezza stradale e i problemi di salute) diventino problemi pubblici (*public problems*), all'interno di certe culture, acquisendo specifici significati anche nell'opinione pubblica. Ciò avviene principalmente quando le istituzioni pubbliche e le autorità governative, di fronte alla presa di coscienza del problema, introducono interventi di contenimento e attuano politiche di controllo degli stessi problemi identificati, condividendoli con la popolazione. L'autore usa l'espressione 'problemi pubblici' perché non tutti i problemi sociali che affliggono una società acquisiscono lo status di essere pubblici, ma molti rimangono privati o comunque marginali nel dibattito pubblico e mediale.

I problemi pubblici, dice sempre Gusfield, sono quelli che divengono anche materia di conflitto e/o di controversia nelle arene dell'aire pubblico. Il processo di costruzione sociale di questi problemi vede intervenire le istituzioni, le autorità governative, oltre ad altri soggetti che se ne assumono la responsabilità in modo pubblico: per esempio alcuni movimenti e associazioni che contribuiscono con le loro voci a definirli e diffonderli pubblicamente, così come i mass media che li inseriscono nelle proprie trattazioni e coperture informative facendo acquisire loro ulteriore visibilità nell'opinione pubblica.

Come abbiamo scritto all'inizio di questo paragrafo, le informazioni false, problematiche, sia quelle condivise in modo ingenuo senza specifiche finalità, sia quelle prodotte in modo malevolo per danneggiare alcuni soggetti o organizzazioni, sono sempre esistite. Quello che è cambiato è che le *fake news* sono passate da essere un tema marginale o comunque ad appannaggio di pochi esperti (i giornalisti, i *debunker*, i *fact-checker*, i docenti universitari) a divenire un problema all'agenda dell'opinione pubblica e dei governi a livello internazionale. Hanno quindi raggiunto lo status di "problema pubblico" per usare le parole di Gusfield.

Lo scarto visibile è avvenuto proprio con la pandemia da Covid-19 che ha amplificato e velocizzato alcuni processi che stavano sviluppandosi da numerosi anni e che erano emersi,

per esempio, in occasione dello scandalo di Cambridge Analytica, il referendum inglese sulla Brexit, la vaccinazione obbligatoria infantile in Italia (LOVARI – MARTINO – RIGHETTI 2020), così come si erano mostrati in azione nella rappresentazione della crisi climatica, fino ad arrivare alla pandemia da Covid-19 (CALIANDRO – ANSELMINI – STURIALE 2020). Tali accadimenti, queste "situazioni specifiche" come le definisce Gusfield (1984), sono andate a sommarsi e ibridarsi, ottenendo visibilità e rilevanza negli ambienti digitali che hanno amplificato la salienza del tema della disinformazione, non solo per la nascita e lo sviluppo di testate online e di nuovi attori del mondo dell'informazione, ma anche per il contributo degli utenti in rete che "facendosi media" (BOCCIA ARTIERI 2012), hanno contribuito alla pluralità delle voci, così come all'*overload* informativo in rete, in un momento di grande criticità come quello della prima parte della crisi pandemica.

Questo scenario ha richiesto un intervento pubblico e una domanda di responsabilità. Spesso questi interventi sono stati accompagnati da specifiche campagne di comunicazione o comunque da interventi di comunicazione pubblica istituzionale di tipo multicanale, principalmente pianificati nei canali digital e social (FACCIOLI *et al.* 2020; LOVARI 2020b; LOVARI – RIGHETTI 2020; SALA – SCAGLIONI 2020). Perché una delle leve con cui i governi e le istituzioni sono intervenuti sul tema delle *fake news* è stata proprio la comunicazione pubblica istituzionale che, con la pandemia, ha assunto una nuova centralità non solo a livello nazionale ma anche internazionale (OECD 2021). Gli obiettivi erano quelli di informare i cittadini sulle misure preventive relative al virus, su come evitare il contagio, ma anche su come difendersi dalla disinformazione relativa a possibili cure, alla vaccinazione o alla pubblicazione di provvedimenti pubblici (per esempio: chiusura delle scuole, determinazione di divieti o restrizioni, validità del certificato di *green pass*) a livello locale, regionale e nazionale (LOVARI – DUCCI – RIGHETTI 2021); con l'obiettivo generale di riallacciare percorsi e traiettorie di fiducia di fronte a una cacofonia di voci che tendeva ad accrescere incertezze e paure tra i cittadini.

In tale ottica la comunicazione pubblica istituzionale si è sviluppata principalmente nei siti web e nei social media, non solo attraverso la produzione di flussi informativi autoprodotti, arricchiti da innovativi corredi visuali e video, ma anche grazie ad accordi strategici con le piattaforme digitali. L'Italia da questo punto di vista è stata il primo Paese occidentale a definire accordi con *digital companies* come Facebook e Twitter nel bimestre febbraio/marzo 2020, attraverso pratiche di reindirizzamento delle ricerche degli utenti sul Covid-19, e la messa a disposizione da parte delle piattaforme di spazi pubblicitari gratuiti nei canali social e per specifiche campagne di prevenzione (LOVARI – RIGHETTI 2020). Inoltre, nell'aprile

2020, il governo italiano ha lanciato una *task force* dedicata al tema, denominata "Unità di monitoraggio per il contrasto della diffusione delle *fake news* relative al Covid-19 sul web e sui social network", con l'obiettivo di promuovere la collaborazione con *fact-checker* e incoraggiare l'attivismo dei cittadini nel segnalare la disinformazione e la collaborazione con le piattaforme. Si è trattato di interventi importanti di fronte a una popolazione – quella italiana – che mostrava di non avere molti anticorpi contro le *fake news*: lo evidenziava la ricerca "Percezioni e disinformazione. Molto 'razionali' o troppo 'pigri'?" promossa da AGCOM in collaborazione con SWG nel marzo 2020, nella quale emergeva come ben 6 italiani su 10 non sapessero riconoscere una notizia falsa da una vera. Su questo dato incideva anche un altro fattore importante che riguarda anche oggi la popolazione italiana e che è emerso con rilevanza con la pandemia: cioè il livello basso di *health literacy* (alfabetizzazione alla salute) degli italiani rispetto agli altri Paesi europei, fattore che ha agito da moltiplicatore delle paure e delle incertezze dei cittadini di fronte all'avanzare del virus.

Abbiamo già detto che il tema delle *fake news* non è solamente un problema pubblico italiano, ma ha coinvolto e coinvolge un grande numero di Paesi a livello internazionale, tanto che l'Unione europea ha dedicato specifiche *policy* e interventi fin dal 2016 per combattere la diffusione del disordine informativo negli ambienti digitali e social, anche grazie ad accordi sanciti con le principali piattaforme digitali, attraverso l'approvazione del cosiddetto "*Code of Practice*" (D'AMBROSI et al. 2021; LOVARI – BELLUATI 2022). In questo quadro è interessante riportare alcune evidenze empiriche contenute nello studio dell'OECD (2021) sulla comunicazione pubblica – "Report on Public Communication" – che ha coinvolto Governi e i Ministeri della Salute di 28 Paesi di area OSCE. Dal report emerge come il tema dell'informazione sia stato messo al centro dell'intervento pubblico internazionale anche con specifiche strategie e azioni comunicative. Ma emergono anche dati contrastanti. In particolare, le istituzioni pubbliche stanno ancora attrezzandosi per combattere il fenomeno della disinformazione: nel report si legge che solamente il 38% dei *Centre of Government* e il 21% dei Ministeri della Salute avevano adottato schemi, politiche o strategie per contrastare il fenomeno delle *fake news* prima della crisi pandemica. È incoraggiante pensare che una percentuale maggiore (64% nei governi) abbia però già designato specifico personale o strutture dedicate per intervenire sulla problematica, e che la maggior parte dei Paesi coinvolti nello studio abbia attuato velocemente interventi su questi temi, riconoscendo le *fake news* come problema pubblico e quindi integrandolo nelle proprie *policy* e azioni istituzionali (54%). Infine, è interessante rilevare che il 72% dei governi ha compreso l'importanza di attivare reti con soggetti diversi, non solo quelli istituzionali. In particolare, nel report di ricerca si

parla di consultazioni con *stakeholder* esterni, con i quali sono attivate specifiche collaborazioni per conoscere e intervenire sul problema del disordine informativo nelle sue diverse manifestazioni. Nello specifico, i partner delle collaborazioni sono il mondo accademico, i media, i *debunker* e gli attori della società civile. In tale quadro è evidente come siano richiesti ai comunicatori nuovi saperi e competenze, e come l'adozione di un modello di comunicazione pluridirezionale e multilivello, anche in questo ambito specifico, possa rappresentare un approccio efficace per gestire e affrontare con consapevolezza le sfide della disinformazione come problema pubblico.



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He is author of more than 100 publications in books, encyclopaedias and international journals, like *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Public Affairs*, *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *Health Communication*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, *International Journal of Communication*, *Media & Communication*, *Place Branding & Public Diplomacy*.



# Fake news as a public problem and the role of institutional communication<sup>1</sup>

By Alessandro Lovari

One of the most urgent problems raised by the Covid-19 pandemic was the spread of fake news, an English expression that has also entered common Italian jargon, which has strong implications in the field of institutional public communication. Fake news has been defined as “fabricated information that imitates media content in form but not in organizational process or intent” (LAZER et al. 2018, p. 1094). This term is used to indicate news produced by sources that completely invent information, disseminate misleading content and exaggerate distort true news. A somewhat overused term which has led the academic community to favor the expression ‘information disorder’ which seems to capture more effectively the diversity of communication practices which tend to create turbulence in the information system, and which can increase the toxicity of the digital and social environments in which they circulate most frequently (BENTIVEGNA – BOCCIA ARTIERI 2021).

This is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, which has been examined by numerous scholars from all over the world (GIGLIETTO et al., 2019; JACK 2017; VENTURINI 2019) for many years now. The spread of false, rumors and inaccurate information has in fact accompanied humanity since its origins (KAPFERER 2012) and is also linked to social and psychological phenomena such as confirmation bias, i.e. that cognitive process for which people tend to move within a scope delimited by acquired beliefs and are therefore led to research, select, interpret and disseminate information that confirms their beliefs and hypotheses (VELTRI – DI CATERINO 2017). The circulation of misleading information developed first through orality and subsequently became articulated and spread with greater reach thanks to the mass media. One of the first cases of fake news was considered that of the “War of the Two Worlds”, a radio play by Orson Welles broadcast on 30 October 1938 by the American broadcaster CBS, and exchanged by approximately one million radio listeners - out of a total of six - for a real invasion of aliens in the United States, with consequent panic-driven behavior (BENTIVEGNA – BOCCIA ARTIERI 2019). The spread of rumours, false and unreliable information about people, politicians, institutions and organizations has continued to develop with the growth of media and digital systems, highlighting how “the public mind is shaped largely through processes that take place in average” (CASTELLS 2009, p. 157). But disinformation has achieved greater visibility thanks to the development of the Internet and social media, to be understood, as we have already written in Chapter I, not as channels for conveying messages, but as environments in which unprecedented practices of communication and relationality are defined.

Information disorder is a phenomenon that has been fueled by the transformations of contemporary society and which has found fertile ground in the crisis of trust in expert systems and institutions (such as governments, administrations and the media) (EDELMAN 2017; 2022), in transformations of information ecosystems and in the communicative prosumerism of citizens enabled by 2.0 platforms. A phenomenon that exploded with the Covid-19 pandemic, connecting with the so-called ‘infodemic’. The World Health Organization used this term to define the condition of “overabundance of information - some accurate and some not - which makes it difficult for people to find reliable sources and guidance when they need it” (PAHO 2020). In fact, the state of great uncertainty caused by an unknown virus such as SARS-CoV-2 has fueled citizens’ need for reassurance, and therefore for knowledge and information. It has been complex to provide answers to these needs, considering the inevitable lack of etiological certainties about the virus, the strong dystonia between media rumors and institutional communication flows, and the opportunity seized by multiple actors to speculate on the interest in the topic by flooding the web and the media of content created ad hoc to increase information disorder, spectacularization and political polarization around the topic (BOCCIA ARTIERI – FARCI 2021; LOVARI 2020b; PEDRONI 2020). In this infodemic flow, just when the need for clear information and reliable sources was greatest, fake news proliferated, jeopardizing citizens’ health, but also their trust in institutions (BELARDINELLI - GILI 2020).

These phenomena of widespread information disorder present in contemporary digital society can take different forms and it is not always immediate to identify the different practices within digital spaces. In particular, scholars have distinguished between different types of misinformation (GIGLIETTO et al. 2019; JACK 2017). Among these distinctions, an important one is that between misinformation and disinformation. While misinformation refers to false or misleading news spread unintentionally (for example, by journalists who do not adequately verify their sources), disinformation refers to the deliberate creation and circulation of false news with the intention of deceiving those exposed to the message. Disinformation can be further distinguished into disinformation based on political (for example, political propaganda) or economic reasons (for example, a news organization publishing false news solely to profit from readers’ visits to its website). Another related concept is that of ‘misinformation’, which refers to fact-based news that is used to inflict harm on people and organisations. To include all types of false or inaccurate information that can lead to harmful social consequences, it was suggested by Kim and de Zúñiga (2020) to adopt the more general concept of ‘pseudo-information’.

1 Extract - Chapter 7.2 of ‘Comunicazione pubblica - Istituzioni, pratiche, piattaforme’, by A. Lovari e G. Ducci, published by A. Mondadori Università - Mondadori Education, 2022.

Fake news and information disorder are nowadays topics present in public debate, not only in the specialist one of the academic world and the media: that is, they have become real public problems. But what do we mean by this expression? The reference is to the work of the American sociologist Gusfield (1984) who, in the volume *The Culture of Public Problems*, had critically analyzed how some specific situations (for example: drinking driving, alcohol, road safety and health problems) become public problems, within certain cultures, acquiring specific meanings also in public opinion. This mainly happens when public institutions and government authorities, faced with awareness of the problem, introduce containment interventions and implement control policies for the same problems identified, sharing them with the population. The author uses the expression 'public problems' because not all social problems that afflict a society acquire the status of being public, but many remain private or in any case marginal in the public and media debate.

Public problems, Gusfield always says, are those that also become a matter of conflict and/or controversy in the public arenas. The process of social construction of these problems sees the intervention of institutions, government authorities, as well as other subjects who take responsibility for them in a public way: for example some movements and associations who contribute with their voices to define and disseminate them publicly, so like the mass media which include them in their discussions and information coverage, giving them further visibility in public opinion.

As we wrote at the beginning of this paragraph, false, problematic information, both that shared naively without specific purposes, and that produced maliciously to harm some individuals or organizations, has always existed. What has changed is that fake news has gone from being a marginal topic or at least the prerogative of a few experts (journalists, debunkers, fact-checkers, university professors) to becoming a problem on the agenda of public opinion and governments internationally. They have thus achieved the status of "public problem" in Gusfield's words.

The visible gap occurred precisely with the Covid-19 pandemic which amplified and speeded up some processes that had been developing for many years and which had emerged, for example, on the occasion of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, the English referendum on Brexit, vaccination compulsory childhood in Italy (LOVARI - MARTINO - RIGHETTI 2020), as they had shown in action in the representation of the climate crisis, up to the Covid-19 pandemic (CALIANDRO - ANSELMINI - STURIALE 2020). These events, these "specific situations" as Gusfield (1984) defines them, have added and hybridized, obtaining visibility and relevance in digital environments which have amplified the

salience of the theme of disinformation, not only for the birth and development of newspapers online and of new actors in the world of information, but also for the contribution of online users who "becoming media" (BOCCIA ARTIERI 2012), have contributed to the plurality of voices, as well as to information overload on the internet, at a time of great criticality such as that of the first part of the pandemic crisis.

This scenario required public intervention and a demand for responsibility. Often these interventions were accompanied by specific communication campaigns or in any case by multi-channel institutional public communication interventions, mainly planned in digital and social channels (FACCIOLI et al. 2020; LOVARI 2020b; LOVARI - RIGHETTI 2020; SALA - SCAGLIONI 2020). Because one of the levers with which governments and institutions intervened on the topic of fake news was institutional public communication which, with the pandemic, took on a new centrality not only at a national but also international level (OECD 2021). The objectives were to inform citizens about preventive measures relating to the virus, how to avoid contagion, but also how to defend themselves from misinformation relating to possible treatments, vaccination or the publication of public measures (for example: closure of schools, determination of prohibitions or restrictions, validity of the green pass certificate) at local, regional and national level (LOVARI - DUCCI - RIGHETTI 2021); with the general objective of reconnecting paths and trajectories of trust in the face of a cacophony of voices that tended to increase uncertainties and fears among citizens.

From this perspective, institutional public communication has developed mainly on websites and social media, not only through the production of self-produced information flows, enriched by innovative visual and video equipment, but also thanks to strategic agreements with digital platforms. From this point of view, Italy was the first Western country to define agreements with digital companies such as Facebook and Twitter in the two-month period February/March 2020, through practices of redirecting user searches on Covid-19, and making them available from part of the platforms of free advertising spaces in social channels and for specific prevention campaigns (LOVARI - RIGHETTI 2020). Furthermore, in April 2020, the Italian government launched a task force dedicated to the topic, called "Monitoring unit to combat the spread of fake news relating to Covid-19 on the web and social networks", with the aim of promote collaboration with fact-checkers and encourage citizen activism in reporting misinformation and collaboration with platforms. These were important interventions in the face of a population - the Italian one - which showed that it did not have many antibodies against fake news: this was highlighted by the research "Perceptions and disinformation. Very 'rational'



or too 'lazy?' promoted by AGCOM in collaboration with SWG in March 2020, in which it emerged that as many as 6 out of 10 Italians did not know how to recognize fake news from real news. This data was also affected by another important factor which also concerns the Italian population today and which emerged with relevance with the pandemic: that is, the low level of health literacy of Italians compared to other European countries, a factor which acted as a multiplier of citizens' fears and uncertainties in the face of the advance of the virus.

We have already said that the issue of fake news is not only an Italian public problem, but has involved and continues to involve a large number of countries at an international level, so much so that the European Union has dedicated specific policies and interventions since 2016 to combat the spread of information disorder in digital and social environments, also thanks to agreements signed with the main digital platforms, through the approval of the so-called "Code of Practice" (D'AMBROSI et al. 2021; LOVARI - BELLUATI 2022). In this context, it is interesting to report some empirical evidence contained in the OECD study (2021) on public communication - "Report on Public Communication" - which involved the Governments and Ministries of Health of 28 OSCE countries. The report shows how the topic of information has been placed at the center of international public intervention also with specific communication strategies and actions. But conflicting data also emerge. In particular, public institutions are still gearing up to combat the phenomenon of disinformation: the report states that only 38% of the Centers of Government and 21% of the Ministries of Health had adopted schemes, policies or strategies to combat the phenomenon of fake news before the pandemic crisis. It is encouraging to think that a greater percentage (64% in governments) has already designated specific personnel or dedicated structures to intervene on the problem, and that the majority of the countries involved in the study have quickly implemented interventions on these issues, recognizing fake news as public problem and therefore integrating it into their institutional policies and actions (54%). Finally, it is interesting to note that 72% of governments have understood the importance of activating networks with different subjects, not just institutional ones. In particular, the research report talks about consultations with external stakeholders, with whom specific collaborations are activated to understand and intervene on the problem of information disorder in its various manifestations. Specifically, the collaboration partners are the academic world, the media, debunkers and civil society actors. In this context, it is clear that new knowledge and skills are required from communicators, and how the adoption of a multi-directional and multi-level communication model, even in this specific area, can represent an effective approach to consciously manage and address the challenges of disinformation. as a public problem.



# Formazione e innovazione per comunicare la salute nell'era dell'infodemia

Di Cesare Buquicchio

La quantità e la qualità delle sfide che le istituzioni nazionali ed europee stanno affrontando in campo comunicativo in questi ultimi anni è enorme. Ho coordinato la comunicazione del Ministero della Salute italiano dal 2019 al 2022, negli anni più difficili della pandemia da Covid-19. Mentre medici, infermieri e professionisti sanitari combattevano ogni secondo contro il virus SARS-CoV-2, i comunicatori di tutte le istituzioni nazionali e internazionali si confrontavano aspramente con altre "patologie": infodemia e disinformazione. Poi sono arrivate le guerre, mentre diventa sempre più pressante il tema della crisi climatica.

Sono due gli strumenti più potenti a nostra disposizione per migliorare la comunicazione e contrastare le distorsioni dell'informazione presenti e future: la formazione e l'innovazione. Accanto a questi, è nata in questi anni una consapevolezza forte: nessun professionista può farcela da solo, serve un confronto e una collaborazione interdisciplinare. Sono tutti elementi che sono stati inseriti nei nuovi documenti sanitari<sup>1</sup> e nelle linee guida di preparazione e risposta<sup>2</sup> alle prossime emergenze e, con l'Università di Pisa, li stiamo sperimentando sul campo.

Sono partiti nelle ultime settimane, infatti, due importanti progetti: il progetto di formazione CreSP<sup>3</sup> (Comunicazione del rischio in emergenza per la Sanità Pubblica) e il progetto di ricerca RISP (Report Infodemico per la Sanità Pubblica).

CreSP si struttura come il primo corso di formazione messo in campo da una università pubblica italiana per rafforzare le competenze sulla comunicazione nelle emergenze sanitarie, gestire l'infodemia e contrastare la disinformazione. Contando su quell'approccio interdisciplinare a fare da docenti al corso sono professionisti di diverse estrazioni: medici, psicologi, giornalisti, matematici, filosofi, comunicatori, epidemiologi, analisti dei dati, funzionari di sanità pubblica, rappresentanti di aziende sanitarie locali. Docenti e ricercatori che appartengono ad importanti istituzioni: Università di Pisa, World Health Organization, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Dipartimento Protezione Civile, Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna, Università degli Studi di Pavia, Ospedale Pediatrico Bambino Gesù, WHO Regional Office

for Europe, University of Zurich, SISSA Scuola Internazionale Superiore di Studi Avanzati - Trieste, Sapienza Università di Roma, European Commission, Club di Venezia, Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna e molte altre.

Tra i discenti, un mix di professionisti sanitari, comunicatori e altre professionalità, abbiamo voluto favorire proprio la presenza di esponenti delle istituzioni locali per provare a costruire una rete di conoscenza e collaborazione diffusa sul territorio e in grado di collaborare con le istituzioni centrali e internazionali.

RISP, invece, punta a costruire e sperimentare uno strumento di social listening rapido e scalabile da accreditare come modello per la sanità pubblica a livello nazionale e locale per tracciare tempestivamente fenomeni infodemici e di disordine informativo che possano avere impatto sulla salute pubblica. Nel report, costruito secondo le indicazioni del documento WHO-UNICEF "Infodemic Insights Report"<sup>4</sup>. Saranno presenti analisi quantitative e qualitative dei dati e conseguenti raccomandazioni di comunicazione con un approccio che valorizzi l'interdisciplinarietà dei contributi. I set di dati del rapporto dovranno contenere una o più tra le seguenti fonti: social network, media monitoring, comunicazione istituzionale, dati epidemiologici e dati derivanti dalla ricerca sociale e da altre fonti direttamente relative alle domande degli utenti della sanità pubblica. I report saranno mensili, utilizzeranno strumenti di AI e andranno avanti per 12 mesi. I focus tematici potranno variare nel corso dei mesi, ma, ragionevolmente, nella prima fase la principale osservazione sarà dedicata alle campagne vaccinali (influenza/Covid-19) e nella seconda fase alle conseguenze delle ondate di calore. In parallelo, alcune osservazioni e analisi, soprattutto qualitative, saranno anche dedicate alle distorsioni narrative relative alla crisi climatica e alle sue conseguenze sulla salute pubblica, focalizzando l'attenzione su ecoansia o su conseguenze di disastri ambientali per una comunicazione pubblica che, anche nella gestione dell'infodemia, possa seguire davvero un approccio "one health".

1 Piano strategico-operativo nazionale di preparazione e risposta a una pandemia influenzale (PanFlu 2021-2023) - [https://www.salute.gov.it/imgs/C\\_17\\_publicazioni\\_3005\\_allegato.pdf](https://www.salute.gov.it/imgs/C_17_publicazioni_3005_allegato.pdf)

2 ECDC Technical Report - The EU experience in the first phase of COVID-19: implications for measuring preparedness [https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19-the-EU-experience\\_1.pdf](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19-the-EU-experience_1.pdf)

3 Università di Pisa - Corso di Perfezionamento - Comunicare il rischio durante le emergenze sanitarie: dall'analisi delle sfide alla gestione dell'infodemia - <https://www.unipi.it/index.php/corsi-di-perfezionamento/item/26920-comunicare-il-rischio-durante-le-emergenze-sanitarie-dall-analisi-delle-sfide-alla-gestione-dell-infodemia>

4 WHO/UNICEF How to build an infodemic insights report in 6 steps - <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-07-2023-introducing-rapid-social-listening-and-infodemic-insights-for-action-who-and-unicef-launch-manual-on-6-steps-to-build-an-infodemic-insights-report>



# Training and innovation for communicating health in the infodemic era

By Cesare Buquicchio

The quantity and quality of challenges that national and European institutions have been facing in the communicative field in recent years is enormous. I coordinated the communication of the Italian Ministry of Health from 2019 to 2022, during the most challenging years of the Covid-19 pandemic. While doctors, nurses, and healthcare professionals fought every second against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, communicators from all national and international institutions were sharply confronting other “pathologies”: infodemic and misinformation. Then came the wars, while the issue of the climate crisis became increasingly pressing.

There are two powerful tools at our disposal to improve communication and counteract information distortions present and future: training and innovation. Alongside these, a strong awareness has emerged in recent years: no professional can make it alone; there needs to be interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration. All these elements have been incorporated into new health documents<sup>5</sup> and preparation and response guidelines<sup>6</sup> for upcoming emergencies. With the University of Pisa, we are experimenting with them in the field.

In recent weeks, two important projects have been launched: the CreSP training project<sup>7</sup> (Risk Communication in Public Health Emergencies) and the RISP research project (Infodemic Report for Public Health). CreSP is structured as the first training course implemented by an Italian public university to strengthen skills in communication during health emergencies, manage infodemics, and counter misinformation. Professionals from various backgrounds—doctors, psychologists, journalists, mathematicians, philosophers, communicators, epidemiologists, data analysts, public health officials, representatives of local health companies—participate as instructors in the course. These instructors belong to prestigious institutions: the University of Pisa, the World Health Organization, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, the Higher Institute of Health, the Department of Civil Protection, Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna, University of Pavia, Bambino Gesù Pediatric Hospital, WHO Regional Office for Europe, University of Zurich, SISSA International School for Advanced Studies - Trieste, Sapienza University of Rome, European Commission, Club of Venice, Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies, and many others.

5 National Strategic-Operational Plan for Preparedness and Response to an Influenza Pandemic (PanFlu 2021-2023) [https://www.salute.gov.it/imgs/C\\_17\\_pubblicazioni\\_3005\\_allegato.pdf](https://www.salute.gov.it/imgs/C_17_pubblicazioni_3005_allegato.pdf)

6 ECDC Technical Report - The EU experience in the first phase of COVID-19: implications for measuring preparedness [https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19-the-EU-experience\\_1.pdf](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19-the-EU-experience_1.pdf)

7 University of Pisa - Advanced Course - Communicating Risk during Health Emergencies: from the analysis of challenges to the management of infodemics <https://www.unipi.it/index.php/corsi-di-perfezionamento/item/26920-comunicare-il-rischio-durante-le-emergenze-sanitarie-dall-analisi-delle-sfide-alla-gestione-dell-infodemia>



Among the participants, a mix of healthcare professionals, communicators, and other professionals, we aimed to encourage the presence of representatives from local institutions to build a widespread network of knowledge and collaboration at the local level, capable of working with central and international institutions.

On the other hand, RISP aims to build and experiment with a rapid and scalable social listening tool to be accredited as a model for public health at the national and local levels. This tool will track infodemic phenomena and informational disorders that may impact public health promptly. The report, constructed according to the guidelines of the WHO-UNICEF document "Infodemic Insights Report"<sup>8</sup>, will include quantitative and qualitative analysis of data and subsequent communication recommendations, emphasizing an interdisciplinary approach. The report data sets must include one or more of the following sources: social networks, media monitoring, institutional communication, epidemiological data, and data derived from social research and other sources directly related to public health user inquiries. The reports will be monthly, use AI tools, and continue for 12 months. Thematic focuses may vary over the months, but reasonably, in the first phase, the main observation will be dedicated to vaccination campaigns (influenza/Covid-19), and in the second phase, to the consequences of heatwaves. In parallel, some observations and analyses, especially qualitative ones, will also be dedicated to narrative distortions related to the climate crisis and its consequences on public health, focusing attention on eco-anxiety or the consequences of environmental disasters for public communication that, even in managing the infodemic, can truly follow a "one health" approach.



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Cesare has worked as a journalist for Repubblica, Sole 24 Ore, l'Unità and Internazionale. In 2016 he curated the editorial design of the newspaper Sanità Informazione, of which he was editor in chief. From December 2019 to October 2022 he was head of the press office of the Ministry of Health of the Italian government, managing all aspects related to the communication of the Covid-19 pandemic emergency.

Expert in the Communication Area, author of essays and books, consultant of the IRIS Academic Research Group and member of the scientific committee of the Fondazione Italia Digitale. The latest book he published is "Communication in health emergencies - Management of the infodemic and fight against disinformation as public health tools" (www.pensiero.it)

<sup>8</sup> WHO/UNICEF How to build an infodemic insights report in 6 steps - <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-07-2023-introducing-rapid-social-listening-and-infodemic-insights-for-action-who-and-unicef-launch-manual-on-6-steps-to-build-an-infodemic-insights-report>



# DSC<sup>2</sup> – Defence, Democracy & Security Strategic Communication Community

## Nexus; Empowerment; Innovation. A new community for strategic communication experts

By Giulia Dino Giacomelli

In November 2024, GDG Inspire launched the Defence, Democracy & Security Strategic Communication Community (DSC<sup>2</sup>).

In today's evolving geopolitical landscape, effective strategic communication has become crucial for national security and defence policies. Strategic communication plays a vital role in maintaining the trust of citizens, defending public perceptions from malign interferences, and ultimately **safeguarding democracies**.

DSC<sup>2</sup> is a hub for professionals working in strategic communication within the security and defence sectors for **project collaboration, knowledge sharing, and innovative thinking** to address the complex challenges of the contemporary security environment.

### The ambition

DSC<sup>2</sup> aims to foster a **culture of excellence** in strategic communication, enhancing the ability of governments and beyond to effectively communicate for democracy, security and defence, to domestic and international audiences.

DSC<sup>2</sup> holds at its core the promotion of an **integrated approach between security and defence which respects democratic values and freedoms**.

### The policy challenge and initial responses

Increasingly, governments have realised that threats to national security, whether caused by state or non-state actors, concern aspects triggering competences across the traditional Ministerial task repartition. If one takes for example counterextremism policies, they are traditionally addressed by Ministries of Interior. However, foreign interferences, i.e. a domain historically handled by Ministries of Defence or Foreign Affairs, affect the extremist threat – either through funding or through information manipulation.

**Dissociation of state policies is ineffective** to face today's poli-crisis. Malign influencing efforts affecting democratic institutions and liberal freedoms stress the traditional system of governance and demand a **new approach, which integrates civil and military tools**. For the Baltic countries the overlap between defence priorities and internal stability has been an existential matter since their very independence. On the contrary, other European governments have long traditions of civil/military separation which oftentimes jeopardised agile coordination mechanisms. In some countries, there remains a



certain resistance to the idea of approximating civil and military spheres in addressing information interferences<sup>1</sup>. Nonetheless, signs of a progressive shift have been observed.

NATO recently set up an Integrated Cyber Defence Centre (NICC)<sup>2</sup>. To be embedded in SHAPE with a civil and military co-lead, NICC will explore NATO's options in responding to cyber-attacks, as well as proactively promote deterrence in and outside NATO Allies' territory.

Another example of expected integration between defence and security is the first German National Security Strategy<sup>3</sup>, adopted in 2023. Amidst criticism, the Strategy underpins the obvious principle that there cannot be internal security without defending 'peace and freedom', thereby depicting defence and security as two faces of the same medal.

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The French VIGINUM and the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency also testifies governments' tendency in acknowledging the interrelation between defence and security. VIGINUM<sup>4</sup> is run by a multidisciplinary team sitting within the French Ministry of Interior set up in 2021. Their main task is to preserve the public debate from foreign information manipulations on online platforms, and ultimately protect the democratic discourse where it reveals its greatest vulnerability.

The Swedish Psychological Defence Agency<sup>5</sup> "defend(s) and safeguard(s) open and democratic society and the free formation of opinions". Recalling a crucial concept in Swedish military doctrine, "Psychological defence", the Agency's mission is to empower the Swedish population to "defend itself" from influencing efforts aimed at affecting "people's perceptions, behaviours and decision-making". The Agency's team members are seconded from different government bodies and agencies, supporting government action in countering malign actors.

## Why a strategic communication expert community

Strategic communication applied to security and defence in Europe is a relatively niche ecosystem. Strategic communication experts working in security and defence are few and tend to work in silos, only occasionally exchanging during events or when developing joint project outputs.

While the community has always informally existed, DSC<sup>2</sup> wants to provide a sustainable forum and support mechanism for experts holding complementary and adjacent expertise. DSC<sup>2</sup> highlights the need for expertise exchange among European partners and beyond. By doing that, DSC<sup>2</sup> facilitates linkages and knowledge sharing between European and Anglo-Saxon expertise – a dynamic which in the post-Brexit scenario have struggled to find an institutional space.

DSC<sup>2</sup> is a forum where diverse expertise and perspectives allow for more comprehensive and innovative approaches to be developed.

## The community and the activities

DSC2 membership is by invitation or referral by existing members. Spontaneous membership applications are also accepted and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

For more info on the current members and their expertise, visit the dedicated section of GDG Inspire's website<sup>6</sup>.

Aware that strategic communication does not have a univocal definition, members felt the need to, first and foremost, take the time to agree on a common definition which would ultimately frame the remit of their activities. The forthcoming 'StratComm Charter' will also include their ethical principles.

Furthermore, networking events, capacity building and foresight analyses are among DSC2 's expected future activities.

1 In countries which suffered from authoritarian regimes in the last century, there are also historical reasons why this separation is in place.

2 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_227647.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_227647.htm)

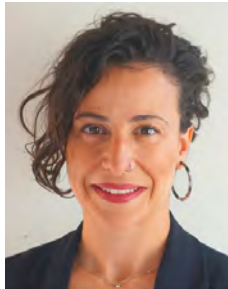
3 <https://www.nationalesicherheitsstrategie.de/National-Security-Strategy-EN.pdf>

4 <https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/notre-organisation/composantes/service-de-vigilance-et-protection-contre-les-ingerences-numeriques>

5 <https://mpf.se/psychological-defence-agency>

6 <https://gdginspire.com>





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For the RAN (Radicalisation Awareness Network) Policy Support, she designed and delivered workshops, meetings and tailor-made support services as well as developed policy analyses – including a mapping of the strategic communications capabilities of the EU Member States and WB countries.

She was member of the evaluation team of the CSEP (Civil Society Empowerment Programme), and lecturer in P-CVE Strategic Communications at the University of Ghent. Previously, she headed the Research and Analysis programme of the ESCN (European Strategic Communications Network), and advised the former EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Mr Gilles de Kerchove.



# The green deal is really an alternative or not?

By Claudio Camarda

The year 2020 could be considered the turning point regarding the **focus on sustainability**. **Two years later** (as also illustrated by Eurostat diagrammes here below), things were not evolving that simply. The Covid-19 and the recent Ukraine war marked a crucial moment towards a world that must increasingly take care of the environment and the land. Some Governments decided to apply some policy reforms such as the **Draghi's government**, which took due account of this moment of transformation and included a ministry for ecological transition, following what had been already done in other EU countries.

Furthermore, other European countries have invested in green energy, creating environmental departments, preferring nuclear and gas power that has caused fighting and destruction decades-long.

*In Italy, the data are below the average.* According to ISTAT, referring to the indicators provided by the United Nations in 2020 - the SDGs Sustainable Development Goals -, the investments in research and development for businesses, innovation, and infrastructure was **only 1.39%**. We could guess how things have changed since then...

Across the Atlantic, in the US, President Biden proposed over \$200 Billion for R&D in Infrastructure plan to boost the R&D capacity of the U.S. In 2018, the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) indicated that research and experimental development (R&D) performed in the United States totalled \$606.1 billion.<sup>1</sup> **The ratio of U.S. R&D to GDP was 2.94.**

An organization like **ethics4growth** believes that a way of global improvements would be to take local commitments and incentivize business activities that can demonstrate, numerically speaking, a real impact (social and environmental) and promote the use of technologies that harness energy from '**alternative sources to fossil fuel**'.

The absence of such an approach is currently producing social consequences such as a failure to reduce pollution and a deterioration in the quality of life relating to one's own economic '**well-being**'.

## Is the green deal really an alternative... Or not?

We can identify a massive problem in the absence of regulations clarity and less consistency by the European institutions.

The European Commission recently declared that nuclear and gas can be labelled as green and sustainable energy.

As well as Greta Thunberg's chatter, there is also a serious commitment to fight climate change (Goal 13), where levels of CO2 and other **climate-altering gases are still very high at 7.3 (CO2 equivalent per inhabitant)**.

The Taxonomy regulation defines "*a classification system, establishing a list of environmentally sustainable economic activities*", setting a fine line determining what is green energy in the EU and what is not.

Our reaction to this new set of norms is aligned to one of many disillusioned others...that being: "Seriously?!"

**Nuclear power as a solution could be a serious issue.** The EU Commission sees the positive side where during normal operation nuclear energy has a low impact on health and the environment. In order to make a continuing contribution to sustainable development goals, nuclear energy will have to maintain its high standards of safety in spite of increasing competition in the electricity sector aging reactors and the expansion of the industry to new countries and regions.

According to a proposal presented to the EU Commission: "*Nuclear power plants would be deemed green if the sites can safely manage to dispose of radioactive waste. So far, worldwide, no permanent disposal site has gone into operation though.*"<sup>2</sup>

The real issues are two: **nuclear wastes** are difficult to work off, it takes more than 1000 years to digest it; secondly, **the proposal presented does not show how they will regulate this sector**, which method they are going to use and what kind (if any) of institution will have to check these emissions.

Hanging over this discussion, of course, is the threat of a divided Europe. There are two schools of thoughts: in one hand some European nations like **France, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Finland**, it seems that they are **promoting a nuclear vision** where they want to invest in new nuclear power plants, particularly in new generations like small modular reactors. Especially now, that the war involving Russia is generating an energetic crisis, the call for nuclear power is understandably getting louder.

1 <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R44307.pdf> - <https://www.aip.org/fyi/2021/biden-proposes-over-200-billion-rd-infrastructure-plan> - <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf21324>

2 [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_22\\_711](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_711)

On the other hand, the second school of thought is represented by **Germany, Denmark, Austria and Luxembourg** that appears that prefer a different approach, **investing in gas and carbon fuel** until we don't have enough resources to give energy to everyone. Of course, goal to achieve, before 2050, the year when Europe is "supposed" to be completely climate-neutral.<sup>3</sup>

As above-mentioned in the very beginning of this article, **Italy does not close the door to the nuclear power**, but the main concerns are to re-convert nuclear factories and to digest nuclear waste; and also because it appears already "too late" to comply with the goals that Italy set for 2030 regarding the green energy transition.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, there are several and different nuances with various nations:

- Spain prefers **"traditional" green energy** (wind and solar power) also because these renewable sources contributed around 47% to the total energy mix in 2021.<sup>5</sup>
- On the same page there was also **Portugal, which recently closed its last nuclear power plant**, moving to greener energy, prevalent generated from nature, and going to the decarbonization following the guidelines of COP26.<sup>6</sup>
- Tagging along, **Greece and Cyprus stated that will never turn to nuclear energy.**<sup>7</sup>

*Are we serious? How can we consider nuclear and gas as green alternative energies? The war is also showing the delicate situation around the militarization of nuclear plants, threatening the world with another Chernobyl or Fukushima.* Still, the fear that we shall not be able to eliminate and eradicate the dependence on carbon fuels, realizing that green energy might not be enough yet could be an input to forget the externalities of nuclear?

According to the **World Nuclear Waste Report**: "Over 60,000 tons of spent nuclear fuel are stored across Europe (excluding Russia and Slovakia), most of which in France. Within the EU, France accounts for 25 per cent of the current spent nuclear fuel, followed by Germany (15 per cent) and the United Kingdom

(14 per cent). Spent nuclear fuel is considered high-level waste. Though present incomparably small volumes, it constitutes a vast bulk of radioactivity.

The main problem is nuclear waste, according to the World Nuclear Association (WNA), which points out that the radioactivity of nuclear waste will decay within a finite radiotoxic timeline.<sup>8</sup> Depending on the waste, that could be last for 1,000-10,000 years. Naturally, its hazard, too, would wane depending on its concentration. If we were to compare with other industrial wastes (such as cadmium and mercury) which could remain hazardous eternally, nuclear waste wouldn't sound that bad!<sup>9</sup>

In the light of the above, it becomes crucial to communicate the real intentions of European Leaders and communicating clearly is more important than everything, especially during these difficult days that we face.

Communicators, strategists, and companies have to fight the misinformation, crap news and sometimes also the social media that influence negatively on people, being more harmful than helpful.

Where are the communicators — now? Communicators need to be close to the ordinary people using clear language with a transparent message, not only for general issues but especially on green energies.

In this way, it is possible to avoid any type of conflict that could be a verbal one or escalation that transforms into a real war.

**Dear Europe, this is not acceptable.** Rather than preferring the lobbies and lobbyists of oil enterprises and also other big companies, why don't you encourage nations, countries, towns and villages to be green, helping them in their green transition?

For example, there are numerous companies such as multinational and oil and gas corporations that were proclaiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but in reality, they have been increasing them due to their self-interests. A law on green labelling and on greenwashing should be on the following agenda to protect EU citizens from misleading information.

Regarding this type of **greenwashing**, it can be defined as *"Organizations that make disingenuous claims risk greenwashing, or making deceiving claims about the sustainability of their products or companies"*<sup>10</sup>.

3 <https://www.dw.com/en/european-commission-declares-nuclear-and-gas-to-be-green/a-60614990#:~:text=The%20European%20Commission%20has%20labeled,become%20climate%20neutral%20by%202050>

4 <https://www.ft.com/content/bbb79e85-0009-4459-a3fc-7d4795846594>

5 [https://www.google.com/url?q=https://english.elpais.com/economy-and-business/2022-01-03/spain-rejects-brussels-plan-to-classify-nuclear-power-and-natural-gas-as-green-energy.html&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1644484844538078&usq=A0vVaw28h\\_ogdRYGPIggsX6FG1f](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://english.elpais.com/economy-and-business/2022-01-03/spain-rejects-brussels-plan-to-classify-nuclear-power-and-natural-gas-as-green-energy.html&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1644484844538078&usq=A0vVaw28h_ogdRYGPIggsX6FG1f)

6 <https://www.motorpasion.com/futuro-movimiento/portugal-apaga-su-ultima-central-carbon-nuevo-paso-delante-para-producir-electricidad-limpia> - <https://www.theportugalnews.com/news/2022-02-03/iberian-anti-nuclear-movement-rejects-proposal-for-green-label-for-nuclear-investment/65021>

7 [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/greece-will-never-turn-to-nuclear-energy/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/greece-will-never-turn-to-nuclear-energy/)

8 <https://worldnuclearwastereport.org/>

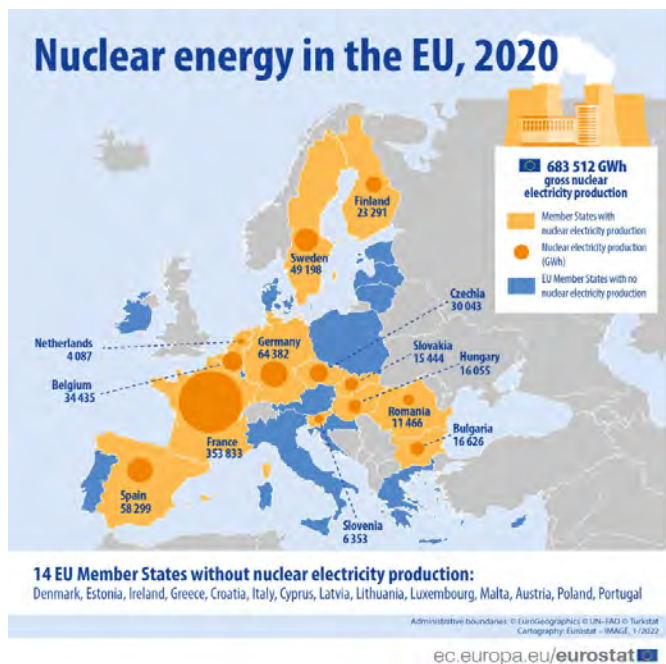
9 <https://www.virtual.prosperoevents.com/blog/where-is-europes-nuclear-waste#:~:text=Depending%20on%20the%20waste%2C%20that,which%20could%20remain%20hazardous%20eternally>

10 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2021/09/09/the-environmental-benefits-of-virtual-events/?sh=22db65446aac>

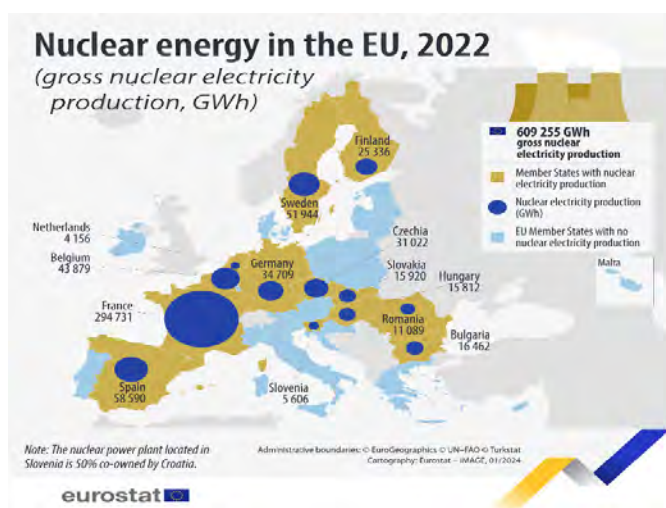


Of course, this taxonomy is unacceptable, it needs to be reviewed as soon as possible.

On the other hand, according to the latest data from Eurostat, the 13 EU Member States running nuclear electricity production accounted for **almost 25% of the EU's total electricity production**.<sup>11</sup> Hence, it is fundamental to insist in research and invest in real alternatives to achieve EU energetic self sufficiency.



And...let's look at the evolution:



According to Eurostat<sup>12</sup>, In 2022, 13 EU countries with nuclear electricity production generated 609 255 gigawatt hours (GWh) of nuclear electricity (-16.7% compared with 2021). This is the

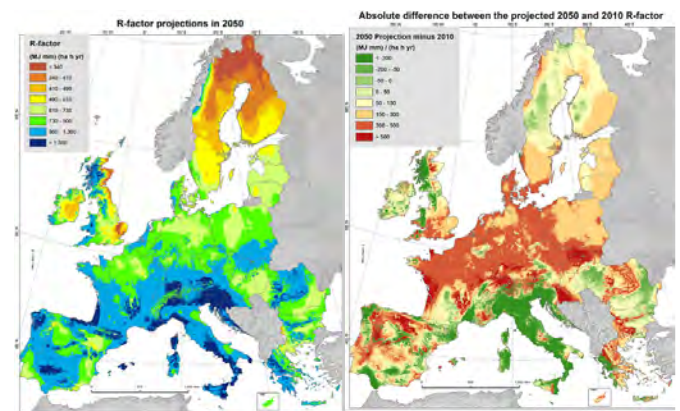
lowest level registered in the period from 1990, the first year for which comparable data are available for all EU countries. Nevertheless, nuclear power plants accounted for over a fifth (21.8%) of the total electricity production in the EU.

France remained the EU country most reliant on nuclear electricity, which represented 62.8% of all electricity generated in the country in 2022. The only other EU country with more than half of its electricity generated in nuclear power plants was Slovakia (60.2%). Among countries that relied on nuclear electricity, the Netherlands (3.4%) and Germany (6.0%) recorded the lowest shares.

The decrease is largely attributable to reactor maintenance and repairs in the EU's largest producer of nuclear power - France.

If we don't reduce our reliance on nuclear power and fossil fuels, we will face serious climate events, such as increased future rainfall erosivity. Rainfall erosivity, a key factor in soil erosion, is projected to increase significantly across much of Europe by 2050 due to climate change.<sup>13</sup> This increase, particularly in North-Central Europe and Western Europe, could exacerbate soil erosion. However, changes in land cover and land use could potentially mitigate or amplify these effects, as seen recently with the DANA storm that affected Valencia, Spain.

In the following graphics, we can see how the situation could be even worse than we imagine, according to predictions from the European Soil Data Centre (ESDAC).



Meanwhile, the outcome of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC) taking place in Azerbaijan few weeks before the Club of Venice plenary meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> December, seems to confirm a worrying shift towards the primary interest of preserving the privileges of global economic deals, rather than seriously thinking about protecting public health, climate change and environmental standards.

A new report from Union for the Mediterranean<sup>14</sup> warns that the Mediterranean, a densely populated and highly vulnerable region, is suffering the devastating impacts of climate change. Rising sea levels, increasingly frequent and intense extreme

11 <https://greekcitytimes.com/2022/01/12/25-of-eu-electricity-production-from-nuclear-sources-greece-cyprus-yet-to-go-nuclear/>

12 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240112-1>

13 <https://esdac.jrc.ec.europa.eu/themes/future-rainfall-erosivity-projections-2050-based-climate-change>

14 <https://www.lifegate.it/cop29-mediterraneo-clima>



weather events are putting the lives of millions of people and local ecosystems at risk. Experts emphasize the urgent need to act drastically to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adopt adaptation measures. If current trends continue, by the end of the century up to 20 million people could be forced to abandon their homes and land permanently.

We have to act, now!

In our little world, in **ethics4growth**, we help every small and medium enterprises that want to become greener, but they can't achieve it, due to a lack of culture rather than resources. We have to rethink the way of doing sustainability, we need to start from a local level to reach a global one, amplifying the social impact that can be generated from green energy.

## At this rate, how do we expect to get out of the issue?

This is one of the reasons why we sponsor “**innovations**” that can provide people with what they need, but in a **sustainable way that binds us to goal number 7 of the SDGs which includes access to clean energy for all**.

In **ethics4growth**, we promote the idea that every single company should embrace the SDGs goals in its corporate policy and should attempt to bring about a revolutionary change towards much more sustainable countries. This could also be achieved through access to a series of European funds (Next Generation, Recovery plan, Green deal).

In Europe, many private companies are approaching this ecological transition, especially in the field of mobility. Ferrovie dello Stato and Snam have recently signed an agreement in which **the mission is clearly to get the hydrogen train off the ground in Italy**, as is already the case in some European countries such as Germany and the Netherlands.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding sustainable mobility, **the European Commission has identified hydrogen as one of the crucial sectors for achieving the 2050 decarbonization targets**. The introduction of hydrogen in transport will be one of the main drivers for Italy and represents a possible competitive advantage in the European market.

Taking again the example of Ferrovie dello Stato, which says that out of 16,779 kilometres of railway lines in operation in Italy today, non-electrified (diesel) lines account for around 28% of the total of 4,763 kilometers. Investing in the hydrogen train is an excellent, fully sustainable alternative to the diesel trains currently running on non-electrified lines and to modernize the train line.<sup>16</sup>

**Ethics4growth** supports the growth of sustainable mobility solutions that can reduce the ecological impact, creating a strategic and synergistic long-term action plan that leads the transport world towards fully sustainable mobility.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/alleanza-gruppo-fs-e-snam-sviluppare-treni-idrogeno-ADrAdPx>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/mobilita-sostenibile-cosi-snam-convertera-5mila-chilometri-linee-ferroviarie-non-elettrificate-idrogeno-ADoxL6>





# The day the networks died<sup>1</sup>

Plus: Moldovan comedy, Victorian MPs and kidnapped Europe

By Anthony Zacharzewski

I guarantee I can tell you the weather in Brussels. Even though I am on holiday in Romania, I'm checking the Brussels weather forecast twenty to thirty times a day.

It's not because I'm feeling homesick. Twitter's change to X gave the push I needed to close my account and delete the app. Now the reshuffling of the icons on my phone home screen means that when I don't know quite what to do with myself, I automatically tap the blue-and-white icon, and up pops the Belgian Royal Meteorological Institute's weather app<sup>2</sup>.

Like an ex-smoker not knowing what to do with their hands, it's a small sign of how addictive the habit was. It also shows how much I have relied on Twitter both for current information and for online socialising. I've been on the site since 2007, and made many friends - but the shift to X meant that I could say that I had lived all the way through Twitter, from hopeful early days to broken hellsite, and I didn't find the buzzword-filled promise of what was to come<sup>3</sup> even slightly convincing. As euphemistic French death announcements say, "Twitter has lived".

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The wrench of deleting the app and closing the account was entirely about the people, not the product. I felt that I was burning a lot of good networks and friendships, and of course an enormous amount of free writing in 15 years of tweeting. (I downloaded my archive, but it would not surprise me if I never looked at it again.)

At the same time, I had noticed the circle of people I was interacting with getting smaller and smaller, as people left and as the blue tick algorithm boosts shoved conspiracy theorists and authoritarians in my face instead of my friends.

The Twitter views metric also showed me that, even with more than eight thousand followers, it was rare for me to get 500 or 600 views on a tweet. Not much for that level of effort, against the headwind of the sense of impending doom, increasingly irrelevant advertising, and the generally odious character of the new owner.

However, I am left with a dilemma. I have a lot of opinions, I'm interested in hearing other peoples, and there are networks of expertise that I want to be part of and learn from. Where do I go?

As a friend said, on some social media platform or other, every Twitter replacement is bad in its own special way. Substack Notes is full of self-promoting 50-something men (myself included). BlueSky is very quiet and heavily skewed towards Americans. Mastodon is complex and lack critical mass, as well as having a moderation problem that seems to be getting

worse. Threads is not available in the European Union, and even if it were I would be very reluctant to jump on a platform that gives me the opinions of people whose photos I want to see. After all, I don't want to see Loïc Blondiaux's holiday snaps.



Networks are a complicated business. (Credit: AZ)

So what's an opinionated wonk to do?

In terms of getting the word out, there are a few options. I will probably try to write more on Substack, so I am building up a collection of things that I have written rather than just thousands of potentially-searchable tweets.

I might use Substack Notes or BlueSky, or even, God have mercy, start posting regularly on LinkedIn. That's going to be the best set of tools that I can have for putting down what I think and getting it in front of (some) people.

<sup>1</sup> <https://anthonyzach.substack.com/p/the-day-the-networks-died>

<sup>2</sup> <https://itunes.apple.com/be/app/meteo.be/id393832976>

<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/lindayacc/status/1683213895463215104>

# Desiccated calculating machines<sup>4</sup>

## Or, the inadequacy of sortition

By Anthony Zacharzewski

Where there is a much bigger problem is in finding new networks. During the pandemic, everyone's networks froze in place and if you were lucky you didn't lose much - but you gained nothing, because you weren't meeting any interesting new people.

Twitter's fatal Musk infection feels like it risks the same. I don't want to be in a situation where I'm only talking to the people I met on Twitter, but I don't see somewhere that will allow the creation that the early days of Twitter provided. In particular, there isn't anywhere that allows you to interact as an equal with people who are far more expert than you in your field, or to directly get into the eye-line of the right politician or journalist.

Let's not pretend that Twitter was egalitarian in that respect. It was much easier for people who were more eloquent, more middle-class, and more opinionated to push themselves forward and Twitter was never a representation of society as a whole.

However, it gave a level of immediacy that I think will be hard to replicate elsewhere. I know I'm going to feel it when the next big story breaks. I can also see it being a real loss to people earlier in their careers who are trying to build up networks - unless the networks are more interested in TikTok dance videos than I anticipate.

Many of the good things that I would like to see in a social network, such as more democratic control, better moderation, better validation of information, and more inclusivity weren't ever provided by Twitter, but the reach of its network at least was a starting point.

Now it's gone, will we be able to reinvent it better somewhere else?

Claudia Chwalisz has a piece in the new RSA Journal<sup>5</sup> arguing for the primacy of randomly selected citizen assemblies over electoral politics. For simplicity I'm going to call this idea klerotocracy.

The core of her argument is this:

I once viewed citizens' assemblies as a necessary complement to strengthen representative democracy as we conceive of it today. However ... a system defined by elections, with political parties and politicians, is designed for short-termism, for debate, for conflict and for polarisation. It puts re-election goals and party logic ahead of the common good. Adding on new forms of democratic institutions like citizens' assemblies to an electoral system does not address the underlying democratic problems of an elections-based system. [...] There is a need to shift political and legislative power to institutionalised citizens' assemblies so that they can eventually become the heart of our democratic systems, defining a new democratic paradigm.

Claudia is an expert on citizen assemblies from her work at the OECD and elsewhere, but I think the model that she puts forward loads the format with more weight than it can bear, and underplays some essential features of the current system which assemblies can't replace.

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## Power and accountability need to be felt not theorised

Politics is about power and accountability, and about taking the most difficult decisions in society - who lives, who dies, who gets what. Resources are finite, choices are never simple, so conflict is inevitable. The whole of politics is managing that conflict as best we can, and representative democracy is a good way to do it.

The power of the state to make those choices has to be spread as widely as possible, if people are to support the process. Everyone needs a piece of that power, not just a hundred lucky lottery winners. Claudia's article says that there may be opportunities for other forms of democracy to be available, but subordinated to the citizen assemblies that are creating the new paradigm - and the problem lies in that subordination. If voters are electing chief implementing officers for the decisions taken by assemblies, then assemblies have the power.

If that is the case, then power is more concentrated than it was before - into whoever happens to be in that room (and, unless the oversight is good, into whoever sets the agenda and provides the information).



<sup>4</sup> <https://anthonyzach.substack.com/p/desiccated-calculating-machines>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thersa.org/comment/2023/06/assembly-required>

The equal vote is the best tool for distribution of power we have devised, and it's not just me who says so. For all voters feel let down by current politics, two thirds of citizens<sup>6</sup> say that free votes and regular elections are essential features of democracy.

What those voters have grasped is that those who take decisions need to be accountable. Modern electoral systems, particularly first-past-the-post systems, do not always deliver that accountability in a fine-grained way, but failure is punished. The article criticises the "re-election goals and party logic" of representative systems, but I thoroughly support them - they are the sign of powerful people being afraid of the voters, which is a healthy and democratic sentiment.

## Voters are people too

Klerotocracy's biggest challenge is how to reflect the fact that every individual citizen is a person, with a whole range of complex and often contradictory views, and a strong sense of their own rights and interests.

Existing citizen assemblies rationalise that complexity down to the views of a hundred people for the sake of simplicity and cost, not because those hundred people cover the full range of public views and opinions.

Even if, by some miracle, those happy hundred were perfectly representative and perfectly informed, by what right should they rule over the unlucky many? In Athens, you might reasonably expect to get your turn in the assembly sooner or later. Even in my *petit plat pays* of 11 million, you'd need tens of thousands of citizen assemblies for people to genuinely be able to rule and be ruled in turn.

In any case, even with hundreds of thousands of assemblies meeting each weekend, any individual decision will have been taken by one assembly of a few hundred at most - with no accountability for their decisions or implementation, and no opportunity to step up and have your say.

Which citizen is going to sit back and accept a decision they deeply disagree with, if they could not vote for or against it, were not selected to participate in taking it, couldn't campaign for or against it, and the people who did take it cannot be held accountable? It requires an impossible leap of faith to deprive people of the power of the vote on this basis.

## Running before we can walk

I think citizen assemblies are a valuable tool, and I've run more than a few, but they are fundamentally a means of understanding societal views and drawing broad recommendations out of discussions. Their processes are nowhere near robust or transparent enough to be given the prime decision making power over every government decision. Their long and deep thinking approach is not adapted for the endless series of rapid and detailed decisions every politician has to make, still less the rapid guesswork that is needed in a crisis.

This incompatibility is hard to get away from. Restricting assemblies only to the strategic summit would mean handing immense power of implementation to bureaucracies. Multiplying them and pushing them deeper into decision making systems would create endless conflicts of mandate, as well as being expensive. The accountability that elected politicians and parties have for their handling of crises would be completely absent.

More generally, klerotocracy raises the centuries-old question of who guards the guards? Transparency and anti-corruption rules would need to be introduced for members. Detailed selection algorithms would need to be agreed - by a different assembly? Controls would need to be in place to ensure that facilitators, information providers, and implementing bureaucracies did not abuse their positions. Some of these are in place for existing advisory assemblies, but generally there is an assumption that controls can be light because impact is indirect. If trillions of euros of direct spending decisions were flowing through those processes, the opportunities for corruption would be immense, and the controls against it would have to become commensurately heavy.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/02/27/how-people-around-the-world-see-democracy-in-8-charts/>





## Horror politici

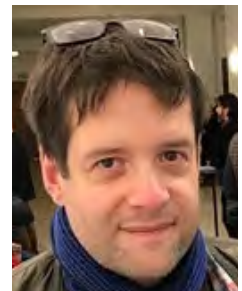
I think Claudia and I disagree most fundamentally on the value of politics. It's clear from her piece that she sees it as an obstacle to good decision making, and indeed an obstacle to democracy itself, in the form she prefers.

As I've said on here before, I believe politics and political parties are essential elements of democracy. Without them, government is reduced to a technocracy moderated by civil uprisings. Parties are not just vehicles for self-interest, they are also vehicles for continuity of policy making and accountability. They can train future representatives and synthesise different positions around a core philosophy to create the coherent policy framework that any government needs to operate. They provide a set of reference points for voters, who often pay attention to politics only when the election is close. Their campaigning logic and relentless oversimplification of complex issues are features, not bugs.

Inside the citizen assembly chamber, democracy is unconfined. The happy hundred can be informed, express their opinion, have deep discussions and even express their indignation - in a measured way - as they produce their recommendations.

Feeling the human and democratic energy in that room is one of the great pleasures of designing and running citizen assemblies. But if that is *all* we have, then outside that room, power is in the hands of desiccated calculating machines - selection algorithms, facilitation plans and implementing bureaucracy - with little oversight and no accountability.

I wouldn't give up my vote for it.



Anthony Zacharzewski co-founded the international non-profit organisation Democratic Society in 2006, and has been its President since 2010, and has grown it to a multi-national team working across 31 countries to build new models of democracy and improve citizen participation and governance.

As well as chairing Demsoc's Board, he co-leads the city relationship for Net Zero Cities, the EU Cities Mission platform, for which he is also a member of the strategic management committee. In the last years he has had significant roles in the Belgian federal government's Agora on Just Transition, the Horizon project Networks for Democracy, and work with the OECD on the future of citizen participation.

Before starting Demsoc, he was a senior civil servant and local government officer in the UK.

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# Calendar of Club meetings 2024-2026



2024
London, 14-15 March 2024 7th Stratcom seminar
Brdo (Slovenia), 25-26 April 2024 Thematic seminar Communicating enlargement, Media Freedom
Strasbourg, 23 May 2024 Workshop (co-organised with Cap'Com) The challenges of European public communication: Synergies in the fight against disinformation, media literacy
Dublin (Ireland), 20-21 June 2024 Plenary meeting
Venice, 5-6 December 2024 Plenary meeting
2025
London, 12-13 March 2025 8th Stratcom seminar
Greece, April 2025 Thematic seminar
Latvia (tbc), June 2025 Spring plenary
Poland, October 2025 Thematic seminar
Venice, end November 2025 Plenary meeting
2026
London, March 2026 9th Stratcom seminar
May 2026 (venue to be confirmed) Plenary meeting
September/October 2026 (venue to be confirmed) Thematic seminar
Venice, end November 2026 Plenary meeting of the 40th Anniversary of the Club of Venice

# Chronology of the Club of Venice meetings



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	
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	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
2003	7-10 September	Venice	plenary	
2004	13-15 April	Bratislava	plenary	
2004	18-19 November	Venice	plenary	
2005	14 January	Istanbul	plenary	
2005	13-15 April	The Hague	plenary	50 <sup>th</sup> anniversary Rome Treaty on audiovisual and interactive communication
2005	3-4 November	Venice	plenary	
2006	10 February	Brussels	workshop	
2006	27-28 April	Prague	plenary	
2006	16-17 November	Venice	plenary	
2007	25-26 April	Vienna - Budapest	plenary	Break-out groups: a) Capacity building b) Public diplomacy c) Code of conduct, ethics and professional statute
2007	15-16 November	Rome	plenary	
2008	25 February	Brussels	workshop	
2008	5-6 June	Ljubljana/Postojna	plenary	
2008	21-22 November	Venice	plenary	



YEAR	DATE	VENUE	MEETING	REMARKS
2009	13 February	Vienna	workshop	on management and strategic partnership agreements
2009	17 April	Brussels	workshop	on interactive Web 2.0 comm. and session on communicating on EP elections
2009	27 May	Paris	workshop	on public diplomacy
2009	28-29 May	Paris	plenary	
2009	15 October	Brussels	workshop	on capacity building
2009	19-20 November	Venice	plenary	
2009	21 November	Poreč (Croatia)	thematic meeting	on communicating pre- and post- enlargement
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	
2012	15/16 November	Venice	plenary	on "Open Government in the Making"
2013	1 February	Vienna	workshop	Spokespersons' seminar on 14.12.2012
2013	22 March	Brussels	joint WPI/CoV seminar	on management and strategic partnership agreements
2013	6-7 June	Tallinn	plenary	on "Public communication in the evolving media landscape: adapt or resist?"
2013	14-15 November	Venice	plenary	
2014	21 February	Brussels	seminar	on Digital Communication Trends

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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	(with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Wilfred Martens Centre for European Studies and SEECOM) "Digital Communication: New Challenges for Governments and EU Institutions"
2014	13-14 November	Rome	plenary	
2015	26-27 March	Sofia	joint conference	
2015	11-12 June	Vienna	plenary	(with the Council Working Party on Information) on communication challenges in the field of migration "The refugee and migration crisis: dealing with a European problem"
2015	22-23 October	Milan	plenary	
2015	9 December	Brussels	joint workshop	
2016	9 April	Lesbos	seminar	"Terrorism: Challenges for Crisis Communication" <sup>101</sup>  Adoption of the London Charter on Strategic Communication
2016	26-27 May	The Hague	plenary	
2016	30 September	Brussels	seminar	
2016	10-11 November	Venice	plenary of the 30 years	
2017	17 March	London	seminar on "Strat-Com strategic communication challenges for Europe"	
2017	18-19 May	Sliema (Mal-ta)	plenary	seminar on "The refugees and migration Crisis: a crucial test for public communicators"
2017	19 May	Sliema (Mal-ta)	seminar	
2017	23-24 September	Athens-Thebes-Livadia-Thessaloniki	seminar	seminar on "Mobilising communicators in the field of the refugee and migration crisis"
2017	23-24 November	Venice	plenary	seminar "Open Government and Open Data: New Horizons for Communication and Public Access to Information"
2018	8-9 March	Luxembourg	seminar	
2018	7-8 June	Vilnius	plenary	Adoption of the - Vilnius Charter on Societal Resilience to Disinformation and Propaganda in a Challenging Digital Landscape - Vilnius Charter shaping professionalism in communication (Capacity Building)
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	Joint meeting organised in cooperation with the UK Government Communication Service
2018	13-14 December	London	2nd Stratcom Seminar: "Truth, Tech and Trends - The issues that European communicators need to address in 2019"	

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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 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 EU and the President of the Club of Venice
			- High Level Event	Adoption of the Action Plan on synergies between public communication and the media sector
2019	5-6 December	Venice	plenary	
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	4 <sup>th</sup> 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



YEAR	DATE	VENUE	MEETING	REMARKS
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
2021	23 November	On line meeting	2nd meeting of the ad hoc working group of comms experts in resilience vs. hybrid threats	
2021	2/3 December	Venice (resuming meetings in presence)	Plenary meeting of the 35 years of activity of the Club	Co-organised with the Italian government authorities
2022	16/17 February	Toulouse (hybrid)	Joint international seminar on citizenship and civic participation - the role of local public communication in the different EU countries	In cooperation with Cap'Com and in partnership with the Region Occitanie and the European Parliament
2022	18 February	On line meeting	3rd meeting of the ad hoc working group of comms experts in resilience vs. hybrid threats	
2022	30-31 March	London	5th Stratcom seminar "Professionalizing Strategic Communication to tackle social and technological challenges"	Co-organised with the UK GCS
2022	31 June - 1st July	Fiesole (Firenze), Italy	Plenary	In cooperation with the European University Institute (EUI)
2022	13-14 October	Prague	Seminar on Government Communication Challenges in times of crisis	In cooperation with the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU
2022	21 October	Virtual event	Communication on EU funded projects	Preliminary brainstorming to prepare for a future seminar in 2023 or 2024
2022	10-11 November	Rabat	5th EURO-Med – EMM5 Migration Workshop "Understanding the governance of migration narratives in the Euro-Mediterranean region" + 2nd Euro-Mediterranean Migration Narrative Conference	Co-organised with the ICMPD and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Morocco
2022	24-25 November	Venice	Plenary	Co-organised with the Co-organised with the Department for European Policies, Presidency of the Council of Minister of the Italian Government
2023	9-10 March	London	6th StratCom Seminar Shared understanding and campaign work among European strategic communicators	Co-organised with the UK GCS
2023	1-2 June	Nicosia, Cyprus	Plenary	Co-organised with the Department of Press and Information of the government of Cyprus
2023	28-29 September	Dubrovnik, Croatia	Seminar on communicating EU enlargement and the EU macro-regional strategies	Co-organised with the Central Government authorities and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia
2023	5-6 October	Valletta, Malta	Euro-Mediterranean Migration Narrative Conference	Co-organised with the ICMPD and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of the Maltese government

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2023	30 November – 1st December		Venice, Italy	Plenary meeting Co-organised with the Department for European Affairs, Presidency of the Council of Minister of the Italian Government
2024	14-15 March	London	7th Stratcom Seminar Recipes to optimise strategic comm - suggested models for European governments and institutions	Co-organised with the UK Government Communication Service
2024	25-26 April	Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia	Seminar on challenges in communicating EU enlargement and progress in countering disinformation	Co-organised with the Slovenian Government Communication Office
2024	23 May	Strasbourg, France	Seminar on synergies in the fight against disinformation and on media literacy	Co-organised with Cap'Com
2024	20-21 June	Dublin, Ireland	Plenary meeting	Co-organised with the Department of the Taoiseach and the Directorate of Communications of the Department of Foreign Affairs
2024	5-6 December	Venice, Italy	Plenary meeting	Co-organised with the Italian PM Office Department for European Affairs



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