

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY Ph. D. THESIS RESEARCH

Communication Strategies within the European Union's Energy Policy

- English -

The research focuses on the role of communication in creating, developing and implementing European Union's policies, in particular the Energy Policy.

Communicating Europe in a time of crisis has never been more challenging. The confidence crisis threatens to undermine European Union's ability to govern and successfully implement its policies. Europe is considered by its citizens as being too far, complicated and very technical.

At the end of the Cold War, the perception of institutional actions and the implementation of European policies exceeded technocratic character, often taking a political way. Hence the need for an European political communication at all levels: in Brussels, at the national, regional and local level. Contrary to the information flow and the multiplication of communication tools, the European Union (EU) communicates chaotic or too little. Citizens are not informed about how they can be involved in the development and implementation of European policies, which hinders progress and complicates the EU decision-making process.

Throughout this thesis, I analyzed the energy sector-specific communication strategies from the perspective of the institutional decision-makers (European institutions) and private sector representatives who, by their actions and activities contribute to the creation, development and implementation of the EU's Energy Policy.

The initial question which draw my attention and encouraged me to write this PhD thesis is: What is the most effective communication strategy used by the EU decision-makers with regards to the Energy Policy? In this respect, the thesis aims to investigate the content of Energy Policy, the type of messages and communication tools that European decision-makers use to communicate energy issues to citizens, communicators' profiles in Brussels.

The following research questions represent the initial interrogations of the PhD research:

1. In the context of a trust crisis, citizens might consider less EU's added-value and importance. Could this jeopardize the EU's ability to govern and successfully

implement its policies?

2. Which message would be the most appropriate to convince citizens that the Energy Policy is not just for experts, but can become a real benefit in their daily lives?

I chose to use the qualitative research by relying heavily on field research, direct observation and analysis of Brussels decision-making and interactions between stakeholders.

The research paper is divided into two parts, one theoretical (first three chapters) and one practical – the questionnaire (chapter four). Following the introductory chapter, the second chapter ("Brussels' Communication: artifact or reality?") explains how the European Union, especially the European institutions, have started to communicate and how communication has transform over the years, following important moments in the EU history. The third chapter ("The EU's Energy Policy") presents the main issues of the Energy Policy, in particular energy efficiency, and analyzes the profiles of the decision-makers in charge of communication. The fourth chapter examines which changes should take place for the Energy Policy to become a tangible project with real benefits for citizens.

The research context includes the following aspects:

1. The analysis of the negativ reaction of the citizens towards EU;
2. The analysis of the perception regarding the EU communication;
3. The need to create a real Energy Policy;
4. The need for effective communication regarding the Energy Policy.

The EU communication followed the European construction, developing very intensively after the referendum on the European Constitution in 2005. The communication doesn't represent an EU Policy in itself.

Over the years, the European Union developed competencies in various sectoral policies, from fishing to agriculture, industry, consumers, health and environment, often forgetting to explain its political efforts and results to citizens, and transforming itself into a technocratic machine of details and procedures. And because EU didn't take the time to explain all these changes to its citizens, they felt somehow excluded from the decision-making process and sanctioned EU by not going to vote and general non-involvement.

Consequently, the EU has decided to communicate a lot about European institutions,

believing that Europeans do not understand their work. Communication remained focused on the EU institutions and less on the outcome of their work and actions, which are truly relevant to the daily life of millions of European citizens. Without a specific strategy, the EU institutions felt the need to justify their existence and thus communicated increasingly more, creating instruments and institutions to deal with communication.

The PhD thesis introduces the following concepts which could bridge the gap between citizens and the European Union:

1. European Union needs a communication strategy;
2. European Union needs a political project with real benefits for citizens;
3. European Union needs leadership at the local, national and European level.

With regards to the Energy Policy, it is not a matter that can be easily presented to citizens or consumers. As an "invisible" concept, the Energy Policy is often converted into money/savings, kilowatts, carbon or jobs. There is also the argument of combating climate change, which is less compelling, hard to measure and more elitist. In this context, the role of European policy-makers is not easy: they must persuade citizens that energy efficiency, for example, is not just a theoretical issue debated in Brussels, but a real solution for people to save money and natural resources, and live healthier. For this thesis, I decided to investigate the optimal communication regarding the Energy Policy.

Given the challenges that the Energy Policy is currently facing (energy security, energy poverty, high energy prices, high dependency on gas imports etc), it cannot longer afford to remain a strictly national or European policy. In this research paper, the Energy Policy is treated as a subject of international relations, a global problem that requires global solutions, a subject that dictates relations between member states and the rest of the world. Although Energy Policy is a global project, successful implementation depends very much on the support and active participation of local actors, whether they are politicians or citizens. Furthermore, the Energy Policy not only affects the environment, but many more areas such as security, transportation, health and social policy, foreign policy etc.

The energy sector is very politicized and may have clear and immediate effects on everyday life of citizens; this is why, the research highlights the important role that local decision-makers have in developing and successfully implementing the Energy Policy.

Regarding communication, the thesis demonstrates that the stakeholders who

communicate the Energy Policy are not experts in communication, this is why they communicate in a very technical language, specific for the European affairs environment in Brussels. Moreover, the European institutions have different opinions and communications regarding the Energy Policy. The best example of inadequate and ineffective communication is energy efficiency, one of the EU's energy objectives: the objective is unachievable also because of the lack of communication towards citizens, who do not understand how and why they should reduce their energy consumption. In addition, the decisions in the energy sector are taken at the national, while the communication happens mostly at the EU level.

The research highlights that the Energy Policy has always been segmented, and so was its communication. The most powerful communication strategy took the form of lobbying, mostly from large companies defending their products and economic interests. Social and political communication is missing in the energy sector.

My PhD thesis develops the idea that the EU Energy Policy needs an integrated approach and a clear message explaining all its benefits, from health to comfort, lower energy prices, peace, security, carbon dioxide emissions, melting glaciers etc. In this way, the Energy Policy is likely to become the new political project of the European Union, following the example of the European Coal and Steel Community founded in 1951.

In addition, it requires a new approach, one that focuses on more integration and solidarity, in order to complete a common market for energy.

Regarding the energy message, this research demonstrates that the Energy Policy should become a tangible project with real benefits for citizens; in this regard, changes need to be made in terms of the messages that might motivate people to get involved for a social and sustainable Europe.

To strengthen the results of the research, I interviewed 60 key stakeholders in the energy sector in Brussels about the role of communication in creating, developing and successfully implementing the Energy Policy at the EU level.

Analysis results helped to conclude that EU energy policy needs an integrated approach which regroups different objectives (renewables, carbon emissions, energy consumption, energy efficiency, security of supply, energy prices), areas (security, economy, environment, transportation, social, political), actors (EU institutions, NGOs, industries, associations, local political actors, media etc). An integrated approach would not only

facilitate communication with citizens regarding the direct benefits, but would also demonstrate that the Energy Policy can become the new political project of the EU to regain citizens' trust.

The PhD thesis makes several recommendations regarding changes and improvements to be done in order to better and efficiently communication with citizens. Firstly, the research proposes a model of communication in the energy sector, based on the reasoning "What's in for me?", whether we are talking about national and local political actors, companies or citizens. This communication involves two major changes from the current situation: the EU would have more power of decision in the energy sector and the politicians would become more responsible for the European project. The proposal relies on the capacity and political interest from local politicians to communicate energy benefits to voters, in simple words. In this case, we have a clear interest from all parties involved in the communication process: politicians want to gain votes and therefore will be motivated to better communicate the benefits of their policies, companies look for subsidies and economic benefits to increase their investments, and citizens want to pay less for electricity and live a healthy life.

The second communication strategy proposed is related to local and regional leaders, able to communicate effectively the Energy Policy to citizens.

The four years of research and analysis helped me to find answers to the two main interrogations of the thesis:

1. The economic crisis has created a crisis of confidence. Europe is considered by its citizens as being too far removed, complicated and very technical, threatening to undermine European Union's ability to govern and successfully implement its policies.
2. The Energy Policy of the European Union needs an integrated approach based on the interaction between policy makers, objectives and sectors involved. The Energy Policy is not confined to economic benefits, it affects many areas - security, environment, transportation, social, health etc. The message to citizens should encompass all these aspects and focus on the real-life everyday benefits.

Regarding the energy message, the Energy Policy should become a tangible project with real benefits for citizens; in this regard, there should be major changes in terms of the messages that might motivate people to get involved for a more sustainable and social Europe.

Based on the data collected using qualitative research, some of the final conclusions are:

1. The European Union is the most qualified to defend the energy interests of Europeans. For this to happen, Member States must cease to see the Energy Policy as a purely internal policy.
2. Local political actors are key in developing and successfully implementing the Energy Policy; they are also those who know the needs of citizens and thus can adapt European communication to local realities.
3. Internal energy market can provide real benefits to consumers from lower prices due to competition among energy European companies, to energy security and European jobs.
4. Achieving the European energy objectives requires citizens' involvement and empowerment. In this case, the interests of citizens prevail.

The keywords are: European Union, energy, communications, lobbying, politics, citizens, consumers, stakeholders, local political actors.

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