#BRANDEUROPE HOW POLICY BRANDING IS SHAPING EU COMMUNICATION

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December 1st, 2022

Loft 58, Rue de l'Etuve 58, 1000 Bruxelles and online via Twitch

18:45

A Masterclass organised by EPAC students and Protagoras

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Report of the Masterclass on "How Policy Branding is changing EU Communication", organized by the EPAC students of the Executive Master in European Public Affairs and Communication in collaboration with PROTAGORAS. The Masterclass was sponsored by GOPA.com and IHECS Academy Brussels.

You can watch the full Masterclass on the link below:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aev1aA6djbQ&feature=youtu.be

The pictures of the event can be found on the following link:
https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/19PkW6sxeDhiC2_OHCxkv6zstc7aamZsJ

The Masterclass was moderated by Nicolas Baygert, Director of PROTAGORAS, and gathered a distinguished panel of EU Affairs experts;

- Ms. Elena Linczenyiova - Director for Content and Policy - ICF Next.
- Mr. Tim McPhie - Spokesperson for Climate Action and Energy - European Commission.
- Mr. Hervé Paques - EU Strategy Director - Ogilvy Social.Lab.
- Mr. Roberto Tomasi - Communication strategist on the NextGenerationEU campaign - European Commission.

39 participants joined the masterclass on site and 55 followed it online.

The evening was held at the Loft58 at the IHECS Academy building. Mr. Baygert gave the initial welcome to the packed venue and noted the efforts of the students, thanked the Sponsors GOPA.com and IHECS Academy, and noted that "this event was co-branded […] with the aim of building bridges between practitioners and research…"

After a quick introduction of the speakers and their fields of expertise and action, the panel got right into a discussion of the first issue, guided by Mr. Baygert - "Policy Branding, what does it mean? And has there been a paradigm change in communication?

Mr. McPhie started the discussion making note that there is a perception that change has happened, paired with a conscious effort in placing a brand as such in an effort to make policy more understandable, he highlighted the need for people to understand what happens at EU Level. On the perspective of Communications, Ms. Linczenyiova reported the changes in the field, stating the obsolete nature of television today and highlighting the many new channels of information that the Institutions could use to communicate more effectively. A point was made of the history of policy branding, which recalled the first action by the Juncker administration in 2015/16, in relation to "Europe as a speaker". The panel agreed on the importance of branding as an indispensable aspect. Mr. Tomasi

explained how the EU was to function as a brand, adding that the policies could play a role of "sub-brands". It was also concluded that the shortcomings in the lifespan of a policy and the long-term goals of a proposal could hinder a campaign. Mr. Paques concluded the questions explaining the role of emotion in relation to visual identity and discussed how "moving from complexity to simplicity" was key and that a connection with the citizen was essential.

Mr. Baygert, then chose to delve more deeply, bringing forth the following question - "what are the steps taken for producing these branding schemes? How does it start? And what are the key performance indicators?

Here, the panel discussed and pondered the possibilities of a branding campaign already being present within the policy, needing only to be uncovered, and how the specifics of branding a policy can come about. On the subject, Ms. Linczenyiova directed the attention of the panel to the creation of the Green Deal as a piece of policy branding. It was then stated, by Mr. McPhie, that mostly the ideas come as part of the internal steps of a political guideline, which then evolves into visuals and grows into an identity. Mr. Paques remarked how sometimes the definition of a policy as a brand can come easily, but others are difficult to give personality to. The panel agreed on the importance of the Commission in its role of naming the policy and the task of the DG in shaping it. The importance of "political branding creating perception, which turns into reality" was pointed out as key by Ms. Linczenyiova, highlighting the word play of the Green Deal as a positive factor in the perception of the policy. It was also discussed how "a mental construct" can benefit or hinder the perception of a policy and lead to a failing brand. Mr. Tomasi also noted the nature of the Commission work by stating that "not all policies are created equal", with the panel agreeing on the unmarketability of some proposals. With that said, the panel turned to the attention of Mr. Paques who stated the importance of "brand equity", with which the panel concluded on the key role of transporting policies from wishful thinking into a reality.

The next topic brought forward by the moderator on the impact assessment, relating to the ability to measure the scheme? the branding? Or how can the reception of messages by people be adapted?

On this, the panel pointed at how the measurability could be achieved through different ways, specially noting the use of "ex ante surveys" and their capacity to weight the changes in attitude from audiences, as Mr. Tomasi stated. The panel also developed the question by wondering, as Ms. Linczenyiova put it; "how is the feeling of a policy deciphered?", here the panel discussed the relation of emotion and how to make it appealing. It was broadly concluded that the shortcomings of the Green Deal were its lack of attached emotion in comparison to the feeling that the NextGen EU had garnered. It was also noted, specially by Mr. Paques, the transformative nature of brands and also the example of policies as different pillars under one branded umbrella was discussed. The panel then concluded also on the problematic of current affairs in relation to the trajectory of a policy brand, with Mr. Tomasi recalling the disappointment at having had Covid-19 derail the further development of NextGen EU and its agenda.

On the topic of branding, Mr. Baygert proposed the following, related to recognition - is there a need to recall these brands, are there key words?

With the topic of key words and recognition, the panel noted the overall lack of scripted material for guidance and highlighted how the process was more a reaction to the "policy moment", as Mr. McPhie explained. The experts also took the Fit for 55, as pointed by Ms. Linczenyiova, as an example which had led to incoherent correlations in terms of its visualization by the general public. It was also discussed how many policies are the byproducts of main policy brands or proposals, but Fit for 55 was also used by the panel to reflect on the characteristics of communication within the EU bubble, with Mr. McPhie as a Commission insider declared that although not popular, outside the EU media, especially on social media, the scoping had proven that Fit for 55 is widely being referred to. The panel also

agreed on the intrinsic value of the "offshoot initiatives" which may serve as a reassuring source of stability for the main policy, with Mr. Paques singling out their importance in helping "build momentum". The panel also concluded not to forget that the messages accompanying a policy must be carefully chosen as to not miss the opportunity for impact, in order to "fight the correct policy battle" as stated by Mr. Tomasi.

To conclude the panel section, Mr. Baygert, decided to bring the discussion to an end with a simple yet powerful question, which resonated throughout - Is there potential for rebranding? Will there be continuity on the next Commission?

With this question the experts weighed the possibilities and renounced the triviality of not continuing with policies as brands, they agreed on the importance of keeping some sort of continuity. Yet it was also discussed and made clear that due to the realities of functioning by the Commission, that it was highly likely that continuity could break somewhere, as each Commission turn is at will to decide on its own priorities and political agenda.

At the end, the audience was given the chance to ask questions to the panelists, and the first one referred to what the key performance indicators were to measure success.

Mr. McPhie indicated that he evaluated the success by measuring how much reporting was given in articles and newspapers, stating that this is more a qualitative assessment. He finally added that it is also important to reach new audiences, which was the initial idea of the video clip about the EU Green Deal in collaboration with UEFA.

Mr. Tomasi instead indicated a more quantitative assessment, speaking of KPI, brand awareness, mentality change measurement being among the most important. However, he highlighted that EU institutions have limitations in terms of measuring data traffic due to privacy and because each member state is different.

Mr. Paques mentioned as important measuring the perception of the EU also abroad is an important survey necessary to understand whether the EU has been successful or not in its communication.

The second question referred to what more can the EU institutions do to improve their communication to narrow the gap with citizens.

Ms. Linczenyiova indicated three persisting problems that should be addressed by the EU to further improve its communication. Firstly, the majority of key policies, such as the EU Green Deal, are very future-looking, thus making it difficult to explain to citizens what will happen in 30 years from now. This is also a problem or relevance, as some do not see it as something that will benefit their life. Secondly, it is a problem of complexity, meaning that certain terms or jargon used within the EU bubble or experts are not known by citizens, thus they do not feel attached. She also mentioned that it is hard to promote "what the future will be" to citizens. Thirdly, the EU is very much overshadowed by member states who manage EU funds as Next Generation EU, thus it is difficult for citizens to see the EU in the process.

Mr. Paques reported that it is important for EU institutions to answer to critics or constructive criticisms, as it is important for citizens to feel that they are listened to at the highest level. He then mentioned that it is fundamental to go deeper in understanding the different nuances between member states but also geographical areas within the bloc to be more relevant for citizens.

Mr. McPhie talked that the previously mentioned are some of the problems that the EU is faced with, but that it is important to remember that the Commission for example is built to propose law and the communication side of it is catching up, as it was understood by the political level of the important of it for the Union as a whole. More resources, time and personnel will be dedicated to it in the next few years.

A question was asked by an online participant as well in regard to what communication agencies can bring to policy branding that in-house communication agencies cannot.

Ms. Linczenyiova mentioned that communication agencies can bring a better understanding of the audiences to which the message is to compare in-house communication agencies. By working with data, sociological institutes, and other actors to have the best understanding of the audiences.

Mr. Paques highlighted the need to have a local presence to better understand how the EU can promote its objectives among its citizens but also around the world. To do so, communication agencies have a wider network of partners.

Mr. Tomasi, having worked for both sides, talked about the business-driven style that communication agencies have and that they bring to the table when working with the EU.

Mr. Baygert then asked how to have better cooperation between communication agencies and institutions.

Mr. Tomasi mentioned that the EU is not an easy client to deal with, but this is due to the level of accountability that needs to be maintained for the resources that come from the citizens.

Mr. McPhie argued that thanks to agencies the EU can work and target messages to new audiences, mentioning that they worked with communication agencies for the video clip about the EU Green Deal in collaboration with UEFA. They also have flexibility and knowledge on how to convey messages from the EU.

A further question was asked to Mr. McPhie about his view in regard to the importance of communication in times of crisis. Mr. McPhie replied that it is indeed very much, as it is also shown by the Commission President because it is considered a tool in times of crisis as during the COVID-19 pandemic, showing the value of the EU acting together.

The last question was in regard to the difference between social media and traditional media in terms of policy branding.

Mr. McPhie explained that the Commission decided to invest in social media campaigns because they allow the EU to be in direct contact with citizens, quickly and clearly compare traditional media.

Mr. Paques argued about the risk of not being on social media, as others would fill the gap left by the institutions but without the certainty that they would support the same messages and values.

Mr. Tomasi mentioned that targeting is a very specific feature that social media can provide to EU institutions compared to traditional media. However, in social media there is more competition with other players and, since the reach will be bigger than traditional media, there is a higher risk of critics.

The event ended with a networking drink between the participants and the speakers where they had the chance to exchange views.