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GOOD GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE EU

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Abstract:
Originally stemming from the necessity of establishing a "better" governmental system in development countries, the term Good Governance refers in general on how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources including the process of decision-making and decisions-implementation. As pointed out by the European Commission and specified by the United Nations "Good Governance" is mainly based on five characteristics:

Openness: "The Institutions should work in a more open manner."

Participation: "Improved participation is likely create more confidence in the end result and in the Institutions which deliver policies."

Accountability: "Roles in the legislative and executive processes need to be clearer."

Effectiveness: "Policies must be effective and timely, delivering what is needed on the basis of clear objectives, an evaluation of future impact…"

Coherence: "Policies and action must be coherent and easily understood."

Taking into account these principles, it is evident that there is an interdependence between a functioning political communication system and "Good Governance" in the EU. The existing decision and control mechanism inside the EU-decision process must be enforced not only by (transnational)media but above all by the "power" of the European citizens as a new force in promoting and claiming the fulfillment of the "Good Governance" criteria.

It can be shown that through the establishment of specific internet networks (social media) a new age of international political communication in a new interactive way has started, which will help as a consequence in reducing the well-known democratic deficit in the European Union.

Keywords: Good Governance, Political Communication, European Citizen, Participation, Social Media

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1. INTRODUCTION

The term Good Governance came up in the context of bad governance in development countries at the beginning of the 19th century. Even though if the term allows a broad approach, there were several attempts of describing this concept without offending the addressees. The UN-Agency of The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific defines governance in general as "the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)" (UNESCAP, 2013). The World Bank points out "the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies" (Worldbank, 2013). Good Governance underlines the model of a functioning political system in development countries referring to liberal democratic states above all in Western Europe and the United States as standard countries. In this regard, Good Governance is often used "to compare ineffective economies or political bodies with viable economies and political bodies"(Khan, p.16). According to the United Nations, Good Governance consists of eight characteristics (UNESCAP, 2013) as it can be seen in figure 1:

Figure 1: UN-Characteristics of Good Governance

Source: UNESCAP 2013, online.

In 2001 the European Commission took over this term, stressing the necessity of Good Governance also for Western European Countries. In the so called "White Paper on European Governance" the European Commission states that people have disappointed expectations (European Commission, 2001, p. 7). "Democratic institutions and the representatives of the people (…) can and must try to connect Europe with its citizens. This is the starting condition formore effective and relevant policies. The White Paper proposes opening up the policy-making process to get more people and organisations involved in shaping and delivering EU policy" (European Commission, 2001, p.3). The keywords were defined as followed: *Openness*, *participation*, *accountability*, *effectiveness* and *coherence* (European Commission, 2001, p. 10, figure 2).

Figure 2: EU-Characteristics of Good Governance
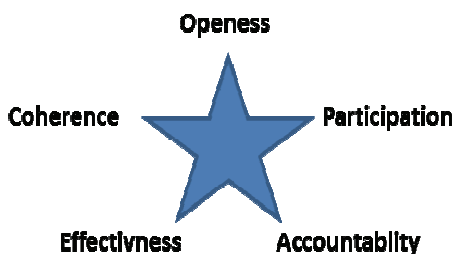
Source: Own illustration.

Openness: The Institutions should work in a more open manner by using a language accessible and understandable for the general public

Participation: Improved participation from conception toimplementation creates more confidence in theend result and in the institutions.

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Accountability: Roles in the legislative and executive processes need to beclearer at all levels, from the Member States and all those involved in developing and implementing EU policy.

Effectiveness: Policies must be effective and timely on the basis of clear objectives and evaluation of future impact taking into considerations the most appropriate level.

*Coherence:* Policies and action must be coherent and easily understood.

In comparison to the UN-characteristics it can be seen that the aspect of equitable and inclusive, consensus orientation and responsiveness are not mentioned explicitly but included in the other terms like participatory or coherence. As the European Commission pointed out: "Each principle is important for establishing more democratic governance.They underpin democracy and the rule of law in the Member States, but they apply to all levels of government – global, European, national, regional and local" (European Commission, 2001, p. 10).

The dialogue aspect with the European Citizen, however, still seems to be neglected not only by the European Institutions but also in the scientific literature. It is evident that there is an interdependence between a functioning political communication system and Good Governance in the EU.The existing decision and control mechanism inside the EU-decision process must be enforced not only by (transnational)media but above all by the "power" of the European citizens as a new force in promoting and claiming the fulfilment of the Good Governance criteria. The importance and the new possibilities of interaction also against the background of established communication models is still not analysed in depth against the background of digital revolution. There is a scientific need for studies on the framework shift from the traditional media like television, radio and newspaper to the Web 2.0 and the new dimensions of a dialogue oriented communication process.

2.   THE COMMUNICATION CONCEPT IN THE MULTILEVEL EU-SYSTEM

Good governance goes along with fulfilling certain communication principles. Having a look at the basis communication model of sender and receiver (Shannon& Weaver, 1949) (figure 3), it can be seen that this process initially implied a one-way communication:

Figure 3: The sender-receiver model (one way linear transmission of messages
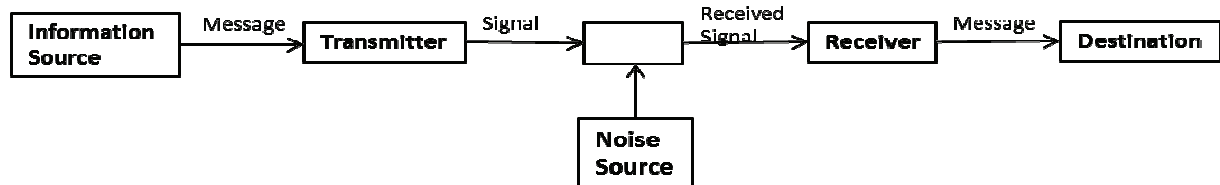
Source: Shannon & Weaver, 1949, p. 98

Taking at the one end, the sender as the source of the message and at the other end, the receiver as the target recipient for the message transported through a certain channel, it is important to introduce also the feedback loop. How was the message received and above all, was it interpreted in the way the sender intended it to be? The well-known Lasswell formula "Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?" underlines the importance of the channel analysis and above all the way of acceptance of the message (Lasswell, 1948, p. 37-51).

Having a look at the four Public Relations Models of communication by Grunig and Todd (1984), it could be argued that not only the feedback aspect should be taken stronger into consideration but above all the symmetrical, two-way communication, including an exchange of views, a dialogue. What does this mean for the communication policy on the political decision level? Or, as the European Commission stated: "The communication gap between the European Union and its citizens is widely recognised. In Eurobarometer opinion polls many of the people interviewed say they know little about the EU and feel they have little say in its decision-making process.Communication is essential to a healthy democracy. It is a two-way street. Democracy can flourish only if citizens know what is going on, and are able to participate fully" (European Commission 2006, p.2).

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There were some attempts for improving the situation. With a so called Action Plan, listing specific measures like reinforcing the Commission representation offices and more access points for citizens and the launch of 'Plan D for democracy, dialogue and debate' there were some attempts in improving the situation (European Commission, 2005a, p.2) (European Commission, 2005b).The European Commission is aware of the necessity to change communication in a more coherent, open, effective and consistent way. "A decisive move away from one-way communication to reinforced dialogue, from an institution-centred to a citizen-centred communication, from a Brussels-based to a more decentralised approach.Communication should (…) be based on genuine dialogue between the people and the policymakers and lively political discussion among citizens themselves" (European Commission, 2006, p. 4).

3.   SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Taking into consideration the media as the main channel of information transportation between sender and receiver, it is important to know from which source the European Citizens are getting their information on European matters. In 2011 the Europeans primarily rely with a total score of 79% on television, followed by the press (47%), radio (35%) and the Internet (26%). The ranking is the same as for national political matters, though with lower scores. "Focussing on the first source of information mentioned, television continues to head the list (61%), but there is a narrower gap between the press (11%) and the Internet (10%), which moves ahead of radio (7%)"(Eurobarometer, 2012, p. 27). This underlines the importance of television on the national, vertical level, but also on the transnational level like European focussed television like Euronews in Lyon or ARTE in Strasbourg. However, even if the European Media on the transnational level are playing an important role as an information pivot for connecting different cultures, values and information sources, there is still the obstacle of the "common" language and as a consequence the access to the respective information. Therefore, national media are still playing the crucial role not only in explaining the decision making and implementation process to the public, but in general in building a public sphere. There are numerous analysis on this topic, especially in the context of transnational analysis of national newspapers (e.g. Brüggemann et al. 2009a/b; Peters et al, 2005; Kleinen-von Königslöw 2012; Wessler et al, 2008a/b; Sifft et al., 2007).

New information technologies, changing behaviour in the use of technology and increasing demands of the information seekers bring new chances for a two-way political communication process in the European Union.The Internet penetration rate per population in Europe of 63,2% (Internet World Statistics, 2012) underlines the importance of the internet in general and the interaction possibilities through Social Media. Social networks are web-based services "that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison 2008, p. 211). The belief that social networks offer an appropriate means of discussing politics has also gained considerable ground in European public opinion" (Eurobarometer 2012, p. 36). More than a third of Europeans use social networks at least once a week (35%). Almost half of the interviewed persons (47%) see social networks a modern way to keep abreast of political affairs, as a good way of getting people interested in political affairs and to have a say on political issues(47%) (Eurobarometer, 2012, p. 36). More than two third (72%) of the regular users of social networks welcome the utility of social media in the political sphere as a way to have their say, as a way of getting people interested in politics (70%) and as a way of keeping abreast of political matters (69%), but they are also more likely to stress the unreliability of the information found there (53%). It could be also shown that there is still a generation cleavage: Young people are far more likely to emphasise the benefits of social networks: for example, 64% of those aged 15 to 24 consider that they are a good way of keeping abreast of political matters (compared with 31% of those aged 55 or over) and 66% see them as a good way for the public to have their say on political issues (compared with 29% of the 55+ group) (Eurobarometer, 2012, p. 36).

4.   POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ON THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

At the European level and the political communication system two levels can be distinguished: *(1) The level EU and journalist* and *(2) the level EU and Citizens*:

(1) With around thousand accredited journalists in Brussels the aim of the press division on EU level is to inform the media about key decisions in real time. The television information service "Europe by

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Satellite" (EBS) supplies with videos, sound and images on behalf of the three main EU institutions (European Commission, 2013, press division).The Newsroom contains information in English, German and French as the official news website of the institutions of the European Union. Press releases and statements are gathered on the site using automatic feeds (European Commission, 2013, EU Newsroom; European Commission, 2013, Media Center). The 'highlights' section provides links to additional information, e.g. official documents, photos, videos or background information. Information and an overview of developments on current topics is provided in a 'special coverage' section that also includes the latest press releases on the subject, links to documents, websites, statistics and more. A calendar provides details of forthcoming political events and includes a search option. Other features include multimedia material, a list of RSS feeds by topic and by source, practical information on contact persons and accreditation.

(2) The Website Europa.eu started in 1996 and was revised in 2009. It now offers a broad link system with general information on the institutions and almost uncountable documents on specific topics ready for downloading. Responsible for the content is the Directorate General Communication and as Commissioner Viviane Reding, also Vice-President and responsible for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship (European Commission, 2013, Commissioner Reding). She sticks out among the relatively unknown names of EU actors on the supranational level. Her face could be the one standing for more transparency and openness, which is an important fact for the dialogue concept. Since 2010 the European Commission has taken part in Social Media (Facebook). It is supervised through a "social media team" in the Directorate General of Communication. Here it is possible to communicate via Twitter, but also via the news tool (European Commission, 2013, DG Communication). Commissioners and the EC President are also active in Facebook. EU-Tube with around 18 000 subscribers and almost 21 million video downloads is another information tool. The European Commission is present in this channel since 2006 and tries to get also attention through video messages (Youtube, 2013). There is a special section called "Get in touch", including the following links: "Contact us via Europe Direct by phone, email, form. Find your nearest information centre in your country or contact the spokesperson´s service or the DG Communication staff". With feedback forms the European Commission gets in direct dialogue with the European Citizens (European Commission, 2013, Europa Portal). Also the European Parliament has a strong presence in the same Social Media channels (European Parliament, 2013). In contrast to the Council of Ministers focussing more on one-way communication. This underlines also the more hidden communication tactics and less desired transparency of the national governments which are represented in this organ.There is another important aspect involving Europeans by using Web 2.0.: `The European Citizens initiative´allows EU citizens to participate directly in the development of EU policies, by calling on the European Commission to make a legislative proposal. This initiative has to be backed by at least one million EU citizens, coming from at least 7 out of the 27 member states with a minimum number of signatories in each of those 7 member states (European Commission, 2013, Citizens). If there is a need of a (renewal) directive, there is the possibility of public consultation for giving the European Citizens the possibility of participation and policy making, before there is any voting in the Council of ministers or the European Parliament (European Commission, 2013, Your Voice).

5.   European Internet Platforms as new communication tools

Even if media coverage of European issues remains still limited and fragmented, the information revolution has fundamentally increased the accessibility of this kind of information and has opened up the world of 'interactive' media. Bearing in mind the new opportunities for the European Institutions by using the tools of Web 2.0 it is important to have a look at the emergence of communication platforms facilitating not only information but also the possibility of a dialogue communication process between European Citizens and actors on the European policy level. Communication platforms emerged within a various range of fields. The following platforms can be highlighted, involving different level of actor networks:
- *Journalists to the consumer (European citizen) networks*
- *European Citizen to European Citizen(people) networks*
- *Expert to expert network*

Journalists to the consumer (European citizen) networks:
  - The European Magazine (www.theeuropean.de) with the headquarter in Berlin, Germany, is free accessible. It is a discussion platform in German and English for European Citizens on

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current European issues and has no specific political direction and is financed through commercials and events.
- Eurotopics press review (www.eurotopics.net) reviews since 2005 European topics and reflects opinions, ideas and emotions. "Whatdoes Europe think?" is analyzed in 28 countries and 300 media and selected for one Press Review. It appears from Monday to Friday in German, English and French and is supported by a network of correspondents. The press review promotes trans-European discussion and creates new networks for media, cultural and political exchange. It disposes of aconstantly growing archive of around 23,000 articles.Eurotopics is a service provided by the Federal Agency for Civic Education in Bonn, Germany.
- Presseurop (www.presseurop.eu) is situated in Paris, France. The news website publishes a daily selection of articles chosen from more than 200 international news titles, then translated into ten languages (English, German, French, Spanish, Romanian, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, Polish and Czech). Even if there is a financial support by the European Commission, it is underlined that multilingual team is working completely independently. The Agency was established in 2009 by a consortium of four magazines specialising in international news: Courrier International (Paris), Courrier Internacional (Lisbon), Forum (Warsaw), and Internazionale (Rome).

European Citizen to European citizen (people) networks
- Cafe Babel (www.cafebabel.com) has the headquarter in Paris, France. It is the publication of the association Babel international and was created in 2001 mainly by Erasmus students. It has an »ever-expanding network of local offices« across Europe and claims to be »the voice of the euro-generation« (in German, Polnish, French, Spanisch, English).

Expert to expert network
- Eurozine (www.eurozine.com) was founded 1998 in Vienna, Austria and appears in English, Russia, German, often in the original language. It is a network of European cultural journals, linking up more than 80 partner journals and associated magazines and institutions from most European countries. Eurozine is also a netmagazine, publishing outstanding articles from its partner journals.
- Labforculture (www.labforculture.org) with its headquarter in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, connects 50 countries in 6 languages (German, English, Polish, Italian, Spanish, French). The networking platform for information and discussion on European arts and culture work with and for artists, arts and culture organisations and networks, cultural professionals and audiences. It provides also research and analysis related to cultural cooperation and collaboration, including funding opportunities, critical perspectives, research, news, and contacts.
- Networking European Citizenship Education (NECE) (http://www.bpb.de/veranstaltungen/netzwerke/) is a service provided by the Federal Agency for Civic Education in Bonn, Germany. It is an initiative for networking citizenship education in Europe. The initiative's chief goal is to promote the "Europeanisation of citizenship" education. It brings together academics, practitioners, and policymakers at the European level, and stimulates knowledge transfer and information exchange on good practices, also by fostering co-operation and projects.

6. CONCLUSION

Originally emerged from the necessity of establishing a `better´ governmental system in development countries, the term Good Governance refers in general on how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources including the process of decision-making and decisions-implementation. According to Sam Agere "the discretionary space left by the lack of a clear well-defined scope for what governance encompasses allows users to choose and set their own parameters"(Agere, 2000, p. 4). Nevertheless, it forces governments to reflect their way of decision making and implementation. Taking into account the five characteristics of Good Governance specified by the European Commission a decade ago, there could be made the following observations:

- *Openness* of the working process of the European Institutions and
- *Participation* will be considerably improved by using the possibilities and interactive tools like Web 2.0. The European commission's goal of creating more confidence in the end result will

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be increased by the possibility of a feedback loop and active dialogue possibilities. With the continuous effort of the European Commission and also the European Parliament in improving their services in the internet going along with the possibility of a two way communication between the EU institutions and the European Citizen the policy making and implementation process will be comprehensible and more traceable.

- As a consequence there will be also more controlled *effectiveness* via the Media and the European Citizens, following the defined objectives and at the end the impact of policy making and implementation.
- This increases also the *accountability* with the possibility of making clear the different roles in the legislative and executive processes within the multilevel European decisions making system.
- By this, there might be more chances to define policies and actions in a coherent and understandable, allowing more overall *Coherency*.

Eurobarometer surveys revealed that that "Europeans continue to believe that they are ill-informed about European issues: 73% consider that the public in their country is ill-informed (versus 24%) and 66% think that they are ill-informed themselves.Only a third of Europeanstherefore feel personally well-informed about European matters" (Eurobarometer, 2012, p. 21). Policies and action in the European Union are still not easy to understand for the European Citizens. Even if there is improved participation like the analysis of the respective platforms has shown, the objective of creating more confidence in the end result and in the institutions (criteria of openness and effectiveness) which deliver policies can be still doubted.One of the main questions remains: How to get awareness of the European Citizens in times of information overload and regionalization tendencies? Here, the importance of key personalities might be a way to attract more attention and on the long run to create a better image of the European Union among the EU citizens. Beside the direct "one-to-one-communication" between EU and its citizen, it is also important to identify those persons, who are spreading news in social networks and start viral processes. Having a clear vision and mission, defining the respective target groups and serving this group with a specific tailored message is already a great step towards more comprehension and involvement of the citizens.

Thanks to the new communication tools like the WEB 2.0 there started a process in direction of a more interactive, symmetrical communication, where understanding and feedback might work in a more consistent way in the future. This is also underlined by the European Year of Citizens 2013, which is dedicated to the rights that come with EU citizenship: "Over this year, we will encourage dialogue between all levels of government, civil society and business at events and conferences around Europe to discuss those EU rights and build a vision of how the EU should be in 2020" (European Commission, 2013, European Citizen). Taking into consideration that a majority of European Citizens consider that media coverage on European topic is adequate in television (54%), in the press (55%), on the radio (48%) or via websites (41%), going along with an increasing feeling that national media talk "too much" about the European Union (Eurobarometer, 2012, p. 32), it shows that there is an increasing, perhaps more diffuse "feeling" for European Topics. There is still a need not only for receiving information on European Policy via media but more in the sense of real understanding European Policy. A two way, dialogue oriented approach with space for interaction and discussion might help to fix the European thought in the heads of the European Citizens in the sense of *understanding* European policy making and implementation. As a consequence this would help in closing the communication gap, to create a real European public shere and in general to reduce the well-known democratic deficit in the European Union.

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