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DEAR COLLEAGUE!

The volume you are holding is the Estonian government communication handbook.

The book is a helpful resource foremost for new communication personnel at government bodies who wish to know how to do their job better. It will also benefit senior officials at government bodies who want to organize their agency’s communications better, and for university students who are interested in government communications.

The handbook gives a brief overview of how communications are organized at ministries and other government bodies. The topics in the book are based on the provisions of legal acts, the results of government media relations studies and accepted practices. The handbook was compiled based on similar government communications manuals used by the American, British, Finnish and Dutch government.

Compared to previous editions, this version includes new section on distribution of misinformation and pseudo media. All of the other chapters have been updated as well.

All comments and suggestions for additions are welcome at the Government Communications Unit at: Stenbock House, Rahukohtu 3, 15161 Tallinn or via e-mail at press@riik.ee.

Yours faithfully,
The Government Communications Unit
CORE VALUES OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS

None of us ever work alone or by ourselves. Every government action has results that affect citizens, companies and organizations, society and the international community. Thus communication must be part of every government activity from planning to final implementation. Communication is always a two-way street - the government communicates with the public and takes into consideration the positions of citizens.

Our activities are based on respect for the Estonian constitution. We operate on the basis of and in conformity to legislation. As public servants we are in the service of citizens and communicating with them is our duty.

OPENNESS

- We understand that a government is an open organization. Any information that is not subject to access restrictions is public.
- Being open, we strive to ensure that citizens participate as broadly as possible in exercising the power vested in them. We do not only notify people of government decisions; we help them all take part in making decisions that pertain to them.
- We initiate discussions in society and take part in them.
- Being open, we help ensure public checks and balances on exercise of public duties.
- Being open, we are also open to criticism.

HONESTY

- We are honest in our communications. If we do not know the answer, we admit it and say when we are able to provide more information in response to the query. We also acknowledge any errors we make, explaining why it happened and how we plan to avoid it in future.

RESPONSIBILITY

- In communicating with the public, we realize that we represent our organization, government and entire country. Our country, government and colleagues are all judged on the basis of what we say or do.
- We release only verified information.
COMPREHENSIBILITY

- Our primary tool is language. We use clear, simple and understandable Estonian. We also consider the ability to communicate in foreign languages important.
- We try to make ourselves understood by the entire population. We also forward information in a manner compatible with people with special needs.

NEUTRALITY

- We do not interfere in partisan politics.
- We do not take part in election campaigns. In the run-up to the general elections, we do not forward statements that pertain to the government’s plans for the future after the current period in government. This is to be done by the press representative of the relevant minister’s political party or the minister’s political adviser.
- We do not justify or support government policies with partisan political rhetoric or talk of any politician as “belonging to” or “being a member of” any political party. We make reference to only the uniform government policy. In explaining government policies, decisions and actions, we describe their essence and explain the underlying fundamental principles.
- We take a respectful attitude toward all citizens who disagree with the government’s positions or actions. We do not attack the policies of any parties or groups.

JUSTIFIABILITY

- Every government action has reasons and grounds and we know that our obligation is always to state them.
- We forward to the public information on party policies or decisions in the purview of the government and government bodies. We do not forward statements or comments about parties’ policies, agreements or alleged intentions.

RESPECT

- We remain cordial when communicating with people. We show respect for the people we communicate with. We never speak ill of our partners.
- We give the benefit of the doubt to the recipient when our message is not understood. We always try to thoroughly understand our partners’ side when listening to them.
- We know that time is precious. We always try to be efficient in our work and respond to questions not just accurately but also rapidly.
- We understand that information must be forwarded to all parties equally without favouring one party over another.
- We protect people’s privacy.
COOPERATION

- In fulfilling our duties, we continually work with other government bodies to ensure that the state is run in a consistent manner.
- When receiving a query pertaining to another agency, we promptly notify the relevant agency’s communications office. If we receive a query pertaining to more than one other agency, all parties notify one another and discuss the matter with each other.
- We avoid resolving disagreements between agencies through the mass media. It is not appropriate for the government to contradict itself.

INNOVATIVENESS

- We are innovation-minded. We constantly pursue development of ourselves, our services and work-related arrangements.
- Where there is doubt that the principles listed above were followed correctly, we always analyse the situations with superiors and colleagues. We learn from our mistakes.
COMMUNICATIONS ARE PART OF GOVERNANCE

Each and every government action has a reaction that exerts an influence on citizens, companies and organizations, society and the international community. For this reason, communication must be part of all facets of government activity from planning to final implementation.

“Whoever leads is obliged to lead with a clear rationale for action even if the rationale is not to everyone’s liking,” President Lennart Meri once said.

The head of every government body is responsible for planning, organizing and evaluating the agency’s communications and is the primary spokesperson for his or her agency. The head of the agency is responsible for creating a position of communications specialist or communications unit. The need for communication must be taken into consideration in planning personnel and budget issues at the government body.

OBJECTIVES OF COMMUNICATIONS AT GOVERNMENT BODIES

Every government body must comply with requirements arising from the Public Information Act and other legal acts with regard to releasing information and responding to queries. In accordance with the state crisis management plan, the government body must also notify the public in an emergency situation.

The activity of public servants must be in conformity with the code of ethics in public service and good practices for public administration. The public and the free press have high expectations as to government bodies, much as they have expectations with regard to democratic governance in general: they expect government to be transparent, mindful of public interests, inclusive, influential and effective in fulfilling its duties.

Estonian government bodies’ communication units go by different titles: communication, press, media, information, spokesperson’s office, and public relations offices, departments or divisions.
Their principal functions are however relatively uniform:

To support the government’s communications with the public, explain to the public the government’s goals, decisions, actions and activities, to keep people up to date with their rights and obligations, give them instructions for how to act in the case of an emergency and to increase awareness of public administration.

POLITICAL NEUTRALITY
The communication unit of a government body is not a political propaganda mouthpiece; it is a contributor to freedom of speech in civic society. It is not appropriate for a government body to intervene in the political affairs of parties.

A government body that justifies or defends its decisions or activities with partisan rhetoric or talks of some policy, decision or activity as “belonging” to any specific party will be roundly condemned by the public.

The communication unit of a ministry distributes information to the public regarding policy in a certain field or decisions in the purview of the government of the ministry. A ministry’s spokesperson may not issue statements or comments pertaining to parties’ policies, agreements or alleged intentions. This is the responsibility of the spokesperson for the ministry’s own party or the minister’s political adviser.

PROFESSIONALISM
Government communication is an area that requires high level of professionalism and constant development. Fulfilment of the communication functions of a ministry and subagencies requires systematic, long-term planning and organizational memory and, by that measure, state continuity.

A practice where the head of the communication unit is replaced each time a minister is replaced will inevitably result in lost time in performing the government’s communication functions and will keep the agency from achieving its objectives. If the head of the unit is frequently replaced, this will make it harder for the organization to amass the specific information it needs and the cooperative networks may become weaker, yet these networks are necessary to maintain a communication environment that supports the legitimacy of the government bodies.
Many European governments operate on the principles of government communication developed on professional grounds. For instance, a neutral communications unit was created in 2004 in Great Britain and an official at the level of chancellor or secretary general responsible for government communication was appointed. The Netherlands, Finland and Estonia have similar units.

**FREEDOM OF THE PRESS**
Unrealistic expectations should not be set for the activities of the communication unit. The communication unit shall not be responsible for what papers write or what radio and TV news report, but through honest and forthright communications, the standing of the agency in the eyes of the public can be improved.

The communication unit may not create news where there is no news, but it can provide information on actual activities. The communication unit cannot turn a bad policy or activity on the part of the government body or a government body official into a good one, but by communicating openly, it can reduce its negative impacts.

**COOPERATION WITHIN THE AGENCY**
Communications make up an important part of the strategic management of every government authority. The director of communications or press representative must take part in all operational meetings and must be included in the making of important decisions.

A government communication unit officer is present at every sitting of the Government of the Republic and cabinet meeting as well as at working meetings for preparing these sittings and meetings.

The Government Office staffs a communication specialist who not only organizes the Government Office’s internal and external communication, but coordinates the preparation of the agency’s strategic development plan and keeps an eye on performance of the set goals.

The rule at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is that the minister is accompanied on official visits by a press representative who is part of the official delegation. In the interests of having a complete overview, the press representative is entitled to take part in meetings hosted by the minister and other official and working meetings, to receive detailed information from all ministry employees on matters in their competence and to access documents circulated in the ministry.
COOPERATION BETWEEN AGENCIES

Public communication between the government and a government body can be successful only if their communication units engage in good mutual cooperation. Consistent work-related exchange of information with colleagues helps avoid a situation where government bodies send out conflicting information. If conflicting information is in fact sent out, journalists can justifiably ask: if the government bodies are not unanimous and do not work together, is our country really being governed well?

Coordinated communication is essential in crises and in cases where the topic of communication pertains directly to the activities of more than one government body. At a time that people must be given instructions on protecting their life, health and property and avoid panic that could arise from being deprived of information, any sort of conflict in the messages from different agencies can result in tragic consequences. To avoid this, for instance, the Ministry of Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Board and the Ministry of Social Affairs worked closely together in 2005 to prepare for a possible avian flu outbreak.

Standard practice for queries concerning another agency is for the press representative to promptly notify the communication unit at that agency. In the case of a query pertaining to more than one agency, all of the parties notify each other and discuss the issue mutually.

Standard practice is for the ministry’s communication unit to coordinate communication-related cooperation in the ministry’s area of government.

The communication units for several ministries organize regular working meetings and joint trainings with colleagues working in agencies in their area of government and engage in cooperation to improve exchange of information. For example, they harmonize the content and design of websites of the agencies in the area of government or use a common mailing list.

New Government of the Republic rules that came into effect in winter 2011 make mention of the term government communication for the first time in a legal act and set forth its fundamental principles:

- The Government Office, in cooperation with ministries, ensures that the public is kept informed in a uniform and forthright manner regarding government decisions and actions.
- The ministries have the obligation to notify the Government Office in a timely manner of matters in their area of government which require notification of the public.
- The Government Office has the right to give other government bodies instructions for organizing government communication.
To exchange information and organize communication activities, a government communication coordination council meets every week in Stenbock House. The council is responsible for discussing government communication topics, making proposals for establishing instructions governing organization of work in the field, providing consultation to the Government Office in amending and establishing legal acts pertaining to government communication and discussing and adopting positions on salient matters pertaining to government communication.

The working meetings of the coordination council are chaired by the director of government communication and the heads of communications units at the ministries are ex officio permanent members of the council. The Chancellor of Justice’s public relations advisor and the head of the State Audit Office’s communication service are also included in the work of the government communication coordination council.

**WELL-CONSIDERED COMMUNICATIONS**

Communications at a government body must be planned. “Planned communications increase credibility,” says director of government communication Inga Bowden. “It is important for all those who need information to receive consistently accurate information and that they have the right to have a say as well.”

Careful planning requires namely that interest groups be included in legislative drafting and preparation of development plans. Ministry officials – being public servants – should always consider in the process of drafting development plans and legislation who and in what stage they need to work with to make the result understandable and well-functioning.

The core values and objectives of communication at government bodies are the same, but a separate communication plan should support the fulfilment of each government body’s specific functions arising from legal acts.

**COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

The communications plan should answer the following questions:

- **On what topics and to what ends does the agency communicate?**
  The topic and objectives of communication derive from the competence and functions imposed on the government body by legal acts. The agency must be clear on what extent and on what topics it desires to develop active communications (offering information via press releases, press conferences, website etc) and the extent and on what topics questions must be responded to.
- **Who does the agency communicate with?**
The primary communications partners are everyone directly impacted by the agency’s activities. When making plans, one should not forget the importance of the internal communications of the agency, the area of government and the entire government sector.

- **In what situations and how frequently does communication take place?**
Regular communications increases credibility. An annual calendar is suitable as a basis for more long-term planning of communication. Events and topics that are periodic or known a longer period in advance should be recorded on the calendar.

For instance, the key principles of the communication plan at ministries might comprise the objectives set forth in the ministry’s development plan and the projects listed in the work plan, functions assigned for a certain quarter in the government action plan, annually recurring procedures involving drafting the state budget, dates of entry into force of legal acts, and regular international and domestic events and important dates.

- **What are the primary channels means of communication?**
Aside from communicating via the mass media, direct communication may be much more effective. The same is true of the use of social media for discussion.

- **How should communication be evaluated?**
When providing support for the activities of an agency, we proceed from the standpoint that if the information is not understood, we first look for the fault in the outgoing communication. Specific proposals for improving communication can be made on the basis of media monitoring and analyses in media relations studies. Certainly, if there is doubt whether the core values of government communication were adhered to, the situation should always be examined together with one’s supervisor and colleagues.

**COMPOSITION OF THE COMMUNICATIONS UNIT**
In putting together the positions of a government body communication unit, the functions and communication goals of the agency are considered. Each agency has at least a head of communication (press representative) who deals above all with media relations, providing information about the agency to journalists and keeping the agency’s employees up to date with what is to be published in the media.

In larger bodies, the units deal with communications in the broader sense, organizing trainings, conferences and exhibitions, designing and administering websites, writing speeches, publishing speeches, and taking responsibility for the agency’s internal communications and taking part in legislative drafting.
The activities of the communication unit must support the involvement of citizens and civic associations in the making of decisions pertaining to them. Thus ministries’ communication units engage in close cooperation with departments and legislative drafting units within their agency and communicate regularly with NGOs. A number of ministry communication units have an official who is responsible for eliciting feedback (public comment) from NGOs on legal acts, based on good practices for involvement.
MEDIA RELATIONS AT GOVERNMENT BODIES

THE TRUSTWORTHY PRESS REPRESENTATIVE

The press representative is much like a reporter who is embedded within the government and gathers information for the public - that is how onetime US presidential spokesman Mike McCurry has described the job.

Government bodies do not have the right to decide what people should read in the newspaper, listen to on the radio or watch on television. The function of the press representative at a government body is to offer all journalists information that helps them understand the government’s plans, decisions and actions.

“Democracy does not just mean free and fair elections,” President Toomas Hendrik Ilves once said, “but it also means the freedom of the press and electronic media to publish information on the activities of government authorities and, when necessary, to criticize them.”

The press representative of a government body is not a magician who can change a non-functional policy or controversial decision into something that appears to be superb. Communications cannot replace good ideas or effective deeds. A press representative cannot foster a “fair impression” in the absence of fairness, nor can he or she talk of objectives when these are not clear.

The most valuable asset that a press representative has is his or her credibility. A press representative’s work is effective only if journalists trust him or her. They will not be trusted if their earlier answers have proved to be misleading. A press representative must also establish and maintain trust-based ties with the head of his or her agency and with public servants. A good communication specialist garners trust on a consistent basis and makes sure that no action or word would give reason to destroy the amassed trust.

Journalists expect a press representative to efficient. A good press representative is fluent and articulate speaker and writer, has a patient mindset, good memory and helpful demeanour. He or she must always be prepared for the unexpected, multi-task when necessary and have quick reactions.
Journalists expect a press representative to be confident and human. A professional press representative is not afraid of communicating with journalists and is not hesitant to take part in public discourse on behalf of his or her organization. They are expected to have empathy, the desire and skill to understand what journalists need, and talk using simple language.

A press representative must continually improve his or her knowledge and keep up to date with the news. A press representative’s working time is largely divided between three tasks: first, responding to questions and distributing information; second, preparing press releases and organizing press conferences; and third, gathering and organizing information - taking part in meetings, reading documents and news and interacting with experts.

Communicating with the public is a key part of running a government body; thus a press representative must be present for the making of decisions and, if necessary, take part in the process right from the inception.

**SENIOR OFFICIALS AND THE MEDIA**

In general political and strategic matters, the government body is represented in the media by the director of the agency. For instance, a ministry’s key spokesperson is the minister; the key spokesperson of an agency in the area of government of a ministry, the director general. An agency may have other spokespersons who talk on topics in which the agency is engaged on a daily basis and who help clarify matters pertaining to their line of work. The spokesperson may be the head of a unit, sectoral specialist or press representative.

Studies on media relations, which have been conducted for years in Estonia, and which have drawn responses from hundreds of journalists, show that the availability of the head of an agency for interviews and comments is of great importance for the media. In responding to these surveys, journalists have said for instance that “it would be good if press representatives would not always try to be a “filter” between journalists and the organization and the “press representative’s job is not to serve as a screen for the head of the agency.”

Journalist Märt Treier says it is not possible for senior officials to be shielded from the media in a country the size of Estonia. “People’s telephone numbers are known to journalists and if needed, they have a direct line to the prime minister and president.”

At receptions and society events, journalists can approach senior officials and ask whatever is on their mind. This is especially so for ministers. “Society gatherings are the places where politicians meet
the people,” says the former editor-in-chief of Kroonika, Ingrid Veidenberg. “A politician must be prepared to field unpleasant questions if he or she is in a public place.” Thus a press representative cannot always have total control of an agency’s media relations.

The task of a press representative is to assist journalists in finding the necessary spokesperson. TV and radio journalists expect a press representative to recommend interviewees who are good speakers and debaters and have undergone media training. “Often it proves necessary to interview politicians,” says the responsible editor-in-chief of Baltic News Service, Ainar Ruussaar. “But in the case of certain questions, prominence is not important, we will gladly let a specialist in the field do the talking.”

NEWsworthINESS

A good press representative is up to date with how media channels decide what is worth covering and do not inundate journalists with “news they can’t use”. If a press representative is planning to issue a press release or hold a press conference, they first must answer the following questions: what does my agency have to say that is newsworthy?

More often, expectations for news are the following:

- **Freshness.** Journalists are interested above all in what is going on today and in the near future. “Journalists do not want to receive press releases that start with the words yesterday or the day before yesterday”, says journalist Märt Treier. “We want information about today and now!” For the same reason, it is important to publish advance notices about planned events.

- **Impact.** A large part of the information proffered by the government pertains to people’s rights and obligations and can have a significant impact on people’s attitudes and behaviour.

- **Salience and fodder for discussion.** Journalists prefer to cover what people are talking about.

- **Prominence.** Well-known people and influential organizations make it into the news more often.

- **Geographical proximity.** This is especially important for local media outlets.

- **Special nature.** Events that are unexpected and prompt some conflict for the reader, listener or viewer make it into the news.

- **Controversy.** The news contains another side to the story and opposing positions.

- **Suitability to the medium or channel.** Coverage is devoted to stories that are suited to the nature of a specific channel. For instance, television news will cover events that promise interesting visual footage.
PARTICULARITIES OF BROADCASTING AND WEBSITES
Unlike newspaper reporters, radio, TV and Internet journalists do not often have news “beats”. Often broadcast and Internet journalists get story ideas from preliminary information, print media or wire services or websites. Their news does not dig as deep as stories in the printed press. Complicated stories are shortened to segments several minutes or paragraphs long.

When holding a TV interview or press conference, one must make sure that the setting has a background and lighting compatible for TV screens. For instance, a dark blue fabric emblazoned with the coat of arms is the backdrop in the Stenbock House press conference room and additional spotlights can be aimed at speakers.

TV and news portals can be offered photographs from house photographers if it helps tell the story better.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA RELATIONS
- Always tell the truth. Never lie. Be fair and precise, as your credibility depends on it.
- Be as open as possible when dealing with the media.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, admit it. Promise to find the answer and do so as quickly as you can.
- Do not engage in conjecture or speculation. Good journalists check facts. If you are wrong, you will lose your credibility in their eyes.
- Correct errors immediately. Admit you were in error and that you wish to issue a correction.
- Avoid jargon and slang, use ordinary language.
- Assume that anything you say will be quoted.
- Let journalists know if they have published something that is inaccurate.
- Explain politely what is incorrect and provide supporting evidence.
- Always answer the telephone and letters.
- Keep a sense of humour.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OFFICIALS BEING INTERVIEWED
- Before the interview, make sure who is the journalist and what publication he or she represents.
- Find out the interview topic and bring yourself up to date with the facts of the matter. Think about your message, formulate it in a maximum of three sentences (advisably in writing) and be sure to express your message during the interview.
- Comment only on matters pertaining to your area of expertise.
- Talk about the facts.
- Don’t be afraid to admit you don’t know the answer or that it isn’t possible for you to answer the question.
- Be specific in your responses, don’t prattle on.
Correct the interviewer if he or she interprets facts incorrectly in the questions. All misinterpretations and misunderstandings must be refuted before the next question is tackled.

In TV interviews, maintain eye contact with the interviewer. Don’t look into the camera.

Try to speak with clearer diction, and slower than you would in ordinary conversation.

Take into account the fact that the camera and microphone may be on before and after the interview. The interviewee’s appearance in a TV interview should be suitable to the general context.

Don’t engage in speculation, lie or make assumptions. Do not let the situation or the journalist get under your skin. Do not use specialized terminology or slang that might not be understood by ordinary people. Don’t share information that is not intended to be released immediately. Don’t comment on matters outside your area of expertise.
DISTRIBUTION OF MISINFORMATION AND PSEUDO CHANNELS

PRINCIPLES

Estonian government communications is based, in the case
of misinformation and pseudo media, on the following principles:

1. We cooperate fully with publications and journalists who follow the principles and values of independent journalism in their work.

Freedom of speech and information, i.e. the right to express opinions without interference, the right to receive information, and the right to distribute information, thoughts and ideas, are in force in Estonia.

Press freedom is thus a very important value for us too, which is confirmed by our high ranking of 12th place out of 180 countries (World Press Freedom Index 2017 http://www.http://rsf.org/en/ranking#). However, we clearly oppose the promotion of hostile influences and propaganda while appealing to press freedom. Each opinion, or forum for expressing it, need not necessarily be regarded as journalism.

2. Estonian state agencies reserve the right to not treat the editorial staff of channels that are not independent and that do not follow good journalistic practice as media outlets. We will not guarantee them accreditation, and we will also adhere to this principle in organizing the work of press centres of international events taking place in Estonia.

Each government agency has the right to set rules for access to its events. In order to attend events organised by the agency, media channels must meet the prerequisites. This is the case in the European Union and in other countries.

For example, accreditation for institutions of the European Union requires, inter alia, that the publications must be companies with independent editorial staff and without distribution restrictions. One of the most important accreditation conditions is also the openness on, how the media channel’s activities are funded and by whom. (https://ec.europa.eu/info/contact/press-services/media-accreditation/annual-media-accreditation-eu-institutions_en)

Journalists have several privileges (the opportunity to receive comments, the right to protect sources), but also an obligation to follow journalistic ethics and the principles of responsible journalism, to be sure of the accuracy of the information being disclosed.

Calling oneself a journalist, but failing to respect these principles and those of credibility and independence, cannot guarantee equal rights with other journalists. Just as the misinformation distributed by
hostile pseudo channels is not regarded as journalism by Estonian state agencies, neither do journalistic privileges apply to the employees of these channels.

The Estonian journalists code of ethics (see http://www.eall.ee/code.html) and the code of principles of the International Federation of Journalists (http://www.ifj.org/about-ifj/ifj-code-of-principles/) set out the responsibility of the journalist for their words and creations, and the duty to ensure that inaccurate, distorted or misleading information shall not be published.

3. We will not promote hostile propaganda and influences in any way. We will not offer material and stories to pseudo channels. We will not contribute to the growth and spread of these channels.

Estonian government communications employees have the complex and responsible task of managing the identification of misinformation distributors and distinguishing them from the press. Propaganda attacks and interventions against democratic societies have become bolder and more visible in recent years. There are countries that treat the media as part of a weapons system and emphasize its importance in their military doctrine. Misinformation - an intentionally misleading mixture of truth and untruth - is disseminated to create tension in the Estonian society, too. For example, both various publications and countless false accounts on social media are used for this.

On July 4, 2017, RenTV aired as story about the Jõhvi Cemetary, which argued that local Lutherans would seek the reburial of people of Russian origin. Although the actual facts were also included in the story (there are not enough burial places in the cemetery), this story about reburial was an intentional lie that in turn was attempted to arbitrarily relate to the remains of the Red Army soldiers. (http://ren.tv/novosti/2017-07-04/nacizm-posle-smerti-nakladbishchah-v-estonii-zapretyat-honorit-russkih)

Editors, who receive instructions from their financier to intervene against another nation and the people, are not independent. This is not free press. Practice has confirmed that these channels do not follow good journalistic practice and information is published in an incomplete or biased way. We call these channels pseudo media or hostile propaganda.
The dangers of misinformation and propaganda have truly been understood by most democracies and the institutions that unite them. For example, in its resolution of 23 November 2016, the European Parliament named Sputnik a “pseudo news agency”: “/.../ The Russian Government is employing a wide range of tools and instruments, such as think multilingual TV stations (e.g. RT), pseudo news agencies and multimedia services (e.g. Sputnik), cross-border social and religious groups, as the regime wants to present itself as the only defender of traditional Christian values, social media and internet trolls to challenge democratic values, divide Europe, gather domestic support and create the perception of failed states in the EU’s eastern neighbourhood; (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2016-0441+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN)

Among European heads of state, French President Emmanuel Macron called Sputnik and RT “influence and propaganda bodies” at a press conference on 29 May 2017.

These pseudo channels of influence are disguised as online portals, “independent” TV channels, news agencies, radio programs or print publications. Often, the editors’ contact information and related people are classified, some of their representatives use false names, and there are cases of lying to represent other publications.

For example, the yearbook of the Security Police sets out a case where a person contributing to the Russian television channels ORT, RTR, Zvezda, REN TV and St. Peterburg Channel 5, presented himself as an employee of the editorial staff of the Russian-language programs of ETV, and presented other lies in order to win the trust of different institutions and key players for the purposes of collecting information about events in Estonia. (file:///C:/Users/paivi.tampere/Downloads/Annual%20Review%202010.pdf)
These channels do not only cover national security and politics, but also “soft” news such as culture and entertainment. Estonian government agencies will not help pseudo channels in the production of soft stories (such as giving a comment, inviting to press events) either, since such behaviour would contribute to their desire to prove editorial independence. Pseudo channels gain popularity through soft topics and legitimacy through genuine news stories spread among propaganda.
CRISIS COMMUNICATION

DEFINITIONS
A crisis may be caused by a natural event (such as storm, flood, epidemic, drought) or human activity (environmental pollution, disorders, extensive infrastructure disturbances, alerts, war). If a crisis threatens a state’s principal values or has endangered human lives, health and property and the situation can be described as uncertain, it is a very serious crisis or emergency situation. The unrest in April 2007 called Bronze Night is an example of such a crisis.

Pursuant to the Emergency Act, government authorities have the obligation to inform the public about the crisis or emergency situation. According to the act, an emergency is an event or a chain of events, which endangers the life or health of many people or causes significant property damage or significant environmental damage or severe and extensive disruptions in the continuous operation of vital services, which requires a prompt and coordinated response from several agencies.

Crisis communication involves more than informing the public. Crisis communication also includes risk and internal communication and information exchange between agencies, companies, non-governmental organizations and media organizations that react to the situation.

Not all situations requiring crisis communication are emergency situations. It might be that the situation has no locus in Estonia and thus the crisis commission will not convene. The smoke that disturbed the citizens of Tallinn in August 2006 is an example of such an event. It took time to ascertain the circumstances of the occasion, but communication needed to be started right away, as people perceived the situation as disturbing and potentially dangerous. The situation did not have a locus in Estonia, as the disturbing smoke came to Tallinn from the east.

A similar crisis communication situation occurred with the so-called ash-cloud crisis at the beginning of 2010. The volcanic eruption that created the ash clouds took place in Iceland, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had to start informing the public (as well as Estonians living abroad) as soon as it became evident that people’s everyday lives were disrupted.

In other words, the public’s understanding of the situation determines how the situation is handled - if people perceive the situation as a crisis, the situation must be handled as a crisis.
**Risk communication**
Risk communication means informing the inhabitants of the dangers threatening the state and society. It also encompasses measures the state and its inhabitants can take to manage those risks or reduce their negative influence.

Risk communication includes instructions for conduct and early warnings that the agency communicates to the public during an emergency in order to inform people about immediate danger. Risk communication also includes preventive notification that draws attention to possible threats and how to avoid them, e.g. natural disasters and fires, dangers related to using chemicals, etc.

Examples of preventive risk communication are the Rescue Board’s smoke detector and water safety campaigns, which focussed on risk awareness and informing people about safe conduct.

**Communication is the key element of crisis management**
Well-organized crisis communication supports finding a solution to the crisis and helps the state as a whole - not only specific establishments - in ensuring reliability and solving the situation.

The decisions made to solve the crisis and their implementation are called crisis management. Crisis communication must act in compliance with crisis management - it is the key element of crisis management that lends support to solving the situation.

Well-organized crisis communication and solutions to a crisis help people save themselves, their property and the surrounding environment, understand the situation and be informed about how it is being solved.

A crisis is characterized by its uncertain nature, the resulting insecurity of the public and suddenly growing need for information. If true and precise information does not reach the people affected by the crisis (to crisis communication target groups), it might significantly hinder the crisis’s solution and reduce state authorities’ credibility.

Some crises, such as terrorism, may activate groups who, incited by self-profit or other reasons, send out information that intensifies the crisis and misleads the public. Therefore it is the obligation of government bodies to gather and distribute correct and precise information as soon as possible, avoid speculations and refute false information.

Authorities related to crisis management are under close public scrutiny during the crisis. The information that reaches the public during the crisis fosters an impression of the government bodies’ and
the whole state’s preparedness to act - this will remain in the public’s mind for a long time.

PRINCIPLES

Key to successful crisis communication
The key to successful crisis communication is thorough preparations, clear division of responsibilities and cooperation. Therefore it is important to plan communication activities for possible crises, practice crisis communication beforehand in a normal situation and give a thorough assessment of the possible risks that cause a crisis of confidence.

“Without an effective and pre-practiced crisis communication plan you might get stuck in the middle of the events like a passenger in a car that is heading towards a cliff,” says Martin Jaško, Deputy Director of Government Communication Unit. “A crisis is not the time to design a new system.”

Crisis communication does not only include the reaction to the situation, but starts with preparations for crisis communication and ends with the analysis of what was done.

The media might raise the question about the preparedness of a state agency for crisis communication even before an emergency situation arises. After eliminating the consequences of the crisis, the interest in the conclusions drawn from the crisis and improving the preparedness for crisis management remains. Therefore, we have to be constantly prepared for organising crisis communication.

The solution to each emergency situation is managed by one state agency. Thus the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for solving emergencies where law and order must be maintained and rescue work (e.g. mass disorder, landscape and forest fires, storms, floods, marine and coastal pollution), the Ministry of Agriculture for solving emergencies related to infectious animal diseases and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications to cyber attacks.

The information aimed at the public by the authority responsible for solving the situation must contain an overview of the situation and instructions for conduct.

The information is forwarded efficiently and regularly until the situation is resolved.

Legislation and guidelines
The Emergency Act and its implementing provision, “Procedure for notification of the public of the impending risk of emergency or the
emergency and resolving the emergency and the requirements for the information to be communicated”, the State of Emergency Act and the Broadcasting Act regulate crisis communication.

- The Emergency Act stipulates the general procedure and obligations for reacting to the emergency and notifying the public.
- The abovementioned implementing provision of the Emergency Act gives government authorities general instructions for notifying the public and specifies which agency is responsible for providing notification about each specific emergency.
- The State of Emergency Act concerns public communication upon declaration of a state of emergency.
- The Broadcasting Act stipulates the principles of the transmission of emergency announcements to the public by broadcasters.

In addition, the Government Office has prepared instructional materials that specify the principles of crisis communication of government authorities and give guidelines for the operation of the communication group before, during and after the emergency. The Government Office has signed a memorandum with the largest media channels on cooperation in case of emergencies.

For successful organization of crisis communication in government bodies, one should work through the Crisis Communication Handbook published by the Ministry of the Interior and ask for advice and additional materials from the government communication unit.

The following acts also concern crisis communication management indirectly:

- Personal Data Protection Act defines the concept of sensitive personal data and stipulates the conditions and procedure for processing of personal data and liability for complying with the provisions. The aim of the act is to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of natural persons. Disclosure of personal data is proceeded from the act.
- The Public Information Act specifies the conditions of, procedure for and methods of access to public information and the bases for refusal to grant access. The act stipulates restricted public information and the procedure for granting access thereto to the extent not regulated by other Acts. Pursuant to the act, the holder of information has the obligation to disclose information as quickly as possible in danger or crisis (section 28, 30).
- The purpose of the State Secrets and Classified Information of Foreign States Act is to ensure the security and international communication of the Republic of Estonia by protecting state secrets and classified information of foreign states from disclosure or from being accessible to persons who have not been granted access to such information.
ORGANISATION OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Pursuant to the implementing regulation of the Emergency Act, the public must be notified of the impending risk of emergency, the emergency and solving the emergency in an emergency situation.

In Estonia, crisis communication is ensured by local governments, regional rescue centres and government authorities. This means that a communications specialist (or several specialists) must have been appointed in these government bodies or a crisis communication team must have been established.

In order to coordinate the cooperation of different agencies and bodies, the crisis management committee of the Government of the Republic and the regional crisis management committee form a permanent crisis communication team in the respective crisis management committee’s area of operation. This crisis communication team aids the agencies responsible for solving the situation upon notifying the public, if necessary.

The government body’s communication entity has appointed one person who participates in the preparation of the risk assessment and plans of the government body and its coordinating areas.

The risk assessment describes the emergency situation and the threats causing it in the national, regional and local levels, if necessary, the probability and consequences of the emergency situation and other important information related to the situation. Risk assessment is the most important part of preparing a communication plan.

A member of communication entity responsible for crisis organization or head of communication entity should belong to the agency’s crisis management team.

The person responsible for crisis communication coordinates the preparations related to crisis communication with the government communication unit of the Government Office who also organizes the development of the state crisis communication system. The Government Office also monitors the performance of the obligations and requirements of notifying the public.

Cooperation in crisis communication between authorities is coordinated by the crisis communication team of the government body responsible for solving the situation, the crisis communication team of the regional crisis management committee. The communication of emergencies that have a wider effect and require the cooperation of many government agencies is coordinated by the crisis communication team of the crisis management committee, if the crisis is solved by the
crisis management team formed by the crisis management committee of the Government of the Republic.

Wide-ranging situations are, for example, cross-border radiological emergencies caused by a nuclear incident, mass disorders and ship, train or aircraft accidents with many victims.

**EMERGENCY RESOLUTION PLANS AND NOTIFICATION PLANS**
The government has approved a list of emergencies in the case of which the agency must prepare a risk analysis and emergency resolution plan. There are a total of 19 types of emergencies or major accidents that require agencies to put together a plan of action. They include storm, flood, marine or coastal pollution, an aircraft, ship or passenger train accident involving many casualties, mass unrest, radiation accident, cyber attack and epidemic.

Resolving these situations and restoring the normal situation requires good cooperation between many agencies. Emergency resolution plans consolidate information regarding the leadership and management activities, resources, agencies, individual functions and public notification necessary for resolving the event. The plan also describes how international cooperation is organized in the case of an emergency.

**PREPARATION OF NOTIFICATION PLAN**
In the case of the aforementioned emergencies, the responsible agency and its cooperation partners prepare a public notification plan. When preparing the notification plan, the risk analysis for the agency's area of government should be consulted. Also observe the provisions of the government regulation entitled “Procedure for notification of the public regarding immediate danger of an emergency, an emergency and resolution of the emergency and requirements for information to be forwarded,” which sets out detailed division of public notification responsibilities between agencies in the case of an emergency or major accident. In addition, the regulations in the area of government of the relevant agency pertaining to organization of internal communication should be taken into consideration.

The preparation of notification plans is coordinated and consultation provided by the government communication unit. The notification plan shall be approved by the head of the responsible agency upon preparing the emergency resolution plan. The notification plan has been discussed previously in the government crisis committee’s crisis communication working group, it has been coordinated and approved by the head of the government crisis committee’s crisis communication working group.

The notification plan includes:
- brief description of the emergency and characteristics;
the objective of public notification in different phases of the situation (notification of immediate danger, notification of resolution of emergency, follow-up procedure);
• potential impact on availability of vital services;
• risks to notification activity;
• area of responsibility of the agencies that lead and are involved in the emergency;
• composition of the notification group, grounds for convening the notification group, the group’s location during the emergency, equipment and communications (including in outdoor conditions);
• notification group’s organization of work and division of responsibilities pursuant to the four functions of the notification group (steering the notification group; media relations; analysis and planning; coordinator and direct notification, support/logistics);
• list and description of target and related groups;
• the national and regional information and media channels used to notify target and related groups in a specific emergency;
• information channels used for gathering information from the public (social media, telephone information lines, media monitoring etc);
• organization of notification activity in the case of power and communication cuts;
• the distribution of functions with cooperation partners (technical and human resources, joint notification projects etc);
• assessment/(impact forecast as to the aspect of psychological protection;
• main messages and guidelines for conduct pursuant to the different phases of the emergency;
• selection of spokespersons and main talking points;
• organization of media service at the scene;
• organization of communication between the notification group and crisis team at the scene;
• description of the situation in the case of which auxiliary resources should be involved from the government crisis committee crisis communication working group;
• assessment with regard to the need for additional funds for notification activity or for purchasing services.

WHAT TO DO TO BE PREPARED FOR A CRISIS

Tasks have been divided
The crisis communication team must be ready for starting crisis communication at any time.

For this, tasks must have been divided in the crisis communication team in advance. Members of the crisis communication team must be able to be engaged in tasks as similar to the normal situation as
possible, whether it is writing press releases, media monitoring or web management.

Crisis situation requires wide-range continuous information activity; therefore, it might be practical to involve people with communication-related training from outside the government body’s communication entity in the crisis communication team. E.g. the Rescue Board will train crisis prevention specialists who could participate in the crisis communication team’s work in emergency situation.

At the same time, the establishment’s communication activities that must remain functioning as in the normal situation should be reviewed. Additional forces can be obtained from other structural entities and state agencies administered by the government body if they are not already significantly involved in solving the crisis and crisis communication. Members of the crisis communication team of the crisis management committee of the Government of the Republic (communication specialists of government bodies) who form the state’s crisis communication network will also provide help, if necessary.

Prior cooperation agreements may be concluded with PR companies in order to cover the crisis communication area of activity (e.g. media monitoring, registration of the press).

The person responsible for crisis communication will update the list and contact details of the members of the crisis communication team. It will be noted in the contact details if someone is on long holiday, ill or on a business trip and cannot start performing his/her tasks in the crisis communication team right away. The list must be available also on paper, in case the crisis communication team needs to be launched also during blackouts or communication disruptions.

The agency’s head of communication will specify the assembly of the crisis communication team and the order of the emergency situation notification and inform the agency’s crisis management committee. In the crisis management team, permanent substitutes must be appointed to the head and the representative of the crisis communication team. In the crisis communication team, at least the names of persons who are responsible for replying to media inquiries, collecting and checking information, communication cooperation with other agencies and media monitoring must be specified.

**Equipment is available**

The equipment necessary for crisis communication must be ensured even in normal situations: it should be agreed from where the crisis communication team will receive transportation in case of emergency, how phone and data communications has been ensured from the scene of the event, that a sufficient number of computers and printers, TV
sets, radios, recording equipment is available, photo and video recording, press conference rooms, catering of crisis communication team members and covering extraordinary costs is organized. Prior cooperation agreements must be concluded with other state agencies or private companies, if necessary.

**Plans have been prepared**

“A bad plan is much better in a crisis than no plan at all,” says Martin Jaško, deputy director of the government communications unit.

Constant collecting of information about problematic subjects and developments reduces the risk of ending up in a totally unexpected crisis. Assess the risks and make a plan for avoiding or directing undesirable developments. For example, it is advisable to prepare thematic plans for those agencies whose job is related to threats to human life and health. A plan for restraining curious people who are unintentionally inhibiting crisis management might also be necessary.

Crisis communication plans supplement the emergency resolution plans; and crisis communication organizers from other government bodies related to solving the situation must be involved in their preparation in order to specify the division of subjects and procedure for disclosing information during the crisis. For example, in case of inland environmental pollution, the agency responsible is the Ministry of Environment, which prepares the plan for notifying the public in cooperation with other authorities involved in solving the situation – the Ministry of the Interior, the Environmental Inspectorate, the Environmental Board and the Rescue Board.

**Target groups and information channels are specified**

With regard to planning crisis communication, it is important that the communication target groups, their needs and the channels for informing them be specified beforehand. The precedence specified by the implementing provision of the Emergency Act concerning notifying the public according to which it is most important to notify the population group directly endangered by the threat and then the family of the (possible) victims must be proceeded from. Employees of the government body or foreign journalists may be the most important target groups upon common communication, but in an emergency situation, they come after the aforementioned parties.

Compose messages to target groups according to their needs. There is a big difference whether the message is directed at the family and friends of the victims and the deceased, the persons located in the danger zone or the international public.

For example, if the people located in the danger zone are given specific instructions of conduct, the international public is given general information about the solution of the crisis event.
When selecting the information channel, the location of the people being informed (e.g. small islands, low density areas), the media channels available in the location, the inhabitants’ language skills, age composition, etc., should be taken into account.

In the event of blackouts and communication disruptions it is not possible to use common communication channels for distributing and receiving information. Upon planning communication, alternatives must be considered such as informing people directly by the police, the Border Guard Administration, the Rescue Board and the Defence League.

In low-density areas, it is possible to include the community (village societies and elders, non-governmental organization) in information distribution in addition to the local government.

**Cooperation has been guaranteed**

Partners and crisis communication target groups become evident during risk assessment and crisis organization. Most important partners are other state agencies whose tasks in launching a crisis scenario have been established in the plans of solving emergencies or prescribed by law. For example, the Rescue Board frequently participates in solving the situation, and in counties, often the Defence Forces or the Defence League are involved.

Cooperation with companies and non-governmental organizations whose help might be necessary for solving the situation is also important. For example, the government authorities’ partner has been the Estonian Fund for Nature if they are dealing with environmental pollution.

**Spokespersons have been specified**

In a crisis it is important that spokespersons speak with one voice. Therefore, the number of spokespersons is limited during a crisis and the right to give comments about the crisis in the media is given by the crisis communication team. Groups have the right to appoint spokespersons to talk about the crisis, deliver information about solving the situation and use additional resources meant for organising communication activities.

Spokespersons are as high-ranking as possible, are responsible for crisis management and, pursuant to the procedure for crisis management, are informed of current information and the representative of the crisis communication team. In Estonia usually the head of on-site operations and senior executive of the government agency concerned are the spokespersons. Specialists in the field are also often used to deliver messages that support communication. The senior executive
Some drafts have been prepared
Prepare a draft of a press release and communication and a set of possible questions and answers for the most probable crises. If target groups or the media channels they use are in foreign languages, have the press release and the basis of the questions and answers translated into the respective languages before, in a normal situation. Thus it is possible to save time if the crisis arises and it will be possible to deliver instructions of conduct faster.

Systematic training and practice
Practising crisis communication firstly enables to make better plans for crisis communication – find effective ways to organize cooperation and reach target groups and improve possible mistakes before a crisis.

Secondly, members of the crisis communication team and cooperation partners get to know one another during the practise and understand the information needs of different participants better during the crisis. When involving journalists in the practice, they will get a better understanding of the organization of crisis communication in government bodies and know how to seek information and reflect the events more professionally during the crisis. Practising crisis communication is also a good opportunity for training spokespersons for crisis in order to increase their self-confidence and ensuring better performance during crisis.

It is recommended to practise crisis communication as a part of crisis management or separately at least once a year. Then the members of the crisis communication team and other partners will remember their tasks when the crisis arises and people in state agencies and the media will know one another better.

HOW TO ACT IN A CRISIS

Take initiative in communication
In the event of emergency or impending risk of emergency, it is important to inform the target groups about it as soon as possible. People have the right to be informed and receive instructions of conduct.

In order to make sure that the public will not get unverified information, it is important that authorities be the first to deliver information about the situation. Withholding important information in
the hope that the public will never know about it is bound to fail.

The first official notice about the situation must be delivered no more than an hour after learning about the event. The first notice does not have to be thorough, but must give an idea of the situation’s nature and say when more specific information will be delivered.

“If you keep hoping that you will get more information that is more reliable, you will be tempted to postpone the release of the first official message infinitely,” says Beata Vessart, director of the public relations office at the Rescue Board. “The feeling that you can wait a bit longer must be overcome with force when pushing the Send button.”

**Launch the crisis communication team**

When a crisis hits, the crisis communication team is launched, the prepared plans are reviewed and the informants’ tasks are specified. If the head of the crisis communication team and their substitute have not been specified beforehand, they must be appointed to the first activity when the crisis communication team assembles. It is important to specify a substitute, as the crisis communication team’s work should not stop if the head of the crisis communication team needs to participate in the meetings of the crisis management team or coordinate cooperation with other agencies participating in crisis communication.

The crisis communication team should always be prepared to work 24 hours a day. The group must always include people who have had a rest and changing shifts must function properly in order to ensure constant communication. In order to guarantee that changing of shifts is well-organized, a work schedule of the crisis communication team is prepared. For consistency, the whole group cannot change their shift at the same time.

The head of the crisis communication team or his/her substitute must be available for a new shift within an hour after the next shift starts.

The crisis communication team immediately starts collecting information about the event by agreeing on the possibilities and need for receiving further information.

**Respect privacy**

If there are casualties, the crisis communication team agrees on how to communicate information to the public and the victims’ family. Names of the casualties may not be disclosed before their families have been informed and given consent for publishing the information. Names of the injured and the nature of their injuries are not disclosed.

The relevant provisions of the Personal Data Protection Act concerning
the principles of the processing of sensitive personal data (sections 4-6) and the disclosure of personal data (sections 11-15, 18) should be consulted when planning communication.

If journalists receive information about the dead before their or injured before the victims’ families are notified, the journalists must be informed of the abovementioned principle in order to avoid additional moral damage to the injured and their families. A person’s state of health is among the sensitive personal data that, pursuant to the Personal Data Protection Act, may not be disclosed without the permission of the person.

Check facts and avoid speculation
When collecting information about events you must make sure the principal facts - who, what, when, where and how - about the people involved in the event as well as people engaged in crisis management. An answer to the question “why” might be received only after a while and it will be understood.

During the crisis you should not accuse people or try to find the guilty party - if an investigation has been started, journalists must be told of it. Avoid speculation.

Authorities participating in crisis communication may speak only in their area of government. The person in charge at the scene speaks about the activities taking place at the scene and the minister about the possible lessons the whole area of government learned from this event.

Notices about solving the emergency situation should be coordinated with other agencies involved in resolving the situation, if possible. Otherwise a situation may easily arise where different agencies give factually contradicting information to the media. This in turn causes static.

The agency leading efforts to resolve the situation may speak about solving the situation in general and refer to the contributions of different cooperating agencies.

Information received must be thoroughly checked before publication. The crisis communication team must cooperate closely with the crisis management team and coordinate the published information with them.

It is important to create a basis of trustworthy and efficient information sources to get new information about the situation quickly and on a regular basis. Checking facts and being critical about sources is vital in a crisis.
Ensure media service at the scene
When crisis arises, a well-prepared spokesperson or the agency’s press representative must be sent to the scene and a schedule of regular briefings must be established for the press. Such way you will assure the public that your agency is dealing with finding a solution to the crisis. In the event of very dangerous situations, the head or senior executive of the government body should be present at the scene, which in turn means closer interest of the media.

Guarantee smooth internal communication
When informing the media and the public, the agency’s own employees should also be informed at the same time, if possible, in order to explain the decisions made to solve the situation. If the media becomes the only information source for the employees of the organization related to crisis management, the employees might not be adequately informed and their morale might suffer.

In the event of crisis, journalists use all the employees of the organization related to crisis management as information sources and if the internal communication is weak, people may distribute misleading information or rumours. At the same time, the agency’s employees must be aware of the existence of crisis communication plans and that they have the right to give information to journalists only with the crisis communication team’s coordination. Make sure that your organization’s employees are well informed about the situation.

Talk about solving the crisis
During the crisis you must be ready to answer difficult questions. “You must think two steps ahead and be ready to give explanations in all arising subjects,” says Inga Bowden, director of the government communication. Additional assurance comes from providing as much detail as possible about impending crisis management activities. In order to do that, analyse the situation and people’s need for information. Say which steps will be taken in order to solve the problem, help the victims and normalize the situation. Before doing that, be certain that what you say will also be done. Be honest and don’t speculate. Be helpful and convincing.

For example, in 2006 the preparations for a possible pandemic of avian influenza included thorough press briefings where the planned activities to manage risks and ensure the safety of the inhabitants as well as working organization principles were clarified to journalists step-by-step. The preparation and provision of sufficient information ascertained people that if the problem should arise, it would be well dealt with.
What to do if access to the scene of an event is limited
Organize access to the scene of an event for journalists, if possible. For television it is vital to have the visuals, for radio the sound. When creating a media centre at the scene of an event, it should be observed that journalists are able to park their cars, use phones, that electrical connections, desks and chairs are available, etc. The head of the scene of an event should restrict the direct access of the media to the emergency area if it impairs resolving the emergency situation, damages the interests of the investigations or poses a danger to the life and health of the journalists.

In a more extensive crisis, a round-the-clock media centre must be established which collects facts, communicates news, refutes rumours and false information and gives press conferences.

The cooperation memorandum between the Government Office and the biggest media channels specifies the principles from which to proceed if access to the scene of an event is limited. In such event, the head of the crisis communication team has the right to choose mass media channels that will be given access to the scene of an event. The media channel that is granted access must be able to inform the public to as large an extent as possible and is thereby obliged to forward the recorded material to other media channels without any special conditions or delay. It is possible to establish an additional rule that no one can use the material until it has been distributed to all the parties requesting it.

Keep a media log
In a crisis, it is important to guarantee the consistency of media communication. The crisis communication team must keep a log of media communication - which journalists have submitted inquiries, what they have asked, when they should be replied to, what you have promised them and who deals with specific inquiries. Calls that go unanswered should always be returned.

Participate in decision-making and ask for help, if necessary
The communication specialist responsible for communication activities must actively participate in making the most important decisions of the crisis management team. Each decision has an effect on the public, irrespective of whether the decision-makers perceive it. The task of communication specialists is to make the executives aware of and attentive to this fact.

If plans change or it becomes evident that they will not be enough for successful communication, people with prior experience in such matters should be consulted. Problems unite people, and communication specialists from other organizations are always willing to help in the event of a crisis.
Organise media monitoring
As a crisis creates news very fast, it is necessary to ensure constant media monitoring and immediately refute false information that has been published. Media monitoring can be performed by members of the crisis communication team whose everyday work is not media communication if they are given specific instructions on which media channels to observe at what time and what to pay attention to.

Upon a more serious emergency situation, the website www.kriis.ee will be launched in cooperation with the government communication unit and information will be provided to the public via the webpage about the current situation. All press releases, statements, fact sheets and references to other information sources will be published on the website.

Remember that openness and fast response help to reduce human suffering and property damages in a crisis, decrease the possible threats to state security and increase the organization’s reliability.

WHAT TO DO AFTER THE CRISIS
Crisis communication does not end after the consequences of the event have been eliminated. Although the activity of the crisis communication team is finished, all the promises about giving additional information must still be kept. Follow-up communication will continue until the last procedures related to solving the situation (investigation, analysis, etc.) have been finished.

In case of an important crisis, the media is always interested in what conclusions the state has drawn from the crises and what measures will be taken in order to enable smooth crisis management in the future. The results of any investigations also receive closer attention by the public. If the organization delays making conclusions or disclosing investigation results, the public will criticize the whole process of crisis management and there will be less confidence in the organization will be in subsequent crises.

The head of the crisis communication team organizes follow-up coordination and making conclusions after the crisis. For that purpose, they collect information from their partners in state agencies and the media and assemble the information team to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, possibilities and threats of the conducted activities for future knowledge.

It is important to assess the activities as well as their impact. Many activities that required a large workforce during the organization of crisis communication might have operated very smoothly, but did not help to inform target groups better or find a solution to the crisis.
Therefore, it is important to look at the activities from the point of view of the media and target groups when documenting the lessons learned from crisis communication. On the basis of the assessment, improvements are made to crisis communication plans by specifying target groups, messages, spokespersons and organization of coordination.

**CONCLUSION**

A prerequisite of successful crisis communication is the existence of communication specialists at an agency who are well-informed and available.

Secondly, thorough preparation is a necessity: training and earlier agreements on communication management and communication plans.

Thirdly, smooth information exchange and collection of information, responsiveness and regularity must be guaranteed. Everything must remain flexible, not bureaucratic or departmental.

Crisis communication will be unsuccessful if the government body fails to give meaning to the situation, forecast its effects or launch crisis communication in proper time. Failure is also certain if crisis communication turns into partisan political communication or the authority tries to shirk responsibility in press releases. No government body, politician or party gains from unsuccessful crisis communication.

**TEN GOLDEN RULES OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION**

- Be honest and open; don’t give empty promises
- React fast, but with reason
- Assemble a team and divide roles
- Think through the delivered message and take initiative in media relations
- Prepare specific spokespersons
- Organize media service at the scene of an event
- Check the information to be communicated and distribute it regularly
- Monitor how the event is reflected and immediately refute false information
- Cooperate with all parties related to the event
- Involve experts
COMMUNICATION RELATED TO NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENCE

Every country’s national security is founded above all on the people’s self-confidence, solidarity and will to defend themselves. This is why many countries use public diplomacy and information-based means of influencing decisions made by governments of other countries. Estonia is no exception - it is also on the receiving end of public diplomacy and influence tactics from other countries, and our government communication specialists must take this into consideration.

It is important that all government bodies’ communications specialists have a good appreciation for (and explain to the public) the restrictions that democracies impose on the public release of information for the purpose of protecting national security.

RESTRICTIONS ON RELEASE OF INFORMATION PERTAINING TO NATIONAL SECURITY

The prerequisite for a democracy is an educated and well-informed citizenry and possibilities for free exchange of information and opinions on matters pertaining to society. In accordance with Estonian legislation, information obtained or created in the line of public duty is public, but in certain cases, access restrictions are necessary for the protection of people or the state.

In the interests of national defence, security and safety, the State Secrets and Classified Information of Foreign States Act sets forth the categories of information that may only be disclosed upon expiry of classification notice or (in some cases) declassification. Certain restrictions on public disclosure are also set forth in the Public Information Act, which also stipulates the principle that the publication of information may not be denied unless there is a basis stemming from a specific legal act. This principle is necessary for ensuring transparency and trustworthiness, but it places national defence and security agencies in a complicated position. Namely, information that is formally public may be turned against the country’s interests, or information that poses a direct threat to security may be derived from it.

For instance, if someone were to ask a security agency whether person X has engaged in covert cooperation with a security agency, the security agency could formally give a negative answer without violating the requirements of protection of state secrets or, if it is an individual case, without even harming national security. But if such questions are asked repeatedly, it may happen that the inquirer chances on a covert operative: the security agency is forced to be silent. In this manner, a state secret would be exposed, a valuable
source lost to the state and in the worst case, the operative’s life and well-being could be placed in jeopardy.

To avoid such a process of elimination method, every country has certain areas that in general are not commented on or are commented on very briefly. Such topics are the following:

1. State intelligence and counterintelligence activity

2. Security agencies’ information sources, including not only human sources, but also signals intelligence, information gathering operations (such as wiretaps), international exchange of information etc.

3. Composition of security agency and defence forces intelligence, personal data of personnel, and official duties of specific employees and structural units. The exception here is individual public persons such as the director general, the director general’s deputies and other public spokespersons.

State intelligence and counterintelligence are spoken about publicly only in certain exceptional cases. Information is provided regarding criminal proceedings if an arrest is being made (depriving a person of liberty is not a secret and the public must be provided with a reason for it). Secondly, overviews of the activity of security agencies published periodically at the state’s initiative (the Security Police Board’s yearbook is such an example) are published. Third, incidents that occurred in other countries where the other country itself has published the information and which necessitate an explanation by Estonia (such as the case of 11 Russian spies apprehended in the US in the summer of 2010). Fourth, explanatory comments of a general nature (such as this manual).

Standard practice is for government bodies to provide a standard response to inquiries related to intelligence and counterintelligence: “Estonia does not comment on any individuals’ ties to Estonian intelligence and counterintelligence bodies. Estonia does not comment on statements in which Estonia is accused of intelligence activity against third countries.”

In some cases, providing a laconic comment may be unavoidable in order to refute misinformation or speculations, but the Pandora’s Box effect should also be taken into consideration - the comment may draw more attention to the topic and may provide fodder for new speculations. In international practice, there have been events where misinformation has been planted in the media as a straw man namely by the special services of other countries, as a result of which a country faces a quandary - should it let the damaging rumours spread or release sensitive information in order to refute them.
The situation is similar in the case of many police operations. If information is released too early or is too specific, it may give the criminals a chance to cover up their acts or plan crimes. For instance, operations involving cash transport are not publicized.

There is no ideal formula for resolving every such individual case, but if it is a generally known that the state does not comment on such topics, the urge to speculate is also deprived a foothold. Thus it is important that all communication specialists at government bodies remind people of this rule when such topics arise - there is no point to ask us or other agencies as such topics are simply not talked about.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC INFORMATION PERTAINING TO SECURITY
The basic principles of Estonian security policy approved by the Riigikogu, in which the purpose, principles and operating principles of Estonian security policy are set out, describe security threats as follows:

“Pressure jeopardizing Estonian security may emerge in the form of damage to Estonia’s international reputation, creation of internal instability, military pressure, and influencing of Estonia or its allies to make political decisions that endanger Estonian independence and statehood. The anti-Estonian activities of foreign Estonian security services may pose a threat to Estonia’s security. /…/

The influence of information that distorts reality may lead to tensions in international relations, the radicalization of groups in society and instability and damage to society’s solidarity of society. /…/ As a democratic, open society, Estonia may also be impacted by the spread of extremist, malicious or hate-based ideologies. This may weaken solidarity in society, reduce tolerance and create social tensions.”

The decisions of the Republic of Estonia must be developed through the democratic mechanisms set forth in the Constitution, and thus government bodies’ communication specialists and spokespersons must be source-critical and distinguish free press activity from malicious propaganda that may be inspired by a desire for influence by a foreign country or interest group.

The function of government bodies’ communication specialists is to provide consultation to their respective agency’s spokespersons, so that Estonian government authorities would not be tempted to dispute each other and amplify by repetition the impact of messages and images devised by malicious propagandists.

To better assess the sensitivity from a security standpoint of public information, the communications directors of ministries and their
deputies must have undergone a background check to gain permission to access information protected under the State Secrets Act.

It would be prudent to ask the following questions with regard to analysis of public information in the area of activity of their agency (including information at the disposal of the media which is not yet public but is expected to become public):

1. Could this information affect national security?

2. What is the background of the person distributing the information and what are their likely objectives?
   a) Is this ordinary journalism aimed at producing a news item that is fact-based and balanced (even if the person distributing the information erroneously gives the information greater billing than it deserves or is not source-critical, or if it is a slow news season)?
   b) Is it advocacy journalism /publicity aimed at producing a news item with a definite slant and thereby influencing the behaviour or the views of the public or a certain target audience?
   c) Is it deliberate subversive activity where the journalist’s actions are used solely as a subterfuge and where the goal may be to influence the public (including by provoking or amplifying events) or gathering intelligence?

3. Which government bodies should be notified and who should be consulted?

4. In case of doubt, certainly the Government Office should be contacted (if the information damages the credibility of the state as a whole) or the Security Police if the aim of harming national security can be detected). Issues where it is clearly evident that the inquirer may possess materials that contain state secrets or the inquiring person's source information may come from a person in possession of secret information. In such a case, the Security Police Board must be notified promptly; it is in their competence to determine the circumstances related to protection of state secrets or classified information of foreign states. In case of suspicion regarding foreign journalists, it would be prudent to contact the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Estonia’s representation in the country of location.

5. Should a response be made to the information, and if so, how?
   a) Should the response be active - publicly refute the misinformation, and to draw attention to the key circumstances in the same context?
b) Should the response be passive - with responses to likely questions prepared in advance and kept ready to be provided if needed?
c) Should the response be only at a personal level, such as communicating personally (“off the record”, “deep background”) with the source or “messenger”, such as by drawing attention to problems with the credibility of the original source?
d) Or, to refrain from a response completely?

Example 1: Question about an extremist demonstration
If the communication specialist of a government body receives a query from a person purporting to be a journalist inquiring how the agency is planning for a demonstration by extremists and the “expected unrest to take place tomorrow,” the routine analysis would be as follows:

1. The information is clearly related to national security
2. If the fact of the planned extremist rally is not generally known and the publication of advance information may have a significant effect on the course and consequences of the rally, there is reason to doubt that the source of the inquiry truly wants to run a news item that is balanced and based on verified facts. It is important to check the background of the person: is the person him or herself and his media outlet known, how have they acted in the past, what are the contact details for the media outlet and the journalist etc. (If, for instance, the person making the inquiry is the Internet portal baltija.eu, you will already after consulting the Security Police be told that this is a website that operates with support from the extremist group Nochnoi Dozor and Russia and the purpose of which is to incite and amplify such events.)
3. It would be wise to consult the press representative of the government’s communication office and the Security Police Board.
4. Probably one should keep a low as possible profile (any kind of response in the case of baltija.eu would essentially mean taking the bait). It should be considered that the more senior the spokesperson for the authority commenting on the topic, the more the topic will be amplified. A good communication specialist will remind this to his or her superiors if necessary, will make suggestions regarding spokespersons and take part actively in making critical communication-related decisions.

Example 2: The case of the “Estonian SSR farms”
The Estonian press has discussed a scenario of how one country could, provided there is a certain collusion of circumstances, sow confusion, fear and unease in a neighbouring country. On 4 September 2008, the Russian news sites RIA Novosti, Regnum.ru and Interfax picked up on a hoax fabricated by the Communist Party of St. Petersburg and Leningrad oblast and posted on their website a day earlier, according to which several farms in Ida-Viru County had declared they were seceding from Estonia and had contacted Russia with a request for
assistance. The recent aggression by Russia against Georgia and the unhappy experiences from Estonian history made a number of readers quite concerned after the news made it on to Estonian media channels.

On an historical side note, the Soviet term for publicists and public servants who unwittingly spread unverified facts that were harmful to their own country and advanced the Soviet agenda should be recalled: “useful idiots”. Today terrorist organizations that plan terrorist acts with emotion-driven and far-flung media coverage in mind place their hopes in useful idiots.

PARTICULARITIES OF MILITARY NATIONAL DEFENCE COMMUNICATIONS

The objective of Estonia’s national defence is to preserve Estonian independence and sovereignty, the indivisible integrity of its territory, territorial waters and airspace, constitutional order and the security of its people. Estonia’s national defence is a part of integrated national defence and rests on two equally important bulwarks - the developing independent capacity for primary defence and collective defence with the cornerstone being Estonian membership in NATO.

Totaalkaitse (“total defence”) means that use of all possibilities is made in order to prevent and combat anti-Estonian military activities. That includes state structures as well as the efforts of the population at large.

For a small country such as Estonia, it is exceedingly important to ensure that citizens are included and involved on as broad a footing as possible, that they have trust and confidence in national defence structures, and that the state has an exemplary reputation in international relations. To achieve and maintain both of these objectives, honest and professional communication has a very important role. Estonian inhabitants’ belief in Estonia’s capacity and capability to defend itself against a foreign invasion has, characteristically of the Nordic countries, remained high through the years.

For instance, according to a public survey conducted in January 2010, a total of 80 percent of Estonians expressed confidence in the defence forces and a total of 77 percent of Estonian inhabitants were in favour of military resistance should the nation come under attack.

The state’s image has a direct effect on national defence. If Estonia is known and thought of as a democratic country governed by the rule of law and enjoying strong relations with allies and a well-trained and armed reserve army with a populace that is ready and willing to defend the nation, this adds up to a powerful deterrent.
In Estonia, public relations efforts pertaining to military national defence is dealt with primarily by the communication units of the Ministry of Defence, Defence Forces, Defence League and the Defence Resources Agency, all of which, in order to guarantee a united front, engage in cooperation with the Government Office, the Office of the President of the Republic and security agencies.

Like Estonian government communication as a whole, openness, honesty and comprehensibility are important core values in public relations in the defence sector. A substantive public discussion on issues of national defence helps people better understand the national and international security situation and makes the population less susceptible to hostile subversive efforts.

Yet there are restrictions with regard to how much can be publicly released on a number of military national defence-related topics, and overstepping these bounds would harm the country’s capacity to defend itself or put people’s lives in danger. For instance, government authorities cannot go into detail in commenting on military defence or mobilization plans, as the organization of the military defence of Estonian territory would be significantly harmed were these to become public. Certain restrictions are also imposed on photographing and filming sensitive military sites and equipment. For instance, journalists are not permitted to film from close up the operation of the radar systems that monitor Estonian and by extension NATO airspace.

Journalists who are interested in a limited-access topic are advised to contact the defence forces general staff, which can, if necessary, provide comment and distribute information in the form of text and images without revealing sensitive information.

**COMMUNICATION REGARDING INTERNATIONAL MILITARY OPERATIONS**

To get a better overview of the activities of Estonian troops in international military operations, the Defence Forces general staff, Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs arrange media visits each year to the theatres of operations.

Occasionally journalists are embedded with the units to get a better picture of what Estonian troops are doing over a longer period of time. For example, a journalist for *Helsingin Sanomat*, Heikki Aitokoski, spent a week with Estonian troops in Afghanistan in 2010.

The journalists’ visits can be ad hoc or they may coincide with the visit of an official or military senior leader. In the latter case, journalists are not allowed to notify the public before arriving in the theatre of operations as otherwise the enemy could use the information to plan an attack.
It is life-threatening to undertake independent travel in conflict zones. The senior units and the states operating in the conflict zone have established rules that must be observed by both Estonian journalists and defence forces members. The Defence Forces assist journalists in getting around the conflict zone and obtaining accreditation. During official visits to combat zones, the security rules for covering the operation must be adhered to strictly.

When visiting a theatre of operations, the following is non-public information:
- Details about forthcoming, ongoing and cancelled operations
- Precise descriptions of the units’ activities, their size and capability, including the specific properties of the weapons systems and equipment used
- Detailed descriptions of tactics, standard operating procedures and combat situations
- Details of rules of engagement
- Any and all intelligence data and the precise methods and channels used to gather such
- Precise descriptions of special units
- Precise assessments of the impact of enemy fire and other actions, effectiveness of camouflage and equipment
- Technical means and tactics for combating IEDs
- Details of weak points in logistics lines
- Precise times when units are in movement, including future flight times, and durations of time needed to cover specific distances
- Precise sequence of soldiers in columns and duties while en route
- Troop casualties, identity of the dead, until the DF general staff has released the information to the public
- Identity of the casualties, precise nature of the injury or wound unless there is written consent from the soldier
- Information on lost or crashed aircraft, until the end of rescue operations
- Other information that could jeopardize an operation’s security (additional rules established in the theatre of operations, rules of higher-up units)

Prohibitions on photographic and video recording while visiting theatres of operations
- Access badges and cards and ID cards
- Access points, gates, checkpoints
- Field camp fortifications
- The dead, injured and wounded, their injuries, unless there is written consent from the injured person
- Prisoners or detained individuals in a manner that could lead to their identification or in a manner that is undignified or humiliating
- Exact landing spots of helicopters in a manner that could lead to the location being identified
• Communications and electronic military equipment and antennae
• Vehicles destroyed by the enemy, injuries of soldiers wounded in the attack in a manner that could indicate the exact impact of the attack
GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

None of us ever work alone or by ourselves. Every government action has results that affect citizens, companies and organizations, society and the international community. Thus communication must be part of every government activity from planning to final implementation.

Communication is always a two-way street - the government communicates with the public and takes into account the positions of citizens.

When working in the public service, always strive toward achieving the broadest possible level of participation by citizens in the exercise of power. Thus government communication specialists should not solely announce government decisions to people - they should help everyone take part in making decisions pertaining to them, initiate discussions in society and take part in them.

INVolVEMENT: WHAT FOR?

Civic participation in the public sector decision making is necessary to bring about better decisions. Involvement allows the state to avoid error and misunderstandings, better assess the potential impacts of decisions and achieve effective implementation. Inclusion in public administration also increases the sense of belonging to society and a duty of care for one’s country.

“Unless a critical mass of citizens takes part in creating the state, there will be no improvement,” says communication consultant Daniel Vaarik. “The state is precious and it demands that people take part jointly.”

The public authorities should discuss key development plans and draft legal acts with those who stand to be impacted by the planned decisions. Naturally this is especially important for decisions that impact the general development and impact the entire population.

For instance, over 50 experts took part in drafting the sustainable Estonia strategy “21”, and companies and civic organizations served as partners. The materials were submitted to parties, ministries, representatives of civic associations and other interested parties for comment several times as the strategy was being prepared. Draft versions of the materials were likewise available on the website of the Ministry of the Environment. Thus the process of preparing a strategy...
for Estonia’s future could be better followed by the public and people had an opportunity to express their opinions.

In 2004, the Praxis Centre for Political Studies published a study called “Engaging interest groups in decision-making processes”, which showed that public servants and interest groups in Estonia see involvement in pragmatic terms - for the former it is an opportunity to improve the quality of their decisions and defuse tensions while for the latter it is a way to defend their interests. Engaging interest groups is part of the ordinary work performed by the public servants who draft decisions.

To make the process smoother, it is necessary for legislative drafting specialists and communication specialists to work well together.

Each ministry employs an “engagement coordinator” - a person who knows the principles of engagement and provides consultation to colleagues on how to take these into account in their everyday work.

GOOD ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES
A number of countries and organizations, the European Commission and the OECD among them, have published advisory engagement principles and have issued guidelines for public discussions - consultations.

In Estonia as well, good engagement practices have been set out. These serve as a basis above all in organizing public consultation, where a ministry will send out a piece of draft legislation to interest groups for comment and provide feedback on how the suggestions were taken into account.

The following steps are discussed when planning engagement:

- **Start engagement early on**
The activities and time needed for engagement are already factored into preparation of work plans. It is advisable to start engagement as early as possible - upon description of the problem that is to be resolved and assessment of the implications of the decision.

- **Determine the interest groups**
An interest group may include either a citizen or organization of citizens - everyone whose life and activities may be impacted by the planned decision. Normally it is not possible to prepare an exhaustive list of interest groups and thus it is necessary to be open and give all those interested a chance to have a say.

For example, 45 people took direct part in compiling the Estonian oil shale development plan in 2006-2007 - scientists, engineers, representatives from local government and civic associations,
politic ians, officials - but the number of those indirectly engaged became even larger.

Through the participants, the opinions of inhabitants of “oil shale municipalities” reached the drafters at the Ministry of the Environment. The ministry in turn notified a number of other interest groups and, through the media, the public. In this manner, very many people learned of the development plan and could speak their opinion.

According to Ministry of the Environment public relations department adviser Agnes Jürgens, a broad discussion arose around the plan - not just regarding the natural resources but the social conditions in Ida-Viru county.

It is normal for active advocacy organizations with expertise in a given area take part in preparing a draft legal act or development plan. For instance, the Ministry of Agriculture has a number of chambers in which organizations that represent interest groups play a role. The committee that monitors the Estonian rural development plan regularly discusses decisions pertaining to rural development, such as conditions for subsidies for farmers. The interests of all parties must be represented equally, and thus it is a good idea to engage representatives of employees as well as of employers, producers and distributors, and so on.

Prepare an engagement plan
The engagement plan specifies the interest groups to be engaged, the engagement methods and an action plan along with deadlines. Whether a survey or poll should be conducted, or a working group convened, a seminar held or e-mail correspondence - the selection depends on the nature of the decision, its scope, the needs of the interest groups and, of course, the financial opportunities. For instance, when the Ministry of Social Affairs started developing draft legislation dealing with the health care information system, many interest groups were engaged, medical professionals were interviewed and familiarization events were organized. An advisory body was also formed, which included representatives of a number of bodies that deal with implementation of the information system. To discuss the draft decision thoroughly a number of different methods were used.

Consult, explain, give time
If the draft document (for instance a draft legal act, development plan or other rough draft) is presented to interest groups for an opinion, they must be told the issues on which feedback is expected from them - it is better to express a position in specific matters than just to comment on a voluminous document.

The means and deadline for feedback from the interest groups must be specified. It is also necessary to describe what will happen with the
draft legislation from that point on - for instance, tell the interest groups when it is planned to officially coordinate the draft legislation with other ministries and when the material is to be presented to the government for discussion.

Interest groups should be given enough time for feedback - preferably at least four weeks - considering the fact that the organizations must discuss the positions with their members.

Inform, notify, keep people updated
It is advised to release preliminary information regarding public discussions of draft legislation on a regular basis so that all people would be informed early on regarding the possibilities for dialogue.

On the day on which the government was sworn in, 6 April 2011, the Government Office introduced a draft legislation information system at http://eelnoud.valitsus.ee, where matters to be submitted to the government for discussion and resolution, documents related to the European Union decision-making process are coordinated, submitted and forwarded between authorities.

The information system allows everyone to keep track of the proceedings on draft documents, view dossiers of the documents and their contents. In addition, everyone with an Estonian ID card has an opportunity to comment on the draft legislation submitted for coordination.

Via the information system, the draft can be submitted to the participatory website www.osale.ee for public comment also before the coordination process. At the start of each consultation, notify the interest groups and call on them to submit opinions. Both the draft legislation and other materials must be in clear and understandable language.

Not everyone uses the Internet, thus it is advisable to use more than one notification channel.

Provide feedback
Interest groups expect that they will receive feedback after they have expressed their positions. On the basis of opinions received during the consultation process, prepare a composite response - a summary of the suggestions made along with the reasons for considering or not considering them. Publish the new version of the draft legislation that includes the changes made in the course of the consultation.
Assess performance

Finally, the engagement result is assessed to whether it was productive. Was the objective attained? Were the methods used relevant? How actively did the interest groups take part, and how well did the feedback process work? To what extent were the interest groups satisfied with the involvement and the decision made?

The assessments from the participants will be of assistance in organizing the next consultations.

WHAT MAKES ENGAGING SUCCESSFUL?

If engaging is not planned as a concerted part of the public authority’s work and it is done superficially, the result could be standstill, confusion, discontent and a worsening of relations with citizens and organizations.

British engagement experts from the organization Involve have described situations where it is not advisable to involve citizens, such as a case where the decision has already been made and engaging is used only to justify a fait accompli.

Engagement should not be done merely to satisfy a formal requirement if there is a lack of actual willingness to listen to participants’ opinions or there is no opportunity to organize substantive discussions. Such a situation would constitute pseudo engagement, which would lead to disillusionment in good faith participants and reduce their willingness to take part in subsequent decision-making.

Studies show that the success of engagement is related to experience. Thus engagement must be planned carefully and it must be skilfully carried out. This will result in positive experiences that will reinforce engagement as a natural part of a public servant’s job.
EUROPEAN UNION-RELATED COMMUNICATION

PRINCIPLES
European Union communication is a part of government communication. It is the function of government to notify people of Estonia’s goals and activities in the European Union and rights and responsibilities related to European Union membership. Government communication also supports the participation of citizens in decision-making in the European Union.

Responsibility for planning and organizing European Union government communication is divided among ministries according to sector. Each ministry notifies the public regarding the actions of its minister or official in the Council of the European Union and working groups thereof and regarding other matters related to the European Union in its area of administration. For instance, communication related to the Schengen area is organized by the Ministry of the Interior and public relations involving agricultural subsidies are handled by the Ministry of Agriculture.

The communications units of government bodies regularly exchange information regarding notification work in the field of the European Union. This ensures that information about all important European Union policies is available to people, and this also avoids redundancy.

Cooperation is especially necessary in the case of topics involving more than one government authority simultaneously. For instance, in 2009, to organize public relations related to the changeover to the European common currency, an inter-agency working group was formed, consisting of representative from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government Office, Ministry of Social Affairs and Eesti Pank.

The primary inputs for EU-related communication are the government’s action plan, the government’s long-term EU policy, the government’s goals approved every half-year for the term of the presidency in the European Union, and information received upon participating in the work of the European Union.

Government communication specialists should be up to date with the European Commission’s legislative and work programme, which also contains a section on communication, as well as with the European Union’s communication priorities, which are likewise approved by the interinstitutional working group in October.
The primary spokespersons in European Union-related government communication are the prime minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, along with other ministers pursuant to their respective field. In addition, the Government Office’s director of European Union affairs and other officials who take part in the European Union decision-making process also often have a say.

**TRANSPARENT AND COMPREHENSIBLE PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING**

**Involvement**
When many people and organizations take part in developing policy, it is easier to develop and defend Estonia’s positions in the European Union. For this reason, the government holds consultations with interested parties on the topic of Estonia’s long-range interests in the European Union.

For instance, public discussion on Estonia’s European Union Policy for 2007-2011 took place in summer 2007 on the participatory website [www.osale.ee](http://www.osale.ee). Upon the conclusion of consultation, the Government Office organized a meeting with interested parties where the proposals received were discussed and feedback was provided regarding the course of the consultations. The participants engaged in the consultations were representatives of the business community, employers, employees, regions, third sector, Parliament and academic and research circles. Also the previous European Union policy document prepared for 2004-2006 was the result of consultation with many different organizations.

European Union institutions publish draft legal acts or strategic documents - green books - for consultation with their citizens. In Estonia, the public discussion on European Commission green books is organized by the ministry in whose area of administration the topic belongs.

**Notification of the work of the councils**
The primary institution that makes EU decisions is the Council of the European Union; Estonia’s minister responsible for the relevant topic usually participates in its work. The communications units of the ministries are responsible for communication pertaining to the work of the Council. In the same manner, the Estonian Government Office organizes notification pertaining to the European Council. Communication pertaining to the councils is organized as follows:

- In the coming events for the week, the ministry releases the time and place of the Council meeting and information on Estonian representatives participating in the meeting. A summary of the activities in the upcoming week is also released by the
government communication unit, based on the advance information sent out by the European Union secretariat of the Government Office and ministries.

- A day before the Council meets, the ministry shall send out a preliminary notice repeating the previous information regarding time and place of the meeting and the participants. It also gives an overview of the most important topics for discussion. The notice should certainly include the contact data of the person who can be contacted by journalists looking to cover the meeting.

- Immediately after the end of the Council meeting, the ministry will release follow-up information regarding the outcome. In the case of decisions that affect very many different people (such as lowering the costs of international mobile communications charges) a follow-up press release is not sufficient and the ministry would do well to hold briefings as well, submit articles to the press, and so on.

**Publishing information online**
Information on participation in European Union work must be easy to find on government body websites. The Government’s website includes information on Estonia’s European Union policy and an overview of Estonia’s participation in the affairs of the European Union. The ministries’ websites have an overview of the European Union’s areas of activity in a relevant ministry’s competence, European Union councils and working groups and the most important legal acts and information on implementation of European Union structural funds. It is also important to publish the details for the ministry’s European Union affairs coordinator.

**THE EUROPEAN UNION: DISCUSSED BY MANY**
Not just government bodies deal with European Union communication. All of Estonia’s constitutional institutions are connected with it. So are the representations of European Union institutions in Estonia, NGOs, and science, research and educational institutions.

The closest sources of information on European Union affairs for citizens are the European Union information counsellors in each county. These are county government officials who respond to queries from citizens, NGOs and local officials and provide advice to them in searching for information on the European Union.

The information officers distribute European Union-related information materials and hold lectures on general European Union issues and topics pertaining to Estonian membership of the organization. The information officers in each county organize, either independently or in cooperation with partners, notification, discussion and interest events and take part in country-wide European Union-related PR
campaigns. The work of the European Union information officers in each county is coordinated by the government communication unit. Close to half of the European Union information counsellors in counties are also members of the Europe Direct information network administered by the European Commission.

In the Riigikogu, European Union-related communication is above all related to the activities of the European Union Affairs Committee (ELAK). The committee provides an opinion regarding Estonian positions prepared for upcoming Council of the European Union meetings as well as regard to positions stated by Estonia with regard to European Union legal acts. The ministers attend committee sittings to introduce Estonian positions slated for defence in the council. The Riigikogu’s press office releases information on the work of the committee both as advance information and, occasionally, more comprehensive press releases on what was discussed in committee. At least once a year, the prime minister submits an overview of the government activity in implementing European Union policy.

The representation of the European Commission in Estonia distributes information on the European Union’s development direction and the activities and positions of the Commission. The representation organizes the communication related to the visits of European Commission officials to Estonia. The employees of the representation introduce opportunities for Estonian citizens related to membership of the EU. The representative publishes informational materials and a weekly electronic information newsletter and organizes press conferences and information campaigns. The European Commission administers the Europe Direct information network in Estonia, the activities and functions of which are similar to those of the European Union information officers at the county level.

The European Parliament information office distributes to journalists and all other interested parties information on the activities of European Parliament, MEPs, and legislation. The information office responds to requests of information and assists people in communications with MEPs elected in Estonia. The information office offers printed matter introducing the European Parliament, organizing seminars for journalists and organizes trips to sittings of European Parliament.

The Representation of the European Commission and the European Parliament information office engage in cooperation with the state and local governments as well as with NGOs. Both administer jointly the European Union building located in Tallinn, which has an open information point, and where press conferences, information days and seminars take place. The European Union building also serves as a cultural centre, for instance offering a line up of European film evenings and exhibitions.
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

We live in an era of globalization. Just as we keep track of what is taking place outside Estonia’s borders, others also keep an eye on our doings. It might be a tourist planning to visit Estonia or a country planning an official visit. Our everyday doings are of interest since we are an active member of the European Union, NATO and other international organizations – for instance the World Food Programme.

Each government authority communicates with foreign journalists itself pursuant in its own area. Membership in the European Union has blurred the distinctions between internal and external relations, both in the everyday work of ministries and media relations. If a ministry is in charge of handling the affairs in its field from the European Union working group to the council of ministers, then it is the best poised to be the official explainer to journalists. Each ministry also keeps track of its area of administration so as to correct any errors of fact that appear in the international media. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs comes to the assistance when keeping track of broader topics that are of general interest.

In the case of a crisis, communication is likewise handled by the ministry in whose area of administration the crisis has occurred. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also provides assistance in retrieving contact data, and consular issues. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs organizes communication in the case of crises that occur abroad and which affect Estonia or Estonian citizens.

It is important that government authorities be prepared to organize communication in foreign languages as well, both orally and in writing. For instance, the government communication unit releases all key press releases in not only Estonian but English and Russian as well.

In handling publicity for Estonia abroad, Enterprise Estonia, the Estonian Institute, the Ministry of Culture and culture and business organizations have an active role alongside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The ministry’s press and information department makes internationally available information that explains Estonia’s foreign policy aims and Estonia in general. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs organizes the preparation of information materials and overviews on Estonia and contributes to the process of organizing cultural events that promote Estonia.
The spokesperson’s office communicates with foreign journalists within its purview. The spokesperson’s office introduces Estonia’s foreign policy and explains its aims at home and abroad; contributes to foreign policy planning and implementation with regard to communicating with the media and the public; is the first responder to errors of fact in the media; establishes and maintains the network of foreign journalists long with the press attaches at foreign representations.

The press attaches posted to Estonian foreign representations (Brussels, Moscow, Washington, London, Paris and Helsinki) serve as the point of contact for the country of location and the journalists accredited there with all Estonian government bodies. The press centre of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs accredits foreign journalists with permanent assignments in Estonia. The contact details for accredited journalists are posted on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ international press centre, which is outfitted with the latest technologies, can be used by other government bodies as well.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs media office monitors and analyses the international media. The information office prepares and distributes materials on Estonia and administers the Ministry’s website. The cultural office assists the foreign representations in organizing cultural events.

INTERNATIONAL MARKETING OF ESTONIA AS A COUNTRY
The primary role of Enterprise Estonia in international marketing of Estonia is to promote Estonia as a travel destination, support Estonian companies abroad and drawing foreign investments that create higher value added and promote technology transfer. Enterprise Estonia focuses on the most important target countries for the Estonian economy and the business community. Enterprise Estonia has foreign representatives in Finland, Sweden, Russia, Ukraine, Germany, Great Britain, the US, China and Japan. In the most important destination countries, promotional campaigns and cooperation seminars are organized regularly in cooperation with partners; visits of foreign journalists to Estonia are also organized on a regular basis.


THE ESTONIAN INSTITUTE
The function of the Estonian Institute is to spread information about Estonian society, culture and education; promote Estonian culture in other countries and promote cultural interchange between Estonia and the rest of the world, and support the teaching of Estonian language and culture outside Estonia.
Over the years, the Institute has published printed matter about Estonia; prepared and set up websites on Estonia; fielded questions concerning Estonia; organized conferences and seminars on diverse subjects; welcomed journalists, researchers and teachers, translators and writers to the country; organized festivals and exhibitions; compiled catalogues and other publications on Estonian culture.

The Estonian Institute has opened four branches abroad to better organize cultural interchange and promotion of Estonia abroad: Finland, Hungary, Sweden and France. The Institute receives support for its activities from the Ministry of Culture, and grant money is also sought for various projects. The Institute’s longstanding partner in issuing and distributing information materials is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and to better introduce Estonia, it has engaged in cooperation with other institutions from the public, private and third sectors.

NETWORK OF CULTURAL ATTACHES
Estonia’s foreign representations employ specialized diplomats appointed by the Ministry of Culture - cultural attaches, who promote Estonian culture and further and maintain cultural ties between the respective two countries. Estonia has six cultural attaches: one posted to the European Union in Brussels, and in London, Berlin, Moscow, Paris and Helsinki. A cultural attaché is often an intermediary, distributor of information and sometimes serves as an event organizer. The cultural attaché in Paris is also Estonia’s representative to UNESCO.

COMMUNICATING WITH FOREIGN JOURNALISTS
When communicating with foreign journalists, government bodies represent their own organization, the government and the entire country. The words and actions of the head of a government authority or communication specialist are something by which not only that establishment will be judged, but the entire country.

For foreign journalists news about Estonia is not always about what’s new - it is what is presumably the most interesting to their readership.

When communicating with foreign journalists, consider that correspondents are generally up to date with the background and developments in the country and elsewhere.

The comments and explanations given to foreign journalists must fit in with the broader context and, if necessary, you should offer background information about Estonian history, system of government and major statistical indicators.
GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS' COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS

The government has the obligation to notify people of their rights and obligations. The government also has the responsibility to promote behaviour that is in conformity with public interests (such as crime prevention, traffic safety, healthful lifestyles, tolerance and non-discrimination).

A government body may organize communication campaign as part of fulfilling its functions under law. The purpose of the campaign derives from the agency’s activity plan in its field and is part of the agency’s communication plan.

For instance, the Road Administration’s traffic safety department is responsible for increasing the awareness of drivers, cyclists and pedestrians and shaping their views and behaviour. To fulfil this function, the Road Administration organizes communication campaigns to improve traffic safety awareness. In the run-up to accession to the European Union, one of the functions of the Government Office was to prepare accession to the EU; as part of this, in 2003 it held a campaign calling on people to take part in the referendum on accession to the European Union.

Communication is an ongoing, regular activity for achieving long-term goals. A one-off shorter campaign does not replace the need for consistent public relations. The campaigns must be fact-based, aimed at resolving a problem determined by studies; they should have a definite measurable goal and their results must be assessed publicly.

The head of the government authority is responsible for the campaigns organized by the government authority. Communication campaigns are ordinarily organized by the institution’s communication unit, assisting the officials responsible for the field in preparing the campaign and organizing media relations on the topic.

WE PROCEED FROM PUBLIC INTERESTS
Campaign expenses should be taken into account when preparing the institution’s budget. Communication campaigns paid for by state money must be justified and the results must be measurable.

In the case of all notification activities, consider the relationship of the potential impact to the resources expended. The price of contact is suitable as a basis for weighing - i.e. how much it costs to win over one person’s attention.
A campaign may consist either in part or completely of advertising. In such a case, the government body works in conjunction with ad agencies or PR firms.

Under the Advertising Act, “advertising” means information which is made public in any generally perceived form for a charge or without charge for the purpose of the provision of a service, increasing the sale of goods, promoting an event or directing the conduct of a person in public interests.

Advertising that promotes behaviour in the public interest is not by any means solely the province of public authorities, as NGOs and companies also produce such ads. For instance, early 2007 saw a campaign by the Estonian Donors Society that called on people to give blood through a message printed on to milk cartons made by AS Tere. In this case, an NGO and private company worked together.

The purpose of government body campaigns is not to increase profits or increase support for political parties. When organizing campaigns in conjunction with private and third sector, it should be taken into consideration that such activity should conform to the purpose of shaping people’s views and behaviour in line with the public interest. For instance, if people are called on to ensure that their homes are fire-safe, sales of smoke alarms increase, but the campaign is actually designed to prevent fires.

A government body may not organize campaigns in support of the politicians or policies of any party. In accordance with the code of ethics for public service, refrain from leaving the appearance that a public servant’s neutrality may be open to question. During the pre-election period, ministries are thus advised to avoid organizing public events, ordering or distributing keepsakes. Nor is it appropriate to enumerate the accomplishments of the government or a government body in a paid slot or space.

**STEPS FOR ORGANIZING A SOCIAL CAMPAIGN**

- **Put the purpose of the campaign in writing: why is this necessary?**
  First it is necessary to clearly articulate the problem that can be resolved by way of communication- first by increasing people’s awareness and then guiding their behaviours in the public interest. For instance, the purpose of the Road Administration’s campaigns is to reduce the number of traffic violations: drunk driving, speeding or lack of proper equipment.

  A communication campaign can be beneficial only if there is a real and continuous commitment to resolving the problem. For instance, if it
becomes evident that smoking may be reduced by individual counselling, then it is first necessary to create a counselling system or improve it; only at that point can information be provided regarding counselling offices. It may also be easier to change the traffic environment than to “train” people to avoid the hazards.

A problem can be described with studies. A preliminary study allows the baseline level to be determined - the indicators regarding the status quo - and then the measurable objective can be set. For instance, about 2.6 percent of the Estonian population are donors, but the WHO recommends that the share of donors in the country must be at least 4 percent. The goal of communication campaigns is to increase the number of donors.

Campaigns where the results are inconclusive may not be organized using state money. Take into consideration that studies may swallow even more than half of the campaign budget but if they are not conducted, it may not be possible to assess the outcome. Data may naturally also be mined from previous studies.

It is important to meet with senior officials with regard to the need and purpose of a campaign. The head of every government body is responsible for communication and thus also for the communication campaigns organized by the government body. It is important for the minister as the main spokesperson to be up to date with the planning, course and outcomes of the campaign.

**Take your audience into account**
A communication campaign must speak to the audience the message is intended for. The primary target group of the campaign must be clearly defined and this must be taken into account in choosing both the message and channels. For instance, the Health Insurance Fund’s social campaign “A beautiful woman is sober” in 2007 was aimed at women 25-50 as studies were showing an increase in excess alcohol use in this demographic. The goal was to make people aware of the harmful effects of alcohol abuse not only for the health, but for people’s appearance, sense of self-worth and motivation.

**Prepare a specification that serves as the blueprint for the campaign**
Do not carry out a campaign “alone in your office”. To elucidate the problems and goals of the communication campaign, talk to your colleagues and involve competent partners and interest groups in the relevant field. You will get good input from them at the outset for preparing the specification. Later the partners can help distribute printed matter or other materials.

Plan the campaign budget and period. You can estimate the cost through an analysis of the costs of previous campaigns or actions. The
cost of the campaign depends on the size of the audience and selection of channel. TV clips and outdoor media have a large viewership and cost significantly more than print ads. When timing a campaign, take into account the public relations context - for instance, it would be appropriate to talk of charity around Christmastime, and environmental protection or saving for retirement are topics that may not garner much attention.

When choosing the campaign messages and channels, take into account both linguistic and regional particularities. In the case of advertising in other languages, follow the requirements of the Language Act.

* Find someone to run the campaign
It is a good idea to specify in the government body which campaign-related functions are to be performed by the government body’s own communication unit (such as expressing the idea and purpose of the campaign, media relations) and which jobs will be outsourced (such as design, printing, studies).

“There is no point in outsourcing media relations from a PR agency,” says the head of traffic education division in Road Administration Urve Sellenberg. “Sending out press releases and responding to questions from journalists should be the agency’s own job.”

If the campaign or part of its actions is outsourced, follow the requirements for organizing public procurements. It is reasonable to elicit competing tenders for the purpose of comparison. The recommended terms and conditions for open application procedure are posted on the website of the Association of Advertising Agencies www.eral.ee. If the total sum is large, a public procurement must be held pursuant to law.

The campaign specification should include a description of the problem along with enough background information regarding the campaign field and government body’s functions. Agencies can then submit more thorough tenders and the competition is more productive. If the communication is well-thought out in advance, the campaign can be hoped to have a greater impact.

The specification should state that the campaign messages and presentation should be tested first, ordinarily using qualitative methods such as observation or focus groups. The most suitable plan will be used to compile a final conceptual solution and select channels.

Advertising in the media is not the only way to achieve the goal. It may be that it is more effective to hold information briefings, to
publish brochures, operate an information line or create a website. For instance, many events were held to mark the 90th anniversary of Estonian independence – exhibitions, concerts, theatre performances, television and radio specials. Posters commemorating the anniversary were put up in places such as village stores, pharmacies, and customer service departments of large companies.

♦ **Get the word out about the campaign and provide support for its goals**

Your colleagues at your government body, the minister and cooperation partners should be the first to know about the campaign goals, messages, channels and target groups.

It is necessary to prepare a media relations plan for the campaign containing an overview of press conferences, responses to possible questions, and spokespersons.

The campaign is introduced to media outlets. For instance, a press briefing could cover the intended goals of the campaign, explaining why the specific message was chosen and how the campaign outcomes will be assessed. The earlier the media relations are started, the better. Government bodies' activities must be transparent and competitors should not be feared.

♦ **Keep track of and manage the course of the campaign**

It is important to keep track of the media and public’s reactions and respond to them in an efficient manner. During the campaign, the rise in awareness can be gauged by studies for determining whether the communications are expedient and effective. The more concrete the goals expressed at the outset, the easier to monitor compliance.

For instance, Hannes Rumm, organizer of the publicity campaign that preceded the referendum on EU membership in 2003, has recalled that journalists often came up with questions during the campaign - demanding, in their words, whether taxpayer money had to be wasted before the referendum at all, as everyone supposedly knew about having to go to the polls again. The fallacy of this view was proved by regular studies that showed that hundreds of thousands of people learned the day of the referendum only after the campaign was launched. If necessary, campaign activities should be modified on the basis of the studies, but this would mean planning additional funds in the project, which would allow activities to be added or omitted.
Assess and publicize campaign outcomes

The success of a campaign cannot be assessed only according to the extent to which it is noticed and the message understood. People’s choices are influenced by a combination of many factors. For instance, the fact that people know about the dangers of smoking will not necessarily lead them to quit. Changes in views and behaviours must likewise be monitored using studies.

When the campaign ends, we must assess what we were able to accomplish and how we should organize campaigns in the future to capitalize on what was achieved. To ensure comparability, a follow-up study must be conducted using the same methodology as the preliminary study. It would be good to pinpoint how the behaviour has changed - for instance a traffic safety campaign “Buckle up!” can be considered successful if there is a decrease in the number of passengers not wearing their seatbelts. The public presentation of study conclusions provides a good opportunity to dialogue on how the resolution of the problem will be dealt with in future.
GOVERNMENT BODIES AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Estonia’s state insignia - the coat of arms - is always to be used in visual communication by government bodies. The coat of arms is used on documents issued by government bodies and it can be used on their printed matter. To ensure consistency of visual style, the coat of arms is placed in the symbol of the government body.

The visual identity of state and gas is established on the same basis; it should ensure that government bodies are distinct from private enterprise and that they are viewed as similar.

The symbol of the government body is used in internal and external communication if the information pertains to the organization itself and not to the state. The symbol of the government body is either the coat of arms itself or a symbol that contains the coat of arms. The principle here is that the more extensively the government body exercises public authority, the closer its visual identity is to that of the state.

The President of the Republic, Riigikogu, Government of the Republic and the Supreme Court use a large coat of arms along with the name of the respective institution. A smaller coat of arms along with the name of the agency is used by the Chancellor of Justice, National Audit Office, chancelleries and offices of constitutional institutions and ministries. Boards, inspectorates and other authorities, bodies and persons that exercise public authority (not including county governments) may use their own insignia.

Government bodies that do not exercise public authority do not use the Estonian coat of arms in their insignia.

For more on the use of the Estonian coat of arms, visit http://www.valitsus.ee/et/riigikantselei/riigi-ja-omavalitsuste-symbolid/riigivapp
INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AT GOVERNMENT BODIES

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IS PART OF RUNNING AN AGENCY

- Well-organized internal communication within a government body supports achievement of the government’s goals and is a part of running a government body. If public servants know what the primary goals and functions of the government and their own agency are, they contribute to achieving these goals - both in their everyday work and in dealing with the public.

- Good internal communication improves everyday cooperation in the agency: knowing who does what and whom to turn to helps avoid overlapping activity. For instance, at the Ministry of Finance, all public servants get a written overview of the most important work and meetings at the start and end of each week.

- Good internal communication supports the changes that take place in the organization. For instance, in the case of a structural change planned at an institution, public servants might have ideas how to better perform the restructuring. It is good if the public servants affected by the decision are notified as early as possible of the plans and are given an opportunity to have a say.

- Good internal communication helps the government body keep people in the loop. If the experiences and knowledge of officials are systematically documented, this will help keep the state on a consistent path of development. It is necessary to compile work-related instructions and auxiliary materials - if the techniques that work are documented, previous experience can be relied on when performing an analogous function. Government bodies have Intranets and shared directories for sharing and storage of information resources.

RESPONSIBILITY

Internal communication is part of the running of a government body and the government body’s director is responsible for it. At a ministry, the secretary general is responsible for internal communication. The director of the agency is not the spokesperson for the agency but is a key spokesperson within the agency as well.

The communication units of a number of government bodies have an internal communication specialist position. The internal communication specialist engages in close cooperation with the director and the structural units, above all the personnel, information systems, administration and other support units. The internal communication specialist provides consultation (in his or her field) to the director and all public servants.
SMOOTH EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION

Good practice dictates that public servants should first learn of key news pertaining to the agency from the director or direct superior, not from the mass media. Thus press releases are also sent out to all of agency’s personnel, no later than they are sent out to the media.

Senior officials at government bodies meet at least once a week to exchange work-related information and make decisions related to the running of the agency. It is important to ensure that short written summaries are prepared and made available to everyone over the Intranet.

And certainly it would pay to encourage those who took part in meetings to provide additional explanations regarding their decisions to their subordinates. Audio transcripts have been made of meetings at the Ministry of Agriculture, so that all public servants could listen to them at once.

The Intranet, e-newsletters and shared electronic calendars have become the most conventional sources of information within ministries and agencies. In a number of government institutions, MSN, Skype and Wiki interfaces are used for exchanging information - these allow group conferences to be held regardless of people’s physical locations.

Internal communication is better if an institution has a logical document management system and information filing and archival procedures are in place - for instance how employees who leave hand over work-related information. It does not pay to forget that to find the necessary information, consistent development efforts must take place, for instance training on the use of information systems must be organized and guidance must be provided to new employees.

Ministries coordinate internal communication also in their own area of administration. In some ministries, the heads of the agencies in the area of administration always take part in meetings. The Minister of Social Affairs uses a mailing list, among other means, to keep heads of sub-agencies informed. The Ministry of Justice has partially connected its Intranet to the Intranets of its sub-agencies in order to improve its internal communication.

INTRANET

Publishing all the key information on the Intranet instead of sending out e-mails frequently to all public servants is a better course of action.

The Intranet should be treated and developed as if it were an “electronic manual” for the agency where all of the support information that public servants at the government body need is
always available: everything that affects the agency’s employees and division of labour (contact details and explanations as to who does what), administration (for instance, how contracts are concluded), personnel operations (how trips abroad and leave are set up), technical assistance (what to do when the printer is down), recognition of public servants and other aspects.

The Intranet is also used to publish news pertaining to the agency, links to resources (registers and information systems), personal information for each employee (status of process of applications for leave) and materials related to joint activities of the organization (for instance, photographs of events). The Ministry of Education and Research Intranet front page each morning features a “morning letters” about what will take place that day at the ministry.

The structure of the Intranet should be as thin and simple as possible. For instance, the Government Office Intranet only has three headings:

- the front page, where news on the agency and summaries of meetings are published, there are also links to agency’s electronic resources;
- the contact details and photographs for public servants are displayed in the Intranet directly from the personnel database;
- an instructions and resources heading, where documents and tips concerning administration, IT, accounting, personnel work, management, internal rules and the style guide and presentation materials are filed.

It is reasonable to proceed from the principle that information is published by the creator of the information. It is good if only all support units in an agency have the right and ability to edit the Intranet. For instance, only the personnel department advisor publishes personnel information in the Government Office Intranet, recommendations for use of IT are published by the IT division adviser and administration guidelines are published by the administration service assistant.

VISION DISCUSSIONS
From time to time, it is good practice for government bodies to devote joint discussion to goals and values. Understanding an agency’s mission, vision and values helps the official become aware of what its functions are in the organization and more broadly throughout the entire public sector.

No doubt the best-known example of dedication that shapes understanding is the story of the cleaner who worked for NASA during the first mission to the Moon, who when asked “What are you doing here” answered: “My job is to help put a man on the Moon.”
The Ministry of Finance regularly holds “in-house meetings”, where the ministry’s strategic goals and values are discussed as well as how they are connected with daily work. Everyone can have a say and this increases the dedication of the public servants. During the preparation of the development plan, a strategy seminar is held, with the participating of at least two department heads and senior officials, where all of the units' heads speak of their development plans. The head of each unit goes through the same discussion in their respective unit as well. When the strategy is essentially ready, the whole organization comes together and the head of each field introduces its objectives to everyone.

The senior officials at government bodies are replaced fairly frequently and a change of government can mean significant changes in many fields. If, for instance, the new minister takes office, it is relevant to ask him to explain his goals to the entire agency.

ESPRIT DE CORPS
In the private sector, company solidarity is supported by competing with other companies - a kind of team sport. Government bodies do not have this type of competition and public servants are united more by the common opportunity to take part in shaping Estonian history, the opportunity to help people and pursue personal development.

When a public servant says “we” or “us”, that does not refer just to the people working for the public servant’s own agency but also in other agencies in the same area of administration or all authorities in the executive branch - or the entire public service.

As in private companies, common trainings and motivational events are held to deepen unity and motivation of employees in government bodies.

All common events should support achievement of the government body’s goals. Uniformity and comprehensibility also help create materials on the government body’s strategic objectives, mission, vision and values. Many government bodies prepare yearbooks which contain overviews of what was achieved during the year and interviews with employees.
KEY PRINCIPLES FOR PLANNING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Communication is a part of governance and the objectives of government communication derive from the goals set for governance. In doing strategic planning of a government body’s communication, it is relevant to consider the hierarchy of goals, based on the persons receiving the document that contains the goal (the people, the Riigikogu, cabinet, minister), the time perspective (for ever, decades, four years, one year) and scope (international, national, sectoral, organizational).

1. National objectives: The Constitution
The country’s primary objectives and functions derive from the Constitution. See the final report of the Republic of Estonia’s constitutional experts’ committee, posted on the Ministry of Justice website, [www.just.ee/10719](http://www.just.ee/10719).

2. Sectoral goals: Legislation and strategic development plans
The authority of the state is exercised only on the basis of the Constitution and constitutional legislation. The objective of a law is expressed in the first section of it. For the systematic division of laws, see Riigi Teataja [www.riigiteataja.ee](http://www.riigiteataja.ee). Strategic development plans articulate the objectives for one or more field and the measures needed to achieve them; for instance, Estonia’s Environmental Strategy 2030, Estonia’s Integration Program 2008-2013, the State Budget Strategy for 2010-2013. Visit the government website [www.valitsus.ee](http://www.valitsus.ee) for the current development plans and draft proposals.

3. Government goals: Government action plan
The government’s action plan sets out the primary activities that must be taken to fulfil each item in the coalition agreement along with the deadlines and those responsible. Visit the government’s website [www.valitsus.ee](http://www.valitsus.ee) to view the action plan.

4. Strategic objectives of the organization: Agency development plan
For development visions for the ministry’s area of administration and agencies in the area of administration, along with the activities necessary for achieving them and estimated reserves, see the Government of the Republic regulation “Types of strategic development plans and procedure for drafting, supplementation, implementation, assessment and reporting.”
5. Organization’s short-term goals: Agency’s annual activity plan and state budget
The activities for the next budgetary year planned according to each of the government body’s areas of activity and set according to strategic objectives and measures. See the budget and operational plans on the Ministry of Finance website www.fin.ee.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE MINISTRY COMMUNICATION PLAN
Ministries are responsible for preparing draft strategic development plans, resolving emergencies and, in their own field, for EU affairs. Based on this, it is relevant when planning the ministry’s communication for the long term, to put in place the aims of involvement, crisis communication and European Union-related communication, taking into account the following documents and procedures:

Legislative drafting: Engagement
- The ministry’s legislative drafting plan, plans for engagement
- Public consultation on draft document (including in the participatory website) and coordination
- Submission of the draft to the government (in general 10 days before the sitting), adding the draft document to the government sitting agenda (a day before the sitting), government decision communication
- Readings of and voting on the draft legislation in the Riigikogu
- Entry into force, communication on implementation of the legislation

Emergencies and crisis management: Crisis communication
- The emergency risk analyses and emergency resolution plans (such as extensive cyberattack - Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications; extensive contamination - Ministry of the Environment; epidemic - Ministry of Social Affairs.

European Union European Union-related communication
- Estonia’s European Union policy and government objectives for one period of EU presidency
- Actions of minister or ministry official in the Council of the European Union and working groups thereof and other matters related to the European Union in the ministry’s area of administration.
Communication should be planned taking into consideration the connections with the activities and communication of other institutions, such as:

- Preparing studies and forecasts. See, e.g. the Statistics Estonia publishing calendar [www.stat.ee/avaldamiskalender](http://www.stat.ee/avaldamiskalender) and the calendar of Eesti Pank events [www.eestipank.info](http://www.eestipank.info)
- National Audit Office annual plan, see [www.riigikontroll.ee](http://www.riigikontroll.ee)
- Ministers’ remarks in the Riigikogu (including annual addresses: prime minister’s address on research and development, on EU policy, upon delivering the state budget; Minister of Foreign Affairs annual foreign policy address)
- Discussions in the Riigikogu of national issues of vital importance
- Public holidays, dates of importance and special events, themed years and months
- Notification campaigns in agencies in the area of administration
PRESS RELEASES ISSUED BY GOVERNMENT BODIES

JUSTIFIED AND COMPREHENSIBLE PRESS RELEASES
Press releases are sent out based on the agency’s annual communication plan, the focal points of which might be the objectives set forth in the ministry’s development plan and the projects listed in the work plan, functions assigned for a certain quarter in the government action plan, dates of entry into force of legal acts, annually recurring procedures involving drafting the state budget, and regular international and domestic events and important dates.

A press release must contain news. Journalists have at times criticized government bodies for a lack of important news in press releases; they may seem like they are not thoroughly considered and complicated.

For instance, journalists have said: “remove jargon and cant from the press releases and formulate them so your child or grandmother can understand their content too” and “there is too much ballast that is not actually interesting to the media”.

Government bodies’ press releases must pertain to activities of the Estonian government or government body or be directly related to it. For instance, if an Estonian ministry published a press release entitled “Lithuania looks for a solution for workforce drain by raising wages”, the question arises: should the release not have been sent out by the Lithuanian government instead?

Press releases must be elucidatory, not polemical. In describing the government’s policies, decisions and actions, their content and their fundamental principles are described.

Government bodies’ press releases must refrain from attacking the policies of parties or groups.

PRESS RELEASES REGARDING DECISIONS
A press release should be sent out if a government, minister or government body makes a significant decision. For instance, the government communication unit sends out releases from Government of the Republic sittings, allowing the public to learn of government decisions almost in real time.

It is important to clearly express the substance of the decision: who or what the government body’s decision impacts and how.
The press release should conform to the following questions: How many people, companies, organizations, or what regions or areas does the decision directly affect? What will change after the decision is taken? Who will be given new rights or who will inherit new responsibilities? What are the expected consequences for citizens, companies, the state budget, the rule of law, the environment, etc? When will the decision enter into force?

PRESS RELEASES IN THE CASE OF EMERGENCY
A press release must be sent out to provide instructions and information to the population. A government body must provide the information and instructions necessary for the protection of human life, health and assets in a uniformly understandable and efficient manner.

For instance, after the street unrest in Tallinn on 26 April 2007, the Government of the Republic called on schools and schoolchildren in a press release to remain calm and not to let themselves provoked into doing anything untoward.

PRESS RELEASES CONCERNING ANNOUNCEMENTS AND STUDIES
A press release must be sent out when the government, minister or government body makes a key announcement on behalf of the government or agency. For instance, the government communication unit issues a press release when the prime minister appears before the Riigikogu with a political statement when delivering the draft state budget bill.

A government body does not send out a press release regarding a minister’s remarks in his or her capacity as a member of a political party. The government communication unit does not, for instance, send out a release about what the prime minister might have talked bout at his or her party congress.

A press release must be published to notify the public about state-funded studies, surveys or analyses.
PRESS RELEASE FORMAT

- A press release follows inverted-pyramid structure, just like a news story. The lead/first paragraph communicates the most important information, followed by additional details in descending order of importance. The least important comes at the end.
- Like a good news story, a press release answers the questions: who, what, when, where, why and how. The first paragraph should express the topic, the date/time and place of the event and why the story is important.
- The sentences and paragraphs of the press release must be short, so that journalists can quickly decide on how important the information is. For the same reason, the press release heading must be visible on e-mail subject line.
- The language of the press release must be simple and correct; it should not contain jargon, abbreviations, details that are not explained, or clichés. The quotations used in the press release must not be anonymous.
- The press release must list the date and place of publication and the contact details for the issuer. For instance, the first line of the government press release reads: “Tallinn, Stenbock House, 22 February 2011”.
- It is advisable to include links or references to additional information, if possible references to photographs pertaining to the event and contact details for a specialist journalists can contact for additional comments.
COMMUNICATION REGARDING SITTINGS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC

A sitting of the Government of the Republic is an event of national importance. At a sitting, the government decides a number of matters in its competence: it makes proposals to parliament with regard to draft legislation, issues orders and regulations, appoints officials, distributes funds etc.

The decisions made at each government sitting must be justified, clear and comprehensible. Already at the beginning of the drafting process at the ministry, it should be thought through and documented how the draft legal act should be defended, why the decision is necessary, who it impacts and what its effect is, and what expenses and revenue are related to it, etc.

Such information is necessary:
- for cabinet members who make decisions jointly at the sitting;
- journalists who cover government decisions;
- all people who have the right to know how the government objectives and decisions impact their rights and obligations and how the government uses the state’s money.

The members of the cabinet are not always able to read through or analyse the explanatory memoranda for all draft legal acts. The explanatory memoranda are often prepared in official parlance, and are complicated and voluminous. Thus decision-makers often consider the quality of the short précis compiled regarding the draft legislation to be of decisive importance. The summary determines how well the ministers have understood the content of the draft government decision. The summary also determines whether the arguments the decision was based on reaches the public.

Thus every draft legal act presented to the government must be accompanied by a short summary. This summary should be a text in a format similar to a one-page news story, which summarizes the crux of the draft decision and offers some background necessary for understanding it.

The summary should be provided at the beginning of the explanatory memorandum or provided separately. It will be published in the information system on government sittings, the agenda of the government sitting annotated on the government website and if necessary in the press release to be prepared regarding the decision adopted at the government sitting.
It is important for ministries’ departments, communication units and legal departments prepare a short summary of the draft legal act in a format similar to a news item, suitable for publishing in the information system of government sittings or publishing in the press.

“Format similar to a news item” means above all that the first few sentences of the text express the most important parts, followed by paragraphs that provide more detail and finally background; the text employees simple language, short sentences, avoids foreign words and specialized terminology and unusual abbreviations.

The summary must be precise, short and clear. The questions that are to be answered based on the content of the government decision are: what? why? who? how? when?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What is the most important part of the draft legal act? What does it involve, what does the draft legal act govern?</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>WHY?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Why is the decision/draft legal act necessary?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Why is the government discussing it at present? Why is it on the agenda? (Technical draft legal acts, e.g. for a draft regulation for implementing a piece of legislation, we explain that the amendments derive from the act and that the regulation is established for the purpose of implementing the legislation.)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Who does the adoption of the legal act impact? How many people, companies and organizations does the decision directly affect? Who will be given new rights or who will inherit new responsibilities?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>HOW?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How does the decision influence people and/or interest groups? What will change after the decision is taken? What are the expected consequences for citizens, companies, the state budget, the rule of law, the environment, etc?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Will it result in expenditures for people/interest groups/state, and if so, to what extent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What interest groups have been engaged in cooperation in the process of drafting the decision? What are their most important positions?</td>
</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>WHEN?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• When will the legal act enter into force? From what date will the new standards apply?</td>
</tr>
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</table>
PREPARING THE SUMMARY

- The sentences of the summary should be concise. We do not use run-on sentences, avoid commas.
- We avoid use of foreign words and specialized terminology. If the use of such terminology is necessary, we explain what they mean in understandable fashion.
- We avoid passive voice - otherwise it isn’t clear who does what or should do it.
- We generally use downstyle: valitsus (government), majandus- ja kommunikatsiooniministeerium (the economic affairs ministry), maksu- ja tolliamet (the tax and customs board).
- Full names are necessary only on first reference (For instance: Prime Minister Andrus Ansip will submit to the government Estonia’s positions for the European Council meeting. The prime minister considers it important that the European Council discuss …)
- Names of legal acts should be conveyed in as understandable a fashion as possible. We do not capitalize the names of legal acts and do not enclose them in quotation marks. An exception: acts with very long names (amendment acts, e.g.) if distinguishing them with the use of capitalization and quotation marks helps make the text more readable.
COMMUNICATION RELATED TO THE STATE BUDGET
The state budget is the government’s most important document; it is the most important instrument for governing the state. The state budget is used by the Riigikogu to empower the government to use state funds. In addition, the budget is also a government revenue plan, which is the basis for spending.

The state budget pertains directly to the activities in the forthcoming year for all ministries and agencies in their area of government. Thus it is very important to engage in close, coordinated cooperation in the field of communication. State budget communications are coordinated by the government communication unit in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance.

The ministers discuss the draft state budget for the next year at cabinet meetings. In parallel to the ministers’ meetings, the ministries’ communication departments prepare the messages and media plans pertaining to their respective fields.

When the government has approved the draft state budget at a sitting and sent it to the Riigikogu for discussion, the government communication unit forwards the unified state budget related talking points to the ministers, secretaries general, deputy secretaries general and heads of agencies. In addition to the general state budget data, the talking points also contain each ministry’s main messages regarding the state budget.

The government’s communication office sends out the press release regarding the approval of the state budget directly from the government sitting and adds to it the most important messages concerning each field. After approval of the state budget, it is good practice for ministries to issue their own press releases containing messages in the sector and comments from the minister. Good practice is for ministers to explain the objectives and activities to be undertaken to achieve the objectives in county newspapers as well.

At the post-sitting press conference, standard practice is that the prime minister, finance minister and social affairs minister - whose spending level is greatest in the budget - explain the state budget. It is also important to make sure that representatives from all coalition partners are present to brief journalists on the state budget.
STATE BUDGET COMMUNICATION TIMETABLE

August/September: cabinet meetings
- Government cabinet meetings discuss the draft state budget. The government communication unit and Ministry of Finance public relations department send out a joint press release based on the agreement reached. Comments to the media are made primarily by the Minister of Finance.
- If the government cabinet decides that the budget is ready for approval at the sitting, the communication office and the Ministry of Finance public relations department send out a joint press release and initial talking points for ministers.
- Every ministry’s public relations department prepares pertaining to its field. The Minister of Finance and all the other ministers as well provide comments.

September: government approves the budget
- The government’s communication office will send out the press release on the approval of the state budget directly from the government sitting. At the same time, the background materials on the budget are published on the government and Ministry of Finance website.
- The government communication unit sends ministers and senior officials talking points related to the approval of the budget.
- At the post-sitting press conference, the prime minister, finance minister and the two ministers in whose field the most important budget-related messages are, provide comments. Representatives of all of the coalition partners must be present at the press conference.
- A detailed budget-related press briefing takes place at the Ministry of Finance.
- The primary spokespersons with regard to the approval of the draft budget are the prime minister and finance minister.

September: the prime minister delivers the budget to the Riigikogu
- By 1 October, the prime minister delivers the draft state budget for the next year to the Riigikogu.
- The prime minister’s office prepares a political declaration for submission to the Riigikogu.
- The government communication unit prepares a press release regarding the declaration made in the Riigikogu.
- After the budget is delivered to the Riigikogu, an article by the prime minister or finance minister on the state finances and budget is prepared for publication in national dailies.
- Good practice is that the prime minister meets with the editors-in-chief of media outlets to brief them on the most important items in the state budget.
- The primary spokespersons with regard to the approval of the draft budget are the prime minister and finance minister.
October: first reading of the state budget in the Riigikogu
- Before the first reading of the state budget, the Minister of Finance addresses the Riigikogu. The public relations department of the Ministry of Finance prepares a press release on the finance minister’s address.
- The Ministry of Finance and the government communication unit organize a budget-related briefing for journalists in Ida-Viru County.

December: The Riigikogu passes the state budget
- After the Riigikogu has passed the budget, the Ministry of Finance public relations department prepares a press release regarding that fact.
- The Ministry of Finance public relations department publishes the state budget and related background materials on the Ministry of Finance website.
PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FROM GOVERNMENT BODIES

Preliminary information is necessary for providing information to journalists regarding upcoming events related to the government or government body. Reporters and editors can thus make preparations for covering topics of interest to you and to gather background information. It is recommended to send out information on upcoming events to journalists via e-mail.

Journalists are looking for preliminary information first and foremost on events in which a social impact can be sensed, for instance if important decisions are planned to be made. “There is not much use for an upcoming events bulletin consisting of a list of foreign trips by officials,” media outlet representatives have noted.

Certainly a few sentences should be added regarding the content and impact of each event, along with the landline and mobile telephone numbers of the people directly connected with the event. An e-mail address is optional, but the telephone number is required.

It is useful to add a direct link to previous press releases or background on the same subject (not the general website for the agency). This makes the event more understandable for the journalists and increases the likelihood that it will be covered.

Important events that at first glance seem “raw” or regarding which there is not much to say may also be included in the preliminary information. It could be separately noted that the event is a “working meeting”, and that it is to be used as a backgrounder. Such a course allows journalists to track the process and to keep abreast of developments.

Any changes and updates in the upcoming events should be highlighted - with a larger or bolder heading, different colour or other manner.

Primary events covered in preliminary information are: meetings and conferences; organizational development-related matters (such as structural changes, changes in councils and sub-agencies); public events (e.g. press conferences, briefings, campaigns); prestigious events (e.g. seminars, academic days, opening ceremonies, award ceremonies); studies completed and public procurements in progress; major draft legal acts in preparation; publishing of publications (e.g. reports, brochures, newsletters); foreign visits.
Above all, the preliminary information sent out by a government body should answer the question of what is taking place and why. What is the substance and impact of the meetings or visits? Why is the agency head visiting place X, what is the purpose of the visit? Why is working group Y meeting, what is the desired result, what topics will be dealt with? The more thorough the explanation, the more likely it is that the event will be covered in the press.

Secondly, preliminary information is expected to answer the question of what the objectives of the public servants' work are. Besides information on official visits and ministers' meetings, the preliminary information should, if possible, provide broader information about the goals of draft acts and projects and the activities pertaining to their preparation. This also applies to working groups that meet abroad, and in whose activities various specialists take part.

Where do Estonia's interests lie? Preliminary information on foreign visits, and especially on working groups and meetings on European Union topics, should specify Estonia's position, interest and goal which is being represented and defended. What is the news value? The efforts of working groups dealing with salient events could be made clear in the preliminary information - questions that incite discussions and controversial issues are dealt with everywhere, so why not provide an indication as to these efforts.
PRESS CONFERENCES AND PRESS BRIEFINGS

GOVERNMENT BODIES’ PRESS CONFERENCES
The primary prerequisite for holding a press conference is the existence of news. Journalists are disappointed if they come away from a press conference without an interesting story. Thus it should always be thoroughly considered whether a press conference is necessary or whether sending a press release or backgrounder is enough.

A press conference gives a government body’s representatives a chance to talk with the public via the media, speaking of goals, decisions and activities and if necessary, providing instructions for further action.

- Prepare talking points for the person who will be appearing at the press conference. Bring out up to three ideas.
- Think through the answers to possible questions from journalists. Take into consideration that questions need not pertain only the main topic of the press conferences.
- Post the background materials on the topic of the press conference online no later than the end of the press conference. At the end of the press conference, post a recording and/or transcript of the press conference online.

GOVERNMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
Each Thursday after the government sitting, a government press conference is held at Stenbock House. Good practice is that the prime minister takes part in the press conference (or the minister who is serving in the capacity as the prime minister) and two or three other ministers. The prime minister provides an overview of the most important decisions at the sitting, and the other ministers speak of the most important topics discussed at the sitting, or matters not discussed at the sitting.

The ministry’s public relations department has a key task - to remember that the ministers must keep the Thursday press conference slot free in their schedules and would always be ready to take part in the post-sitting press conference.

The government communication unit provides a livecast from the government press conferences, which can be viewed on the government website. After the press conference, the recording of the press conference is also posted. In the case of more important topics, the government communication unit also produces separate video clips that can be viewed on the government website and shared from the government’s YouTube channel: http://www.youtube.com/user/ValitsuseUudised.
All video clips produced by the government communication unit can be used by other government bodies on their website or linked to in press releases on an appropriate topic. The government communication unit can also be notified if there is a desire for a video clip on a specific topic. The government communication unit can edit the press conference recording into a suitable clip that the government body can disseminate via its communication channels.

Besides the videos, photographs from the press conferences are also available on the government website. These, too, may be used by ministries if needed on their website or attached to press releases.

In exceptional cases, the government holds extraordinary press conferences. The ministers’ participation in these is decided based on the topic at hand and whether the presence of several ministers is necessary in a given case.

BACKGROUND BRIEFING
Taking part in a backgrounder allows journalists to increase their expertise in certain fields and be better up to date with the government’s objectives and planned actions. The prerequisite for holding a background briefing need not be a news story.

For instance the government communication unit has held backgrounders on key foreign visits by the prime minister and on the eve of the European Council meeting and to allow specialists to explain or provide detail on important issues. These backgrounders are generally informal and off the record but the background information handed out to journalists at the briefing are posted publicly on the government website.

The government communication unit has organized unofficial meetings for the prime minister with editors in chief of national and regional newspapers, editors in chief of electronic media outlets, Russian-language media outlets and international media representatives.
GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION VIA THE INTERNET

At a time when over three-fourths of the Estonian population uses the Internet, it is essential that the possibilities of the new media be utilized in government communications.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COMMUNICATION CHANNEL OF A STATE AGENCY

A state agency can participate in social media if its officials know how to communicate in different environments and compare their impact. Communication in social media moves in two directions: interactive environments shouldn’t be used as information boards.

There are no agencies that have the capacity to participate in all social media environments and this isn’t necessary either - they just have to find the most effective channels. The things to consider when choosing a suitable channel are the time and human resource, the special features and relevance of the environment and the target group, and also the information that the agency plans to give.

All employees may represent the agency in social media within the scope of their competence, unless otherwise specified in the public communication guidelines.

Before an agency starts participating in social media, it should specify the clear goals of this activity: what does the agency want to achieve and how, or the concept of its presence in social media? The agency must appoint a person who is responsible for the agency’s social media channel, so that everything works technically and all questions are answered, and they would also monitor social media.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Listen
The first thing is to find out which environments are used by the target groups the agency wants to reach, and where discussions on the subjects that interest the agency are taking place. Since everyone has an equal opportunity of making themselves heard and visible in social media and to develop discussions, then a private channel may prove to be more effective than an official one.

There are various solutions to monitoring social media, which are easy to install: news feeds (RSS), keyword searches in networks, search engines of web logs, etc.
Speak
Information must be given consistently and at the frequency appropriate for the specific social media channel. The number of posts can be increased in the event of a crisis or if the subject becomes topical in other (social) media channels.

Messages must be clear, officialese must be avoided and audio-visual material should be added when possible. The nature of the web environment determinates the format and detail of messages.

Excessive automation should be avoided: sending the same message to several social media channels may seem disrespectful towards the addressee. Every social media channel is unique with its manner of speaking, communication style and community, who expect that certain rules of behaviour be observed. Social media also calls for interaction, which means that the agency has to be prepared for feedback and comments in every environment.

A colleague should read any work-related blog posts before they are published in order to make sure it is not ambiguous and contains no factual mistakes.

Participate
Answers to questions and comments must be given quickly: for example, within a couple of hours on Facebook, and at least within the same day in a web log. The subject can be discussed further, additional information can be given and questions can be asked in the comments following the message.

Any debates concerning the agency’s areas of activity also occur in places other than the social media space created by the agency (these places can be found with monitoring). It is also a suitable place for having a say as the agency’s employee. It pays to keep an eye on social media environments where the agency’s subjects are discussed (blogs of agencies and individuals) and to get in contact with the people who administer them in order to offer them competent information and involve them in relevant discussions. It is also good to publish certain information on the websites of partners from time to time, as cross-referencing increases visibility.

Posting on clearly provocative websites, which present information in a biased manner or have a style that is not respectable, must be avoided.

Everyone can generally comment on the posts published by the agency in social media and these comments are usually not checked before publication. Only posts that are indecent or promote violence or have nothing to do with the subject (junk) are removed. Criticising opinions
that are different is not good practice, but any factual mistakes discovered should be corrected and a reference to correct information must be included.

Crisis communication
The public needs more information during a crisis and attention is often turned towards social media channels. An information flow like this may be difficult to grasp and it may come from persons who are not qualified to give it. It is therefore important to start participating actively in social media in the initial stages of the crisis and to gather information and steer people interested in this information to the websites and social media channels of the agency.

Social media monitoring helps to predict a crisis before ordinary media starts dealing with the subject. The agency should not wait for media inquiries, but launch active communication activities as soon as the first signs of threat appear. It pays to remember that the authority’s official channel in social media need not seem more reliable than any other channel, especially if unofficial information reaches interested persons faster.

People who observe social media presume that they will find information faster and receive quicker answers to their queries than in ordinary media. Even a couple of sentences about the course of events and further activities may reduce tension and reduce communication by telephone and letter.

The person responsible for social media (and a substitute, if necessary) must also be appointed in crisis communication. Well-functioning channels and the competence of officials are the basis of crisis management in social media.

REMINDER FOR OFFICIALS PARTICIPATING IN SOCIAL MEDIA

An official also observes the public service code of ethics in social media

- An official, even when acting as a private person, must maintain the good reputation of public service when participating in social media.
- The principles of the public service code of ethics also apply in virtual space.

Officials also have to be responsible in social media

- An official must avoid anonymity when speaking about their work, agency and colleagues.
- An official should indicate whether the opinion they express is their personal opinion or the official standpoint of the agency by including a relevant note with the post.
An official must weigh everything they post for others to read. It must be kept in mind that anonymity on the web is deceptive: everything people do leaves a trace by which they can be identified.

The quality of communication must never slip
- Words and pictures carry more weight in social media than in everyday communication: every text, photo and video uploaded on the Internet may remain there forever and the author may no longer have the right to decide what happens to them.
- An official must always consider whether the wording of the post is accurate enough so that the author’s opinion cannot be interpreted arbitrarily or in a manner that is harmful to the author. If the values and opinions expressed in social media are open to various interpretations, this conflict can be transferred to the official’s service in the agency.

Officials should stick to their competence when discussing work-related matters
- It is usually permitted and good practice to present personal professional knowledge and experience in discussions taking place in social media. Officials should avoid speaking and giving opinions on subjects where they lack competence and experience.
- Giving misleading or incorrect information reduces the official’s and thereby also the agency’s reliability. Also, giving opinions that are incompetent or based on insufficient information also created the threat that, due to their lack of knowledge, officials may give out information that is sensitive or subject to restricted access.

Privacy requires particular attention
- The security settings of a social network must always be thoroughly reviewed. Only the closest friends and acquaintances should have access to the most personal information.
- Giving information about one’s private life must be carefully considered. Users should think whether they should share detailed information about their lives and hobbies with the community and how necessary it is.
- Giving information about friends, relatives or other people may threaten their right to privacy. People should always be asked whether they agree to the publication of information about their private lives or sensitive personal details. The principle is “Treat others how you want to be treated”. People have a different understanding of privacy, which is why this principle must always be conservatively observed.
- People should not be tagged in photos without their permission.
Data published in common networks may be abused
- Seemingly innocent information that is published in a social network may be a valuable source for criminals (e.g. saying when someone is away from home, or describing their possessions).
- Photos that may damage the agency’s security must not be published. For example, photos that show the locations of the agency’s security cameras give criminals the information they need when planning crimes.
- Information about officials who work with sensitive information (detailed work-related information, personal weaknesses, etc.) may interest foreign intelligence services. Officials should therefore be cautious with information that the official themselves and other people post about them in social media.
- Considering unsuitable information, every official must make sure that information that is offensive or violates privacy is removed.

Publication of information that is sensitive or for internal use only is prohibited
- Ignoring the prohibition on publishing information that is for internal use only is punishable pursuant to legislation. It is also prohibited to publish information that has become known to the official during their services the publication of which would damage the reliability of the agency or public service.
- Officials should consult their line managers if they have doubts about the information they may publish.

The general principles of Internet security must also be observed in social media
- Computer viruses and other malware are also spread in social media. It is easy to overcome the communication barrier with a fake account in a social media channel and then send viruses, steal user data and obtain information that is sensitive from the state’s point of view.
- Identify theft, which may cause serious reputation and financial damage to the victim, is also widespread in social media.

GOVERNMENT BODY WEBSITES
It is elementary fact that all government bodies have websites and that the basic objectives of these sites do not differ from the general communication objectives:
- to make information on the government body’s goals, decisions and activities, people’s rights and responsibilities and functioning of the state available to everyone.
- to allow people to communicate conveniently and productively with government bodies.
- if necessary, to warn people and provide instruction for protection of their life, health and property.
The government body’s website must display prominently the main areas of activity of the agency (the areas of competence and responsibility), simple access to the information specified in the Public Information Act and services provided by the agency.

It is also to display prominently information that is most frequently queried. You can determine this by keeping track of the user statistics. Press releases and other content that is frequently updated should be available as RSS feeds and via e-mail lists. Make sure that the information on the website would be easy to find using search engines.

The content on government bodies’ websites must be available to all, including to people with special needs. Web content should therefore be created using the internationally recognized recommendations on the website www.w3.org/WAI/.

The action plan of the government that took office in 2011 includes a point that calls for all ministry websites to have a uniform structure by 2014. To achieve this objective, it is planned to establish a government gateway to all ministry websites. The portal envisions similar design, structure and content administration principles.

WRITING STYLE FOR WEBSITES
Text on the website should be kept concise as many will not bother to read lengthy passages. People want to find the information they are looking for rapidly and read answers to specific questions.

Divide the text into separate sections. Keep paragraphs short – six lines is enough. If possible, use bulleted lists. Make liberal use of subheadings. Phrasing headings in the form of questions is good, as often readers look for answers to questions.

When composing or editing text for the Web, keep your potential audience in mind and craft the text for the needs of those readers.

SIMPLE CONTENT ADMINISTRATION
Web content administration should be based on the principle that information is published on the site by the creator of the information. The ability and privilege of publishing website content should be shared by as many public servants as possible. Each heading on the site should have an “owner” who is responsible for the up-to-dateness and freshness of the content.

Free blogs and social networks can be created to share information and incite discussion on certain topics. For instance, the Ministry of Social Affairs has a corresponding department for gender equality issues, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications has a section on energy policy and the Ministry of Justice has a department
for introducing draft legal acts. Social networks are operated on Facebook by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statistics Estonia and State Informatics Centre RIA, while the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of the Interior are on Twitter.

Materials authored at a government body can also be distributed over sharing environments such as Flickr, YouTube and Slideshare, among others.
APPENDIX: CODE OF ETHICS FOR PUBLIC SERVANTS
adopted by the Riigikogu on 27 January 1999

1. A public servant is a citizen in the service of the people.
2. The basis of a public servant’s activities is the respect for the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia set forth in the oath of office.
3. The public servant adheres in performing his or her duties to the legitimately expressed will of politicians who have received a mandate from the citizens.
4. Public authority may be exercised only in the public interests.
5. Exercise of public authority always takes place on the basis of law.
6. Responsibility always goes hand in hand with the exercise of public authority.
7. Exercise of public authority is generally a public act.
8. The public servant must also be prepared to make unpopular decisions in the public interest.
9. Those exercising public authority strive to involve as broad participation of citizens as possible in the exercise of authority.
10. Public servants always subordinate their agency interests to public interests.
11. Public servants must be politically neutral in their activities.
12. In making decision, public servants shall proceed from public and universally comprehensible criteria.
13. Public servants shall refrain from a situation that may create the appearance that a public servant’s neutrality and objectivity in conducting affairs are open to question.
14. Public servants must administer the property entrusted to them sustainably, expediently and prudently.
15. Public servants shall use the information that has become known to them in their official duties only in the public interest.
16. Those exercising public authority are characterized by honesty and respect for the public and their colleagues.
17. Public servants are cordial and helpful in dealing with people.
18. Public servants are dignified, responsible and conscientious.
19. Public servants shall pursue continual personal growth in order to ensure they can best fulfil their duties in the public service.
20. Public servants shall do their utmost to contribute to the dissemination of the above principles.