



Some Remarks About Information Services Pertaining to Political Leadership

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‘If the Kremlin strikes, we can impose high costs’, said the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen at the 58th Munich Security Conference on 19 February 2022, on the eve of Russia’s invasion into Ukraine.

Today, hardly anyone would argue Russia’s disbelief in the truth of this statement: since 2014, political leaders have uttered a great number of truthful words while condemning aggression, but their statements were worth a zilch.

The start of the war brought about reactions by politicians and bureaucrats: the so-called first, second, third...sixth package of sanctions on Russia. Eventually, the Kremlin gave way to rage and astonishment. Particularly as, against the background of the altered agendas of the European Commission and Parliament, the media started analyzing what had brought West European leaders to the interaction with the Kremlin and why putinism had created the ‘Schröderization’. The author of the latter term is the former President of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves (and he himself admits it), who said during the ceremony of the Knight of Freedom Award at the Warsaw Security Forum in 2021:

Back in those days, when I was a young research analyst and later the Estonian service director at RFE-RL, we in the West at least had the moral clarity to stand up to the thugs, to raise these issues with our governments, in our parliaments, in all possible international fora. (...) Today, the liberal democratic West has abandoned that one-time clarity. We have become partners in crime, colluding with the enemies of liberty, of our Enlightenment heritage of rule of law and human rights. We are the unindicted co-conspirators of our own demise and in the destruction of Russia, collapsing under the weight of its corruption and thievery.¹

The ‘Schröderization’ means the corruption of Europe, which has been enticing former politicians (such as Gerhard Schröder, François Fillon and Karin Kneissl), as well as bureaucrats, to serve the Russian economy. The media, of course, usually focus on politicians.

In November 2021, there was an international conference on political leadership (‘Political Leadership in a Parliamentary Democracy’) at Lithuania’s National Library, which, among others, performs the function of a parliamentary library. The conference endeavoured to encourage discussions namely about the interaction of the making and realization of decisions as well as about leadership, which has

¹ Knight of Freedom Award Ceremony: Alexey Navalny. *Warsaw Security Forum*. Retrieved from <https://warsawsecurityforum.org/wsf-2021> [accessed 03/05/2022].

both the formal (provided by suffrage) and informal (based on values and principles) power. At that time, we perceived the growing tension against the background of Russia recruiting its armed forces at Ukraine's borders and preparing for a mass attack. Still such a context did not prevent us to discuss the interplay of politics, political leaders and information services.²

The force of political leadership may change depending on public interests, but the role of a politician as a personality stays important as much as they use their power to safeguard public interests and not those of a clan or the more especially, the interest related to their 'safe' position.

Moreover, the potency of a leader is certainly substantially influenced by information services. This topic, on the one hand, covers value-based principles (i.e., political views), which are declared at every opportunity when a politician is to express their view on certain democracy issues, and an elector is to believe that statements of a political leader conform to democratically produced decisions. On the other hand, information services nonetheless primarily mean the presenting of data, recommendations and projects based on competent analysis.

At the above-mentioned conference, Giedrius Česnakas and Ainė Ramonaitė, who are involved in monitoring decisions being made, noticed regretfully that the presentation of analytical works to Lithuanian politicians is a formal act. They generalized that the uptake of works commissioned even by public authorities was non-existent or very low. The conference's audience, who were basically researchers, were not surprised to hear such an account.

Information services are a public-funded system designed to provide trustful information to political leaders. Its effectiveness is complicated to measure: changes in the composition of political authorities entail the change of political advisers, who have (although not necessarily) to coordinate their ideas with established servants and experts at ministries, chancelleries, agencies and offices.

When a school student, one is taught the basics of a democratic system: the executive and the legislature are separated, and the judiciary is independent. The issue regarding who in fact draft, evaluate and take decisions is far from simple. When a legislative amendment reaches an appropriate commission of the parliament and, subsequently, a plenary session, it is already 'wrapped' in experts' arguments. Even a more challenging importance this issue acquires when governmental decisions are discussed: the pandemics and the ensuing war in Ukraine demonstrate that parliaments, prime ministers and their advisers, who are used to routine, are slow to react to challenges and they do it with some hesitation.

Within the process of decision-making, most of the time and action go into bureaucracy, though the latter is not so visible in public sphere as political structures. If we look at the office of the chief executive of any democratic country, we would see massive resources pertaining to information services that prime ministers possess. Their offices have a structural unit which is common for all countries and alike everywhere, i.e., the prime minister's bureau, which usually coordinates the realization of the political agenda of the chief executive.

It is worth comparing other resources ensuring information services for prime ministers and their decisions. What is important for us is not names of political leaders but the possibility to perceive the width and depth of bureaucracy, i.e., its numbers and the variety of competences because the multi-layered bureaucracy has substantial impact on political agents. Prime ministers change, but bureaucratic structures neither dwindle nor are diminished.

The Prime Minister of France (with the population of 67 million) declares that he has ten political confidence advisers, though his Office informs: 'The Prime Minister's administration includes more than a hundred departments, which assist the Prime Minister and take part in the development of Government

² See more information about this conference in the following article published in the present issue: Janavičienė, D.; Žiemelis, D. Commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania as a Parliamentary Library: The International Research Conference 'Political Leadership in a Parliamentary Democracy'. *Parlamento studijos / Parliamentary Studies*, 2021, No. 31, p. 116–121, <https://doi.org/10.51740/ps.vi31.780>.

policy'. The Prime Minister's Office has fourteen departments,³ each of which has several or a dozen staff members. Moreover, the coordinating and decision-making tasks within sixteen spheres (Social Affairs; Independent Administrative Authorities; Coordination of Government Work; Territorial Coordination; Rights and Freedoms; Economy; Training; High Commission for Planning; Administrative Information; Memory and Honours; Digital; European & International Policy; Public Health, Security and Defence, Support; and Strategy and Foresight) are performed by one to a dozen authorities or missions.

The Chancellery of Poland's Prime Minister has 43 authorities⁴ and is fully comparable with its French equivalent by its bureaucratic coverage (Poland's population is 39 million). Like in France, the Chancellery of Poland's Prime Minister publicly informs only about the heads of authorities. Deputy prime ministers have ten advisers; some deputy prime ministers also serve as ministers and, therefore, they have another body of advisers at ministries. At both the offices, there are authorities for contacts with the parliament. There are also authorities, agencies and inspectorates for certain social spheres accountable to the prime minister.

In Lithuania (with the population of about 2.8 million), the Prime Minister has sixteen political confidence advisers, among whom one is responsible for contacts with the parliament. At the Office of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, apart from the Prime Minister's Bureau and the body of advisers, there are thirteen departments and divisions with their own structural units⁵ employing from one to 43 officials (at the Administration Department). The Communication Department has 24 staff members (the Office of the Prime Minister of France informs about seven communication advisers, and the Chancellery of Poland's Prime Minister, only about the Director of the Government Information Centre and four deputies).

If we would unfold these massive resources within the structure of each government, they would appear as a relatively small part of human resources. A spokesperson of any of prime minister would assure us that bureaucracy is required for ensuring the quality of decision-making. Though the number of advisers and officials representing various spheres does not necessarily entail an increasing improvement in

³ Pôle Écologie, Transports, Énergie, Logement et Agriculture; Pôle Territoires; Pôle diplomatique; Pôle Europe; Pôle Santé, Solidarités, Protection sociale; Pôle Économie, Finances, Industrie; Pôle Éducation, Enseignement supérieur, Recherche, Jeunesse et Sports; Pôle Budget, Fonction publique, Réforme de l'État; Pôle Parlementaire; Pôle Communication; Pôle Culture, Communication, Régulation numérique; Pôle Justice; Pôle Travail, Emploi; Pôle Affaires intérieures. See Jean Castex Premier minister. *Gouvernement*. Retrieved from <https://www.gouvernement.fr/ministre/jean-castex#rf-accordion-group-colab-1> [accessed 03/05/2022].

⁴ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Secretariat of the Deputy Prime Minister, Secretariat of the Head of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Office of the Minister for European Union Affairs, Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Cybersecurity, Government Information Centre, Digital Competence Development Centre, Department of Analyses, Department of State Security System Analysis, State Information Architecture Department, Department of National Security, Department of Cybersecurity, Economic Department of the European Union, GovTech Department, Development Instruments Department, Department of the Committee on European Affairs, Department of the Economic Committee of the Council of Ministers, Department of the Coordination of the Legislative Process, Department of the Coordination of International Projects, Department of Supervision and Control, Regulatory Impact Assessment Department, Digital Policy Department, Department of Civil Rights and European Identity, Department of European Union Law, Law Department, Department of Government Work Programming, Department of Digital Regulation, Service Development Department, Department of Civil Service, Department of Civil Society, Department of Civil Affairs, Department of Parliamentary Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Strategic Studies, Department of Telecommunication, Department of Digital Identity, Department of the Cooperation with the Polish Diaspora and Poles Abroad, Department of the Cooperation with the Local Government, Data Management Department, Systems Management Department, Budget and Finance Office, Office of the Director General, IT Office, Human Resources and Professional Development Office, Classified Information Protection Office. See *Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów. Gov.pol*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.pl/web/premier/sekretariaty-departamenty-biura2> [accessed 03/05/2022].

⁵ Group on International Relations and European Policy, Threat Management and Crisis Prevention Group, Economic Policy Group, Public Administration Group, Social Policy Group, Strategic Management Group, Project Management Group, Strategic Competence Group, Government Communication Department (including Public Relations and Media Division, Strategic Communication Division and Open Government Division), Legal Group, Administration Department (Document Management Division, Government Meeting Organization Division, Asset Management Division, Procurement Division and Personnel Management Division), Internal Audit Service, Prime Minister's Protocol Section. See *Vyriausybės kanceliarijos struktūra. Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės kanceliarija*. Retrieved from <https://lrvk.lrv.lt/lt/vyriausybes-kanceliarijos-struktura> [accessed 03/05/2022].

decision making or in the development of documents related to enforcement actions. There is no evidence that, with acting ministries under their supervision, prime ministers would survive with fewer advisers and other officials within each specific sphere. Authorities are accustomed to declare that there is an ever-growing need for bureaucrats (when Lithuania chaired the European Council in the first half of 2013, governmental structures employed additional staff, passing it off as a temporary phenomenon; however, subsequently these posts were made permanent).

Decision-making done by a government leader is not complete without contacting not only ministers as well as ministries, but also analytical centres. The question is: which of them? For example, a purchase of an analytical service by a government or parliament can be shaped by factors related not only to the official public procurement procedure (i.e., price or terms) but also the status of a think tank (agency, research establishment or public expert institution).

From the perspective of public funding alone, we should care how much is spent for case studies and about the actual number of analytical certificates or recommendations that are used for the development of decisions. And there is more to it. Of importance is the fact who, i.e., what think tank, has drafted and presented suggestions: though the so-called criterion of independence is important, it is not right in case of private analytical centres, some of which may serve lobbyists' interests. A somewhat naïve question could be asked: did not advisers to several governments of Germany foresee that close relations with the Kremlin would determine not only Germany's political but primarily energetic dependence on Russia? If a government disregarded the advice of such experts, we could ask what the overall role of bureaucracy is.

Theoretically, competences of advisers and bureaus of prime ministers can perhaps be judged by the quality of drafted decisions, i.e., resolutions and laws. But we know that the length of the chain of a draft decision varies: starting at some authority or agency or ministry, it proceeds to some ministry or the prime minister's office, then from a parliamentary fraction to a ministry and goes back to the parliament. It can also be short: begin and end at the prime minister's office. If each decision-making would carry a mark of its 'journey', it could possibly provide experts the possibility to eventually evaluate the effectiveness of decision-making. The more especially from a retrospective and historic aspect.

'For political leadership, of particular importance is analysis of actions, the ability to foresee the outcome of decisions and weigh odds. What makes it effective is monitoring and, in particular, analysis of social, cultural and political processes done by a political leader, who not only evaluates but also offers solutions. A leader should be rational, appreciate knowledge, be free of prejudice and open to polemics. Then even in the face of a crisis, a leader will be able to substantiate their deeds by solid arguments, remain consistent and give directions', said the Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen at the Conference 'Political Leadership in a Parliamentary Democracy'. Three authors of this issue of *Parliamentary Studies* were among the participants of this conference: Cyril Benoît, Emma Crewe and Guillaume Tusseau.

When discussing independent regulatory agencies, Cyril Benoît notes at the beginning of his essay:

While bureaucrats are expected to act on behalf of elected officials, they may use their crucial role in policy implementation to pursue their own goals and motivations.

Further on in the article, the author deliberates about how much of their power politicians are to 'delegate' to external bureaucracy when building solutions.

Emma Crewe, the author of the book *The Anthropology of Parliaments*⁶, in her contribution *Anthropology of Parliaments at the Juncture of the 20th and the 21st Centuries: Methodological Challenges and Trends*, suggests looking at a parliament as a certain ritual. i.e., not only as a system or 'a rule-bound

⁶ Crewe, E. *The Anthropology of Parliaments: Entanglements in Democratic Politics*. London: Routledge, 2021.

institution'. This article, connecting parliaments and ethnography, reminded me of the Chairman of the Committee for Culture at the 2017 Lithuanian parliament (the Seimas) working towards the implementation of the idea to dress all children in national costumes: the Seimas held the conference 'The National Costume Today', and members of one the fractions (that of the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union) tried national dress for size at the National Museum of Lithuania.

The fact that the issue of information services is important for the entire democratic system is discussed by Guillaume Tusseau:

When analysed from the perspective of contemporary constitutionalism over a long period of time, and at the cost of some simplifications, the relations between parliaments and fundamental rights are characterised by an attraction-repulsion movement.

The author discusses the role of parliaments in protecting fundamental rights.

Parliamentary democracy, when it is not substantially influenced by a severe internal crisis or an international conflict, often reminds of a confection shop: politicians know that there they will find the cakes that they usually prefer since bureaucrats will ensure continued presence of their favourites. Still once in a while, there comes a leader who does not accept cakes: for one, as we all know, the attitude of the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was the opposite: he would appoint individuals who ought not to obey exclusively bureaucrats...⁷ Therefore, I cannot promise anything honeyed to the readers of this issue who are choosing which article to read first.

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⁷ See Larson, E. *The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz*. New York: Penguin Random House LCC US, 2020.