CEER

Council of European
Energy Regulators

GUIDE FOR

*Communication
Specialists of
National Authorities
and Journalists in
the Energy Sector*

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS / EXPLANATIONS

CEER

Council of European Energy Regulators CEER is the voice of Europe's national energy regulators at EU and international level. Through CEER, the national regulators cooperate and exchange best practice.

NRA Communications Manager

Employee of the National Regulatory Authority responsible for Public Relations and Communication

SoS

Security of Supply

Clean Energy Package

Clean Energy for All Europeans Package EU Energy legislation comprising 8 legislative acts that have been developed in compliance with the European Union's Committments to reduce greenhouse gas emmissions

EU

The European Union
The EU is a political and economic union consisting of 27 member states subject to the membership's obligations and privileges.

NRA

National Regulatory Authority for Energy defined under European Union legislation

DSO

Distribution System Operator

TSO

Transmission System Operator

Third Energy Package

EU Legislative package of 2009, comprising 2 Directives and 3 Regulations for further promoting liberalisation of the EU internal electricity and natural gas markets
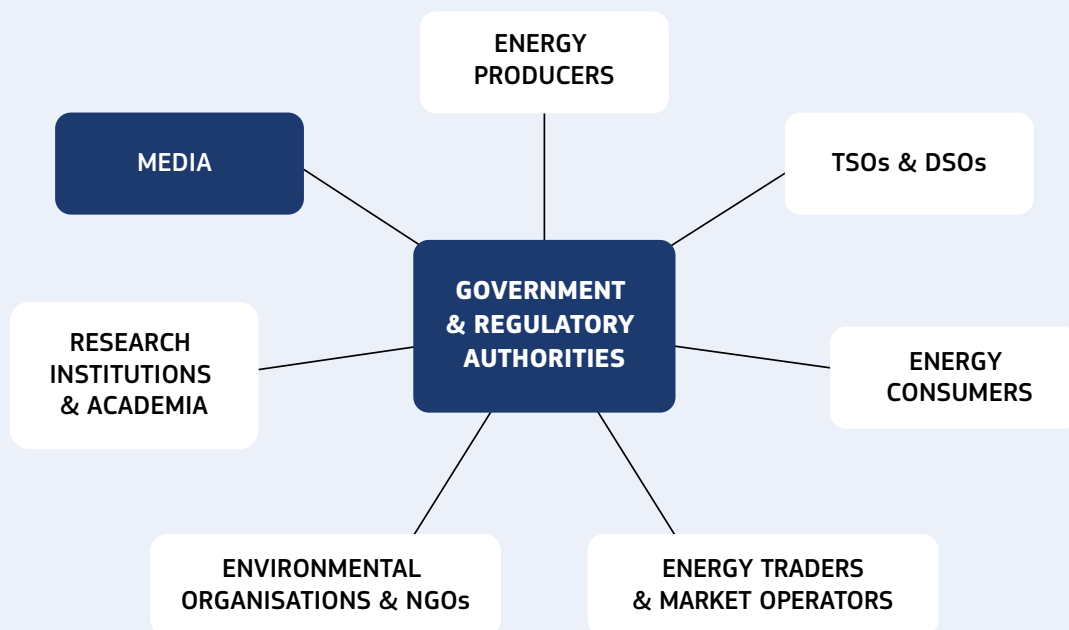
PR

Public Relations

INTRODUCTION

The given document has been designed for the communication and PR specialists of the national energy regulatory authorities (NRA) of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Countries, as well as journalists. The aim is to aid the communication professionals of these entities in enhancing their work by presenting some key principles, case studies and sharing European examples.

The document recognises the fact that communication on energy-related topics has specific characteristics due to the highly technical nature of the subject and its complexity. It also explores the critical role of Communication Managers of NRAs, offering insight into some key aspects of the communication effort. The role of the media and journalists as instrumental players in providing accurate information to the public has been emphasised too.

Energy is a complex technical topic, and an indivisible part of our everyday life. Oftentimes, even though information is available, "translating" highly sophisticated concepts and technical language into simple and easily comprehensible messages represents the main challenge.

The present guide underlines the need for national energy regulatory authorities to develop a comprehensive communication strategy that encompasses timely information dissemination and the delivery of trustworthy information to target audiences. It highlights the importance of incorporating a research component in the elaboration of the communication strategy and using research methods during the strategic planning process. In the information age, when information streams are massive and sources diversified, misinformation and so-called "alternative facts" can distort the objective picture, making verified and reliable information particularly valued.

With its broad thematic spectrum and far-reaching implications, the energy sector is a multi-faceted setting including a diversity of players with distinctive roles, responsibilities, interests and influence. The complexity of the topic as well as the often debatable nature of the issues at stake necessitates a thorough understanding of the sector and its stakeholders to shape targeted and effective communication efforts.

ENERGY
PRODUCERS

MEDIA

TSOs & DSOs

GOVERNMENT
& REGULATORY
AUTHORITIES

RESEARCH
INSTITUTIONS
& ACADEMIA

ENERGY
CONSUMERS

ENVIRONMENTAL
ORGANISATIONS & NGOs

ENERGY TRADERS
& MARKET OPERATORS

THE ENERGY SECTOR AND ITS STAKEHOLDERS

The European Union's energy policy places great importance on an integrated energy market, ensuring energy supply security, and fostering a sustainable energy sector. These objectives are also shared by the EaP countries. The ultimate goal is to provide citizens with secure, sustainable, and affordable energy supplies in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible.[1]

The EaP countries are currently in the process of implementing regulations that are either the same as or similar to those in the European Union, with the aim of developing and liberalising their energy markets. While there may be variations in the stage of market development across these countries, the key stakeholders in the energy sector and their core functions remain consistent.

- **GOVERNMENT:** The task is the formulation and implementation of energy policies and regulations to ensure the efficient functioning, security, and sustainability of the energy industry. Additionally, governments often provide strategic direction, support research and development, and invest in infrastructure to promote the development and diversification of energy sources.

- **NATIONAL ENERGY REGULATORY AUTHORITIES:** The independent bodies designated at national level to regulate the energy sector. The national regulatory authorities play a crucial role in establishing regulatory frameworks in the energy sector and ensuring the proper functioning of the energy markets, in particular by regulating monopoly system operators in the public interest.

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1   https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/markets-and-consumers/market-legislation/electricity-market-design_en#:~:text=An%20integrated%20EU%20energy%20 market,delivered%20to%20consumers%20in%20another.

- **ENERGY PRODUCERS:** Energy producers are entities engaged in generating electricity, extracting fossil fuels, operating renewable energy facilities, or producing nuclear energy. Their main task is to produce energy efficiently and reliably while adhering to safety and environmental regulations.

- **TRANSMISSION SYSTEM OPERATORS (TSOs):** TSOs are responsible for operating and maintaining high-voltage electricity transmission systems or high-pressure gas pipelines. Their tasks include ensuring the safe and reliable transmission of electricity or gas, maintaining grid stability, and coordinating energy flows between different regions or countries.

- **DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM OPERATORS (DSOs):** DSOs are responsible for the operation, maintenance, and development of the local electricity and gas distribution networks. Their tasks include managing the flow of electricity and gas to end-users, maintaining network infrastructure, and integrating distributed energy resources such as solar panels or wind turbines.

- **ENERGY CONSUMERS:** Energy consumers are individuals, households, businesses, and industries that use energy for various purposes. Their tasks include purchasing energy, managing energy consumption efficiently, and complying with any energy-saving measures or regulations.

- **ENERGY TRADERS AND MARKET OPERATORS:** Energy traders facilitate the buying and selling of energy in wholesale markets. Market operators provide the platforms and infrastructure for energy trading, ensuring fair and transparent market operations. Their tasks include pricing energy, managing contracts, and balancing supply and demand in the market.

- **ENVIRONMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOS):** Environmental organisations and NGOs advocate for sustainable and clean energy practices. They monitor the industry's environmental impact, promote renewable energy adoption, and raise awareness about energy-related issues.

- **RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND ACADEMIA:** Research institutions and academia contribute to the energy sector by conducting scientific studies, developing new technologies, and providing expert advice on energy policy, efficiency, and sustainability.

- **MEDIA:** The media has a key role in the energy sector by disseminating information, raising awareness, and facilitating public discourse on energy-related issues, policies, and developments. Through news reporting, analysis, and investigative journalism, the media can hold stakeholders accountable, foster transparency, and shape public opinion, influencing the energy agenda and decision-making processes.

These stakeholders collaborate, interact, and influence one another to ensure a reliable, affordable, and sustainable supply of energy while addressing the evolving needs of society and the environment.

THE VALUE OF INFORMATION

In the 21st century, when information is widely available and a broad menu of technology tools offered to access it, the significance of carefully selecting information channels, transmission methods and distribution possibilities cannot be underestimated. Timely, accurate and reliable information is a powerful tool that provides its owner with a competitive advantage in any situation. With precise information at hand, it becomes easier to create effective development plans or determine the next steps to take. The information age has indeed reverberated on the various aspects of social and economic life, leading organisations and companies to allocate more budget and human resources to support communications and public relations.

A crucial element in the process of information dissemination and transmission is the relationship between the information provider and the recipient. The reliability of the information provided and the willingness of the recipient to receive it should be given particular attention. In this context, it is essential to set proper communication goals and ensure transparency. The Communications Manager is central to ensuring that the target audience is receptive to the information and treats the information provider with a high level of trust and confidence. Furthermore, in some countries, demographics, knowledge and concerns of the audience also play an important role, e.g. certain ethnic groups or other minorities may require a particular communication strategy.[2]

Despite the availability of various communication channels and tools, the media and journalists remain the most reliable sources of information dissemination. When transmitting information, the media acts as an intermediary between the source and the target audience. Therefore, it is critical for the media to be properly trained on specific topics (i.e. tariff calculations and investments, reliability of supply etc.) and understand the information they are conveying to the public. Due to various factors, the prevalence of false and biased information being disseminated to the public is increasing. Therefore, it is the responsibility of information providers to guarantee that they are providing the public with correct, verified and accurate information to minimise the spread of false information as much as possible.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION IN THE ENERGY SECTOR

Due to the highly technical character of energy-related issues in particular, customers without technical educational backgrounds are often in need of receiving information on sector regulations and developments that directly affect them in a clear and easily understandable manner. Studies[3] show that energy consumers are often unaware and lack information about their rights, therefore, it is important that Communications

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2   Status review of public outreach tools employed by regulatory authorities of the Energy Community Contracting Parties, April 2023, Energy Community Regulatory Board
3   Good Practice Guidance for Energy Consumers Information and Education, MEDREG Consumer Issues Task Force – June 2014

Managers of the respective organisations (NRAs, state bodies/agencies, companies etc.) carry out proper consumer education and dissemination of information that is necessary for their protection. In this regard, a close collaboration of energy experts, policymakers and the media is extremely important and would lead to a better understanding of energy-specific issues.[4]

Another issue related to the energy sector in particular is that many of the lay public have misperceptions about the energy sector, and, inasmuch as they vote, these can feed into policymaking based on misunderstandings. For example, many citizens tend to underestimate the effect of diet and overestimate the role of recycling on climate change. Or, many of the public do not understand that simply building new renewable energy production capacity is completely insufficient if there is no grid infrastructure to properly handle it. Or, household consumers may not even know that they have the choice (in many countries) to switch their energy supplier. For Communications Specialists in the energy sector, overcoming these misperceptions is an important part of the role, and further speaks to the importance of the Communications Specialist in the energy sector keeping himself/herself well-informed and in touch with colleagues in more technical roles in the organisation who can 'fact check' when necessary.

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4   Energy Communication Toolkit, Hiroki Shin and Heather Chappells, A Publication in Association with Science Museum, London, UK 2021

RELIABLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Official pages that serve as a primary source of information are considered reliable sources of information. These sources include public entities, civil servants, state organisations, official pages of companies, official pages of non-governmental organisations, and reputable media outlets, among others. Additionally, "influencers" who have a substantial following on social media are considered by some people as reliable sources of information. Through their audience, these influencers can assist different organisations and entities in disseminating accurate information to the public. In some cases, politicians can be considered as reliable sources of information, however, there is a potential in both politicians and "influencers" for biased information that may lead to the distortion of facts.

Different internet search portals can be considered reliable sources of information; however, it is worth noting that false information may be presented alongside reliable information. Differentiating fake information from accurate factual information is becoming increasingly challenging, as various groups often exploit these platforms to mislead people and gain financial benefits.

RELIABLE INFORMATION IN THE ENERGY SECTOR

Ensuring that consumers can exercise their right of access to information and providing them with reliable information is particularly important for the energy sector. Not only it is a major requirement in the European Union and countries implementing the European acquis, but it fosters the creation of robust and trustworthy relations between the market players.

Consumers are at the centre of the European energy policy and a wide range of actions and measures aim to make consumers an active part of the clean energy transition, helping them to save both energy and money. The Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER), for example, was founded to ultimately benefit energy consumers. In addition to general consumer rights guaranteed in EU legislation, consumers have a set of rights as regards their energy supply. Consumer energy rights aim to enable consumers to get a better deal, manage their energy use and empower them to fully participate in the transition towards new and innovative energy services.[5]

The EU Clean Energy Package also emphasises the importance of providing plain and unambiguous information to consumers as one of the guarantees of protecting their rights and obliges different stakeholders (NRAs, service providers etc.) to ensure that consumers are aware of the applicable tariffs, complaints handling procedures, billing data, terms and conditions of receiving services and other types of information that might be important for their empowerment.

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5   https://commission.europa.eu/live-work-travel-eu/consumer-rights-and-complaints/energy/energy-supply-policy-information_en

To find reliable information, you can explore the following sources:

1. EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The European Commission's website and those of related institutions (e.g. the Energy Community, the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators) provide an extensive range of reports, analyses, and resources covering several aspects of the energy market, along with comprehensive explanations of diverse energy-related matters.

2. MINISTRIES

The official websites of the Ministries or relevant government agencies in EaP countries often provide valuable information on energy policies, regulations, projects, and updates. These sources can offer insights into national energy strategies and initiatives.

3. ENERGY REGULATORY AUTHORITIES

These organisations, such as the National Energy and Utilities Regulatory Commission (NEURC) in Ukraine or the Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission (GNERC) and regulatory associations, such as the Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER), often publish reports, studies, and relevant data related to the energy sector.

4. INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Organisations like the European Investment Bank (EIB), the World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and provide reports, studies, and funding information related to energy projects and investments in EaP countries. Their publications can offer insights into the energy sector development and potential opportunities.

5. INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY (IEA) AND INTERNATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY AGENCY (IRENA)

The IEA and IRENA produce reports, statistics, and analyses on energy-related topics, including renewable energy, energy efficiency, and energy transition. Their resources often include specific information on EaP countries and can provide valuable insights into the regional energy sector.

6. ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND THINK TANKS

Universities, research institutions, and think tanks focusing on energy and policy analysis in the region may produce studies, reports, and publications related to the energy sector in EaP countries. These sources can offer independent analysis and research on various aspects of the energy sector.

It is important to critically evaluate the information, consider multiple sources, and cross-reference data to ensure reliability and accuracy when researching the energy sector.

The importance of providing accurate information to the public and identifying false information

In the modern time of increased informational dependence, when political parties and businesses strive to control media outlets, the dissemination of correct, accurate and verified information is of critical importance. As the means of information dissemination have expanded, the percentage of verified and accurate information has tended to decrease. The spread of false information is particularly pervasive in social media, where it is relatively easy and cheap and does not require special knowledge or skills. To address this challenge, various organisations dedicated to increasing information reliability have launched campaigns and provide free methods to help the public/reader identify fake information.

- Checking the reliability and existence of the source: The reader should verify the credibility of the website that posted the information, paying attention to grammatical errors in the company name as well as the domain of the website. Often those who disseminate false information develop webpages with domains very similar to those of official, popular and well-known pages.

- Verifying the author: The reader should examine the expertise and trustworthiness of the author on the subject matter.

- Developing critical thinking skills: False information has the potential to spread virally because it is easily mistaken as being accurate. While reading and analysing a piece of information, the reader should ask the following questions: Why was it written? With what purpose? Does it contain hidden/subliminal advertising or phishing? Does it redirect to another page?

- Cross-referencing the information: The reader should check whether the information is disseminated via other reputable sources and how consistent it is across various platforms.

- Considering the timing of information dissemination: False information is often spread actively during crises to create anxiety and promote specific products, services or beliefs. For example, during the coronavirus pandemic, alarming false information was spread alongside claimed solutions, prompting the public into buying specific medicines or equipment.

- Looking for the facts: Fake news often lacks real arguments or evidence. Unlike false information, genuine stories contain multiple facts, expert opinions, research, official statistical data, detailed information, etc. Therefore, the reader should seek supporting evidence when consuming news or information.

- Be aware of fake photos: Modern technology has enabled the creation of manipulated photos. As studies show, only half of the readers can distinguish between real photos and fake ones. Look for give-aways such as strange shadows, unusual cropping around shapes, and unprofessional use of Photoshop. Some photos may be 100% real but might be used out of context. Tools like Google Reverse Image Search can be used to verify the authenticity of a photo.

In fact, the scale and spread of fake information and preventive measures to combat it has seen the emergence of the "active reader", a new type of reader who takes on the role of researcher and journalist and actively verifies the accuracy of the received information.

CASE STUDY:

During the New Year period, a video featuring the logo of an energy supplier in Georgia was distributed on social media. While it seemed to originate from the supplier itself, the content of the video had no relation to the company.

Instead, the video was meant to lure viewers into a financial pyramid scheme, by exploiting the name and reputation of the well-known energy company and encouraging investments in a dubious financial operation.

The energy supplier promptly released a statement reacting to the video across all media channels, clarifying that the information was false and unrelated to the company's operations. The information was posted on the company's official page. After a few days of intense communication campaigning and the technical support of social media platforms, the dissemination of the fraudulent advertisement was significantly curtailed.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Timely reaction from the organisation in addressing fake news is highly effective.**

- **The organisation should maintain control of the information dissemination and monitor media and social media news.**

- **Establishing close communication with the media is crucial for the Communications Specialist.**

PUBLIC RELATIONS – COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY, BRANDING AND REBRANDING

Public relations (PR) encompasses all types of communication and relationships with external audiences, whether it be the general public or business organisations. It is essential for any organisation to establish effective communication with the public in order to combat misinformation and increase the organisation's credibility among its target audiences. Well-planned public communications play a significant part in achieving success and understanding how to provide information of interest to the public and disseminate it to reach a broader audience.

Communications Strategy

A communications strategy serves as a guide for an organisation and outlines the priorities, goals and objectives of communicating with the target audience during a specific timeframe. The strategy is implemented according to the action plan approved by the organisation's management.

Before developing a communications strategy, it is important to carry out a marketing survey (or a similar appropriate survey for non-profits and government agencies), conducting both quantitative and qualitative methodological research, as well as SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) and PEST (political, economic, social and technological) analyses in order to assess the circumstances accurately. It is recommended to carry out such research on an annual basis before the development of the action plan. Market/stakeholder research is a valuable tool for improving communication, identifying opportunities, and mitigating risks. It serves to assess the effectiveness of the organisation's strategies. The research is conducted in several stages involving data collection and analysis, such as problem identification, budgeting and timeframe definition, methods and needs, sampling method, and data analysis process.

When elaborating a communications strategy, careful attention should be given to the organisation's goals, vision, mission, and short- and long-term plans.

EXAMPLE OF A MISSION STATEMENT

Mission Statement of E-Control (the Austrian NRA)[6]

E-Control is Austria's independent regulator for electricity and gas. As such, our main purpose is to serve energy consumers in Austria.

We provide information that is easily understood and we take objective regulatory decisions built on expertise, with a service-oriented approach that underpins all our activities. Our goal is a competitive, efficient and sustainable energy system that creates the least cost while maintaining a high degree of security of supply. We monitor the energy markets and design the transition of the energy system together with the other involved actors. We are thought leaders in our areas of expertise. As part of the European regulatory system, we develop the framework for the Internal Energy Market and ensure that it can deliver benefits for Austria.

Fair cooperation and collaboration are important to us, as are communicating openly and supporting our staff in further expanding their expertise or acquiring new skills.

It is vital that all senior managers of the organisation take part in the development of the communications strategy to ensure that the tasks and goals of the organisation are correctly defined. The communications strategy can be created by a contracted person, but the organisation's representatives should be actively involved in this process. In addition to the development of the communications strategy, attention should be given to the visual side of the organisation and developing (or reconsidering) a logo and a slogan fully consistent with the organisation's work.

During the elaboration of a communications strategy, it is important to assess the communication and informational peculiarities in the sector, or, define communication goals, topics and channels, as well as the target audiences for both external and internal communications. As communication with the public is a dynamic and live process with often uncertain outcomes, it is important to review and revise the communications strategy as needed during the development of the annual action plan.

An organisation's communications activities should be based on a communications strategy updated every 3-5 years (depending on the implementation status of the strategy's goals and objectives in the current situation), along with an annual action plan. The action plan should be developed based on the strategy and include a list of activities to be implemented throughout the year, along with a schedule and a budget.

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6   www.e-control.at

To align with the organisation's budgetary requirements, the Public Relations Department/Communications Officer presents a list of planned annual activities along with a draft of the budget and a description of the expected results to the relevant departments. Once the draft budget is reviewed, it will be finalised and approved by the organisation's management.

However, maintaining budget flexibility can be instrumental in responding to ad hoc situations effectively. Due to the changing environment, it may be necessary to accommodate unforeseen activities that may arise. It is therefore important to prepare an approved budget adjustment procedure for such cases.

The connection with external audiences and the framework for communication strategies of national regulatory authorities are predominantly shaped by the European energy acquis.

According to the European legal framework, national energy regulatory authorities need to be legally distinct and functionally independent from any private or public entity.

NRA staff and management shall act independently, take autonomous decisions, and exercise their rights impartially and transparently.[7]

A strong and independent NRA is one of the preconditions for ensuring a well-functioning competitive energy market that would allow consumers to engage with and benefit from the opportunities of market developments. Moreover, CEER's and BEUC's[8] vision, formulated in a joint document "CEER-BEUC 2030 Vision for Energy Consumers", aims to ensure that the energy sector delivers Affordability, Simplicity, Protection, Inclusiveness, Reliability and Empowerment (ASPIRE) for all consumers. This can be achieved through consumers' awareness and understanding of all environmental impacts, provision of clear and reliable information and taking informed decisions to ensure a successful energy transition. Therefore, close cooperation of all stakeholders is key in this process.[9]

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7   Policy Guidelines by the Energy Community Secretariat on the Independence of National Regulatory Authorities, PG 02/2015 / 28 Jan 2015

8   The European Consumer Organisation

9   CEER-BEUC 2030 VISION FOR ENERGY CONSUMERS, www.ceer.eu

Branding

Branding is a marketing practice whereby a company creates a name, logo or design to identify itself, its products or services and distinguish them from others. Branding is important, not only because it makes a memorable impression on the public, but also because it acts as an indicator as to what is expected from the organisation/company.

Elements such as advertising, customer service, promotional items, reputation and logo contribute to creating a unique and memorable professional image.

Branding is crucial not only for businesses but also for any type of modern organisations, as a visual aid to communicate with the public.

The branding of the organisation should be done by a qualified PR organisation that will collaboratively develop the logo, slogan, colours, communications strategy and communication methods with the organisation's representatives.

BRANDING IN THE ENERGY SECTOR

Branding in the energy sector bears special importance. It is recommended that the branding of NRAs emphasise the independence of the regulator from any other public or private entity. The issue of branding has been brought to a higher level in the case of the unbundling of Transmission and Distribution System Operators under the EU Third Energy Package, specifically, Directive 2009/72/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 concerning common rules for the internal market in electricity and Directive 2009/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 concerning common rules for the internal market in natural gas envisage the requirement for the TSOs and DSOs to have a clear separation of the vertically integrated undertaking or of any part thereof their corporate identity, communication and branding.

This is important to properly inform consumers about the services provided by the companies as the name and logos are the first information and marker that they receive.[10] Especially at the beginning of the liberalisation, issues of branding and communication are highly relevant.[11] In case of non-compliance, the NRAs must intervene and oblige the respective company to rebrand and redefine their communications according to the unbundling requirements.[12]

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10   Implementation of TSO and DSO Unbundling Provisions, Update and Clean Energy Package Outlook CEER Status Review, Ref: C18-LAC-02-08 14 June 2019

11   Status Review of DSO Unbundling with Reference to Guidelines of Good Practice on Functional and Informational Unbundling for Distribution System Operators, European Regulators' Group for Electricity and Gas, Ref: E09-URB-20-05, 9 September 2009

12   Implementation of TSO and DSO Unbundling Provisions, Update and Clean Energy Package Outlook CEER Status Review, Ref: C18-LAC-02-08 14 June 2019

Below are a few examples of the development of DSO logos or the production/supply branch of vertically integrated undertakings:

COUNTRY	OLD LOGO VIU	NEW LOGO VIU	OLD LOGO DSO	NEW LOGO DSO
DENMARK	N/A	seas-nve	seas-nve	cerius
	DONG energy	Ørsted	DONG energy	Radius
	N/A	SE ENERGI & KLIMA	SYD ENERGI NET	Evonet
	N/A	eniig	ENERGIMIDT	NETSELSKABET N1
FRANCE	N/A	eDF	eRDF ELECTRICITE RESEAU DISTRIBUTION FRANCE	ENEDIS L'ELECTRICITE EN RESEAU
	N/A	Séolis Energies - Services	Gérédis DEUX-SÈVRES	GÉRÉDIS Deux-Sèvres
GERMANY	energis	energis	energis netzgesellschaft / energiSaar / energisnetz	energienetz saar
	enercity positive energie	enercity positive energie	enercity netz	enercity Netz

COUNTRY	OLD LOGO VIU	NEW LOGO VIU	OLD LOGO DSO	NEW LOGO DSO
GREECE	AEPIO	ZéniΘ	AEPIO	ΕΔΑΘΕΣΣ
	φυσικο αεριο ΕΠΑ ΑΤΤΙΚΗΣ	φυσικο αεριο	φυσικο αεριο ΕΠΑ ΑΤΤΙΚΗΣ	διανομή αερίου αττικής
	N/A	ΔΕΠΑ	ΔΕΠΑ	ΔΕΔΑ
ITALY	N/A	edison	EDISON D.G.	Infrastrutture Distribuzione Gas
	N/A	enel	Enel Distribuzione	e-distribuzione
LUXEMBOURG	CEGEDEL	enovos	CEGEDEL Net	creos

Source: Implementation of TSO and DSO Unbundling Provisions – Update and Clean Energy Package Outlook,
CEER Status Review, Ref: C18-LAC-02-08, 14 June 2019

Rebranding

Rebranding a non-profit organisation or a national entity such as a national regulator is a complex task. Compared to the rebranding of a business entity, it acquires another dimension of having a potential impact on a much broader spectrum of public life. Rebranding in this case does not merely equal to the change of a logo or a slogan but rather implies solidifying the reputation and image to enhance stakeholder confidence.

The rebranding process usually involves several stages. The first stage requires analysing the existing situation to determine the needs for a rebranding and identify the direction and specific areas to be addressed. This initial assessment can be divided into four key parts:

- Assessment of the existing situation and the need for change;

- Evaluation of the weaknesses and strengths of the existing brand;

- Assessment of consumer attitude towards the organisation and the services it provides;

- Assessment of the organisation's capabilities, including available resources for rebranding, and potential changes in its work practices.

Another important phase in the rebranding process is to effectively communicate to the public the changes made to the brand. This phase is critical as it ensures that the public is fully informed about the rebranding efforts and understands the rationale behind the transformation.

CASE STUDY: GEORGIAN NATIONAL ENERGY AND WATER SUPPLY REGULATORY COMMISSION

The rebranding of the energy regulatory authority was necessary due to a newfound legal independence. The existing logo, which included the Georgian Coat of Arms used by other governmental institutions, needed to be replaced. The main goal of the rebranding process was to emphasise the Commission's autonomy in its activities and decision-making. The new logo incorporates four distinct colours, each representing a regulated sector: green for renewable energy sources, orange for electricity, dark blue for natural gas and light blue for water supply.

In conjunction with the new logo, a slogan reflecting the Commission's mission and vision was created: "When balance is achieved". This rebranding helped enhance the Commission's transparency. A communications strategy was developed as part of the process, defining the main communications approaches needed for effective public relations.

GNERC logo
before rebranding

GNERC logo
after rebranding

The left side logo was the first logo used by the Greek Regulatory Authority for Energy (RAE). RAE has changed its logo to the one provided on the right side, as it is important that its logo is clear, simple, easily understandable, conveying the purpose and identity of the authority at a glance, Currently, RAE is working on a new logo that will reflect the new functions of water and wastewater regulation, but also the energy-related function conferred upon it on the basis of the legislation.

THE VALUE OF RESEARCH IN PUBLIC RELATIONS (PR)

Research plays an important part in the planning of a communications campaign by providing key indicators, data and statistics. In a technical sector like energy, obtaining the right indicators, data and statistics is particularly important. According to best practices, any large-scale and results-driven campaign should begin with a robust research component. Before launching a campaign, goals need to be defined and preliminary work carried out to achieve these goals, with research providing answers to important questions.

Research methods in PR are broadly divided into two groups: quantitative and qualitative research.

Quantitative research methods, such as mass polling and content analysis, use indicators, data points, and percentages to determine the frequency of the research object. Statistical regularities ensure the reliability of the results obtained through quantitative methods. One of the main values of the results of quantitative research lies in the representativeness of its findings. This means that the individuals interviewed in the research process (respondents) proportionally represent the entire population or the portion of the population that is targeted in the research process. The representative selection of the respondents scientifically justifies the dissemination of the results of the survey to the general community, as a result of which the opportunity is given to consider the opinion expressed by the respondents as the opinion of the representatives of the general community.

Among quantitative methods, mass polling is the most widely used globally and involves studying peoples' opinions on a particular case. This method is based on two assumptions: (1) that the distribution of social events evaluations by the population follows certain statistical laws, and (2) that individuals of similar social standing tend to evaluate events similarly. During mass polling, each respondent is considered part of a particular social unit (group), which represents the opinions of similar individuals and provides information about the social phenomenon under examination or evaluation.

Qualitative methods explore the causes and depths of behaviours in greater detail. These methods combine a variety of research techniques, such as:

- In-depth interviews
- "Life Stories"
- Biographical interviews
- Verbal stories
- Qualitative examinations of letters, personal diaries and other written documents
- Focus groups and group interviews
- Observations
- Monographic research ("case study")

Research using qualitative methods often requires employing several techniques simultaneously in order to examine the issue from different perspectives.

By conducting research in the field of communications, it becomes easy to understand people's thoughts and attitudes towards specific issues. The insight obtained from the research enables the development of more effective campaigns.

The aforementioned instruments can be applied to assess the level of public awareness of specific issues in the energy sector. The results of such research can be used for defining communication strategies of NRAs or state agencies and better address the problems in the field.

SWOT ANALYSES

A SWOT analysis, short for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, is an important element in effective campaign planning. Analysing all these factors helps create a complete picture enabling a proper assessment of the challenges at hand.

Here are some key advantages of conducting a SWOT analysis:

- It enables the identification of the most suitable channels to focus on.
- It provides an opportunity to identify weaknesses and develop means to overcome them.
- Campaign threats can be identified before they affect the final results.
- Using existing assets and strengths becomes easier.
- It improves long-term goals.
- A SWOT analysis is an intensive work process that simplifies data generation within the campaign.

The first step in performing a SWOT analysis for a communications campaign is to determine its scope. It may be necessary to focus only on the content strategy, SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) or a specific advertising campaign. There is no single correct approach to conducting a SWOT analysis, because every organisation has a unique strategy and faces specific challenges.

A SWOT analysis consists of four components:

STRENGTHS

This component helps to identify what the organisation does well, easily, and which campaign elements have proven successful.

WEAKNESSES

This component focuses on recognising where the organisation's campaigns may have fallen short, a challenging but necessary step in the analysis.

OPPORTUNITIES

This component serves to determine where the organisation can make changes or take advantage of favourable circumstances to have a significant positive impact on achieving its goals.

THREATS

Successful organisations share the ability to anticipate future threats and make changes before they become significant problems. This component accurately assesses and analyse potential threats in advance.

A SWOT analysis can empower communications professionals to make informed decisions. Whether it is used to analyse an overall strategy or specific campaigns such as content marketing, this approach provides valuable insight for launching more effective campaigns.

As an example, the following SWOT analysis was used to define Strengths, Weaknesses, Strengths and Weaknesses of an NRA.

STRENGTHS

Transparency in the decision making process

Impartiality

Clearly defined regulations

WEAKNESSES

Lack of necessary human/financial resources

Lack of public awareness on the functions/activities of NRA

OPPORTUNITIES

Qualified staff

Informed energy market participants

Professional expertise

THREATS

Unstable Political Environment

Crises caused by external factors

PRESS RELEASE STRUCTURE

The distribution of official information by an organisation, intended for the general public and provided to the media as an information distributor, is accomplished through a press release. The content of the release should be directly related to the news that the organisation wants to convey to the public. The language used should be simple, avoiding specific technical terminology (particularly important in the energy sector when trying to reach a mass audience) and the sentences should be concise and easily understandable. The release should contain key messages. The reader should be able to understand the organisation's intended message upon reading the release. Both direct and indirect messages can be included. The release should be entirely based on facts.

The following are the key elements of a press release:

TITLE

The title of the release should be short and simple, reflecting the main messages of the release. Sometimes one or two key bullet point take-aways may be inserted under the title.

FIRST PARAGRAPH

The information given in the first paragraph of the release should answer the key questions of who, what, where, when, why, and how.

SECOND PARAGRAPH

The second paragraph should contain the main information pertaining to the messages intended for the public and should outline the purpose of the release.

QUOTE/COMMENT

It can be beneficial to include a quote/comment from a key stakeholder that reinforces the key messages in the release.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

At the end of the release, there may be supplementary information that is secondary to the main messages and does not represent the primary focus at that moment.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The release should provide contact details of the designated person for further inquiries. The placement of this information can vary, and it depends on the organisation's decision whether to include it at the beginning or the end of the release, Contact information should go beyond email addresses and telephone numbers to add social media accounts when available.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If the organisation has a logo, it should be included at the head of the release. Different options such as left corner, right corner or centre can be considered.

CONSISTENT FORMATTING

The release should be distributed in a standardised format, ensuring the style of the release is aligned with the organisation's guidelines.

CAREFUL EDITING

Spelling and grammatical errors are not acceptable; the use of jargon is not recommended.

Co-funded by the European Union

CEER
Council of European Energy Regulators

Press Release (CEER PR 23-04)

Brussels, 5 May, 2023

EU assists Armenia in further developing its Regulatory Framework in the energy sector

*Regulatory experts of the Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER) share their knowledge and experience in electricity pricing mechanisms, energy communities and electricity market development with their Armenian counterparts in the framework of the EU4Energy Programme Phase II – **Promoting the Clean Energy Transition in the Eastern Partnership Countries**.*

On May 2-5, meetings were held with the Public Services Regulatory Commission (PSRC) of the Republic of Armenia, aimed at capacity building and exchanging information on the legal requirements and challenges related to the implementation of EU legislation and the electricity market liberalisation of Armenia. The experience shared with the beneficiary will help foster increased competition in the energy market and greater transparency of regulatory processes, in addition to promoting the PSRC as a strong, independent institution capable of functioning as an independent national regulatory authority.

During the week, CEER experts visited the American University of Armenia (AUA) and highlighted citizen-driven energy actions that contribute to the clean energy transition and advance energy efficiency within local communities to interested students. The collaboration between EU4Energy and AUA will contribute towards raising awareness of the new ideals envisaged by the Clean Energy for All Europeans legislative package for empowering customers and the development of skills of future energy professionals and creating an encouraging environment for their active involvement.

The EU4Energy initiative is funded by the European Union with a total budget of €8.5 million and is jointly implemented by the Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER), the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the Energy Community Secretariat (EnCS). The Programme highlights the importance of collaboration and cooperation between the EU, implementing partners and beneficiary institutions in carrying out reforms and bringing concrete benefits to citizens.

For more information, please visit:

www.ceer.eu
www.twitter.com/CEERenergy
www.linkedin.com/company/council-of-european-energy-regulators/
www.facebook.com/CEERenergy

Press Contacts:

	CEER
	Ms Alba Glass
Tel.	+32 2 788 73 49
Email:	alba.glass@ceer.eu

	CEER
	Ms Nino Bukhnikashvili
Email:	nino.bukhnikashvili@ceer.eu

COMMUNICATION IN A CRISIS

In an unstable or critical situation when a decisive change is impending and a difficult or important decision must be made, proper and effective communication acquires particular significance. Although the first reaction to the crisis could be to contain the damage and set the situation back to normal, this may not necessarily imply cutting back on the communication effort. Uncertainties and non-standard situations can cause exaggeration and inconsistencies; therefore, it is vital to maintain regular and clear communication during the crisis.

The EU Regulation on risk-preparedness in the electricity sector stipulates that "even where markets and systems function well and are interconnected, the risk of an electricity crisis, as a result of natural disasters, such as extreme weather conditions, malicious attacks or fuel shortages, can never be excluded. The consequences of electricity crises often extend beyond national borders."[13] This demonstrates that the implications of a crisis in the energy sector can be manifold and far-reaching, going beyond limited geographical borders. During the crisis in the energy sector, response and engagement of national authorities is of utmost importance, considering their role and responsibilities in taking necessary measures to mitigate the crisis. Although a crisis situation may put the authorities in the spotlight and under increased scrutiny, it is essential that regular exchange of information, clarity and transparency is maintained throughout the process. In communications, particular importance is given to the relationship between the media representative and the Communications Manager. It is highly recommended to have a PR Specialist within the organisation who is in contact with the media and understands the specifics of media work. In addition to the standard qualifications which are often sought by Human Resources (HR) for a Communications Specialist position, it is essential that the Communications Specialist serves as a reliable source for the media, has comprehensive information about the organisation's activities, demonstrates effective information transfer skills, and possesses the ability to substantiate information.

During crisis situations that an organisation may encounter, it is crucial to implement a timely, concise, flexible and pre-developed plan. Alongside the communications strategy, a crisis management plan is necessary to outline how the organisation will navigate in unusual crisis situations. The plan should determine who will lead the crisis management team, the spokesperson, action group members, and the anticipated timeframe within which the crisis can be resolved.

In cases where a crisis directly affects the public and requires responses, constant communication with the media is necessary to ensure the dissemination of accurate information. It is advised that the information is provided by one person who will maintain systematic contact with the media. Collaborative efforts between the Communications Manager and the media should focus on preventing public panic.

If matters concern state security, cybersecurity, criminal law cases or any other situation where premature communication and excessive media activity can pose a threat, it is more productive if the media refrains from spreading information uncoordinated and act as an "ally" in assisting with problem-solving.

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13   https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019R0941&rid=2#:~:text=This%20Regulation%20lays%20down%20rules,competitive%20internal%20market%20for%20electricity.

Journalists may obtain information from other sources, but it is essential that they adhere to ethical standards and refrain from disseminating information until the organisation's official announcement is made. In such cases, close communication between the Communications Specialist and the media representative plays a crucial role: the Communications Specialist needs to immediately get the media representative's (or his/her manager's) attention when unsubstantiated/false information has been disseminated and, at the same time, use the organisation's own communication methods to contradict the false information.

CRISIS IN THE ENERGY SECTOR

Russia's unjustified military aggression against Ukraine and its weaponisation of gas supplies provoked an unprecedented energy crisis for the EU. They caused a sharp rise in energy prices and brought hardship for Europeans. The EU took strong action to address this.[14]

In response to this crisis, the EU adopted a combination of measures, including tackling the issue of rising energy prices, mitigating market volatility, helping citizens and businesses by redirecting excessive energy sector revenues to them, reducing electricity demand, strengthening EU solidarity and other.

Although it has its own specificities, crisis communication in the energy sector can rest upon the fundamental principles that apply to communication in all sectors. Effective crisis communication involves promptly addressing issues, being transparent and accurate in providing information, and maintaining consistency in messaging. It is important to proactively engage with stakeholders.

In order for an NRA to be prepared for crises, it is useful if there is a message platform available. A message platform can be developed by identifying risks and preparing ready-made key messages in response to crises. Hereby, it is also a good practice to prepare Questions & Answers in advance – by focusing on worst-case scenario around specific issue, questions can be identified and answers prepared, such Q&A should be made available to the public. This approach will save time and energy for the communication managers in the crisis situations. For ensuring adequate crisis preparedness, it is important to conduct risk assessment that can be followed by the elaboration of a set of mitigation measures. The existence of a well-defined response plan where roles and responsibilities as well as action items are clearly defined (who does what when in a crisis situation), increases the response efficiency and helps the organisation to handle the crisis effectively. It is a good practice if such plan is widely known within the organisation and the relevant people know how to react. While this approach may help dealing with anticipated crisis, unforeseen events or so called "surprise" crises require a swift and well-coordinated response by the organisation. This is, furthermore, significant for NRAs, as the potential consequences can be profound and impactful. A strong and well-prepared communications team can be instrumental in handling such events successfully by leading the coordination and offering different communication tools and means.

In summary, successful crisis communication in the energy sector requires a timely and transparent approach, along with accurate and consistent messaging. Proactive stakeholder engagement may be needed, and the entire effort to be supported by a well-prepared crisis communication plan that is adaptable to changing circumstances. Reflecting on the crisis response allows for continuous improvement and better preparedness for future challenges.

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14 https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/eu-action-address-energy-crisis_en

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION SPECIALISTS

The recommendations list can be extensive and depending on specific and distinct cases. The following are some essential "golden rules" that should be followed by both Communication Specialists (as well as by media representatives where applicable):

- Establishing systematic cooperation between the Communications Specialist and the media representative is highly recommended and should be based on the principles of transparency and trust. This collaboration should align with the organisation's communications strategy.

- Conducting regular training sessions or informational meetings on the energy-related issues e.g. consumers rights, tariff calculations, market developments is necessary to keep media representatives updated on the organisation's activities. Involving Specialists and Managers from the organisation will ensure the media representatives' understanding of the issues at hand.

- It is crucial for the Communications Specialist not to provide incorrect information to the media representative, as this will undermine credibility. If incorrect information is inadvertently disseminated, the Communications Specialist should promptly inform the media representative and provide the correct information. The media representative should then rely solely on the accurate information provided.

- The Communications Specialist in the energy sector must keep himself/herself well-informed and in touch with colleagues in more technical roles in the organisation who can 'fact check' when necessary.

- The Communications Specialist should provide the media representative with all the necessary core and additional information, facilitating their access to relevant resources and data, whilst avoiding disclosure of confidential information.

- The Communications Specialist should organise communication campaigns to better inform consumers about the impacts of the developments in the energy sector on their rights and obligations, and ensure transparency of and easy access to the relevant information.

- Media representatives should obtain information in a bona fide way; avoiding hidden recording, the use of spy recorders or misinterpretations that distort reality. Such practices can damage the relationship between the Communications Specialist and the media representative. From the organisation's perspective, they could serve as grounds for pursuing legal action.

RECOMMENDED LINKS

#	WEBSITE	ABOUT
1	https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/online-disinformation	Tackling online disinformation The European Commission is tackling the spread of online disinformation and misinformation to ensure the protection of European values and democratic systems.
2	https://www.prca.org.uk/	The Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) is the world's largest professional PR body. The association represents more than 35,000 PR professionals in 82 countries worldwide. The association's mission is to create a more professional, ethical, and prosperous PR industry.
3	https://www.gepra.ge/en/stories	PR and Marketing Communications Company GEPRA has been working actively on providing PR consulting services to its clients since 2002. It is a privately owned and independent PR consulting organisation.
8	https://www.nuj.org.uk/about-us/rules-and-guidance/code-of-conduct.html	National Union of Journalists - For more than 100 years, the NUJ has fought for journalists and journalism. Today, the union is one of the largest independent journalists unions in the world.
9	https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/eu-and-council-of-europe-working-together-to-support-freedom-of-media-in-ukraine	EU And Council of Europe Working Together to Support Freedom of Media in Ukraine
10	https://www.ceer.eu/	Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER)
11	https://www.iea.org/	International Energy Agency (IEA)
12	https://www.energy-community.org/	Energy Community (EnC)
13	https://energy.ec.europa.eu/index_en	European Commission
14	https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/energy-union/	European Council