

7.2 Communication between States

In the concrete case of "Liechtenstein and the German tax affair", this paper has confirmed that communication between States increasingly takes place via the media, beyond classic and public diplomacy. National Governments increasingly make use of the communication instruments that originally were conceived for businesses, especially issue management and agenda setting. Due to lack of basic theoretical research, the field of crisis communication (still) falls within the scope of issue management and is discussed within that framework.

States increasingly compete not only for attention in general (e.g. in international organizations) in order to achieve their political goals, but also increasingly for the attention of the media. As for other organizations, the media here likewise have a "gatekeeper function".

This paper has also shown that political systems are powerful actors in setting public agendas. Apparently, it is easier for German political actors to place their agendas and opinions in the German print media. However, it was seen that Liechtenstein political actors are likewise able to place their opinions in the German print media – especially if the actors were prominent or the statements were pithy enough. In the view of the author, the media distinguish less and less between representatives of States and representatives of the private sector. The respect previously seen in communication with and about the State appears to have receded somewhat in light of the general trend toward flatter hierarchies.

The head of the Liechtenstein opposition Andrea Matt (Free List) summed up the affair in SPIEGEL (issue 09/2008 of 25.2.2008, 74) with the following statement: "Perhaps this affair is also an opportunity for Liechtenstein."

One could only wish this for the small State of Liechtenstein, which had a fantastic business idea in the year 1926 and was able to work itself up from an extremely poor agrarian country into a respected and successful financial center within a very short time. The chances are good, since the Liechtensteiners have always been forced to respond quickly and flexibly to changing circumstances and to face globalization with innovative and courageous ideas. Liechtenstein is also convinced that this cannot happen at the expense of others.

The political actors in Liechtenstein will however have to learn, in contrast to their traditional attitude that the external communication of a small State must be quiet and restrained, that they need not hide from the outside world, but should instead communicate internationally in a more visible and courageous way, and to actively make use of the communication tools they already use within the country. Only then will they succeed when playing the game of transnational and global communication, which is increasingly played via the media, to assert their interests, and even to look good while doing so.