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2

Structures, strategies and spin: Government communication in Sweden

Kajsa Falasca and Lars Nord

After the national elections in September 2010, a State Secretary for Communication was appointed in Sweden for the first time ever. The first person to hold this position, Per Schlingmann, was recruited from the election-winning Moderate Party (*Moderaterna*), where he had successfully designed the campaigns that brought his party to victory in the two previous election campaigns. Schlingmann had great influence on the strategic transformation of the Party, helping it to shift from the right to the centre of the left-right continuum and he was widely perceived as the outstanding communication strategist or 'spin doctor' in Sweden at this time.

His appointment to the government was of symbolic importance as it confirmed two trends in government communication in Sweden. First, it was a natural step in the continuous upgrade of communication capacity within the government in recent years. The improvement of communication skills in the prime minister's office and in the ministries had been going on for a long time, but the increased need for strategic coordination and implementation of government communication activities required a new high-ranking communication position close to the prime minister him- or herself.

Secondly, the recruitment of a famous political party strategist and communicator showed that government communication was not only neutral information on government decisions affecting citizens' daily lives, but could also be perceived as communication in the interest of the ruling political party

or parties, as a continuation of the past election campaign and, perhaps most importantly, as long-term preparation for the next election campaign. Thus, the appointment of the new State Secretary for Communication confirmed the intertwined connections between party politics and government actions.

This chapter analyses the general principles and practices of government communication in Sweden, highlighting both organizational structures and the behaviour of the most significant actors in government communication processes. The data in this chapter concerning the structures and strategies of government communication is mainly based on interviews with press secretaries, heads of information departments and information officers in the government offices (see Annex 2.1 for list of interviewees). In the next section, we will offer a brief overview of politics and media in Sweden as well as some remarks on recent trends and the legal context.

Political and media contexts in Sweden

Swedish democracy is based on a multiparty parliamentary system, where the political parties traditionally have been more important than individual candidates in national elections. General elections are held every four years with national, regional and local elections on the same day. Voter participation is comparatively high with around 80 per cent in the national elections in 2010. Public opinion polls show that about 70 per cent of all Swedes have confidence in politicians (Holmberg, Näsman & Wänström, 2010). At the same time, electoral volatility is high and party identification is declining (Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2008).

Historically, one single party has dominated the political party system. The Social Democrats have been in power for 65 of the past 80 years, and the party has been positively associated with the principles of the welfare state, economic growth and outstanding political leadership. However, the two most recent national elections in 2006 and 2010 resulted in centre-right alliance governments, dominated by the Moderate Party, and breaking the previous Social Democratic hegemony. Since September 2010, there have been eight political parties in the Swedish Parliament.¹

The electoral system is strictly proportional, which encourages coalition building and cooperation between political parties. Generally, minority governments have been more frequent than majority governments in the postwar era (Hadenius, 1995). Constitutionally, the elected members of the new parliament, *Riksdagen*, appoint the prime minister, but he or she has complete freedom in the selection of ministers and the future organization of government work. The government is held to account by the parliament in different ways: a parliamentary constitutional committee,

Konstitutionsutskottet, scrutinizes government activities on a regular basis and may also arrange public hearings on current events. As a final step, the parliament can hold a vote of no confidence which, if passed, requires the government to resign immediately (RF, 1974).

Constitutionally, Sweden is a monarchy but, since a consensual agreement in 1971 between the most important political parties, the monarch has no formal influence on political processes, and plays only a symbolic role representing the State. The Swedish Constitution may only be changed after two different parliamentary decisions with elections in-between. One part of the Constitution, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which was proclaimed in 1766 and is the oldest such legislation in the world still in force, has particularly strong protection in Sweden. According to the Constitution, the government rules only by collective decisions. Consequently, single members of the government and single ministries have no legal right to make government decisions on their own (RF, 1974). However, public administration outside of the government structure, such as public authorities or state companies, are independent, and members of the government are constitutionally prohibited from interfering with public administration activities.

Some of the most important and distinctive features of the FOIA of the Swedish Constitution are its solid defence of public access to official documents and its strong protection of sources of information. According to the Act, every Swedish citizen who asks for a public document should have access to it as soon as possible. There are few clearly defined exceptions to this rule (TF, 1949), and the general principle is complete openness. The Act also prohibits searches for sources of information used by journalists. As a result, public officials receive legal protection if they leak information to the media as it may be a criminal act to investigate who has leaked public information to the media.

The Swedish media system can generally be described as reflecting a mixture of classical liberal ideas of the press as an independent and monitoring 'fourth estate', together with state interventions in the broadcast markets, in order to maintain diversity and independent reporting in public service media (Nord, 2008). The newspaper market historically developed as a party press but today it is independent from political parties and highly professional and market oriented. Newspaper reading is gradually declining, but readership rates are still among the highest in the world and 77 per cent of the population read at least one daily newspaper (Carlsson & Facht, 2010, p. 172). Broadcasting markets have been transformed from public service monopolies to dualistic competition between public and private media companies. Public service media are still popular, but are gradually losing importance as the number of available commercial stations and channels grow. The audience market share

for public radio was 64 per cent in 2008 and 34 per cent for public television (Carlsson & Harrie, 2010, pp. 52 and 71).

Media habits are gradually changing in Sweden with the exception of the rapid development of digital media. Internet penetration figures in Sweden are among the highest in the world, and most households today have broadband access. In 2009, internet was regularly used by 79 per cent of the population (Carlsson & Facht, 2010, p. 151). Media development is characterized by the convergence of media platforms and the commercialization of media content. However, it is an oversimplification to state that new media replaces old media. The most interesting development is probably new ways of interaction and interplay between different media and the success for mixed media platforms such as web-TV, pod-radio and newspapers' online versions. In 2009, 50 per cent of the population used the internet for listening to radio or viewing television (Carlsson & Facht, 2010, p. 153).

For a long time, political journalism in Sweden has been guided by professional principles of objectivity and impartiality as well as strong general support for the watchdog function of the media (Asp, 2007). Due to increased news media competition and 24-hours news production, political commentary, such as news analysis and journalists interviewing journalists in broadcast media, have become more important (Nord & Stúr, 2009). Sources representing influential groups in society have a substantial influence over the media agenda and journalists rely heavily on trustworthy and powerful sources in the newsgathering processes (von Krogh & Nord, 2011, p. 271). Nevertheless, journalists tend to have the final say regarding the framing and presentation of news and therefore play a crucial role as editorial gatekeepers and maintain a strong position in the battle for the political agenda (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006).

To conclude, Swedish legislative processes provide strong protection for freedom of information. Journalists and citizens are granted access to public documents and the parliamentary system holds the government to account. However, the communicative power of the government is growing due to professionalization and centralization processes. In the following section, these issues will be examined in more detail.

Structure of Swedish government communication

Despite the above-mentioned appointment of a brand new State Secretary for Communication, Swedish government communication has not totally altered the tradition of independent ministers who communicate their issues

personally. Thus, the national government does not engage or appoint a principal government spokesperson, as is common in many other countries. The prime minister presides over the government and, as the government's political leader, he or she is the spokesperson for the government as a whole on important matters. However, different cabinet ministers' press departments usually handle communication concerning their own political areas and issues.

Traditionally, government communication in Sweden was something each minister of the government managed as a part of their political work, and the different ministers communicated personally in press conferences, interviews and speeches. However, the expansion of the government communication organization has resulted in each minister having their own press department with press advisers and press secretaries, and each ministry having their own information department in order to manage the increasing communication demands (Erlandsson, 2008). Swedish politicians have thus responded to their complex communication environment by focusing on multifaceted communication operations rather than just parliamentary performances. This way, government communication in Sweden has moved from a point where political actions and decisions were simply announced by political leaders towards the notion that political leadership requires effective communication, a development that has also been observed in Britain, especially during New Labour's and Blair's years in office (Seymour-Ure, 2003).

Since 1997, the Swedish government has been assisted in governing practices by the government offices, which forms a single integrated public authority that consists of the prime minister's office, the 12 government ministries and the office for administrative affairs (www.regeringen.se). The prime minister leads and coordinates the work of the government offices and the 12 ministries handle government business in their respective fields. The structure of the communication organization is linked to the structure of the political organization in the government offices, and the structure is thus based on the different ministries communicating within their fields and the prime minister's office communicating on a central level when requested. In addition, a non-ministerial information and communication department, Information Rosenbad, was created in 2001. This department is responsible for internal and external communication on a central level in the government offices and can also assist the different ministries in their communication and information activities. Furthermore, the government communication structure is divided into three different systems: political appointees in the different ministries' press departments, civil servants in the different ministries' information departments and civil servants in the Information Rosenbad (see Figure 2.1).

FIGURE 2.1 *Government communication structure in Sweden, 2010*

The organization of government communication is flat and decentralized but may also be described as fragmented; there are 13 different information departments and 13 different press departments within the ministries, plus the non-ministerial information and communication department of the Information Rosenbad. The press departments deal with the political communication and promotion of the government, whereas the information departments deal with politically impartial informative communication. On a central level, the Information Rosenbad manages external communication with a special focus on the central government website. In addition, the civil servants in the information departments and in the Information Rosenbad deal with internal communication as the internal part of the websites of the government offices. Coordination of communication between all these different departments has up until now been ad hoc and dependent on the current situation and the persons working with different issues or events. This fragmentation may explain why government communication is sometimes perceived as fragmented and uncoordinated since, most of the time, real world events are not organized according to the divisions in-between the different ministries.

The Swedish government has been criticized, both internally and externally, for lack of coordination of communication activities and for not considering the demands of the receivers in a complex contemporary communication environment. Thus, it is difficult for the government offices to establish coherent communication practices and strategies due to the fact that the different ministries with their press and information departments work within their respective areas of responsibility. Failures to communicate effectively and in a trustworthy way as during the tsunami crisis in 2004 (Nord & Strömbäck, 2009) have forced the government to rethink and reorganize the communication organization and their communication strategies.

During 2010, three new sections were introduced within the communication structure (see Figure 2.1). Firstly, the crisis management coordination secretariat that coordinates government communication with ministries in the event of a crisis. Secondly, the editorial office that is part of Information Rosenbad, and deals with the coordination of internal and external information and communication for the central government web. This section is managed by an editor and a weekly rotating staff from the different ministries' information departments in an attempt to attain input from the whole government and thus coordinate communication in a proactive way. Thirdly, the previously noted appointment of a State Secretary for Communication with the responsibility of developing the prime minister's and the government's collective communication strategy. So far, the State Secretary for Communication has worked on the government's communication strategy and not operated as a spokesperson or been visible in the media. These new posts, units and strategies indicate an increased importance attributed to the role of communication and an intended development towards strategic and coordinated government communication. It is, however, too early to draw any conclusions from these newly established features of government communication in Sweden.

An important part of the development of the communication organization in the governmental offices is the division between politically appointed and civil servant communicators as mentioned earlier. Ministers of government employed the first communicators during the 1970s as information secretaries, and they were all politically appointed. Gradually, the information secretaries became press secretaries, responsible for media contacts and media management, still politically appointed by and working with the different ministers, and funded by the public (Erlandsson, 2008). Presently, politically appointed communicators work in the press departments, and consequently deal with media management and political agenda setting. In contrast, civil servant communicators deal with internal and external information and communication within the information departments. As civil servants, the communicators working with government communication have an ethos of

political neutrality and serve the entire government, independently of the government's political orientation.

The main task of the civil servant communicators is to support the government in its work. The civil servant communicators at the different departments in the governmental offices describe their role as assisting the government with communication and information regarding the work and the policies of the government. This way, professional considerations guide their communication work rather than political ones. There are no official rules or mechanisms that guarantee the balance between legitimate government publicity and party promotion, but the neutrality of the civil servants is an unwritten work ethos in Sweden. The civil servants' neutrality can thus constitute a counterweight to the politically appointed staffs' will to persuade, as research in Britain has revealed (Sanders, 2009). This division between politically and non-politically employed communicators is important in order for the government to maintain trust among the public. Political neutrality is considered a key value with regards to information about the work of the government in order to avoid accusations of party political intentions or political propaganda.

Nevertheless, the division between politically appointed and civil servant communicators can contribute to complexity and diversity in the organization when it comes to the goals and the role of communication as discussed by Graber (2003). While the politically appointed staff is dependent on election results, the civil servants are expected to serve government independently of their political ideas. This can generate conflicts, as political power is confronted with civil servants' principles, especially in an organization that deals with information and communication. Government is both a public and a political organization and actor as expressed by Horsley and Liu (2010) and the goal of communication can thus be complex. On the one hand, the goal is to communicate to inform publics and execute effective governance, and on the other hand the goal is also to communicate the political intentions, objectives and aims of the government in order to remain in power.

Government communicators in Sweden confirm this complexity and how it can result in conflicts over communication content. Furthermore, government communication often becomes uncoordinated due to the fact that the press departments work separately from the information departments and in a substantially different way (Ullström, 2011). Because civil servant communicators in the information departments focus on public relations, generation and dissemination of information, while press secretaries in the press departments focus on dealing with media and keeping up with their need for news. Consequently, the goals and the roles of communication often clash.

Thus, government communication in Sweden is faced with an organization with complex internal structures and processes and with in-built challenges for communication. The new position of State Secretary for Communication, with the responsibility of developing the prime minister's and the government's communication strategy, is symptomatic of these challenges. This new post in the government offices focuses on the development from a point where political leaders simply announced their actions and decisions towards effective strategic communication and the changing role of government communication. As members of the government can no longer exclusively rely on their own abilities to speak to the public through the media, new practices of interacting with the media and the public are required.

The gradual construction of a communication apparatus in the governmental offices has thus changed how politicians in government communicate with the public. The number of communication professionals – both political appointees and civil servants – and the quantity of information disseminated suggest that government communication is transparent and accessible (Erlandsson, 2008). And the government has multiple communication channels for contacts with citizens, media and other important publics which facilitate access to government information. At the same time, communication professionals and impersonal information dissemination can be experienced as an impenetrable wall damaging for open political debates and discussions. Deliberation, which has constituted an important part in Swedish political culture (Lindvall & Rothstein, 2006), is substantially different from easy accessible information.

Furthermore, the increasing importance attributed to managing strategic government communication in order to speak with one voice can also have implications for public trust in the government (Sanders, 2011). If the core role of communication becomes that of maintaining a permanent campaign, image making by strategic communication in order to sustain a government's popularity (Blumenthal, 1980), then government communication can be viewed as political spin – the systematic coordination of communication activities to produce clear-cut messages favourable to the government or party – where the public is no more than a target for professional spin doctors (Negrine, 2008; Brown 2011). But an information rich environment can be hard to navigate. Consequently, strategically planned government communication can provide better information and communication of important political policies and initiatives. Still, communication is not only about structures and strategies, but also to a large extent about the resources available for communication. The following sections focus on personal and economic resources devoted to government communication in Sweden and central tasks and functions in these communication activities.

Government communication resources

In order to handle the expanding demands for information and communication in contemporary society, Swedish governments have expanded their communication organization. More people and resources have been directed into dealing with communication during the past four decades. The numbers of politically appointed communicators have grown from one single information secretary at the beginning of the 1970s (Erlandsson, 2008) to forty press secretaries currently working within the government offices.²

The expansion of the communication organization is most visible among the numbers of civil servant communicators in the government offices, expanding from none to approximately 100 persons employed today (Erlandsson, 2008). This means that at the time of writing, there are approximately 140 civil servant communicators, press secretaries and press assistants officially employed in the government offices out of a total of 4,800 employees.³ The number of personnel dedicated to government communication might not seem so large, but the increase in personnel over such a short time from 1 to 140 places the expansion into a different light (see Figure 2.2).

The establishment of information departments in the ministries was initiated by the government in the late 1990s and lasted until the beginning of the 2000s. Consequently, the expansion of civil servant communicators is most noticeable during this time and indicates the continuous upgrade of communication capacity within the government in recent years. In addition, public relation companies are hired, and communication professionals are

FIGURE 2.2 *Personnel in the government offices in Sweden, 1970–2010*

Source: Interviews (see Annex 2.1).

employed as consultants in the different departments in order to build and guide communication strategies and operations. The number of these additional communication professionals does not show in official personnel statistics as they work as temporary consultants. However, a 2011 media investigation revealed that the practice of hiring public relation companies for temporary communication commissions is quite common within departments (Kärrman, 2011). Consequently, it is difficult to establish the exact number of people working with communication operations within the government offices at present. However, the government has clearly expanded the communication organization and the amount of personnel dedicated to communication in recent years.

It is difficult to obtain a complete account of the financial resources dedicated to government communication in Sweden. Costs for press departments, politically appointed communicators and external consultants are not available, as they do not have separate budgets from the total budgets of the ministries. However, budget figures from Information Rosenbad and the Ministry of Finance's information department indicate the upgrade of the government communication capacity in recent years (see Figure 2.3).

By expanding the personnel and finances dedicated to communication in the government offices, an apparatus has been built in a relatively short time to handle internal and external communication and information demands. There is constant pressure and demand for information from media. There is also pressure and demand for information from the public, especially

FIGURE 2.3 *Budgets, 2001–10*

Source: Elaborated with information from official documents retrieved from Information Rosenbad.

during any type of crisis. And there is pressure and demand for information from departments and sections within the government offices. Thus, strategically planned communication is important: on the one hand to be able to handle increasing media pressure and on the other to generate, produce and disseminate information successfully. The government in Sweden presently disposes of communication resources resembling those of a large international news agency and produces an impressive amount of information (Erlandsson, 2008). Government communication resources are deployed in order to influence media, their coverage and their agenda as well as public perceptions of and trust in government.

Communication activities, functions and tasks

Deliberation and dialogue, through different community organizations, media and political parties, have been an integral part of Swedish society in order to keep an informed public opinion concerning public policies. The history of Sweden's political culture has been that of stability and consensus, characterized by open and free dialogue. Traditionally, great importance has been attributed to transparent communication and public debates as part of the Swedish political 'model' of public openness (Lindvall & Rothstein, 2006). Thus, one expected function of government communication has been to facilitate interaction, as dialogue and deliberation, between the government and the public.

The main objective for the central information and communication department Information Rosenbad is to facilitate such communication between the government and the public. Consequently, the Information Rosenbad has developed a communication strategy during the past decade that all communication should be transparent, clear and objective. Furthermore, information should be easily accessible when requested; the language should be uncomplicated and adjusted to the receiver of the information. In addition, information and communication activities should contribute to efficiency within the organization, and enhance the public's knowledge of the work of the government and the operations of the government offices (Information Rosenbad, 2008). This communication strategy supports transparency, but not necessarily deliberation, in government communication.

There are also some interactive communication channels available to ensure that the public can pose questions and make comments to public officials and politicians. By using the government website-based questionnaires, or phoning the different ministries, it is possible to contact the government and receive an answer to questions asked. Still, there are no other official public

feedback mechanisms other than the written questions and answers that become official documents.

Legislative structures also support transparency in the public sector. The previously mentioned FOIA remains a cornerstone of Swedish democracy and guarantees the public and the media an unimpeded view of activities pursued by the government and local authorities (RF, 1974). In principle, all official documents received or drawn up by an authority, except those classified on security grounds, can be requested and read or published. There are at least one or two employees in every ministry working with demands for official documents such as receipts for travel and other expenses of politicians, as well as lists of received gifts, and so on (Erlandsson, 2008). Information must be provided as quickly as possible and at a low cost for the receiver.

Another expectation of government communication in Sweden is the availability of ministers for media and public. Ministers are expected to participate regularly in the media by commenting on current issues and events, as well as presenting statements concerning political policies (Ullström, 2011). Political actors such as the government and its ministers need to adapt to media logic in order to have access to the important communication channel that media constitute (Strömbäck & Nord, 2008). To acquire publicity, news management has become more or less indispensable for political actors. So, on the one hand, media demands access to ministers and, on the other hand, ministers need access to media. Thus, there is a symbiotic relation between media and politics, where information is provided in exchange for publicity (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006).

Consequently, the communication organization does not only deal with demands for information and communication, but also wants to practice strategic and effective communication. Thus, the functions of the government communicators include media management, news management, agenda setting and coordination of messages. Media management and coordination of messages are substantially becoming a more integrated practice as exemplified by the implementation of the new section in the communication organization of the government offices, the editorial office in the central information and communication department (the Information Rosenbad). The editorial office deals with the content presented on the government's central web and internal web. In addition, the editorial office has access to the press centre where they can organize their own press conferences as well as produce webcasts with ministers' pronouncements or comments on different issues. The aim is to develop a section that focuses on coordination of information in order to create news for internal and external audiences. The editorial office is not only intended to act as an actor in media management but also as an arena for managing salient issues and create news from the government and thus combine proactive news making while adapting to media logic.

The internet is perceived as one of the most important channels for communication, given the high internet penetration of Swedish society. The government offices have invested considerable resources in the development of the government website. The web is also easily accessible for journalists and other political and social actors who can act as transmitters of information and communication. The web is used to publish documents, to promote information and activities, to publish press releases as well as to send webcasts from press conferences and ministers' speeches. It is thus employed as a communication medium that the government can manage and command in contrast to independent news media (Strömbäck & Nord, 2008).

The government website is a joint communication channel for the press departments and the information departments of the different ministries. The website is thus managed by both civil servants and politically appointed communicators. This model fuels power struggles over priorities of content and the flow of information on the website and there are constant discussions concerning what can be published and by whom (Ullström, 2011). On the one hand, the press departments prioritize media management and want to keep up with the speed and demands of the media. On the other hand, the information departments prioritize information dissemination in order to maintain the public well informed of the work of the government. These power struggles highlight the conflicts concerning the functions of government communication within the organization.

The prime minister and the government head the government communication organization, its functions and activities but in practice different information and press departments work rather independently from the prime minister, establishing their own priorities. However, the appointment of a State Secretary for Communication implies that government communication in Sweden is evolving and adapting to an environment that requires strategic coordination and implementation of government communication.

Conclusion

To conclude, government communication in Sweden has become professionalized to a considerable extent due to the expansion of the communication organization and the number of communication professionals as well as to the new emphasis on communication practices and strategies. The term 'professionalization' is multifaceted and contested but we think that Negrine's general definition can be useful for government communication. He describes it as: 'A process of change in the field of politics and communication that, either explicitly or implicitly, brings about a better and more efficient – and

a more reflective – organization of resources and skills in order to achieve desired objectives, whatever they might be' (2007, p. 29). This definition describes professionalization as a process over time with no definite start or ending. Furthermore, it is a process that involves an interaction between structures and strategies. In principle, professionalization may either improve democracy, if communication is more efficiently conducted, or damage democratic functions if some interests and intentions are more efficiently expressed than others.

This examination of contemporary government communication in Sweden confirms a continued professionalization process in terms of staff, costs, tasks and functions. Since the 1990s, there has been a rapid development of communication capacities in all parts of government organization. This development can be seen from different perspectives: either as a natural reflection of the increased information demands from the media and the public, or as an independent expansion of capacities in order to maintain influence in the public debate and keep the initiative in the political agenda-setting process. Perhaps, the most accurate way to explain this development is as arising out of a combination of both external and internal driving forces.

As the Swedish media and political systems develop, moving from stability to volatility in terms of audiences and voters since the 1990s, the government is faced with new structural conditions. As a political actor, the government has had to find new ways of interacting with the media and other important publics. The development in the government offices of press secretaries and press departments, civil servant communicators and information departments in all ministries as well as newer sections indicate new strategies for communication. A more professional communication organization also means new practices. The communication organization does not only deal with demands for information and communication, but it also wants to practice strategic and effective communication. Functions of government communicators thus include media management, news management, agenda setting and coordination of messages. Strategically planned communication is important both to be able to handle the increased media pressure, and to generate, produce and disseminate information successfully.

In the Swedish case, the organization of government communication and its strategies is still rather fragmented. It is difficult to coordinate a unified communication strategy for the different ministries and departments as well as between politically employed and civil servant communicators. However, this study reveals that difficulties of coordination is not solely an organizational issue but also due to the fact that the different groups conducting government communication have diverse goals and audiences for communication. There are internal or external audiences of importance for some, and there are informational or political goals of importance for others. Government is both a

political and a public organization and actor and consequently there is diversity and complexity in relation to objectives of government communication. So even though the aim of conducting coordinated and strategic communication might be shared, different objectives are not isomorphic and thus create fragmented communication.

Some of the early twenty-first-century changes in government communication practices in Sweden have been implemented in order to deal with these problems. New functions, such as the State Secretary for Communication, and new departments, such as the editorial office, have been introduced to improve coordination and efficiency of communication activities. Nevertheless, these developments will require further research in order to be able to confirm that government communication in Sweden is in fact gaining strategic coordination.

However, recent changes suggest that government communication is becoming more politicized in that it is being used in part to promote political parties in government to facilitate their success in forthcoming elections. Obviously there exists an in-built conflict between persuasion and information in the way government communication is structured and conducted. The traditional political neutrality of civil servants may in different respects be perceived as a contrast to recent changes in order to control and centralize government communication in line with political objectives of the ruling parties. However, this politicization process is still taking place in a constitutional context where basic democratic values such as transparency and public access to information are distinctive features. There might be a place for more 'spinning' elements in government communication in the future but, at the same time, it is possible that traditional openness and accountability procedures will limit the effects of such a development.

All modern democracies face a crucial conflict between the benefits and the problems of more professional government communication. Persuasive elements may be important parts of such communication. Strategically planned communication can ensure effective government communication that is beneficial for the public as long as government is also faced with scrutiny. As an information-rich environment can be difficult to navigate, strategically planned government communication may assist better information and communication of important political policies and initiatives. Due to the parallel development of an independent and influential media sector, government-controlled communication through manipulation of the media seems implausible in Sweden. The long tradition of professional journalism in news media and its outstanding ability to frame public issues still balance the increased professionalism in government communication and the growing tendency to 'spin'.

Annex 2.1

List of interviewees

Anna Olofsson, Head of the section for regional growth at the Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications (7 June 2010).
 Christine von Sydow, Head of Information at the Ministry of Finance (15 June 2010).
 Helena Lombrink, Public Information Officer at the Crisis Management Coordination Secretariat – SPKH (3 June 2010).
 Jonna Danlund, Editor at Information Rosenbad (1 June 2010).
 Jörgen Eklund, Head of Political Planning at the Ministry of Finance (24 May 2010).
 Malin Modh, Press Information Officer at Information Rosenbad (31 May 2010).
 Marcus Sjöqvist, Press Secretary at the Ministry of Finance (29 April 2011).
 Mari Ternbo, Head of Information at Information Rosenbad and Head of Information at the Government Offices (17 May 2010).

Notes

- 1 The Alliance Parties (the Moderate Party, the Liberal Party, the Centre Party and Christian Democrats), the Social Democrats, the Left Party (the former Communist Party), the Green Party and the rightwing-populist Sweden Democrats.
- 2 Information from the Government Offices website, www.regeringen.se. Retrieved on 16 November 2010.
- 3 Information from the Government Offices website, www.regeringen.se. Retrieved on 25 November 2010.

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