SIGMA
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COORDINATION AT THE CENTRE OF GOVERNMENT FOR BETTER POLICY MAKING

CONFERENCE PAPER

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I. What is policy?

The word policy is used often, and in many different contexts, personal, social, national and international. A good definition of the concept is found in the Webster Dictionary: **Policy**: "a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future actions".

Not all action is policy. The distinguishing features are that it is based on analysis of circumstances, assessment of alternatives, and a conscious decision. Policy is not itself an action but a framework that guides a small or even large number of specific actions.

We focus here on policy by the Executive. So, for example, having examined and costed various options for reducing car accidents, the government may decide on a policy of improving road safety through driver educations. Many actions would then follow, e.g., preparation and dissemination of training material, courses, advertising, etc.

II. What is coordination?

As a concept, "coordination" is even more abstract that "policy". Here are two dictionary definitions that seem to capture the concept rather well.

- "To make various different things work effectively as a whole"

- "Managing dependencies between activities and interdependencies among actors"

- "The regulation of diverse elements into an integrated and harmonious operation"

From our perspective, there are interesting things to note about these definitions.

- "Coordination" does not happen on its own, but requires management

- "Coordination" allows <u>elements</u> and <u>actors</u> to remain plural and different, while it aims for <u>results</u> that are harmonious and effective

So, in the context of government work, coordination does not mean central control, and it does not mean eliminating Ministries' autonomy in developing policy. Coordination is an interactive process, and the best results are achieved when it is seen as a common search for optimal solutions through openness, sharing information, and cooperation rather than through applying authority and control.

III.   What is good policy?

In practice, it is not possible to know if a policy is good or not in terms of achieving its purposes until sometime after it has been implemented through concrete actions. What can be done in advance is to try to maximise the chances that the agreed policy, that is "the course of action selected from among alternatives" is the optimal choice.

Here are the criteria to assess in proposing policy to the government so as to maximise this chance:

- The policy is **in line with Government programme** and other commitments made by the Government

- The policy or law is actually **needed** in order to address a real problem

- The policy or law **actually addresses** the identified problem

- The policy or law is **effective and cost-efficient** (compared with alternatives)

- The policy or law does not create (serious) new problems

- The policy or law does **not contradict other laws**, or create legal and enforcement confusion

- Means for implementation the policy or law are available (money, human resources, organization)

These aspects of policies and laws should be assessed by collecting and analysing the best available information.

IV. Types of Government policy

There are different types of government policy, but the criteria should apply to all of them. The main policy tools are:

- Spending policy (budget, spending decisions)

- Legal policy (laws and regulations)

- Communications policy (messages)

- Foreign policy (positions on affairs of countries or organizations)

- Enforcement policy (augment or reduce enforcement)

V. Policy development – the role of ministries

The initial development of policy proposal is the task of the ministries. In selecting subjects on which to develop policy proposals to be brought to the government, the ministries should be guided by the government programme and other strategies, the annual work plan, and pressures from their own client groups and/or the public. A model of the activities of the ministries is shown below.

Summary Table: Roles and responsibilities in the 12 Steps of the Policy Process (from SIGMA Paper # 39)

----------------------------------- Step in policy process	Body with <u>lead</u> role for preparation/support	Other contributing bodies
1. Definition of priorities	Parties, PM Cabinet (General Secretariat)	General Secretariat, all ministries
2. Policy and legislative planning	General Secretariat	All ministries, Legislative Secretariat
3. Preparation of policy proposals	**Proposing ministry**	Working groups, NGOs, outside experts
4. Preparation of legal drafts	**Proposing ministry**	Working groups, NGOs, Legislative Secretariat, outside experts
5. Inter-ministerial consultations	**Proposing ministry**	Some/all other ministries (normally MoF in horizontal capacity)
6. Submission to General Secretariat	**Proposing ministry**	
7. Review by General Secretariat	General Secretariat	Proposing ministry
8. Review by Commissions	General Secretariat	Proposing ministry
9. Decision by Government	General Secretariat	Proposing ministry
10. Parliamentary process and passage	Parliamentary Office	General Secretariat, Proposing ministry
11. Implementation	**Proposing ministry**	NGOs, outside experts, local government
12. Monitoring and evaluation	**Proposing ministry**, General Secretariat	Outside experts, NGOs

VI. Reasons for policy coordination

The ministries have the essential expertise in their own domains to prepare policy proposals. However, most policy cut-across the domains of more than one ministry. Also, some general technical expertise may not exist sufficiently in any one ministry, and may exist only in the centre of government (e.g., certain legal expertise, certain expertise related to EU matters). So, while policy is developed in ministries, it should be coordinated by the centre in order to ensure that the overall system:

- Creates polices that are not deficient in law or substance, are consistent with one another, are economically efficient and do not impose unnecessary regulatory burdens;

- Creates policies that are in line with overall government priorities;

- Creates policies that are sustainable in budgetary terms;

- Ensures that decisions can be implemented;

- Supports principles of integrity in government through transparency and consultation with the public; and

- Lays the foundations for operating effectively within the EU.

VII.   An effective system of policy coordination

An effective system of policy coordination is characterised by the following:

- The Government **agenda is planned** clearly, ideally for a year but at least for the coming weeks and the coming months

- **Ministries consult each other** on draft laws and policy papers, so that they are not conflicting with each other's objectives

- The Government takes decisions on the basis of **adequate information**, coherently presented, well argued and with clear cost estimates

- Decisions are in line with the **money to implement** them

- Individual decisions are related to the **Government's stated priorities**

- There is a process to resolve minor (and even "medium") disagreements between ministries so that **disputes are settled before** the Government meets

- The process is monitored on a regular basis

VIII.   Dimensions of coordination within the Centre of Government (CoG)

Extensive comparative research has shown that, as a general rule the institution(s) at the centre of the government (e.g., General Secretariat, general secretariat, Legislative Secretariat, Office for European Integration) perform the following **eight tasks:**
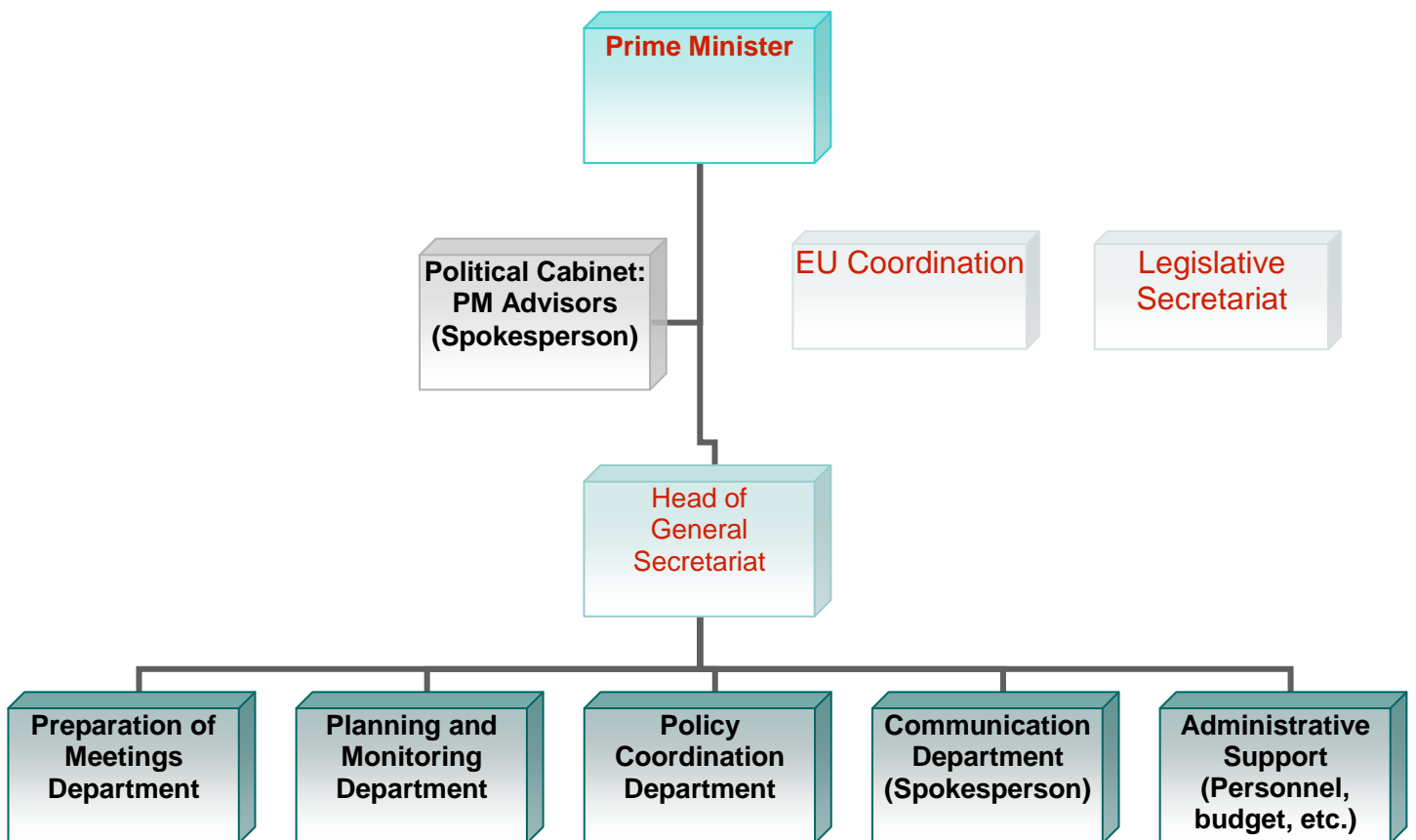
1. Preparing Government sessions;

2. Coordinating legal conformity;

3. Drafting the Government Action Plan (prioritization, strategic planning and adjustment to the Budget);

4. Coordinating the content of policy documents (quality of policies) and settling divergences;

5. Communicating with mass media;

6. Monitoring Government performance;

7. Relations with other public authorities (Presidency, Parlament)

8. Coordinating certain horizontal strategic priorities (European integration, public administration reform etc.)

In assessing the adequacy of any coordination system, the first simple test is to check if all these dimensions are in fact present and actually performed. A second test is, of course, how well they are performed.

IX.Schematic structure of the Centre of Government (CoG)

There is no one structure common to all (or even most) centres of government. However, in some combination or another, the units shown below are normally present, although the reporting relations and overall structure (one institution or more?) vary significantly. For example, in some cases the legislative functions is performed by a unit within the General Secretariat, as is also the case of EU Coordination. What is important is to have the necessary units to perform the required 8 dimensions of coordination.

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                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │ Prime Minister  │
                        └─────────────────┘
                                 │
    ┌──────────────────┐        │      ┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
    │ Political Cabinet:│───────┤      │ EU Coordination  │   │   Legislative    │
    │   PM Advisors    │        │      └──────────────────┘   │   Secretariat    │
    │ (Spokesperson)   │        │                             └──────────────────┘
    └──────────────────┘        │
                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │    Head of      │
                        │    General      │
                        │   Secretariat   │
                        └─────────────────┘
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| Preparation of Meetings Department | Planning and Monitoring Department | Policy Coordination Department | Communication Department (Spokesperson) | Administrative Support (Personnel, budget, etc.) |

X. Main activities of the Centre of Government (CoG)

Another way to look at the picture is to look at the main activities that should be performed by the coordinating institution(s). The main ones are:

- <u>Planning</u> – draft the Government Work Plan and participate to development of certain strategic documents (e.g., NDP, budget)

- <u>Coordination and Analysis</u> – ensure legal and policy quality and consistency, facilitate consensus at professional working level

- <u>Monitoring</u> – follow-up government decisions, report

- <u>Advising</u> – advise Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers, the Head of the General Secretariat on issues related to policy documents submitted for decision-making;

- <u>Development of Methodologies</u> and support to policy-preparation and training in the Ministries

- <u>Management of the Policy System</u> – enforce RoP

- <u>Logistical Support to the Government Meetings</u> – agenda, material, circulation, note-taking, minutes

XI. Lessons from reforming Centres of Government

Many countries in central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, as well as countries all over the world have taken steps to reform and upgrade their policy management systems, and in particular their Centre of Government. While each case is unique, there are some common lessons from these efforts:

- Reform of the policy management system needs to supported at the **highest political level** (initial decision by PM or Government)

- The reform should **begin by strengthening the main institution** at the Centre of Government

- The reform should be **led internally by a senior official** supported by an internal team and by TA

- Reform of the policy management system can be expected to last about **four years** (or more)

- The reform should proceed **step-by-step**, including legal changes, personnel recruitment, development of methodologies and procedures, training, etc.

- Additional **Government decisions** are normally required as the reform progresses

- The **Ministries should be included** in the reform process at a second stage (a year or two into the reform process), to ensure that better coordination is matched by better prepared policy documents and legal drafts.