EUI–ESM Conference on Crisis Communication

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Conference Proceedings

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1. Introduction

The 2025 EUI–ESM Conference on Crisis Communication brought together academics, communication experts, and senior policy practitioners to explore how public institutions can respond to crises in an era of "omni-crisis", defined by overlapping shocks, hyper-communication, and rising public distrust. Building on a multi-year collaboration between the European University Institute (EUI) and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), the conference followed an earlier workshop (April 2024), an executive training (December 2024), and the publication of the joint *Handbook on Crisis Communication for Public Institutions* (April 2025). The event provided a platform to bridge theory and practice, integrating research insights with lessons learned from real-world crisis management.

2. Welcome Remarks

George Papaconstantinou opened the conference by highlighting the importance of combining academic evidence with practitioner experience. He shared how the EUI-ESM partnership grew out of a shared recognition that crisis communication in the public sector requires dedicated attention, especially given the lessons of the Greek sovereign crisis and the new environment of digitalized, fast-moving emergencies.

Pierre Gramegna stressed that "trust is the currency of stability, not only firepower." He recalled how past crises, from the euro area crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated the centrality of communication as a tool for maintaining stability. In today's hyper-communicative landscape, he noted, visibility is harder to achieve, misinformation spreads faster, and timing is critical: "Speak too soon and you confuse; wait too long and you lose trust."

3. Academic Insights (Panels 1 & 2)

The academic sessions examined crisis communication from multiple angles.

• **Crisis communication during turbulent times: Trends and challenges (Winni Johansen):** Johansen outlined the evolving crisis landscape shaped by geopolitical tensions, digital misinformation, polarization, and shifting citizen expectations. She highlighted "interference society," where multiple actors (and often unauthorized voices) shape the crisis narrative. Public institutions, she argued, must cultivate "organizational mindfulness", strengthen internal crisis communication, anticipate communicative complexity, and engage in "strategic listening" to detect early signals.

• **Monetary communication and AI (Dimitrios Kanelis):** MILA, the Monetary-Intelligent Language Agent, is an explainable AI tool designed to analyze monetary policy communication with granular context awareness. MILA produces consistent, transparent classifications of tone and sentiment, allowing policymakers to better understand how communication shapes expectations during crises.

• **Emergency politics in the ECFIN Council (Paula Montano):** Research on emergency politics in the ECOFIN Council during the euro crisis. Guarantor countries tended to amplify emergency framing to legitimise strict measures, while bailout countries downplayed it during programme years. Analysis highlights how crisis communication reflects underlying power dynamics within EU economic governance.

• **AI-driven analysis of crisis discourse (Dmitry Erokhin):** Using 76,000+ YouTube comments from the Iberian Peninsula blackout, AI tools detected strong negativity, widespread misinformation, and significant distrust. The study showed how real-time monitoring can help institutions pre-bunk emerging rumours rather than react to them.

• **Trends shaping future corporate crisis communication (Paul Argenti)**: Future crises will require predictive analytics, AI-supported content drafting, radical transparency, and omnichannel responsiveness. Empathy and authenticity will matter more than ever.

• **The misinformation multiplier in banking crises (Margarita Iliopoulou):** The Silicon Valley Bank collapse illustrated how social media accelerates depositor panic, turning traditional coordination problems into instantaneous digital bank runs. Communication failures can quickly become systemic risks.

• **Risk culture and preparedness (Pavel Rodin):** Survey data from Sweden showed that citizens differ widely in how they assign responsibility for preparedness to authorities or individuals. Mixed risk cultures require communication strategies that build self-efficacy without undermining trust in institutions.

• **Strategic improvisation (Jesper Falkheimer):** Classic crisis-communication models assume linearity and rationality, but real crises involve ambiguity, emotions, and narrative

conflict. Falkheimer argued for "strategic improvisation": combining preparation with flexibility, creativity, and rapid sense-making.

4. Policy Practitioner Roundtable

Speakers: Florian Eder; Emilie Tournier; Tina Hunstein-Glasl; Paul Gordon.

Moderator: Juliana Dahl

The roundtable highlighted the operational realities institutions face when managing communication amid uncertainty. Participants underscored that credibility is the primary asset in crisis settings. Clear, timely, and honest communication was viewed as essential for maintaining public trust and preventing unnecessary escalation.

A central theme was the need to align internal and external communication. Institutions that ensure staff understand decisions and their underlying rationale are better positioned to deliver coherent messages to the public. Internal clarity helps reduce confusion, prevent contradictory narratives, and sustain organisational cohesion during fast-moving events.

The discussion emphasised that crisis communication is not confined to moments of acute pressure but is instead a continuous function. Trust must be cultivated well in advance of crises through transparency and accountability, and preserved during emergencies through steadiness, empathy, and precision in messaging.

Finally, the roundtable stressed that resilience is both structural and human. Institutions require systems that support rapid sense-making and decision-making, but they also depend on the emotional capacity, judgment, and situational awareness of their teams. Human connection, adaptability, and sustained preparedness were identified as prerequisites for effective crisis communication.

5. Closing Reflections

Nicola Giammarioli concluded by emphasising that "crisis communication is an integral part of crisis management, not a last-minute add-on." The conference reinforced that effective public-sector crisis communication requires preparedness, trust-building, internal alignment, and a willingness to adapt to complexity.

Across academic findings and practitioner experience, a unified message emerged: modern crises demand communication that is fast, empathetic, coordinated, and grounded in trust. Institutions must prepare not only messages, but mindsets, systems,

and relationships. Only then can public communication meaningfully contribute to stability in times of uncertainty.