

# OPTED

**Defining organizations and texts of interest**

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## **OPTED**

Observatory for Political Texts in European Democracies:  
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# **Defining organizations and texts of interest**

## **Deliverable D4.1**

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## 1. Defining organizations of interest

Information and communication from within and about politics are at the heart of political processes, and understanding the current challenges to the functioning of democracy inevitably must rely on a comprehensive assessment of communicative processes. Political texts in their various forms nowadays offer a vast resource to study democracy from a supply (political elites, political institutions) and demand (citizens, non-government organizations, interest groups) side, be it through the study of political parties (e.g. manifestos, election campaigns, websites, social media channels), parliaments (debates, laws or resolutions), individual politicians (speeches, social media accounts, inter-views), news media (news coverage and editorials, alternative media), citizen media (blogs, social media), NGOs, social movements or lobby organizations/ trade unions (web-sites, social media, lobby documents) or the public (social media, letters to the editor, petitions). Work Package 4 of OPTED deals political parties and interest groups (IGs) as central actors in political communication processes. In this deliverable, we outline how political parties and IGs are defined and why they are considered as organizations of interest for OPTED activities.

Based on the OPTED proposal, we include all countries of the former EU28 (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Czech Republic, Hungary and Cyprus). In addition, we also want to include Norway and Switzerland, as well as party actors at the level of the European Union (EU).

### 1.1 Political Parties

**Political parties** are what most people immediately associate with the political process, and their inclusion in any systematic study of political texts therefore is paramount. In our definition of organizations of interest, we include all political parties in the selected countries that comply with one of the following criteria (see also Sartori, 1976; Volkens et al., 2017). We will restrict ourselves to parties represented in national parliaments or the European Parliament and leave out parties with a regional but no national parliamentary presence. We furthermore include all political parties which won **at least two seats** in either the national parliament or the European parliament in at least one of the elections that we cover as these parties are relevant for government formation and because they can directly influence decision-making processes in parliament. The suggested time frame is 1990-present, but we will leave the definite decision for the feasibility study which WP4 will also provide. These criteria ensure that we do not exclude any party that is relevant for the political context within a given country.

## 1.2 Interest Groups

In addition to political parties, we suggest the inclusion of **interest groups** (IGs), as defined by Beyers, Eising and Maloney (2008, also Klüver, 2013). In addition to being voluntary organizations and having a non-profit character, interest groups have the following features:

- First, they need to have some sort of **organization**, like formal membership status and a permanent secretariat handling administration. We will hereby rely on a minimalist definition of organization and consider an interest group as organized if it has a spokesperson and a website.
- Second, **political interest** needs to be present. For an actor to qualify as an interest group, there should be a recognizable will to influence the political sphere.
- The third feature of interest groups is **private status**, which means that interest groups do not compete in elections to gain public office.

## 2. Defining texts of interest

We will include **external** as well as **internal communication** issued by the actors of interest as defined above. We will only include texts that already exist in written form or that have already been transcribed. This excludes communication through audio or video format. Furthermore, it should be noted that not every type of text will be available for all organizations. The text-formats presented below are therefore not meant as an exhaustive list, but rather intended to give the reader an idea of the type of text we believe WP4 should prioritize. We denote in italics for the different text types whether they are primarily relevant for parties or IGs or both.

### 2.1 Internal Communication

Internal communication refers to all general texts which are primarily (but not exclusively) aimed at internal actors. In the following, the relevant types of texts are listed and briefly described.

First, **speeches and motions at party congresses** are of interest to us. Both motions and speeches can and have been used to analyze intra-party preferences and intra-party competition (Ceron, 2015; Greene & Haber, 2016). They are therefore a valuable tool when assessing intra-party heterogeneity and how parties intend to position themselves. *Applies to political parties.*

Next, an organization's **statutes** provide an insight into its aims and structure. Such information is deemed useful because it provides us with a comprehensive insight into how an organization operates. *Applies to political parties and IGs.*

Working Package 4 will also consider **newsletters** as well as **magazines for members of an organization**, in cases where such publications are available. It is a core task of any organization to keep its members informed and share important news and updates. These types of texts should be included, because they fulfill the important task to keep members informed and can therefore be a helpful tool to analyze how an organization positions itself. *Applies to political parties and IGs.*

To sum up, internal communication by parties or interest groups is meant to inform its members about the organizational structure, purpose and direction of the organization in question.

## 2.2 External Communication

External communication refers to all texts which a political party or an interest group publishes that primarily (but not exclusively) address recipients external to the organization. Following section 2.1 on internal communication, the types of texts of interest will be named and explained below.

**Public speeches** (e.g. at campaign rallies) should be included among the text-types of interest, because they are meant to showcase an organization's priorities and what they want to convey to the outside world. They are hardly spontaneous but have likely been drafted carefully, which makes them suitable for Working Package 4. *Applies (mostly) to parties*

Further, we want to include **press releases**. Party press releases have been used to examine agenda-setting (Grimmer, 2010; Haselmayer et al., 2017; Hopmann et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 2017; Sagarzazu & Klüver, 2017) and are an apt instrument to analyze an organization's main goals over a period of time. Using press releases also guarantees that any analysis will have a certain *dynamic*, since press releases are published throughout an electoral circle (unlike manifestos, for example). *Applies to parties and interest groups.*

Next, an organization's digital presence on the internet is considered. This means party **websites** and **social media posts**. Studying the social media presence of organizations and individuals is a comparably new field within social sciences. For example, social media data (mainly from Facebook and Twitter) has been used to identify users' political positions (Barberá, 2015) and there is a developing body of literature on parties' social media use (see Baxter & Marcella, 2012; Larsson, 2017; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Inclusion of social media contents depends on the regulatory framework (also in coordination with WP10). *Applies to parties and interest groups.*

**Consultation submissions** are documents that interest groups submit to legislative and executive consultations on new legislative initiatives. Interest groups are invited to provide their view and their expertise on a piece of legislation. Consultation is an important part of the legislative process and has thus received widespread academic attention (see Bunea, 2013; Bunea, 2014; Klüver, 2009; Klüver, 2013). *Applies to interest groups.*

**Position papers** are an instrument through which interest groups state their positions on a given issue. Such papers are mostly published on their websites without necessarily being tied to a particular legislative or executive consultation. *Applies to interest groups.*

**Manifestos** provide an invaluable insight into a party's agenda and their location within the policy space (Franzmann & Kaiser, 2016). Countless research questions have been examined by using data that was gathered from party manifestos (e.g. Green-Pedersen, 2007; Meguid, 2005; Walgrave & Nuytemans, 2009), which is why they should be included among the political texts of relevance. *Applies to parties.*

**Coalition agreements** are documents that detail the policy goals of a multiparty government, as well as

how intra-cabinet cooperation will function during a legislative term. They therefore act as a control mechanism for coalition parties (Moury, 2011). Coalition agreements have, among other things, been used to evaluate bargaining success (Bäck et al., 2011; Quinn et al., 2011), issue attention (Klüver & Bäck, 2019) and promise-keeping by governments (see Thomson et al., 2017) and are thus important examples of political text. *Applies to parties.*

External communication is, as implied by the name, meant for a wider circle than simply the members of a party or interest group. It's within the context of an organization's external communication where the concrete ways in which it wants to influence the political process are articulated. Taken together with internal communication, the types of texts described above inform scientists about the image an organization wants to convey, how it is run and in what direction it wants to influence the political process.

An overview of the texts discussed above can be found in table 2.1 below.

Another way to distinguish the texts is their *purpose*. There are four main purposes of the texts listed, namely:

1. **Influence of the political process:** All communication by an organization that serves the purpose to influence the policy-making process (e.g. coalition agreements, consultation submissions)
2. **Position formation:** All communication directed towards forming a position on an issue within the organization in question (e.g. congress motion, manifestos, position papers, press releases)
3. **Maintenance:** All communication that serves the purpose to regulate the organization of the interest group or party in question (e.g. statutes)
4. **Survival:** All communication that serves the purpose to mobilize supporters and maintain the survival of the organization in question (e.g. campaign speeches, member magazines, social media posts, newsletters)

**Table 2.1** OVERVIEW OF TEXT TYPES

	Internal Communication	External Communication
Parties	Party Congress Motions, Statutes, Speeches at party congresses, Newsletters, Magazines	Press Releases, Website, Manifestos, Coalition Agreements, Public Speeches, Social Media Posts
Interest Groups	Statutes, Newsletters, Magazines	Press Releases, Website, Position Papers, Consultation Submissions, Public Speeches, Social Media Posts

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