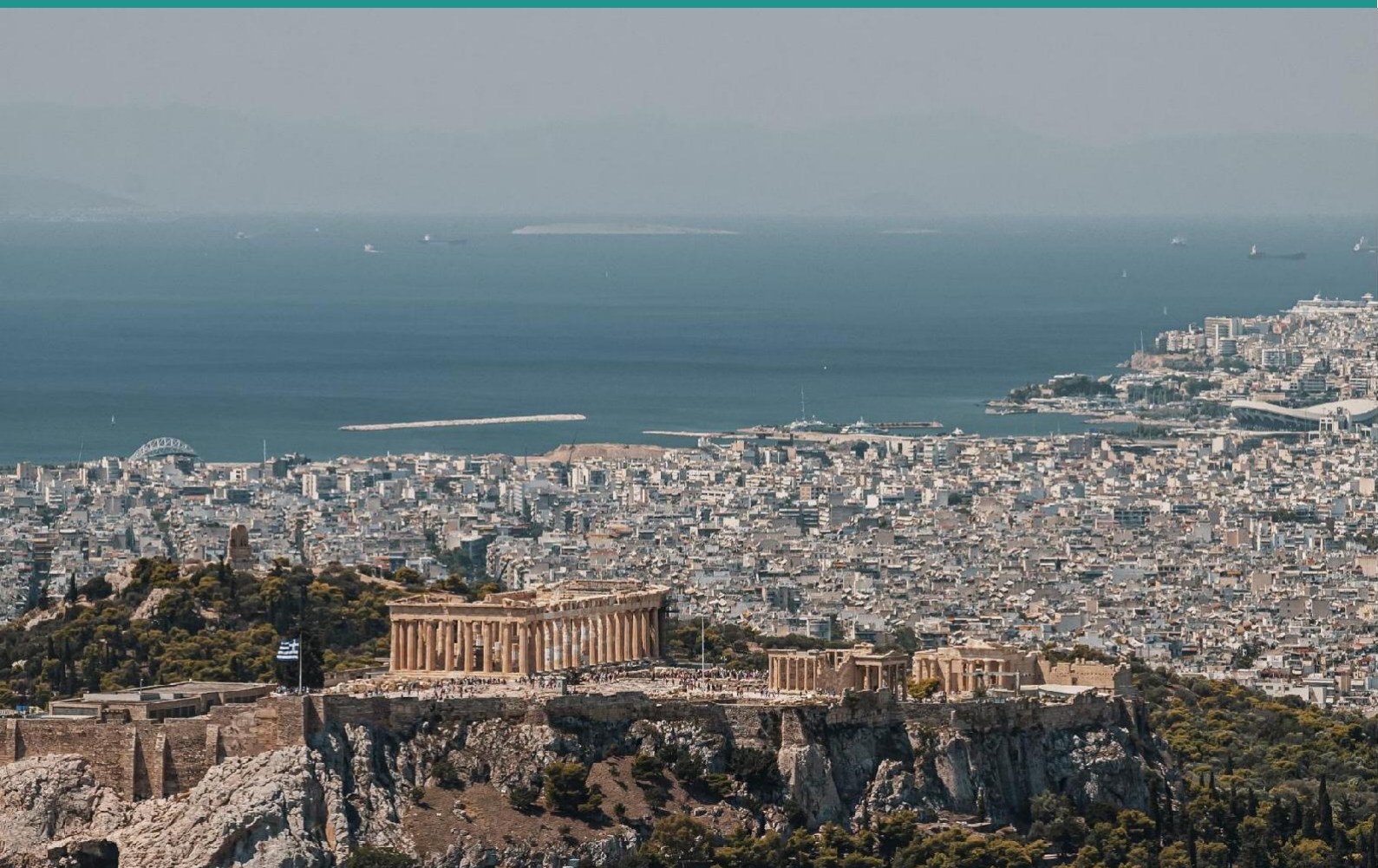


Strengthening the Capacity of Independent Fiscal Institutions

Deliverable 4B. External Communication Strategy

Technical Support Instrument

Supporting reforms in 27 Member States



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Executive Summary

This report provides a communication strategy and action plan for the Hellenic Fiscal Council (HFISC). It forms part of an EU project to support Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs) in various aspects of their operations, under the EU Technical Support Instrument (TSI).

Communication is crucial for IFIs to fulfil their watchdog role in overseeing government finances and ensuring compliance with the EU fiscal framework. This framework (Directive 2024/1265) states that IFIs shall have the capacity to communicate publicly about their assessments and opinions in a timely manner¹. IFIs should develop effective communication channels from the outset, particularly with the media, civil society, and other stakeholders. Given that the influence of IFIs in fiscal policy is persuasive, rather than coercive by means of legal sanctions or other punitive measures, media coverage of their work helps foster informed constituencies that can exert timely pressure on the government to act transparently and responsibly in fiscal matters (OECD, 2025, Principle 8.1). This applies directly to government decision-makers and indirectly through stakeholders (media, policymakers, parliament) who can influence government policies.

To increase their policy impact, IFIs need clear communication objectives and to prioritise their audiences. In general, audiences include the executive and legislative branches of government, the media, the academic community, and the general public. To reach these audiences, an IFI uses various communication channels at its disposal. Based on literature, best practices of other IFIs, the review of HFISC communications (Report 4A), and a needs assessment, this report provides a communication strategy and action plan, tailored to the resource availability of HFISC.

Earlier findings and needs assessment

The assessment of HFISC's current communications (Report 4A) and subsequent needs assessment identified the need for a comprehensive strategy with clear goals, defined audiences, and optimised channel use. Capacity should be strengthened through dedicated communications staff, improved report presentation, tailored products for different audiences, and more proactive media and academic engagement. Measuring impact through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and enhancing social media with visual, accessible content will increase reach and influence. A targeted communication plan is crucial for the costing of election platforms to preserve HFISC's impartiality and credibility.

Organising HFISC communication function

HFISC currently employs a part-time external communications advisor but plans to expand the function to 1.5–2 full-time equivalents (FTE) by adding a part-time role, following a structure similar to the Slovak Council for Budget Responsibility (CBR). The future team would comprise a communications advisor/spokesperson, focusing on press relations, strategic messaging, and advising leadership, and a content manager, responsible for content creation, visuals, website updates, social media, media monitoring, and event support. This division of labour would enable HFISC to engage its audiences effectively, improve the accessibility of its work for diverse audiences, and manage its channels and outputs more efficiently.

¹ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=OJ:L_202401265 article 8a sub b.

Communication Goals and key recommendations

The strategy identifies three goals of HFISC communication:

- A. Establish and protect HFISC's reputation as an independent, non-partisan, and credible authority.
- B. Ensure that fiscal policy decisions and government budgets are subject to parliamentary and public scrutiny.
- C. Ensure that fiscal and economic insights contribute to informed decision-making and public debate.

Key recommendations and actions

In order to achieve the communication goals, this strategy makes some key recommendations.

- HFISC should **strengthen its media presence through proactive engagement**, including op-eds, press briefings for major reports, and maintaining informal journalist relationships. A newsletter targeting policy, media, and academic audiences, along with regular seminars, can broaden outreach (Goal A).
- **Clarify communication roles within HFISC and strengthen the Chairperson's media presence** through op-eds, occasional television interviews, and parliamentary hearings on flagship publications (Goal A).
- **Visual communication should be enhanced**. This can be done through 1) the improved use of visual elements in reports, including simple infographics, 2) provision of a slide deck for press briefings (Goal B); and 3) production of a professional video on the role and mandate of HFISC (Goal A). In addition, HFISC should consider mirroring the tone of voice of comparable Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs) in its mandatory publications, thus addressing budgetary risks and other deficiencies more candidly.
- **Enhance content creation through structured internal procedures**, such as clear writing guidelines that promote plain language and a pyramidal structure. Use "text plans" to align publications, messaging, press releases, and graphics. Provide staff training on writing and "text plan" use to ensure clarity and consistency (Goal C).
- **Communication impact should be tracked with an expanded set of KPIs**, reviewed annually by the communications team and the board, to refine the strategy (Goal A).
- For **election platform costings**, HFISC should follow a structured communication process (Goal C): an initial background meeting with the press to explain timelines and methodology; no press contacts during the exercise except for possible content providing an overview of the process; and a launch via a press conference with embargoed materials. Post-launch, HFISC should avoid commentary to maintain neutrality. Lessons from experienced IFIs should inform all communication practices around election costings.

1. Introduction

This report is part of the project “REFORM/2023/OP/0010: Strengthening the capacity of IFIs”. The project aims to provide Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs) with strategic, institutional, and operational support in response to evolving European fiscal rules, the increasing impacts of climate change, and to better prepare them to face significant economic shocks. The project is funded by the European Union through the Technical Support Instrument (TSI).

This report (4B) contains advice to enhance the communication strategy of the Hellenic Fiscal Council (HFISC) and is part of Pillar 4 of the project, which focuses on supporting IFIs in their communications. It builds on the 4A report, which assesses HFISC’s current external communication practices, evaluating key elements and identifying areas for improvement.

In this report, we aim to:

- A. Provide advice on ways to improve the communication strategy of HFISC;
- B. Develop an action plan to implement such enhancements;
- C. Identify topics for capacity building in the next phase of the project.

2. Current performance & improvements

This chapter explains the methodology used to identify improvements in the communication strategy, recaps the main conclusions of the (4A) assessment report, and presents the needs assessment.

2.1. Methodology

To advise on the tailoring of communications, it is necessary to have an overview of current communication practices. To determine the data and findings necessary to obtain such an overview, we utilised the elements typically present in a communication strategy.

More specifically, we assessed the following elements:

- **The role of the HFISC within the Greek context.** This includes the mandate and overall goals of the organisation.
- **The communication goals of the organisation.** These are the goals that help achieve the overall strategy of the IFI and provide general guidance to the way the organisation communicates.
- **The different audiences to address in its communications and why.** Reaching out to a specific audience requires the use of resources. Therefore, it should be clear how reaching these audiences contributes to the goals of HFISC. In general, logical candidates are: policymakers (including their staff), politicians, the wider public, the academic community, and other institutions relevant to public finances, such as workers' and employers' associations, the central bank, and international organisations (OECD, IMF, EU).
- **Through which communication channels these different audiences will be reached.** There are several channels an IFI can use to communicate its message. Some target a particular audience, others are broader, but each has its own characteristics, which should be considered. In addition to such formal communication channels, an IFI also has direct links with relevant organisations.
- **How publications are tailored to specific audiences.** This refers to the type of publications an IFI will issue and to the guidelines relating to these publications. Consider aspects such as the maximum length of (policy) publications, rules regarding the type of language used, rules regarding the use of social media, or those relating to checks and balances in the publication process, for example concerning readability or the academic quality of the working papers.
- **The timing of publications.** The timing of publications is important, in essence because IFIs can only improve budgetary policy making by influencing the decisions of others. Hence, an IFI should ensure that its analysis is timed to be considered in policy. An obvious element to consider is the annual budgetary policy cycle.
- **The frequency and tone of communications.** To be effective, an IFI should not only seek to be in the media but also aim to optimise its signal-to-noise ratio. The latter implies that an IFI is selective about the type of issues it communicates on. In addition, the tone of publications is also relevant. An IFI should strive to find the right balance between “robustly telling the truth” and being too confrontational. This is to preserve the respect of its audiences as a voice of reason in budgetary discussions.

To assess these different elements, we used different methods, including:

- A recap of the findings of the 4A report;
- An additional literature review;
- An interview with the Chair and the communication expert of HFISC;

- Benchmarking session on communication strategy and communication of election costing with FPB
- Benchmarking with several other IFIs, CPB, OBR and Slovak Council for Budget Responsibility (CBR)
- Additional interviews with CPB and CBR

2.2. A recap of findings earlier in the project

Based on the first part of the project (4A), we assessed current communications targets and performance (3 in the inception report), reviewed the (under)performance and considered what areas need revision or relegation (4 in the inception report), and identified the areas that show high potential for uptake/engagement (5 in the inception report). A recap of these findings in the first part of the project (4A) yields the following summary of communication performance and areas that need revision and offer potential for engagement in the future.

- To further enhance its communications, HFISC should consider recruiting dedicated communication staff. Given the size of the organisation, one full-time equivalent staff member tasked with communication would be the minimum (as opposed to the current part-time, external communications advisor). In response to this recommendation (in the TSI 4A report), HFISC has indicated the ambition to employ two persons (1.5–2 full-time equivalents (FTE)) as communications staff in the near future. This communication strategy is based on the premise of this ambition and contains a proposal for the internal organisation of the communication function.
- HFISC could enrich its current reports by enhancing its visuals and tailoring them to different audiences. In addition, a short summary of these reports on the website could help make them more easily accessible.
- HFISC could tailor its publications more to its audiences. An option is to develop short notes providing economic analysis.
- HFISC could better track its reputation among its audiences by monitoring a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) measuring media profile and possibly policy impact.
- HFISC can further improve its relationships with the media by organising press conferences and by providing background briefings to journalists on the more technical aspects of its work.
- To further strengthen its ties with the academic community, HFISC could organise a regular event (once every one or two years). This will attract an academic audience and help HFISC to establish its academic reputation.
- To reach its audiences, HFISC should consider issuing a newsletter to its external stakeholders. Through this channel, several audiences can be reached, including the press, policymakers, academics, and individuals within the wider public who are interested in HFISC's analysis.
- If and when HFISC undertakes a costing of election platforms exercise (as stipulated by its new mandate), the communication strategy merits special attention to preserve its reputation as an impartial and independent institution.

2.3. Needs Assessment

Based on the assessment of the current communication practice (4A part of the project) and interviews, we defined a clear set of needs to improve the communications of the Hellenic Fiscal Council (HFISC). This has led to the following set of needs, which will be addressed in the communication strategy. The goal of this report is to provide HFISC with the elements listed in this needs assessment, in order to enhance its communication strategy.

A general improvement in the external communication strategy

Currently, HFISC does not have a fully-fledged external communication strategy. Therefore, HFISC seeks advice on how it can enhance its current communication strategy.

Clearly define HFISC's communication goals

As part of enhancing its overall communication strategy, HFISC would like to define the goals of its communications strategy.

Clearly define the different audiences of the HFISC

As part of enhancing its overall communication strategy, HFISC would like to assess what audiences it should address in its communications strategy.

Improving the use of all communication channels

Based on a clear definition of its audiences, HFISC aims to optimise its use of communication channels. As part of this, it seeks to identify who could be involved in managing these communication channels.

The use of social media

HFISC seeks advice on how to utilise social media. Although the continued use of social media highlights their relevance, their use presents dilemmas regarding the level of involvement and requires more visual and interactive content.

Provide content that facilitates communication

To effectively communicate its message, HFISC aims to assess to what extent this might require adapting the content it provides. More specifically, this pertains to the use of elements such as infographics, blogs, vlogs, and improvements in the use of language and accessible economic concepts.

Improve the measurement of the effectiveness of its communication

To assess the impact of communication and the impact of changes in the communication strategy, feedback channels are needed to provide information about its effectiveness. HFISC aims to learn what tools, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and evaluation mechanisms are available to do so.

Targeted communication plan for costing of election platforms

When undertaking the costing of election platforms exercise (as stipulated by its new mandate), HFISC requires a tailored communication plan to preserve its reputation as an impartial and independent institution.

3. External Communication strategy

This chapter provides advice on the Hellenic Fiscal Council's (HFISC) communication strategy, based on the needs assessment. The strategy includes communication goals, a reflection on audiences and communication channels, content improvement, and the internal organisation of HFISC.

Currently, HFISC does not have an explicit communication strategy. This report presents a draft communication strategy, emphasising those elements referred to in the needs assessment.

For an Independent Fiscal Institution (IFI), a clear communication strategy is especially important because its influence is indirect, in the sense that an IFI does not have the legal power to change policies but should encourage others to do so (OECD, 2024). Hence, an IFI should be aware of the stakeholders that potentially influence the (budgetary) policy-making process.

3.1. HFISC's missions and roles

In Greece, HFISC is the IFI responsible for assessing and monitoring government budgetary policies. HFISC was established in 2015 in response to an EU Regulation requiring all euro area Member States to establish independent bodies to monitor compliance with fiscal rules and to produce or assess macroeconomic forecasts. The organisation is of medium size compared to other IFIs within the EU, with a staff of around 15 persons and an annual budget of approximately 1 million euros.

To assess and monitor budgetary policies, HFISC has a broad range of tasks. HFISC has the mandate to endorse the macroeconomic projections and budgetary plans of the Ministry of Finance and to monitor compliance with national fiscal rules. The assessments of HFISC take the form of opinions, in which HFISC explains whether or not it endorses these plans or projections. In addition, HFISC has the mandate to assess the methodology used by the Ministry to make budgetary and macroeconomic projections.

In addition to these opinions, HFISC publishes twice a year a report on macroeconomic and fiscal developments and several other publications. These reports provide an overview of the macroeconomic and fiscal developments of the Greek economy and a chapter that monitors budgetary policy. HFISC also publishes notes on current economic topics and academic background papers. Examples include the informative note HFISC published in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis on the increased uncertainty of the economic situation and thus of the macroeconomic and fiscal forecasts. A recent academic paper focuses on improvements in government debt arithmetic.

To enable the assessment of macroeconomic forecasts, HFISC maintains several macroeconomic models. These models use different forecast techniques to produce a forecast of expected economic growth in the year ahead. Together, these models provide HFISC with a range of expectations that are used to assess the projections made by the Greek Ministry of Finance.

HFISC's role as an independent fiscal institution is stipulated in national law 4270/2014. The budget of HFISC and the appointment of board members are endorsed by Parliament. To explain its perspective on the economic and budgetary stance of the Greek economy, the President of HFISC appears before Parliament upon request.

3.2. Organising the communication function within HFISC

Currently, HFISC employs one part-time external communications advisor who is responsible for all (external) communication advisory activities to the Chairperson. HFISC's ambition is to add at least one (part-time) communications advisor to upgrade its communication function. In that case, the communication function could grow to 1.5–2 full-time equivalents (FTE). The internal organisation of HFISC's communication function could then be structured comparably to the Slovak Council for Budget Responsibility (CBR), which employs 1.75 FTE (2 persons) in its communication department. For the purposes of this report, we assume it is structured accordingly.

The main tasks of the communication department are:

- Managing press relations and journalist inquiries;
- Drafting press releases, managing press conferences and briefings;
- Ongoing (day-to-day) preparation of communication activities in collaboration with HFISC Chair;
- Drafting and executing the communication strategy and annual plans;
- Evaluating results of the communication strategy;
- Designing visuals and supporting the development of visuals by HFISC analysts;
- Updating the website content in collaboration with IT;
- Overseeing social media accounts (LinkedIn, X, YouTube);
- Monitoring other (print and electronic) media with a focus on HFISC's activities;
- Preparing monthly press dossiers and activity reports;
- Collecting communication statistics and maintaining mailing lists;
- Organising events such as seminars and webinars;
- Publishing job vacancies and supporting employer branding efforts.

The communication department consists of a communications advisor/spokesperson and a content manager. Background and tasks of the communications advisor and spokesperson are:

- Background: preferably worked previously as an economic journalist, bringing significant value through their experience in effectively presenting complex topics. An extensive network of contacts within the journalism community and practical understanding of media operations are additional assets. Preferably has knowledge of EU institutions, EU fiscal framework, and role of IFIs.
- Tasks: primarily, the communications advisor advises on structuring and framing topics, ensuring the language used makes the content accessible for journalists and understandable to the general public, and advises the Chairperson and board of HFISC on all external communication issues, including the communication strategy.

Background and tasks of the content manager are:

- Background: preferably a degree in communication or journalism, and at least 5 years' experience in content creation, editing, and publishing, and a track record in managing content workflows (preferably in the context of a governmental organisation).
- Tasks: content creation for internal and external website, create and support creation of visuals, focus on updating the website in collaboration with IT, overseeing social media accounts, monitoring HFISC's communication impact, managing organisational matters, supporting the organisation of events.

Table 1 - Tentative distribution of tasks within the communication department

Tasks	Comms Advisor	Content Manager
Managing press relations, and journalist inquiries;	√	
Drafting press releases, managing press conferences and briefings	√	
Ongoing (day to day) preparation of communication activity in collaboration with HFISC chair	√	
Drafting and executing communication strategy and yearly plans;	√	
Evaluating results of the communication strategy	√	
Designing visuals and support development of visuals by HFISC analysts		√
Updating the website content in collaboration with IT;		√
Overseeing social media accounts (LinkedIn, X, YouTube);		√
Monitoring other (print and electronic) media with focus on HFISC's activities		√
Preparing monthly press dossiers and activity reports		√
Collecting communication statistics and maintaining mailing lists.		√
Organising events such as seminars and webinars		√
Publishing job vacancies and supporting employer branding efforts		√

3.3. Communication goals

The Hellenic Fiscal Council (HFISC) wants to prioritise three main goals related to the impact of its work.

1. Maintain **independent** messaging and **credibility**: Establish and protect HFISC's reputation as an independent, non-partisan, and credible authority.
2. Promote **transparency** and **accountability**: Ensure that fiscal policy decisions and government budgets are subject to parliamentary and public scrutiny.
3. Raise **awareness** and strengthen policy **impact**: Ensure that fiscal and economic insights contribute to informed decision-making and public debate.

These goals support the core mission of HFISC to provide objective information and analysis on economic and fiscal policies and on the sustainability of Greek public finances, contributing to informed decision-making. This means HFISC aims to inform, not to advocate; to clarify, not to politicise; and to contribute meaningfully to sound fiscal policy through trusted and transparent communication.

3.4. Audiences and communication channels

The HFISC's different audiences

To enhance the effectiveness of communication, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of the audiences HFISC seeks to reach. Recently, HFISC has undertaken an audience segmentation that identified several audiences to which it aims to tailor its communication. These are: the general public, government (ministries and their staff, public authorities), political parties and parliament (and the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)), the media, international organisations (EC, IMF, OECD), and academia. HFISC has not developed specific communication goals for each of these audiences. When determining the relevant audience, one must consider the extent to which these audiences are likely to contribute to the communication goals of the organisation and the available resources.

Table 2 – Linking communication goals to audiences

	HFISCs reputation	Scrutiny of fiscal policy	Informed decisions
General public	✓	✓	
Government	✓	✓	✓
Ministries and their staff	✓	✓	✓
Public authorities	✓	✓	
Political parties, parliament	✓	✓	✓
Media	✓	✓	
International organisations	✓	✓	
Academia	✓	✓	

The definition of these audiences should enable clear decisions on how to deploy scarce communication resources. Reaching these audiences can be resource-intensive. Not only does the communication department need to manage various communication channels, but reaching these audiences will often also require valuable time from the board of the Hellenic Fiscal Council (HFISC). Therefore, given the limited resources available at HFISC, taking a critical look at the number and relative importance of audiences can help increase the effectiveness of the communication strategy. Alternatively, applying a clear hierarchy in targeting audiences can help prioritise scarce communication resources.

Communication channels

HFISC distinguishes seven key communication channels, each of which is strategically linked to specific target audiences (see table 3 below for an overview).

Direct Communication. Direct communication remains one of HFISC's most essential channels. The organisation maintains frequent contact with key audiences, especially within the executive branch - most notably the Greek Ministry of Finance. This contact intensifies during the assessment of budgetary and macroeconomic forecasts. In addition to direct interactions, HFISC also reaches the executive through its website and media channels, including newspapers and social media. Given that policymakers are typically subject-matter experts, they are a primary audience for HFISC's online publications, as they can interpret economic and policy content effectively.

Table 3 - Matching channels and audiences

Channels: Audiences:	Direct	Quality media	Mainstream media	X	LinkedIn	Website	Mailing list
General public			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Government	✓	✓				✓	✓
Ministries and their staff	✓	✓				✓	✓
Public authorities		✓				✓	
Political parties		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Media		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
International organisations		✓				✓	✓
Academia		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

Quality and specialised Media. Quality media outlets, characterised by in-depth journalism and specialised reporters—often with an economic background—are crucial for communicating HFISC’s work. Specialised media include the financial press and other media outlets with a strong economic orientation. These journalists are capable of analysing IFI reports and conveying them accurately to a professional audience. Many Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs) rely on such outlets to disseminate their key messages.

To increase the impact of its most important publications, HFISC should not only release press statements but also develop stronger relationships with quality media. Institutions like CPB (Netherlands) and the Slovak Council for Budget Responsibility (CBR) have successfully organised background press **briefings**. These events typically include a presentation followed by time for off-the-record questions and selected on-the-record quotes. Informal meetings with journalists, such as breakfast discussions, are also a proven strategy.

Distributing publications broadly under embargo can also enhance media coverage. A short embargo (e.g., half a day) allows journalists to absorb the material in time for publication. For more technical papers, longer embargo periods may be appropriate. It is better to offer embargoed access to multiple outlets rather than granting exclusives, which can create friction with excluded media.

Mainstream Media. While mainstream media are less specialised, they are more effective at reaching the general public. This category includes popular online news outlets, which often lack paywalls. Because these platforms do not typically offer detailed analysis, they are easier to serve: a well-crafted press release can provide everything needed. Since these channels do not require intensive servicing, they offer a cost-efficient way to broaden HFISC’s public reach.

Social Media. Social media platforms serve as channels to amplify messages but do not involve professional journalistic practices. They allow institutions to share publications, reach followers, and receive feedback, though usually not in a structured, two-way format. Most IFIs—including HFISC—use platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn for one-way communication. Though limited in scope, platforms such as LinkedIn are essential for providing formal access to institutional output. Due to limited staff capacity and minimal added value, most institutions—including HFISC—do not actively engage in comment sections unless a discussion is picked up by major media outlets. Continuous monitoring of these platforms is not deemed feasible.

That said, leveraging staff members’ personal accounts can be effective. When a researcher shares a link to their work on LinkedIn, it adds authenticity and may help reach more relevant audiences.

Website. HFISC has adopted a restrained approach to its digital presence. The website currently functions primarily as an archive for budgetary assessments, working papers, and other official documents. A practical first step is to improve the website’s structure and add clear explanatory texts, making it easier to access materials and key messages. While additional features—such as publishing model-based data, forecasts, dashboards, or infographics—could further enhance visibility, their added value is uncertain given HFISC’s limited budget. A modest investment in structural improvements is advisable, while prioritising the strengthening of publications and modelling tools to generate richer content.

Newsletters and Mailing Lists. Many IFIs use newsletters to maintain direct contact with engaged audiences. A periodic newsletter—delivered via email—can be an effective tool for informing stakeholders about new publications or relevant economic developments. This type of outreach can reach a broad spectrum of audiences, including the media, policymakers, academics, and members of the public who have an interest in HFISC’s work.

HFISC should consider launching a newsletter, with a subscription feature available via its website. Producing the newsletter will require some coordination and resources, which could be shared between communication and research staff.

Events and Seminars. Organising public lectures or academic seminars can significantly enhance HFISC’s reputation, particularly among academics and high-level policymakers. Several IFIs, such as CPB in the Netherlands, hold periodic lectures featuring prominent economists. These events attract a distinguished audience and reinforce the institution’s image as a centre of excellence.

HFISC could consider hosting a similar event once every one or two years. Such gatherings could involve top ministry officials, members of parliament, academics, and media representatives. Events like the CPB Lecture, the Tinbergen Lecture, or CEPR events offer useful templates for this format.

Examples of academic lecture series:

- CPB Lecture: <https://www.cpb.nl/cpb-lectures>
- Tinbergen Lecture: <https://tinbergen.nl/events>
- CEPR Events: <https://cepr.org/events>

Recommendations on communication channels

1. HFISC should continue its proactive engagement with quality media, including authoring op-eds and maintaining informal relationships with journalists.
2. The organisation should explore holding press briefings at its premises when publishing major reports.
3. The website’s structure can be improved, and by adding clear explanatory texts, making it easier to access materials and key messages. A newsletter should be developed to reach interested stakeholders across policy, media, and academic spheres.
4. HFISC should consider hosting regular seminars or academic lectures to strengthen ties with both academia and policymakers.

3.5. Messaging and timing

Main messages and presentation

Main messages depend on the content of the analysis in the specific publication and on the circumstances. Consequently, it is not possible to specify ‘main messages’ in advance in a communication strategy. The only main messages that are independent of the content of the analysis are (sub)messages communicating the impartiality, independence, and quality of the analysis. These aspects are typically communicated by showing, not telling. The impartiality and quality of the analysis are convincingly demonstrated by the analysis being impartial and thorough, not by stating that it is.

On a more abstract level, main messages can be linked to the type of publication (see Table 4 below). The Hellenic Fiscal Council’s (HFISC) opinions typically assess whether macroeconomic forecasts are realistic and substantiated, and whether fiscal rules are met. Even if this is the case, there might be risks associated with the forecast that must be considered. These main messages should be communicated clearly. Opinions are relatively politically sensitive publications as they assess the quality of the Greek government’s forecasts and compliance with fiscal rules. When the assessment is critical, it is crucial to be factual and clear in communication, and to communicate transparently about assumptions. In addition, messages can also concern the functioning of the fiscal rules themselves or other elements of the “fiscal system”. Box 4.1 and

Annex A present some examples of the tone of voice and messaging of comparable Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs). This overview also presents examples of the communication products these IFIs use. Primary audiences of these messages are the government and parliament, as these are the stakeholders who are supposed to act on the information. Secondary audiences are the media, international organisations, and the general public.

Other types of publications are more descriptive and analytical and less sensitive from a communication perspective. The spring and autumn economic reports that HFISC publishes are currently relatively descriptive and do not assess forecasts or fiscal rules. In terms of main messages, it is crucial to communicate implications for the economy and government finances in the near future and in relation to the expectations in the previous analysis. Working papers are an instrument to communicate the quality of the analysis and tools HFISC produces and uses (by showing). They are primarily targeted at the academic community. Their main message, for broader audiences, is to communicate the analytical rigour of HFISC's analysis and tools.

Table 4 - Linking yearly publications by HFISC to messages, audiences and channels

Publication	Main message	Main audiences	Main channels
Assessments, opinions			
Opinions on the Macroeconomic Forecasts	Macro forecast is (not) realistic and sufficiently substantiated, risks to outlook are down(or up)ward	Government, Parliament, media, general public	Direct, (quality) media, website, mailing list
Opinions on macroeconomic and fiscal forecasts and assessment of compliance with the fiscal rules	Macro and/or fiscal forecast is (not) realistic and sufficiently substantiated, the fiscal rules are (not) met, risks to outlook are down(or up)ward. Possible message: an opinion on the functioning of the fiscal rules themselves.	Government, Parliament, media, general public	Direct, (quality) media, website mailing list
Periodic reports and economic analysis			
Reports on the macroeconomic and fiscal stance of the Greek economy	Economic and fiscal outlook is positive (or negative) improving (or deteriorating)	Government, Parliament, general public	Direct, quality media, website
Working papers	Depending on analysis, accountability	Academia	Website

Frequency and timing

The frequency and timing of opinions are mandated by law, leaving little room for manoeuvre. Opinions must be prepared when budgetary plans are submitted to the Greek Parliament (in April for the Stability Programme, in October for the Draft Budgetary Plan and Preliminary State Budget, in November for the State Budget, etc.) and throughout the year if any supplementary budget is submitted to Parliament. Regarding the timing of opinions, there is little flexibility.

The Hellenic Fiscal Council (HFISC) has, however, some freedom regarding the timing of its spring and autumn economic reports. The timing of these reports can potentially be aligned with the budgetary process. In that case, some of the analyses required for the opinions (e.g., for the Stability Programme and for the (Preliminary) State Budget) could be integrated into these reports, saving time and resources to allocate to other activities, and providing a more thorough basis for analysis of these opinions. In any case, providing clear advance notice about its publication timetable (by publishing a calendar including approximate dates of publication) will support HFISC's image of impartiality and independence, as it demonstrates that the timing of its publications is not subject to ad hoc political motivations.

3.6. Who communicated what?

Different communication roles

To communicate with different audiences, HFISC needs to decide who within its organisation is best positioned to communicate on which subject or publication. It is logical that the most important publications are presented by the Chairperson, the highest management level within the organisation. This underlines the importance of these publications to the outside world. An example is communication about election costings. The same is true for interviews about politically sensitive issues. The most sensitive are probably television interviews, with a broad range of subjects under discussion. Somewhat less, but still highly sensitive, is a press conference or press briefing for an important report such as the Annual Progress Report, where questions need to be answered on the spot. These are best addressed by more experienced, senior staff, in the case of HFISC the Chairperson. It is advisable to have the spokesperson present at all times during (on-record) meetings with the press.

However, it is helpful when those who communicate have a clear understanding of the subject matter. Hence, highly technical publications are probably best presented by researchers on a background basis. This has the additional advantage of fostering a communication culture within the organisation. Researchers should only answer questions on a background (not quotable) basis. In cases of quotable or politically sensitive subjects, the Chairperson should be the spokesperson.

Table 5 - Possible communication roles within HFISC

Type of publication	Representing HFISC
Assessments of macroeconomic and fiscal projections	Chair
Election costings	Chair
Policy analysis or technical research reports	Research staff when technical and on a background basis Chair when quotable or the topic is politically sensitive
Interviews about broad themes	Chair
Interviews about a policy-relevant topic, based on a publication	Chair when quotable or topic is politically sensitive
Interviews about a highly technical topic (based on publication)	Research staff on a background basis

3.7. KPI's and feedback mechanisms

Tracking Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is crucial for monitoring the media presence of the Hellenic Fiscal Council (HFISC) and assessing the reach and influence of its publications. Since autumn 2024, HFISC has been actively recording references to its work in external publications. This monitoring provides valuable insights into the level of attention HFISC and its outputs receive, and it also facilitates reflection on media strategies and improvements in communication efforts.

HFISC currently collects several basic metrics to evaluate media coverage and engagement:

- Website traffic: general visits and visits to specific publications; session duration
- LinkedIn performance: number of (new) followers, interactions, and page views
- X (formerly Twitter): number of (new) followers and interactions
- Number of news articles featuring HFISC

In addition to these metrics that HFISC already collects, there are other valuable metrics that offer a broader view of HFISC's visibility and influence:

- Number of downloads per publication
- Mentions of HFISC in parliamentary debates
- Appearances by HFISC representatives in parliament
- Invitations to conferences and professional events
- Number of TV interviews featuring the Chair
- Number of op-eds authored by the Chair in quality media outlets

Some of these indicators can be tracked manually using Google searches, either by administrative staff or interns (as is done at the Federal Planning Bureau (FPB)). Other Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs), such as the Slovak Council for Budget Responsibility (CBR), use specialised media tracking tools, although these come with associated costs. Together, these indicators help HFISC understand its media presence, the performance of its social media platforms and website, and the popularity of specific publications. However, while these metrics are helpful for tracking visibility, they offer limited insight into the actual policy impact of HFISC's work. A more comprehensive evaluation is required to understand the broader societal and policy influence of HFISC's publications.

Options for a More In-Depth Impact Assessment

For a more robust evaluation — conducted less frequently, for example, every four years — HFISC could consider the following approaches:

- **Policy impact tracking** of four flagship publications per year. This would include:
 1. Mentions in parliamentary debates
 2. References in official government reports
 3. Use of HFISC's work in general in policy documents
 4. Citations in legislative texts
- **Focus groups with journalists from quality media** to assess the accessibility and perceived impact of HFISC's work and explore ways to improve communication.
- **Stakeholder surveys** involving all key audiences mentioned earlier to gather qualitative and quantitative feedback.
- **Contextual response analysis**, as demonstrated by CPB in its 2016–2021 self-evaluation report ([link](#)). This method maps HFISC's interaction with key stakeholder groups—political, media, scientific, social media, and broader societal actors. It evaluates the use of HFISC's work and perceptions of the institution, using “productive interactions” as a proxy for authority and impact.

Recommendations on KPI's

5. Expand the current set of basic metrics to include mentions in parliamentary debates, appearances in parliament, and television interviews. These can be tracked manually or with specialised monitoring tools for selected media sources.
6. Establish an annual feedback cycle, in which the HFISC board and communication officer review the KPIs from the previous year and determine whether adjustments to the communication strategy are needed.

4. Content development

This chapter provides advice on the development of content to enhance the Hellenic Fiscal Council's (HFISC) communication, focusing on adding visuals, a video, and improving work processes.

4.1. Additional content

This section offers guidance on improving HFISC's communication through enhanced content strategies.

Infographics

Infographics can significantly strengthen communication by visually conveying key messages. These visuals generally fall into two categories:

1. **Enhanced Graphs:** These are existing graphs from a publication that are visually improved to highlight the main conclusion or message. They require basic graphic skills and software.
2. **Elaborate Visual Storytelling:** These are more complex infographics, often presented as a visual narrative. Producing them demands advanced design skills, specialised software, and considerable more time and resources.

While the first type is relatively low-cost, the second involves substantial investment. Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs) that use sophisticated infographics report that they require at least one part-time communication staff member and often rely on external designers. As a result, some institutions, such as the Slovak Council for Budget Responsibility (CBR), have reduced their reliance on elaborate infographics in favour of simpler, more scalable visuals. Instead, they now focus on enhancing a few central charts per publication for web and social media use. Feedback from IFIs on the impact of infographics is overwhelmingly positive. These visuals work well as teasers on social media and provide journalists with a quick overview of the publication's core message, encouraging deeper engagement with the full report.

HFISC should begin experimenting with simple, graph-based infographics. Select the most essential graphs from a publication and improve them to deliver the key message at a glance. These visuals can be used both within the publication and on social media. See below for examples from the Slovak Council for Budget Responsibility (CBR).

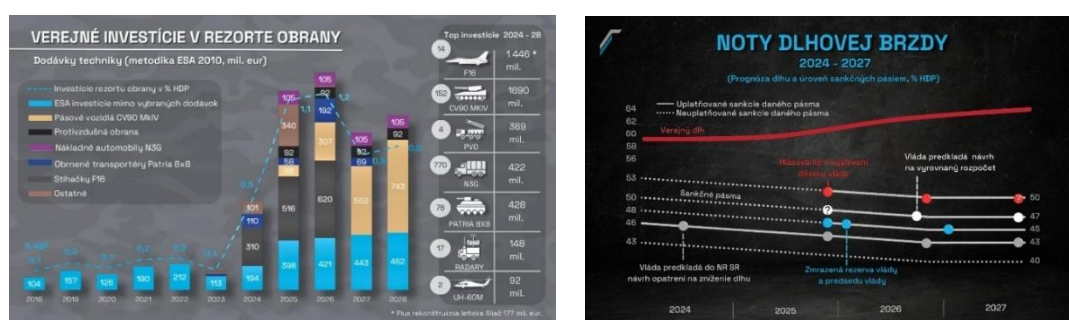


Figure 1 - Examples of simpler chart-based infographics (CBR in Slovakia)

Videos and Vlogs

Several IFIs, such as the UK Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) and the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB), have used short (2–3 minute) videos to explain or introduce key publications, such as economic outlooks. These videos can be shared on websites and social media platforms to generate traffic.

Although usually produced in-house, such videos incur high costs—including equipment, scripting, recording, and editing time. They are typically presented by staff or the Chairperson, which limits the professional polish of the final product. Feedback from these institutions indicates that the benefits of such videos in terms of increased website traffic or publication reach are limited. The CPB, for example, discontinued its video production due to high costs and modest returns. Meanwhile, the Slovak Council for Budget Responsibility (CBR) selectively produces reusable videos for recruitment or institutional introductions.

Rather than regularly producing short videos, HFISC could invest in one or two high-quality, reusable videos. These could focus on the institution’s role, mandate, mission, and/or work environment. Since these types of videos remain relevant for years, they are more likely to justify the investment. Slovak CBR has successfully adopted this approach for recruitment and institutional introductions.

Box 1: Examples of other IFIs

To examine how other Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs) communicate, we selected comparable outputs (reports) from IFIs similar to the HFISC in terms of mandate and resources, and with high scores on the OECD Fiscal Advocacy Index (2024). Specifically, we reviewed the assessments of (1) the state budget and (2) current budgetary policies by the IFIs in Ireland, Portugal, and the Czech Republic. For an overview, see Annex A.

Based on this review, several conclusions can be drawn. First, these assessments are often presented through multiple channels: a detailed assessment report, a press release, a presentation, a dedicated web text, an Excel dataset, and in some cases a YouTube presentation and briefing presentation (IFC). Each format serves a distinct purpose and targets a different audience. Notably, a common feature among these IFIs is the publication of a short text on their website summarising the key messages, without requiring the reader to open a PDF or Word document. This approach makes the information more accessible and easily translatable for an international audience.

Second, the tone of voice adopted by these IFIs is often direct and critical towards the budgetary policies of the respective Ministries of Finance. This critical stance is consistently supported by well-substantiated arguments that rigorously address specific policies or assumptions.

Third, these IFIs not only comment on specific policies, but also examine the functioning of the budgetary rules themselves (a systemic perspective) and the availability (or lack) of information necessary to conduct robust assessments.

Blogs

Blogs are short articles (600–700 words) with engaging titles that highlight specific topics or research projects in an accessible way. Published on the IFIs’ website, they can be shared via social media to draw attention to corresponding full reports.

However, the utility of blogs for HFISC may be limited. Unlike larger IFIs, which regularly publish original research and employ larger research teams, HFISC primarily focuses on legally mandated assessments. As a result, the potential benefits of blogs are not as significant.

Recommendations on additional content

7. Begin producing simple, graph-based infographics to visually summarise key points within publications and promote them on social media.
8. Invest in one or two reusable, professional-quality videos explaining HFISC’s role, mandate, tasks, and core outputs.

4.2. Improving readability and work processes

Elements that improve the readability of publications

Drawing on communication literature and the experiences of other Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs), several general principles can be identified to improve the readability and communication value of HFISC's publications. In addition to applying these principles, training can play a key role in strengthening staff skills in plain language writing. For instance, the Dutch CPB employed a so-called "writing doctor" who visited the organisation biweekly and offered consultation at various stages of the writing process. Similarly, the Irish IFI conducts annual internal training sessions on effective writing and presenting, using lessons drawn from their own past publications.

Box 2: Plain language

Shannon, founder of information theory, measured the information process according to the effect of reducing uncertainty it would create for the receiver, not based on words or digits. If receivers feel discouraged by the difficulty of the report or overwhelmed by its complexity, Shannon would consider that reporting action to be disinformation. Haldane (2017) points out: "For a significant portion of society, the very volume of reporting may be increasing uncertainty and impairing information, understanding, and trust."

The history of economic-related communications shows how, in earlier times, when trust in institutions was high, "complex language posed no trust problem. Little was published, and even less was read. Public discourse was infrequent, and attentive audiences were narrow. Complex language added to the 'mystique' of institutions, including central banks, and served as a sign of technical competence. Complex language today is more likely to breed mistrust than mystique (...) and it has become a source of scepticism rather than reassurance" (Haldane, 2017).

The Plain Language Movement was established to avoid disinformation and rejection of institutional communication in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Plain language focuses on writing text in a way that is clear, concise, and flows well for the reader. The Centre for Plain Language states that: "[a] document, website, or other information is in plain language if the target audience can read it, understand what they read, and confidently act on it". Writing in plain language does not mean oversimplifying concepts but rather presenting information in a way that makes it easier to understand and use by a wider audience. Texts written in plain language are still formal but are easier to read and inspire confidence in the reader. Using plain language in communications ultimately improves efficiency, as there is less ambiguity for readers, and less time is needed for clarifications. Clear communication improves the user's experience with the organisation, ultimately fostering trust in the organisation.

Software can support plain language: The Canadian Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) is active in coaching staff on plain speaking. To assist with this, the PBO uses software tools like "Antidote", which highlight redundancies, repetition, dull verbs, and other stylistic features of writing, as well as more conventional errors. This is used not only for publications but also for internal communications.

Key principles to improve readability include:

- Clarify the relevance: Clearly explain why the publication matters. This should be done early in the report, in the press release, and on the website text.
- Lead with the conclusion: Most readers want to know the key findings or outcome right away. Present the main conclusion first before diving into the details.
- Maintain a consistent tone of voice: Ensure that all publications reflect a uniform writing style and tone, regardless of the topic or author.

Improving Work Processes

Research staff can play an important role in enhancing communication by assisting in presenting results to the media, contributing to press releases, incorporating visuals, and using accessible language. Involving researchers in communication processes also fosters a communication-minded organisational culture.

Given the limited availability of dedicated communication resources, it is particularly helpful to integrate communication tasks into the research workflow. This can be achieved by adopting best practices from other IFIs to streamline communication during the final stages of a project:

Start with the end in mind: Before drafting the publication, create a detailed, annotated outline — or “text plan” — that defines the overall structure and highlights the key messages. This approach not only enhances the coherence of the final document but also provides a solid foundation for preparing a press release and other communication materials.

Use the summary as a communication base: The summary in the text plan can serve as a starting point for drafting a press release. It can also help identify which figure or chart from the report best captures the main message, allowing work on a simple, chart-based infographic to begin early and proceed in parallel with writing.

Coordinate roles in drafting press releases: Typically, the communication officer drafts the initial version of the press release using the report summary, and the researcher refines the content. By introducing the text plan early, communication staff can contribute sooner to the process, reducing time pressure closer to the publication deadline.

Recommendations on improving readability and work processes

9. Adopt writing guidelines to improve clarity and consistency in publications and provide training to staff on effective writing techniques.
10. Integrate a text plan into the writing process to structure the storyline and highlight key messages. Use this plan as the basis for both the press release and the infographic to ensure alignment and efficiency.

5. Communication of election costings

The analysis of election platforms consists of four phases relevant to communication planning: preparation, the costing exercise, publication of the outcomes, and the period until elections.

5.1. Preparation: managing expectations about content and process

Given the significant workload and strict timing, it is crucial to manage effectively the election costing process. This can be facilitated by clearly defining the process through the publication of a starting document (see, for example, the Belgian Federal Planning Bureau (FPB) and the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB)) before commencing the election costing. Such a document outlines:

- A. the process and the timelines
- B. the conditions under which policy measures will be accepted
- C. the themes and indicators to be used in the costing exercise
- D. an overview of the models to be used in the analysis (FPB).
- E. possibly, a set of dummy tables and dummy charts of the outcomes. These can be used by political parties and media to prepare their own charts and tables to compare outcomes.

Recommendations for communication in this phase

- Publish a starting document outlining the process, timelines, conditionality, themes and indicators
- Organise an informal (background) meeting with the press where timelines, the process and a (dummy) presentation of the outcomes are discussed. This can help foster a productive collaboration with the press. In this meeting, it is crucial to manage expectations regarding the limits of the exercise and availability for the press during the rest of the process;
- During the costing exercise itself, refrain from commenting in the media.

5.2. The costing exercise

During the costing exercise itself (about 12 weeks), there is intensive contact with the participating political parties. To manage this, it is advisable that political parties assign a designated contact person for communicating with the Independent Fiscal Institution (IFI). Conversely, during the process, every political party should have its own designated contact person at the IFI. This contact person is responsible for receiving policy measures, sending back results, and answering questions (see Box 3).

Usually, there is a period of 5 or 6 weeks to develop a first set of (checked) policy measures per party, then a period of 4 or 5 weeks to calculate and report on the economic impacts of this set of policy measures, after which the political parties have one last opportunity to make (small) changes to the set of policy measures. Subsequently, a final report per party is prepared and, after a final check with the political parties, is published. This can be published in the form of a publication (CPB) or on a website (FPB). Before publication of the final results, all communication with political parties is strictly confidential. Communication with political parties remains confidential (see Box 3).

Box 3: Guidelines on communication with political parties when election costing, based on best practice

- **Introduction:** The process begins with a joint meeting with all political parties, during which the procedure, timelines, and working methods are explained.
- **Iterations:** There are limited opportunities for parties to adapt or withdraw policy measures. Usually, there are two iterations and one round of comment on the final text. These process steps and their timeline should be communicated in advance clearly and strictly adhered to, to avoid an uneven playing field and accusations of partiality.
- **Confidentiality:** After the first meeting, all communication takes place exclusively between the IFI and the individual political parties. This communication is strictly confidential.
- **Contact persons:** Each party is assigned a designated contact person at the IFI during the costing process. This reduces the risk of errors (for example, accidentally sending responses or outputs to the wrong party) and improves efficiency (faster responses and no need to repeat explanations). On the party's side, the contact person is usually the financial spokesperson of the parliamentary group or their key financial policy advisor.
- **Communication channels:** All communication is conducted through the designated contact person. Only in cases of serious disagreement may issues be escalated to thematic experts, the chief of staff, or IFI management.
- **Costing of policy measures:** The actual costing of policy measures is carried out by IFI thematic experts (e.g. healthcare experts, social security experts). Each expert is responsible for assessing the policy measures of all parties within their theme, ensuring equal treatment of comparable policy measures and drawing on in-depth expertise.
- **Role of the contact person:** Ideally, contact persons are not themselves thematic experts. In practice, this division is difficult to maintain due to staffing constraints. In some cases, a contact person may also be required to assess measures in a specific policy area, or to serve as the contact person for two political parties.
- **Means of communication:** Communication usually takes place via email or phone. Email is preferred, as it provides a written record.
- **Physical meeting:** During the process, at least one physical meeting takes place, after the first round of assessment and feedback on all measures has been completed. In this meeting, IFI thematic experts present and explain the costings to the party's specialists (usually the financial spokesperson and one or two policy advisors).
- **Internal coordination:** Before responding to the party, the contact person consults extensively with the thematic experts who assessed the measures. The contact person does not engage in substantive discussions (unless they are an expert in that specific field) but instead acts as a channel to pass information between the thematic experts and the political party.

Recommendations for communication in this phase

- Refrain from commenting on the process in the media in this phase,
- Communication with political parties is confidential and runs through one contact person for every political party.
- Media are referred to the general information with respect to process and timelines that has been provided at the start.
- An option in this phase is to do an item 'behind the scenes' describing how the process works, to explain the process in general to the larger public

5.3. Publication of the outcomes

It is advisable that the publication (or website) of the IFI compares the outcomes of the analysis across political parties. This supports a clear discussion of the results, as such comparisons are often what the media communicate. When comparing, it is important to refrain from presenting ‘rankings’; using a fixed (e.g., alphabetical) order to present outcomes in charts is helpful.

In addition, the publication (or website) should also present the outcomes per party. This helps to communicate the overall results of the measures each party aims to implement. Differences between the original election programme and the policy measures in the costing exercise can and will emerge. Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs) involved in election costing do not check the consistency of policy measures with the official party programme or election platform: the responsibility for ensuring consistency between the costed policy measures submitted to the IFI and the election platforms lies entirely with the political party. Inconsistency is the first thing the media look for upon receiving the publication. The media undertake the ‘policing’ of consistency, and the IFI refers all questions on this issue directly to political parties.

Recommendations for communication in this phase

- Organise a press conference or press briefing where the Chairperson presents the results and answers questions.
- Provide copies of the publication to the media under embargo a few hours in advance, to enable them to prepare questions.
- During the presentation, avoid naming of individual political parties (e.g., ‘almost all parties do this or that’, ‘a number of parties choose to...’, or ‘most parties take...’).
- Questions on differences between election platforms and measures in the costing exercise are referred to political parties.

5.4. Period until elections

After publication, the media and political parties use the outcomes in their contributions and in political debates. Usually, the outcomes dominate the debate and the news cycle for one or two weeks, after which other topics tend to become more important. This is why IFIs involved in the costing of election platforms ideally publish a month in advance of the elections—to avoid the costing exercise dominating the debate in the last week before elections.

Recommendations for communication in this phase

- After the presentation of the costing, refrain from communicating about the costing exercise. Even when misunderstandings arise or incorrect interpretations of the outcomes of the costing exercise emerge in the public debate, it is better not to respond officially. Intervening in the political debate at this point risks compromising impartiality. Usually, quality media are quick to correct incorrect interpretations by checking the publication or consulting academic experts.

5.5. Best practices and pitfalls

In a workshop with the Belgian Federal Planning Bureau (FPB) about communication around the costing of election platforms, some best practices and pitfalls were shared. It is essential for the FPB to strike a balance between clarity, neutrality, and accessibility. The institution must build public trust while maintaining its reputation as an independent authority. Below are best practices — the do’s and don’ts — that should guide communication efforts around this politically sensitive exercise.

Best practices: what to do

First and foremost, the FPB presents itself as an independent and impartial research institution. Its credibility lies in its provision of scientific and objective analysis, without political bias. Emphasising this neutrality is crucial, especially when evaluating policy proposals from competing parties.

At the same time, managing expectations is crucial. While the costing exercise provides valuable insights, it also has limitations—whether due to time, data availability, or methodological complexity. The FPB clearly communicates both the value and the boundaries of the analysis, helping stakeholders understand what the exercise can and cannot achieve.

It is also crucial to clearly articulate the objectives of the costing process. These include contributing to democratic transparency, supporting political parties in creating more robust and realistic policy programmes, and empowering citizens to make better-informed choices by demonstrating the potential consequences of different electoral platforms. These goals should be consistently repeated in both internal and external communications.

Positioning the FPB as a partner of the press is another key element. Journalists play a crucial role in amplifying the FPB's work, and providing them with accurate, well-structured, and neutral information enhances both the quality of coverage and public understanding. A collaborative tone and proactive engagement with media outlets help reinforce the FPB's credibility.

The quality and seriousness of the costing exercise should be emphasised. This includes acknowledging the work of the scientific team behind the scenes, whose efforts often go unseen by the public. Highlighting the complexity and rigour of the analysis helps foster appreciation for the methodology and builds institutional respect.

In presenting results, the FPB ensures that the examples and indicators used reflect a wide range of political positions. This demonstrates fairness and reinforces the impartial nature of the institution's work. No party or ideology should feel favoured or targeted.

A clear communication strategy should be developed around a central message supported by two or three smaller, consistent sub-messages. These key points should be repeated across interviews, briefings, and publications to ensure they resonate and are retained by audiences.

Finally, transparency is key to building trust. Within the limits set by legislation and confidentiality agreements, the FPB should explain its methods, sources, and assumptions wherever possible. This openness reassures stakeholders and reinforces the institution's commitment to objective, evidence-based analysis.

Pitfalls to avoid: what not to do

In order to maintain its neutrality and protect its role as a trusted, non-partisan institution, the FPB must avoid certain pitfalls in its communication.

Most importantly, the FPB should not single out any specific policy measure or political party. Doing so risks undermining the perception of impartiality and could inadvertently draw the institution into political debates.

Equally, the FPB must avoid becoming the object of political controversy. The focus should always remain on the substance of the analysis and not on the institution itself. Engaging in back-and-forth disputes or becoming overly visible in contentious discussions could compromise the Bureau's credibility and overshadow the work it aims to highlight.

Recommendations on communication

- Present as an independent and impartial research institution providing scientific and objective analysis, without political bias. Emphasise the quality of the work, be transparent about the methods used, and build trust
- Clearly manage expectations: communicate both the value and the boundaries of the analysis, and position yourself as a partner of the media
- Clearly articulate the objectives of the costing, and ensure that indicators used reflect a wide range of political positions
- Develop a central message supported by two or three smaller, consistent sub-messages. These key points should be repeated across interviews, briefings, and publications.
- Do not single out any specific policy measures or political parties and avoid becoming the object of political controversy by engaging in public discussions

Recommendations on communication of election costings

11. At the start of the process, publish a starting document and organise an informal (background) meeting with the press where timelines, the process, and (dummy) presentation of the outcomes are discussed, and expectations are managed.
12. During the costing exercise, avoid contact with the press. An option is to publish an item 'behind the scenes' on how the process works, to explain the process generally to the wider public.
13. Launch the publication at a press conference where the Chairperson presents the results and answers questions. Copies of the publication are provided to the media under embargo a few hours in advance.
14. In this phase, after the presentation of the costing, refrain from communicating about the costing exercise, even in cases of incorrect interpretations.
15. Best practices from Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs) with experience in communicating the costing of election platforms (such as the Belgian Federal Planning Bureau (FPB)) should be adopted:
 - Present as an independent and impartial research institution providing scientific and objective analysis, without political bias. Emphasise the quality of the work, be transparent about the methods used, and build trust.
 - Clearly manage expectations: communicate both the value and the boundaries of the analysis, and position yourself as a partner of the media.
 - Clearly articulate the objectives of the costing, and ensure that indicators used reflect a wide range of political positions
 - Develop a central message supported by two or three smaller, consistent sub-messages. These key points should be repeated across interviews, briefings, and publications.
 - Do not single out any specific policy measures or political parties and avoid becoming the object of political controversy by engaging in public discussions

6. Summary of recommendations

Box 4: Summary of all recommendations, basis for the action plan

1. HFISC should continue its proactive engagement with quality media, including authoring op-eds and maintaining informal relationships with journalists.
2. The organisation should explore holding press briefings at its premises when publishing major reports.
3. A newsletter should be developed to reach interested stakeholders across policy, media, and academic spheres.
4. HFISC should consider hosting regular seminars or academic lectures to strengthen ties with both academia and policymakers.
5. Expand the current set of basic metrics to include mentions in parliamentary debates, appearances in parliament, and television interviews. These can be tracked manually or with specialised monitoring tools for selected media sources.
6. Establish an annual feedback cycle, in which the HFISC board and communication officer review the KPIs from the previous year and determine whether adjustments to the communication strategy are needed.
7. Begin producing simple, graph-based infographics to visually summarise key points within publications and promote them on social media.
8. Invest in one or two reusable, professional-quality videos explaining HFISC's role, mandate, tasks, and core outputs.
9. Adopt writing guidelines to improve clarity and consistency in publications and provide training to staff on effective writing techniques.
10. Integrate a text plan into the writing process to structure the storyline and highlight key messages. Use this plan as the basis for both the press release and the infographic to ensure alignment and efficiency.
11. At the start of the process, publish a starting document and organise an informal (background) meeting with the press where timelines, the process, and (dummy) presentation of the outcomes are discussed, and expectations are managed.
12. During the costing exercise, avoid contact with the press. An option is to publish an item 'behind the scenes' on how the process works, to explain the process generally to the wider public.
13. Launch the publication at a press conference where the Chairperson presents the results and answers questions. Copies of the publication are provided to the media under embargo a few hours in advance.
14. In this phase, after the presentation of the costing, refrain from communicating about the costing exercise, even in cases of incorrect interpretations.
15. Best practices from Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs) with experience in communicating the costing of election platforms (such as the Belgian Federal Planning Bureau (FPB)) should be adopted:
 - Present as an independent and impartial research institution providing scientific and objective analysis, without political bias. Emphasise the quality of the work, be transparent about the methods used, and build trust.
 - Clearly manage expectations: communicate both the value and the boundaries of the analysis, and position yourself as a partner of the media.
 - Clearly articulate the objectives of the costing, and ensure that indicators used reflect a wide range of political positions
 - Develop a central message supported by two or three smaller, consistent sub-messages. These key points should be repeated across interviews, briefings, and publications.
 - Do not single out any specific policy measures or political parties and avoid becoming the object of political controversy by engaging in public discussions

7. Action plan

Preconditions:

- Resourcing: additional 0,5-1 FTE for communication (redaction, infographics). Assumption is a total capacity of 1,5-2 FTE for the communication team (a communication advisor | spokesperson, a content manager), organised as described in paragraph 3.2
- Clear communication of the importance of communication from board to the organisation
- Clear communication of internal procedures and guidelines on communication to the organisation
- Availability of (AI-)tooling for enhancing visuals and infographics
- Optional: External support for (pyramidal) writing and plain language training
- Optional: External support for text plan training and guidelines

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Hellenic Fiscal Council (HFISC) | External Communication Strategy

Table 6 – Action plan

Action	Rec	Timeline	Resourcing	Responsible, accountable
Goal 1 Establish and protect HFISC's reputation as an independent, non-partisan, and credible authority				
Invite and meet quality press journalists at least every two years for an informal coffee (bilateral or in a small group)	1	Start Q4 2025, ongoing	Time of communication advisor and Chair (~4 hours per meeting, including preparation)	Communications team, Chair (and or board)
Focus group with journalists (e.g. after the election costing process)	1	Start 2027	Time of communication advisor and Chair (~16 hours per meeting, including preparation)	Communications team, Chair
Increase number of op-eds of chair in quality media, (TV) interviews and press contacts	1	Start Q4 2025, ongoing	Time of communication advisor and Chair	Communications team, Chair
Experiment with a press briefing at least once a year, starting with first major publication in 2025	2	Q4 2025, ongoing	Time of communication advisor and Chair (~16 hours per briefing, including preparation)	Communications team, Chair
Start hosting a seminar cycle (2 a year) for interested academics and policy advisors	4	Start Q4 2025, ongoing	Time of staff for preparation (~16 hours per meeting) and communication staff	Communications team, technical staff
Define and collect a dashboard set of monthly KPI's	5	Monthly as of Q1 2026	Communication staff (selection) administration (collecting, ~1 day a month)	Secretariat, administration
Measure yearly mentions in parliamentary debates, appearances in parliament, and television interviews	5	Q1 2026 over 2025, yearly	~2 weeks for administration staff a year	Secretariat, administration
Discuss the KPI's once a year and adjust communication plan accordingly	6	Yearly Q2, start Q2 2026	Time of communication staff to prepare (~16h) and board (~2h)	Communications team, board
Make a reusable video (2 or 3 mins) on HFISC: "Mission and tasks of HFISC"	8	Deadline summer 2026	~2-4 weeks for scripting, scheduling, filming and revising Budget for external agency	Communication team, HR, board and external agency
Goal 2 Ensure that fiscal policy decisions and government budgets are subject to parliamentary and public scrutiny				
Develop a quarterly newsletter to reach interested stakeholders across media, policy makers and academia	3	Start Q4 2025, ongoing	Develop format (~16h) Content per newsletter (~16h) Mailing list	Communications team
Start with simple, chart-based infographics or visuals, internal procedures, for every publication	7	Start Q4 2025, ongoing	- Guidelines and template infographics (~16 hours) - Staff produces a first draft 1 or 2 enhanced charts (~4 hours per publication) - Communication polishes charts (~4 hours per publication) - AI-tool for infographics Optional: Training infographics	Communications team, Technical Staff

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Produce 2-3 slides with highlights / main messages for main publications and press briefings	7, 2	Start Q4 2025, ongoing	- Guidelines and template slides (~16 hours) - Staff produces a first draft of slides (~4 hours per publication) - Communication polishes slides (~4 hours per publication)	Communications team, Technical Staff
Goal 3 Ensure that fiscal and economic insights contribute to informed decision-making and public debate				
Make a concise set (3 pages) of writing guidelines	9	Q1 2026	Time of communication staff (~40 hours)	Communication team
Use these as standard for all publications by HFISC staff	9	Q2 2026	Time of staff, ~8 hours per publication	Technical Staff
Optional: writing training (pyramidal writing, plain language) for all HFISC staff publications	9	Q2 2026	Budget for external (inhouse) trainer, time of staff	Communication team
Make a set of guidelines for working with text plan	10	Q2 2026	Time of communication staff (~40 hours)	Communication team
Start with a text plan in way of working for all publications	10	Start Q3 2026, ongoing	Time of staff, ~8 hours per publication	Technical Staff
Optional: training using text plan for all HFISC staff	10	Q3 2026	Budget for external (inhouse) trainer, time of staff	Communication team
Goal 4 Ensure that election platform costing contributes to informed decision-making and public debate and protect HFISC reputation				
Organise an informal background meeting for the media at the start to brief them about process, timelines etc	11	2027	Time of communications team and chair to prepare (~16h) and meeting (~2h)	Communication team, Chair
When possible, provide media in this meeting with (dummy) presentations of the outcomes	11	2027	Time of staff and communications team to prepare dummy (~2 weeks)	Communication team, technical staff
During costing exercise no communication about the exercise to the media	12	2027	-	Communication team
Embargoed publication of results, embargo of 3 or 4 hours	13	2027	Time of communications team for preparation (~8 hours)	Communication team
Presentation of results in a press conference by Chair, same day	13	2027	Preparation of presentation (~24 hours) and of Q&A (~24 hours)	Communication team, technical staff, chair
After publication no communication about the exercise to the media until after elections	14	2027	-	Communication team

References

OECD (2020). Independent fiscal institutions: Promoting transparency and accountability early in the COVID-19 crisis. OECD Paper.

OECD (2024). How we communicate the public finances? OECD paper, presented at the 46th Annual Meeting of Senior Budget Officials.

OECD (2025). Recommendation of the council on Principles for Independent Fiscal Institutions, OECD/LEGAL/0401

Annexes

Annex A: Examples from other IFIs

In order to help HFISC to evaluate the way it presents their reports, we look at the way other IFIs publish comparable reports. For this, we selected three IFIs that are somewhat comparable in size and mandate with HFISC and that rank high on the OECD Fiscal Advocacy Index (OECD, 2024):

- The Irish Fiscal Council
- The Portuguese Public Finance council
- The Czech Fiscal Council

Per IFI we selected two reports that are comparable with existing HFISC report. With regard to the presentation, we looked at the following elements:

- The presentation on the website
- The press release
- The report itself
- Possible additional materials
- A possible endorsement note

Annex A1: Irish Fiscal Council

For the comparison with the IFC, we selected a fiscal assessment report and an assessment of next year's budget, see table below.

HFISC	Irish Fiscal Council	Website
Assessment on the annual progress report	Fiscal assessment report 2025 (June 2025)	https://www.fiscalcouncil.ie/fiscal-assessment-report-june-2025-2/
Opinion on the draft budgetary plan 2025 (October 2024)	Pre-budget statement 2025 (September 2024)	https://www.fiscalcouncil.ie/pre-budget-statement-budget-2025-2/

Fiscal Assessment Report 2025

Presentation on website

- On its website the Irish Fiscal Council has a summary page, which uses four charts to highlight job growth, incidental corporation tax revenue hike, spending growth vis-à-vis the forecast and spending net of tax measures increasing. It closes with a clear set of recommendations to the government:
 "The Government should:
 Commit to a fiscal rule. This would set a sustainable growth rate for spending net of tax changes.
 Use budgetary policy to reduce the ups and downs of the economic cycle.
 Focus on infrastructure and competitiveness. No matter how the economy evolves, Ireland needs to address shortages of key infrastructure.
 Set realistic spending forecasts. Recent forecasts have ignored previous overruns."

Press release

- The press release of the report is two pages, it discusses the economic situation, the governmental budgetary policy and fiscal rules, and also contains the recommendations cited above. The tone is critical of the stance of fiscal policy given the state of the economy (positive output gap) and it is also critical of lacking a medium-term forecast and lacking fiscal rules:
"Government spending is rising much faster than planned. The Council says poor budgeting is mostly to blame. So far this year, current spending has increased by almost 6% - well above the 1.4% implied by Budget 2025. This is because earlier overruns weren't properly built into the latest forecasts.
Looking ahead to Budget 2026, the Council says the Government should adapt its approach to the state of the economy. If the economy stays strong, there's no need for extra stimulus. In that case, budgetary policy should show some 2 of 3 restraint. But if the economy takes a downturn, budgetary policy should provide support. "
The Council also raises concerns about Ireland's fiscal rules. It says the current framework is not effective. EU rules won't help much either. They still rely on GDP and ignore the risks from volatile corporation tax receipts".

Report

- The report itself contains a first page summarising the report in three charts and a second page summarising the report in words.

Additional material

- Based on the report there is a briefing presentation which can be used to brief the press (or other stakeholders). In addition to the messages from the press release, it contains a slide (14) with a very critical checklist of what "Ireland needs for a better fiscal framework".
- In addition, there is an endorsement note assessing the macro-economic forecast and endorsing it, by comparing it to its own benchmark forecast (page 13) and forecasts from other institutions.
- Moreover, the IFC presents all data and figures used in the analysis also in an Excel file.

Pre-budget statement 2025

Presentation on website

- The IFC presents a visual summary of the analysis in five graphs on the website. Also, the main messages are presented on the site in four clear bullets, that are critical of current government policies:
"Ireland's economy is strong.
However, the Government's "everything now" approach is adding needless pressure to the economy.
The Government might also have to reverse these promises in future.
The Government should stick to its rule."
- In addition, the IFC has put a YouTube video on the website of the presentation of the report. This provides more information than the summary, although the sound of the video is of medium quality.

Press release

- The press release is a two-page document, which provides the main messages of the analysis and has a clear header as well: "Press Release: Fiscal Assessment Report - Ireland's outlook: strong today, uncertain tomorrow"

- The press release is quite outspoken about the critical way IFC reviews the budgetary plan. It also presents the main recommendations for the government looking ahead:

"Looking ahead, the Government should: 1) Commit to a fiscal rule. This would set a sustainable growth rate for spending net of tax changes. 2) Use budgetary policy to reduce the ups and downs of the economic cycle. This means showing restraint when the economy is strong. It also means providing support when the economy is struggling. 3) Focus on infrastructure and competitiveness. No matter how the economy evolves, Ireland needs to address shortages of key infrastructure. 4) Set realistic spending forecasts. Recent forecasts have ignored previous overruns and been unrealistic."

Report

- The report itself contains a first page summarising the report in three charts, a second page summarising the report in words and a third page providing key indicators.

Additional material

- Based on the report there is a briefing presentation, which can be used to brief the press (or other stakeholders). In addition to the messages from the press release, it contains a slide (21) which explains the analysis of the IFC in more detail. Some of these slides are very outspoken, see figure X below.
- In addition, the IFC presents all data and figures used in the analysis also in an Excel file.

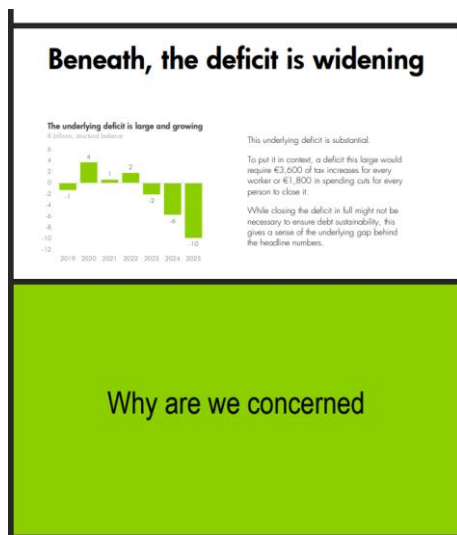


Figure 2 - The outspoken presentation of the IFC about the 2025 draft budget

Annex A2: Portuguese Public Finance Council

For the comparison with the Portuguese Public Finance Council, we selected a fiscal assessment report and an assessment of next year's budget, see table below.

HFISC	Portuguese public financial council	Website
Opinion on the draft budgetary plan 2025 (October 2024)	Analysis of the State Budget Proposal for 2025	https://www.cfp.pt/pt/publicacoes/orcamento-do-estado/analise-da-proposta-de-orcamento-do-estado-para-2025
Assessment on the annual progress report	Opinion on annual progress report	https://www.cfp.pt/pt/publicacoes/plano-estrutural/parecer-relativo-ao-relatorio-anual-de-progresso-2025

Analysis of the State Budget Proposal for 2025

Presentation on website

- The site of PFC provides a summary, in words (no graphs). Which is written on the site itself. This is useful, as it provides easy access that is also directly translatable (through the browser).
- This summary reiterates parts of the budget and points to risks for the budget, both at the income and expenditure site. The language used here is fairly nuanced, less outspoken compared to the IFC. However, the summary includes a comment on the way the data are presented, which is quite candid, using the term "undermines": "The inclusion of non-actual expenditure in the MFD, such as financial transactions, undermines transparency and the assessment of the actual evolution of public expenditure. Presenting the data in a consolidated manner would also help to improve transparency. "

Press release

- The press release is a two-page document, which is quite descriptive. It gives a summary of the budget analysis. It points to some budgetary risk but not in an alarming way. It does not provide recommendations.

Report

- The report itself contains a first page, that provides an overall appreciation of the budget, followed by an executive summary of the full analysis. Both these elements contain just words, no visual elements such as a graph or a table.
- The report is quite lengthy, about 40 pages. Different types of graphs and tables make it visually attractive. In addition, starting all paragraphs with a sentence in bold improves the readability of the report.

Additional material

- In addition, the PFC presents all data and figures used in the analysis also in an Excel file.

Assessment on the annual progress report

Presentation on website

- The conclusions of the opinion are directly presented on the web page in four bullets. This makes the main content easily accessible.
- These bullets are quite outspoken, stating that the forecast is not prudent. In addition, these bullets also refer to the need that the ministry provides more information to the council (arranged through a protocol):

"The forecast of 2.4% growth in 2025 appears probable, but not prudent. The Public Finance Council (CFP) calculated a growth of 10.1% in net expenditure before discretionary revenue measures (DRM) in 2024, higher than the 9.0% implied in the National Medium-Term Structural Budgetary Plan (POEN-MP). Taking the DRMs into account increases the growth of net expenditure to a range between 11.6% and 12.5%. The approved trajectory envisaged a growth of 11.8% in this expenditure. The difficulties in estimating net expenditure arising from the quantification of discretionary revenue measures reflected in this Opinion reinforce the need for a protocol between the CFP and the Ministry of Finance."

Press release

- Here is no press release accompanying this opinion

Report

- The report is 26 pages long and does not include a summary. The conclusion at the end, however, contains the main messages of the report.
- The analysis in the report assesses the macroeconomic forecasts and judges this forecast as "probable but not prudent".
- It also is critical of the information provided by the ministry of Finance, both in terms of data and methodology.
- The report also criticises the implementation of the EU rule in the case of Portugal: "It is reiterated that a new national supplementary rule to the European framework should be adopted. In this regard, it is important that such a national rule not be subject to influence from unobservable variables concerning "net expenditure."

Additional material

- No additional material has been provided.

Annex A3: Czech Fiscal council

For the comparison with the Czech Fiscal Council, we selected a fiscal assessment report and an assessment of next year's budget, see table below.

HFISC	Czech Fiscal council	Website
Opinion on the draft budgetary plan 2024	Statement of the CFC on the Draft State Budget for 2025	https://www.rozpctovarada.cz/en/publikace/statement-of-the-cfc-on-the-draft-state-budget-for-2025/
Assessment on the annual progress report	Opinion of the CFC No. 4/2025 on general government finances and fiscal and budgetary policy	https://www.rozpctovarada.cz/publikace/stanovisko-nrr-c-4-2025-k-vyvoji-hospodareni-sektoru-verejnych-instituci-a-k-nastaveni-fiskalni-a-rozpctove-politiky/

Statement of the CFC on the Draft State Budget for 2025

Presentation on website

- This statement is a short note of two pages. That is published on the website itself and as a Word document. There are buttons added to share the link to the page via LinkedIn, Facebook or X.

Report

- The opinion assesses both the macroeconomic and budgetary projections. With respect to these projections, it identifies clear shortcomings and communicates them explicitly:
 "... when analysing the approved draft state budget for 2025, the CFC has identified several items about whose realism it has partial or significant doubts: *"The CFC considers problematic the revenues from the sale of emission allowances (EU ETS), which are budgeted at CZK 30 billion."*
- The council adds four more points of budgetary posts whose income or expenditure are not adequately projected in their view. The note concludes therefore: *"Based on the above, the CFC notes that the draft budget does not respect the principles of realism and completeness in some items."*

Additional material

- No additional material has been provided.

Opinion of the CFC No. 4/2025 on general government finances and fiscal and budgetary policy

Presentation on website

- This is a short note this is published on the site itself and as PDF. It analyses risks to government finances and compliance with fiscal rules.

Report

- The report assesses risks to the government budget and clearly communicates about these risks. It points to specific risks to the budget that begin to materialise. Some of them the CFC already warned for in its assessment of the budget.
- The report is also critical about compliance with budgetary rules:

"From the medium-term perspective, it is necessary to reiterate that the current settings of tax and expenditure policies do not ensure fulfilment of the consolidation trajectory after 2026. Like the Convergence Programme of the Czech Republic[3] (April 2024), the Fiscal Forecast of the Czech Republic[4] (May 2025) assumes that the structural public finance deficit will be higher in 2027 than assumed by the Act on Budgetary Responsibility Rules."

Additional material

- No additional material has been provided.

Annex B: list of interviewees

- FPB
- CPB
- CBR Slovakia



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