

PUBLIC AFFAIRS IN THE 21ST CENTURY



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The precise definition of the term “public affairs” (PA) or “government relations” is still largely unknown among most of the companies in Slovakia. Besides a few multinational companies that know what PA is about from their operations at home, most Slovak companies still feel it is about having good relations with decision-makers, mostly political elites.

However, professional public affairs involve much more than this. What do public affairs consultancies do? Broadly speaking they assist clients in many types of PA programs such as helping set up a government relations organisation from scratch, risk assessment and risk management projects, regulatory reviews and advice on how to manage specific issues of importance to the firm through building coalitions.

The two largest areas of interest to the PA industry are competition and consumer policy. In the area of competition policy, the PA services involve working closely with the companies, their lawyers and economic advisers on the Public Policy aspects of mergers, acquisitions, state aid and other anti-trust cases. The most important aspect of all these cases is the EU dimension. That means that it is not only EU institutions

in Brussels that deal with these issues but also national authorities have say into particular cases. Therefore, the necessity of being able to advise companies every day on how best to engage with government or regulatory bodies on specific policy issues that concern them in virtually any country in Europe, and centrally at the EU level in Brussels, is much more present nowadays than ever before.

The area of consumer policy is getting to the top of the agenda of the European Commission as well as national governments. The EU and National regulatory authorities use the consumer protection argument for regulating selected areas of industries. Past attempts to regulate roaming charges, the recent telecommunication package and energy packages at national levels are just few of the examples.

It is expected that the Commission will become more active in fighting monopolies and investigating companies in particular sectors concerning anti-competitive behaviour. Only a few companies in Slovakia have experienced the investigations that the Commission may decide to carry out in economic sectors that do not seem to be working as well as they should or when there are indications of anti-competitive practices. The information obtained is used to understand how the market works and why it works that way. Based on the inquiry, the Commission may open company-specific investigations to ensure that Community rules on restrictive agreements and abuse of dominant position are respected.

For companies to be able to respond to new challenges rooting from membership in the EU and globalisation processes, it is more much important than ever to work with PA professionals. They will be able to bring together such senior teams across the EU in a closely coordinated way, which can address a wide range of regulatory and political needs and interests.

By Patrik Zoltvány

THE RANGE OF PROFESSIONAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Identifying and following public policy issues of concern to you.
- Developing an overall strategic public affairs plan and timeline to engage on those issues.
- Identifying key political, regulatory, official audiences and competitors or third parties concerned with your issues.
- Establishing the views held on your issues by key audiences and third parties.
- Developing your public affairs messages and then drafting and distributing correspondence & briefing materials, or advocating those messages.
- Tactical support and implementation, including arranging meetings with key political audiences and contacts with relevant third parties.
- Providing intelligence and feedback – “eyes and ears”.
- Identifying new potential issues along the way – avoiding surprises.
- Co-ordination of media messages consistent with your public affairs.



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