

Communicating Europe Abroad: EU Delegations and Public Diplomacy

By Julien Abratis



**Communicating Europe Abroad: EU
Delegations and Public Diplomacy
State of Play, Challenges and Ways Forward**

Julien Abratis

**August 2021
Figueroa Press
Los Angeles**

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by Julien Abratis

Guest Editor
Emily Metzgar

Published by
FIGUEROA PRESS
840 Childs Way, 3rd Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90089+
Phone: (213) 743-4800
Fax: (213) 743-4804
www.figueroapress.com

Figueroa Press is a division of the USC Bookstores

Produced by Crestec, Los Angeles, Inc.
Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN-13: 978-0-18-001832-3
ISBN-10: 0-18-001832-9

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USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School
University of Southern California
3502 Watt Way, Suites 232-234
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0281
Tel: (213) 821-2078; Fax: (213) 821-0774
cpd@usc.edu

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Abstract

Following the Lisbon Treaty's entry into force, the former European Commission Delegations were replaced by so-called EU Delegations, representing the Union vis-à-vis third countries and international organizations. In addition to fostering political and economic links with the host countries, a major task of the Delegations is to conduct public diplomacy (PD), a crucial exercise when it comes to favorably shaping perceptions abroad. This paper scrutinizes the latter task in greater detail and identifies challenges EU Delegations are facing in their outreach activities, aiming at developing an action plan to upgrade the Delegations' PD efforts and their role in foreign policy. The study is based on 17 semi-structured interviews with officials in EU Delegations, a former member of the European External Action Service (EEAS) HQ and diplomats from EU Member States' embassies. The interviews revealed that EU Delegations have been fairly effective in adapting to the "new" PD practices, focusing on dialogue rather than on one-way communication and using a broad range of communication channels. Nevertheless, several challenges remain, including a lack of resources and restricted evaluation mechanisms. To tackle these challenges, a series of recommendations were deducted, including inter alia better training for PD and communication officers before taking up their positions abroad, greater levels of trust from the EEAS HQ toward the Delegation staff and enhanced financial and personnel resources.

1. Introduction

Diplomacy has gone through major changes over the last decades, notably through a widening of its scope to include new policy issues, the eroding distinction between domestic and foreign policy and the emergence of new diplomatic players like non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and regional as well as multilateral organizations (Bátora & Spence, 2015). The traditional concept of diplomacy, referring to “government-to-government” interaction, has increasingly been complemented by a second component, known as *public diplomacy* (PD). PD goes beyond governmental relations and encompasses direct and mutual engagement with a third country’s population to influence perceptions and foster a favorable image among foreign citizens (Roberts, 2007). Therefore, PD is closely connected with the concept of *soft power*, arguing that power “occurs when one country gets other countries to *want* what it wants” (Nye, 1990, p. 166).

This article analyzes how the European Union (EU) as a particularly progressive diplomatic player conducts PD in third countries, as there has been little research on EU PD and even less on EU Delegations. It aims at providing a more thorough understanding of EU Delegations’ PD activities and the challenges they encounter to ultimately develop concrete policy recommendations. These aspects will be explored through qualitative interviews with staff working on the ground in EU Delegations, a former official of the European External Action Service (EEAS) HQ in Brussels and diplomats from EU Member State (MS) embassies. The interviews will elucidate to what extent the EU has scaled up its PD efforts, which have developed rather late compared to other multilateral organizations.

2. Methodological Approach

In order to achieve a comprehensive scope, this paper is based on 17 semi-structured interviews conducted with diplomats based at EU Delegations and national embassies located on five continents and in countries with different income levels. Moreover, the selection of Delegations contains representations having a relation with a single host country (bilateral Delegations), with multiple countries at the same time (multilateral Delegations) as well as to international organizations.¹ All interviews except for one were conducted online or via phone and lasted, on average, between 30 and 45 minutes. The Interview Guideline (cf. Annex) was designed based partially on the findings from a prior literature review,² including for instance the most frequently mentioned challenges.

The data gathered will be presented in three segments. First, a descriptive section will delineate the current state of play, mapping out how PD by EU Delegations works on the ground. Following, the main challenges for EU PD according to the practitioners' testimonies will be outlined. These insights will thereupon be used to work out a series of recommendations to improve the exertion of PD.

3. The Functioning of EU Public Diplomacy on the Ground

This chapter will provide the basics of EU PD functioning in its Delegations to achieve a starting point for the subsequent discussion on challenges and possible ways forward. To do so, it will briefly picture the understanding of PD by EU practitioners as well as messages conveyed, tools used, target groups and cooperation with EU MS in the host countries.

3.1 Understanding of Public Diplomacy

The interviews confirm the changing nature of PD and are in line with the definitions given in the literature (cf. e.g., Melissen, 2005; Riordan, 2004; Roberts, 2007). Asked about what PD represents for them, the EU diplomats explained that the discipline is about “promoting policies, values and interests [...] through a variety of channels to give visibility to an organization per se or certain projects. It is about perceptions, how people perceive.” Others said that EU PD is a means to inform foreign publics and decision-makers about how the EU functions. It seems that for the practitioners, PD combines both aspects, informing foreign people about what the EU is and presenting it in the best possible conditions. In this regard, PD can be considered as a supportive tool for foreign policy: “PD is an instrument that does not have a value per se if it comes without a policy.” Facing the recurrent argument that PD simply is another name for propaganda, one delegate stated that it sometimes is difficult to draw a line between both terms. However, there was a consensus that PD is more about dialogue than a simple one-way monologue and that this direct engagement has proven to be very successful. This two-sided approach focusing on increasing the understanding of an entity and mutual confidence is one of the aspects distinguishing PD from propaganda, which rather encompasses a manipulation of information, including mixing disinformation with true facts (Misjuk, 2013).

3.2 Messages Conveyed

The messages conveyed depend to a high degree on the local specificities, even though some aspects were repeatedly mentioned by most EU officials. These messages can roughly be divided into four groups, which will now be outlined according to their number of mentions.

Informing about the EU

Firstly, the most frequent message conveyed is trying to make people understand what the EU is, since many host country citizens “mix the EU with its MS,” or with other international organizations such as the UN and NATO. In some countries, not only the local population but even political institutions and civil servants do not dispose of a detailed knowledge of the EU. This mainly informative component applies in the case of faraway countries just as in countries that are closer to the EU in geographic terms. In the latter case, the host countries’ population may have a broader basic knowledge of the EU’s main characteristics so that information on other issues is in the foreground. This can be for example communication on the benefits of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) in the European Neighbourhood, the single market or the European Economic Area. This information is relevant because even in the case of close geographic proximity, the EU Delegations see themselves obliged to counteract misunderstandings and misinformation circulating among the host country’s population.

Promoting a Friendly Image

The second main aspect of EU PD is the promotion of a friendly image of the EU and therefore is closely connected to the concepts of soft power as well as state and nation branding. Fostering a favorable image relates to spreading an image of “EU as friends” of the host country and as a major international player and partner that supports the local population and delivers substantial contributions to the prosperity of the country. In countries with which the EU has a tense political relationship, communication focuses on a more culture-related message (“we are all Europe, there are more things that unite us than separate us”) or on pointing

to concrete cooperation, e.g., in fields such as education, culture and science. In this sense, one could argue that the EU tries to use its PD to exercise soft power and shape a positive environment for its foreign policy by portraying itself as a reliable and vital partner. The concrete content of its messages depending on the local context, the role of EU Delegations in the Eastern Neighbourhood was discovered to be a particular field for the EU to play due to the tension between Russian and EU foreign policy. The Delegations in this area proved to be actively involved inter alia in rebutting disinformation about the EU, for instance using the EEAS's East StratCom Task Force project EUvsDisinfo, which was established "to better forecast, address, and respond to the Russian Federation's ongoing disinformation campaigns affecting the European Union, its Member States, and countries in the shared neighbourhood" (EUvsDisinfo, n.d.). Part of this positive framing of the Union is to underscore that the EU and the host country "are stronger together," signaling a partnership of equals. In other third countries, however, where the EU is not such an important partner and where other global players such as China are more visible, the soft power component appears less resounding. In one of these cases, a PD officer declared that it is less about exerting soft power and more about simply being present on site without having concrete goals or interests.

Partnerships on Development and Beyond

Third, Delegations based in developing countries have a special role when it comes to the messages conveyed. In these countries, the EU Delegations concentrate on communicating on development cooperation projects implemented locally and on underscoring their direct benefit for the population. Nowadays, most of the financial support is not expended for concrete projects but is used as budget support for the host country's treasury fostering the

principles of ownership and a partnership of equals (European Commission, n.d.). Yet, the remaining EU development cooperation budget used on concrete projects appears to allow for enough undertakings that could be communicated and portrayed through EU PD activities. On the other hand, some interviewees in developing countries also stressed that they seek to communicate to the host country's population that their EU Delegation is "not simply a development cooperation agency," but also plays an important political role especially since the Lisbon Treaty. This facet of the EU's external policy seems to be less known to some partner countries, a stance embodied by the fact that in some countries, the local foreign ministry tends to take the EU Delegation less seriously than the ministry of economy in charge of administering development assistance. Therefore, communication *inter alia* on the Joint Africa-EU Strategy is a key element in highlighting the collaboration between both continents, going beyond traditional development cooperation.

Communicating EU Values

Lastly, in addition to these host country-tailored messages that are primarily based on highlighting the close connection between the EU and the receiving country, most Delegations stressed that they are trying to convey the core EU values in their communication. This includes emphasizing the role the Union attributes to principles such as human rights, gender equality and the international rule-based order, but also refers to more concrete fields such as the fight against climate change and the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

While informing about the EU and its values is a core task, many diplomats stated that the most successful messages are those of concrete benefit for the recipients. This can be

projects in the development cooperation sector, trainings and workshops for journalists and many other contents. A particularly successful “product” is the promotion of study trips and exchanges to the EU, which are well received, above all in countries with less favorable prospects or tight job markets. This shows that PD goes beyond simple communication of information and entails vigorous exchanges with the host population, illustrating that the sphere of diplomacy is more and more about establishing multilevel cooperation with stakeholders from the public, private and civil society sector. These testimonies are well in line with the findings from the PD literature, as e.g., Nye argues that “actions speak louder than words, and Public Diplomacy that appears to be mere window dressing [...] is unlikely to succeed” (Nye, 2008, p. 102).

3.3 Tools

All consulted Delegation staff members declared using “different channels for different targets,” depending on the message that is to be communicated. This includes both online and offline channels, which form part of a broader strategy.

3.3.1 Online Channels

Website

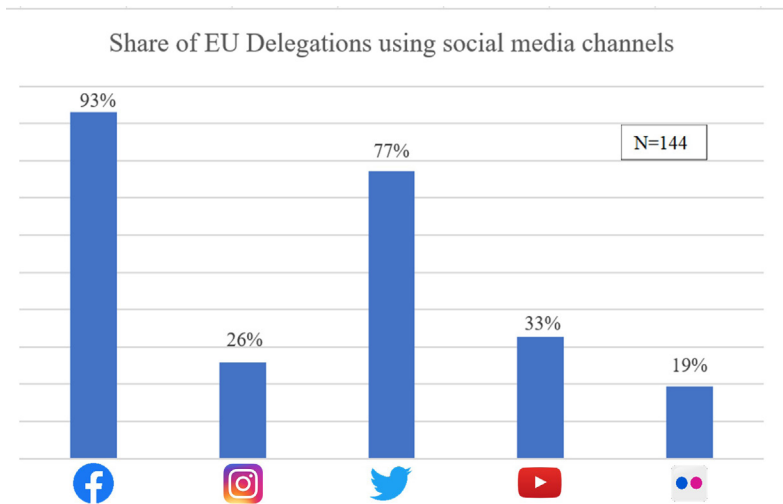
Some Delegations tend to convey political topics in an “old-fashioned” way, for instance through official statements on the website. Furthermore, the websites are used as an initial point of contact through which interested citizens can approach the Delegation. However, no interviewee referred on its own initiative to the official website as a PD tool. It was recalled that EU Delegations are not a consulate, which is why there is little reason for a host country’s citizen

to regularly consult the website unless in the case of real interest in the EU.

Social Media

In general, it can be stated that each social network has its own specificities and user groups, but for most of the Delegations, the messages conveyed do not differ substantially between the platforms. Quantitative research revealed that almost all Delegations dispose of a Facebook presence.

Figure 1



In some countries, mentioned especially by interviewees in the Global South, the weight of Facebook supersedes traditional websites, so that even ministries and corporates do not have a homepage but are active on Facebook.

More than three out of four EU Delegations dispose of a Twitter account. If the broader public is to be reached with political messages, Twitter is often mentioned as preferred channel. The willingness to use this network seems to depend significantly on the personal motivation of each Head of Delegation.

Other online platforms only play a subordinate role. This applies especially to content published on YouTube and Flickr, both of which usually attract a significantly lower number of followers compared to the first two platforms. Instagram, however, takes a special position among the less frequently used services. The platform is still experiencing a rapid growth of monthly active users and therefore could potentially be a powerful tool for EU Delegations. And indeed, some interviews confirmed that the platform is becoming more important as one diplomat stated that if the Delegation had more personnel at its disposal, it would wish to be more active on Instagram. But not only the direct use of the platform could play a key role in the future, also cooperating with local influencers to spread EU policies via Instagram is growing in popularity. In general, the usefulness of such social networks gaining more influence was considered a double-edged sword by some officials, who described Instagram a “superficial” tool that nevertheless would be beneficial to reach youth.

Generally, one can conclude that social media channels have become a key tool of PD—this assumption is confirmed unanimously by all experts on the ground. In some host countries, surveys were carried out showing that more than half of the population uses social media as a primary source for their information on the EU. This is why social media platforms are an important pillar for PD, although one Communication Officer argued that the EU still needs to “find its footing” in how to use social media appropriately.

3.3.2 Offline Channels

Despite the increasingly crucial role of online content, the offline component of PD remains a central element and was often referred to as being particularly fruitful. This includes the organization of workshops, seminars and cultural events like a European Day of Language, European Food Weeks or sponsoring initiatives such as the Plastic-Free September. A key activity is the engagement with local educational institutions, notably high schools and universities. The visits to the latter—often in cooperation with MS embassies—lead to intense dialogue, as students are interested in learning more about the EU and its institutions. These opportunities also permit the EU Delegations' staff to gather information on the young generation's perspectives. Furthermore, more institutionalized PD bodies such as Europe Houses and EU Info Centres can be an offline tool bringing the EU closer to the ordinary people. Moreover, traditional communication media like radio and television were mentioned as particularly important by some diplomats based in Caribbean and African countries with lower literacy rates, especially as a means to reach elderly people.

In general, the Heads of Delegation seem to be key pillars for effective outreach. In some countries, the latter are "omnipresent" in the media and have a reputation for being engaged in certain topics such as strengthening women's rights according to the interviews. But not only is the role of EU ambassadors vital, but heads of certain departments such as the cooperation section are prominent actors in the local media of some countries.

The tools used by EU Delegations depend substantially on the local context in the host country and on the most important political issues. For instance, diplomats from Delegations in developing countries argued that development

cooperation is a “magnificent instrument” for PD as it allows for communication of EU values and to talk about topics such as culture, education and environmental protection on numerous occasions. Every host country is different: in some places, traditional “offline” media remains very important; in others, the media landscape is quite restrictive so that alternative ways have to be found in order to engage with the local population. The use of new information and communication technologies is firmly anchored in most outreach strategies, allowing—in combination with offline activities—for a dialogue-based engagement with the host country’s population.

3.4 Target Groups

More than four out of five EU Delegations argued that reaching **youth** would be crucial and that their efforts focus on engaging with this target group, given that young people can have multiplier effects on others, as they are the future of the host country and usually among the most eager to learn new languages and discover foreign cultures. Also, the “European mentality” is more pronounced among youth than among older generations, turning them into an “incredibly useful resource.” Engaging with this target group allows the EU to shape the way in which the future generation perceives the Union at least to a certain extent, turning EU countries into attractive destinations for study trips, exchanges and cultural interaction.

Another target group mentioned in numerous interviews is the **political elite** of a country, servants in ministries and here in particular in the foreign ministry. These politicians and public officials are targeted inter alia with seminars, for instance on specific topics such as climate change policies as well as on the advantages of a strong bond between the EU and the host country. In addition to policymakers on the

federal level, aiming for local and regional representatives also proves useful in order to draw partnerships between the local level and the EU and MS ambassadors in order to anchor the EU presence in more remote areas. This can be done for example by organizing high-level visits to the regions and through meetings with governors and other political stakeholders.

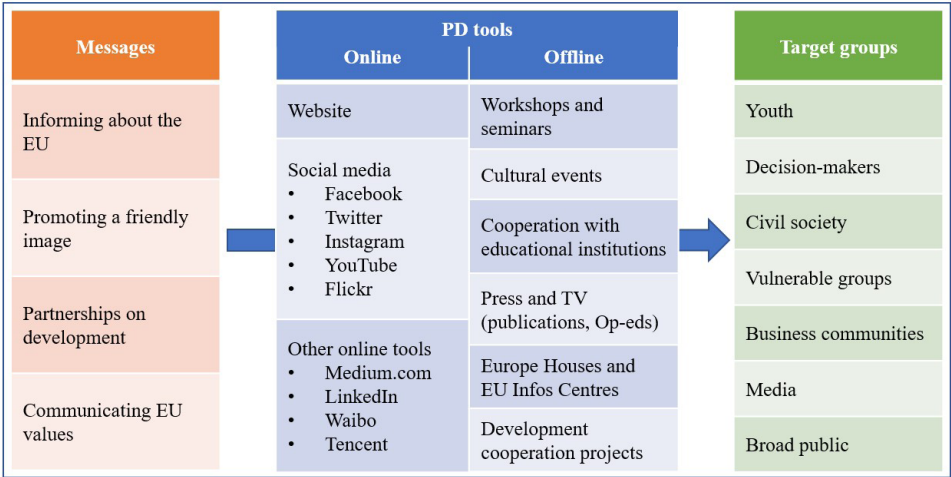
Of particular significance is engagement with the **media and journalists**, through traditional means like media releases and press conferences, which then are utilized by media outlets, but also through more hidden channels. These less obvious activities take place in the form of background talks, anonymous interviews and seminars especially in those host countries where the freedom of the press is restricted. The Delegations in some of these countries have been able to build up a strong network through confidence-building measures and support their partners as much as possible without being too easily identifiable.

The **civil society** in the host countries is likewise among the groups targeted by PD activities. For the future, one can expect closer cooperation with **business communities**, seeking to link European chambers of commerce with local associations and organizing conferences and exchange platforms. Such campaigns targeting small and medium-sized enterprises and the business community is of special relevance in partner countries of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, considering that these agreements extend the "four freedoms" of the EU to third countries. Therefore, communicating on the benefits of the free trade areas to local businesses is a key role of the EU Delegations in the region. In the case of less liberal countries, the same rules apply as outlined above for the media and journalists, meaning that cooperation is not always done in an obvious way. For instance, EU Delegations maintain contact with

NGOs and civil society organizations and try to support them, e.g., by issuing statements when members of these groups are arrested or imprisoned.

In developing countries, the target groups differ substantially from those in more developed countries. While youth and students are again mentioned as an open-minded and curious group in the process of intellectual formation, other targets also play a central role. This can be women, who are receptive to the EU stressing values such as gender equality in countries where the role of women is about to become more equal, or in host countries in which females are facing violence. Another example is a focus on less privileged groups among which criminality is a rampant issue. To these targets, the EU seeks to exert a preventive and educational function through its PD messages.

Figure 2 visualizes the key findings outlined in the chapters 3.2–3.4.



Cooperation between EU Delegations and EU Member States' Embassies: The tension field between the duty of cooperation for MS versus the EU's obligation to respect the diplomatic prerogatives of the MS is one that has often been outlined in the literature (e.g., Duquet, 2018). In fact, the interaction between EU Delegations and MS embassies represents an important ingredient for consensus and for the EU to speak with one voice abroad. The interviews with PD practitioners have shown that cooperation between EU Delegations and MS embassies on PD matters ranges from very little ("MS are not always very European") to relatively intensive teamwork.

In general, there seems to be a spirit of cooperation between the EU and its MS on PD issues, as the latter covers areas such as culture, education, etc.—all issues of great interest to the MS. As in other policy areas, most EU Delegations mentioned that joint coordination meetings on outreach activities serve as a platform to discuss current priorities and possible synergies. At the very least, MS embassies and EU Delegations try to keep each other informed of their actions, and very often, real cooperation takes place. This can be done through the joint organization of events on special occasions such as Europe Day, EU Film Festivals or through cooperation on cultural and educational campaigns. In addition, some EU Delegations have started to send out e-mail newsletters to the public, listing all upcoming cultural events organized by MS embassies. One EU diplomat explained that their Delegation had started to share so-called "visibility plans" with MS embassies in 2019. These are lists of all events and activities planned for the following year, together with the expected expenses, allowing the MS to opt in for certain endeavors. In many cases, the local EU Delegation disposes of considerably more staff than the national representations, which makes cooperation with the EU particularly attractive for countries

whose embassy's work suffers from the limited resources available.

Nevertheless, PD cooperation between MS embassies and the EU is not all-encompassing. MS do not rely entirely on the EU but also promote their own country's interests, about which an EU official said that the MS "have every right to do so." This applies in particular to host countries with which some MS have close bonds due to their colonial past and therefore wish to take the lead in many activities. Also, a certain degree of competition between EU MS was mentioned, although only by one EU official, in the context of the cultural events newsletter mentioned above. In general, the EU Delegations seem to be well attentive not to replace or outshine the MS but to provide added value and pool efforts. As a result, some delegates stated that the Head of Delegation in their PD activities explicitly recalls that the budget of the EU stems from its members, saying that this "deserves the recognition of the host countries." This assessment was shared by a MS ambassador based in the same country.

It was also stated that the fact of having fewer EU MS present in a country facilitates joint PD activities, especially if the present MS are known for having pro-EU ambassadors willing to join forces. A national ambassador added that according to his assessment, interpersonal relations between EU and national ambassadors are another key factor. Although the MS embassies receive instructions from their own HQ, many MS are keen to show that "we are one Europe" and that the EU "is more than the sum of its parts." To sum this up, one can observe that trends in cooperation are increasing. MS seem willing to join forces although keeping a healthy distance from giving up their own priorities. In that sense, PD reflects the general status quo in most foreign policy matters, with the EU usually playing a supportive role

in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, albeit some supranational tendencies can be identified.

3.5 Measuring the Success of Public Diplomacy Activities

The assumption derived from the literature (e.g., Pamment, 2011; Melissen, 2011) that it is difficult to measure the success of PD was confirmed by the interviewees. At the end of each year, every Delegation submits a report summarizing the meetings organized and the use of resources to allow for an evaluation of outreach activities and to better plan the coming year. Some Delegations have developed communication strategies that outline the goals of their efforts as well as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to assess the success of their activities. Nevertheless, it has become clear that evaluation remains a difficult task for EU Delegations—be it due to the lack of resources needed or simply because PD is an “imprecise science” that is difficult to keep track of, as one official noted. Instead, the focus is on observing “broader trends over the years.” To evaluate their PD, the Delegations have come up with both quantitative and qualitative methods.

3.5.1 Quantitative Approaches

The most convenient way to quantitatively assess the impact of PD activities is the one provided by social media platforms. Almost all respondents referred to social media analytics, which enable them to identify particularly successful posts, the age groups and geographic distribution of users reached. Also, the number of shares can be highly relevant to a Delegation’s communication section, as shared posts imply multiplying effects and facilitate a wider reach. The success of events and workshops is another factor that is comparatively easy to evaluate in quantitative terms by counting the attendees. Quantifying the success of

television and newspaper appearances is more difficult to realize. Apart from raw estimates of the audience share of television programs, one way of monitoring the influence in a country is to count the number of articles reporting on the EU Delegation published, e.g., in widely distributed, free journals or simply to read the media on a daily basis to gauge the prevailing mood toward the EU.

One Delegation expressed that it would aspire to soon conduct an empirical survey to determine which regions and social strata are reached by their activities. Some interviewees voiced that they conduct opinion polls to determine how the host country's population sees the EU. In countries of the European Neighbourhood, the quantitative evaluation of PD activities appears to be distinctively progressive. For instance, surveys are conducted at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of project implementation and through focus groups as well as through annual surveys on a regional and country level in order to monitor the impact of EU assistance.

3.5.2 Qualitative Approaches

Qualitative indicators include more informal impressions of EU staff, as one Head of Delegation explained that sometimes a letter from a host country's citizen saying, "Thank you for your work," e.g., regarding a concrete project can be a good source of motivation. On the other hand, some evidence that is difficult to quantify may also indicate negative feedback to EU PD. For example, an official mentioned that at times when the EU's image in the host country suffers, the number of bot attacks increases exponentially.

Lastly, it should be noted that not all respondents are in favor of enhancing measuring the success of PD activities.

One official pointed to the tension field between informative and “populist” posts, which means that Delegations, in an effort to increase their reach, are tempted to publish “cute panda photos” instead of authentic posts about EU values, which risks devaluating the role of the diplomatic mission. Being “obsessed with likes and followers” could compromise the quality of PD efforts and therefore is a double-edged sword.

4. Challenges in Conducting Public Diplomacy

Despite being quite effective in most of their outreach activities, EU Delegations still face several difficulties when conducting PD. The interviewees were confronted with the most frequently outlined challenges and criticisms disclosed by the literature review as well as with their own hypotheses. The practitioners’ assessment of these aspects will be outlined below. In addition, chapter 4.7 portrays a series of obstacles that had not been pre-identified and were revealed in the interviews only.

4.1 Public Diplomacy as an Infringement upon a Host Country’s Domestic Affairs?

Many researchers argue that PD can represent an infringement upon the domestic affairs of host countries and therefore might lead to diplomatic tensions (Melissen, 2011). This seems logical, recalling that the definition of PD entails engaging with a foreign public, a process which for a long time was considered inappropriate and a violation of international law. In general, the EU claims to be an actor following the principles of neutrality and multilateralism and therefore does not seek to interfere in the political affairs of a host country, but rather focuses on building long-lasting relations. This is also illustrated by the fact that EU missions abroad are backed by resolutions of the UN Security Council.

In many cases, EU Delegations' PD does not seem to be perceived as an infringement, since communication focuses, e.g., on cooperation projects in developing countries, which is mostly welcomed by the local population.

Yet, several EU Delegations indicated that they had experienced reactions from their host countries pointing to a possible or alleged infringement upon their domestic affairs. At best, these reactions could be political commentators publishing articles in newspapers in which they complain about the EU's behavior without more serious consequences; in the worst case, the host country's government can lodge a complaint if the EU comments too frankly on (e.g., economic or political) problems in the country or the Head of Delegation can even be declared *persona non grata*.

On the other hand, the EU through its Delegations must be a credible actor sticking with its values, representing a political balancing act. One diplomat summed up the dilemma as follows: "If you say something that is not very popular, the reaction is, 'Why are you meddling?'. But if you don't say anything, people [in the host country] ask, 'Where is the EU?'". Another diplomat explained that its relatively young and conflict-prone host country would often "rely on the EU" to mediate and engage rather than remain passive. In one developing country, the EU Communication Officer said that the local population does not really like the EU but does not forget about it either and appreciates its role as major donor. In that specific case, the EU does not interfere openly, but discusses issues such as corruption directly with decisionmakers to avoid public aversion. A way to prevent accusations of interference is to appeal to the fact that the host country is signatory to conventions rather than seeking to teach the population and decisionmakers how to behave. In addition to this field of tension within the host countries,

one official referred to EU-internal expectations, which require the Delegations to stick with EU values.

This challenge hints to a more fundamental dilemma, occurring when PD efforts and other foreign policies collide. A flagrant example is the EU's decision to put some third countries on a blacklist, e.g., for money laundering, which can "impair the PD in the long run." On the other hand, it allows the EU to express that this process does not aim to punish the local population, but to point out necessary improvements. Striking the right balance between outreach activities presenting the EU as a steadfast partner and holding up its values and external policy principles is of the utmost importance and necessitates a determination of political priorities. Again, this challenge depends to a large extent on the local context. It appears that these decisions require a high degree of cultural awareness and can only take place on a case-by-case basis.

4.2 Limited Interest by the Target Audience

The hypothesis that PD might be met with little interest in some cases was not confirmed by the interviews. Most interviewed officials asserted that there is generally a strong interest in their Delegation's activities. In developing countries where the EU is among the major donors and partners, developing cooperation is "so important that it dominates the political news" so that the EU can easily reach the people. Another reason for this is that development cooperation projects are highly relevant to "ordinary" people and not only to the elites, which facilitates the EU's PD activities. In countries of the European Neighbourhood, the EU Delegations are likewise able to reach their target audience relatively effortlessly, as there usually is strong interest in the EU. However, in countries where Euroscepticism, a strong sense of nationalism and governmental propaganda prevail,

the interest in the EU Delegations' activities is much lower, and the EU is not considered a desirable role model.

Differences can be observed regarding the size of the host country's population and its demographic density. Officials in smaller host countries more often expressed that their activities are successful in reaching the population, whereas in larger countries, this represents a much more significant challenge. In sparsely populated countries, the Head of Delegation regularly tries to leave the densely populated agglomerations to be visible in the less inhabited areas. Another diplomat expressed that their greatest PD achievement is their ability to go outside the big cities and into rural areas, which is a major challenge, but one that the Delegation is increasingly able to cope with.

4.3 Competition with Other Actors

The limited interest in the EU is closely connected to the competition for attention with other influential actors. In some Eastern countries, officials argued that there was a certain degree of rivalry with China and Russia due to the longstanding geographical, historical and cultural proximity to these countries ("people have loyalties to other players"). This can go so far that it is almost impossible for the EU to make its voice heard and spread its values. The Chinese influence is also increasingly perceived on African soil. But not only other global powers from the East can be competitors to the EU, also Western partners do not refrain from trying to shape the population's opinion through their outreach measures. Examples are the U.S. and Great Britain, especially in host countries with close ties to either or both actors. A diplomat based in a country geographically close to the EU mentioned the influence of the British press, conveying a certain image of the EU that does not necessarily facilitate

the EU's efforts to spread its values and create a positive narrative.

There are other actors in developing countries who also try to reach the local population with their information, such as the UN or national development agencies. Nevertheless, the EU staff did not consider these actors as competitors to the EU's outreach but rather as partners striving for the same goals. In the past, the U.S. development assistance agency USAID was also a competitor for the attention of the local population. Over the last years, USAID has ceased or reduced its activities in some countries, so that the EU is henceforth even more distinctively recognized as the most active actor in the development cooperation sector. In general, despite the examples given in this subsection, most interviewees argued that PD should not be seen as a competition and "is not a zero-sum game."

4.4 Lack of an Internal Consensus

The interviews revealed that in contrast to the strong focus on a domestic consensus in the literature (cf. e.g., Duke, 2013), the day-to-day work does not seem to be so greatly impacted by the phenomenon. This may be because the core of the cooperation between the EU and the host country is mostly about comparatively uncontroversial topics. A prime example is development cooperation, being based on the European Consensus on Development which is accepted by every EU MS. But even for more contentious foreign policy issues such as PD in countries with a disputed legal status, the lack of a common EU position is not a major problem since the concerned EU Delegation adopted measures to handle these circumstances and has a good relationship with those EU MS who do not recognize the host country. The overarching goal in their PD efforts remains to

aim at reaching a consensus for joint statements as often as possible.

For other countries, it can be stated that the potential lack of an internal consensus might simply not matter that much in outreach activities. An official working in a state distant from the EU in which China and Russia exert a significant influence argued that the host country's population would just not care about the EU's condition and whether or not there is a consensus. For them, among the only aspects they are aware of concerning the EU is Brexit, which is seen as "the beginning of the collapse of the EU." This, according to the interview partner, is also due to the influence of Russian propaganda. Intricacies of the functioning of EU institutions are of no interest to the local population in this setting.

More generally, a major challenge for the EU, which sums up many other difficulties and which is related to the establishment of a domestic consensus, is to better explain its added value, both to foreign publics and to its domestic audience. The EU officials argued that in some cases it seems even easier to explain the additional value of the EU to third countries' citizens, for instance by funding development projects. The EU MS, however, often play a double game by blaming the EU for problems while spuriously taking credit for favorable developments. To sell the EU more positively, it is therefore necessary to better explain what the EU does and to address its critics.

4.5 Language Barriers

Some interviews revealed a lack of resources rendering the communication in all major languages spoken in a host country impossible. While this challenge has been raised to the HQ and some Delegations have tried to put it on the agenda, for now, "there is nothing in the pipeline" that could

indicate an improvement in this respect. Aiming at reaching the entire population and stating that “languages are important,” this seems to be a recurrent issue, even though other bi- and multilingual countries did not consider this a pressing problem.

4.6 Staffing and Capacity Problems

The early post-Lisbon literature and the 2013 EEAS self-assessment claimed that a major challenge resulting from the institutional changes could be staffing and capacity problems (EEAS, 2013). This is on the grounds that downgrading the rotating presidency’s role following the Lisbon Treaty has led to a significantly higher workload for the EU Delegations (Duke, 2013). In fact, the interviews show that staffing and resources seem to be among the biggest problems EU Delegations are facing, though to diverging extents. In one Delegation interviewed, only two delegates work on PD although more than 200 projects must be covered, in addition to the daily press work. In Delegations where the political, press and communication sections are merged into one position, this problem seems to be particularly alarming. This lack of human resources can severely hamper the effectivity of outreach activities—one official explained that he alone is responsible for PD, press and cultural activities and would appreciate having another colleague not only to have more capacities, but also to develop new approaches and ideas.

In this situation of limited resources, the communication staff can only comprehensively cover selected flagship projects without being able to report about “normal” projects as much as they wish. Communication on concrete projects can lead to a particularly fruitful engagement with the target audience, but this dialogue requires commensurate resources. The thin personnel cover often leads to the

merging of positions outlined above and to the fact that in some Delegations, there is no dedicated Communication Officer at all.

In financial terms, the EU's budget for PD is incrementally increasing, but remains much lower than, e.g., in the case of the U.S. However, the lack of financial resources was not confirmed as unanimously as the personnel shortage. For instance, some diplomats disclosed that the current budget would be sufficient for the PD staff and that a higher budget would "overload" them. A MS embassy's diplomat recalled that EU Delegations usually dispose of far more resources than their national counterparts.

4.7 Other Challenges

In addition to the challenges outlined above, the respondents mentioned further obstacles that had not been included in the questionnaire derived from the findings in the literature. One major issue is related to PD by those EU Delegations covering more than one country, which an official described as "enormously complicated." For the staff to cope with this challenge, one Delegation set up an antenna in one of the other countries covered by its mandate that handles the day-to-day development cooperation tasks. In the case of major events, the EU ambassador travels to the country, accompanied by the Head of the Political, Information and Press Section. The presence of the antenna seems to alleviate the burden of covering multiple countries with regards to PD, as the local press also covers the attendance of the antenna's local delegates to meetings and events with local stakeholders.

Secondly, the EU Delegations also suffer from the general trends in the communications sector. Platforms like Facebook appear to become more commercial,

whereas objective coverage seems to fade more into the background. Fake news increasingly affects EU outreach activities, contributing to Euroscepticism in some places. In third countries where newspapers play a major role in reaching the local population, the decreasing size of this more traditional medium will also pose a problem, especially in the communication with older, less tech-savvy people.

A main challenge for PD staff is to accept that not everyone can be reached through their activities, for instance due to illiteracy in some countries. While the young generation can read in the largest portion of cases, this cannot always be said about older generations. This finding represents a potential source of fragmentation, aggravated by the fact that illiterate people often live in the countryside. Given these limitations, innovative solutions must be found to further extend the scope of outreach activities. Inspiration for this could be drawn, e.g., from the UN, using for instance music and art to connect the people.

Moreover, authoritarian trends and the lacking maintenance of democratic standards complicates the EU Delegations' leeway in some places and can prevent them from exerting PD in the best possible way. Some countries exhibit a highly politicized society in which politics take so much space and resources that very little room is left for topics that the EU Delegation would like to focus on, such as rule of law, education and the implementation of its projects. In other countries, the EU's room for maneuver is restricted by the harsh media and political environment, which considerably limits the scope for public, visible actions and pushes the EU Delegation into more "underground" operations.

For host countries in which assistance or development cooperation projects are implemented, a major obstacle

to PD is the complexity of these programs, which makes sending a “clear message in a clear context” very difficult. Some diplomats from one Delegation explained that the way EU assistance is designed is very complex, even for the Delegation staff. One example of this is the series of COVID-19 response packages intended to help the host countries. Occasionally, it happens that the country’s administration as beneficiary does not understand the assistance in all its details, which is a prerequisite for proper communication. The challenge therefore is to distil the necessary information and package it into a clear format.

In contrast to Delegations maintaining relations with nation-states, EU Delegations to international organizations face particular challenges. They do not dispose of a “host country population” whose opinion could be shaped by PD activities. Rather, their political objectives consist in strengthening the EU’s role in the respective international organization, to inform about the benefits of the latter and to ensure internal communication to the EEAS HQ. Since the “usual” PD instruments outlined above are not always fit for this purpose, significantly less PD resources are allocated to these Delegations. This results in the fact that there was either no or just one person dealing with PD on a regular basis in the representations interviewed. A further challenge for these EU Delegations is the lack of EU competences in the respective policy areas at most multilateral organizations, which turns the Delegations into marginal figures with little to say or decide. This is exacerbated when EU MS positions in these international fora diverge, so that the EU cannot speak with one voice.

5. Possible Solutions and Policy Recommendations: A Ten-Point Action Plan for a More Effective EU Public Diplomacy

The previous chapter illustrated that although PD seems to function well in general, several improvements appear necessary to further enhance the effectivity of outreach activities. All recommendations point toward the overarching goal of making PD a central priority of EU foreign policy and turning it into an integral element of the foreign policy decision-making process. Several concrete policy recommendations can be derived from this objective, encompassing both organizational and content-related suggestions as well as addressing general underlying challenges.

5.1 Setting up Better Training Possibilities

The first policy recommendation, which was explicitly brought up in several interviews, is to set up better training possibilities for PD staff. This refers especially to delegates wishing to improve their capabilities before starting their duty abroad, given that many officials do not have a relevant academic or professional background in communication science. For this reason, some PD Officers admitted that they felt somewhat overwhelmed at the beginning of their service and discovered the profession only on a learning-by-doing basis. This recommendation applies in particular to Heads of Delegation, some of whom are not overly familiar with the subtleties of online communication due to their advanced age and therefore are more skeptical about using such channels. According to one diplomat, many officials are “good generalists” and know very well the traditional diplomatic work, whereas communication activities are a very specific field. Therefore, he or she encouraged the creation of better training possibilities on how to place messages, how to maintain contact with the local media,

etc. However, the person slightly backpedaled, saying that such suggestions are always a question of budget.

5.2 Fostering Language Skills of EU Delegation Staff

The interviews revealed that adequate language skills are of paramount importance to achieve thriving PD. Many practitioners said that communicating in the native language(s) of the host country is very successful. This is not only valid for Communication and Information Officers but was also mentioned for the Heads of Delegation. If the latter speak the local language, this is considered an “asset,” rendering the daily work much easier and having a positive impact on outreach efforts. However, past studies have shown that at least in 2010, none of the Heads of Delegation in Arab countries spoke Arabic, only four spoke Russian and in Asia, nobody claimed good knowledge of Chinese, Hindi, Korean and other important languages (Formuszewicz & Kumoch, 2010, p. 21). Even moderate language skills can already show the host country’s population that the EU’s staff is open to their culture. The use of local staff and interpreters also play a key role in this context.

5.3 Increasing the Resources Available for PD Activities

As previously mentioned, the lack of resources is a substantial challenge to EU PD. Therefore, a key recommendation of this study is to enhance the resources dedicated to outreach activities, above all in terms of staffing. This would allow for a wider range of activities and communication in all official languages of a host country. The interviewees indicated that higher staffing levels could enable the Delegations to be active on more channels, such as Instagram. The latter is still underused despite its tremendous importance especially for reaching the young generation, which constitutes one of the most

important target groups. The EU practitioners expect that the Delegations will have to adapt to new communication trends, perhaps even including the use of platforms like TikTok. Moreover, a greater number of staff working on PD would enable the Delegations to cover more projects than just a few flagship operations and to foster a stronger dialogue-based engagement both on- and offline. In this respect, the insights from the interviews confirm the findings in the literature, which already determined a shortage of resources a decade ago.

On top of human resources, EU Delegations must be equipped with adequate technical equipment enabling them to exert PD in the best possible conditions. One official described that the equipment on the ground had to be bought “ad-hoc” by the staff members themselves. Not only does it have to be ensured that such equipment is provided to the staff, but they must also receive regular training on the proper use of it. Lastly, the call for better training opportunities raised in the first policy recommendation, possibly in combination with language courses, reiterates the need for increased PD resources if the EU is to considerably step up its efforts in this area. One way to test and start implementing this recommendation could be an incentive structure whereby those Delegations submitting a particularly innovative PD plan could be granted additional resources.

5.4 Enhancing Evaluation Mechanisms

The evaluation of outreach operations remains a weak spot of PD. Despite the evaluation mechanisms already put in place, this aspect harbors substantial potential for improvement. The implementation of regular and comprehensive surveys could ensure not only a detailed assessment of the EU’s perception abroad, but also that

factors such as the social status of the reached audience be gauged to subsequently adapt measures. Setting up comprehensive PD strategies including verbose KPIs would lead to a more structured and standardized way of capturing the impact of the EU Delegations' activities, as the examples of some Delegations have shown. Information on how to structure such evaluation frameworks could also be a topic to be addressed in the training sessions mentioned above.

In this regard, some multilateral organizations appear better equipped than the EU in its current state. For instance, NATO disposes of an elaborate annual PD strategy that is based on SWOT analyses and spells out a relatively extensive evaluation mechanism (Pagovski, 2015, p. 31). The organization furthermore has a Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre and appears to plan its PD in a more sophisticated way than is the case for the EU. Admittedly, this recommendation presupposes the availability of considerable resources. However, despite the increased spending required for a more thorough evaluation, these expenses could in return lead to long-term cost savings due to more adapted and targeted measures on the ground.

5.5 Establishing a More Trust-Based Relationship between the EEAS HQ and the EU Delegations

The relationship between EU Delegations and the EEAS HQ in Brussels was among the most ambivalent topics covered in this paper. While in general, many servants in the Delegations described the relationship as a positive and close one, the statements of some interviewees underlined the need for a few adjustments for the future. For one thing, it was encouraged to strengthen the confidence of the EEAS HQ in its Delegations' staff and to let them use their knowledge of the local specificities to a greater extent. One diplomat portrayed the relationship with the HQ as a "tight

leash,” since the HQ invites the Delegations to talk about certain topics of great importance to the EU (e.g., animal protection in countries with lower standards in this respect), while other issues such as Brexit should not be touched upon. However, in some countries, the Delegation staff explained that the lines to take provided by Brussels aim at very sensitive issues in the host country and could lead to a deterioration of the EU’s image abroad. On the other hand, Brexit was an acute topic in some third countries when the interviews were conducted, so that it could be detrimental not to talk about such processes at all. In a nutshell, the EEAS could decide to follow the maxim “trust your ambassador” to achieve optimal results, a strategy that would become even more appropriate with increased training and evaluation resources. Yet, this recommendation does not apply to some Delegations, notably those already suffering from a perceived lack of attention by the EEAS HQ. Closer links with these more distant Delegations could prove useful to strengthen the morale of the local staff, which sometimes seems to feel overlooked by the central administration.

5.6 Intensifying the Cooperation between EU Delegations and MS Embassies

Close cooperation between EU Delegations and MS embassies is particularly vital to ensure a more coherent image of the EU abroad. This collaboration could kill two birds with one stone: on the one hand, teaming up on more occasions would enhance the visibility of the fact that the EU and its MS form a strongly interconnected and cohesive community of destiny. Secondly, a closer partnership would offer significant potential for rationalization and therefore increased cost-efficiency. For these reasons, it would be recommendable to expand burden-sharing measures such as the visibility plans introduced in some EU Delegations. Transparently setting up lists of envisaged activities and

costs would allow each MS to decide whether it wishes to join the EU in collective PD activities. On the other hand, organizational features like the possibility for national ministries to delegate staff (SNEs) to work for the EEAS either in the HQ or in the Delegations entails the potential for better coordination between the MS and the EU (Furness, 2010). Thus, this instrument should increasingly be used in PD matters as well.

5.7 Tailoring the PD Content to the Target Groups

As outlined in section 3.4., EU Delegations target a wide range of people with their PD and expressed themselves fairly satisfied with their target groups, while also noting that it is impossible to reach the totality of a host country's population. For the future, several groups could play a key role in the EU's outreach activities. Deepening the engagement with young journalists and influencers could be crucial due to their potential role as potent multipliers with an above-average affinity to European values. Secondly, bridging the gap with people in rural localities is important to reach an even broader audience and to make sure that all social classes are targeted. For the EU to be a truly successful player in third countries, it is key to analyze and understand the EU's image among the population, for instance via surveys. This would allow the Delegations to conduct a stocktaking and consequently try to change the perceptions in the country according to the findings.

5.8 Achieve More Coherent Positions of EU Member States at International Organizations to Facilitate a Common Approach to PD

The situation of EU Delegations to international organizations is particularly complicated and would deserve a more in-depth analysis on its own. This starts with the

finding that the concept of PD cannot be as easily applied to these Delegations, be it due to the absence of clearly definable target groups or political objectives that are difficult to achieve with traditional PD instruments. At least in those Delegations to organizations in which the EU has only limited competences, the EU so far only has a very secondary significance and is not in a position to convey strong messages through PD, apart from a few cultural events on occasions like Europe Day or by organizing small-scale events such as visits for interested groups. To sustainably alter this state of play, a more profound change would need to take place, stepping up the EU's role in international organizations.³ However, the reservation must be made that the Delegations at the UN in New York and to the WTO in Geneva, presumably those where the EU has a relatively important position compared to other organizations, were not interviewed for this paper. In addition, it must be ensured that EU MS act in concert when it comes to taking decisions at multilateral organizations. This would in turn enable the respective EU Delegations to launch external communication campaigns underscoring the common position of the EU through its MS and to effectively team up in joint outreach efforts.

5.9 Focusing on the Right Message-delivery Techniques

Furthermore, several content-transmission related policy recommendations have emerged that could potentially give greater impact to the outreach activities of EU Delegations:

- The EU's external communication should focus on topics and strategies that are particularly successful. The interviews have shown that very well-functioning contents are, above all, concrete projects with a direct impact on the local population, which usually also tend to attract a great deal of attention in the media.

One of the central takeaways of the interviews is that PD does not have a value for its own but needs to be combined with something that adds value, showing the EU's concrete impact on the ground.

- Closely related to the first aspect is a stylistic element: the use of storytelling as a means of conveying information. Instead of only referring to statistics and hard facts, the EU practitioners underscored that explaining the EU's actions in a relatable, personal way is a very expedient and fruitful approach. Rather than mentioning the actual sum of euros spent on projects, it proves more successful to indicate how many schools have been built and how many children can benefit from them, to give an example.
- A key result from the interviews with staff based in countries where the EU implements or funds assistance, development cooperation projects and free trade areas is the promotion of a sense of ownership among local stakeholders and the population. In order to counter the recurrent criticism of paternalism, the EU Delegations refrain from being too present in the communication on these topics and leave it to the host countries' multipliers to communicate the benefits of this cooperation to their peers. This includes cooperation with local and central authorities and should foster the core narrative of an equal partnership.
- In one interview, the expert explained that in the future he or she expects cultural diplomacy to be given a more explicit focus as a means of public outreach that makes it possible to connect with new audiences. Existing examples of this include Study-in-Europe Weeks, European Food Days with

national ambassadors cooking their home country's typical food and photo marathons for which European photographers come to the host country to take photos that are then exhibited in Europe. This cultural approach is in line with the first content-related recommendation in the sense that cultural PD is people-oriented and of concrete rather than abstract and highfalutin nature.

It is clear that these recommendations could potentially lead to new challenges. Some practitioners explained that when certain projects or schemes work well, the Delegations usually receive many requests from other people who would like to benefit as well. This leads back to a core problem of EU PD, namely the lack of resources.

5.9.1 Strengthening the Link between Domestic and Foreign PD to Ultimately Achieve More Coherent Policies

At the end of the day, if the EU is ultimately to be a respected and credible actor on the international stage, it needs coherent policies. A major problem impeding a more attractive PD is the fact that political messages sometimes are rather weak due to a lack of unanimity or ambitions on political issues. Although the absence of a domestic consensus apparently does not affect the Delegations' outreach efforts as much as expected by other scholars, one of the main questions remains what is decided at political level. If the EU MS were to agree on increasing their influence in the world, taking a strong joint approach on crucial political topics would undoubtedly facilitate a more coherent PD. This again shows how closely the internal and external dimensions are interwoven, reflecting the concept of *intermestic* PD. Resolving internal criticism of the EU, for example by enhancing its transparency and

democratic accountability, is therefore equally as important as developing a vision for its foreign policy.

In this respect, it will be crucial to continue working on bridging the communication gap between the EU and its citizens and to establish a truly European public sphere (see e.g., Kurpas, Brüggemann, & Meyer, 2006). It remains essential for the EU to continue the shift from purely informational campaigns toward communication and interaction with its citizens to enable the latter to have an informed opinion, hold decision-makers accountable and achieve greater cohesion (*ibid.*). Proposals with this aim are manifold and include calls for more civic education, dialogue with EU citizens through open debates and a stronger link with the media to strengthen coverage of EU issues (European Commission, 2006).

6. Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This research represents a contribution to the nascent academic and practical debate on the future of EU PD and the role of the EEAS and its Delegations. Nevertheless, the study by no means claims to be representative and exhaustive in its scope, due to a series of limitations encountered during the research process.

In the first place, it was difficult to achieve a geographical and thematic equilibrium of Delegations, as the responses to interview requests were mixed. Even though Delegations from five continents were interviewed, covering both developing and more developed countries, it would be beneficial to include even more interviews into the research. This also applies to EU Delegations to international organizations, among which only Delegations with a relatively weak position were interviewed.

In addition, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted the relatively short period of input collection. Due to these circumstances, many diplomats from MS embassies had to devote their time to more urgent matters (e.g., organizing return flights), wherefore several interview requests had to be rejected. For a future continuation of this research, it would thus be useful to consult more MS embassies of both smaller and larger EU MS to identify potential differences in their assessment of PD activities by EU Delegations and to reveal untapped potential for improved cooperation and burden sharing. The same impediment applied to the EEAS HQ in Brussels, which at the time of the research was in full lockdown.

A main implication for future research would be to focus the scope of investigation on topics that have been touched upon in this study but require further analysis. This includes challenges such as PD as a possible infringement upon host countries' internal affairs, competition with non-EU actors and cooperation with MS embassies. In addition, a quantitative approach analyzing the impact of EU PD in third countries could be useful to assess how effective the Delegations' activities really turn out to be. In this context, the stance of local actors and host populations should be considered.

7. Conclusion

PD is a central foreign policy instrument allowing states and entities to exert soft power, shaping perceptions among citizens of other countries to create a favorable policy environment. Against this background, EU Delegations are an important asset for the EU in terms of creating a positive image abroad and building a good reputation in third countries. Thus, if the EU is to be taken seriously as an

international actor, it is indispensable to adopt a clear PD strategy.

With this overarching objective in mind, the goal of this study was to analyze the current state of play regarding the EU Delegations' PD activities and to develop policy recommendations to render EU outreach in third countries more fruitful. The research has shown that old and new PD approaches co-exist in the daily work of EU Delegations, increasingly incorporating the use of new communication channels. While parts of the EU's outreach measures in third countries only aim to inform the public about what the Union is and what it consists of, a substantial part of its PD is concerned with shaping a positive image of the EU by emphasizing its role as a reliable and desirable partner of the host country. This is in line with the fundamental aims of soft power and shows that the EU has moved from purely informational campaigns toward more substantial, multi-level dialogue with a broad spectrum of target groups. In this sense, the EU has become a rather progressive player despite a relatively late development of PD compared to other multilateral organizations. In general, the respondents converged on the importance of PD and their motivation to take the current practices to the next level.

Based on the challenges derived from 17 semi-structured interviews with EU and national officials, a Ten-Point Action Plan for a more effective PD was developed. It entails an increase of human and financial resources available for this purpose, which would open up new possibilities in terms of enhancing trainings, promoting better evaluation mechanisms and allowing for content tailored to the perceptions and expectations of the target groups. Each local context is different, and instead of a silver bullet, adapted strategies are a key factor for success. In more conceptual terms, both the bond between EU Delegations and the

EEAS HQ and the cooperation with MS embassies offer untapped potential for improvement, for which the Ten-Point Action Plan equally presents fruitful starting points. For all these points to be implemented, a political decision must ultimately be taken that attaches greater importance to PD as an indispensable EU foreign policy instrument.

Author's Biography

Julien Abratis has been working for different Directorates-General at the European Commission, dealing with EU development cooperation, regional development policy and coordination with International Financial Institutions. Intrigued by the EU's external relations, he completed a MA in European Affairs at Sciences Po with a particular focus on Europe's role in the world. During his BA, Julien studied International Relations, Economics and Social Sciences at the University of Erfurt (Germany) as well as one semester at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in Mexico City. Prior to joining the European Commission, Julien gained insights at PwC, the German Federal Foreign Office and the European Parliament.

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Endnotes

1. Nota bene: Due to the limited space available for this contribution, the focus of this paper will lie on “regular” Delegations (= to a country rather than to international organizations). The interviews unveiled that EU Delegations to international organizations are facing very different challenges when it comes to their PD activities, as will briefly be described in Chapter 4.7. This topic would deserve a closer look as part of a dedicated contribution.
2. The literature review analyzed existing research from different angles: (i) PD as such (e.g., Melissen, 2005; Roberts, 2007; Duke, 2013), (ii) the connection with similar concepts such as nation and state branding (Anholt, 2011; van Ham, 2001) and (iii) PD conducted by EU Delegations (Melissen, 2011, 2013; Azpíroz: 2014, 2015; Cross, 2015).
3. To get an idea of the practical implications this recommendation could entail, it is worth looking at the controversy around the EU Delegation to the UN in New York (cf. e.g., Laatikainen, 2015).
4. This was asked as an open question. The sub-questions were only raised by the interviewer if they were not mentioned in the initial answer. This was done to verify whether challenges recurrently mentioned in the literature are of practical relevance in the EU context.

Annex: Interview Guidelines

1. What are the most important messages you are conveying with your Public Diplomacy (PD) activities?
2. What are your PD tools?
3. Who do you target with your PD activities?
4. (How) Do you cooperate with EU Member States' embassies? Are there any challenges in cooperation with MS?
5. Is there any competition for the attention of the target audience(s) and if so, with whom?
6. How do you measure the success of your PD activities?
7. What are your biggest achievements in terms of PD? What works particularly well?
8. What are challenges and how do you meet them?
 - a. PD as infringement upon the host country's domestic affairs?
 - b. Lack of a broad domestic consensus about the European identity—is this a problem?
 - c. Staffing and capacity problems?
 - d. Other challenges?
9. Do you have any “lessons learned” on what could be improved to make EU PD in EU Delegations even more successful?

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