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The Role of EU Delegations in Public Diplomacy

Challenges and Opportunities

Julien Abratis

Master's Thesis supervised by Odette Tomescu-Hatto

Second member of the Jury: Richard Balme

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Abstract

The Lisbon Treaty has significantly changed the EU's institutional setup regarding its external relations, replacing the former Commission Delegations with so-called EU Delegations which represent the Union vis-à-vis third countries and International Organisations. Apart from maintaining political and economic relations and keeping the EU informed of developments in the host country, a major task of the Delegations is to conduct Public Diplomacy (PD). This thesis scrutinises the latter task in more detail, questioning what makes supranational EU PD successful in times characterised by a renationalisation of foreign policy and lies out important challenges EU Delegations are facing in their outreach activities. These questions are assessed by means of 17 semi-structured interviews with officials in EU Delegations and diplomats from EU Member States' embassies as well as with a former member of the EEAS HQ. The interviews reveal that EU Delegations have been fairly effective in adapting to the "new" PD practices, focusing on dialogue rather than one-way communication and using a broad range of communication channels. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain, such as a lack of resources and restricted evaluation mechanisms. This work develops a Ten-Point Action Plan for a more effective EU PD through its Delegations, aiming at turning PD into a more prominent foreign policy priority. Recommendations include inter alia better training for PD and Communication Officers before taking up their positions abroad, greater levels of trust from the EEAS HQ towards the Delegation staff and enhanced financial and personnel resources.

Contents

Why should I read this research?

Despite a series of major challenges and crises over the course of its existence, the European Union (EU) is often described as an unparalleled success story. After devastating wars on European soil and centuries of enmity, the EU and its predecessors have brought peace and considerable prosperity to its citizens. While the European integration process for a long time focused primarily on domestic matters, the EU's increasingly important role as an international actor equally deserves the attention of the academic literature. As well-recognised as its engagement in recent international events such as COP21 or the Iran nuclear deal might have been on a political level, these successes reveal only limited information about non-EU citizens' perceptions of the Union. It is this latter aspect that will be scrutinised in this work, looking at the EU's *Public Diplomacy* (PD), a concept which describes mutual engagement with a foreign public, ultimately striving to positively influence perceptions and images abroad. On that account, this research could be of interest for those desiring to look outside the box of traditional diplomatic matters and to get insights into a growingly important aspect of foreign affairs.

PD could be a particularly relevant instrument for the EU if it strives to step up its role and reputation on the international scene. Against this backdrop, there are at least two reasons why readers should be interested in this research. Firstly, there is only a small number of theoretical and empirical works on EU PD and even less on EU Delegations. The present study stands for an attempt to close this gap in research by providing a practical, insightful stocktaking as to what the state of play of PD in EU Delegations looks like. Secondly, the existing literature, partially dating back several years, points to various obstacles to a fruitful exercise of PD. This finding underlines the challenges and opportunities to develop new tools of PD and is questioning the future of old and new concepts in the field. The reader will discover to what extent the EU has been able to introduce modern approaches to its outreach activities and to tailor them to the host countries' population, examining the Union's PD and Soft Power toolbox.

On a broader scale, this study can be considered part of a more profound analysis of the EU as an international actor, how it acts, when and with what purpose. These questions are key when it comes to deciding how the future of EU foreign policy should be structured and what goals should be achieved. The present research hints to the potential leverage the Union can exercise via its Delegations, showing that the latter constitute a core component in shaping the way the EU is perceived abroad. This makes the case for further bolstering up the resources available to the EU Delegations and enshrining PD as a priority in the EU's foreign policy. Therefore, this thesis could be of interest to readers intrigued by the international understanding between peoples, modern ways of exerting Soft Power and by how the EU can increase its footprint and influence in foreign countries.

This paper will not answer the broad international questions the EU will have to face in the upcoming years: modern methods of war, migration fluxes, cybersecurity. Rather, it represents a more humble and pragmatic approach to a concrete facet of foreign policy and develops practical recommendations based on solid evidence derived from interviews with EU and national experts in third countries, thus adding another piece to the puzzle on the way to designing more coherent EU foreign policy.

<div align="right">Julien Abratis, May 2020</div>

List of abbreviations

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
COP	Conference of the Parties
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas
DG	Directorate-General
EC	European Commission
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EEA	European Economic Area
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
HQ	Headquarters
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MS	Member States
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PD	Public Diplomacy
SCU	Strategic Communications Unit
SNE	Seconded national expert
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VCDR	Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations
WFP	UN World Food Programme
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWII	Second World War

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 NGOs and regional as well as multilateral organisations (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). The term "PD" goes beyond governmental relations and encompasses direct and mutual engagement with a host country's population in order to influence perceptions and foster a favourable 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). In this light, PD has become an indispensable foreign policy component and is used by many countries all over the world.

This thesis analyses how the European Union (EU), as a particularly progressive diplomatic player adding a "new layer of 'supranational' diplomacy alongside national foreign policies" (Petrov, Pomorska, & Vanhoonacker, 2012), conducts PD in third countries. To do so, it is expedient to briefly recall how EU diplomacy has evolved over the last years, especially owing to the inception of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. The treaty as an important milestone had a great impact on the foreign policy of the Union, resulting inter alia in the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The EEAS should support the bolstered role of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) in strengthening a coherent, effective and visible EU voice on the world stage. Particularly, more convergence in foreign policy shall be achieved based on the idea of more exchange and regular meetings with EU Member States (MS) (Comelli & Matarazzo, 2011).

To concretise the Lisbon Treaty's provisions, the European Council adopted the "Decision establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service" in July 2010. The decision provides that the EEAS "shall be made up of a central administration and of the Union Delegations to third countries and international organisations" (EUR-Lex, 2010). These Union Delegations represent the EU in its entirety and succeed the so-called Commission Delegations. These changes represent a major shift in the EU's foreign policy, which formerly focused mostly on trade and aid issues, towards a more comprehensive approach including the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and enshrines the ambition of coordinating and representing the positions of the Union in third countries in the institutional framework. Creating the EEAS and reforming its Delegations shall not replace the diplomatic efforts of EU MS, but is meant to create synergies and thus add value (Maurer & Raik, 2018).

This thesis will not focus primarily on the organisational implications for the EU Delegations brought along by the Lisbon Treaty, as this has been done extensively in the relevant literature. Rather, this work aims at providing a more thorough understanding of how EU Delegations conduct PD, and which challenges they encounter in doing so to develop policy recommendations for a more effective external representation. Among the topics covered by this work are the different PD instruments employed by EU Delegations, the main targets of their outreach activities, cooperation with EU MS and the most important challenges in conducting PD. These and more aspects will be elaborated through qualitative interviews with

staff working on the ground in EU Delegations, a former official of the headquarters (HQ) in Brussels and with diplomats of EU MS embassies. The interviews will help elucidate to what extent the EU scaled up its PD efforts, which it mainly began to develop as from 2005 after the failure of the EU Constitution, hence rather late compared to other multilateral organisations.

A main hypothesis is that the more EU Delegations' activities approximate what scholars like Melissen (2011) call "new", dialogue-based PD practices and the more their efforts are adapted to the local specificities, the greater the success will be. Hence, one assumption is that there is no silver bullet to a perfect PD approach since different contexts require different methods implying the need for a decentralised strategy. It can also be assumed that some cooperation between EU Delegations and MS takes place, but that a coherent approach leveraging the full potential of synergies is yet to be developed. To this end, the present work examines how EU Delegations contribute to the achievement of a more efficient EU PD in times which are increasingly characterised by trends of renationalisation of foreign policy (van Hooft, 2016).

In order to achieve a comprehensive scope, the study comprises 17 interviews conducted during spring 2020 with EU Delegations and national embassies located on five continents and in countries with different income levels. Moreover, the selection of Delegations had the goal to include 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 Organisations. This was done to identify differences regarding their respective target audiences and adopted tools. Furthermore, this research design allowed for an inclusion of different policy domains treated by the Delegations: some of them concentrate on more low-level policy issues such as development cooperation, others act in countries where security policy and high-level meetings regularly appear on the agenda.

The research concludes that there are significant differences between EU Delegations' PD activities resulting from the local specificities and the nature of the Delegation. All of them have in common that they seem to adapt measures falling under what scholars qualify as "new" PD, that is, dialogue-based interaction with the host country's population and civil society using different types of communication channels. Despite most Delegations expressing satisfaction with their PD activities, they encounter several practical challenges which need to be faced and will subsequently lead to a series of policy recommendations. These will be outlined throughout the thesis and include, among others, increasing the resources available for PD activities, enhancing evaluation mechanisms, more autonomy for and trust in Delegations in their daily PD tasks as well as setting up better training possibilities for Communication and PD staff wishing to improve their capabilities before starting their duty abroad.

The thesis will be structured in the following way: in the first place, an introduction to EU Delegations will be given, describing their most important activities, organisational structure as well as their historical development. Followingly, the theoretical framework of the thesis's topic will be outlined, explaining what characterises PD and the most important criticism related to it. After presenting the current state of knowledge and the methodological approach of the research on which the paper is based, the core part will follow, consisting of the analysis of expert interviews with EU officials and national diplomats. Their findings will be used to deduct policy recommendations both on an organisational and content-related level.

2. Introduction to the topic: what are EU Delegations?

Even though they have existed for more than sixty years in a dynamically changing form, EU Delegations still are a topic somewhat under the radar of many European integration scholars. That is why, before proceeding to the theoretical framework and the analytical part of this work, a brief introduction to EU Delegations as such will be given to present the main characteristics of the research object. In order to do so, the different types of Delegations, their tasks, organisational structure and historical evolution will be outlined.

2.1. Types

EU Delegations are the representations of the EU in third countries, comparable to traditional embassies of nation states. According to the latest available data, the Union disposes of 143 Delegations all around the world after opening the most recent proxy in the United Kingdom on February 1, 2020 (EEAS, 2020a). The Delegations can be classified in four different groups. Firstly, there are more than a hundred *bilateral* Delegations, which are responsible for the EU's relations with a single country from A as in Afghanistan to Z as in Zimbabwe. Moreover, twelve *multilateral* Delegations are responsible for groups of countries or a region, especially in the case of smaller host countries like in the Eastern Caribbean or the Pacific island states. In addition to this, the EEAS has four *representation offices* around the world in countries whose legal status or official recognition is debated, and the term "Delegation" therefore is avoided for diplomatic reasons. This is the case for the offices in Kosovo, Taiwan, Hong Kong/Macao and the West Bank/Gaza Strip. Lastly, there are about ten Delegations to *International Organisations*, which are located in New York (UN), Vienna (OSCE, UNODC, IAEA and UNIDO), Paris (OECD and UNESCO), Geneva (WTO and UN), Rome (FAO and WFP), Strasbourg (Council of Europe) as well as to regional organisations such as the African Union in Addis Ababa and ASEAN in Jakarta.

The EU Delegations as main subjects of interest in this work must not be confused with other bodies of the EU. Most notably, the European Commission has representation offices in each MS, which are in charge of informing the local population and maintaining political relations with the member country. These offices do not play a role in the EU's foreign policy and shall therefore not be considered in this analysis[1].

2.2. Role and tasks

The EU Delegations' role slightly differs between each Delegation's local context and setting. Nevertheless, there are some characteristics and tasks which all of them have in common:

- **Coordination of MS missions**: With the Treaty of Lisbon, the EU Delegations took over the role of hosting and chairing coordination meetings with the embassies of EU MS in third countries and to International Organisations, which previously was carried out by the rotating Council presidency's embassies. These coordination meetings usually take place at least on a monthly basis, bringing together the Heads of Missions or the staff on a technical level (e.g. trade, development, since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty: CFSP matters). The EU Delegations serve as a "full-fledged secretariat" in the coordination of a joint EU position, entailing the provision of minutes, draft reports,

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[1] Hereafter, the occasional use of the word "representation" shall be considered as a synonym for EU Delegations and must not be confused with the Commission representations in the EU MS.

facilities and, importantly, agenda-setting (Helly, Herrero, Knoll, Galeazzi, & Sherriff, 2014).

- **Representation and implementation of the EU's foreign policy**: Not only are the EU Delegations in charge of internally coordinating the MS to agree on a joint position, but also are they a point of contact for their host countries' administration and engage in political dialogue. An important task in developing countries is the implementation and management of development cooperation programmes (ibid.). In addition, EU Delegations sometimes negotiate on behalf of the EU in accordance with a given mandate, especially in trade aspects. Terzi (2018) argues that even though the EU Delegations should be the central contact point, this position is not always recognised by some host countries, who prefer to work with the bilateral embassies of some of the large EU MS. Therefore, he reasons, it is crucial that MS embassies actively promote the role of their European counterparts for the latter to be truly successful.

- **Improving awareness and understanding of the EU in third countries**: A particular aspect of external representation is the EU Delegations' PD role which consists in increasing the visibility, awareness and understanding of the EU. This happens through a variety of online and offline activities and will be further analysed throughout this thesis. The EU Delegation to the United States sums up its PD functions in the following way, which can also be applied to most of the other Delegations:

  > *"The Press and Public Diplomacy section works to enhance awareness in the U.S. of the EU and its policies. From engaging on social media to responding to public inquiries, the section serves as the Delegation's first line of contact with the public and press. Maintaining close contact with U.S. media, the section provides up-to-date information and analyses of EU developments and positions. It produces a wide range of content and communications for the Delegation, from its publication on Medium to its podcast series – EU Now. Additionally, the section manages several education initiatives and other programs in support of the EU's policy agenda and organizes a variety of outreach activities, including policy-related events and conferences, major cultural festivals, study tours, and press briefings."* (Delegation of the EU to the United States, 2017)

- **Link between third countries and the EU institutions**: The EU Delegations create analyses and reports to inform the European Commission and EEAS HQ on the situation in the host countries. Furthermore, they are responsible for supporting site visits e.g. of Members of the European Parliament and of European Commission Directorates-General (DGs).

- **Consular protection of EU citizens?** One major responsibility of traditional national embassies consists in the consular protection of their country's citizens. The EU does not have such a role per se but can support the MS in this matter upon request (Art. 5 V, Council of the European Union, 2010).

There have been a few articles assessing the role of EU Delegations to determine whether the Delegations act in the same way as traditional diplomatic representations like national embassies. For this purpose, Duquet (2018) collates the usual tasks of EU Delegations with the

Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (VCDR), which outlines the basic rules of conduct in international diplomatic relations. He concludes that the activities exerted by EU Delegations encompass both traditional diplomatic and non-diplomatic tasks. In addition, Duquet argues that the EU follows a rather modern interpretation of principle of non-interference, as its Delegations involve intensively with their host countries and do not refrain from publicly promoting EU values such as rule of law, democracy and human rights.

2.3. Organisational structure

EU Delegations can be considered as hybrid entities, bringing together staff with different backgrounds and organisational affiliations. They consist of EEAS employees, officials of the different DGs of the European Commission and locally employed staff. Approximately a third of the workforce comes from the EEAS, while two thirds belong to the Commission. Also, national diplomats having expertise in the fields dealt with in the host country, so-called seconded national experts (SNEs), can be sent to EU Delegations. This implies budgetary benefits for the EU, as SNEs in general are cost-neutral, their salaries being covered by their national ministries. In addition, this opportunity allows MS diplomats to acquire a better understanding of how the EU's foreign policy works, leading to mutual benefits considering that SNEs also bring along their expertise gained in a national or bilateral context (Helly et al., 2014). The concrete composition of Delegations always depends on the local context: for instance, in countries of the European neighbourhood, Commission experts from DG NEAR play an important role, while DG DEVCO staff is very present in developing countries et cetera.

EU Delegations are directed by the Head of Delegation, colloquially referred to as "EU ambassador". The structural organisation of the subordinate departments again depends on the local context and usually includes e.g. sections for political, security-related, economic and financial affairs and, where pertinent, a development cooperation section. In addition, many Delegations dispose of departments on trade and agriculture and, lastly, an administration unit. Very importantly for this thesis, all Delegations feature a section devoted to information, press and PD, which should raise awareness for the EU and is therefore at the core of this analysis. Depending on the size of a Delegation, positions can be merged so that one official oversees several topics at once, such as for information and political affairs. As will be discussed later, these merged positions can pose significant challenges to an efficient PD. Compared to national embassies it becomes evident that EU Delegations do not dispose of a military, consular or cultural section, which again reflects their scope of action, being limited by the competences of the EU and the principle of subsidiarity.

2.4. Historical evolution

In order to understand how the scope of the EU Delegations' work has evolved over time, it is expedient to briefly trace their emergence and historical development. With regards to PD, this allows to depict why PD in certain policy areas or geographic locations might not be as easy, as the story of the Delegations is an old yet at the same time quite short and dynamic one. The history of the Delegations of the EU and its predecessors goes back many years and started shortly after the Treaty of Paris, which established the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). In the 1950s, the European Commission started opening some "information and communication offices" located in strategically important capitals and later also to the United Nations (UN). The very first Delegation was opened in 1954 in Washington, D.C. as a two-

person information office after the United States became the first non-member country to officially recognise the ECSC (EU Delegation in Washington, 2017). In the same year, an EC Delegation was opened in London (Drieskens, 2012).

In the first decades after the opening of the first proxies - particularly during the 1960s and 1970s in a postcolonial context – the EC Delegations dealt mostly with technical and financial cooperation programmes and supervised the European development cooperation policies in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, which followed the creation of the European Development Fund in 1957 (Austermann, 2012). It is important to recall that the Delegations at that time were in charge of representing only the Commission in issues over which the Community had competence. Therefore, the EC Delegations had a very limited scope of competences as most political and security issues were dealt with bilaterally at MS embassy level and coordinated by the country holding the rotating Council presidency.

The international conventions between European and ACP countries exemplify how the scope of cooperation and accordingly the role of the EC Delegations changed significantly in the 1970s. In 1975, the Lomé Convention was signed, applying to the relations between the European Economic Community (EEC) and as many as 71 ACP countries, which led to an increased intensity of European development assistance, simultaneously strengthening the role of the EC Delegations (Drieskens, 2012). In parallel to this, several countries joined the European Communities, including the United Kingdom in 1973, which led to a broader geographic scope of action.

After a phase of consolidation and continued growth during the 1980s, the political changes of the 1990s brought along an increased workload for the Delegations in post-Soviet countries, due to the implementation of financial and technical assistance programmes as a result of (pre-)accession efforts (Austermann, 2012). The Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 further institutionalised the role of EC Delegations and strengthened the Delegations' role in the CFSP (Kerres & Wessel, 2015; Dimier & McGeever, 2006). At that time, the cooperation between EC Delegations and national embassies still remained relatively limited compared to today's collaboration (Drieskens, 2012).

However, while a constant evolution in the geographic scope and competences of the former EC Delegations can be noted, it was only with the Lisbon Treaty that their institutional role was substantially altered. With the treaty entering into force in 2009, the Delegations were transformed into EU Delegations, representing *all* EU institutions and their scope of competences extended to the CFSP. The latter, in principle, remains intergovernmental, but EU Delegations and national embassies shall cooperate to formulate a common approach (Drieskens, 2012). Furthermore, the legal personality of the EU was introduced (Art. 47 TFEU), which allows the EU to sign international agreements and enhances the Delegations' role on the world stage. Also, new figures and institutions have entered the game, notably the permanent President of the European Council, the HR/VP and, very importantly, the EEAS, all of which serve, among others, the goal of a more coherent and visible EU foreign policy.

To sum up the historical evolution, one can see that after a rather low-politics and administrative function in their early existence, the EU Delegations have assumed more political tasks over time and now embody the EU in a wide range of topics as full-fledged diplomatic

representations. Moreover, the historical evolution of the EU Delegations is driven by major global events and summits such as decolonisation, the end of the cold war, but also climate COPs, the Earth summit or, as in 2020, pandemics. Throughout these happenings, the Delegations enhanced their role in shaping major global discussions and taking part in political processes on behalf of the EU (e.g. EEAS, 2020b). Besides, the cooperation between MS and the EU on the ground for a long time focused on relatively few issues and was only lately intensified significantly, accompanied by contentious debates between intergovernmentalists and functionalists in the mid-2000s (Dimier & McGeever, 2006, p. 484).

3. Theoretical framework: Public Diplomacy

The functioning of diplomacy has gone through a major transition over the last decades and centuries. While in the past, diplomacy meant convening diplomats and intellectuals to discuss political issues behind closed doors, diplomatic conventions have changed significantly in modern days. This is not least since the role of technology has lastingly altered diplomatic negotiations, as is illustrated by the many tweets and live coverage of international negotiations, making the processes of international relations and diplomacy more visible (Melissen, 2011). The use of such technologies can not only help open up new communication channels, but also sustainably "forge a new image" of a country (Manor, 2019).

Numerous scholars have expressed themselves in favour of dividing diplomacy into two parts which are pursued on parallel, but tightly interlinked tracks (Melissen, 2005, p. 3): *traditional diplomacy* (meaning the classical government-to-government activities) and *Public Diplomacy* (the "new", government-to-foreign people approach, Roberts, 2007). As traditional diplomacy is considered to become less important, *Public Diplomacy* has incrementally gained traction, turning into a key component of a more open and complex version of diplomacy. The term "PD" hereby refers to engaging with a foreign public aiming to influence the broader opinion in foreign societies. As Riordan (2004) put it, PD is about "selling values, policies and national image. […] The strength of a country's image emerges from its cultural, political and economic plurality" and must be credible to be successful (p. 9f.) The EU defined PD in the following way:

> *"Public Diplomacy refers to the process whereby a country [or an entity] seeks to* **build trust and understanding** *by engaging with a* **broader foreign public** *beyond the governmental relations that, customarily, have been the focus of diplomatic effort."* (European Union, 2017)

The idea behind PD is not a new phenomenon - its origins can be traced back to ancient times and even appear in the bible. Particularly during wartimes, direct communication with the opponent's people was repeatedly used as a way of demoralisation and psychological warfare. However, conducting this sort of communication in times of peace is a phenomenon that is relatively new and was initially met with a lot of scepticism. For a long time, diplomacy was perceived as an "intergovernmental" affair and any kind of communication with a foreign public was ostracised as undiplomatic. This perception was enshrined in the 1927 Havana Convention, limiting the diplomatic room for manoeuvre in a host country. Walter R. Roberts

(2007) identifies three reasons why this perception gradually changed, paving the way for a more straightforward and customarily accepted PD:

On the one hand, the invention of the radio as first electronic mass medium significantly facilitated entering into direct contact with a host country's people. Moreover, the geopolitical changes at the first half of the 20th century brought along a considerable impact on the emerging concept of PD. The Soviet Union and later the Nazi government defied the prevailing diplomatic customs and started using radio technologies to broadcast their ideology and messages to foreign publics. Lastly, Roberts describes the 1923 decision of the French government to include a cultural section into its foreign office as a vital move promoting PD. The latter move was inspired by France's belief that its cultural achievement, its *mission civilisatrice,* should be used to create a pro-French climate abroad (Roberts, 2007, p. 38).

After the assumption of power of the Nazis in 1933, the goal of influencing perceptions in other countries rapidly gained momentum. For this purpose, the Nazi regime set up the ministry for propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*) under the leadership of Joseph Goebbels and added cultural attachés to some German embassies in order to spread its ideology through the guise of culture. This move was countered by the Western allies, as, for example, Great Britain founded the British Council and its broadcasting corporation BBC started broadcasting in languages other than English. With a similar intention, the United States later created programmes such as Voice of America and the Office of War Information. It was towards the end of the Second World War that the term *public affairs* was coined, alluding to the act of explaining foreign policy to other people (ibid.). After the end of WWII, despite many people expecting the end of such programmes and agencies and a return to the principles of the Havana Convention, the story of PD did not end. During the post-war period, most countries continued their efforts in spreading cultural influence, such as Germany and Great Britain through institutions like the Goethe-Institut or the British Council (Melissen, 2013a). In the context of the cold war, engaging with a broader public to shape a positive image abroad in a global "contest of ideas" had become more important than ever before (Melissen, 2005, p. 3). Simultaneously, the designation of such activities also underwent some changes: In the 1950s, the popularity of the term *public affairs* decreased, as it became more associated with the communication towards the domestic audience. Instead, the notion of *Public Diplomacy* increasingly gained in popularity and started to be anchored in many institutions worldwide (Melissen, 2013b, p. 5).

As has become clear throughout this historical embedding, PD in its traditional form is a relatively simply structured process, the main actors being states which try to target their recipients, above all foreign citizens (Azpíroz, 2014). The ultimate goal of this operation is to influence a foreign government's behaviour by shaping the attitudes of its citizens to create a favourable climate which facilitates the acceptance of another nation's foreign policy (Roberts, 2007). The most important channels of communication to reach the outlined ambitions for a long time were e.g. radio and television, one-ways flows of information allowing for only limited interaction (Pamment, 2013, pp. 6-8). This monologue-oriented communication is among the reasons why for most of the 20th century, the term "PD" was often associated with propaganda, also keeping in mind the context of the cold war (ibid.). The goal of PD was often

described as trying to influence the elites of a country, which shall in turn exert their influence on the country's decisionmakers.

Nevertheless, the growing globalisation, technological advances and the rise of new actors are only some of the reasons why a significant change in how countries manage their international relations can be witnessed (Lutai, Staniste, & Mogosan, 2015). This change has also embraced the practice of PD, which has incrementally shifted in shape towards what many scholars have come to label as "New Public Diplomacy".

3.1. From traditional towards "new" Public Diplomacy

The EU's working definition outlined above sums up important characteristics of what is considered to be PD by the relevant literature. While PD traditionally used to refer mostly to informing a foreign public and thus could be considered a one-way process, scholars like Jan Melissen declared that today's PD follows an approach focusing on dialogue rather than on monologue and seeks to build long-term relationships instead of achieving short-term policy objectives (Melissen, 2011). This is also due to the increasing importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs),

„It is no longer a stiff waltz among states alone, but a jazzy dance of colourful coalitions, and public diplomacy is at the heart of its current rebooting."
Khanna, 2011, p. 22 cited Melissen, 2013b, p. 1

which entail some major consequences on diplomacy. For instance, foreign ministries and diplomats lost their long-standing monopoly over diplomatic communication as NGOs and other non-state players started using online platforms to communicate with the people (Pamment, 2013). These opportunities led to more parties entering the stage, turning the digital world into an arena in which a multitude of actors have to fight for the attention of the digital audience (Manor, 2016). Lastly, the new technological advances enhanced the fragmentation of the audiences and created "networks of selective exposure" (Hayden, 2012).

In this more "social" approach, PD is not exclusively reserved to states as central actors holding the "monopoly of truth" (Riordan, 2004, p. 11). Rather, diplomacy is opening up to supranational, sub-state and non-governmental players able to undertake PD activities (Azpíroz, 2014). The altered context requires that if countries intend to change their perception abroad, they need to appear as credible agents, which is why e.g. building networks with local NGOs, engaging with universities and setting up exchange programmes can help build bridges across countries and reach a broader public (Riordan, 2004, p. 3). Rather than following a top-down approach to convey messages, a key element of "new" PD is the focus on civil society empowerment and imparting a feeling of ownership (ibid., p. 6). Diplomats turn into catalysts expediting the interaction between the domestic and host country's civil society (ibid.). These altering roles of actors are reflected in the messages conveyed through PD efforts: even though the discipline naturally keeps serving a country's own interests, a thematic shift towards an emphasis on common concerns and global public goods can be noted (Melissen, 2013b, p. 15). Instead of centring on influencing the target audience with one-way messages, as this was the case with traditional media such as radio, television and newspapers, PD actors are much more involved in dialogue to foster mutual understanding. This is why some scholars refer to PD as the "democratisation of diplomacy", empowering the public in a discipline that was previously restricted to very few practitioners (Melissen, 2013b, p. 2).

Furthermore, modern PD is characterised by what some scholars call an *intermestic* approach: nowadays, it has become more difficult to distinguish between internal and external communication as both aspects are closely interlinked. Therefore, the melding of *inter*national and do*mestic* aspects represents the origin of the term 'intermestic' (Duke, 2013). This concept is of particular relevance for the EU. In the historic retrospective, the EU's PD has to a significant extent been directed inward, focusing on its own citizens. Messages conveyed internally are part of the EU's internal identity construction, which in turn is important for the external communication (ibid.).

These innovations of "new" PD explain why the EU as a non-traditional actor has been able to turn into a key player in this field, recalling its nature as a supranational organisation. In addition, the EU's fundamental values imply a strong role for democracy, rule of law and the protection of human rights, which is why the Union has extensive expertise in fostering civil society and network building. Due to its unique history, institutional composition and economic prosperity, numerous scholars argue that the EU is a trailblazing example of normative power, which can be spread through PD activities. This normative power and the idea behind PD bring us to a concept that is closely connected to these topics: *Soft Power*. Many researchers express that the long-term goal of PD is to augment a country's (or entity's) Soft Power (Cross, 2015), which is why it is worth looking more closely at this concept.

3.2. Soft Power and Public Diplomacy

The term "Soft Power" was branded especially by American political scientist Joseph Nye. In his 1990 article "Soft Power", published in *Foreign Policy*, Nye refers to the common definition of power, which is the "ability to do things and control others, to get others to do what they otherwise would not" (p. 154). The exercise of power has traditionally been associated with factors such as resources, the economic size of a country, its military strength, population and other, rather "hard" facts. However, at the time when Nye's article was published - shortly before the end of the cold war - he argues that military power had become less important, while other aspects such as technological, ecological and economic attributes increased in relevance. He goes on explaining that power is no longer as much about controlling certain resources as it was before, but rather about the ability to change the behaviour of states and thereby control the political environment. Due to the high levels of interdependence, "the direct use of force for economic gain is generally too costly and dangerous for modern great powers" (Nye, 1990, p. 159). Furthermore, Nye outlines a number of trends having led to a diffusion of power, inter alia the growing significance of transnational actors, nationalism in weak states and changing political issues (i.e. ecological change, epidemics, terrorism) which are difficult to tackle with the traditional instruments of power.

To conclude his description of the changing role of power at a time that is marked by the shift from a bipolar, capital-rich and militarised world towards an information society, Nye argues that the "face of power" also changes accordingly. In place of constantly referring to the traditional role of hard power, it is much more about intangible resources such as ideology, institutions and culture. Power, in this concept, "occurs when one country gets other countries to *want* what it wants" (ibid., p. 166). This is what the scientist defines as *Soft Power*.

It comes as no surprise that the concepts of PD and Soft Power are interconnected as PD can be seen as a tool serving to mobilise Soft Power resources (Azpíroz, 2014). Joseph Nye himself worked out the relation between PD and Soft Power, arguing that the three main sources of Soft Power are culture, values and policies, which can be mobilised through PD activities. He goes on by making a remark which has a significant impact on the success of PD: if a country's culture (both high culture such as art and literature and popular culture comprising mass entertainment), values and policies are not attractive, PD activities broadcasting such "resources" are doomed to fail. According to Nye, this is what happened to the U.S. following the invasion of Iraq, which was considered an illegitimate policy by many third countries (Nye, 2008).

In the age of the information society, characterised by the "paradox of the plenty" (Simon, 1998) inasmuch as the unmanageable quantity of information leads to a scarcity of attention, credibility and the ability for self-criticism are key conditions for PD to be successful. This is also what differentiates PD from propaganda, which often lacks credibility and therefore is counterproductive to exerting Soft Power.

> *„Without underlying national credibility, the instruments of Public Diplomacy cannot translate cultural resources into the soft power of attraction. The effectiveness of Public Diplomacy is measured by minds changed, not dollars spent or slick production packages."*
>
> Joseph Nye (2008)

For Nye, several aspects are important to be an influential Soft Power actor. First, it is crucial to understand the target audience, as two-way communication and exchanges are far more effective than simple broadcasting. In addition, "telling is far less influential than actions and symbols that show as well as tell", which makes the case e.g. for development cooperation, conflict mediation, peace-keeping missions and other concrete activities as means to spread a country's messages (Nye, 2008).

The wide range of publications on the EU as a Soft Power actor point to what many scholars consider important sources of the EU's influence in the world and potential foundations of what other countries might aspire to. Furness (2010) elaborates that the economic weight of the EU represents an essential component of the Union's Soft Power. Other sources include inter alia the "normative component of [its] 'constitutional' construction" (Michalski, 2005, p. 125), the promotion of fundamental rights, the EU's engagement against climate change and its civilian rather than military role in world politics.

3.3. "Nation branding" and "state branding"

Apart from Soft Power, the idea behind PD is closely related to other theoretical frameworks, notably the concepts of "nation branding" and "state branding". Simon Anholt (2011) addresses the comparison between a country's attempt to forge a positive reputation with private companies' efforts. He puts forward that while countries appear to behave like companies seeking to manipulate their images using marketing techniques, they are in the end "judged by what they do, not what they say" (p. 6). Therefore, to develop a positive reputation, "product development" must take place by developing consistent and relevant policies. In times of globalisation, in which countries seem to compete on a "crowded global marketplace", a

positive image can help "pull in" certain groups like investors and tourists and at the same time "push out" products, policies and culture (p.8).

Already at the beginning of the new millennium, Peter van Ham introduced the notion of a "brand state" as "the outside world's ideas about a particular country" (2001, p. 2). State branding goes beyond simple advertising by adding an emotional component with which people can identify. In the best case, this process translates into a positive image and reputation, which are crucial ingredients for economic and political attention. Not only countries can have an image, but also International Organisations like NATO and the EU, which, according to Van Ham, "radiates self-confidence and affluence" (p. 5). These examples show how the importance of crafting a positive image in third countries, which is at the core of PD activities, has significantly increased in theoretical and practical terms.

Despite a comparable direction of impact, there are some conceptual differences between both concepts and PD. For instance, nation branding is more aimed at promoting economic rather than political interests and tends to focus on "consumers" instead of citizens. While state and nation branding focus primarily on image management, the role of relationship and trust building plays a more important role in PD. Nevertheless, a clear-cut distinction in this highly dynamic research field is not always feasible (Szondi, 2008).

3.4. Criticism and problems associated with Public Diplomacy

Naturally, the concept of PD is not only met with positive feedback, but also evokes criticism. In the following, typical points of critique and problems discussed in the literature will be outlined. This shall serve as a basis for the interviews with officials in EU Delegations, who will be confronted with some of these findings.

A recurrent criticism PD is exposed to is the assumption that such activities could represent an infringement upon a host country's domestic affairs and thus violate the international law principle of non-interference (Melissen, 2011). This argument is underpinned by the intense debate about whether PD intrinsically is a new concept or plainly "a fancy name for traditional propaganda" (Riordan, 2004, p. 1). As has been outlined in the part on the genesis of PD, entering into direct contact with a foreign people was for a long time considered an unfriendly, undiplomatic and even unlawful act. Even though such activities are more accepted nowadays and perhaps even seem unavoidable in a world as globalised and interwoven as today's, PD could still be rejected by some host countries. This applies in particular if PD is exerted by establishing close connections with local civil society organisations or if values such as human rights and democracy are promoted in a (too) offensive manner. On a similar note, there could exist cultural divergences with regards to the extent to which political elites and the government engage with the broader public (Melissen, 2011).

Furthermore, it can be assumed that the legitimacy of external PD is based on an internal, domestic consensus on norms and narratives (Duke, 2013, p. 114). That being said, it is questionable whether the EU as a community of henceforth 27 MS, each of which equipped with a long history, cultural norms and traditions, fulfils this criterion. Not only is it debatable whether this cultural diversity complicates a coherent external image displayed by PD, but also some doubts arise about whether MS accept being represented by the EU Delegations in sensitive cultural issues. In this context, it is expedient to recall that the European public sphere

is best characterised by the finding that there is hardly any. Kurpas, Brüggemann & Meyer (2006) define the European public sphere as "a truly transnational place, where pan-European media and parties shape public discourse and a common political culture". Although there have been initiatives for instance by the European Commission to enhance such as common public sphere, the pan-European media landscape remains underdeveloped. MS prefer maintaining their own public sphere, which often shows only limited commitment to the European integration. These domestic debates could impede a strong and unified image of the EU abroad.

Some scholars argue that an excessive focus on PD activities could prevent the diplomatic corps from exercising its traditional tasks, "the real job" (Melissen, 2011). And indeed, in the case of EU Delegations, which are constantly facing understaffing according to the literature, this could be a sensitive problem. If a Delegation seeks to take PD seriously, it must operate on several layers, both on- and offline to reach out to diverse target groups. In EU Delegations experiencing a thin personnel cover, this may give rise to problems, especially in the case of "merged" positions, where officials dealing with information and PD activities also cover other sections at the same time.

One of the biggest problems with PD is its evaluation to determine whether the activities carried out could justify further increases of PD budgets (Melissen, 2011; Pamment, 2011). If PD is considered an instrument to exercise Soft Power in the way defined by Joseph Nye, aspiring to change the attitudes of other countries, it seems understandable that this target is difficult to measure and quantify. Among the possible tools mentioned in the literature are opinion polls and popularity ratings capturing a country's reputation. Nevertheless, the new PD's focus on long-term relationships and dialogue most likely does not lead to short-range goals and its progress can only be achieved step by step (Melissen, 2011, p. 13).

4. Interdisciplinary state of knowledge

In the following, the state of knowledge based on a literature review will be outlined and used to determine some sticking points which could hamper a potent PD by EU Delegations. Therefore, not only literature covering PD issues shall be assessed (section 4.1.), but also articles dealing with the role of EU Delegations per se, if considered appropriate for the purpose of this thesis (section 4.2.). The sources used to assess the state of knowledge can be divided into different categories, with some scholars focusing on the EU's PD in general, others dealing explicitly with the pertinent efforts by EU Delegations and some texts analysing challenges EU Delegations are encountering on a more universal level. Moreover, this work follows an interdisciplinary approach, not only taking into account political or communication theory research, but also input from other academic fields.

In general, it can be stated that the existing literature on EU Delegations is relatively limited compared to research on the EEAS HQ itself: "The Brussels-based part of the EEAS has captured attention of both academic and non-academic literature, while the interaction between EU and national embassies in third countries has received less attention" (Baltaq & Smith, 2015; see also Austermann, 2012; Drieskens, 2012). Thus, a more detailed analysis of EU Delegations represents a research gap that can be filled partly with a carefully conducted, diligent master thesis.

4.1. Literature on EU Public Diplomacy

While several texts dealing with PD in an EU context have been published, one should consider that many of them were issued shortly after the establishment of the EEAS in the early 2010s. On a general basis, it has been found that PD is an "existential necessity" for the EU. However, the bulk of its communication work focuses on internal audiences with the long-term goals of reinforcing the support for the organisation itself, promoting a European identity and fostering a EU citizenship (Melissen, 2013b, p. 12). A potential solution related to fostering a more stringent domestic consensus is the question of a truly European public sphere, meaning that the communication gap between the EU and its citizens must be narrowed. This would enable the citizens to form an informed opinion and hold decisionmakers accountable (Kurpas, Brüggemann, & Meyer, 2006). The focal point of this work, however, shall not be on internal PD communication but on the its external counterpart, even though both aspects are interwoven following their characterisation as *intermestic* outlined above.

Regarding their external dimension, EU PD efforts concentrate inter alia on demonstrating its coherence as an international actor and its role as a global norm entrepreneur (Melissen, 2013b, p. 12). Most articles and papers dealing specifically with PD conducted by EU Delegations on the ground conclude that these activities exhibit many characteristics of the "new" PD approach. For instance, Azpíroz (2015) finds that EU Delegations exert PD in three spheres, namely through media, cultural and niche diplomacy, engaging in dialogue with the local civil society and therefore complying with the requirements for "new" PD outlined above. In fact, the more recent findings in the literature underscore the development of EU PD over the last 15 years. In 2005, shortly after the French and Dutch vetoes against the EU Constitution, Dev Lynch (2005) still had found that the EU's efforts "consist mostly of the dissemination of information" with "relatively little emphasis on long-term relationship-building or analysis of third-party perceptions" (p. 26). In his article, Lynch argues that while "the Union has a fantastic story to tell" (p. 24), this storytelling fails due to the lack a coherent strategy and since PD is not a priority in EU foreign policy. The shift from old-fashioned methods to more modern ones coincides with the inception of the Lisbon Treaty and the establishment of the EEAS and shows how the EU is moving towards a more narrative way of working and that it attributes more importance to PD (Rasmussen, 2010, p. 275). On that account, a gradual development of the discipline can be expected on the European level "as long as it serves greater efficiency without eroding the national profile of Member States" (Melissen, 2011, p. 17). Assessing the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on the EU's PD, Duke (2013) sets out that the henceforth much weaker role for the rotating presidency could lead to significantly more consistency, as the countries taking over the presidency for six months each tended to introduce new priorities (p. 119).

The EU itself has also considered the increasingly important role of PD, for example in an "Action Document for Public and Cultural Diplomacy". The document highlights that EU Delegations play a key role in developing the EU's Soft Power by building alliances. Concrete themes mentioned are multilateralism, EU values and principles, economic partnerships and fundamental rights

> *"In a more connected world, it is important to project a clear vision of what the EU stands for and seeks to achieve in the world."*
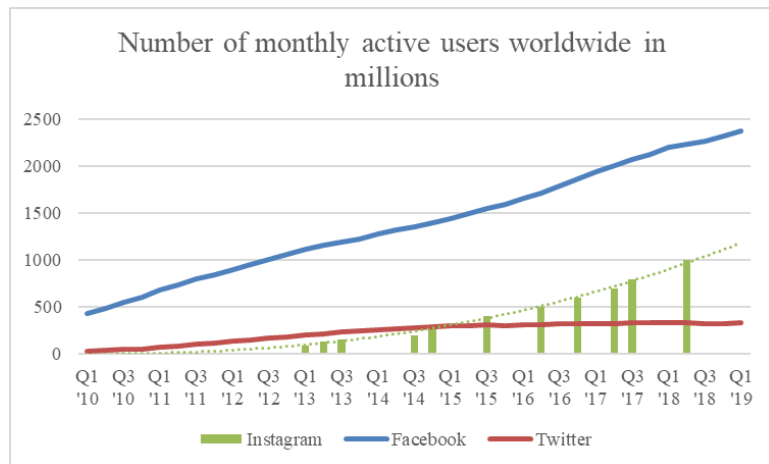>
> EEAS (2018)

which should be promoted through EU actions. This enumeration reflects the principles set out in the EU Global Strategy, which was adopted in 2016 and pursues the development of a more coherent external EU policy (European Commission, 2019).

On top of the literature exclusively covering EU PD, further sources were consulted to introduce additional topic-related perspectives. For instance, Pagovski (2015) compares different multilateral organisations' PD approaches by contrasting the cases of NATO, OSCE, ASEAN and the EU. From this, the author concludes that each organisation's activities depend on the organism's purpose and organisational structure. According to his findings, the EU's PD is comparatively bureaucratic and its MS are reluctant to transfer more competencies in this regard to the Union, while NATO is more open and straightforward about its PD efforts. Other studies investigate very specific aspects of PD, such as Biedenkopf and Petri (2019) in their recently published article on the EU Delegations' role in climate diplomacy. Based on interviews conducted in 2015, the researchers discover that there is some variance between each Delegation's activities, depending on the contacts between the Delegations and the HQ in Brussels, the individuals staff members' expertise and the host country's context.

Nevertheless, despite improvements regarding coherence and visibility in recent years, the consulted literature also points to major challenges EU Delegations are confronted with in their PD activities. Manners and Whitman (2013) refer to some highly relevant issues such as disparities in terms of staffing and capacities between the Delegations. Azpíroz (2014; 2015) equally sets out budgetary constraints limiting the activities' potential. Part of this finding is due to the fact that PD represents only a small part of the EEAS's scope of tasks (Cross, 2015). Moreover, the early years after the Lisbon Treaty's adoption and the establishment of the EEAS were overshadowed by the economic and internal crisis of the EU, rendering a coherent foreign policy and strong PD more difficult (Duke, 2013, p. 118). Among other scholars, Duke (2013) also mentions the need to coordinate the EU Delegations' PD with the MS by sharing strategies to promote a "single message". According to Duke, this is not always the case in some host countries, where the EU promotes values such as human rights while the MS primarily pursue their own agenda. Tailoring the messages conveyed to the specific audience, while keeping in mind the host country's cultural and historical background, is key in this regard (ibid.). Given these challenges, it will be interesting to evaluate how the PD of EU Delegations has changed ten years after the adoption of the Council Decision and to provide a more specific insight into the practice on the ground in third countries.

Despite valuable methodological and content-related insights from these studies, there are, however, some limitations which reiterate the raison d'être of this thesis. First of all, the overall number of studies on the topic still remains fairly restricted. Secondly, many papers are limited in their geographic scope, focusing for instance on a small number of bilateral representations in the same region (Azpíroz: 2014, 2015). This underlines the need for a more comprehensive and systematic analysis. In addition to this, the research field is rapidly changing due to fast-paced geopolitical, cultural and technological shifts, requiring constantly updated scholarly

Figure 1: Number of monthly active users worldwide on selected social media platforms (Statista, 2018, 2019, 2020)

coverage, whereas many of the pertinent articles date back to the early 2010s. To illustrate this seemingly short time period, it proves useful to recall how the number of active users on social media platforms has increased over the last decade (cf. *Figure 1*), constituting one of the main communication channels of a topical PD.

4.2. Literature on EU Delegations in general

In addition to the pertinent publications explicitly related to PD, the literature review revealed several articles dealing with EU Delegations on a more general basis, which thus could provide some critical input concerning this thesis's topic. This could be e.g. by highlighting general challenges EU Delegations are facing, hampering their effectivity as a whole and therefore also limiting the success of PD efforts.

By comparing the work of the EU Delegations in Moscow and Washington, Maurer and Raik (2018) come to the conclusion that both Delegations have taken over more and more functions considered "traditional diplomatic tasks" and play an important role in coordinating the EU MS on the ground (p. 57). They identify i.e. the diverging expectations by host countries and an (initially) unclear delimitation of the Delegations' competences as practical challenges. In addition, the authors point to the need for a strong leadership of key individuals, first and foremost the Heads of Delegation, as a key to success.

In a study on the EU Delegations in Moldova and Ukraine, the authors conclude that the EU Delegations and MS embassies are increasingly expected to work together by their host countries. In practice, the coordination meetings chaired by the EU Head of Delegation have led to a certain degree of administrative efficiency and more joint reporting than before Lisbon. However, several challenges remain, such as competition between EU MS, clustering of big players as well as double structures and the partial lack of willingness to engage in joint actions. Ultimately, truly upgrading the external relations of the EU will remain difficult "as long as there is no political will" (Baltaq & Smith, 2015, p. 19). Drieskens (2012) equally identifies that the cooperation with MS on the ground tends to fail due to the lacking tradition of such local cooperation: "Cooperation may be the Lisbon mantra, but it was not the reality on the

ground in the pre-Lisbon era" (p. 58). These challenges could as well be very relevant for PD activities, since all MS embassies present on the ground would have to team up and join the EU Delegation in speaking with one voice for the PD to be truly successful.

It is this recurrent theme which summarises one of the most crucial problems of the Union's external relations: the fact that the EU is not a state. This has significant consequences in the international diplomatic sphere, a territory that is traditionally dominated by intergovernmental relations. While the Lisbon Treaty conferred a legal personality to the EU, its external competences remain limited by the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality as outlined in Art. 5 TEU, entailing an inherent, "looming risk of diplomatic overreach" (Duquet, 2018, p. 23). Therefore, the effectiveness of the EU's external policy depends to a large degree on the third states' willingness to accept the EU as a diplomatic actor as well as on the EU MS inclination to cooperate (Wessel & van Vooren, 2013).

Other academic contributions focus on the role of EU Delegations to International Organisations and the particular challenges they are facing. Comelli and Matarazzo work out the reluctance of some EU MS to recognise the competences conferred to the Union through the Lisbon Treaty (2011, p. 11). The EU plays a subordinate role in many of these organisations, particularly in those bodies in which none of the exclusive EU competences are at stake. It is for this reason that some EU Delegations to International Organisations were included to this study, considering their special position and practical issues such as the lack of an obvious target group for their PD.

But not only the scientific community, also the EU institutions themselves have produced some analyses of the EU's diplomatic service to develop recommendations. One example is the European Parliament, trying to answer how the EU could potentially have a bigger impact on the international stage. It identifies the diverging positions of MS and the deficits of the European integration process as main challenges, leading to fragmented positions regarding international issues (European Parliament, 2011). Hence, the findings exposed above are identified and picked up internally by the EU, confirming the doubts whether the lack of consensus among EU MS in foreign policy could lead to less concerted and effective PD efforts.

The EEAS provided a review of its functioning in 2013, which was widely discussed in the literature. Among other findings, the service determines that the budgetary resources available to its Delegations are restrained, limiting the scope of their actions. In addition, the review encourages a more intensive debate as to how the interaction between EU Delegations and MS embassies could be improved through innovative burden and resource sharing (EEAS, 2013). In the HR/VP's progress report on the implementation of the 2013 EEAS Review published in 2016, it is stated that EU Delegations cooperate increasingly with MS embassies, inter alia mentioning explicitly the role of PD, but that the use of staff resources can still be optimised (HR/VP, 2016). Given this lack of resources, it will be interesting to ascertain if the officials on the ground in charge of PD encounter this constraint in their daily work as well as to what extent cooperation with the MS embassies effectively takes place.

Despite the abundance of outlined challenges, EU PD is not doomed to fail. If the right levers for intervention are found and if the different concerned levels work together, careful rationalisation can be achieved, so that the EU Delegations could enable economies of scale

and lead to more convergence of EU foreign policy (Emerson, et al., 2011). More research on the ground needs to be conducted to provide a complete picture of the current situation and develop policy recommendations. Before turning to the analytical part of this work, in which the interviews will be evaluated, the used methodology will be briefly outlined in the following.

5. Data, sources and methodology

As in all social science matters, unveiling laws on causal relations as is the case for many natural sciences is an impossible task, be it because of the free will of man or irrational human behaviour. Yet, speaking with King, Keohane and Verba (1994), the goal of social science research must be inference, that is, to deduct some rules and certain logics explaining human behaviour and relationships that go beyond simple observations (p. 8). In this sense, the aim of research in social science is to be more positivist than relativist. For the present thesis, this premise implies that the goal shall be to discover which factors explain particularly successful PD conducted by EU Delegations.

"The distinctive characteristic that sets social science apart from casual observation is that social science seeks to arrive at valid inference by the systematic use of well-established procedures of inquiry."

King, Keohane & Verba (1994, p. 6)

Regarding the research design, four considerations brought forward by Todd Landman shall be reminded (cf. quote below):

*"The distinction between different comparative methods should be seen as a function of the particular **research question**, the **time and resources** of the researcher, the **method** with which the researcher is comfortable, as well as the **epistemological position** he or she adopts."*

Landman (2008, p. 24)

The *research question* of this thesis defines the scope of analysis, as this thesis is assessing PD conducted by EU Delegations. This focus narrows down the number of potential interviews, given that e.g. PD by MS embassies and the role of national cultural institutes shall not be analysed in depth. Instead, it will be tried to examine the PD role of EU Delegations in the best possible way. Therefore, to develop the broadest possible understanding of the topic, different types of Delegations in diverging geographic, economic and political contexts were contacted for interviews. More concretely, Delegations both in very small and large host countries were interviewed, situated on five continents and with different priorities in their PD activities due to the local political situation and the host country's ties with the EU. In addition, the participating Delegations include some situated in countries whose legal status is disputed, to carve out whether the status of an "EU Office" instead of being an EU Delegation does affect their practical work.

In terms of *methodological approach*, this starting position means that the level of abstraction is limited, hinting to a more qualitative method rather than a large-n study. Given the restricted amount of *time and resources* of a master thesis, this choice is confirmed. Lastly, the *epistemological position* is crucial in determining the appropriate method of research: which

approach could be the one creating the most credible and valid results, what is the appropriate way to generate knowledge? Considering the nature of the research topic, a qualitative study including telephone and face-to-face interviews with EU diplomats allows for the most thorough understanding of challenges EU Delegations are facing in their outreach activities. Interviews generally allow for data gathering to collect first-hand information from individuals and tap into their expert knowledge (Harrell & Bradley, 2009, p. 24). More concretely, the aim of this work is to find out which factors are responsible for turning an EU Delegation's PD into a success and what differentiates a more effective Delegation from one encountering more difficulties. Thus, a Most Similar Study Design is applied, being an outcome-oriented method seeking to unveil differences.

The data of this thesis was gathered by semi-structured interviews following a guideline. This guideline was designed based partially on the findings from the literature review, including for instance the most frequently mentioned challenges. Placing them on a continuum between unstructured and structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow for a certain degree of control over the conversation and permit the researcher to "delve deeply into a topic" (ibid., p. 27). These interviews are non-standardised, meaning that the neither the questions nor the answers are rigidly fixed, despite some questions which were asked in every interview. Generally, the guideline followed a funnel style, starting with broad questions which subsequently led to more specific ones. The order and formulation of questions depends on the course of the interviews, probes and further inquiries for clarification are possible.

For the input of this thesis, 17 anonymous, semi-structured interviews were conducted, representing the most adequate approach to ensure comparability of interviews on the one hand while allowing for a certain degree of flexibility on the other. A core component of the qualitative basis of this work are interviews with EU Delegations' staff working on PD, since they are the ones closest to the research topic on the ground. However, in accordance with the screened literature, it proved useful to also conduct interviews with representatives of EU MS embassies' employees to be able to compare different perspectives on the topic. Lastly, a former official of the EEAS HQ in Brussels was interviewed.

6. From theory to practice

As outlined, the ambition of this thesis is to provide a more thorough understanding of how EU Delegations conduct PD and which challenges they encounter in doing so, the ultimate goal being to develop policy recommendations for a more effective external representation. To this end, the practical and analytical part hereafter is subdivided into three segments. First, a descriptive section will outline the current state of play, mapping out how PD by EU Delegations works on the ground. Followingly, the main challenges EU practitioners are experiencing according to their testimonies will be outlined. These insights will thereupon be used to work out a series of recommendations to improve the exertion of PD in situ in the third subsection. The paragraphs of the first, descriptive part follow the structure of the interview guideline, as one paragraph correlates with one interview question.

6.1. How does EU Public Diplomacy work on the ground?

This chapter will outline the messages conveyed, tools used, target groups and cooperation with EU MS in the host countries. For most of these chapters, a subdivision can be made between

"regular" Delegations to host countries and EU Delegations to International Organisations, since the information obtained from the interviews varied significantly between both groups.

6.1.1. Understanding of Public Diplomacy

The interviews conducted for this master thesis confirm the changing nature of PD and correspond with the definitions given in the literature. 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 organisation per se or certain projects. It is about perceptions, how people perceive" (Interview (I) 2). Others said that EU PD is a means to inform foreign publics and decision-makers about how the EU functions, since the Union is "quite far" away from their host countries and the knowledge about the EU's characteristics is only limited (I7). In the end, 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" (ibid.). Facing the recurrent argument that PD simply represents a new name for propaganda, one delegate stated that it sometimes is difficult to draw a line between both terms (I3). However, there seems to be a consensus that PD is more about dialogue instead of a simple one-way monologue and that this direct engagement has proven to be very successful (I2). 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 (Misyuk, 2013).

6.1.2. 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 citizens of the host countries mix the EU with its MS, or do not see a difference to other International Organisations such as the UN (I3) or NATO (I10). In some countries, not only the local population but even the political institutions and civil servants do not dispose of a very profound knowledge of the EU (I7). This mainly informative component applies in the case of faraway countries just as in countries which 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 e.g. communication on the benefits of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA) in the European Neighbourhood (I13), the single market or the European Economic Area (EEA). This information is relevant because even in the case of close geographic proximity, the EU Delegations see themselves obliged to counteract misunderstandings and misinformation on the EU circulating among the host country's population (I11).

Promoting a friendly image

The second main message conveyed by EU PD is communication promoting 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 favourable image can be interpreted in manifold ways: it can relate to spreading an image of "EU as friends" of the host country (I3, I10) and portraying the EU as a major international player and partner that supports the local population (I10, I14) and delivers substantial contributions to the prosperity of the country (I8). In countries with which the EU has a tense political relationship, communication focuses on spreading 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 and science (I9). Moreover, the role of art and culture can be used to create a "link between the people" by showing that no matter how big the distance between the EU and the host country is, both share common values and interests (I14). 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 the EU 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 Russian disinformation about the EU, for instance using the EEAS's East StratCom Task Force project EUvsDisinfo, which was established to forecast and respond to Russian disinformation campaigns affecting the EU (EUvsDisinfo, n.d.). Part of this positive framing of the Union is to underscore that the EU and the host country "are stronger together" (I13), signalling 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 very concrete goals or interests (I10).

Partnerships on development

Thirdly, a special role regarding the messages conveyed is held by Delegations based in developing countries. 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 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 development cooperation budget used on projects financed by the EU appears to allow for enough projects which could be communicated and portrayed through EU PD activities (I1). On the other hand, some Delegations 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 (I14). 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 (ibid.).

Communicating EU values

Lastly, in addition to these host country-tailored messages which 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 emphasising the role the Union attributes to principles such as human rights, gender equality and the international rule-based order (I9), but also refers to more concrete fields such as the fight against climate change and the implementation of the Paris Agreement (I11).

These testimonies are well in line with the findings from the PD literature, as e.g. Nye argued that "actions speak louder than words, and Public Diplomacy that appears to be mere window dressing […] is unlikely to succeed" (Nye, 2008, p. 102). While informing about the EU and its values is a core task, many diplomats indeed stated that the most successful messages are those which are of concrete benefit for the recipients. This can be projects and measures 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 favourable prospects or tight job markets (I10). 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.

The situation of EU Delegations to International Organisations is a very specific one and differs greatly from Delegations with a determined host country. In comparison to the latter, the conveyed messages are not as much about spreading a positive image of the EU. Rather, the interviewed experts explained that their goal is to inform about the benefits of strengthening the role of the respective organisation and promoting a prominent role of the EU in this setting (I4). One official stated that according to his assessment, the EU Delegations would have to be subdivided into four categories whose role and conveyed messages would differ accordingly: a) bilateral Delegations; b) the Delegation to the WTO; c) the Delegation to the UN in New York and d) all other Delegations to International Organisations, particularly the smaller ones. The representations falling under a) mostly exhibit a prominent role for PD and are very active in this respect. Regarding the Delegations to International Organisations, one would have to differentiate between those proxies where the EU has important exclusive competences (as in the case of the WTO, since trade is among the core competences of the Union), the Delegation to the UN in New York due to its enhanced observer status and all other representations. For instance, in the case of the WTO, the EU has fairly concrete objectives, namely maintaining the global trading system which is currently under threat. In turn, especially the EU Delegations falling under category d) are quite inactive in outreach activities due to the limited competences of the EU in their respective forum. Asked about their PD role and communicated messages, one diplomat in such a Delegation argued that his team had "no role whatsoever" in this regard (I5). This stands in stark contrast to the interviews with bilateral EU Delegations, which referred to a broad spectrum of activities.

6.1.3. 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.

6.1.3.1. Online channels

Overview

The online communication consists of a range of different channels used for diverging purposes. 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 use social media as a primary source for their information on the EU (I8). This is why social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram 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 (I15). In addition to these widespread networks, some representations are active on more specific websites. This is the case for the EU Delegation in Washington, which is registered on the publication website Medium.com and the Delegation in Turkey, using LinkedIn. Also, the representation to the UN in New York has published material on the video network Vimeo. The EU Delegation in China does not use Facebook and Instagram, but the Chinese counterparts Weibo and Tencent to reach out to the host population. Lastly, while all other Delegations use the provided website template (see template structure in *Figure 2*), the two proxies in Serbia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina have created special websites with a different design and functions.

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, as they exhibit the most important reference persons of each section in addition to open jobs, calls for tenders and other potentially relevant information. However, when answering the question which tools the specific Delegation uses for its PD activities, none referred on its own initiative to the official website. Explicitly asked about the purpose of the website, one official even declared the provided template is "terrible" and "outdated by the time everybody adjusts to it" (I9). Furthermore, it was recalled that EU Delegations are not a consulate, which is why there is no reason for a host country's citizen to regularly consult the website unless in the case of real interest in the EU (I15). On a similar note, a national diplomat expressed that about 80% of their embassy's traffic on the website is triggered by visits of the visa and consular services, confirming the previous statements (I17).

About	Relations with the EU	Projects	Travel & Study	Press & Media	Jobs & Funds	Contact us

Figure 2: Typical structure of an EU Delegation's website

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 (I14). Quantitative research during the preparation of this thesis revealed that almost all Delegations dispose of an own Facebook page (*Figure 3*). Compared to other platforms such as Twitter, Facebook serves as a channel for a mix of political and less political messages. This encompasses, among many other aspects, invitations for events or information about projects. In some countries, the weight of Facebook supersedes traditional websites, meaning that even many ministries and corporates do not have a homepage but are active on Facebook, which underlines the pivotal role of the medium (I1).

More than three quarters (77%) of EU Delegations dispose of a Twitter account. If the broader public shall be reached with political messages, Twitter is often mentioned as preferred channel. The willingness to use this network seems to depend to a significant extent on the personal motivation of each Head of Delegation. In one host country where
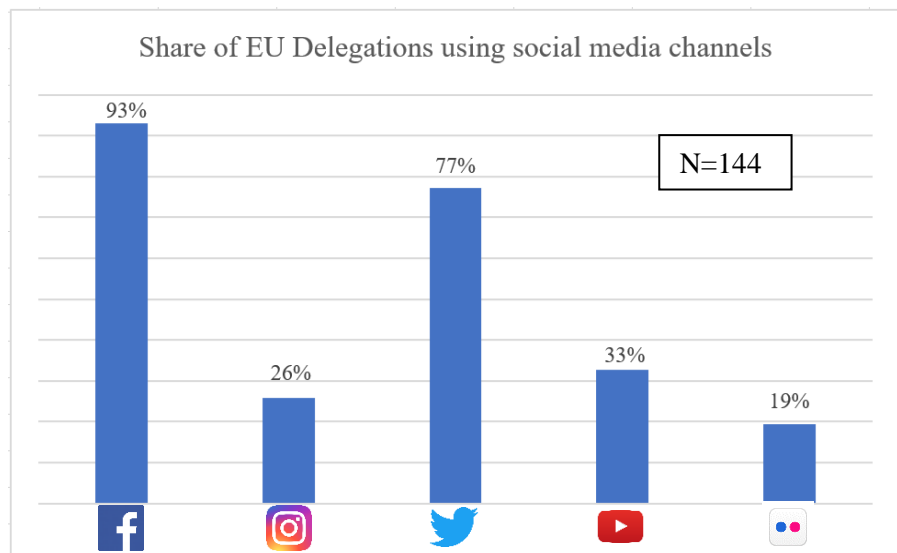
Figure 3: Share of EU Delegations using social media channels, calculations based on information available on the EU Delegation's websites and own research. Includes one atypical Delegation (Task Force Iran)

the Delegation's Twitter account is only used very sporadically, the Communication Officer explained that the ambassador's main motivation for the channel is "to show Brussels that he has it", without actively employing it (I10). In other places, where the EU ambassador is known for being a particularly charismatic personality or has built up a considerable number of followers due to his or her pre-EU professional life, Twitter can play a distinctive role in external communication.

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. As *Figure 1* in chapter 4.1. showed, Instagram 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 (I10). 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. Asked about to what extent such influencers are ready to spread political messages, one interviewee responded that this usually does not represent a problem (ibid.). 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 which nevertheless is beneficial to reach the youth (I1).

Considering these findings, virtual PD constitutes a communication channel allowing to reach new audiences, such as younger generations or more remote areas (cf. 6.1.5.) at a lower cost compared to traditional tools. Over the last years, social media has sustainably altered the diplomatic interaction with citizens, NGOs and governmental structures. Although online channels offer an added value to PD and complement traditional tools, they also bring along some challenges such as security risks which will have to be addressed in the future.

6.1.3.2. Offline channels

Despite the increasingly crucial role of online content, the offline component of PD still is a central element and was often referred to as being particularly fruitful. This includes the organisation 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 – frequently in cooperation with MS embassies – often 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 what the young generation is concerned about. Furthermore, more institutionalised PD activities such as the Europe Houses and EU Info Centres can be an offline tool bringing the EU closer to the ordinary people (I8, I13). These are projects funded by the EU which inform about the European institutions and policies through trainings, roundtables and all sorts of cultural events.

In general, the Heads of Delegation seem to be key pillars for fruitful outreach activities. Several interviewees referred to their head either by listing him or her explicitly among their PD instruments or by mentioning the position when talking about best practices and what works exceptionally well. The Heads of Delegation in some countries are "omnipresent" in the media and have a reputation for being engaged in certain topics such as strengthening women's rights (I7). But not only the role of EU ambassadors is vital, also heads of certain departments such as the cooperation section are prominent actors in the local media of some countries (I8).

EU Delegations to International Organisations again face particular challenges in their activities, given that there is no "host country population" as such which could be reached through PD tools. This is reflected in these Delegations' use of online platforms, as only 50% are active on Facebook (compared to an overall share of 93%), 20% on Instagram and only a tenth on YouTube. The only platform on which all EU Delegations to International Organisations are present is Twitter, even though the intensity in which the accounts are used varies substantially. Apart from online activities, one Delegation explained that they try to organise at least some offline events, for example for visitors and student groups coming to the Delegation. Furthermore, they organise events around special dates and occasionally in cooperation with the International Organisation, such as for Europe Day on 9 May.

The tools used by EU Delegations depend significantly on the local context in the host country and 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 to communicate EU values and to talk about topics such as culture, education and

environmental protection on numerous occasions. Each time a new project is started, or a building is inaugurated, these elements are repeatedly addressed, representing a "very cheap way" of PD (I7). Every host country is different, in some places, traditional "offline" media outlets might still play a more important role, in others, the media landscape is quite restrictive so that alternative ways have to be found in order to engage with the local population. Overall, it can be noted that EU Delegations have a wide range of instruments at their disposal, which they use in a more or less active manner. The use of new ICTs is firmly anchored in most outreach strategies, allowing – in combination with offline activities – for a dialogue-based engagement with the host country's population.

6.1.4. Involved actors on the EU side

For a better understanding of the PD dynamics on the ground, it proves useful to briefly assess the role of involved actors on the EU side, consisting mainly of the Delegations themselves and the HQ in Brussels. The size of the unit in charge of PD on site varies between the different Delegations. In some, the outreach activities are conducted by only one person, while this number was significantly greater in larger representations. In addition to the PD and Information Officers, some interviewees explicitly mentioned their Heads of Delegation, Deputy Heads of Delegation and interpreters as actors involved in PD activities. The number of staff dealing with PD in EU Delegations to International Organisations deviates considerably from the other representations in a sense that there was either no (I5) or just one (I4) person dealing with PD on a regular basis. Therefore, it is not surprising that these Delegations are much less active both online and offline than "regular" Delegations covering host countries.

Naturally, the Delegations do not work entirely independently of the HQ in Brussels. The Communication Officers are in "constant contact" (I8, I16) with the EEAS's Strategic Communications Unit (SCU), which provides the Delegations with information about centrally launched campaigns, lines to take and support material such as videos and infographics (I7). The SCU also organises yearly seminars in which all press sections of a specific region participate to discuss priorities, campaigns and lines to take (I3, I4, I7). In addition to the regional seminars, the SCU sets up regional videoconferences to provide updates about new developments and campaigns and to catalyse exchange between the Delegations (I4, I7). Lastly, on average every two years, all Heads of Press and Communication meet in Brussels for an entire week to be briefed on a broad range of topics related to outreach activities and foreign policy in general (I7). Despite the large majority of Delegations describing the relationship with the EEAS HQ as a very close and efficient one, one officer expressed feeling as if the HQ just invites them "out of courtesy" to the seminars in Brussels, where the official felt like an "honourable guest" (I10). The delegate went on saying that for some third countries such as in the Eastern Partnership, desk officers in the SCU focus closely on the region, while in the area where this interviewee was based, he or she felt that "we are on our own". However, he or she appreciated that "they don't intervene" and prevent them from doing what they consider appropriate in their local context (ibid.). This suggests that the relation between the HQ and the Delegations still harbours potential for improvement. Then again, the findings also simply reflect (geo)political priorities in a sense that the EU, despite trying to be present in all parts of the world, attaches more relevance to strategically or politically important third countries.

Not only do EU Delegations hold close contact with the EEAS HQ, but also with the Commission's DGs which are of importance for their daily PD work. For instance, Delegations in EU neighbouring countries keep in touch with DG NEAR, those in developing countries with DG DEVCO (I14). The interaction with DG COMM seems to be more limited than with the EEAS HQ and apparently takes place mostly in the case of major, more comprehensive campaigns (I4). In addition, DG COMM supports the Delegations with technical assistance (I13). Lastly, several Delegations mentioned the Spokesperson's Service as an additional point of contact in Brussels with whom they are in regular exchange (I8, I13).

6.1.5. Target groups

Cross (2015) argues that the EU cannot target all audiences but should try to be attractive to those which it considers most important. Five years after the publication of her article, this argument remains valid and is reflected in the interviews conducted. The target groups vary between third countries and are subject to the respective realities on the ground.

More than four out of five EU Delegations argued that reaching the youth would be crucial and that they focus their efforts on engaging with this target group, given that young people can have multiplier effects on others (I3), that they are the future of the host country (I11) and usually among the most eager to learn new languages and discover foreign cultures (I9). Also, the "European mentality" is more pronounced among the youth than among older generations (I1), turning them into an "incredibly useful resource" (I14). The outstanding role of the young generation is one of the reasons why most EU Delegations count on expanding their social media presence. But not only the online world can be a powerful tool to reach out to the youth, offline events seem to be equally as effective. This can be e.g. through visits of universities and similar institutions as mentioned above or by hosting events for student organisations. With a little wink of the eye, one member of a Delegation mentioned that providing finger food and alcoholic beverages is among the most successful ways to attract such audiences (I11). 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 an attractive destination for study trips, exchanges and cultural interaction.

Another target group mentioned in some interviews is the political elite of a country, servants in ministries and here in particular in the foreign ministry (I9, I11). 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 (I11). 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 their presence in more remote areas. This can be done for example by organising high-level visits to the regions and through meetings with governors and other political stakeholders (I9).

Of particular significance are outreach activities to engage with the media and journalists, through traditional means like media releases and press conferences, which then are utilised 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 more 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 (I9).

The civil society in the host countries is likewise among the most relevant groups targeted by PD activities, including all kinds of organisations such as environmental and gender equality activists, associations for the protection of people with disabilities and many more. For the future, one can expect closer cooperation with business communities, seeking to link European chambers of commerce with local associations and organising conferences and exchange platforms (I9). Such campaigns targeting SMEs and the business community is of special relevance in DFCTA partner countries, considering that these agreements extend the "four freedoms" of the EU to these 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 (I13). 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, but is also about maintaining contact with NGOs and civil society organisations and trying to protect and help them, e.g. by issuing statements when members of these groups are arrested or imprisoned (I9).

Some Delegations draw a clear connection between the target group and the employed communication channels. One delegate explained that their activities mainly focus on three groups, the elderly people, the young generation and those who are professionally involved in EU projects, for instance members of the civil society. The elderly people are reached through more traditional means of communication such as TV and the radio. For instance, the local EU Delegation is very present in the evening news, in which its workshops and activities are regularly mentioned. On the other hand, the younger generation is rather reached through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram (I1).

In developing countries, the target groups differ substantially from those in more developed countries. While the youth and students are again mentioned as 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 issued messages (I7).

The extent to which the target groups depend on the individual context of each Delegation is also exemplified by those EU Delegations covering multiple host countries at once. An official of such a Delegation revealed that about 50% of their work is focused on the country where the Delegation is based, about 30% on another comparatively big country under their mandate, while the remaining 20% are split between the remaining few countries (I7). These remarks bespeak a challenge which will later be discussed in more detail, namely the lack of personnel resources to ply commensurable PD adapted to the peculiarities of each host country.

The Delegations to International Organisations are once more in a special position regarding the assessment of their target groups, since there is no "natural" intended audience as such. One official said that rather than focusing on the public in the city or country where the organisation is located, the Delegation's goal is to make the International Organisation's role more visible

in Brussels and communicate the potential for cooperation with the EU by stressing possible benefits for EU citizens (I4). Engaging with the local audience plays a much more subordinate role, as the interlocutor at another organisation expressed that a small part of their activities consists in inviting groups of students and inform them about their daily work as well as answering inquiries by whomever is interested in EU Delegations as such (I5).

Lastly, a potential criticism of PD identified in some of the literature consulted is that outreach activities in a host country only reach the elites and those who are interested in politics anyway, for instance students. This could be underlined by the fact that users of online platforms such as Twitter, a tool used particularly frequently by EU Delegations, generally have above-average levels of income and education (Tien, 2018). Nevertheless, in the face of this criticism, both EU and national officials claimed that they are addressing the wider society, as illustrated by their activities in schools, quizzes on the radio in local languages, market stalls and other animations (I14, I17).
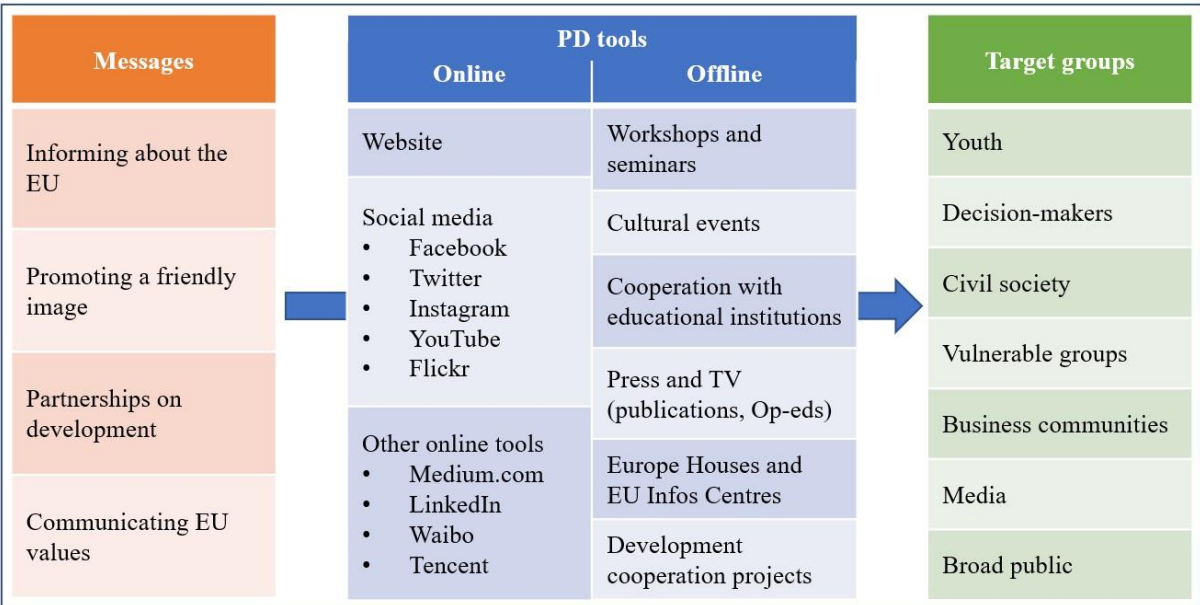

Messages	PD tools		Target groups
	Online	Offline	
Informing about the EU	Website	Workshops and seminars	Youth
	Social media	Cultural events	Decision-makers
Promoting a friendly image	• Facebook • Twitter • Instagram	Cooperation with educational institutions	Civil society
	• YouTube • Flickr	Press and TV (publications, Op-eds)	Vulnerable groups
Partnerships on development	Other online tools		Business communities
	• Medium.com • LinkedIn	Europe Houses and EU Infos Centres	Media
Communicating EU values	• Waibo • Tencent	Development cooperation projects	Broad public

Figure 4: Overview of the most frequently mentioned messages, PD tools and target groups

6.1.6. 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). It is therefore justified to analyse how these interactions work on the ground. Figuring out whether certain patterns can be observed in the field of PD and ascertaining the nature of collaboration in outreach activities between the EU and its MS as well as potential double structures hence is a main feature of this thesis.

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 the cooperation between EU Delegations and MS embassies on PD matters ranges from very little to relatively intensive teamwork. Factors that determine the intensity of cooperation include the resources available to MS embassies, the number of MS

present in the host country and the predominant issues in the daily work on the ground. A national ambassador added that according to his assessment, the interpersonal relations between the EU and national ambassadors are another key factor (I17).

In general, there seems to be a spirit of cooperation between the EU and its MS on PD issues, as PD covers areas such as culture, education and so on – all issues of great interest to the MS (I3). As in other policy areas, the vast majority of EU Delegations mentioned that joint coordination meetings on communication issues should serve as a platform to discuss current priorities and possible synergies in PD efforts (I2, I13, I14, I17). At the very least, MS embassies and EU Delegations try to keep each other informed of what they are doing and very often, real cooperation takes place. This can be done through the joint organisation of events on special occasions such as Europe Day or EU Film Festivals (I7) or through cooperation on cultural or educational campaigns (I3). In addition, some Delegations have started to send out e-mail newsletters to the public, listing all upcoming cultural events organised by MS embassies (I15). 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 the events and activities planned for the following year, together with the expected expenses, allowing the MS to opt in for certain endeavours. Up until then, the Delegation and MS embassies only used to invite each other to events without agreeing on a closer partnership (I10). 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 (I7, I17).

In general, the cooperation between the EU and its MS can roughly be divided into two levels. Firstly, high-level visibility events are organised to promote more general EU values and to present the history and culture of European countries. Secondly, cooperation takes place on a project level since many MS implement EU-funded projects through their national development agencies. In this case, PD has a dual objective, ensuring the visibility of the EU and putting forward the role of the implementing organisation (I13).

Nevertheless, PD cooperation between MS embassies and the EU is not all-encompassing. Even though this aspect is difficult to quantify representatively, statements by some EU officials revealed that in their host country only about half of the MS are willing to participate regularly in joint PD activities (I3). 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" (I2). 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 (I14). 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 (I15). In general, the EU Delegations seem to be well aware that they are not trying to replace or outshine the MS, but to provide added value and to pool efforts. As a result, some delegates stated that the Head of Delegation in their PD activities explicitly presents the EU as a combination of the EU institutions and the MS and recalls that the budget of the EU comes from its members, saying that this "deserves the recognition of the host countries" (I7). This assessment was shared by a MS ambassador based in the same country (I17).

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. Although the MS embassies each 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" (I14). To sum this up, one can observe that trends in cooperation are increasing, laying the foundation for what could become a fruitful collaboration resulting in a strong image of the EU and its MS in the world. MS seem willing to cooperate and 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.

EU Delegations to International Organisations seem to be lagging behind in the increasing trend of cooperation with MS on PD matters, which might be traced back to the limited resources on both sides. During the preparation of this thesis, several MS representations were contacted and asked for their assessment of the cooperation with the local EU Delegation. Very tellingly, one MS representation to an International Organisation stated that a proper interview on this topic may not prove useful, as there is no such cooperation between the EU Delegation and MS embassies at least at the organisation at stake (I12). This was confirmed by the EU Delegation to another multilateral organisation, albeit in weakened form, saying that there is a small degree of cooperation when it comes to jointly organising events. Sometimes, there is also occasional cooperation if a MS has a special concern in the International Organisation covered by the EU Delegation, so that they team of for a few events on a (highly selective) case-by-case basis (I4).

6.1.7. Measuring the success of Public Diplomacy activities

The assumption derived from the literature that the success of PD remains difficult to measure and quantify is confirmed by the interviewees who said that "in an ideal world", they would be able to assess their impact, but that reality is more difficult (I9). At the end of each year, every Delegation submits a report on the outgoing year, summarising the meetings organised and the use of resources in order to allow an evaluation of PD activities and to better plan the coming year at the HQ. Over and above that, some Delegations have developed communication strategies which outline the goals of their efforts as well as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to assess the success of their activities (I9). Nevertheless, it has become clear that evaluation remains a difficult task for EU Delegations – be it due to the lack of resources needed to carry out detailed analyses of their actions' impact on the ground or simply because PD is an "imprecise science" (I11) which is difficult to keep track of, as one official noted. Instead, the focus is on observing "broader trends over the years" (I4). To evaluate their PD, the Delegations have come up with several quantitative and qualitative approaches. For this thesis, quantitative approaches shall be defined as data which can be counted, measured and expressed using numbers, while qualitative data is more descriptive and conceptual (Pickell, 2019).

6.1.7.1. Quantitative approaches

The most convenient way to quantitively assess the impact of PD activities is the one provided by social media platforms. Almost all respondents referred to the use of the analytics provided by these platforms, 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 the communication section in an EU Delegation, as shared posts imply multiplying effects

and facilitate a wider reach (I2). The success of events and workshops is another factor which is comparatively easy to evaluate in quantitative terms, usually by counting the number of attendees as a reflection of the activity's impact. 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 (I1). Some interviewees voiced that they conduct opinion polls to determine how the host country's population sees the EU. This is usually done via a subcontractor since the capacities of the Delegations themselves are limited (I8, I9). In countries of the European neighbourhood, the quantitative evaluation of PD activities appears to be distinctively progressive. For instance, in order to monitor the impact of EU assistance, 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 to analyse how the EU is perceived (I13).

6.1.7.2. Qualitative approaches

Quantifying the success of television and newspaper appearances is more difficult to realise and requires a more qualitative approach. Apart from raw estimates of the audience share of television programmes (I10), 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 (I11) or simply to read the media on a daily basis to gauge the prevailing mood towards the EU (I9). The qualitative indicators also include more informal impressions of EU staff, as one Head of Delegation explained that sometimes a letter saying "Thank you for your work" can be a good source of motivation (I11). On the other hand, some evidence which 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 (I2).

Lastly, it should be noted that not all respondents are in favour of enhancing the measurement of 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 (I15).

6.2. 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 own hypotheses. The practitioners' assessment of these aspects will be outlined below. In addition, chapter 6.2.7. portrays a series of obstacles that had not been pre-identified and were revealed in the interviews only.

6.2.1. 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. 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. While in practice, PD has become more widely accepted among the international community, it is not possible to simply dismiss

this issue. 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 UNSC. 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 behaviour without more serious consequences (I2); in the worst case, the host country's government can lodge a complaint if the EU comments to frankly on problems in the country (I1) 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 at least to a certain extent, representing a political balancing act. One diplomat sums up the dilemma in the following way: "If you say something that is not very popular, the reaction is 'why are you meddling?'. But if you don't say anything, people ask 'where is the EU?'". This ambivalent role is reflected in the fact that despite criticising the EU when the latter addresses certain issues, the host country still relies on the EU's expertise and often requests its engagement (I8). 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 (I10). 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 (I2).

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 (I7). 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. In countries where the EU plays an extraordinarily prominent role because the host country might be inclined to join the Union, the Delegation preaches in a certain way the importance of EU values for this purpose (I2). It appears that these decisions require a high degree of cultural awareness and can only take place on a case-by-case basis.

6.2.2. Limited interest by the target audience

Generally, most interviewed officials asserted that there was 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" (I1), 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 Delegation is likewise able to reach the target audience relatively effortlessly, as there usually is strong interest in the EU (I2). 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 (I2, I9).

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 (I1, I3, I9, I16). In sparsely populated countries, the Head of Delegation regularly tries to leave the densely populated agglomerations to be visible in the less inhabited areas (I11). Another diplomat expressed that their greatest achievement in PD 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 (I3).

In host countries in Asia where Russia and China play a major role, one delegate argued that the host population is loyal to other players, so that the EU is even considered an "evil organisation" by some. This would originate from the pro-Russian sentiment in the population of the country, which would result partly from the fact that the local media environment is dominated by Russian media. In this environment, the main purpose of the EU Delegation is to raise awareness about the EU and create a positive understanding of it, at least among some groups such as the youth and politically open-minded people (I10).

6.2.3. Competition with other actors

The limited interest in the EU is closely connected to the competition for attention with other influential actors, as has become clear in the paragraph above. 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. This can go so far that it is almost impossible for the EU to make its voice heard and spread its values (I10). The Chinese influence is also increasingly perceived on African soil (I14). 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 relatively close to the EU in geographic terms mentioned the influence of the British press, conveying a certain image of the EU which does not necessarily facilitate the EU's efforts to spread its values and create a positive narrative (I11).

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. This is also because the EU's budget in development matters is large, but the Union itself only has few staff on the ground and therefore commissions national and UN agencies to implement projects (I1). 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 recognised as the most active actor in the development cooperation sector (I3). 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" (I15).

6.2.4. Lack of an internal consensus

The interviews revealed that in contrast to the strong focus on a domestic consensus in the literature, 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 and therefore should not display a lack of internal consensus (I1). 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 relation with those EU MS who do not recognise the host country. The overarching goal in their PD efforts remains to aim at reaching a consensus for joint statements as often as possible (I8).

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 (I10).

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 favourable developments. To sell the EU more positively, it is therefore necessary to better explain what the EU does and to address its critics (I14).

In the case of the Delegations to International Organisations, the situation is slightly different, since in most of these fora, the MS have a much stronger role than the EU itself. If one of the EU MS were to be condemned by the International Organisation for its actions, the EU Delegation would refrain from communicating externally about it in order not to emphasise the lack of domestic consensus implied by the condemnation. However, as mentioned several times, the external PD of these Delegations is not very pronounced anyway. The most important aspect of their work is the internal communication of procedures within the International Organisation to the HQ in Brussels rather external outreach activities (I4).

6.2.5. Language barriers

In some of the interviewed Delegations' host countries, more than one language is recognised as official language or, in the case of Delegations covering several countries at once, multiple languages are spoken. In addition, in many countries there are minorities who speak their own language and who sometimes make up a significant proportion. Nevertheless, one official expressed that the only internal "obligation" is to communicate in a country's official

language(s). This requirement tends to pose a challenge for Delegations in which there are not enough (native) speakers of all officially recognised languages. 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" (I8) which could indicate an improvement in this respect. Aiming at reaching the entire population and stating that "languages are important" (I2), this seems to be a recurrent issue, even though other bi- and multilinguistic countries did not consider this a pressing problem (I10).

6.2.6. 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. This is on the grounds that the downgrading of the rotating presidency 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 one of the biggest problems EU Delegations are facing, though to diverging extents. This can mean that only two delegates work on PD in countries where more than 200 projects must be covered, in addition to the daily press work (I3). In Delegations where the political, press and communication sections are merged into one position, this problem seems to be particularly alarming. One such person claimed that the fraction of time devoted to PD activities is "very little" since the other activities take up the bulk of the capacities (I4). This lack of human resources can severely hamper the effectivity of outreach activities – one official explained that he or she 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. At this point, with the scarce resources available, the Delegation conducts more or less the same events every year (I10).

In this situation of limited resources, communication staff are only able to extensively cover selected flagship projects, without being able to report about "normal" projects as much as they wish – a fate they share with other International Organisations. Communication on concrete projects can lead to a particularly fruitful engagement with the target audience, as is shown by the numerous reactions received on major projects that were broadly covered, but this dialogue requires commensurate resources (I8). The thin personnel cover has remarkably significant consequences for EU Delegations to International Organisations, which are very small in general anyway (I4, I5). This leads to the merging of positions outlined above and to the fact that in one Delegation, there was no dedicated Communication Officer at all (I5).

In addition to human resources, the financial side also plays a role mentioned by some practitioners. One Delegation stated that they usually receive about 50% of what they request at the EEAS HQ, while their neighbouring country would receive around 70%. The diplomat assumed that these differences are due to the bigger size and resource deposits in the neighbouring country, making it strategically more interesting for the EU (I10). Generally speaking, the EU's budget for PD is still much lower than e.g. in the case of the U.S. but is incrementally increasing (I1). Also, the lack of financial resources was not confirmed as unanimously as the personnel shortage. For instance, other diplomats disclosed that the current budget would be sufficient for the staff working on information and communication and that a higher budget would "overload" them (I11). A MS embassy's diplomat recalled that EU Delegations usually dispose of far more resources than their national counterparts (I17).

6.2.7. Other challenges

In addition to the challenges outlined above, the respondents mentioned further obstacles which 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" (I7). For the staff to cope with this challenge, one Delegation set up an antenna in one of the other countries covered by its mandate which 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 (ibid.).

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 (I1). Fake news increasingly affects EU outreach activities, contributing to a mood of Euroscepticism in some places (I11). 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 (I1).

A main challenge for the PD Officers 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 the 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 tend to live on the countryside (I1). 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, which has introduced a variety of creative tools in countries with high illiteracy rates, 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 (I14). Some countries exhibit a highly politicised society in which politics takes 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 (I8). In other countries, the EU's room for manoeuvre 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 (I9).

For host countries in which assistance or development cooperation projects are implemented, a major obstacle to PD is the complexity of these programmes, 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 (I13).

For the EU Delegations to International Organisations, one of the main challenges is the lack of EU competences in the respective policy areas at the multilateral organisations, which turns the Delegations into marginal figures with little to say or decide. In addition, EU MS "are not always very European" in their behaviour, which complicates the Delegations' tasks and impedes the dissemination of a joint European image and message (I5). The greatest problem mentioned by another Delegation to an International Organisation is the fact that the latter is "obscure" for the broader public and that it is based in a rather provincial city, so that only few media actors can be targeted. To raise awareness for its work, the International Organisation itself even sends representatives to Brussels every now and then to increase its visibility (I4).

6.3. Impact of current events

During the interviews, the EU diplomats were asked about their assessment of the impact of current political events on the PD of their Delegation. Given that many interviews were conducted before COVID-19 reached the scale of a pandemic, the implications of this sanitary crisis on EU PD were explicitly not included into the scope of this research to preserve comparability across interviews.

6.3.1. Transition from Juncker to von der Leyen Commission

Confronted with the transition from the Juncker to the von der Leyen Commission, which took place in December 2019, the responses of EU diplomats were unanimous in saying that this change of leadership does not represent a challenge in the daily work of Communication Officers. Rather, it was said that the new Commission has new priorities (such as the stronger focus on climate change through the "European Green Deal", I3, I6, I4), which will have an impact on the messages conveyed by EU PD.

6.3.2. Brexit

The impact of Brexit on PD was slightly more contended. On the one hand, as outlined above, Brexit accentuates the diverging positions among EU MS, potentially pointing to a lack of domestic consensus and depleting the EU's radiance as a collective community of values (I10). However, another diplomat in a developing country argued that Brexit "is not relevant on the ground" (I1). Rather, it is sometimes even considered an example which shows that the EU looks after its members, adducing its strong support for Ireland in the negotiations. Instead, past events such as the sovereign debt crisis and the "bailout" of Greece were mentioned as more influential factors hampering the EU's power of attraction (I11).

6.3.3. Increased global polarisation

The increased global polarisation seems to have an impact on the PD work, as the environment becomes "more and more political every day" and manipulation from other political actors with diverging governmental systems is a factor to be considered by the EU Delegations. This increased polarisation does not necessarily only affect the EU Delegations' work per se but is also reflected among the target groups of the host societies (I1).

7. Possible solutions and policy recommendations: A Ten-Point Action Plan for a more effective EU Public Diplomacy

The previous chapters 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 towards 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 basic assumption, encompassing both organisational and content-related suggestions as well as addressing general underlying challenges.

7.1. Setting up better training possibilities

The first policy recommendation, which was explicitly brought up in several interviews, is setting up better training possibilities for communication and 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 (I7). This recommendation applies in particular to Heads of Delegation, who tend to be older delegates who are not overly familiar with the subtleties of online communication and are therefore more sceptical about using such channels (I11). According to one diplomat, many officials are "good generalists" and know very well the traditional diplomatic work, but communication activities are a very specific field. Therefore, he or she encouraged the creation of better training possibilities, for example, on how to place messages, how to maintain contact with the local media et cetera. However, the person slightly backpedalled, saying that such suggestions are always a question of budget (I7).

7.2. Fostering language skills of EU Delegation staff

The interviews revealed that adequate language skills are of paramount importance to achieve a 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 role of the Heads of Delegation. If the latter speak the local language, this is considered an "asset" (I13), rendering the daily work much easier and having a positive impact on outreach efforts (I3, I13). 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). While this situation seems to have slightly improved, one policy recommendation remains to ensure a sufficient level of language skills adapted to the local context in order to achieve the best possible basis for a successful PD. This does not necessarily require perfect working proficiency, as even moderate language skills can show the host country's population that the EU's staff is open to their culture. The use of local staff and a sufficient number of interpreters also play a key role in this context.

7.3. Increasing the resources available for PD activities

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the lack of resources is a substantial challenge to the practice of PD. Therefore, a key recommendation of this thesis 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 apps like TikTok (I3). 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 (I7). Not only has to be ensured that such equipment is provided to the staff, but they must also receive regular training in 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 e.g. those Delegations submitting a particularly innovative PD plan could be granted additional resources.

7.4. Enhancing evaluation mechanisms

The evaluation of outreach operations remains a weak spot of PD. In spite of the evaluation mechanisms already put in place, this aspect harbours substantial potential for improvement. The implementation of regular and comprehensive surveys could ensure not only a detailed assessment of the perception of the EU 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 standardised 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 other multilateral organisations appear better equipped than the EU in its current state. For instance, NATO disposes of an elaborate annual PD strategy which is based on SWOT analyses and which spells out a relatively extensive evaluation mechanism (Pagovski, 2015, p. 31). The organisation furthermore has a Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre and generally appears to plan its PD in a more sophisticated way than is the case for the EU. For the latter, Pagovski (2015) finds that the EU "lacks a comprehensive PD strategic plan" and that existing documents on improving the communication activities of the Union "fail to present clear indicators for success". In addition, there is no evaluation or analysis unit comparable to the structures of NATO (p. 32). 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.

7.5. 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 thesis. While in general, many servants in the Delegations described the relationship as a positive and close one, some recommendations for the future can be derived. 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 is an acute topic in some third countries, so it could be detrimental not to talk about this process at all. In a nutshell, the EEAS should seek to follow the maxim "trust your ambassador" (I11) to achieve optimal results, a strategy that becomes 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 in strengthening the morale of the local staff, which sometimes seems to feel overlooked by the central administration.

7.6. Intensifying the cooperation between EU Delegations and MS embassies

Cooperation between EU Delegations and MS embassies is particularly necessary 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, an information that apparently has not yet reached all parts of the world. Secondly, a closer partnership would offer significant potential for rationalisation and therefore an 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 (I10). 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, organisational 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.

7.7. Tailoring the PD content to the target groups

As outlined in section 6.1.5., EU Delegations target a wide range of groups with their PD and expressed themselves fairly satisfied with their target groups despite the observation that it is impossible to reach the totality of a host country's population. Also, it must be reminded that each context is different and requires an adequate approach. For the future, several groups could increasingly 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 analyse 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.

7.8. Seeking to achieve more coherent positions of EU Member States at International Organisations to facilitate a common approach to PD

The situation of EU Delegations to International Organisations is particularly complicated and would deserve a more in-depth analysis on its own. At least in those Delegations to organisations in which the EU has only limited competences, hardly any PD takes place and the EU should call into question how much importance it wishes to attach to possible outreach activities in these Delegations. The interviewed delegates were not very optimistic that their situation will change, as the MS have their own representations and the concerned organisations dispose of their own channels of communication, focusing on the organisation as a whole rather than on singular voices. The EU therefore 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 such as Europe Day or by organising 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 Organisations and intensifying joint efforts together with the MS. 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 organisations, were not interviewed for this thesis.

7.9. Focusing on the right messages

Furthermore, a number of policy recommendations of a contentual nature have emerged which could potentially give greater impact to the outreach activities of EU Delegations:

- The EU's external communication should focus on topics and strategies which 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. This involves a wide variety of topics, such as projects to support victims of domestic violence, to reduce air pollution, workshops or the promotion of study and exchange programmes. 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 way 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 (I14).

- 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 (I3). First examples of this have already been mentioned above, such as 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 which 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 a 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 very 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. If the EU is to take its outreach activities seriously and seeks to convey the best possible image abroad by engaging with foreign people, it will inevitably have to increase the resources allocated to this purpose and make PD a foreign policy priority.

7.10. 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 (I5). A major problem that stands in the way of an attractive PD is the fact that political messages sometimes are very 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 (I3). 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 doubts and 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 to bridge the communication gap between the EU and its citizens and to establish a truly European public sphere (Kurpas, Brüggemann, & Meyer, 2006). Efforts to achieve this objective date back at least to the post-2005 discussions after the failure of the EU Constitution and address the development of a European identity, which was also brought up by a Commission White Paper on a European communication policy. It remains essential for the EU to continue the shift from purely informational campaigns towards communication and interaction with its citizens to enable the latter to have an informed opinion, hold decision-makers accountable and lead to 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).

8. Implications for future research

This research represents a starting point for the academic and practical debate on the future of EU PD and the role of the EEAS and its Delegations. Nevertheless, the thesis 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 scope of research. This also applies to EU Delegations to International Organisations, among which only Delegations with a relatively weak position were interviewed. Assessing for example the role of the Delegations to the UN and at the WTO could shed further light on this thesis's topic.

On the other hand, one major trend casting a shadow on the research process was the impact of the COVID-19 crisis which started in early 2020. Due to these circumstances, many diplomats who had previously agreed to interviews had to devote their time to more urgent matters and several interview requests had to be rejected because of the outbreak. This was even more the case for MS embassies, who were heavily involved with organising return journeys for their citizens, whereas some EU Delegations were still available for interviews at a comparatively late stage of the crisis. 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 finding can be 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 widen the scope of investigation. The present study focuses primarily on how PD is conducted by EU Delegations, offering several points of departure. Firstly, it would be expedient to scrutinise more closely the PD of EU MS embassies and cultural institutes to carve out concrete occasions for burden sharing. In addition, a quantitative approach analysing the impact and effects 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 taken into account.

9. 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 favourable 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 adapt a clear PD strategy.

With this overarching objective in mind, the goal of this thesis was to analyse the current state of play regarding the way EU Delegations conduct PD and subsequently to develop concrete policy recommendations to render EU outreach activities 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 emphasising 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 towards 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 organisations. In general, it can also be stated that 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 existing perceptions and expectations of the target groups. Each local context is different, 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. In order 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.

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Public Policy Master's Thesis Series

The Role of EU Delegations in Public Diplomacy: Challenges and Opportunities

Julien Abratis

Abstract

The Lisbon Treaty has significantly changed the EU's institutional setup regarding its external relations, replacing the former Commission Delegations with so-called EU Delegations which represent the Union vis-à-vis third countries and International Organisations. Apart from maintaining political and economic relations and keeping the EU informed of developments in the host country, a major task of the Delegations is to conduct Public Diplomacy (PD). This thesis scrutinises the latter task in more detail, questioning what makes supranational EU PD successful in times characterised by a renationalisation of foreign policy and lies out important challenges EU Delegations are facing in their outreach activities. These questions are assessed by means of 17 semi-structured interviews with officials in EU Delegations and diplomats from EU Member States' embassies as well as with a former member of the EEAS HQ. The interviews reveal that EU Delegations have been fairly effective in adapting to the "new" PD practices, focusing on dialogue rather than one-way communication and using a broad range of communication channels. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain, such as a lack of resources and restricted evaluation mechanisms. This work develops a Ten-Point Action Plan for a more effective EU PD through its Delegations, aiming at turning PD into a more prominent foreign policy priority. Recommendations include inter alia better training for PD and Communication Officers before taking up their positions abroad, greater levels of trust from the EEAS HQ towards the Delegation staff and enhanced financial and personnel resources.