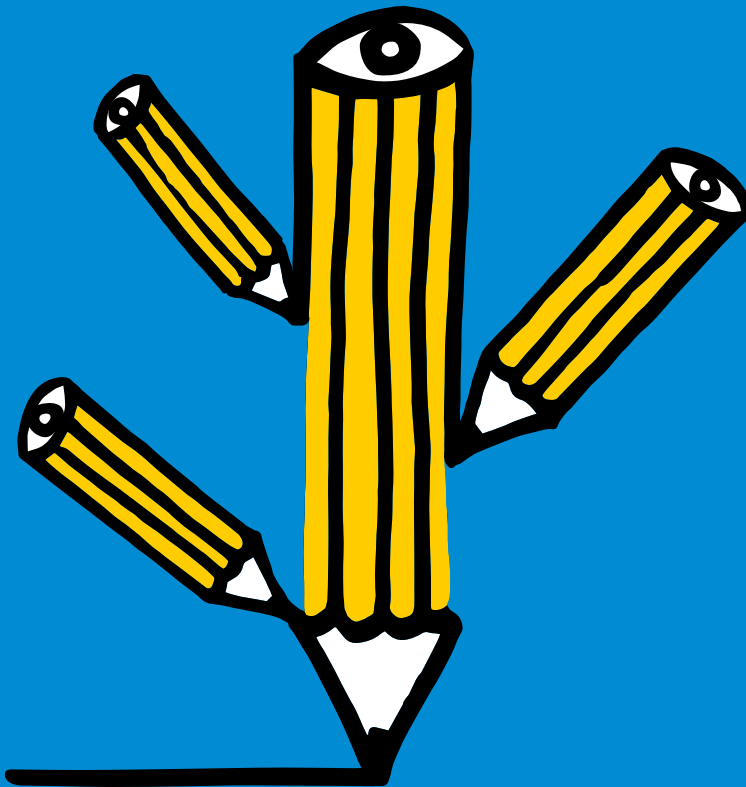


# EU STATECRAFT IN THE AGE OF PERMACRISIS

INVESTING IN NEW USES  
OF SOFT POWER AND PUBLIC  
DIPLOMACY



Christos A. Frangonikolopoulos



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# INTRODUCTION

The pandemic crisis and the Russo-Ukrainian war have demonstrated that the European Union (EU) is extremely vulnerable. It is important to recognize this, because only in this way will the EU be able to discuss and implement policies aimed at increasing the resilience of European integration. However, despite the elaboration of the Recovery and Resilience Plan in 2020, and the EU's unexpected and prompt reaction to Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Union's orientation remains unclear. In fact, *we have entered a period that will see the emergence of many issues that will require difficult decisions and decisive action from the European Union. Should "soft power" be abandoned? Is it time for "hard power"?*

The birth and evolution of the EU was and remains founded on a simple idea: connecting nations and peoples towards the goal of lasting peace. However, developments such as Brexit, the election of Donald Trump in 2016, and the behavior of other countries such as China, Russia and Turkey, point to the possibility that nationalism and power may prevail over interdependence, cooperation and dialogue. Interdependence does not only connect the world – it also divides it. Hyper-connectivity polarizes societies, cultivates envy and provides new “weapons” for power and competition. Countries engage in conflict by manipulating the ties that bind them together, deploying sanctions, boycotts, export controls or import bans.<sup>1</sup> The pandemic should have united the planet. Instead, we witnessed mask diplomacy and vaccine competition. In addition, Putin's invasion of Ukraine has put the US and the EU on the defensive, as politicians and citizens now view the world as a more dangerous place and appear willing to accept policies that may lead to increased defense spending.

With the above in mind, the purpose of this working paper is twofold.

*First*, to suggest and examine how the EU can enhance its security and its global role, without diverting its focus to the (unrealistic and dangerous) remilitarization of European politics. Undoubtedly, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has united the West. At the same time, it has also underlined the rift with the Global South, which goes

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1 Mark Leonard, *The Age of Unpeace* (Transworld Publishers, 2021).

beyond the rights and wrongs of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, originating from the frustration arising from the West's stewardship of the global system. In a world facing existential global risks, this frustration is dangerous and needs to be addressed. Bearing that in mind, the EU, it will be suggested, needs to attain a *new global* relevance and to develop and invest in *new uses* of its soft power in a changing global order and with diminishing influence.

Second, to examine how, in the age of *permacrisis*, deliberative and discursive processes should be at the heart of EU public diplomacy. This, as it will be suggested, will require that the EU reimagine its public diplomacy *in a more dialectical manner*. There is a need to experiment with refocusing the thematic orientation of the Union's public diplomacy, which is currently heavily concerned with issues regarding identity, culture, and education and centers on normatively positive images of the EU (its policies and institutions). In today's world, fundamental issues such as climate change, immigration, development, etc., should be at the core of public diplomacy. This calls for the establishment of hubs for discussion, argument, counterargument, and feedback, towards the thorough and systematic collection of citizens' opinions and positions and subsequent investment in analysis and synthesis.

**P1**



# PART ONE: RETHINKING SOFT POWER

Putin's invasion of Ukraine threatens to push the EU into a new, bipolar global status quo, strengthening the hegemony of the United States in the west and China in the east. Equally worrying is the emergence of rhetoric in both the US and the EU that is based on Cold War-speak, such as the "West" and the "Free World". In a world that has changed radically over the past 70 years, such language is an ideological setback, which risks turning the EU (and NATO) into a crusading organization.<sup>2</sup> Firstly, the present conflict between the United States and Russia has no ideological depth. Secondly, nowadays the world is not bipolar but multipolar, including great powers such as China, India, and Brazil.<sup>3</sup> Thirdly, globalization, with its advantages and disadvantages, has created established realities that, if disrupted, risk devolving into chaos.

The world is more complex than oversimplified dichotomies would have us believe. Due to different economic, cultural, and political backgrounds, many countries around the world (not just those with autocratic regimes) do not share the same concerns and anxieties as the EU, the US and NATO towards securing the continuation of the current international system. The reluctance of many states to condemn or sanction Russia for its invasion of Ukraine is a case in point. In a series of United Nations votes that have been held since Russia invaded Ukraine, around 40 countries representing nearly 50 percent of the world's population have regularly abstained or voted against motions condemning the Russian invasion. Fifty-eight countries abstained from a vote, in April 2022, to expel Russia from the Human Rights Council. According to the *Economist Intelligence Unit*, two thirds of the world's population live in countries that are officially neutral or

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2 Richard Haas, "The Dangerous Decade: A Foreign Policy for a World in Crisis", *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2022.

3 Bilahari Kausikan, "Navigating the New Age of Great Power Competition", *Foreign Affairs*, 11 April 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/china-great-power-competition-russia-guide>

supportive of Russia. Although 52 countries comprising 15% of the global population – the West and its allies – condemn and sanction Russia’s actions, and just 12 countries laud Russia, some 127 states are categorized as not fitting neatly into either camp.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, the over-emphasizing of hard power in terms of military partnerships and trade cooperation could lead to major regional or global wars as in the past. This is the exact opposite of what is needed today. Pandemics, climate change, food and energy shortages know no borders, but require global cooperation.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the challenge for the institutions and Member States of the EU is to strengthen defense capacity without undermining the fundamental principles of European integration. Insecurity stemming from an increasing sense of a diminishing role in global politics should not lead to the development of a new identity founded on geopolitical competition and combative behavior. The mistake that the EU must avoid is the eradication of the basis of the soft power identity it has cultivated for itself, and its role in the world as both a unique historical peace experiment and a major power in a multipolar international order, bound to promote peace and security worldwide in the medium and long terms. It must and should do more in the defense and military fields. The EU needs to develop tools that will enable it to be more resilient and efficient, investing in better decision-making through majority voting, strengthening the Commission’s role, setting up a European Security Council. However, it must not redefine its identity, nor forget that in addition to military/armaments and geopolitical issues, there are issues ranging from the climate crisis, development, prosperity, terrorism and immigration, where its role is extremely important.

The current crises provide an opportunity to rethink and discuss the global multilateral order. To reimagine it in a reformed and more inclusive direction, with the aim of not only reducing uncertainty, but also establishing forms of cooperation to deal with shocks and problems that have global repercussions. What is required today is not “competition” and “propaganda”, but a strategy that is guided by the logic that “power with others” is more important than “power over others”.<sup>6</sup>

While President Biden has revived the transatlantic relationship, it is unclear whether this will continue after 2024. And everything is not well in the transatlantic relationship as frictions, old and new, are coming to the fore, regarding the future of Russia,

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4 See “How to survive a new superpower split”, *The Economist*, 11 April 2022,

<https://www.economist.com/international/2023/04/11/how-to-survive-a-superpower-split>

5 G. John Ikenberry, “Why American Power Endures”, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2022.

6 Joseph Nye, *Do Morals Matter* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

economic nationalism (tariffs/subsidies), and how to deal with China.<sup>7</sup> Bearing that in mind but given the extent to which the EU and the US share similar challenges (e.g., a need to strengthen their democracies and public confidence, and to reform multilateralism), the EU must invest in a convergence with the United States. At the same time, it should also pursue initiatives that facilitate cooperation on issues such as health security, the climate, critical and emerging technologies, and cyber-security, without being tied down by North Atlantic alliance priorities, but by asserting itself as a global actor with a vital interest in defending and updating the multilateral system at the global level. It can do so by investing in its global regulatory role in the economic, social and environmental fields. As a recent study has shown<sup>8</sup>, many global regions and countries depend on the EU as an export market for their goods and services, for foreign direct investment, foreign aid, technological and knowledge exchanges, infrastructure connectivity, and labor mobility – far more than they rely on China, Russia, or the United States. On this basis, the EU should seek fairer, deeper and more sustainable trade integration with such countries, and become a driver for positive change by improving technological competitiveness and harmonization, as well as by the process of energy transition. The *Global Gateway Strategy* to promote global investments in sustainable energy, transportation, digital, and other forms of infrastructure is an important move in this direction.<sup>9</sup>

Such a strategy will allow the EU to work with a number of countries and regions around the world on issues of mutual and global concern.<sup>10</sup> With US foreign policy discourse focusing primarily on peer competition with China, the EU must play a leading role in shaping a multi-aligned and non-bipolar world. Today, as the G20 highlights, the non-Western world – or the “Rest” – wants to be heard. In fact, the war in Ukraine represents a failure of the United States and the EU in their expectation that countries outside the West would support the sanctions imposed on Russia. For the West, and in particular the EU, the Russian invasion is understood as an existential crisis on its borders. For the Global South, however, the problems of the West should not dominate the world’s concerns. And in a world in which the West (and in particular the United

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7 Rosa Balfour, “Transatlantic Woes: Neither Side Can Have It All”, *Carnegie Endowment Europe*, 1 December 2022 <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/88524>

8 Vasily Astrov et. al., *Keeping Friends Closer: Why the EU Should Address New Geoeconomic Realities and Get Its Neighbors Back in the Fold* (Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies and the Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2023).

9 See [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en)

10 Hussain Haqqani, “The Minilateral Era”, *Foreign Policy*, 10 January 2023 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/10/minilateral-diplomacy-middle-power-india-israel-uae/>

States) is increasingly competing with China, it is wiser for the “Rest” to sit on the sidelines and assert their own strategic interests instead of the West’s.<sup>11</sup>

As stressed by the Economist,<sup>12</sup> there is a widening gap between how the West sees the world and how the Rest sees it. In a poll published by the European Council on Foreign Relations, a plurality of Indians (48%) and Turks (51%) responded that the future world order will be defined by multipolarity or non-Western dominance. Just 37% of Americans, 31% of people in EU Member States, and 29% of Britons agreed.

As Spektor argues,<sup>13</sup> amid the bipolar competition of the Cold War, the “Rest”, then referred to as the “nonaligned”, rallied around a shared identity to demand greater economic justice, racial equality, and the end of colonial rule. To that end, they formed coalitions within multilateral institutions. Today the “Rest”, referred to also as “Hedgers”, try to avoid the pressure to choose between China, Russia, and the West, but want to make the most of the new, multipolar world and the optimism that comes with it. The diffusion of power, it is felt, will provide them with more breathing space, as security competition among the great powers will make it harder for them to impose their will on weaker states. Great powers, as a result, will not only be more responsive to appeals from the “Rest” for justice and equality, but will also create opportunities for the voicing of such opinions and a wider range of perspectives in international institutions. And rightly so. Consider the 25 largest non-aligned countries, or the “transactional-25” (T25, defined as those that have not imposed sanctions on Russia, or have said they wish to be neutral in the China-US contest). Together, they account for 45% of the world’s population and their share of global GDP has risen from 11% when the Berlin Wall fell to 18% today, more than the EU. After decades of free-wheeling globalization, the trade pattern of the T25 has become multipolar, with a three-way split between the West, China and other non-aligned states. Some 43% of commercial trade is with

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11 Ravi Agrawal, “Why the World Feels Different in 2023”, *Foreign Policy*, 12 January 2023 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/12/global-south-geopolitics-economics-climate/>

12 “How to survive a superpower split”, *The Economist*, *op. cit.*

13 Matias Spektor, “In Defense of the Fence Sitters: What the West Gets Wrong About Hedging”, *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2023.

the Western bloc, 19% with the China-Russia bloc, and 30% with countries not aligned with either of those camps.<sup>14</sup>

The world, Krastev and Leonard argue,<sup>15</sup> is transitioning from an era of “imperialism” to one of “decolonization”. In the former, the success of the capitalist economic model and new communication technologies helped spread Western ideas and values worldwide. In the latter, countries and societies today increasingly want to celebrate their own values, trying to “take back control” and consume their own culture rather than imitating others. The xenophobia, Islamophobia and implicit white supremacy of the populists in the EU and the United States have alienated a large share of the global population. The same might be said of the “internationalists”. Their efforts to support gender parity, minority rights and environmental action, as well as universal principles, have sometimes been met with charges of hypocrisy. EU Member States shut out Syrian refugees but are welcoming Ukrainians. Some \$170bn in aid was pledged to Ukraine in the first year of the war – equivalent to about 90% of spending on all global aid in 2021 by the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee, a group of 31 western donors. To the West, such generosity shows solidarity with a fellow democracy; to others, it shows that rich countries are willing to spend where it serves their interests. Their strong commitment to the principle of sovereignty in Ukraine rings hollow, considering their actions in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Libya. After all, the United States continues to selectively back authoritarian regimes when it serves U.S. interests. Of the 50 countries that Freedom House classifies as “dictatorships”, 35 received military aid from the US government in 2021.<sup>16</sup>

Does the EU understand the implications of the above?

As Leonard<sup>17</sup> rightly stresses:

*[What] is most off-putting is the way that Europeans tend to universalize their own experience, often assuming that what is right for them is right for others... For various historical reasons, most European societies have embraced a balance between majoritarian democracy, minority rights, and private property, and we now take this package of principles as a given. But as the Arab Spring showed, people elsewhere might opt for the right to vote*

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14 “How to survive a superpower split”, *op. cit.*

15 Ivan Krastev & Mark Leonard, “The Power Atlas: Culture”, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, December 2021 <https://ecfr.eu/special/power-atlas/culture/>

16 “How to survive a superpower split”, *op. cit.*

17 Mark Leonard, “Europe’s Soft Power Problem”, *Project Syndicate*, 4 May 2022 <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/europe-soft-power-problem-by-mark-leonard-2022-05>

*without demanding the full package. Those who rebelled against authoritarian regimes sought to emancipate themselves, not to mimic the West.*

The world view that places the EU at the core of what is just and stable needs to be put aside. The EU needs to grasp that the balance of power is changing globally. If not, it will undermine what remains of EU soft power, both *internally* and *globally*.

Internally, the EU must do more to defend what it has created since the end of the Second World War: prosperous and thriving liberal democracies based on the rule of law, accountability, an independent judiciary, and above all, the pluralism of ideas. The demise of the EU will not come because its Member States will not be able to agree on policies to curb climate change or fiscal priorities. Compromise on such issues is difficult, but it is achievable. The end of the EU, as with any political community, will come when its core values are no longer shared by all of its Member States. Hungary has become an electoral autocracy. Poland has transformed the country's judiciary into a branch of government. Journalists have been killed in Malta, Slovakia, and Bulgaria and several Member States have used the pandemic to expand the powers of the executive.

Thus, it is important for the EU to make it abundantly clear, through powerful measures and/or policies, that it will not abandon its fundamental values, especially when they are threatened by Member States where there are systematic efforts underway to dismantle democratic institutions and the rule of law. The hypocrisy of pretending to safeguard its values when it is failing to do so in reality has to end.<sup>18</sup> It is important to understand that the extent to which extremist groups, autocrats or illiberal leaders will further threaten the quality of democracy will depend less on their efforts and more on the nature of the democracies in which they emerge. If democracy is effective and responsive, there will be little constituency for explicitly antidemocratic or radically extremist appeals, and governments and political actors will be able to enforce the democratic rules of the game.<sup>19</sup> The longer that the EU fails to understand this, howev-

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18 S. Islam & E. Woodford, "Diversity and Power in the EU", *European Policy Centre*, 2022 [https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/2022/Jubilee\\_Papers/Jubilee\\_Think\\_Piece\\_Islam\\_Woodford.pdf](https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/2022/Jubilee_Papers/Jubilee_Think_Piece_Islam_Woodford.pdf)

19 Sheri Berman, "Populism Is a Problem. Elitist Technocrats Aren't the Solution. The Problem Isn't Too Much Democracy — It's Too Little", *Foreign Policy*, 17 December 2017 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/20/populism-is-a-problem-elitist-technocrats-arent-the-solution/>

er, the more credibility it will lose in the eyes of its citizens, leading to further anti-European sentiment and loss of power on the global stage.

Globally, the EU should be realistic on what to expect from the “Rest”. Thus, if the EU sees all points of contact between countries as sites for “systemic rivalry”, it will be doomed to live in permanent insecurity. To deal with this possibility, the EU will have to reflect on how it found itself in its current predicament. How has excessive confidence in its own appeal and its own model distorted and undermined the EU's perspective of itself and the rest of the world? Why did the liberal expectation that the EU could transform its immediate neighborhood and the “Rest” prove illusory? Self-confidence, belief and overestimation of the superiority of European culture and liberal democracy is not always a virtue. The exercise of humility and the effort to make the EU a forum for understanding the “others”, communicating and discussing their differences and priorities, would be useful.

Thus, the EU's quest for soft power depends on re-emphasizing long-term objectives, such as building a resilient set of rules for 21st century global governance. However, as Bargués rightly notes,<sup>20</sup> the *Strategic Compass* published in April 2022 interprets the resilience of European integration only as the ability of the EU to protect itself from diverse crises and threats.<sup>21</sup> There is no mention of the need to develop a global agenda of shared responsibilities and collective action, and “multilateral governance” or “global governance” *are not mentioned in the text*. In addition, the Strategic Compass “securitizes” every issue in global politics, from Russia to China, from criminal groups to migration, from climate change to pandemics. This is understandable, given Russia's actions, but it is not pragmatic. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has certainly altered the EU's perception of security, but to view the world only through a narrow and inward-looking security lens would be wrong. It would be counterproductive to the strategy underlying the EU's public diplomacy, which relies on international cooperation as an essential tool to provide concrete answers to today's global challenges, by creating the spaces to hold global conversations and address issues of common concern. Civil society dialogues, cultural diplomacy, support for societal resilience and mediation, so crucial to manage conflicts and crises, are at risk of being relegated if the EU decides to securitize global problems and invest in geopolitical assertiveness.

Bearing the above in mind, it is important for the EU to invest in a different form of assertiveness. Geopolitical assertiveness does not have to mean a return to old patterns

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20 Pol Bargués, “The EU Strategic Compass: A Blueprint for a European Defensive and Securitization Policy”, *JOINT*, 2022, [https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/joint\\_b\\_16.pdf](https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/joint_b_16.pdf)

21 See [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-o\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-o_en)

of combative behavior between great powers, the EU among them.<sup>22</sup> The European Union should aspire and endeavor to become more than an anti-Russian or anti-Chinese geopolitical forum, instead devising initiatives and implementing policies in response to challenges that demand joint international action, such as the energy crisis, growing inequality, climate change, shifting demographics, and destabilizing technological trends.<sup>23</sup> Faced with the prospect of increasingly adversarial relations between the United States and China, as well as an environment where global governance institutions are weak and delegitimized, the EU should invest in a positive vision and practical forms of cooperation that can serve as the basis for compromise and coordination among the countries and regions of the world. All major contemporary challenges, be they environmental, digital, public health or demographic, are cross-national and transnational in nature, necessitating multilateral, cross-border solutions.

To begin with, this requires a change in narrative. The framing of the war in Ukraine as one between democracy and autocracy is not, as noted, widely accepted. Although no one can deny that the Ukrainians are fighting for democracy and sovereignty, for the “Rest” the Russian invasion is nothing more than an offence against international rule of law. As Miliband suggests,<sup>24</sup> there is “a better alternative”. In particular, the war should be framed:

*... as one between the rule of law and impunity or between law and anarchy rather than one that pits democracy against autocracy. Such an approach has many advantages. It correctly locates democracy among a range of methods for the promotion of accountability and the curbing of the abuse of power. It broadens the potential coalition of support. It tests China at its weakest point because China claims to support a rules-based international system. It also sounds less self-regarding, which is important given the obvious problems plaguing many liberal democracies. A coalition built around the need for international rules is far more likely to be broader than one based on calls for democracy.*

To defend that, however, the EU must envision and advocate for a world system that collaborates more closely to combat global challenges. In this direction, as Blavoukos

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22 Georgios Kostakos, “Another Kind of Assertiveness for Europe: Peacebuilding Past, Present and Future”, *Katoikos.world*, 15 November 2022 <https://katoikos.world/analysis/another-kind-of-assertiveness-for-europe-peacebuilding-past-present-and-future.html>

23 Corina Stratulat, “The Beginning of the European Political Community”, *European Policy Centre*, 2022, [https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/2022/DP\\_The\\_beginning\\_of\\_the\\_EPoC.pdf](https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/2022/DP_The_beginning_of_the_EPoC.pdf)

24 David Miliband, “The World Beyond Ukraine”, *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2023.



and Pagoulatos argue,<sup>25</sup> the EU should, among other things, prioritize improving the performance of all international organizations (IOs), engage with running IOs, reform IOs and allocate more resources, address the weaponization of asymmetric interdependence by taking action at a global multilateral, cross-regional and intra-EU level, and save resources by prioritizing key regions (Africa and MENA) and key IOs.

Strengthening multilateral cooperation will also require partnering with developing countries and their organizations (e.g., the African Union). To build meaningful cooperation with developing countries and work together towards constructive multilateralism, the EU and its Member States must accept that such countries have their own views on the shifts in the global order and the desirability of further change. For increased legitimacy of the multilateral system, the EU must move beyond simply protecting the status quo, combining its stance as a defender of human rights and other universal norms and values with support for reforms and efforts to strengthen the meaningful participation of the developing states in multilateral fora.

The EU must support reforms at the UN Security Council to ensure that the Global South gains proper representation. The UN's system excludes the majority of the world's population from international decision-making. No UN body epitomizes this exclusion more clearly than the Security Council. According to the *International Peace Institute*, more than half of all Security Council meetings and 70 percent of Security Council resolutions with mandates authorizing peacekeepers to use force, concern African security issues. Yet there are no African countries among the Security Council's five permanent members. There is, therefore, a need to think past the global order that was shaped in the post-1945 era, and to redesign the UN as a more effective collective security organization. The EU could begin by supporting the "veto initiative" passed by the General Assembly in 2022, which requires that when a country uses its veto in the Security Council, the General Assembly is automatically convened to discuss the matter in question. In addition, the EU could also support the French and Mexican proposal, which calls for the permanent members of the Security Council to agree to refrain from using their veto in cases of mass atrocities. Such a reform would immediately expand the decision-making process in the council to include the views of the ten elected members more equitably with the five permanent ones.<sup>26</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of health as a critical sector for multilateral cooperation. Many countries resent the unbalanced nature of global

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25 Spyros Blavoukos & George Pagoulatos, "EU Strategic Priorities for a 'New Multilateralism': a Follow-Up to the European Commission-EEAS Communication", *ELIAMEP Policy Brief* no. 145 (2021).

26 Tim Murithi, "Order of Oppression", *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2023.

power in today's international institutions. Take, for example, the *ACT-Accelerator partnership*. Launched by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2020 and intended to drive global access to vaccines and treatments, the governance of the program did not meaningfully include representatives from developing countries. This hampered efforts to achieve fair distribution of vaccines and effective delivery of other health services. With that in mind, the EU should seek to work closely with actors from developing countries to reform and improve multilateral structures in the health domain and build future readiness. This should include, for example, supporting African countries in developing local biomanufacturing capabilities, and working together to reform and strengthen the WHO. The EU should also play a leading role in the establishment of a *Global Health Threats Council*, separate from the WHO, with a mission to ensure that governments prepare sufficiently for pandemics, through effective surveillance systems and the timely sounding of alarms on outbreaks.<sup>27</sup>

Western governments have also failed to fulfill their commitments in other areas. The *Climate Adaptation Fund*, established in 2001 to protect poor countries from the consequences of carbon emissions from rich countries, has not yet met its inaugural funding commitment of raising \$100 billion. It is important, therefore, that the EU formulate a common and mutually beneficial position to ensure the success of the *Loss and Damage Fund*, established in 2022. The fund aims to provide financial assistance to the nations that are most vulnerable and affected by the impact of climate change. Research by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) indicates that international adaptation financing that flows to developing countries is five to ten times below estimated needs, which are calculated at over US\$300 billion per year. With that in mind, the EU should work to ensure a broader donor base and the adoption of innovative financing tools to respond to the magnitude of loss and damage; for example, through the imposition of windfall taxes on fossil fuel companies and the diversion of the resulting revenue to populations struggling with rising food and energy prices and to countries suffering loss and damage caused by the climate crisis. The EU could also give due consideration to debt for loss and damage swaps, international taxes and a dedicated finance facility for loss and damage under the UN Framework Convention on Climate

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27 Miliband, *op. cit.*

Change.<sup>28</sup> If the EU does not work in this direction, yet another underfunded global initiative will only deepen the deficit of trust between rich countries and poor ones.

It is also very important for the EU to play a leading role in protecting and supporting the weak and vulnerable countries and regions of the world plagued by poverty and conflict. Today, 350 million people are in need of humanitarian aid, compared to just 81 million ten years ago. More than 600 million Africans lack access to electricity. More than 25 developing countries are spending over 20 percent of government revenue to service debt, with 54 countries suffering severe debt problems.<sup>29</sup> In addition, as the *Economist* points out,<sup>30</sup> the duration of the average ongoing conflict in developing countries has increased from 13 years in 2011, to 20 in 2021. Between 2001 and 2010, roughly five countries each year suffered two or more simultaneous conflicts; now 15 do. Since 1991, there has been a 12-fold increase in the percentage of civil wars involving foreign forces. Climate change is also aggravating these conflicts. A review of 55 studies found that a one-standard-deviation increase in local temperature raises the chance of intergroup conflict by 11%, compared with what it would have been at a more normal temperature. Globally, some 24 million people were displaced in 2021 because of extreme weather, and the UN expects that figure to soar. In Sudan, some 3 million people were displaced by conflict and natural disasters even before the current round of fighting began in 2023.

What can the EU do? It can take the lead in setting up a global program to combat the serious negative effects of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine on developing countries. Also necessary is a response to the just request for fair distribution of public goods throughout the developing world, a request that does not represent a wish but a need. Lacking the resources that the EU has deployed to protect itself from the economic effects of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the developing countries, already financially and socially vulnerable, have been hit hard by the pandemic. In some countries, this has reversed decades of progress in dealing with poverty and improving healthcare and educational structures.

Last but not least, it is imperative that the EU adopt a new immigration policy. The influx of refugees in 2015-2016 challenged the political systems and societies of the EU,

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28 See <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/what-you-need-know-about-cop27-loss-and-damage-fund>, <https://www.economist.com/international/2022/11/20/a-new-un-fund-for-loss-and-damage-emerges-from-cop27>

29 Miliband, *op. cit.*

30 See "The world's deadliest war last year wasn't in Ukraine", *Economist*, 17 April 2023 <https://www.economist.com/international/2023/04/17/the-worlds-deadliest-war-last-year-wasnt-in-ukraine>

with narratives and practices that not only hindered the effective management of the problem but trapped refugees between two narratives: the narrative of fear and the narrative of threat. Today, however, Russia's war in Ukraine has led to an unprecedented show of solidarity with Ukrainians fleeing the country. Even Member States such as Poland and Hungary – which opposed relocation quotas and other solidarity mechanisms in 2015-2016 – have adopted the *Temporary Protection Directive*. But the Directive is an emergency measure, and such emergencies should be expected to occur on a regular basis. Therefore, the EU find more effective ways to manage them and to deal with migration flows as a structural phenomenon, not as a series of emergencies, given also that the war in Ukraine has a significant impact on developing countries, particularly in areas such as food security, which could in turn lead to further migration to the EU. It is therefore necessary to rekindle the EU debate on asylum and immigration, and the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive is an important and constructive precedent.

The times are certainly difficult, but when the developed EU only looks after its own, how sure can it be of its safety, if not everyone is safe? In the Global South, some countries view themselves as casualties of the ripple effects of Western sanctions – a sentiment that both Russia and China actively try to nurture. As Miliband rightly stresses:

*If the next two decades are like the last two, marked by the West's confused priorities and failed promises, multipolarity in the global system will come to mean more than greater economic competition. It will mean strengthened ideological challenges to the principles of Western countries and weakened incentives for non-Western countries to associate or cooperate with the West.*<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, the EU must actively counter the impression that its agenda is self-serving and myopic. It needs to reach out to developing countries with a willingness to listen and to respond to their concerns. By doing so, it would prove that its solidarity is not limited to the victims of military aggression on the European continent, but that it is willing to muster the same amount of solidarity when it comes to other urgent global threats. Only if it reconciles its response to the war in Ukraine with the struggle against persistent global threats will the EU be able to demonstrate that it has better answers to the pressing challenges of our time than Russia and China do.

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31 Miliband, *op. cit.*

**P2**

# **PART TWO: MOVING BEYOND TRADITIONAL FORMS OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

The EU cannot formulate and pursue the above agenda without engaging its citizens in an ongoing discussion of its vision and its place in the world. Restricting its formulation only to intergovernmental and diplomatic channels will not suffice. There is a need to reinforce legitimacy and efficiency through open and transparent debate. Both the EU as a whole and the individual governments of the Member States are scrutinized for what they say, for the accuracy of their data, and for the policies they adopt. Citizens need to be aware of threats to their health, and of how economic, geopolitical, and technological developments affect the future of their work, their families and their lives. The new iteration of the world that we are entering will be more diverse and complex, and citizens should be able to tolerate it and grow within it, not feel threatened by it.

The debate on the EU, its path forward and its future, is usually presented as a tag-of-war pitting the Member States and their national interests against each other. This logic not only enables the media to over-dramatize disputes between Member States and spread distorted “truths”, but it also downplays the importance of meaningful dialogue aimed at building trusting relationships. This reality plays a decisive role in the way global problems are communicated; they are presented in an oversimplified manner and their underlying causes are not addressed. Nevertheless, global problems are present and real – not theoretical, distant, or abstract. Politicians and the media tend to emphasize the “here and now”, what is happening in the moment, and any action adopted deals only with the symptoms.

A paradigm shift is inevitable. Governments and institutions must re-evaluate and reconsider the norms and practices that characterize their unproductive and restrictive communication, and their inefficient management of global problems. It is important

to create space and time for new narratives and ideas, and to develop innovative processes for gathering and disseminating information, with the aim of not only increasing citizens' interest, but also strengthening their will to press for sustainable solutions. The EU's Member States and institutions need to function as learning systems that can adapt, correct and improve their behavior.

Many would consider global problems as too complex to be left to the “vagaries of citizens”. Can citizens, they wonder, have informed opinions on matters of European and global politics, on the challenges of our times? And even if they do, why should their opinions guide strategic decisions?

As Zerka rightly points out,<sup>32</sup> there are many reasons why civil society should matter more today than in the past. First, immigration, climate change, economic and energy crises, and job instability cultivate feelings of uncertainty, fear, and anger. Citizens get frustrated and abandon all efforts to participate in the resolution of such issues. And worst of all, they don't know who to believe. Politicians “shout” instead of working towards solutions. Scientists and experts not only disagree with each other, but also make ominous predictions about the future. Furthermore, in the past few decades the toolbox of diplomacy and global policy issues has expanded. Trade, currency, immigration and technology feature in domestic political debates and disputes. At the same time, because of the difficulty in distinguishing what constitutes domestic and what foreign policy, citizens are not indifferent or detached from most global issues. They feel the immediate impact on their job prospects, their friendships, and their quality of life. Finally, for citizens, improvements in education, healthcare, the justice system, and public infrastructure should take precedence over the zeal for continuous economic growth. The funding of social policies not only reduces citizens' insecurity, but also contributes to increased trust in governments and institutions, which is currently very low.

Existing European institutions, while still valuable, were created for a world where power and decision-making authority were concentrated in the hands of the Member States' governments. Today, power is much more diffuse, and civil society has the capacity to support the EU in dealing with complex and controversial issues. If citizens believe that the institutions of the EU lack legitimacy, then the effectiveness of such institutions is undermined, especially when they have extensive regulatory authority. European integration will only thrive if it is socially legitimate. In this respect, EU

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32 Pawel Zerka, “Why should anyone care? Foreign policy and public opinion”, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 19 April 2021 <https://ecfr.eu/article/why-should-anyone-care-foreign-policy-and-public-opinion/>

public diplomacy could take advantage of the potential of European civil society, to revitalize the path of European integration.

Public diplomacy is usually understood as a process of activities and engagements beyond traditional diplomacy, of a predominantly cultural and informational nature, which are designed to educate, influence, and engage global publics in support of policy objectives tied to the interests of states or international organizations. According to this definition, civil society is not part of the public diplomacy process. Diplomacy is the exclusive domain of the state or of international organizations. However, it could be argued that public diplomacy is also the promotion, on the international stage, of the values and ideas of civil society actors, and in particular when such actors engage in cross-border actions to pressure governments, or when they are recognized as legitimate actors by governments and international organizations (see, for example, the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction). Civil society groups act as the conduits that convey citizens' concerns and messages to states and intergovernmental institutions, and as the drivers of political cooperation on significant global issues (human rights, climate change), participating on equal terms in multifaceted global coalitions with groups of scientists, social movements, and governmental bodies/institutions. Civil society actors complement the tools of diplomacy and public diplomacy, which alone do not have sufficient capabilities to deal decisively and effectively with various global problems. The non-partisanship of civil society groups and the exchange of views on critical global politics issues also pave the way to gradually overcoming dangerous national or transnational differences and facilitate the creation of appropriate political frameworks of consensus and cooperation.

The fact that many current societal problems are prevalent at the European or even at the global level and have the same consequences in all countries, serves to broaden the social and political space for action, which is no longer defined only by territorial parameters. This does not mean that territoriality has lost its significance; rather, it continues to have a powerful effect on our sense of identity and community. However, and given the nature of the issues involved, the governments and institutions of the EU, instead of acting as guardians who are intent on safeguarding the "inside" from the "outside", should instead share the management of European/global issues with civil society actors. This requires a radical change in the objectives, orientation, and pursuits of public diplomacy; a move away from the traditional and dominant assumptions about public diplomacy, which view it as a tool for promoting and exporting a prestigious image of the EU. Public diplomacy must be retrieved from the realm of



“low politics” and integrated into the heart of European politics. This presupposes a focus on the fundamental and common political issues and problems of the 21st century.

The question that the institutions and Member States of the European Union need to answer is this: Do they want to stick to existing policies and procedures, even if they are restricting and misleading, or do they wish to seek better ways of understanding and problem solving? The answer is clear: global threats are already here – there is no sense in postponing managing them; rather, they must be addressed as and when they emerge. Prioritizing narrow institutional and national interests facilitates the perpetuation of such threats. On the other hand, facilitating citizen participation and feedback inside and outside the EU will contribute to the formulation of policies that promote stability and resilience for our planet. The EU’s problem is not a lack of ideas and proposals – fortunately, there are plenty. What is missing is a series of processes that will allow the institutions, governments, and citizens of the EU to deliberate on what is the EU today, where it wants to go, and how it can get there.

This brings us to the concept of *dialectical public diplomacy*, which should be understood as the need to refocus the thematic orientation of public diplomacy. Today, it is focused primarily on the proliferation and diffusion of aspects of European culture, education, and identity. Instead, it should be focused on the growing threats that are common and relevant to most, if not all, segments of the European population. In today’s critical global juncture, meta-issues such as climate change, development, terrorism, immigration, and technological change should increasingly be at the center of public diplomacy. Such issues require multi-stakeholder consultation, deliberation, and debate in order to overcome the narrow-minded institutional concerns and priorities of intergovernmental practices. There is a need to develop nodes for discussion, argumentation, counter-argumentation, and feedback.

Specifically, EU public diplomacy should have the following three objectives:

- a** the thorough and systematic gathering of the opinions and stances of citizens inside and outside the EU, with the aim of understanding any criticism, negative or constructive, expressed about its policies,
- b** investment in analysis and synthesis, with the aim of enabling the EU’s public diplomacy officers to formulate persuasive responses to criticisms with the help of convincing counterarguments, and
- c** investment in reflective processes that facilitate an understanding of the shortcomings of the EU’s public diplomacy policies.

Dialectical public diplomacy:

- 1 will enable the EU to convey ideas/proposals and discuss them with a wider audience. In today's networked societies, this will allow the EU to be inclusive and seek cooperation with non-state actors (NGOs, movements, expert/scientist networks), discussing problem parameters jointly and in depth, reframing their communication and seeking the best possible result. Listening, debating, and seeking solutions through civil society proposals should be the first step before defining and implementing specific policies. Additionally, it will also enable the EU to gain a more substantial understanding of societal concerns and arguments, both internally and externally. The positions and ideas of citizens from different states must be recognized and respected, in order to have genuine and meaningful dialogue to address global problems. The ideas and experiences of people and groups outside the EU experiencing similar crises can only be helpful and should not be dismissed,
- 2 will allow the EU to combat disinformation. Disinformation and fake news are not new phenomena. However, social media have provided them with new energy and increased reach. Propaganda, disinformation, and misinformation are phenomena as early as communication itself, but social media have been crucial for the new phenomenon of "fake news". Misinformation reinforces polarization and directly affects EU democracies. Reality is distorted in public communication and the propagation of EU norms and values is often viewed with skepticism, making it difficult (or impossible) to influence governments, within and outside the EU, by influencing their publics through public diplomacy.<sup>33</sup> Under these new circumstances, the practice of public diplomacy should be reviewed, placing more emphasis on public debate, participation, transparency and a wider understanding and discussion of the issues at stake.

Bearing that in mind, the EU can and should invest more,

- a in the unrecognized aspect of public diplomacy, the so-called domestic public diplomacy, and
- b in the use of digital diplomacy.

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33 H. Saliu, "Narratives of Public Diplomacy in the Post-Truth Era: The Decline of Soft Power", *Communication & Society*, 36(2) (2023).

## DOMESTIC PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Domestic public diplomacy is a relatively new practice within the ministries of foreign affairs of EU Member States. However, its importance has been highlighted by foreign policy experts and academics. As a result of increased human mobility, globalization and global problems, more and more citizens challenge the thinking that foreign policy is the exclusive domain of politicians and diplomats. This has led to an adjustment in the ways that foreign affairs ministries communicate, and to the development of closer relations with civil society.<sup>34</sup>

In practice, this means that, in addition to the usual model of communication with the domestic audience, which is typically unidirectional through announcements and statements to the media, the model of bidirectional communication through dialogue has been gaining ground. This model, based on face-to-face or online dialogue, is utilized as a tool to formulate and support specific European or global strategies at the grassroots level. The decision of the German Parliament and the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs to organize an open debate on Germany's role in Europe and the world over the next 30 years is a good example of this. The debate, which involved 154 people who were randomly selected (by drawing lots), took place in early 2021 and lasted for 50 hours. The participants came up with 32 proposals relating to sustainable development, the economy and trade, security and the rule of law in the European Union.

Another example is provided by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under whose auspices is held the annual "Meeting with Citizens". In this framework, citizens state their positions on issues relating to foreign policy, human rights, climate change, and humanitarian and development aid. This activity is associated with the [www.otakan-  
taa.fi](http://www.otakan-<br/>taa.fi) ("Have your say") online forum, where groups of Finnish citizens contribute to shaping their country's positions on international issues, drafting new laws, and identifying needs and proposing ideas for new policies. It is noted that up to the end of 2015, with the participation of citizens and civil society, 354 actions and initiatives on foreign, European, and international policy issues had commenced and been implemented.

The challenge posed by a growing disillusionment with democracy coupled with the increasing complexity of policy problems does not come as a surprise for policymakers. This has led to a wave of experiments with citizens' assemblies in different parts of Europe, at various levels: the *French Climate Convention*, the *Irish Citizens Assemblies*,

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34 See "Forum: Engaging Home in International Diplomacy", *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, Volume 17, Issue 4 (Oct 2022) <https://brill.com/view/journals/hjd/17/4/hjd.17.issue-4.xml>

the *UK Climate Assembly*, *Iceland's Constitutional Convention*, to name but a few. Citizens' assemblies are convened at different levels of government (local, regional, national) to seek citizens' input on issues of differing scale (global, constitutional, divisive domestic issues) and have varying degrees of success. In Austria, Germany and Belgium, policymakers at the regional level have attempted to establish permanent citizens' assemblies, Belgium's *Ostbelgien* model (the German-speaking community) being the most prominent case.<sup>35</sup> This model is one of the most far-reaching applications where traditional representative democratic institutions are linked to deliberative assemblies composed of randomly selected citizens. In these, (a) the deliberative assemblies' agenda is left entirely in the hands of a citizen body (politicians have no control over the topics that are discussed), and (b) follow-up of the recommendations is the formal task of a citizen body. The model is instituted by law, making it the first region in the world where a permanent citizen council and annual citizen assemblies are mandated by law.

Such initiatives are part of broader developments within European governments, parliaments and societies intended to increase citizen participation and become more open to citizen ideas. This movement has been building gradually since the end of the 20th century but gained momentum in the second decade of the 21st century. Between 2011 and 2021, there have been 237 representative deliberative processes in total in Europe, with an average of 25 processes per year.<sup>36</sup>

The EU should not be detached from such initiatives, *as they can provide the basis for the exercise of dialectical public diplomacy founded on developing relationships of trust between societies*. Citizens have certain advantages that can complement or supplement the EU's public diplomacy efforts, especially in the long run. Long-term dialectical public diplomacy efforts require relationship-building with related stakeholders, who cannot be treated merely as passive target audiences. Successful relationship management necessitates a focus on common interests, shared goals, mutual understanding, and mutual benefit. Non-state actors' potential for public diplomacy can be tapped by

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35 Yves Dejaeghere, Anna Renkamp & Dominik Hierlemann, "The Ostbelgien Model. Institutionalizing Deliberative Democracy", *Bertelsman Stiftung*, 2023, <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/democracy-and-participation-in-europe/shortcut-archive/shortcut-7-the-ostbelgien-model>

36 See [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/339306da-en/1/3/3/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/339306da-en&csp\\_07698b7c924c319dbb92a6500bf563da&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/339306da-en/1/3/3/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/339306da-en&csp_07698b7c924c319dbb92a6500bf563da&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book), <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/oecd-deliberative-wave-database-update.pdf>

states only if state agencies open their channels to collaboration opportunities and/or reach out to non-state actors for collaboration. Otherwise, state-centric public diplomacy will be insufficient.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time, greater participation by citizens and civil society in public diplomacy will strengthen the democratic legitimacy of EU governance.<sup>38</sup> As indicated by the findings of the *Moving Europe Together* project:<sup>39</sup>

*When it comes to the future of the EU, there are a lot of commonalities in citizens' thinking and concerns across member states, but also with debates in the Conference on the Future of Europe context. European citizens are perfectly capable of having difficult conversations about complex issues of EU-wide relevance and agreeing on common proposals for action. Decision-makers should therefore not underestimate, but rather utilize the contribution that people can bring to the ongoing brainstorming about Europe's future.*

The project, comprising seven civil society organizations, carried out a total of 16 so-called Local Citizens' Agoras (LCAs) in 8 EU Member States. These LCAs promoted engagement between Members of the European Parliament and European citizens, through both online and offline discussions about core policy issues on the future of the EU. Citizen "ambassadors" from each LCA came together at the end of the project in an online Transnational Meeting that facilitated exchange between the different local groups. In addition, the project partners jointly designed and tested a common methodology for the organization of local events. The objective of this exercise was to

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37 Geun Lee & Kadir Ayhan, "Why Do We Need Non-State Actors in Public Diplomacy? Theoretical Discussion of Relational, Networked and Collaborative Public Diplomacy", *Journal of International and Area Studies*, 22(1) (2015).

38 E. Huijgh, "Public Diplomacy's Domestic Dimension in the EU". In M. Cross and J. Melissen (eds.), *European Public Diplomacy, Soft Power at Work* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

39 Corina Stratulat & Johannes Greubel, "Moving Europe Together, Through Citizens' Deliberations", *European Policy Center*, 28 June 2022 <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Moving-Europe-Together-through-citizens-deliberations-49ad54>

produce lessons about the opportunities and limits of using a coordinated and comparative approach to deliberations in different national contexts.

## DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

The use of information and communication technologies is no longer peripheral in the conduct of world affairs.<sup>40</sup> This was made clear at the very beginning of the pandemic: as the coronavirus went viral, diplomacy went virtual, with Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) and International Organizations (IOs) moving from conference rooms to online spaces, which would have been unimaginable in the very recent past. Having triggered a profound change in the way diplomacy is conducted, 2020 may well be remembered as the year of digital resurgence.<sup>41</sup> On another level, considering that crisis management is not just a question of action but also of perception, the need to transition from onsite to online goes beyond meetings and conferences. In fact, crises offer opportunities for diplomatic actors who seek to manage their image. Thus, public diplomacy must also be re-evaluated and reshaped accordingly.

Scholars have already introduced the term “new” public diplomacy, which represents an attempt to adjust public diplomacy to the conditions of the Internet-driven information age. Even though the aim of managing the international environment remains the same, there have been some key shifts in the practice of public diplomacy, which include the growing involvement of non-state actors (NGOs, citizens, etc.), the use of real-time technologies (especially the Internet), the blurring of domestic and international news spheres, the increased use of terms like “soft power” instead of “prestige”, and an emphasis on the active role played by the public and person-to-person contact. This reality, combined with today’s global crises, necessitates a new focus on “new” public diplomacy, as it forces diplomatic institutions to better utilize the benefits of digitalization, which is much more than just a technological shift.

There appear to be two schools of thought regarding digital diplomacy. The first claims that it is a new tool for conducting public diplomacy, while the second maintains that it increases the ability to interact with foreign publics and actively engage with them,

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40 C. Bjola & R. Zaiotti, *Digital Diplomacy and International Organizations. Autonomy, Legitimacy and Contestation* (Routledge: London & New York, 2021).

41 Ilan Manor, “The Year of Digital Resurgence – Exploring Digital Diplomacy”, 24 December 2020 <https://digdipblog.com/2020/12/24/2020-the-year-of-digital-resurgence/#more-3930>

thereby enabling the transition from monologue to dialogue. This may explain the fractured terminology encountered in “new” public policy studies, where several terms are employed *interchangeably*. Thus, while some focus more on the conceptualization of diplomacy in the digital age, others emphasize characteristics of digital technologies or attributes of contemporary society: *Digital Diplomacy*, *Netpolitik*, *Network Diplomacy*, and *Twiplomacy*. It is likely, as Manor suggests,<sup>42</sup> that the way to understand the digitalization of public diplomacy is to merge the two perspectives and approach it as the growing use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and social media platforms by countries or IOs seeking to achieve their foreign policy goals and practice public diplomacy.

Furthermore, and taking into consideration that diplomacy *is a social institution, the digitalization of diplomacy is a long-term process that does more than simply offer new functionalities – it actually promotes new norms, such as increased openness and transparency, dialogue, collaboration and network mentality, which in turn have an impact on every dimension of diplomacy: audiences, institutions, practitioners, and the practice of diplomacy itself*. The process of digitalization influences the practice of public diplomacy. At the institutional level, digital technologies facilitate and contribute to the adoption of new norms and beliefs (“dialogue” and interaction with the online public, “listening” and feedback from the online public, “incorporation” of such feedback into policy formulation). At the practitioner level, digital technologies allow diplomats to engage with a plethora of new actors, both online and offline. This leads to greater openness and increased agency for non-state actors (i.e., online publics, civil society organizations, NGOs), but also changes diplomatic behavior through the formation of temporary alliances (or networks) to advance specific goals (protection of human rights, policies to deal with climate crisis). At the audience level, public diplomacy practitioners use online technologies to communicate with their peers and audiences as well as their family and friends. This both cultivates a sharing mentality and contributes to more transparency in public diplomacy practices.

As has been rightly suggested,<sup>43</sup> one should not separate diplomats into those who are digital and those who are not. Diplomats, ministers and ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs), embassies and international organizations are all undergoing a process of digitalization, continuously embracing new tools and platforms as they reimagine

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42 Ilan Manor, “The Digitalization of Diplomacy: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Terminology”, working paper, *Exploring Digital Diplomacy*, August 2017 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319015855\\_Digital\\_Diplomacy\\_Working\\_Paper\\_The\\_Digitalization\\_of\\_Diplomacy\\_Toward\\_Clarification\\_of\\_a\\_Fractured\\_Terminology](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319015855_Digital_Diplomacy_Working_Paper_The_Digitalization_of_Diplomacy_Toward_Clarification_of_a_Fractured_Terminology)

43 Ilan Manor (2017), *op. cit.*

the environment in which diplomacy is practiced. By 2016, for instance, 170 MFAs had created their own websites through which they communicated with the public,<sup>44</sup> and by 2018, 97% of governments and leaders in the 193 UN member states had an official presence on Twitter, including 131 MFAs, 107 ministers of foreign affairs, more than 4,600 embassies, and 1,400 ambassadors.<sup>45</sup>

Like most states and IOs, the EU has eagerly adopted social networks (SNS) over the past decade. This is an important development for the democratization of the EU, as SNS can render the Brussels bureaucracy – which can be perceived as opaque and impenetrable – more visible and “sociable” on the global digital stage. Although the EU’s digital diplomacy apparatus amounts to an empire of SNS accounts, the most representative of these—in terms of public diplomacy – is the account of the EU diplomatic service: the European External Action Service (EEAS). The EEAS was officially launched on 1 January 2011, giving the EU a unique opportunity to shape a successful approach to public diplomacy and address concerns about the visibility, efficiency and coherence of EU action in the world, by centralizing the different public diplomacy components of the EU’s external relations in a single integrated structure, headed by the EU’s Higher Representative. That the launch of the EEAS was accompanied by digital diplomacy ambitions was reflected in its official Twitter account (entitled “EU External Action”, account name @eu\_eeas), which was created as early as October 2009, before the Lisbon Treaty had entered into force, and in effect predated the launch of the EEAS by more than a year. In fact, SNS were identified and anticipated from the start as a tool for achieving the EEAS’s task of strengthening the EU’s public diplomacy. Also indicative of the importance attributed to digital diplomacy is the fact that, while the EEAS’s SNS channels were managed by two people in 2011, six years later, the Strategic Communications Division of the EU’s diplomatic service had grown substantially to a staff of fifty-one. Moreover, the Strategic Communications team now covers languages ranging from Arabic to Armenian.<sup>46</sup> In fact, apart from the EEAS’s main accounts on five SNS (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, YouTube), the Service is also present on many more (such as Weibo and Vimeo), thanks to the work of the 143 EU Delegations

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44 J. Kurbalija, “25 Points for Digital Diplomacy”, *Diplofoundation*, 4 November 2016 <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/25-points-digital-diplomacy/>

45 Twiplomacy Study 2018, <https://www.twiplomacy.com/twiplomacy-study-2018>. See also Twiplomacy – The EEAS and Digital Diplomacy <https://www.twiplomacy.com/the-european-external-action-service-and-digital-diplomacy>; Twiplomacy Study 2020, <https://www.twiplomacy.com/twiplomacy-study-2020>; Diplofoundation 2016, “Infographic: Social Media Factsheet of Foreign Ministries”, <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/infographic-social-media-factsheet-foreign-ministries>

46 B. Baumler, *EU Public Diplomacy Adapting to an Ever-Changing World* (Los Angeles: USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2019).



and 17 Missions and Operations on the ground. Engaging on SNS in local languages has become a best practice among all Delegations, demonstrating that the Service has recognized the value of customized and personalized diplomacy, in accordance with the latest trends in “new” public diplomacy. Research indicates that EU Delegations have been effective in adapting to the “new” public diplomacy practices, focusing on dialogue rather than one-way communication and using a broad range of communication channels.<sup>47</sup> Almost all EU Delegations have a Facebook presence, and more than three out of four have a Twitter account. In some host countries, surveys have indicated that more than half the population uses social media as their primary source of information on the EU. This is why social media platforms are an important pillar of public diplomacy.

In terms of digital diplomacy performance, according to Manor’s analysis of social networking by MFAs,<sup>48</sup> which includes the EEAS’ SNS presence, the EU has the third highest score on the “in-degree” parameter, since it is followed by 38 other MFAs (out of a sample of 69 ministries). This is an important parameter, as the greater a ministry’s popularity within the network, the greater its ability to disseminate information to other MFAs. On the “out-degree” parameter, which relates to the extent to which an MFA follows its peers on Twitter, the EU has the sixth highest score, as it follows 41 of the 69 MFAs on the network. This is also an important parameter, as the more other MFAs a ministry follows, the greater its ability to gather information on other nations’ foreign policy initiatives. The final parameter is the “betweenness” parameter, which reveals which MFAs serve as important information hubs by linking together ministries that do not follow each other directly. The EU achieves the highest score on this parameter, indicating that it is the most important information hub in the social network of MFAs and serves as a crucial “Twiplomatic” link. Overall, the EEAS is in the top five MFAs that score highly on all three parameters. According to the Twiplomacy Study (2018), the EEAS is among the best-connected foreign offices in the world, ranking in first place in 2018 (mutually following 132 MFAs and world leaders) and second place in 2020 (mutually following 145 MFAs and world leaders).

This development, along with the creation of a Strategic Communications Division within EEAS, the strengthening of EU Delegations and EU Special Representatives with EU public diplomacy officers charged with organizing and conducting public diplomacy activities abroad, and the publication of both an *Information and*

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47 J. Abratis, *Communicating Europe Abroad: EU Delegations and Public Diplomacy* (Los Angeles: USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2021).

48 Ilan Manor, “Exploring the EU’s Twiplomacy”, 5 October 2014 <https://digdipblog.com/2014/10/05/exploring-the-e-u-s-twiplomacy/>

*Communication Handbook for EU Delegations* and the *EU Global Strategy* in 2016 (where, for the first time, public diplomacy is described as a major tool in implementing Strategic Communications around the world), has reinforced the status of public diplomacy within the EU architecture and significantly improved its implementation in the field. This was made clear by the Evros crisis in 2020. The initial engagement of multiple EU institutions with the crisis was a good example of a coherent, clear and policy-orientated message having a significant impact on the development of the crisis. It was in marked contrast with the previous dissonance and delays in decision making by European institutions (in the debt and refugee crises) that had severely damaged the EU's institutional reputation, and it demonstrated that the EU possessed the three necessary preconditions of actorness in world affairs: *opportunity*, *presence* and *capability*.

Also indicative was the response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in late February of 2020. The EEAS adapted to the new virtual communication environment, posting on average more than one COVID-related tweet per day, while more than one out of ten tweets during the first six months of the crisis referred to COVID-related live briefings, webinars and online events. Even though the EEAS reacted relatively promptly when it came to posting information on Twitter about the coronavirus (25 February), it could still have done better considering the real-time events in Italy, which had already declared a state of emergency on 31 January. The fact that EU policy statements and reactions to world events must be agreed upon by all Member States has a detrimental effect on the EEAS's ability to leverage Twitter for public diplomacy ends. To face this challenge, the EU may need to adopt new working practices and communications strategies that free up the EEAS and allow it to become an indispensable source of information for SNS users.

This challenge is also connected to a far more complex and sensitive issue, that is, the need for better coordination between the public diplomacy of individual Member States and of the EU. As the coronavirus spread, EU member states prioritized national protection by closing internal borders and imposing strict lockdowns. This worked against a sense of collective solidarity and undermined the effectiveness of EU public diplomacy. The EU seems to lack "self-confidence" in the face of dissonance, and this weakens its resilience when crises occur, making it appear as though the EU is unwilling to stand up for itself. The EEAS could play a much stronger role in this respect by engaging in a long-term public diplomacy strategy; only then can the EU's crisis public diplomacy be effective. The recovery plan signed in July 2020 signaled the beginning of the end of the crisis, giving the EU the opportunity to regain some of the ground it had lost, but it will take more than a one-off recovery plan to rekindle a sense of cohesiveness. This will require protective strategies like reinterpreting its identity, maintaining self-integrity, and reinforcing self-adequacy. Even though the EEAS can help

build a strong voice for Europe, it would still be illusory to hope for a “single voice”. When Member States neglect to support the EU and prioritize their membership status, the EU becomes a more vulnerable target for negative perceptions for audiences both within and beyond the bloc. It also makes the EU and its citizens easier to ignore.

The EU is clearly stronger when its constituent parts seek to convey a united front and communicate to outsiders the significance of their common European project. This is reflected in the EEAS’s digital public diplomacy activity during the COVID-19 crisis. A textual content analysis of the EEAS’s online/social media activity during the first six months of the pandemic revealed that the EEAS used countering incorrect media coverage, as well as framing and narrative methods.<sup>49</sup> However, it did not create a unique COVID-19 hashtag. Rather than creating a separate public diplomacy campaign, the EEAS integrated its COVID-19 messaging into the existing “unity and solidarity” discourse. In so doing, the EU showed that it remains true to its guiding principles, even in times of severe crisis. This also highlighted one of the complicating factors when considering the EU’s public diplomacy historically: namely, that it has been directed primarily inwards. In fact, the complex interconnection between the internal and external dimensions of EU public diplomacy is part of its ongoing identity construction.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that EEAS used framing to brand the EU as a resilient power over time, and as a reliable and robust partner for EU and non-EU citizens alike. Perhaps even more interesting is how the EEAS focused more on the domestic dimension of EU public diplomacy during the first phase of the COVID outbreak. More specifically, looking at the message, hashtags and tone of EEAS tweets, the key message of solidarity in the majority of tweets is expressed via hashtags such as:

- ◆ #WeTakeYouHome
- ◆ #UnitedInDistance
- ◆ #TeamEurope
- ◆ #Eusolidarity/#solidarity
- ◆ #strongertogether
- ◆ #TogetherWeAreEurope
- ◆ #Westandtogether

The tone was emotional, and the language used is that of unity, solidarity and team spirit; it is the language of “we”. Hashtags focusing solely on the

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49 Christos Frangonikolopoulos & E. Spiliotakopoulou, “The Digitalization of EU Public Diplomacy – The Pandemic and Beyond”, *Hellenic Foundation for Foreign and European Affairs* Policy Paper, No. 188 (2022) [https://www.eliamep.gr/en/publication/the-digitalization-of-eu-public-diplomacy-the-pandemic-crisis-and-beyond/#\\_ftn10](https://www.eliamep.gr/en/publication/the-digitalization-of-eu-public-diplomacy-the-pandemic-crisis-and-beyond/#_ftn10)

international dimension of the EU's public diplomacy, such as *#Together4Venezuelans*, *#Eu4HumanRights*, *#EUintheWorld*, *#Worldrefugeeday/ #withrefugees*, represented a smaller percentage of the total number of tweets analyzed. It is also interesting to note that the EEAS used visuals to support the EU's linguistic frames and narratives. Specifically, many of the tweets were accompanied by some kind of multimedia, including infographics and videos. Overall, the results demonstrate that the EEAS used SNS to create a distinct brand for the EU during the COVID-19 outbreak, that of "Europe United in Distance".

In terms of engagement, the EEAS used links in most of its tweets, thereby validating the digital society's norms of openness and transparency. Even though the Service chose English as the main language it uses worldwide, it still invests in translating the core message into local languages in accordance with the latest "new" public diplomacy trends towards a more personalized diplomacy. A great deal of effort was also invested in creating original visual content, as three out of four tweets included some kind of multimedia. The results were rather satisfying, as 80 percent of tweets received some kind of feedback (in the form of likes, mentions and retweets), while 60 percent received comments from online users. In terms of interactivity, special mention should also be made of two surveys which asked users to assess the EEAS website, plus a knowledge quiz posted on Europe Day, as a way of "listening" to their views on the web experience and the EU in general.

Also indicative are the results of a study by Moral on the use of Twitter during the first year of the pandemic.<sup>50</sup> As the pandemic developed, crisis narratives became more consistent. During the acute phase of the crisis, EU diplomats were less spontaneous, since their content was more dependent on their superiors (heads of institutions and governments), but in later stages they produced proportionally more original content themselves. Therefore, as the findings of the study suggest, the EU's performance on Twitter became more competent over time, making the European Commission and its president, the EEAS and its head the most retweeted accounts. This provided the EU with virality, engagement and the creation of bonds with audiences, which would not have been possible with a more hierarchical and rigid approach.

Specifically, during January and February of 2020, the main European institutions did not pay much attention to the COVID-19 outbreak. The few tweets that referred to the novel coronavirus before March of 2020 (only 35 of 1,733 tweets) mostly served as amplifiers of videos of press conferences and institutional announcements. Some

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50 P. Moral, "Restoring reputation through digital diplomacy: the European Union's strategic narratives on Twitter during the COVID-19 pandemic", *Communication & Society*, 36(2) (2023).

tweets focused on the repatriation of EU citizens thanks to the EEAS. Only when Italy registered its first deaths did COVID-19 become a salient issue. As the COVID-19 cases began to rise in other Member States, the EU communicated its readiness to face the pandemic. European institutions portrayed the EU as capable of matching concrete measures with ideational aspirations. For example, the EU presented as a key coordinator whose initiatives and regulations ultimately prevailed over the unilateral measures adopted by Member States.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the EU's involvement enabled Member States to confront challenges together and equally, eventually producing tangible advantages for their citizens, such as the receipt of medical supplies and materials and economic funds, or in a later stage, the equitable distribution of vaccines. All the while, the EU remained loyal to its values, with a persistent narrative that incorporated references to the EU's history and the promotion of multilateralism, human rights, solidarity, rule of law and freedom of expression.<sup>52</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that digital public diplomacy capabilities are crucial in the emerging hybrid world of diplomacy. In fact, in July of 2022, and in the midst of the Russia-Ukraine war in which digital technologies have played a crucial role, the Council of the EU published a policy report outlining the Union's new approach to the digitalization of diplomacy.<sup>53</sup> As suggested in the policy report, moving forward will require the development of a coherent approach rooted in building on the digital capabilities of Member States and engaging in knowledge sharing (especially with regard to Member States' strengths and weaknesses), to ensure the resilience of the EU's digitalized diplomacy, to protect it from digital risks (such as hybrid warfare and disinformation), and to protect the right of EU citizens to have access to accurate information in a safe and inclusive online environment. Similarly, it is also suggested that the EU should

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51 C. Sottilotto, "How not to manage crises in the European Union", *International Affairs*, 98(5) (2022): 1595–1614. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia064>

52 In fact, in regard to Europe and the discourse on solidarity, Europeans seemed to be deeply interconnected despite divisions, unilateral travel restrictions and export bans, according to the *European Solidarity Tracker* (ECFR: <https://ecfr.eu/special/solidaritytracker/>), an interactive data tool that visualized solidarity among EU Member States and institutions in the initial phase of the COVID-19 outbreak. According to the tool's key findings, every Member State demonstrated solidarity towards its fellow Europeans. Moreover, EU institutions stepped up their response in financial and economic terms, but also when it came to the people of Europe. Thus, the European Solidarity Tracker contradicts claims that the European project had failed. In fact, according to the Standard Eurobarometer survey conducted in June-July of 2021, optimism about the future of the EU had reached its highest level (49%) since 2009, and trust in the EU remained at its highest level since 2008 (36%). Nearly two-thirds of Europeans trust the EU to make the right decisions in the future in response to the pandemic.

53 See <https://cutt.ly/Zwa92WVX>

regulate digital spaces through collaborations with Member States, joint diplomatic efforts in multilateral forums such as the OSCE, NATO and G7, or through dialogue with tech companies, governments, and civil society organizations.

These proposals are steps in the right direction, as they underline the need for the EU to be proactive and prepared to deal with the developments that ongoing digitalization will bring in the form of, for instance, virtual reality, holograms, deep fake news, and virtual environments. However, the EU's efforts to comprehend how future innovations will challenge public diplomacy should not be limited to investing in the regulation of digital tools and environments alone. It also needs to ensure that digitalization works based on inclusivity, increased transparency, and the communication of shared challenges to the countries and citizens of the world. Successful public diplomacy begins with listening and advances through dialogue.

As studies have shown,<sup>54</sup> in terms of network diplomacy, during the pandemic the picture was slightly better on the EEAS website, where selected public diplomacy initiatives were presented under the hashtag #UnitedInDistance. The EEAS presented solidarity success stories from both within and beyond the EU, which involved other actors including individuals and NGOs. However, only rarely was there an opportunity to engage in live dialogue or interact with the organizers or with other users directly. In fact, the only tweet which gave the public a chance to pose questions directly to an EU Ambassador was organized in the context of celebrations for Europe Day (in 2020) through a Facebook Live Chat. In addition, the EEAS did not reply to any of the users' comments. In terms of networking, 22.5 percent of tweets mentioned other diplomatic actors as sources of information. Apart from other EU institutions, these included mainstream media and IOs, but not ordinary citizens, indicating that the elite world of foreign affairs is still alive and well in the digital age.

Thus, facilitating actual dialogue as part of the EU's digital public diplomacy is a challenge that could help build a stronger sense of European citizenship, solidarity and trust among Europeans; this, in turn, would help the EU succeed in conveying a better image to the rest of the world. More specifically, as Anholt explains,<sup>55</sup> one of Europe's many reputational issues is a technical one: the word "Europe" can mean different things to different people in different contexts. For Europeans, the EU is not at all the same as the continent of Europe; for them, its strongest associations are with Europe-as-institution. For Europeans, therefore, the "EU" stands unequivocally for the political and administrative machinery of Europe and is associated by some with factors that

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54 Christos Frangonikolopoulos & E. Spiliotakopoulou (2022), *op. cit.*

55 S. Anholt, "Brand Europe—Where next?", *Place Brand and Public Diplomacy*, 3(1) (2007).

are at best tedious and at worst dysfunctional. Therefore, the EEAS should not only listen to its public and post engaging content on SNS; it should also engage more actively in dialogue with online users to render the EU-as-institution less impersonal. This is the way to win the hearts and minds of citizens both within and beyond the Union.

Consequently, an effective public diplomacy strategy should not be limited to message promotion alone. The need for the EU to move in this direction is not new: it has always been a necessity. Today, however, in an age of successive crises and disruptions, it is even more imperative. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine invite a rethink of the role – actual and potential – of public diplomacy in European and international relations. The COVID-19 pandemic was a unique global crisis that changed social, cultural, and political behaviors. Likewise the war in Ukraine, which increased an already heightened sense of uncertainty brought about by the deterioration of multilateral cooperation and a perpetual state of international crisis. Given citizens' uncertainty and their difficulty to make sense of the world around them, it is important for public diplomacy to move away from communication strategies that aim to enhance the security of states and international organizations through protecting or improving their reputation or diminishing that of a competitor or rival.<sup>56</sup> Zaharna also suggests that public diplomacy should be more *human centered*, embracing *empathy* and *perspective taking*.<sup>57</sup> This requires re-examining who constitutes the “public” in public diplomacy. Is public diplomacy still limited to foreign publics? Do feelings of uncertainty limit or constrain the practice of public diplomacy? Are the audiences of public diplomacy less likely to engage with the public diplomacy communication strategies of governments and international organizations, given a lack of trust in national and global governance institutions? If so, how can diplomats restore trust in such institutions?<sup>58</sup>

Numerous studies have shown that EU citizens want to participate, but many feel that their voices do not count. Citizens think it is difficult to participate in European politics, and they have little knowledge of relevant opportunities. This creates a gap, between citizens' ambitions to participate effectively and their perception that there is little opportunity to do so. The EU has an array of different participation instruments at its disposal, but most of these have significant room for improvement. Not only are they unknown, relatively unrepresentative, not very transnational and mostly not deliberative,

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56 Nicholas Cull, “From soft power to reputational security: rethinking public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy for a dangerous age”, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 18 (2022): 18–21.

57 R.S. Zaharna, “The pandemic’s wake-up call for humanity-centered public diplomacy”, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 18 (2022): 4-7.

58 Ilan Manor & James Pamment, “At a crossroads: examining Covid-19’s impact on public and digital diplomacy”, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 18 (2022): 1-3.

but their political impact on European policymaking is fairly low. Citizen participation in the EU lacks the political will it needs to succeed. There is a gap between the Union's rhetoric on participation and the actions taken and resources invested to make citizens' voices count.<sup>59</sup>

Although, over the years, the institutions have approved and adopted a significant number of citizen participation processes (such as the European Ombudsman, the European Citizens Initiative, the Commission's Public Consultations, the Citizens' Dialogues, and Public Petitions to the European Parliament), the view remains that the EU is detached and closed to its citizens. As a result, and as evidenced by a recent research survey by the *Bertelsmann Stiftung*, it is unclear to citizens which procedures can be used and for what purpose. In fact, more than 54% of respondents stressed that their voice did not count, and 32% stated that their participation would not make a difference. The position of the experts on European issues is also indicative, with 95% of respondents stating that knowledge on the use of citizen participation processes is insufficient, and 83% emphasizing that neither the institutions nor the Member States truly want to facilitate and encourage citizen participation.<sup>60</sup>

Building a relationship of trust and an environment of open communication between EU institutions, governments and citizens is an absolute prerequisite. The pandemic seems to have worked as a turning point in this regard: indicatively, European institutions decided in 2020 to go ahead with the *Conference on the Future of Europe* (2021–2022), a pan-European exercise of participatory and consultative democracy which enabled citizens to submit proposals on the EU's future priorities. The Conference marked a departure from previous efforts, as it not only increased the scope and stakes of the debate, but also encouraged the participation of citizens and civil society actors. This may suggest that the EU is beginning to take the need to innovate seriously and is doing something about it. Regardless of whether this process will ultimately produce structural reforms that will renew the political shape of the EU, its undoubted value is the encouragement of experimentation. By daring to try something new in a horizontal collaborative way between state and non-state actors and EU institutions, the Conference was a milestone in the process of adapting and improving contemporary

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59 Dominik Hierlemann, Stefan Roch, Paul Butcher, Janis A. Emmanouilidis, Corina Stratulat & Maarten de Groot, "Under Construction: Citizen Participation in the European Union", *European Policy Center* and *Bertelsmann Stiftung* (2022) <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/publications/publication/did/under-construction>

60 See Policy Brief 01/2022 "The Missing Piece: A Participation Infrastructure for EU Democracy" <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/publications/publication/did/policy-brief-012022-the-missing-piece-a-participation-infrastructure-for-eu-democracy>



politics and democratic practices to the new realities. As such, it might inspire and strengthen efforts to create a more permanent mechanism for citizen participation in European policymaking.

What is called for, as noted above, is investment in dialectical public diplomacy through the establishment of *regular online interviews and discussions* with executives and officials from EU institutions. In this way, citizens would see their queries answered and official policies fully explained. The creation of *EU online forums/hubs* is also important, where citizens can find in-depth news and analysis, as well as links and forums for state actors and European Union officials who initiate policy proposals, and online connections with social movements and non-state actors with the aim of facilitating dialogue and the submission of alternative proposals and ideas. EU institutions are no longer the main or even the best source of information, and they no longer monopolize the collection of data and evidence, or the production of information and research on European and global issues. Social movements and NGOs provide valid and reliable information that comes from outside the state and intergovernmental production and decision-making channels.

The EU's public diplomacy can draw on existing experiences at the European level, particularly with the *Have your say portal*<sup>61</sup> and the *digital multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe*.<sup>62</sup> It should also draw from tested dialogue hubs from EU Member States, such as the Transnational Citizens' Dialogue organized by the EU Commission and Bertelsmann Stiftung. 100 randomly selected citizens from Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Lithuania came together from 27–30 October 2020 to participate in a fully digital dialogue. Supported by moderators and simultaneous translators, they discussed the democratic, digital and green future of Europe in five different languages, with each participant speaking their own language. They learned from experts, co-created ideas and proposals in transnational groups and discussed them with EU Commissioners.<sup>63</sup>

Such hubs can operate in the following ways:<sup>64</sup>

- 1 As citizens' online deliberations on key proposals and policy priorities of EU institutions. Such a process, a group of randomly selected citizens from all over the

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61 See [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say_en)

62 See <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20220509RES29122/20220509RES29122.pdf>

63 See <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/democracy-and-participation-in-europe/shortcut-archive/shortcut-5-transnational-citizens-dialogues>

64 See <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Conference-on-the-Future-of-Europe-What-worked-what-now-what-next-4609bo>

EU, should be provided with the time and resources to discuss and contribute to policy orientations and strategies brought forward by the institutions. The recommendations from these citizens' deliberations can be summarized in a final report and annexed to the institutions' proposals.

- 2 As *multilevel citizens' deliberations* on major strategic public diplomacy priorities of the EU. The multilevel process can include local, regional, national and European citizens' panels, involving different groups of randomly selected citizens. The key findings and recommendations can be discussed with EU institution representatives, national parliaments, other EU bodies and civil society organizations, in the framework of a Plenary bringing together the viewpoints of citizens and representatives, including elected representatives at the regional and local level. The outcome of these multilevel deliberations (subnational, national, transnational) can be summarized in a final report, to which EU institutions are required to respond. In this respect, the EU should examine the possibility of creating "*big tent*" fora, where randomly selected citizens and elected representatives from different policy levels (from EU to local) gather every five years to discuss the Union's strategic agenda. Such fora could involve 500 to 600 members, including citizens and a cross-section of elected representatives at all levels across Europe. The objective would not be to go into detail about how these priorities should be translated into concrete policy objectives, but that participants can present an overview of what they believe the EU and its members should concentrate on in the years to come. Their final recommendations and report should facilitate and reflect policy debates and priorities, within and outside the EU institutions.

Many would argue that bringing citizens, diplomats and politicians together on public diplomacy strategies is difficult. It is, but it is also necessary. In fact, in 2020 the OECD published a report<sup>65</sup> that identified, studied and compared 300 deliberative initiatives that involved hundreds of thousands of citizens around the world in decisions about economic and social issues. The report found that deliberative processes can lead to better policy outcomes, enable policymakers to make difficult choices, and strengthen trust between citizens and governments. Bearing that in mind, dialectical public diplomacy can and should provide the process through which to search for better answers and solutions to our biggest problems.

Let's take the problem of immigration. The governments and institutions of the EU have fostered the perception that Member States are surrounded by "hungry"

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65 See "Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions" <https://www.oecd.org/gov/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions-339306da-en.htm>

immigrants who will destroy their economy and threaten their identity. Relying on the oversimplified logic of the supply and demand model, they emphasize that immigrants not only threaten citizens' jobs but also their wages. This argument may sound reasonable at face value but is not supported by evidence. In fact, the evidence shows that people do not leave their countries of origin in search of better economic conditions; their motivations are not just financial. Even those who live in miserable conditions and could move do not attempt to do so. Many people would like to enjoy a better income, but this alone is insufficient to explain the broader aspects and needs of the human experience. There is the fear of change, the desire to take care of their parents, as well as the desire for their children to grow up according to their traditions. They move only when their circumstances become critical, such as in conditions of violence or war. Understanding and dealing with this reality, therefore, requires discussion and analysis on the following issues: How can the EU and its Member States support those who decide to move? How valid is the fear that immigration leads to job loss for local populations and when do employers and businesses employ those who accept low wages? What are the advantages of employing immigrants in occupations where the local population does not want to be employed, such as cleaning, helping the elderly and harvesting agricultural products? To what extent do immigrants contribute to the development of small businesses (cafés, necessities and clothing)?

The issue of climate change is another example. On this issue the scientific community is unanimous: climate change is real and is a result of human activity. However, globally carbon dioxide emissions are produced primarily by the wealthy and powerful countries of the world, whose industry mainly creates products that are consumed by their own citizens. This means that it is the poorest and developing countries that will be most affected by climate change. Is there a solution? Again, the answer can be found in discussion and the search for proposals through dialectical public diplomacy. How feasible is investment in support programs that will facilitate the transition of developing countries to clean and green technologies? How can this be done, through the redistribution of wealth and the creation of an environmental tax to fund these programs? How can energy consumption be reduced? How acceptable can this be against a logic that believes only in economic expansion? How acceptable can this solution be in the face of arguments that claim it will have a negative impact on European and global development? Is this the wrong question, as it is not easy to define what "development" means? Instead, would it be better to invest in policies that will save the planet, with wealthy countries shouldering the cost of dealing with climate change?

Another issue is that of artificial intelligence. Today, robots can grill burgers and clean floors. But what does this mean for those who hold manual labor jobs? Are they at risk of losing their employment? Not only can we not predict the future, but technology is also evolving rapidly. It is possible that robots will take on more specialized tasks, such

as bookkeeping, research and writing journalistic articles. Also, for a company, using a robot may be more cost-effective than hiring a human, since employers don't have to provide maternity leaves or pay payroll taxes for a robot worker. In this case, would it be useful to impose a robot tax, to discourage companies from investing in the education and training of people with minimal qualifications? The answer is difficult. What is certain is that those who are qualified will inevitably face problems. But can we really only blame the development of technology for the economic and occupational inequality that it can bring?

Economic inequality was a problem long before robots were invented. This requires a discussion of the following: why have wages for non-college educated persons stagnated over the last 30 to 40 years? Why does the wealthiest 1% of the world's population own a huge share of total global wealth? What caused this huge increase in inequality? Can this be sustained? To what extent can high taxes on high incomes make a huge difference in the lives of millions of people, especially if they are used to support the unemployed suffering from the effects of global trade, technology, but also to fund public programs such as housing and education? For the poor, the improvement of education, healthcare, justice and infrastructure is more important than the zeal for continuous economic growth and consumption. And it is possible to initiate and fund social policies that will not only reduce the resentment of those experiencing the effects of today's problems and achievements but will also contribute to increasing trust in governments and institutions that is currently low.

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# CONCLUSION

The EU depends greatly on its relationship with its citizens. Today, citizens expect more opportunities for an open exchange of views on an equal footing and want to be involved in important issues. The EU can benefit from allowing citizens to participate more directly in policymaking. High-quality deliberative processes are one way to bring Europe closer to its citizens and, in a broader sense, can strengthen their identification with the project of European integration.

Therefore, the governments and institutions of the EU should re-evaluate their channels of communication with the citizenship, by investing more in the market of ideas, in collective intelligence and innovative forms of analysis, and in an understanding of problems. *To do so is a necessary step towards establishing not only what has changed, but also what has not changed, but should.* And the answers could prove very troublesome for governments, parties and decision-making institutions. Perhaps the conclusion may be that a comprehensive and radical reform is required at the national and/or EU level. Or that what is required are a few but substantial modifications to the current system. The aim, however, must remain the same, that is, to identify and address the flaws and limitations of the EU's current decision-making model.

Dialogue may or may not lead to new policies or narratives. Dialogue can also create friction between governments and their citizens, and lead to hostile government responses. Which means that the dialogue should be based on well thought out proposals, which respect cultural diversity and sensitivities and political and economic realities in different countries. However, *the willingness to listen and show respect to well-grounded proposals will not only allow civil society to articulate new discourses and policies, but also improve the management of global problems.* By opening channels of communication with citizens and civil society on the causes and corresponding solutions, the governments and institutions of the EU will not only enrich the public debate, but also offer more options to consider that can potentially lead to best practices and outcomes.

The creation of open access and deliberative networks will act as a *confidence-building measure*. Above all, they will work in the direction of *strengthening transparency, legitimacy and therefore also effectiveness*. Such networks will (a) create space for alternative

narratives to dominant paradigms, with the aim of establishing fertile ground for potentially innovative policies, as well as enlightening and enriching the debate on optimal policies, (b) work in the direction of existing policies, making them more effective, and (c) provide critiques of current policies and seek new possible courses of action.

Consequently, EU politicians, diplomats, and citizens have an incredible opportunity to save European integration from polarization and lack of trust and to build a strong dialectical and deliberative culture for the future. Dialectical public diplomacy can:

- 1 enhance public trust in the EU and its global role by providing citizens with a more meaningful role in public diplomacy,
- 2 create a much deeper form of dialogue and discussion that leads to effective and shared decision making on current European and global challenges,
- 3 lead to better public diplomacy outcomes because it will allow for considered public judgements rather than off-the-cuff public opinions, and
- 4 provide greater legitimacy to make hard choices in today's complex and crisis-ridden world.

The message is clear: the "old" institutions of policymaking and diplomacy will have to adapt so as not to become detached from their respective societies. It is necessary for the governments and institutions of the EU to admit without fear that they are confronted with problems and challenges that are beyond their capabilities, and that they must cooperate with other institutions and non-governmental actors and citizens, inside and outside their national borders and within EU institutions.

It is common knowledge that the effort to address specific problems leads to the emergence of specific solutions and practices, as well as ideas, beliefs and working assumptions that form an ideological background and framework that then influences our way of looking at the world and solving problems. A set of ideas that are logically connected to each other is called a paradigm. This, although reasonable, often leads to the paradox of trying to face contemporary challenges with prior ideological schemes, which often end up as dogmatic anchors. This applies, for example, to the "unproblematic" assumption that the growth of the economy is a panacea and that its absence is equivalent to a permanent problematic situation. While economic growth was justifiably the goal of European societies after 1945, today not only does it fail to solve the problems of poverty, inequality and unemployment, but it also creates major ecological damages that harm human well-being. Also, in a globalized world, as recent experience shows, beyond the problems created by the free movement of capital and products, there are deeper and bigger crises, such as immigration and terrorism.

While the dominant orthodoxies remain stubborn and resistant to change, despite their failure to manage crises and global problems, *enriched dialogue* is necessary more

than ever. Especially so today, when the elitist-technocratic perception and oversimplified populist rhetoric have led to a toxic confrontation between those who support the rejection of European integration and those who evangelize that there is no alternative to its current form. To radicals, the above may sound like an agenda for revolution, not reform. And rightly so. But do we need to destroy the EU in the hope that something new will take its place? No. We need to understand its shortcomings and how to deal with them. The choice is simple. Either the EU continues by embracing securitization and introversion, or it acts forcefully and equips the citizens and societies of its Member States with the participatory processes needed in an era of shocking change.







