

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE BRIDGING THE CAPABILITY-EXPECTATIONS GAP

LUCIAN JORA*

Abstract. *Within the EEAS when it came to the Public and Cultural Diplomacy the divergent philosophical traditions converted in strategies of actions can be both a challenge and an asset. The European mix of cultural diplomacy and cultural promotions strategies and approaches can create in theory the most powerful public and cultural diplomacy strategy. Although there is a clear idea of what the EU's fundamental aims and objectives are on the international scene as well as consensus on what type of actor the Union wishes to be at least at this stage. Bridging the gap between theory and practice would involve clarifying the details within the mechanism of representation, virtually for every type of public/cultural diplomacy action.*

Keywords: *European External Action Service, Cultural Diplomacy, Public diplomacy, International Relations.*

Three years after the launch of European External Action Service the question of what is in fact an EU diplomat is still not clear enough. In an informal way (although widely accepted even in official circles) “EU diplomat” is a permissive code used to conceal the identity of sources.¹ It can mean a European Commission or EU Council official dealing with foreign affairs or a diplomat from one of the 27 EU countries (even if European Parliament’s officials and MEPs are not labeled like this, although they often work on inter-parliamentary delegations around the world). The label “EU diplomat” often covers an EU Official in overseas missions which is not a diplomat in the strict sense of being granted a diplomatic rank and special privileges by his host state, for example Belgium, under the UN’s 1961 Vienna Convention. The EU’s special representatives (EUSRs), work for the EU institutions and do have diplomatic status both in the country of origin and while on mission abroad. The same situation applies for the many Seconded National Experts (SNEs) hired on contractual base by the Council and Commission’s

* Research at the Romanian Academy, The Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations; lucian.jora@europaeus.eu.

¹ Andrew Rettman, “EU ponders creation of new diplomatic breed”, in *EU Observer* <http://euobserver.com/institutional/30209>, published on line by 04.06.10.

foreign relations departments. The EUSRs and SNEs are borrowed from national foreign ministries for particular special missions for a limited period, and most of them will pursue future careers in their countries of origin. For this reason is hard to define them as the new typical EU Diplomats. In my mind an “EU diplomat” within EEAS is that person who has come to put the interests of the EU before those of his country of origin.

By 2013, the EU Council and EU Commission also have around 3000 staff with formal diplomatic status working at the EU’s 138 foreign delegations.² Apart from the “loyalty” and “impartiality” issue, the diplomats from member states often have a different professional formation. Most Commission personnel with diplomatic status have not attended a formal diplomatic academy and have no prior experience of embassy work. Within the EU, in a medium term perspective, one diplomatic culture and one set of political objectives (at least general ones) shared by the 27 EU capitals, has to be created. Also, the usual domestic diplomatic procedure to rotate the staff in and out of foreign ministries and EU institutions every four years is less likely to be the rule in EEAS for various reasons — last but not least, the intention to cultivate an internal identity.

At this time within each member state each foreign ministry has its own school of protocol, code of ethics (not to mention the payment scale) etc. For instance, there are several proposals to create an EU Diplomatic Academy. The basic academic infrastructure for such an attempt is already on the place. Institutions like the Defense College, the European Diplomatic Program, the College of Europe, the European university Institutes, the European Institute for International Relations. Those already functional and academically respected institutions with a small expertise infusion can cope reasonably with this mission. An infusion of procedures and courses coming from a joint network of various member states Diplomatic Academies will complete this architecture with the necessary added value. The “reality check” of many EU Diplomats coming from within the Commission structures is also a must.³ Often the postmodern EU Commission “own world” of well officials does not have any correspondent for the “real world” in terms of negotiating, the “compromise culture” or assuming responsibilities under high time pressure in special circumstances.

Within the EEAS, when it came to the Cultural Diplomacy the divergent philosophical traditions converted in strategies of actions can be both a challenge and an asset. Some analysts pretend that the British, like the Americans, do not feel to have a national culture that should be promoted abroad as France did with its “mission civilisatrice” or Germany with its “Kultur”...however both the British and American cultures are admired, imitated and followed all over the world perhaps because in this case the cultural values spoke for themselves on a daily life base

² Staffan Hemra, Thomas Raines and Richard Whitman, “A Diplomatic Entrepreneur Making the Most of the European External Action Service”, A Chatham House Report December 2011, p. 10, available on line at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/afet/dv/201203/20120321_chathamhouse_report_en.pdf.

³ Anna Takman, “External Action after the Lisbon Treaty: the Case of the EU and the OSCE”, Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI), no 18, 14 jan 2013, available on line at <http://www.ui.se/eng/upl/files/84967.pdf>.

without the need to be propagated.⁴ Indeed this mix of cultural diplomacy and cultural promotions strategies and approaches can create in theory the most powerful cultural diplomacy strategy. This approach considers culture — essentially entertainment or “relaxation” that provides a mundane rather than an esthetic satisfaction and often is the product of the profit-seeking private sector, and its global expansion.⁵ Although profit seeking and culture as entertainment is not something to be blamed, there is always the threat of marketization, kitch and cultural prostitution with incalculable negative consequences in a long term perspective. The European culture is perceived as valuable and powerful often in contrast to the US entertainment culture. Dropping standards and principles, although may save funds, may kill the very essence of the European cultural identity and added value.

Within the EU, all the external relations actors, such as the DGs of the Commission, a small number of EU delegations, or the Council General Secretariat and the EEAS at present have developed web-based portals where a plethora of news, videos, narrative leaflets, official speeches, facts and figures, statements or declarations are made available. More recently, the EEAS has even ventured into social media (now on Facebook and Twitter).⁶ The various communication platforms differ in terms of their quality, their maintenance and accessibility, for anyone not familiar with the EU environment. Overall, they form a useful pool of information, but in some instances there is also a fair degree of replication and a factual overflow of information which can be counter-productive to the intended effect. Such forms of communication, with the possibly under-developed “blogosphere”, are essentially one way and do not meet the basic criterion that public or cultural diplomacy is about establishing a two-way dialogue. This can be facilitated and supplemented by various forms of “e-diplomacy”, but this is a functional strategy in “Singapore like” places where there is sufficient internet or mobile phone literacy penetration. Regardless of the technological advances, there is though no real substitute for personal engagement in the field at different levels and fora and the e-diplomacy or the blog diplomacy is not an exception from this rule. Certainly this implies either to add new obligations (with the additional training) to the already existing EU personnel, either employing additional staff, whose job would be to insure the necessary level of interactivity for the EU Commission information portals. This kind of measures is necessary to give “consistency” to an already existent administrative architecture which in theory would be satisfactory enough. The Council decision of 26 July 2010 establishing the organization and functioning of the European External Action Service (EEAS) makes a reference to “communication and public diplomacy actions” perfectly

⁴ John Brown, “Arts Diplomacy — The Neglected aspect of Cultural Diplomacy”, in William P. Kiehl, “America’s Dialogue with the World”, Public Diplomacy Council School of Media and Public Affairs, The George Washington University, 2006, p. 74.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ Simon Duke and Aurélie Courtier, “The EU’s External Public Diplomacy and the EEAS — Cosmetic Exercise or Intended Change?” — (European Institute of Public Administration, Maastricht), November 2011, available on line at: http://dseu.lboro.ac.uk/Documents/Policy_Papers/DSEU_Policy_Paper07.pdf.

transferable to cultural diplomacy as a form of public diplomacy.⁷ This component is reflected today in the EEAS organigram which incorporates a “strategic planning” division, a “strategic communication” division, and a “public diplomacy” unit, the latter being located by 2013 under the “Foreign Policy Instruments service”.⁸

The new EEAS architecture also creates confusion (including within the veteran civil servants of EU Commission) about the balance of responsibilities and influence between the different posts in spite of efforts to lend more coherence, visibility and efficiency to EU external actions generally. The real risk to create new divisions drawn upon old lines between (and within) the EU institutions with the direct effect expressed in inefficiency and wasted public funds was already noticed and reported. Some specialized external oriented units were working well enough as autonomous bodies (DG-Trade or DG-Devco). Now they often appear to be insufficiently coordinated with the EEAS (or, even worse, conflicting the new structure with its personnel often unspecialized). EU is above everything perceived externally as an economic and trade structure. The added value in terms of skills and external experience as compared to the member state diplomatic personnel came from DG Trade. The coordination of DG Trade with the EEAS is still confuse.⁹ The same issue applies with DG DEVCO which in terms of public diplomacy is also caring the actions which gave the EU so far the strongest external identity in public diplomacy terms — the world biggest development promoter. Many aspects which appear simple in theory at the implementation level became complicated. In the particular case of DG DEVCO, this aspect was noticed over the programming of early stages of financial instruments in the implementation of various development projects across the world. Also recently, various initiatives of EEAS regarding civil society development in the aftermath of Arab spring were blocked by various DG DEVCO or DG Enlargement internal procedures, rules and methodologies (which often unfamiliar for the EEAS personnel).

Coming back to the old basic issue of coherence we know that public diplomacy can only be effective if there is internal consensus on the message or underlying aims and objectives of the EU’s external action. In general terms it is not a problem to identify common foreign policy objectives or aims of the EU external action. However, these objectives and aims in fact are general and theoretic enough to create a common denominator for all the member states. But effective public and cultural diplomacy works with concrete facts and not with slogans. And here is the point when the coherence problems appear. The specific content of a cultural program, the balance of authors within a library, the specific content of a TV program, or documentary all this needs to reflect the culture, identity and cultural

⁷ Council decision on the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service, 26 July 2010, (2010/427/EU), Art. 9(6).

⁸ European External Action Service, Organisation chart, 1 April 2011, available at: http://www.eeas.europa.eu/background/organisation/index_en.htm.

⁹ Simon Duke and Aurélie Courtier, “The EU’s External Public Diplomacy and the EEAS — Cosmetic Exercise or Intended Change?” — (European Institute of Public Administration, Maastricht), November 2011, available on line at: http://dseu.lboro.ac.uk/Documents/Policy_Papers/DSEU_Policy_Paper07.pdf.

diplomacy interests of all the 27 member states. There is a clear idea of what the EU's fundamental aims and objectives are on the international scene, as well as a consensus on what type of actor the Union wishes to be at least at this stage. Bridging the gap between theory and practice would involve clarifying the details within the mechanism of representation, virtually for every type of public/cultural diplomacy action. Only then we will have a fully functional EEAS in cultural and public diplomacy terms. Below there are a few proposals regarding the way coordination within the EEAS and the European Commission on public/cultural diplomacy may be enhanced along with firmer ideas about how to mainstream public diplomacy across the EU's external actions in various political and cultural environments.

- Small cost effective pilot projects, based in the EU delegations, should be undertaken. The most natural locations for pilot projects would be the EU's Southern Neighborhood and the countries from the Eastern Neighborhood. Both locations would be a valuable test ground in content terms for the member states with special political and cultural interests in the area (France and Italy in Tunisia and Libya, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary in the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine or the Caucasus countries).

- The EU delegation in Washington DC is usually quoted as the best example of an attempt to develop a public diplomacy role. The successes and challenges of this should be shared in well documented materials and Dos and Don'ts type of information materials. Those guides should not be general (because the general information materials tells a professional what he already knows, for instance, most often is a waste of time and money), but technical and as detailed as possible, regarding the desired language, the expressions used, the content of the used materials, the way it was received by different member states and their diasporas in Washington DC or New York.

- Training on public diplomacy/cultural diplomacy could be widely disseminated and could incorporate lessons learnt and facilitate the development of EU external public diplomacy.

An emerging new direction in cultural diplomacy is for some researchers more radical than the entry of new countries. Cultural diplomacy, just like diplomacy in general, is traditionally bilateral. The new trend (for any country but especially for the EU kind of international actor) is multilateralism. The NGO's here, like in other domains, prove to be more sensitive and flexible to adapt to the new evolutions. And the European Commission proves to be smart enough to borrow some of the NGO's strategies. EUNIC was created in 2006, as the network of European Union National Institutes for Culture, bringing together over 27 organizations in charge of national cultural representation abroad. Being present in over 150 countries with offices and programs, the EUNIC members, in theory, would have an unrivalled experience and expertise in cultural diplomacy. We say "in theory" because most often any institutional network is no more than the sum of its parts. The real challenge is to create integrate products and actions, not disparate ones. Building networks is crucial to meet this challenge. However, the kinds of networking required are far beyond the capacities of most EU member

states governments. For this reason, it is desirable that private cultural diplomacy be associated with official foreign policy interests.¹⁰ The degree of this association will vary widely but there can be little doubt that private cultural diplomacy must constitute an essential component of a network oriented foreign policy. The EUNIC members represent a large variety of organizational structures involved in a way or another in public/cultural diplomacy actions. Perhaps the most valuable members in terms of transferable experience to EEAS are those specialized on a sectoral audience. The EUNIC strategy of building up its partnerships at local country level by forming specialized groupings of the institutes operating in a country is a valuable lesson to be replicated as much as diplomatic procedures and protocol allows. Within a specialized grouping of institutions the members agree on joint activities in the arts and language sectors and so on, and very important the joint sponsorship of the activities. The EU Commission Cultural Programs are continuously encouraging the trans European institutional networking as a valuable strategy to impose effectiveness, to save money, and last but not least to impose the creation of “European minded” cultural activists. It is also encouraging the fact that EUNIC continuous development in size and diversity is translated in larger projects in a continuously larger spectrum of cultural minded topics.

The opportunities for interaction as well as one-way communication need to be taken into account within the EEAS strategy. Static web sites are not efficient in terms of credibility and impact. A wiki-format enabling updates and comments from anyone (although moderated) is more cost effective and efficient. This interactivity tends to dominate the use of the web for cultural diplomacy purposes. It is all about the new dimension the web is introducing about cultural diplomacy namely not only the ability to reach but also to engage. By doing this there are chances to solve one of the big problems any public/cultural diplomacy encounters. To be treated with indifference, is to be ignored regardless the amount of funds, time and effort invested in it. In order to adapt to this change any cultural diplomacy operators including EEAS delegations need new skills to its personal often at odds with the classic diplomatic procedures (within EEAS perhaps more suitable to be solved by contractual agents). The EEAS just like any other public/ cultural diplomacy approach is one directional and monologue like actions. Transforming the EEAS offices abroad in places where the local people can be listen would be a great achievement as an attempt to pave bridges across civilizations and different mentalities. And this is particularly the case of the Muslim or South East Asian audiences.

The importance of “listening” as a key attribute of public/cultural diplomacy was wisely by John Worne: *It's easy to think of public diplomacy as being one way — we give to (or often tell) them. The central premise of cultural relations, and I think the 'smarter' versions of public diplomacy is we listen to and engage as equals with them. Listening is the single most influential thing a person can do. It builds trust, engagement and the platform for discussion, negotiation and*

¹⁰ Teresa La Porte. (2012), “The Legitimacy and Effectiveness of Non State Actors and the Public Diplomacy Concept”, *Public Diplomacy Theory and Conceptual Issues*. ISA Annual Convention, San Diego, April 1, 4.

*informed disagreement. It also enables people to begin to work together effectively and know what they share and what they don't.*¹¹

The key of the new evolutions in public/cultural diplomacy is the concern of how that mutual awareness can be achieved in order to obtain the final prize which in diplomatic terms is defined as “trust” and “confidence”.¹²

To conclude the newer approaches to cultural relations, EEAS needs to take into account the evolution: from events to projects; from bilateral to multilateral; from presentation to co-operation; from products to process; from one-way to two-way; from telling to listening from self promotion to values promotion.¹³

There is to be expected that a genuine involvement into fulfilling the above mentioned objectives will bring more and innovative forms of cultural co-operation which indeed require new expertise, people or a special procedure to sub-contract several actions on a project base.

Also a new form of cultural diplomacy EEAS needs to consider is spreading know how, by sending arts administrators abroad to teach fundraising skills to their counterparts at cultural institutions, which in many places can no longer depend on government funding, in order to develop or even to exist. Self-sufficiency is an essential part of the free market speech in particular for the places used with the exclusive state patronage. From this perspective teaching cultural leaders in emerging democracies to find private resources may not only useful enough, but attractive enough, for the persons fed up with official dinners and ambassadorial like events. To a certain extent, probably, every nation has its own tradition of supporting the arts, just as it has its own form of cultural diplomacy befitting its history and experiences. Transferring abroad a decentralized culture, even if inapplicable to the local environment would be still an interesting cultural experience for any kind of audience which will be immersed into another organizational culture. EU already has an invaluable experience in promoting and implementing development projects and policies all around the world. Capacity building as a development strategy can be also a very subtle and effective form of cultural diplomacy, targeting directly the practitioners (museum directors, journalists, architects etc.), which otherwise, in some countries, would be difficult to approach. Also, capacity building can be a counterargument for those who consider that cultural diplomacy is less immediately interest-driven (and, for instance, less convincing for allocation of generous funds). In this case, even if not directly focused on identities, and underlying values, these actions will actually succeed by doing things in a manner representative for a certain culture. Even if classic cultural diplomacy has a different time horizon in the case of capacity building actions the efforts and exchanges may pay off immediately. In this case

¹¹ John Worne, “Deaf is Dumb, Why listening is important” http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/newswire/cpdblog_detail/deaf_is_dumb_why_listening_is_powerful/.

¹² Martin Rose and Nick Wadham Smith. (2004) , “Mutuality, trust and cultural relations” *Counterpoint*, available on line at, www.counterpoint-online.org/mutuality-trust-and-culturalrelations/ accessed by 15.09.2012.

¹³ Steve Green. (2009), “New Directions”, *Cultura y Proyección Exterior: Nuevos Valores y Estrategias de Acción*. themes presented by the author at the conference La acción cultural exterior: definición de nuevas estrategias, organized by the Instituto Cervantes and Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid, 14-15 December 2009 (unpublished).

the process of “change through interaction” can prove utilitarian and therefore be more credible. Capacity building as a cultural diplomacy strategy can be more suitable to the diplomacy through culture theory which pretends that is not interested in communicating positions on issues but rather on channeling ideas. Some of these ideas may be considered dangerous in some places if expressed directly, but in the case of capacity building actions they would be expressed indirectly in a subtle way. Even more, if they prove to be productive in a host society, they will find their way into debates and discussions and subsequently, quietly, into local thinking.

Within the Globalization and global society the challenge of EEAS is to extend partners’ understanding of their shared interests into the sphere of the global commons and to build a system of reasonably functioning global governance.¹⁴ This is a postmodern, post-national kind of approach and EEAS seems to be best suited to cope with that mission taking into account that it represents a post-modern post-national functioning political structure.

Cultural diplomacy like any other social minded approach, ultimately, also depends on the amount of self-confidence (both institutional and personal). The self confidence came from the power of ideas and message that EU wants to transmit which is generous enough. Then came the self confidence of the people suppose to represent the EU. They must firmly and genuinely believe in the power of the EU ideas in such a manner to consider them the basis the own daily interactions and the basis when addressing any problems of mutual or global concern. What EEAS and any other diplomatic service is still missing is a functional communication strategy not only functioning as a two-way official diplomatic channel, but also relying on personal interaction on the level at which people are most impressionable: in the realm of ideas, emotions, and debate. The internet seems to be well suited to cope with this challenge but nothing leaves as strong an impression on minds as something exposed to a foreign culture in person. And here the cultural exchanges among the young people in programs like Erasmus Mundus (but at a much larger scale) may be the solution.

When it came to the power of ideas the most peacefully and effective change came from within societies, in terms of community capacity building, as a form of cultural diplomacy, which can be the best value for money action and tool EEAS can possibly handle. For instance, EU should increase the investment in networks of higher education, sciences, art, music, theater, literature, and design and here with more than 3000 accredited Universities across 27 member states EU seems to be well suited to cope with the job.

Joseph Nye considers that within the front of ideas and confronting ideologies the state with the best story wins. And the EEAS personnel should be confident that they have a compelling story to tell about economic success accelerated development and pacification among former enemies. The massive influx of East European new member states and diplomatic personnel add new

¹⁴ Wiseman, Geoffrey (2004) “Polylateralism” and New Modes of Global Dialogue’ in Christer Jönsson and Richard Langorne (eds.) *Diplomacy*, vol. III, London: Sage, pp. 36-57.

fresh memories to the development story. Self confidence in the power of own message and culture is only one of the necessary preconditions which makes a good diplomatic service when it comes to soft power. Among other personal ingredients I would add the ability to not insist on being right at all costs and not to regard one's own standpoint as nonnegotiable or exclusive.¹⁵ Without this intercultural dialogue genuine cultural diplomacy cannot be achieved apart from some cosmetic facade events.

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¹⁵ Joseph Nye refers to the passive kind of listening when he states that "by definition, soft power means getting others to want the outcomes you want, and that requires understanding how they are hearing your message, and fine-tuning it accordingly". In contrast, listening as part of cultural relations "reflects a genuine interest in the other's perspective" and "demonstrates that different viewpoints are taken seriously and that other perspectives are given consideration".