

## SADIQ KHAN AND THE REACTIONS OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY TO BREXIT

ANDREEA FERENCZI\*

**Abstract.** This article aims for a punctual analysis, a qualitative-quantitative quantification of Sadiq Khan's posts on Instagram, with a stated interest in some essential landmarks for the topic dedicated to digital diplomacy: the arrangement of the message on/in the platform used; the engagement of the post (number of likes, followers, views, comments, distributions), the visual support used (photo, video, graphics), including clothing details, body position/posture, framing, colours, or graphics; descriptions used (in terms of length, message, language); the technical tools of the message and the recourse to the specificity of social media – hashtags, labelling, geotags. All this converges towards a study of practical identification of the elements of digital diplomacy and its way of operating in online space.

**Keywords:** *Brexit; Sadiq Khan; Social Media; Online; Digital Diplomacy; Cultural Diplomacy*

### *Sadiq Khan: Digital Diplomacy – Part of a Political and Social Vision. From Local to National*

The digitization and use of online social media provide an extended environment for certain groups, communities, or society to express ideas, and to create a more complex and extended inter-human communication channel. Diplomacy has always had to adapt to change, which is why as soon as it became digital, with all of its specific tools, it has metamorphosed the way politics and diplomacy of the moment unfold. The contemporary challenge is extremely demanding, in the sense that the use of social networks requires governments to revise their traditional one-way communication style, in order to strengthen an open dialogue with citizens around the world. The social benefit of the media is not only an opportunity to reach new audiences and disseminate targeted messages more effectively, but also the ability to increase mutual understanding between governments and citizens of other states<sup>1</sup>.

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\* PhD student of the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Bucharest, Romania; andreeaferenczi95@yahoo.com.

<sup>1</sup> Antonio Deruda, *The Digital Diplomacy Handbook. How to use social media to engage with global audiences*, 2014, p. 9.

Involvement is an important part of diplomacy, and taking advantage of the opportunities that social platforms bring is a way to promote the positive image of the state and achieve diplomatic goals. Certainly, improving public diplomacy initiatives requires a thorough understanding of contemporary foreign affairs and a current focus on international communication<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, social media can be used as a means for public and cultural diplomacy to promote the positive image of a country and create a strong national brand. Twitter or Facebook have offered diplomacy the opportunity to become relevant in the media<sup>3</sup> and accessible to citizens.

In this context, politicians have the opportunity to make their political vision, activity or agenda more easily known. Using online platforms and benefiting from their popularity, politicians become emblematic figures of mass culture and manage to gain visibility beyond the classical sphere of activity or the geographical borders of the country of origin. Moreover, they can become true ambassadors and national symbols, even if their professional activity is not traditionally categorized as part of the foreign policy area.

One of the visible exponents of this phenomenon is the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan. A well-known British politician, he has gained international notoriety in recent years, being included in 2018 in Time magazine's list of the 100 most influential people around the world<sup>4</sup>. According to the publication, he is "a celebrity of the political world", with real chances to increase its relevance in the British and international context<sup>5</sup>. Also, in 2017, Sadiq Khan won the "Politician of the Year" award offered by the British publication GQ<sup>6</sup>, a title that propelled him even more to the attention of the general public.

Considered by the British press to be one of the most successful politicians in the Labour Party, according to Tony Blair, S. Khan has a "box office success" that few other British politicians can aspire to have. Although his achievements and policies have been proposed and implemented in London, some have been questioned, and the combination between religious affiliation and active political involvement has made him a "global star", as journalist Jack Blanchard calls him<sup>7</sup>. Sadiq Khan is the illustrative case of a politician who overcame the connotations of the position of mayor, of a relevant politician only locally, becoming a real character on both British and international scenes.

<sup>2</sup> Hary Hadiansyah, Betty Purwandari, *Social Media Strategies for Public Diplomacy*, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322230876\\_Social\\_Media\\_Strategies\\_for\\_Public\\_Diplomacy\\_a\\_Case\\_Study\\_in\\_the\\_Ministry\\_of\\_Foreign\\_Affairs\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Indonesia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322230876_Social_Media_Strategies_for_Public_Diplomacy_a_Case_Study_in_the_Ministry_of_Foreign_Affairs_of_the_Republic_of_Indonesia)>, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Andreas Sandre, *Twitter for Diplomats*, Roma, Diplo Foundation and Istituto Diplomatico, 2013, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Michael R. Bloomberg, *Sadiq Khan*, in *Time Magazine*, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: <<https://time.com/collection/most-influential-people-2018/5217530/sadiq-khan/>>.

<sup>5</sup> In the original article, in *Time magazine*, Sadiq Khan was described as: "a rising star who has a bright political future".

<sup>6</sup> *All the winners and speeches of the GQ Men of the Year Awards 2017*, in *GQ Magazine*, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/gq-men-of-the-year-winners-2017>>.

<sup>7</sup> Jack Blanchard, *Sadiq Khan's next job. Can the London mayor use a second term as a launchpad for the top spot in British politics?*, in *Politico*, accessed: 3.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.politico.eu/article/sadiq-khans-next-job-london-mayor-uk-labour-party/>>.

Using some essential biographical data, Sadiq Aman Khan was born on October 8, 1970, in Tooting, South London, to a working-class Pakistani immigrant family. Academically, Khan holds a law degree from the University of North London. Straight after successfully completing his higher education, he worked as a human rights lawyer<sup>8</sup> and chaired the Liberty advocacy group for three years. In the Labour Party, Khan was an adviser to the London Borough of Wandsworth from 1994 to 2006, before being elected Member of Parliament for Tooting in the 2005 general election. In 2008, he was appointed Minister of Transport.

As a Labour candidate, Khan was elected mayor of London in the 2016 election, defeating Conservative opponent Zac Goldsmith. As mayor, Khan introduced the Hopper fare for unlimited bus and tram travel for an hour, the T-Charge on older and polluting vehicles and the ultra-low 24/7 (ULEZ) emission tax. He was a vocal supporter of the popular vote for Britain to remain in the European Union and in favour of a second Brexit referendum, respectively. Khan has been praised for promoting tolerance, respect and acceptance among various London communities.

Ideologically, Khan's policy is part of the essence of social democratic politics, in the centre-left spectrum of British politics. Referring to his political and ideological choice, journalist Amol Rajan called him a "relevant representative for the social-democratic wing"<sup>9</sup> of the Labour Party. The BBC also positions him on the party's less radical left<sup>10</sup>. In an article for Al Jazeera, commentator Richard Seymour described Khan as a "centrist politician"<sup>11</sup>.

Winning the position of Mayor of London was an important moment in contemporary British history. Thus, Sadiq Khan becomes the first Pakistani-Muslim to hold this position. The investment in this position was received as a gain by the minority and an obvious sign of progress in the democratization of roles and public positions, held so far only by Caucasian people of British descent. In this regard, David Lammy, a parliamentarian born to immigrant parents, told the BBC that the election won by Sadiq Khan was a "huge moment" and that if the UK ever had a black or Asian prime minister, there was no doubt that this will also be possible thanks to Sadiq Khan<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, this premiere in the history of London's leadership was an additional argument in favour of the notoriety gained by S. Khan<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Esther Webber, *London mayor: The Sadiq Khan story*, BBC News, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-36140479>>.

<sup>9</sup> Amol Rajan, After Boris, Mayor Khan for London? *The Labour son of a bus driver takes on a Tory multi-millionaire*, in *Politico*, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.politico.eu/article/tooting-to-victory-london-sadiq-khan-mayor-corbyn-goldsmith-boris-johnson-bevin/>>.

<sup>10</sup> Esther Webber, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Richard Seymour, *Sadiq Khan's victory and free Londonistan*, AlJazeera, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/05/sadiq-khan-victory-free-londonistan-160507174122069.html>>.

<sup>12</sup> Esther Webber, *London mayor: The Sadiq Khan story*, in *BBC News*, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-36140479>>.

<sup>13</sup> In an interview for British *Vogue*, Sadiq Khan claims that he is aware that part of the popularity and increased interest shown by the national and international media is due to the fact that he is a Muslim. The fact that he managed to become the mayor of one of the most important cities in the world, at a time when Islamophobia is becoming more common, has attracted many reactions in the public space, online and in the media.

Without being able to deny or minimize the “progressive perspective” they called, there were voices that challenged the presence of a Muslim in a public position of such magnitude. Declared a practicing Muslim, Sadiq Khan was threatened in 2016 by the far-right group Britain First. They threatened “direct action” against Khan as part of an anti-Muslim campaign to oust British politicians from public office<sup>14</sup>.

With all these overt xenophobic attitudes, S. Khan did not give up the direct and public approach to weighted and democratic Islam, turning his membership into an instrument and strategy aimed at relaxing and normalizing British discourse on this subject. The articulated message issued is structurally different from the discourse and debates present in the public space. S. Khan quotes from the Qur’an, pleads for solidarity, tolerance, analytical-critical thinking, justice and the necessary information about true contemporary Muslim values. Supporter of the Muslim community, the stated socio-political vision provoked immediate reactions, threatening the death of Islamic extremists, especially in its tolerant and supportive position of all minorities – an example of this is the vote in favour of the same-sex marriage law<sup>15</sup>.

Winning the election to lead the most important British urban centre, origin, religion – hence all the hallmarks that define identity – but also the vocal way in which he chose to address a number of national issues, not just local, facilitated the rise of Sadiq Khan on the British scene. International popularity, especially outside the European space, rose following an online conflict: in 2016, on the Twitter platform, S. Khan had an exchange of direct remarks with US President Donald Trump, criticizing the US presidential administration for “banning Muslims in the United States”. His online appeal is not a singular one, but is required to be quantified in the extension of S. Khan’s remarks, posts and position on the terrorist attacks in London. Although Donald Trump’s attitude was offensive and sharp, the US ambassador to Britain, Lewis Lukens, directly contradicted President Trump and publicly showed, in a series of explicit tweets, the support of the mayor of London. He praised Sadiq Khan for the way he handled the events and the way he positioned himself and related to the event<sup>16</sup>.

The online dialogue is required alongside Donald Trump’s direct contact/official visit to the UK in 2019. Sadiq Khan said in an article for The Guardian that the UK administration should weigh in on its enthusiasm for the US president’s visit, considering that Donald Trump does not deserve his honours, related to the policy he pursues and the ideology he supports, recalling the “European dictators of the 1930s and 1940s”<sup>17</sup>. The American president, known

<sup>14</sup> Olivia Blair, *Britain First threatens to target London Mayor Sadiq Khan with ‘direct action’*, URL: <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/sadiq-khan-britain-first-london-mayor-threaten-direct-action-a7047991.html>>.

<sup>15</sup> Jane Dalton, *Sadiq Khan reveals anti-Muslim death threats he has received as London Mayor*, in *Independent*, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sadiq-khan-death-threat-muslim-london-mayor-racist-islamophobic-gay-terrorist-a8252446.html>>.

<sup>16</sup> Ariel Zilber, *US Ambassador breaks ranks with Trump to PRAISE Mayor Sadiq Khan after the president criticized the London mayor for his response to capital’s terror attack*, accessed: 14.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4571030/Outrage-Trump-targets-London-mayor-attacks.html>>.

<sup>17</sup> *It’s un-British to roll out the red carpet for Donald Trump*, in *The Guardian*, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jun/01/donald-trump-state-visit-red-carpet-unbritish>>.

for the controversial way he communicates on social networks, responded on Twitter, addressing S. Khan with the nickname “stone cold loser”<sup>18</sup>. This episode was picked up by the media and presented in several publications, effervescence and transparency that led to the “tabloidization” of the diplomatic incident in question.

All of the mentioned details converge towards the hypothesis of the present case study, the one that accepts through S. Khan the prototype of the defining politician for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, germinated by the way it is delivered publicly, dosing pathos, ethos and logos intelligently and efficiently. His image and strategy outbid his soft power values: articulate discourse and relevant political agenda, aim for accessibility, attractiveness, human approach, open and well anchored in the reality of the present, product and producer of online message, broadcast in and on social networks. His personality construct is the strong point in attracting national sympathy, confirming his character desires, whose theatrical skills were confirmed including by performing in a stand-up comedy, organized to raise funds to support the Labour Party<sup>19</sup>. All these attributes are recognized in the online space, through a jovial, ironic-humorous approach, applied to the subject and/or pragmatic.

Read through this grid, online popularity is a natural reaction-result. In a quick and efficient Google search for S. Kahn’s name, the results total 15.7 million. On Facebook there are two accounts – the personal one with a number of 747,329<sup>20</sup> followers and the mayor’s account (institutional, public, official account), with 201,048<sup>21</sup> interested people. At parity, both accounts can be found on Instagram – the personal one with a number of 121,000<sup>22</sup> followers, and the official one with 118,000 followers<sup>23</sup>. On Twitter, it totals one million followers on personal account<sup>24</sup> and 3.5 million on mayor’s account<sup>25</sup>. It should be noted that, referring to the mayor’s account, it has been made available by the City of London, and used until 2016 by his predecessor. On YouTube, his personal account has 507 subscribers (no video material has been uploaded since 2016)<sup>26</sup>, and the account provided by the London City Hall has a number of 3,960 subscribers.

Regardless of the social network used, Sadiq Khan uses the same type of discourse, his posts respecting the same logic, structure and approach. They are

<sup>18</sup> Donald Trump calls Mayor of London Sadiq Khan a ‘stone cold loser’, in *BBC News*, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: < <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-48495899> >.

<sup>19</sup> *Politician gave up comedy to be London mayor*, in *Chortle*, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: <[https://www.chortle.co.uk/news/2016/09/05/25710/sadiq\\_khan:\\_i\\_used\\_to\\_do\\_stand-up](https://www.chortle.co.uk/news/2016/09/05/25710/sadiq_khan:_i_used_to_do_stand-up)>.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/sadiqforlondon/>, accessed: 13.05.2020.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/MayorofLondon/>, accessed: 13.05.2020.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/sadiq/>, accessed: 13.05.2020.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/mayoroflondon/>, accessed: 13.05.2020.

<sup>24</sup> <https://twitter.com/SadiqKhan>, accessed: 13.05.2020.

<sup>25</sup> <https://twitter.com/MayorofLondon>, accessed: 13.05.2020.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/user/SadiqKhanMP/videos>, accessed: 13.05.2020.

used with approximately the same frequency, addressed to an audience as large/wide as possible<sup>27</sup>. Personal accounts use the explicit name – Sadiq Khan – and the official ones the name of @MayorofLondon or @MayorofLdn. His active online presence delivers and recommends him as an informal diplomat of Great Britain, through the very attributes and ability to functionally use the mechanisms of digital diplomacy, by exposing the vision through contemporary means of dissemination and information.

One of the characteristics of digital diplomacy as used by Sadiq Khan is the articulation of a discourse part of the logic of the local – national – international triad, starting from the realities of the London community, and extrapolating the sphere of interest to issues of national interest – especially recently, the economic impact of Brexit or the need for a second referendum – to promote Britain in the European and international space. The reason also has to do with the position of mayor of London, the stability and prosperity of a cosmopolitan capital dependent on the socio-economic situation of the whole country, but also on the relationship with other states. Specifically, in a global society, in which individuals have the opportunity to travel and in which the export of labour is a contemporary reality, good relations with other states, favourable international agreements or increased attractiveness are a real advantage. Understanding this stake, Sadiq Khan chose to pay significant attention to soft power and cultural-digital diplomacy.

Thus, this article aims at point analysis, qualitative-quantitative quantification and commenting on Sadiq Khan's posts on Instagram, with interest in several key points for the topic of this research: the arrangement of the message on/in the platform used; post engagement (number of likes, followers, views, comments, shares), visual support used (photo, video, graphics), including clothing details, body position/posture, frame, colours or graphics; descriptions used (in terms of length, message, language); the technical tools of the message and the recourse to the specificity of the social media – hashtags, labels, geotags. All this converges towards a study of practical identification of the elements of digital diplomacy and its way of operating in the online space.

In the analysis dedicated to Sadiq Khan's Instagram account, we will not omit the way in which he meets the official recommendations addressed to the organization of the social network officially intended for politicians, with interest in capturing institutional and personal elements: on 05.01.2020 Sadiq Khan posts, on the official account, a picture of nature, together with his dog, Luna, a personal

<sup>27</sup> The personal Instagram account (@sadiq) was opened in April 2015 and has 759 posts, and the official account as mayor (@mayorofldn) was opened in March 2017 and has 1,100 posts. Currently, both accounts are used with the same frequency - posts are uploaded daily or every two to three days. However, it should be noted that on @mayorofldn there is a tendency to post more images, even on the same day. On Facebook accounts, the frequency of posts takes place after the same planning on both accounts and in this case on the official account (@MayorofLondon) posting, in general, several materials per day. On Twitter, both on the @SadiqKhan account and on the @MayorofLondon account, he posts much more often, almost daily, most days with up to 10 posts a day. This is because Twitter provides a framework in which you can express yourself much faster, easier, without having to present to the audience and visual support, as is the case with Instagram.



post that gathers over 2,200 likes<sup>28</sup>. In the series of official recommendations<sup>29</sup> for posting in the social media space, such personal sequences are included, with images from behind the scenes, inside governmental or administrative buildings, surprises and immortalizations in the “workspace”; thus, we mention the post from 25.06.2019, with the image from the City Hall of London, made on the occasion of the meeting with the mayors of the big European cities. The description of the post, which recorded 1,131 likes and 49 comments, insists on a confession, parity, personal-official: “It was wonderful to welcome mayors from all over Europe today. Whatever the outcome of #Brexit, we will continue to work together to address the most pressing issues of our time, from climate change to the rise of right-wing extremism”<sup>30</sup>.

This post has a double value: firstly, Sadiq Khan participates not only as a representative of London, but also as a diplomat engaged in dialogue with foreign counterparts; secondly, it reaffirms that digital diplomacy represents and displays the socio-political vision and explicitly stated strategy.

A relevant aspect in the research is also the real-time reporting to the ongoing events. Posts of this kind are meant to create real connections with the online community, but also to subscribe to the “trend of the moment”. Sadiq Khan sends his best wishes on the occasion of every major national holiday, addressing his good thoughts to Londoners and all his followers. But it does not omit the holidays, the events of the minority or of the groups, communities and states: a post from 10.02.2019, dedicated to the Chinese community, on the celebration of the Chinese New Year, accumulated a number of 1,262 likes and 23 comments; the politician dedicated to the Irish community a series of posts with the occasion of St. Patrick’s Day, on 17.02.2019, making a video material public, in which he himself appears, part of some events organized on this occasion – the post totalled 3,698 views, 404 likes and 13 comments, accompanied by the following description: “Today, Londoners from all over our city gathered at @stpatsdayldn in Trafalgar Square. Thank you to everyone who came together to celebrate the Irish community and culture in London – and who sent a message to the world that #LondonIsOpen”<sup>31</sup>.

The second post published on the same occasion, is a photo with Sadiq Khan taking a selfie with some of the people present in the market. He has a wide smile, looks at the camera, and takes two of the participants by their shoulder, in a familiar gesture. Sadiq Khan wears a dark green scarf and a clover on his chest, one of the symbols associated with St. Patrick’s Day. The post garnered 2,195 likes

<sup>28</sup> There are several such photos on his social media accounts, being verified that such posts attract followers and create the image of an empathetic person. Sadiq Khan resorts to such hypostases even when conveying an important political message. On 19.10.2019, he posted a photo with a puppy in his arms, during an anti-Brexit street movement in which he took part. The information was taken from the Instagram account, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: <[https://www.instagram.com/p/B3zJ\\_FgFls3/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3zJ_FgFls3/)>.

<sup>29</sup> Facebook’s *Instagram Best Practices*, available at: [https://www.dropbox.com/s/89qu8p2hco0fo2t/Facebook%27s%20Instagram%20Best%20Practices%202%202%2018\\_guide\\_international.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/89qu8p2hco0fo2t/Facebook%27s%20Instagram%20Best%20Practices%202%202%2018_guide_international.pdf?dl=0), accessed 13.05.2020. p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/BzItABNIFsT/>, accessed: 13.05.2020.

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/BvH-yYmIJ\\_j/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BvH-yYmIJ_j/), accessed: 13.05.2020.

and 40 comments and had the following description: “Happy #StPatricksDay! For generations, the Irish community in London has made our city a livelier, warmer and more vibrant place. Our diversity is our strength – and regardless of the #Brexit result – we will continue to celebrate #StPatricksDay in our city centre”.

The text of the descriptions is short, concise, and the tone used is informal. The message seeks, even in the context of wishes, the same logic of promoting London as the space of unity and diversity. The post is a pretext to convey once again that London will not change its openness to the Irish and European community after Brexit, continuing to celebrate its cultural heritage.

The first post published on the Instagram account @mayorofldn, on March 14, 2017, highlights just that. The image used leaves the impression of a photo taken by a friend, without professional equipment or frames, edited with one of the filters provided by the online platform used. This first material posted on the social network was premeditatedly chosen precisely to emphasize an informal communication framework – ultimately, Instagram was originally thought of as a personal, non-rigid space, where users can present their instant photos, taken with their phones, in the form of a photo-video diary. The setting of the post is an informal, unexpected one: S. Khan serves food in a restaurant, wearing a simple, white shirt, relaxed, at the expense of an elegant, complete suit, with a jacket and tie; smiles, in a natural position, with the restaurant employees (probably) having the same relaxed attitude.

According to the Instagram user guide, politicians are advised to provide the public with images that present them outside the classic space in which they operate. Relaxed approaches, familiar topics<sup>32</sup>, humanized hypostases are encouraged, placed under the sign of the natural<sup>33</sup>.

The text accompanying the photograph testifies that: “Hello, London! It’s me – I signed up for Instagram. Fantastic fish and potatoes are served here at the Adams Fish Bar in Wimbledon (#tbt April, last month). London is an incredible place to eat, with some of the best chefs, the best food markets, restaurants and cafes in the world. And, of course, we make the best fish and chips menu. #MyLondonDish (...) Take a photo, video or live of your favourite food or place and make sure you tag me and use #MyLondonDish. Show the world that #LondonIsOpen is the best food in the world!”.

The post is addressed to Londoners and the promotion of the city, including as an attraction for gastronomy lovers in the country, but also abroad, and can be considered an act of digital-cultural diplomacy, not only from the perspective of the campaign / advertisement, but especially for the fact that it occurs on and against the background of the Brexit logic, with an explicit message: “Show the world that #LondonIsOpen”. Sadiq Khan confirms that he masters online tools,

<sup>32</sup> In this regard, see the description posted by Sadiq Khan in which he claims that his favourite dish is fried fish in combination with potatoes. This dish is a simple one, popular among the British.

<sup>33</sup> Facebook’s *Instagram Best Practices*, available at: [https://www.dropbox.com/s/89qu8p2hco0fo2t/Facebook%27s%20Instagram%20Best%20Practices%2002%2002%2018\\_guide\\_international.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/89qu8p2hco0fo2t/Facebook%27s%20Instagram%20Best%20Practices%2002%2002%2018_guide_international.pdf?dl=0), accessed: 13.05.2020. p. 9.



mainly using hashtags and acronyms – “tbt”, short for “Throwback Thursday”, used to suggest a moment of nostalgia. The post contains a geotag, mentioning the location where the uploaded photo was taken (here – Adams Fish Bar restaurant) and the tag – the official account of London, @VisitLondon, confirming its double personal-official applicability; S. Khan’s urge is for users to post their favourite dish using #MyLondonDish and tagging his account, subsequent posting, dated 15.03.2017, displaying a collage with photos taken by followers who used #MyLondonDish in their descriptions on Instagram. 27 of those involved were, in turn, labelled in the post.

A cultural employee, the British politician posted, on 19.10.2017, a series of photos with the British actor, Hugh Bonneville, at the presentation of the film “Paddington 2”. The photo captures the same relaxed attitude, in a classic outfit, but relaxed, with a light suit and no tie, a wide smile, the familiar gesture of grabbing the shoulder of the person(s) in the picture.

The description that accompanies the photo states punctually that: “It was great to launch the Paddington 2 pop-ups, celebrating the much-loved bear of the author Michael Bond and another new film made in London #LondonIsOpen”. The hashtag #LondonIsOpen is marked again, with all the connotations mentioned above.

Beyond the explicit and justified interest in promoting London, the post in question, not at all accidental, brings into question other important elements. In the alternative, the same logic of diplomatic and cultural promotion works, also considering the potential economic gains, the popularization of the British soft power through local productions and the support for the creative industries. Sadiq Khan confirms his role as “ambassador”/promoter of cultural products and productions, in the same logic of the triad of local-national-international effects.

Confirming the role and place of digital diplomacy as a vector of geopolitical reality, S. Khan’s visit in December 2017 to India and Pakistan<sup>34</sup> is invested with a double prerogative: the prospect of an imminent Brexit and a stronger India. The need to establish diplomatic relations beyond the European community and to send a global message of rethinking the position and alliances of Great Britain transforms Sadiq Khan from a politician of the local London scene, into a skilled diplomat. Thus, according to official statements, the London mayor’s visit to India was designed to stimulate cultural and business ties<sup>35</sup>, a strategic signal issued by the United Kingdom, in the context in which India is one of the most important global economies – its importance for Britain was underlined in the context of Theresa May’s visit, the first destination outside Europe on her agenda as Prime Minister. The United Kingdom maintains and cultivates a larger diplomatic presence than ever before in India, with 960 employees working to strengthen ties between the two states. Sadiq Khan’s visit stimulates hope for the exchange of business and skills in the top industry sectors, offering opportunities in the fields of law, science and higher education. Sadiq Khan’s #LondonIsopen

<sup>34</sup> *The Mayor’s trip to India and Pakistan*, accessed: 13.05.2020, URL: <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-trip-india-and-pakistan>.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

campaign can provide the ideal setting for new opportunities for qualified people and students. The strategy is required to be geared to the UK's foreign policy objective, which is to stimulate the capital's workforce, through international input, with a view to post-Brexit prosperity<sup>36</sup>.

And this visit is part of the #LondonIsopen approach; 50 posts from the trip to India and Pakistan were posted on the Instagram account @mayorofldn – photos and videos showing the followers meeting with actors from the Indian film industry<sup>37</sup>, visits to public schools and the monument dedicated to the victims of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre<sup>38</sup>, the meeting with Indian Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, Pakistani Commerce Minister Muhammad Pervaiz Malik, or Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi. The photo-video materials are suggestive, high-quality, with short, punctual descriptions, accompanied by the hashtag #LondonIsopen.

During his visit to Pakistan, the British politician took part in a sporting event organized by the British Council, aimed at affirming and cultivating a sense of unity and solidarity. It is important to note that the British Council is a cultural institute of the British government, internationally recognized as a key exponent of cultural diplomacy. The initiative comes as a reaffirmation of the importance of cultural diplomacy. Sadiq Khan has posted the following message on Twitter on 08.12.2017: "It was great to talk to so many young people participating in the British Council's DOSTI sports program. It is an important way to break down social barriers, enhance friendship and promote community cohesion"<sup>39</sup>, a text message accompanied by a photo collage of Sadiq Khan playing cricket, smiling with the organizers the young participants.

In a stage conclusion, we can say that the essential stake of online posts via Twitter is to promote the UK and the positive impact it is willing to confirm and reaffirm. Digital diplomacy becomes part of a political, social, and especially cultural vision, of soft power strategy, confirming its fundamental role in and for the named field.

### *Online Brexit: Information, Image, Action*

Brexit is unanimously accepted as one of the most important political events in Europe and of today. The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union was a first in the history of the European Community, being the first Member

<sup>36</sup> Kartik Mittal, *Why London mayor Sadiq Khan visiting India is British diplomacy at its finest*, in *Dailyo*, accessed: 14.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.dailyo.in/voices/sadiq-khan-bilateral-ties-india-england-brex-it-indo-british-trade/story/1/21039.html>>

<sup>37</sup> Also, observe the post with Katrina Kaif, a British actress in Indian productions. This image was accompanied by the description "Its success is yet another example of the deep connection between the two major cities (London and Mumbai), and our booming film is this industry" – in this way is emphasizing the cultural ties between Britain and India.

<sup>38</sup> The Jallianwala Bagh massacre took place in April 1919; General Reginald Dyer ordered British Indian Army troops to kill the unarmed Indian civilians – killing at least 400 people and wounding more than 1,000.

<sup>39</sup> [https://twitter.com/MayorofLondon/status/939172742225592320?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E939172742225592320%7Ctwgr%5E&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.london.gov.uk%2Fwhat-we-do%2Fmayors-trip-india-and-pakistan](https://twitter.com/MayorofLondon/status/939172742225592320?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E939172742225592320%7Ctwgr%5E&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.london.gov.uk%2Fwhat-we-do%2Fmayors-trip-india-and-pakistan), accessed: 14.05.2020.

State to withdraw from the organization. Joining the single European space in 1973, the United Kingdom affirmed its option and is no longer an integral part of the European Union, as of January 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, 23:00 GMT. A referendum took place in June 2016 and 17.4 million citizens opted for Brexit, accounting for 52% of the voting population.

Through repeated and protracted negotiations, the United Kingdom has agreed on the conditions for leaving the EU, with both sides deciding what their future relationship will look like after the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020. in the field of trade, in terms of security and safety, data protection, in the economic, financial and transport fields, in the energy, medical and pharmaceutical fields, etc.<sup>40</sup>.

Given all these combined issues, it goes without saying that Brexit has become a real concern of both British and European citizens. A Google search for the word “Brexit” will generate 145 million results; for the phrase “Sadiq Khan about Brexit”, a number of 1.130 million results will be displayed<sup>41</sup>.

In order to observe and research the way, strategy and formula of Sadiq Khan’s approach to Brexit in the digital space, a key point is precisely his stated position in relation to the decision to leave the EU. The mayor of London publicly stated for “Repubblica” that he does not support Brexit and called for a rethink of the decision by holding a second referendum: “My opinion is very simple. All forms of Brexit are worse than staying in the EU. I think that what the government has given us now is a million kilometres away from the promises made before June 2016. In these circumstances, what I want to say is to give the British public the last word. Do we accept the exit conditions as the government gave us? Boris Johnson’s agreement, Theresa May’s agreement, without agreement, with the option to remain the European Union? Once resolved, we can move on to the general election. Everyone who campaigned to leave Brexit – Boris Johnson, Michael Gove, Nigel Farage, Liam Fox, all these people, Dominic Raab – all the things they said in 2016 are a million miles away from us now. The British public was sold one thing, and given something else. So, what I mean by resolving Brexit is that the British public should say, “now that you know what it means to leave, you want to achieve without problems, or you don’t want to stay in the European Union, even though it’s imperfect”<sup>42</sup>.

We will investigate the explicitly stated position and positioning through posts on Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, with interest in the applied strategy – the long-term direction used to configure resources, overcome obstacles and, implicitly, meet the needs and expectations issued on local, national and international level<sup>43</sup>. We will thus recognize two applied instruments, which

<sup>40</sup> Antonello Guerrero, *Brexit: All you need to know about the UK leaving the EU*, BBC News, accessed: 17.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887>>.

<sup>41</sup> The information is obtained from Google, according to the results of 29.05.2020.

<sup>42</sup> Sadiq Khan: “*We need a second referendum on Brexit before a general election. We shouldn’t help Johnson*”, accessed 17.05.2020, URL: <[https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2019/10/26/news/sadiq\\_khan\\_we\\_need\\_a\\_second\\_referendum\\_on\\_brexit\\_before\\_a\\_general\\_election\\_we\\_shouldn\\_t\\_help\\_johnson\\_-239495701/](https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2019/10/26/news/sadiq_khan_we_need_a_second_referendum_on_brexit_before_a_general_election_we_shouldn_t_help_johnson_-239495701/)>.

<sup>43</sup> Hary Hadiansyah, Betty Purwandari, *Social Media Strategies for Public Diplomacy*, available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322230876\\_Social\\_Media\\_Strategies\\_for\\_Public\\_Diplomacy\\_a\\_Case\\_Study\\_in\\_the\\_Ministry\\_of\\_Foreign\\_Affairs\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Indonesia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322230876_Social_Media_Strategies_for_Public_Diplomacy_a_Case_Study_in_the_Ministry_of_Foreign_Affairs_of_the_Republic_of_Indonesia), accessed 17.05.2020, p. 1.

reside, including in the statement quoted above: the conviction that a second referendum is necessary and imperative and the promotion of London, by confirming it as an urban centre with values deeply rooted in the European foundation. The latter approach remains constant, including post-Brexit.

A second referendum on Brexit was an important stake for Sadiq Khan, who called for encouraging citizens to call for such a move, and for the government to grant this right to free democratic expression. On his Instagram account he posted several posts referring to this issue: for example, the post-dated 07.10.2018, gathered a number of 2.945 likes. The visual support exposes a short, impactful, easy-to-notice message (due to the font and colours), to restore the terms of Brexit. The post is added to those uploaded on 23.03.2019 and 16.09.2018, following the same descriptive type.

Despite the failure to hold a second referendum, Sadiq Khan did not give up affirming his pro-European actions. On the day that the UK left the European Union, he wanted to officially congratulate the Londoners for succeeding in forming a “truly global, European city”, an exponential space of “progressive ideas, liberal values and decency and diversity”<sup>44</sup>. This message recognizes its Labour-pro-European values and the constancy of the message, in the sense that it remains faithfully committed to the pro-European strategy and to promoting London as an open space, in line with the ideals and vision of the EU – to receive people from all over the world, regardless of the colour of their skin, the colour of their passport or the colours of the national flag<sup>45</sup>. “This statement explicitly targets those who want to emigrate to London, strengthening the feeling of social cohesion, reaffirming the evidence that European citizens who come to London are Londoners and that they add value to the community not only economically, but also culturally and socially, being essential to the success of the metropolis and representing the central reasons why London remains one of the most important and powerful cities in the world”.

The most numerous posts on Brexit are those promoting London as a European city, part of the spirit of the Union’s community. In the post from 01.02.2020, the day immediately after Brexit, the visual support shows the projection from the night of 31.01.2020, on one of the big advertising screens in the centre of the capital. From a compositional point of view, the projection consisted of the name of the city (London), the letter “o” being replaced by the globe and the slogans “London is Open” and “Everyone welcome”. The graphical style in which the design of the elements was made suggests relaxation, familiarity, detachment, optimism, with light colours, thin lines and touches being used, giving the impression of handcrafted material. The description that accompanied the post was: “From the beating heart of our nation, our message is clear – everyone is welcome. #londonisopen”<sup>46</sup>. This post was appreciated by users, gathering 10,403 likes and 132 comments<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> The text of the visual support published by Sadiq Khan, on 31.01.2020, on his Instagram page, URL: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/B7-fLxTHyVf/>>, accessed: 17.05.2020.

<sup>45</sup> The text of the visual support published by Sadiq Khan, on 01.02.2020, on his Instagram page, URL: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/B8BFgg0HieB/>>, accessed: 17.05.2020.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8AMUImHcgP/>, accessed: 17.05.2020.

<sup>47</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/B7\\_\\_I7CHZ88/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B7__I7CHZ88/), accessed: 17.05.2020.

One of the resonant statements about digital diplomacy is that the field called action becomes really effective when it is accompanied by concrete actions. In the case of Brexit, one of the actions initiated by London City Hall and promoted on social media by Sadiq Khan was to provide legal assistance to European citizens in London, who need guidance on the new “established status” in order to be able to work legally in the UK. The approach is a handy one, on the streets of London, in dedicated spaces, through volunteers.

The mayor promoted this action on 31.03.2019, posting a photo capturing the pink bus, used by volunteers, with the message “we are all Londoners”: “Our #LondonIsOpen bus tour continues today, offering legal assistance sessions and tips for #EUCitizens who need assistance with established status applications. Every Londoner in the EU is appreciated, that’s why we try to make your stay easier”. Along with this message, hashtags were published such as: #eucitizensintheuk, #brexit, and #thisislondon.

Sadiq Khan also uses creative videos: the post from 14.02.2020, which accumulated a total of 8,448 views and 71 comments, relies on a “dictionary” type video material, with the help of which followers can learn to say “You I love” in all the languages of the European Union<sup>48</sup> – “This Valentine’s Day, I want European Londoners to feel especially loved by their city. Share this video with a European Londoner you know: #LondonIsOpen”. With this message, Sadiq Khan once again addresses European (Union) citizens, explicitly integrating the British people.

In “Twitter for Diplomats” Andreas Sandre indicates, in the manner of a simple guide, the most important steps that must be followed by a diplomat in order to make maximum use of the Twitter platform. The guide emphasizes the need to use as little “bureaucratic” language as possible and a creative approach<sup>49</sup> that fits within 140 characters and conveys a clear and attractive message. Without explicitly naming this aspect, Andreas Sandre insists precisely on the force of attraction (in the soft power manner) of digital diplomacy. As one of the purposes of using the online environment is to gather as many followers as possible, relevant to the implementation of the target objectives, the user of the social platform must successfully use all online tools and analyse all available parameters. Thus, the tone of a message, the language used, the hashtags used or the time/day<sup>50</sup> it has been posted on, all become important factors in increasing the popularity and impact of the account.

Andreas Sandre argues that the diplomat – the politician by extension – must observe trends in the digital sphere or on the social network used and strengthen the relationship with followers<sup>51</sup>. Therefore, in developing any strategy on social media, it is crucial to observe what type of material users prefer – photos, text, or video – and what are the topics that generate the most reactions. Based on these indices, the diplomat can build an effective approach to the online environment.

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8iczz3Htzu/>, accessed: 17.05.2020.

<sup>49</sup> Andreas Sandre, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 62-67.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.



Brexit remains a real phenomenon in the online space, the users of social networks being involved in discussions and extensive posts on this political event. The hashtag #Brexit ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the top of the most used hashtags on Twitter<sup>52</sup>, a relevant sign not only for private interaction, but a relevant sign, able to shape the global agenda<sup>53</sup>. This is also the case with #LondonIsOpen and #NotMyBrexit hashtags<sup>54</sup>.

On the day the UK officially left the European Union, Sadiq Khan was extremely active on social media, especially Twitter, understanding the importance of effective, real-time communication. One of the posts is addressed directly to European Union citizens living in London. The message conveyed is one of appreciation, solidarity and encouragement; they are reminded that London will remain true to the European spirit, progressive ideas, liberal values, decency and diversity. The text was accompanied by the hashtag with the status of slogan – #LondonIsOpen, an “icon” with the flag of the European Union and an image, in the colours of the EU flag. The post attracted a considerable number of interactions – about 7,000 likes and 2,300 shares. Addressing foreign nationals in London, the Mayor sent a real diplomatic message.

Another moment that demonstrates both Sadiq Khan’s diplomatic skills and how digital diplomacy can work with classical diplomacy is his visit to Brussels on 18.02.2020. Its purpose was to negotiate the rights of the British in the context of Brexit, more precisely, the diplomatic attempt to persuade the European Union to grant “associated citizenship” to the British who want to keep their EU rights after leaving the European space. Khan argued his position, stating that there are “millions of Londoners and Britons who still feel and want to be European” and who would like to keep the freedoms offered by EU membership. He reaffirmed the hope that the future of the United Kingdom would remain closely linked to the rest of Europe, which is why he was publicly calling for “associated citizenship” and to address this proposal with the opening of negotiations in March 2020<sup>55</sup>.

The meeting was posted on Twitter by both Sadiq Khan and Guy Verhofstadt. The mayor of London redistributed Guy Verhofstadt’s post, in which he expressed his support for “associate citizenship”. The photo that accompanies the text-message leaves the impression of a snapshot, none of the interlocutors look at the camera, but look at each other. Sadiq Khan is involved in the discussion, explaining and gesturing, and Guy Verhofstadt is caught smiling. This type of image loaded with a feeling of familiarity (the interlocutors are sitting on the chair, very close to each other, and the body position suggests relaxation) is atypical compared to the classic photos taken during diplomatic visits.

<sup>52</sup> Andreas Sandre, *2019 in review: top 10 digital diplomacy moments*, accessed: 17.05.2020, URL: <<https://medium.com/digital-diplomacy/2019-in-review-top-10-digital-diplomacy-moments-d4e6d9752904>>.

<sup>53</sup> Antonio Deruda, *The Digital Diplomacy Handbook. How to use social media to engage with global audiences*, 2014, p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Ewan Somerville, *Brexit Day: Sadiq Khan leads #LondonIsOpen campaign as UK departure looms*, accessed: 17.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/brexit-day-protests-london-is-open-campaign-sadiq-khan-a4350366.html>>.

<sup>55</sup> Adam Payne, *Sadiq Khan is trying to convince Brussels to let some Brits keep their EU citizenship after Brexit*, accessed: 17.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.businessinsider.com/sadiq-khan-asks-brussels-let-brits-keep-eu-rights-brexit-2020-2>>.



On YouTube, and on the official account of the City Hall of London, @MayorsOfficeLondon<sup>56</sup>, the diplomatic strategy approached in relation to Brexit is reaffirmed. At the end of May 2019, a number of 21 videos were posted: “EU Londoners HUB – POLISH”, “EU Londoners Hub – HUNGARIAN”, “EU Londoners Hub – LATVIAN”, “EU Londoners Hub – ROMANIAN” etc. depending on the language in which the information was presented. Each video features a foreign national, who speaks the language of their country, explaining the most important issues and administrative changes that have converged since Brexit. Specifically, foreign nationals who want to work in London are invited to access the website <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/eu-londoners-hub> to learn more about what they need to do to obtain “established” status and have the right to work in the United Kingdom after leaving the European Union – online, free, step-by-step, and in their native language

The so-called campaign certifies that the online strategy goes beyond a visual, communication and information framework and leads directly, concretely to action. This intercultural approach is equivalent to an act of public diplomacy, facilitated by the means of (post) modern technology. The message conveyed from the beginning of the video is that Sadiq Khan considers every citizen of the European Union, who lives in London, an integral and important part of city life.

Another example of posting on YouTube is the video uploaded on 05.09.2018 and entitled “Why join the Team London Ambassadors?”<sup>57</sup>. The video, which does not exceed one minute<sup>58</sup>, presents a part of the team of volunteers, “ambassadors” of London, who are in the most visited places in the city and guide tourists through information and advice. In the filming you can easily notice some of the most representative attractions of the metropolis, such as London Bridge, but also the fact that the volunteers come from various backgrounds and social categories – British, people of colour, people with disabilities, etc. The initiative of the mayor’s office comes from the desire to transform the metropolis into an attractive space for tourists and contributes to the formation of a strong and current national and local brand. The presence in the online environment becomes a catalyst for the action – attracting more volunteers, but also more tourists.

Sadiq Khan’s posts are part not only of a logic of information and communication (with the help of media and online transmission channels), but also of a logic of action and the materialization of political and diplomatic approaches in social media. Known in the public space as the leader of the anti-Brexit movement, on the last day when the United Kingdom was still a member of the European Union, on 31.01.2020, Sadiq Khan organized a series of specific actions: for example, in all stations of the capital’s subway system, messages were circulated such as “London is open and everyone is welcome”. The buses in the city carried the message (in different languages): “We are all Londoners”.

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkwDAIbXgqE>, accessed: 17.05.2020.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5i82hwYdEo>, accessed: 17.05.2020.

<sup>58</sup> Note in this regard the preference for video materials. They are mounted in a modern way, emphasizing the essential, dynamically shaping the atmosphere. At the same time, the predisposition to use short videos comes precisely from a good knowledge of the online environment. The user of social platforms, who watches the posts on the phone, tablet and is in constant motion, wants to get the information as quickly as possible.

*A Combined Response to Brexit: Sadiq Khan and Naomi Campbell  
– On the Power of Cultural-Digital Diplomacy*

Digital diplomacy has the ability to model itself in relation to the communication channel chosen for disseminating the message.

Sadiq Khan, the informal ambassador of the British space, chooses to deliver an explicit response to Brexit through British Vogue magazine. The dialogue, as a form of conjugated response, envisages a unique approach: offering an exclusive interview to the British model of colour, Naomi Campbell, for the online edition of the famous fashion publication. The video was uploaded on the official YouTube account<sup>59</sup>, Facebook<sup>60</sup> and on the publication's website<sup>61</sup>, as part of the December 2017 issue. It gained popularity in the online space: on YouTube, only on the official British Vogue account, it has 167,147 views (4,700 likes, 203 dislikes, 421 comments)<sup>62</sup>, and Facebook has 544,000 views (7,600 likes, 349 comments, 2,000 shares)<sup>63</sup>. On Google, the phrase "Sadiq Khan and Naomi Campbell interview" generates a number of 620.000 results<sup>64</sup>. This shows that the interview was taken over or discussed by other online publications and raised real interest in the online space.

The dialogue was promoted by both Sadiq Khan and Naomi Campbell on personal social media accounts. There were two such posts on the model's Instagram account, both containing a short excerpt from the interview: one of them was published on 08.11.2017 (gathering 675,048 views, 60,327 likes and 608 comments), and the second one was published a day later, on 09.11.2017 (gathering 625,356 views, 47,504 likes and 457 comments)<sup>65</sup>. Sadiq Khan uploaded two posts promoting this interview on his Instagram account @mayorofldn – the first published on 07.11.2017, features the cover of British Vogue magazine, along with the description: "Proud to have been included in its first issue for @britishvogue, talking about my ambitions for Londoners and priorities for our city. And it's great to see Londoner @adwoaaboah on the magazine's stunning cover! #LondonIsOpen"<sup>66</sup>.

The post accumulated a total of 1,436 likes and 25 comments – in the context in which Sadiq Khan had just opened the named account at the time of posting<sup>67</sup>. The second post promoting the interview was an excerpt from the interview given for the British publication. Uploaded online on 08.11.2017, the post garnered

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIPPG7xIJ5A>, accessed: 17.05.2020.

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/BritishVogue/videos/1727358673961672/>, accessed: 17.05.2020.

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.vogue.co.uk/video/naomi-campbell-sadiq-khan-december-2017-vogue>, accessed: 17.05.2020.

<sup>62</sup> Information taken from the official British Vogue YouTube account, accessed: 27.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIPPG7xIJ5A>>.

<sup>63</sup> Information taken from the official British Vogue Facebook account, accessed: 27.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.facebook.com/BritishVogue/videos/1727358673961672/>>.

<sup>64</sup> [https://www.google.com/search?q=sadiq+khan+and+naomi+campbell+intevriu&rlz=1C1CHBD\\_enR0882RO882&oq=sadiq+khan+and+naomi+campbell+intevriu&aqs=chrome..69i57.12340j0j1&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=sadiq+khan+and+naomi+campbell+intevriu&rlz=1C1CHBD_enR0882RO882&oq=sadiq+khan+and+naomi+campbell+intevriu&aqs=chrome..69i57.12340j0j1&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8), accessed: 27.05.2020.

<sup>65</sup> The British model has 9.2 million followers. The information is taken from her Instagram account, URL: <<https://www.instagram.com/naomi/>>, accessed: 27.05.2020.

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/BbNPCOZFZLg/>, accessed: 17.05.2020.

<sup>67</sup> Sadiq Khan's Instagram account was opened in mid-March 2017, the first post dating from 14.03.2017.

a total of 14,060 views, 1,887 likes and 50 comments. Sadiq Khan also posted the cover of the British *Vogue* special edition on the Instagram staff account, gathering 1,586 likes and 26 comments<sup>68</sup>.

The interview takes place against the backdrop of another online collaboration with British *Vogue* to support the British fashion industry. Under the well-known hashtag-slogan #LondonIsOpen, a video material was made to present London as a capital of international fashion. The video, titled “London’s fashion industry gets behind Mayor Sadiq Khan’s #LondonIsOpen campaign” was uploaded on the official YouTube page of @Mayors Office London, on 20.09.2016. The 45-second material captures the dynamic setting of the British fashion industry, highlighting models, photographers, British *Vogue* journalists, or fashion designers – they come from different ethnic groups and suggest diversity specific to the creative industry called.

Under the premise that London is open to fashion, the authorities’ support for the creative industries, strongly affected by the changes brought by Brexit<sup>69</sup>, is reaffirmed. To further suggest involvement in the field, Sadiq’s video presence is effective: he appears in a short frame (between the 18 and 21-second marks into the video) in a fashion workshop, while analysing pieces of fabric<sup>70</sup>.

The interview analysed is an exponent of what cultural-digital diplomacy represents today, in the explicit key of what Joseph Nye called the driving force of diplomacy<sup>71</sup>. Using several contextual elements (platform used, discussion framework, language, etc.), the diplomatic discourse attracts the target audience using soft power strategies. Ultimately, this act involves the ability to influence others to get “the results you want through attraction, rather than coercion or payment. The soft power of a country is based on its cultural resources, values and policies”<sup>72</sup>, and this becomes more accurately displayed – fashion is par excellence the field of attraction displayed!

Moreover, attractiveness (in terms of soft power), the interview has an affirmed political and cultural stake: the confirmation for Europeans and not only that the United Kingdom remains an open and inclusive space.

The analysed video has a number of features that recommend it as a relevant example of digital diplomacy.

A first argument is that the interlocutors, Sadiq Khan and Naomi Campbell, are not sui generis diplomats. However, both become invested with the prerogative of representatives of British culture, with the advantage of being able to easily address a wide, varied and international audience, being well-known personalities. “Seduction and attraction”<sup>73</sup> are, as Joseph Nye calls them, important elements

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/BbOo0-mnGXj/>, accessed: 17.05.2020.

<sup>69</sup> The media text analysed is reminiscent of London Fashion Week, an event indirectly affected by Brexit. The new travel and entry conditions in the UK could significantly affect the number of international participants attending these events. A low turnout would not only affect the image and status of the event but would lead to considerable financial losses in both the fashion and related industries such as service delivery or HoReCa.

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UY7NIigDIU>, accessed: 18.05.2020.

<sup>71</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Volume: 616, New York, Sage Publications, 2008, p. 94.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*. p. 95.

of contemporary diplomacy conducted according to the criteria of soft power, having the ability to shape the preferences of individuals and make them want what the diplomat wants, according to the established agenda<sup>74</sup>. From this point of view, the presence of Sadiq Khan and the model Naomi Campbell is a real advantage, both being relevant characters for the general public, with strong communication and persuasion skills in a soft way.

Another advantage of Sadiq Khan is the connection with a wide audience, an attribute that resides in the promoted image: British citizen, of Pakistani origin, son of immigrants, who comes from a problematic socio-economic environment and who managed to overcome his status by perseverance, study and work. This is mentioned from the beginning of the interview<sup>75</sup>, in order to establish a strong connection with the audience – they can identify with the interviewee, but also with the message sent. The memory of his origins, from the beginning, establishes a special relationship with the audience, which will be tempted to follow the rest of the discussion considering the confession, personal, biographical aspects. In other words, the interpretation of the interview and the shared visions and ideas are directly influenced precisely by the order and ordering of the sequences in the presentation.

A second appeal this time diplomatically concerns the communication channel used. British *Vogue* (in the online version) is a unique choice, but well-framed in the context of democratizing diplomacy. Following the logic of a necessary force of attraction, the use of an online platform dedicated to fashion, to the detriment of a well-known political publication, is a well-argued choice. The sociology of cultural consumption, taste and preferences appears, especially in the case of young people, marked by the internet, digitalization and new cultural distribution channels, and the interview only confirms this aspect. The decision to present a video with an extraordinary political load and stake such as Brexit follows a strategy aimed at the general public, for which political events are not an everyday interest, or who do not have the necessary training and knowledge to follow and understand a classical political debate – rigid, difficult to understand, with much too formal or academic language.

Also, the chosen publication enjoys a real international reputation, being a pioneer of the creative industry and of the specialized press in this field, which makes it relevant not only for the Anglo-Saxon space, but also globally. Due to this fact, the message transmitted by the two interlocutors, especially by Sadiq Khan, becomes a diplomatic tool used by the politician to elaborate a persuasive/attractive speech.

A third level concerns the moment of publication/appearance of the interview – the special edition of the magazine from December 2017. This was the first issue made by the new editor, Edward Enninfu, the first black British in this leading position. Therefore, the interview with Sadiq Khan, in turn, the first Muslim mayor of London, comes in a context of celebrating diversity, progress and conveys a global message of solidarity and ethnic inclusion in the British space.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>75</sup> Information taken from the video with the interview, available on YouTube, accessed: 18.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1PPG7xIJ5A&t=228s>>.

The interview takes place in London City Hall, an architectural and cultural symbol of the metropolis, with a panoramic view and perspective. The choice of space gives an official framework to the discussion and highlights London as the main element promoted. It is also highlighted that the guest of *Vogue* magazine, Sadiq Khan is the representative figure of the institution / space in question, an authority in the field he represents.

The first part of the interview discusses the issue of ethnic and religious minorities, both interlocutors being part of a minority group. Sadiq Khan initiates the discussion based on personal examples and insists on the importance of solidarity and social inclusion. He argues that personal experience is also the experience of other non-British (ethnically) people in London. In his view, overcoming cultural barriers, discrimination and being part of a social mechanism in which ethics, work and solidarity prevail is the true face of the British space. Clearly, this approach responds to Brexit and anti-immigrant voices. Thus, starting from his personal example, Sadiq Khan publicly conveys that the United Kingdom and London, which he represents, remain open and eager to continue to support minorities, in order to strengthen a democratic and successful British society. Emphasizing this, the politician reaffirms the strength of London's attractiveness. The discourse seems to be aimed at trying to get those who listen to the interview, especially those from ethnic minority groups and foreigners, to look at London as a place they would like to associate with and where they want to be, would love to work in, or invest in. The data of the speech-interview can be linked to the perspective issued by Rand Corporation, which suggests that the relevant indicator of a country's attractiveness, so efficient use of soft power strategies, is the answer to the question: "Where else do you want to live outside your country?"<sup>76</sup>.

Based on personal experience and the racial issues discussed, Sadiq Khan sharply states that an event such as Brexit aggravates the situation of minorities, fuelling ethnic separatism and discriminatory attitudes. The mayor explains this attitude in the key of a reaction to the socio-economic discontent that led the British to vote for Britain to leave the European Union<sup>77</sup>.

Despite the fact that London has been considerably marked by a series of tragic events, such as the terrorist attacks in 2017, its positive image of a city that finds its internal resources in overcoming the difficulties that prevails. The politician, using the quote from the author Zadie Smith – "London is a state of mind"<sup>78</sup>, sends a public message according to which London is "a way of being", "a way of feeling" and "a way of relating with others" in the spirit of freedom and open thinking. According to S. Khan, in London, differences are not only tolerated, but respected, fully accepted, and celebrated as an attribute of individuality and uniqueness. Moreover, he would insist that the British would have a different attitude towards minorities and rethink the issue of Brexit if politicians explained, using clear and accurate data, what the economic impact of leaving the European Union has.

<sup>76</sup> Ying Fan, *Soft power: the power of attraction or confusion?*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, available at: [https://www.academia.edu/5185400/Soft\\_power\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_attraction\\_or\\_confusion](https://www.academia.edu/5185400/Soft_power_the_power_of_attraction_or_confusion).

<sup>77</sup> One of the grievances and fears of the British was that the large number of foreigners coming to the United Kingdom affected them economically, occupying their jobs.

<sup>78</sup> Information taken from the video interview, available on YouTube, accessed: 18.05.2020, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIPPG7xIJ5A&t=228s>.



In the full version of the interview, also published in *Vogue* magazine, Sadiq Khan attaches great importance to the creative industries, which he considers essential for the economic, cultural and social life of London, but also of the UK: “One of the things I try to explain to the British government is this: even if you don’t understand why fashion and culture are important for the city we live in, there is an economic case for that”<sup>79</sup>.

The importance of the field for the economy is also highlighted: “One in six jobs in London is in the creative industries. And do you know what most of the creative industries are? Fashion. It contributes tens of billions of pounds to our economy. You don’t want to create a situation where talented people feel that the only way to reach their potential is by leaving. Or for talented people from overseas who don’t want to come here”<sup>80</sup>.

So, one of the visible concerns the mayor has is that London will no longer be viewed with interest by Europeans. When N. Campbell asked Sadiq Khan what Britain’s biggest challenges were in relation to Brexit, he replied that: “the obstacles [that it would put] in the way of the talent that comes here. And what is the secret of any big city in the world? Talent”<sup>81</sup>. The materialization of this assumption would considerably affect the degree of attractiveness of Great Britain, its soft power, but also the economic and technological evolution. Diverse workforce, different personalities and cultural backgrounds are an advantage in culture and art-related industries, contributing significantly to a successful creative process. To achieve this, the authorities, together with those working in these sectors, must think as inclusively as possible<sup>82</sup>.

The British politician has a constant discourse, the ideas promoted remaining, broadly the same, which proves that his strategy is a long-term one, thoroughly prepared and articulated. In support of this statement we recall the post-dated 02.08.2019: the text “London. This is where talent thrives”/“London. The place where the talent flourishes” is individualized, placed centrally, the background and the font used to bring it a plus of originality and facilitating its ability to be discovered in the online environment.

Sadiq Khan uses the example of the creative industries for at least a number of key reasons. Some of these aim at the fact that the cultural sectors represent the multitude of activities that are based on cultural values, or other creative-artistic expressions and are defined in the legal bases of the Creative Europe program, and their support is provided by Eurostat. The European Union’s growing interest in these industries is not only due to strictly economic reasons, but also to the fact that their impact is vital in developing a common sense of European identity, culture and values. The cultural and creative sectors also stimulate

<sup>79</sup> Alistair Foster, *Naomi Campbell interviews Sadiq Khan on impact of Brexit on British fashion in Edward Enninful’s first Vogue*, in *The Standard*, accessed: 05.2020, URL: < <https://www.standard.co.uk/fashion/news/naomi-campbell-interviews-sadiq-khan-on-the-impact-of-brex-it-on-british-fashion-in-edward-enninfuls-a3685396.html> >.

<sup>80</sup> Information taken from the video interview, available on YouTube, accessed: 18.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIPPG7xIJ5A&t=228s>>.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>82</sup> Rebecca Pugh, *Brexit and the creative industries*, accessed: 18.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.thisishome.co.uk/brexit-and-the-creative-industries/>>.



innovation, acting as a catalyst for change in other sectors. With the emergence of complex-creative business models, the cultural and creative sectors are increasingly becoming a decisive component for almost every product and service<sup>83</sup>.

The UK has a long and successful history of cultural/creative-global transactions. Its creative industries are true success stories, providing more than £ 27 billion in service exports in 2016 or about 11% of total UK exports<sup>84</sup>. Brexit makes this type of cultural exchange difficult, making it much more difficult for artists to promote themselves, market their products/art or travel the European space.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates the UK's accounts for almost a quarter of total domestic investment across the European Union, much higher than any other Member State. According to official data, in the period 2017-2018, 2,072 domestic investment projects were completed, covering over 91,000 jobs<sup>85</sup>.

The creative industries are one of the fastest growing sectors in the UK, twice the rate of the global economy. Those in the creative industries are overwhelmingly anti-Brexit – a poll by the Federation of Creative Industries (CIF) found that 96% of its members voted to stay in the European Union in the 2016 referendum. Beyond political reasons, there are practical reasons why artists and staff involved in the creative industry are concerned about Brexit – their concerns are moving towards free movement, funding and reputation<sup>86</sup>.

The UK has a unique combination of assets in media, culture and education that allows it to create and transmit trends and influence: it ranked 1st in the Portland Soft Power Index 30 in 2018, with London being a constant presence in the Global Power Cities Index.

As a direct cultural consequence of Brexit, the European Commission cancelled the UK's right to implement the European Capital of Culture program in 2023. When Liverpool was the capital of culture in 2008, the city recorded a number of an additional 9.7 million visits and a £750 million injection into the local economy<sup>87</sup>.

Cultural diplomacy and the creative industries are based on culture and belong to its extended sphere. Cultural diplomacy is a complementary approach to classical diplomacy, which, although ultimately oriented towards the same major national goals, uses different practices and addresses different audiences. Specifically, cultural diplomacy is diplomacy that engages the general public, outside the official area, to inform and educate them. Familiarity, trust, admiration are the elements that a true cultural diplomat tries to instil in their interlocutors.

Public/cultural diplomacy remains one of the most sophisticated foreign actions of a state. In its superlative forms, it is a complex approach, which is at the intersection of politics, classical diplomacy, arts, culture and science, creative industries, public relations, national branding. The field includes alternative

<sup>83</sup> *Supporting cultural and creative sectors, Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) and related ecosystems*, accessed: 19.05.2020, URL: <[https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/cultural-creative-industries\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/cultural-creative-industries_en)>

<sup>84</sup> *Five Reasons to Choose UK Creative Industries*, 18.05.2020, URL: <<https://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/uk-creative-overview/why-the-uk>>.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>86</sup> Ian Youngs, *What could Brexit mean for the UK's creative talent?*, in *BBC News*, accessed: URL: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-44300562>>.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*.

approaches and practices that transcend the approved international cultural exchange scheme. Unilateral, univocal action leaves room for mutual action; the cultural diplomacy project is a bilateral creation<sup>88</sup>, which contains elements and protagonists of both cultures<sup>89</sup>.

In the words of Sadiq Khan, part of the post from 02.04.2018: "It is about diversity everywhere – whether it is about race, size, socio-economic context, religion, sexuality. That's what I want to celebrate with this cover"<sup>90</sup>. The photo referred to is that of several women of different nationalities, religions, and covers points that once again strengthen Sadiq Khan's vision of building a successful society, united in diversity, to accept and celebrate the unique differences of individuals.

We can thus certify that Sadiq Khan's digital/online diplomacy recommends him as a cultural "ambassador", whose objectives are recognized both in the "local-national-international" triad, but also in the vicinity of public and cultural diplomacy.

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