

## IS THE EUROPEAN UNION A MODEL FOR OTHER INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS FROM CERTAIN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY INSTRUMENTS' PERSPECTIVE?<sup>1</sup>

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**Petra Vytečka Šedinová**

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### **Shrnutí:**

#### **JE EVROPSKÁ UNIE MODELEM PRO JINÉ NADNÁRODNÍ ORGANIZACE Z POHLEDU VYBRANÝCH INSTRUMENTŮ VEŘEJNÉ DIPLOMACIE?**

Cílem článku "Je Evropská unie modelem pro jiné nadnárodní organizace z pohledu vybraných instrumentů veřejné diplomacie?" je určit v jakém směru lze toto tvrzení vyvrátit či kladně potvrdit. Text článku nabízí komparativní srovnání vybraných instrumentů veřejné diplomacie Evropské unie a Africké unie, pokládá si tři klíčové otázky, na které autorka v závěru textu nachází odpovědi, a zároveň analyzuje míru inspirace EU strategie veřejné diplomacie směrem k praktikám Africké unie. Článek se v rámci veřejné diplomacie zaměřuje především na oblast sociálních médií a mediálních kampaní, skrze které zkoumá míru angažovanosti a vzájemnou inspiraci mezi oběma zkoumanými organizacemi.

**Klíčová slova:** mezinárodní organizace, veřejná diplomacie, veřejné informace, EU, AU, evropská studia, média, veřejné mínění

### **Abstract:**

The goal of the article "Is the European Union a model for other intergovernmental organisations from certain public diplomacy instruments' perspective?" is to refute or confirm the statement. The text provides a comparative analysis of the EU's and AU's public diplomacy's selected instruments, formulates three key questions to which the author finds answers at the end of the text, and at the same time suggests the level of inspiration by the EU public diplomacy strategy towards the African Union's policies. Within the frame of public diplomacy, the text focuses mainly on social media and media campaigns through which it searches for the level of engagement and mutual inspiration of both researched institutions.

**Keywords:** international organisations, public diplomacy, public information, EU, AU, European studies, media, public opinion

### **Introduction**

International organizations and particularly international intergovernmental organizations such as the European Union are without doubt major arenas for public

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diplomacy and decision-making process in the world. The European Union in over fifty years of its existence plays an important role in everyday lives of any European citizen. With the increasing public engagement, world globalization or according to Thomas Friedman's "flattening of the world" (Friedman, 2007), and mainly thanks to social media's essential role, a public diplomacy strategy of any intergovernmental organization plays a crucial part of its existence and functioning. In other words, all the treaties, symbols, programs, projects, initiatives, regulations, laws, elected representatives, and all aspects forming an intergovernmental institution are not visible and communicated toward the target group if there is no relevant public diplomacy applied.

"Public diplomacy...deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications," (Cull, 2016) as the term public diplomacy has been established and formulated by Edmund Gullion in 1965. Gullion's PD definition can still be partially applied today; however, the globalized world with its new technologies, different means of communications, more engaged public approach, and other factors need to be taken into account.

For this article it is important to define the term public diplomacy in relation to an international organization. More than Gullion's classical public diplomacy described above, we now talk more about the new public diplomacy of 21<sup>st</sup> century defined by Jan Melissen (Melissen, 2005) which focuses on a communication based on a dialog, and not on a one way flow of information as it was the case in the last century. Nowadays, everybody can have a say, and international organisations are expecting a feedback and engagement from the public, stakeholders, governments and other institutions. New public diplomacy strategy of an international organisation can, in general, start with: listening and continue to debating, long-term relationship building, positive influencing, targeting, shaping its selected agenda into messages and visuals aimed at the recipients also specified within the strategy. With PD tools ranging from classical websites, bulletins or newsletters, media, events, workshops to wide variety of social media channels. As Melissen states in another research paper, the traditional (public) diplomacy transmuted into a more 'societized' form of diplomacy (Melissen, October, 2011).

Other researched disciplines that are closely related to public diplomacy and also touched upon within this article are, for example, public policy and political marketing. Public policy is also newly researched sector (founded around 1960) and it can be defined as government's activities that are directly or indirectly influencing citizens on three levels: political decisions, political products and political consequences (Potůček, 2005). As both EU and AU are formed by governments as Member States, public policy is interconnected with public diplomacy. "*Political marketing* implies the usage of *marketing* tools, techniques and methods in *political* process. In other words, *political marketing* is the outcome of the marriage between *marketing* and politics" (Menon, 2008). Political marketing can be linked within the text to the mobile technologies and the use of this type of marketing through the studied institutions later described in the Chapter "From Radio to a Smartphone in Africa".

## 1. Similar, but not the same (EU and AU)

The European Union (EU) as an institution has several departments within different key institutions solely focusing on public diplomacy. Among the most important ones are: the Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM) of the European Commission, DG COMM of the European Parliament, Press and Publications Department of the European Council. Aside from those and on a different and more personal line, there are representatives of the EU's institutions that are themselves communicating with their public (of course the personal level of public diplomacy often correlates with the aim to be re-elected again for another term in the office – e.g. members of the European Parliament), however their line is very important because they are the only directly elected representatives with whom the European public (their voters) can feel the closest (unlike with other institutions where the trust of the general public and need to communicate the reason of their existence is more profound).

Directly elected body of the EU, the European Parliament (EP), since 1979, is one of the key aspects helping to understand that the institutions' bodies and structures in Brussels and other European cities are “not them, but us” – the Europeans. 751 directly and democratically elected EP members every five years create a dialog between the institution and the voters, and are part of the overall public diplomacy of the institution in cooperation with the DG COMM. The directly elected body of the EU, the EP, is one of the major differences (from the PD perspective) between the EU and other institutionally similar intergovernmental organization – the African Union.

The African Union (AU) with its seat in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa plays similar role in public diplomacy towards its fifty-four member states as the EU does. Despite the fact that both intergovernmental organizations were created over fifty years ago (AU as former OAU – Organisation of African Unity), they are solving and facing different issues in their respective continents, but both are struggling with the same issue – how to get closer to their citizens, European and African, so they feel more connected to the institution and do not feel that the created bureaucracy is leading its way and promoting unnecessary legislations (in the case of the EU) or employing only family members and friends at the headquarters of the organisation (in the case of the AU). From a political perspective, one can argue that the Unions are fifty years apart and despite the fact that the AU was founded based on a institutional model of the EU, “the AU will have to chart its own course, travel at its own pace, find its own rhythm and write its own history (Babarinde, 2007).”

The article will elaborate on the following three questions:

1. What do both intergovernmental organizations (the EU and the AU) have in common from the perspective of public diplomacy with regard to selected PD instruments?
2. Is the EU somewhat a model to the AU, using and applying, for example, some best PD practices?
3. Are the PD practices applicable from one continent to another?

Currently, PD is a topic of researcher's on-going discussion and one can argue that its relevance and importance is growing year by year. The rise of power of discourse

and growing public diplomacy initiatives suggest the need to communicate, explain, create an image, brand, and target citizens, NGO's and other stakeholders; while they are likewise not only PD targets, but also producers of it. Any citizen or stakeholder with a computer or a smartphone can nowadays easily engage in a dialog with respective institution and become part of the public diplomacy motion. Inspired by a business sector, some initiatives such as nation branding, marketing and PR skill can be a valuable contribution to the public diplomacy field.

## **2. New public diplomacy in Europe and in Africa**

Both Unions were created as a political project of a club of the Member States enforcing the continent's stability and making it stronger, more peaceful and democratic. And as it is written in the core of both the EU and the AU communication strategies (Commission, 2005) (AUC, 2014), the aim is to involve and make the citizens and stakeholders active participants within the system, promote dialog and reach a point when an engaged and informed citizen and stakeholder is satisfied with information received, but is also proactive, and at the same time, willing to express an opinion on programs, funds, goals, strategies and other issues.

EU is currently on a different level of the PD in comparison with the AU using several layers of not only institutional, but also personal communication and extending to the PD in culture, economy, cities and other areas. The main reason is because it is driven and sustained by more democratic institutions and received by the European citizens who are coming from different historical and economical background that is more supportive of their active engagement. The AU, on the other hand, is on a good path approaching and getting closer to their citizens considering the limits starting already with the actual formation of the Union, through the institutional composition coming hand in hand with limited level of democracy in certain Member States, continuing with technical challenges, for example, in the area of Internet or mobile connection, all the way to a third party financial funding of the AU.

Both the EU and the AU are key institutions in Europe and in Africa, providing intergovernmental problem-solving arrangements and activities. They are also independent actors engaging as united intergovernmental entities in public diplomatic activities to attract domestic and international attention, and to work directly with governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), public, stakeholders, and also other international organizations such as the United Nations. The EU and the AU are crucial PD players within their respective continents and beyond, and the role in this field is gradually important as the presence of the institutions' in daily life of many citizens and stakeholders and the need to communicate and exchange with them is indispensable.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century and more precisely the last decade, in line with globalization, shifted traditional public diplomacy performed by diplomats and foreign correspondents into much wider arena and instead of classical public diplomacy as defined by Gullion, we now talk about new public diplomacy that embraces not only individual actors, but also wide range of PD tools that are used to enhance the process. "A central distinction between the old and new public diplomacy demands more complex communication models which present less mechanistic and ambitious conception of communication processes (Pamment, 2012)." Scholars generally define former PD as a one way flow of information set more or less in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; one example of a biased one way form of communication performed usually by non-democratic states is called propaganda (Peterková, 2008).

Since the establishment of social media that have been founded in 2004 and onward, an important milestone enhancing exchange was formed, passing one way communication into a two way interactive dialog that is now at core of every communication strategy.

The new public diplomacy is a major paradigm shift in international political communication both in Europe, and in Africa. Globalisation, a new media landscape, dialog driven communication strategies challenge traditional foreign correspondents, diplomats, and former structures such as the foreign ministries of individual Member States and representatives of communications departments. They can no longer claim to being sole or dominant actors in communicating intergovernmental policy set by international organizations such as the EU or the AU. The new PD demands new ways of elucidating foreign policy to a range of non-governmental international actors, and new ways of evaluating the influence of these communicative efforts. New methods and strategies are applied to reach current demand for information including evaluation and measuring effectiveness of the methods and strategies applied.

### **3. From a radio to a smartphone in Africa**

There are four key factors why PD of both Unions is similar, but still relatively different. Firstly, we need to go back to the creation and realize that the currently united 28 EU Member States and the united 54 AU Member States were in time formed very differently – former through the comprehensive enlargement process of the Member States, and the later by accepting new Member States after Constitutive Act's (Commission, 2001) ratification. Secondly, it is important to consider how the Unions' institutions are functioning, performing their tasks and setting their short term and long term goals because it certainly influences overall public diplomacy of both of them. Thirdly, there are technical circumstances of Internet and mobile connection availability favouring mostly the African citizens in capital cities, despite the fact that according to recent statistical data, the digital revolution in Africa is happening right now and number of mobile phones per thousand inhabitants, for instance, grows more quickly than in Europe. And lastly the third party financial funding of the AU that has been a discussion topic not only on the AU ground but also among citizens of Africa.

When analysing individual PD tools used by both intergovernmental institutions, it is important to consider the similarities and differences while reflecting a journalist's rule of 5W's (what to communicate, to whom, when, why and where) and at the same time respecting a globalized way of communication that sparks dialog and multi-layered exchange of information. Former communication tools replaced new ones as, for example, a radio as the key source of information in Africa is being gradually replaced by a smartphone that is now connecting many Africans to the world. And impact of information technologies on both the European and the African societies is unstoppable and has to be taken into an account when creating any communication strategy.

The EU and the AU focus their work on public outreach both internally within their members, and also to foreign publics with centrally directed communication department units. By joint information dissemination, they demonstrate unified identity of the institution and try to attract the citizens by coordinated messaging and outreach. This strategy is applied by both the African and also the European Union, with the EU having some more profound strategy in the area of culture diplomacy (e.g. the EUNIC

structure), economic diplomacy or EU's recently established diplomatic network (EEAS). The EU has so far implemented the strategic communication programs such as, for instance, 2005 Plan D for Democracy, Dialog and Debate, 2005 Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe by the Commission, e-Commission 2006-2010, 2007 Communicating Europe via Internet – Engaging the Citizens and Communicating Europe in Partnership, and several others (Commission, 2005). Looking at the number of PD programs applied, it is evident that the EU institutions are investing their energy, financial and human resources to inform the EU citizens, making the EU issues as accessible as possible and also giving the citizens priority to communicate with the institutions or representatives of the institutions and becoming engaged.

The AU, in comparison, tries to follow the latest PD trends with social media, events, individual websites for important projects, and comprehensive communication strategies, but the level of engagement of both the Union and also its public is limited due to many factors influencing the two way flow of communication. Interestingly, the African public and stakeholders are becoming more and more engaged also thanks to the fact that the mobile phone penetration has exploded in Africa since 2004 by sevenfold and it is even growing faster than in Europe with an Africa's average of 682 rate of mobile phone owners per thousand inhabitants according to a statistical portrait on the EU and AU (Eurostat, 2014).

Apart from both Union's individual PD strategies, the Joint Africa-EU Strategy also sets a frame to coordinated cooperation also between the two institutions representing Africa and Europe. Based on a Joint Africa-EU Strategy (Strategy, 2007), "the Africa and the EU recognize the need to better communicate with each other and promote social and cultural values of European and African Peoples" which is another angle of communication - not only towards their stakeholders, but also between the two intergovernmental organisations. Africa-EU summits take place every three years to set new strategies for the future.

The results of current PD initiatives are traceable and measurable, but not all the communications units care to evaluate how their PD tools are applied and what impact was created. Using PD tools and going through the whole PD process requires evaluation of the results because without it, financial resources and human capital is used without knowing what the institution received in return. In other words, with social media for instance, it is easy to trace who visited the relevant site and how the number of people liking or sharing the page increases; however, when an institution uses a billboard or other form of campaign, without evaluating the impact of it, it is not clear how efficient it was and how many targeted citizens and stakeholders perceived it.

#### **4. Addis Ababa as Brussels of Africa?**

Public diplomacy is an instrument of cooperation and common ground and it is never a goal in itself, as there is always another policy goal. For instance, both the EU and the AU, aim to get closer through communication to its citizens and stakeholders so they choose various communications lines and themes with which they can apply the PD tools on a topic to be disseminated. For example, establishing European and African Years as awareness campaigns that are aimed to educate citizens and attract the attention of national governments to a particular issue chosen for that particular year. For the AU, the 2016 it is the African Year of Human Rights with Particular Focus on the Rights of Women (AU, 2016) while the EU had designated the 2015 to European Year of Development.

**Table 1 | Similar PD tools used by both Unions (selected by the author):**

PD Tool	EU	AU
<b>EU/AU Year (awareness campaign)</b>	Established in 1983 <sup>1</sup>	Since 2012
<b>50th Anniversary Celebrations</b>	2007 celebrations marking 50th anniversary since the Treaty of Rome (TOGETHER SINCE 1957)	2013 held in Addis Ababa (I am African, I am the African Union)
<b>Newsletters</b>	Individual newsletters by EC DGs , Committees, (e.g. ERTMS Transport, Trade, EEAS, EFSI and other)	AU Echo Newsletter
<b>Websites</b>	For every EU institution, body and agency	General AU website, plus Department, Projects, Summits and Special websites
<b>Long-term strategic plans</b>	Every department of the EC publishes a strategic plan. It sets out the department's vision for the period of the current Commission, which runs until October 2019.	The AU Commission Strategic Plan 2014-2017  Agenda 2063: Africa we want
<b>Booklets/ Publications</b>	EU Bookshop, by Institutions and by topics <b>Documents, reports and data</b> Official documents Reports, studies and booklets Statistics and opinion polls Open data <b>Libraries and archives</b>	AU Handbook AUC library
<b>Social Media</b>	Facebook accounts Twitter accounts Linkedin accounts Google+ accounts YouTube accounts	Facebook accounts Twitter accounts Flickr accounts Livestream accounts YouTube accounts

Sources: (AU, 2016), (EU, 2016)

Getting closer to its citizens and stakeholders is the aim of both institutions' PD strategies. Table 1 shows similar public diplomacy tools such as websites, social media, publications, awareness campaigns, strategic plans, and newsletters that are all presenting the institutions' goals and communicating their achievements (e.g. Millenium Goals and 2063 Aspirations in the case of the AU). The EU uses PD not only on the institutional level, but also on a personal level of most individual representatives of the Parliament, Commission, Council and other EU institutions. The AU, on the other hand, is still much more focused on the institutional way of presentation and communication without much attempt of individual representatives pursuing their role in public diplomacy.

1 List of all European Years can be found:  
([https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/european-years\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/european-years_en))

Both the EU and the AU face different issues when composing their PD strategies. The EU's struggle from a PD perspective is how to make individual topics interesting and attractive to the European public and stakeholders; while the AU is just at the beginning of approaching citizens of individual Member States with, for example, the 2013 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary billboard campaign "I'm African, I'm the African Union". Without a doubt, the level of engagement and ability of European and African citizens to communicate and create a dialog with their related intergovernmental institution differs considerably. Both institutions have at core of their communication strategies to create a dialog and engage. But to evaluate how efficiently they target their audience and stakeholders and what can be improved based on the monitoring and evaluation of the PD tools and processes used would not be a simple task.

**Table 2 presents a social media overview for the AU and EU as institutions and also for several selected high level representatives (Facebook and Twitter only) as of September 28, 2016:**

Institution/Personality	FB (number of likes)	Twitter (no. of followers)
<b>African Union</b>	279.303	174.000(@_AfricanUnion)
<b>PanAfrican Parliament</b>	4399	6974 (@AfrikParliament)
<b>European Union</b>	163.000	-
<b>European Commission</b>	612.000	629.000
<b>European Parliament</b>	2.130.596	259.000
<b>EU Council</b>	237.083	195.000
<b>Donald Tusk</b>	107.896	397.000(@eucopresident)
<b>Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma</b>	6.518	72.300 (@DlaminiZuma)
<b>Jean-Claude Juncker</b>	57.604	309.000(@JunckerEU)
<b>Federika Mogherini</b>	69.401	261.000(@FederikaMog)

Sources: Facebook, Twitter

Based on the numbers in the Table 2, it is evident that the AU as an institution has comparing to the EU institutions very much lacking behind of followers of both types of social media considering the size of the continent (EU is approaching approximately 0,5 billion citizens while AU 0,9 billion Africans). Despite the massive growth of mobiles and the use of the technology in Africa described in the above chapter, the level of literacy and poverty are still playing a major role in the continent and the actual numbers can currently only slowly reach up due to the two obstacles stated above. When looking into individual personalities or bodies within the AU organisation, and in comparison with the EU, there is not much public diplomacy coming from the individual representatives, nor bodies of the institution within the social media.

It is evident that we cannot come to some conclusions based on the number of likes within the selected two types of social media; however, the author wanted demonstrate through this chart of selected institutions' and personalities' engagement a small piece of overall PD strategy focused on social media and its effectiveness within each intergovernmental



institution. With the selected social media channels, the AU is trying to keep up; however, it has a long way to go considering the comparison in numbers of the citizen's engagement and overall numbers of citizens that each institution is targeting.

Despite the growing interest of the European public and stakeholders in the EU's institutions, the trust of the EU institutions varies country by country, but in general terms, the level of citizens' confidence in EU institutions (Council of the European Union, European Parliament and European Commission) is between 2004-2014 decreasing with the European Parliament having the biggest decrease by 15 percentage points within the above mentioned decade. (Eurostat, 2016)<sup>3</sup> So based on the figures, it is possible to state that the more citizens and stakeholders connect and communicate with the respective institution (mainly through social media or directly with their elected representatives in the case of the EP), the level of trust is decreasing.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the international intergovernmental organizations, such as the EU and the AU, have become major arenas for public diplomacy on their respective continents during the past fifty plus years of their existence. In the beginning of the article, three questions were posed and answers were suggested throughout the text. And here are the replies:

1. What do both intergovernmental organizations (the EU and the AU) have in common from the perspective of public diplomacy with regard to selected PD instruments?

Both the EU and the AU, aim to get closer through communication strategies to their citizens and stakeholders so they choose various communications lines and themes with which they can apply the PD tools on a topic to be disseminated as suggested in Table 1 on page nine.

2. Is the EU somewhat a model to the AU, using and applying, for example, some best practices?

Also based on the Table 1, it is evident that the AU is taking over some PD practices that were previously used by the EU (such as the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of the institution); however, not all the PD tools and best practices are possible to replicate in Africa due to different formation, structure and funding of both intergovernmental organisations, Member State's public and stakeholders, and lastly the telecommunication infrastructure differences between the European and African continents (Internet connectivity, number of mobile phones per capita, illiteracy ) also have to be taken into consideration.

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3 "The level of citizens confidence in EU institutions (Council of the European Union, European Parliament and European Commission) is expressed as the share of positive opinions (people who declare that they tend to trust) about the institutions. The indicator is based on the Eurobarometer, a survey which has been conducted twice a year since 1973 to monitor the evolution of public opinion in the Member States. The indicator only displays the results of the autumn survey. Potential replies to the question on the level of confidence include 'tend to trust', 'tend not to trust' and 'don't know' or 'no answer'. Trust is not precisely defined and could leave some room for interpretation to the interviewees."

### 3. Are the PD practices applicable from one continent to another?

The answer for the question 2.) somewhat replied to this one at the same time. Certain PD practices can be applied from a continent to continent; however, there are many factors that influence a PD practise or tool to be successful on one continent, and not working on another. The AU can take the EU as model institution from the public diplomacy perspective with consideration that the audience and stakeholders are much different to those in Europe and while a certain tool can be useful and successful in Europe, it might not necessarily work in Africa.

Globalisation and new technologies created the term new public diplomacy that is more relevant today. The term symbolizes a two way of communication or a dialog between the institution/government and its public and stakeholders rather than one way communication that was applied prior to the creation of social media. The goal of any intergovernmental organisation's communication strategy is to be more visible, transparent, clear and engaged with the public and stakeholders. The EU has much experience with public diplomacy issue despite the fact that the level of trust in the institutions is decreasing and Brexit proved that there is still work to be done in public diplomacy sphere within the individual Member States, however, it is possible to say that the EU can be a model for other intergovernmental organisations, and particularly, the African Union.

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