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THE EU DELEGATION IN SAUDI ARABIA AND THE GCC

COMMUNICATION, VISIBILITY AND CULTURE

ABSTRACT   The paper examines communication and visibility (C&V) aspect in the operations of the EU Delegation in Saudi Arabia and the GFA Consulting Group. The author assumes that properly designed communication using adequate contents may significantly affect the EU external relations. To verify this statement, the twofold approach was used. First, through the lens of Soft Power and EU actorness, it looks into the theoretical dimension of the international relations and its possible links with communication process. Second, drawing on existing internal EU documents (*Communication and Visibility in EU-financed External Actions – Requirements for Implementing Partners* 2018[1] by the EU Delegation in Saudi Arabia, and *Information and Communication Handbook for EU Delegations in the Third Countries and International Organizations*, published in 2012[2]) the paper offers analytical framework to explore the qualitative and quantitative nature of the online communication undertaken in social media platform both by the EU Delegation in Saudi Arabia and the GFA.

Keywords: communication, visibility, European Union, Arabian Peninsula, cultural diplomacy, soft power, actorness, Saudi Arabia, GCC

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[1]   *Communication and Visibility in EU-financed External Actions – Requirements for Implementing Partners*, at https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-visibility-requirements-2018_en.pdf, 15 May 2021.

[2]   *Information and Communication Handbook for EU Delegations in the Third Countries and International Organizations*, at https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/ghana/documents/press_corner/20121231_en.pdf, 15 May 2021.

INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is an absolute monarchy headed by king and prime minister, Salman bin Abd Al Aziz Al Saud, although due to his age, the king's duties are slowly being transferred to Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). Saudi Arabia covers an area of 2.15 million square kilometers, occupying most of the Arabian Peninsula and has a population of nearly 35 million.[3] The majority of the population are Muslims with a significant predominance of Sunnis 85-90%,[4] among whom the orthodox Wahhabi movement is dominant, which exerts a huge impact on the Saudi social and moral sphere. Saudi Arabia is seen as one of the most authoritarian and oppressive countries in the world. Only in 2016, an attempt was made to liberalize social life as part of strategic plan entitled "Vision 2030." The reduction of the religious police activity and granting new rights to women was initiated. However, this change is driven not so much by ethical or philosophical reasons, as by the desire to become independent from Saudi Arabia's main source of income, namely, oil.

Among the reasons for the European Union to pursue its presence in Saudi Arabia, both in the political-economic and cultural fields, we identify the following:

First, the KSA has one of the largest reserves of oil in the world and it plays a key role as a global producer of this commodity. Second, in the region there are the main sea transport routes from the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea further towards East Asia and South Africa. Third, Saudi Arabia is a significant trade partner of the EU. The KSA import 21%[5] of all its goods from the EU exceeding China and USA and exports 18%,[6] which makes the Union second largest target market for Saudi products. Fourth, the region's political stability translates into the dynamics of Europeans' lives, as evidenced by the ongoing conflict in Yemen resulting in an increase in the number of refugees reaching European borders, or the functioning of radical Islam having a direct impact on the activities of terrorist organizations in Europe and, therefore, on the security level of the Community. It is worth adding that Saudi Arabia is a counterweight to Iran, which is constantly building its geopolitical power.

Unfortunately, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the EU is feeble due to numerus obstacles and lack of formal bilateral relationship. On top of that, it is mainly established through the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Saudi Arabia is one of few G20 states that has almost no contractual relationship with the EU. It has no strategic partnership, no free trade agreement, and no political

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[3]   "Saudi Arabia", *The CIA World Factbook*, at https://www.cia.gov/the-worldfactbook/countries/saudi-arabia/, 30 May 2021.

[4]   Ibid.

[5]   EU Delegation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *GCC Country Economic Profile Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, p. 6, at https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/country_fiche_saudi_arabia_2020.pdf, 29 May 2021.

[6]   Ibid.

declaration. Saudi Arabia only opened its mission to the EU in Brussels in 2018, four dec-
ades after China and Russia.[7]

Amongst the biggest discrepancies which effectively block Saudi-EU relations, we can name human rights issues, financing of the extremist movements including Wahhabism as well as arms trade, which despite the primary willingness of some of the European states such as France, Germany, and UK to sustain or even increase weapons sales to Saudi Arabia, was blocked by the European Parliament in 2016 after the outbreak of civil war in Yemen.

The Member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council cooperate closely in many fields, i.e., political, economic, and cultural. Therefore, European bilateral relations with particular countries such as Saudi Arabia are often defined through the agenda and political framework destined to interact with the whole GCC group. The basis for the institutionalized relations between European Community and the GCC countries was established in 1989 after conclusion of the Cooperation Agreement.[8] The agreement remains valid until today, however the negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement launched in 1990 have continued to be suspended since 2008.

Since European External Action Service was established, European Union have gradually started to develop the network of its diplomatic posts, replacing European Commission Delegations to the third countries with the EU Delegations. Under the EEAS, Delegation represents the EU as a whole community of Member States rather than merely European Commission. EU Delegation in the current form was opened in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2010. Beyond the KSA, it represents European Union to the Gulf Cooperation Council Secretariat, Oman, and Bahrain. Thus, this Delegation plays very important role in the Arabian Peninsula.

The responsibilities of the Delegation comprise political relations, security, trade and cultural relations between EU and Gulf countries so it deals with a broad agenda.[9] Apart from governments, it also works with the business community, civil society, and non-governmental organizations. Additionally, it conducts negotiations on behalf of the member states in the case of an approved mandate to do so.[10] Moreover, it provides information on recent developments on European integration, EU policies, and cooperation programs to the involved entities such as government agencies, the media, business, and academia.[11]

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[7]   B. Oppenheim, "You Never Listen to Me: The European-Saudi Relationship after Khashoggi", *Policy Paper*, May 2019, p. 6.

[8]   *Cooperation Agreement between the European Economic Community, of the one part, and the countries parties to the Charter of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (the State of the United Arab Emirates, the State of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar and the State of Kuwait) of the other part*, L54/3, 25 February 1989, at https://eur-lex.euro pa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:21989A0225(01)&qid=1500114915255& from=EN, 16 May 2021.

[9]   EU Delegation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *About the EU Delegation in Saudi Arabia*, at https:// eeas.europa.eu/delegations/saudi-arabia/1723/about-eu-delegation-saudi-arabia_en, 30 May 2021.

[10]   Ibid.

[11]   Ibid.

Nevertheless, a major aspect of a Delegation activity involves its role of increasing the visibility, awareness, and understanding of the EU. This was initially indicated in the TFUE,[12] which states as follows: *Union delegations in third countries and at international organizations shall represent the Union*. It was further reaffirmed in detail in the documents such as *The EU Global Strategy*[13] which highlighted the importance of joined-up approach to public diplomacy and crucial role of the EU Delegations in ensuring coherence and complementarity of the public diplomacy activities with other interrelated projects, for example, funded under Partnership Instrument's Annual Action Program.[14] Coordination is sought especially with the activities sponsored through the EEAS' Press & Information budget, which need to be performed in line with the requirements indicated in the *Information and Communication Handbook for EU Delegations*[15] [t]*o ensure that any communication on EU-funded external actions is consistent with the Union's values and political priorities and with other EU-related communication activities and events*,[16] such as the manual for *Communication and Visibility in EU-financed external actions – requirements for implementing partners*, which was designed and published in 2018.[17]

Therefore, the importance of visibility and communication in the operations of the EEAS through its Delegations seems evident. Two questions need to be addressed in consequence. First, why the EU is interested in engaging externally by facilitating its C&V activities in the structured and orderly manner? And second, how Delegations as well as other implementing partners perform in terms of fulfilling C&V requirements?

To answer the first question, the paper draws from two concepts originally discussed in the field of international relations (IR), namely the 'soft power' and the 'EU actorness.'

Both refer to the willingness of the European Union to act as a normative power with a civilizing mission of spreading European norms and values in the third countries.[18] Joseph Nye's Soft Power theory underlines non-coercive methods such as public or cultural diplomacy which were employed by the EU to peacefully exert influence. On the other hand, as indicated by Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler,[19] the concept of actorness helps to explain the reasons for the EU to engage externally by looking

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[12]   *Consolidated Version of The Treaty on The Functioning of the European Union* Article 221.1, at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT&from=EN, 15 May 2021.

[13]   *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe a Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, p. 49, at https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf, 15 May 2021.

[14]   *European Commission Implementing Decision*, C(2019) 3277 final, Brussels, 6 May 2019, at https://ec.europa.eu/fpi/sites/fpi/files/documents/decision_aap_2019.pdf, 15 May 2021.

[15]   *Information and Communication Handbook…*

[16]   *Communication and Visibility in EU…*, p. 5.

[17]   Ibid.

[18]   J. Zielonka, "Europe's New Civilizing Missions: The EU's Normative Power Discourse", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2013), p. 35.

[19]   C. Bretherton, J. Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor*, New York 2002.

into three constitutive features of the EU actorness: *opportunity*, *presence*, and *capability*.[20] In this paper, communication and visibility practice is understood as an element of the EU soft power with a potential to increase *EU capability*, which relies amongst other things on strategies and procedures for external engagement including external representation.[21] Furthermore and beyond the scope of IR theories, appropriate fulfilment of the C&V requirements seems to be in accordance with the intercultural communication theories explicitly expressed in the following passage: *Communication competence can be understood as an individual's ability to interact appropriately and efficiently with another person in a specific context. As a basic need of human beings, competence can be described as the extent to which a person produces the intended effect in the process of interaction*.[22] The statement may suggest that effectives of the actions designed to make EU more visible depends to large extent on the competent communication process. In the paper, it is assumed the competent communication occurs once the requirements indicated in the internal EU documents are met.

To find the answer for the second question, we need to shed light on the EU practice in the third countries. Therefore, the cases of EU Delegation in Saudi Arabia as well as GFA Consulting Group (an implementing partner of the EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification Project – GFA) are compared in light of the framework consisting of the five qualities describing the communication competence of the actions undertaken (people-centered, local context, local language, partnerships, communication channels). The qualities follow the planning criteria indicated in section 2.1.1 of the C&V manual of 2018[23] and the *Information and Communication Handbook for EU Delegations in the Third Countries and International Organizations* of 2012. The online activity of the EU Delegation and the GFA Consulting Group is the subject of this research. It is important to add that researched EU Delegation activities will embrace culture, whereas GFA Consulting Group is concentrated on economic issues. The purpose of such a comparison is to verify whether culture gives Delegations more opportunities to meet the C&V requirements (competent communication) than mere economic, trade, and business matters. Moreover, the research is focused mainly on the social media because it has become almost synonymous with the internet in the Middle East. Nearly all internet users (95%) use legacy social media or direct messaging; this finding is independent from nationality, gender, or age.[24]

This shows the importance of such a research since the results may be a useful indication for the policy makers of the crucial element that culture is, and may impact

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[20]   Ibid., p. 24.

[21]   Ch. Damro, S. Gstohl, S. Schunz, *The European Union's Evolving External Engagement. Towards New Sectoral Diplomacies?*, London 2018, p. 17.

[22]   K.A. Foss, W.S. Littlejohn, *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, Thousand Oaks 2009, p. 148, at http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=495591&site=eds-live, 15 May 2021.

[23]   *Communication and Visibility in EU...*, p. 8.

[24]   Social Media, *Social Media Ubiquitous, More Used than Email*, at http://www.mideastmedia.org/survey/2015/chapter/social-media.html#, 30 May 2021.

effectives of the EU visibility in the third countries. On top of that, hardly any studies examine communication and visibility aspects of the EU activity[25] and its interdependence with culture, especially in the external dimension. The paper is also linked with a number of publications[26] which raise the problem of *effective communication and significant media exposure in the EU-GCC relations which has been acknowledged already in the relevant literature as a key factor at the root of several setbacks in the interregional dialogue*.[27] Such setbacks may undermine EU legitimacy in the region and thus affect the extent of its actorness. The paper also opens the way for other researchers outside the IR, especially communication scholars, to examine the link between published content and its level of performance in terms of competent communication process.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section explains theoretical concepts of the 'soft power' and the 'EU actorness.' The second one gives insights into Visibility & Communication requirements while engaging in external actions. The third one discusses Partnership Instrument (PI), which next to the EEAS Press & Information budget, is the main source of funding for the external actions including public and cultural diplomacy activities. The fourth focuses on the methodology followed by the analysis and the fifth concludes.

1. SOFT POWER AND THE EU ACTORNESS

1.1 Soft power

According to Joseph Nye, there are two types of power. 'Hard power' involves *the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will*.[28] This form of power will often consist of coercion on the one hand, which represents the threat of military intervention and implementation of economic sanction, and inducements on the other, which stands for reduction of trade barriers or military protection.

In turn, 'soft power' in the international relations means the ability to attract and co-opt, rather than coerce. In other words, through its soft power measures, the

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[25] S. Monza, E. Anduiza, "The Visibility of the EU in the National Public Spheres in Times of Crisis and Austerity", *Politics & Policy*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2016), pp. 499-524.

[26] A.A. Ghafar, S. Colombo, *EU-GCC Relations. The Path towards a New Relationship*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Policy Report No. 2 – March 2020; S.S. Gündoğar, *Saudi Arabia's Relations with the EU and Its Perception of EU Policies in MENA*, PODEM, at http://podem.org.tr/en/researches/saudi-arabias-relations-with-the-eu-and-its-perception-of-eu-policies-in-mena/, 30 May 2021; C. Bianco, "A Gulf Apart: How Europe Can Gain Influence with the Gulf Cooperation Council", ECFR/314, *Policy Brief*, February 2020.

[27] F. Al-Araimi, C. Bianco, "The Role of Mass Media in Building Perceptions of EU-GCC Relations and Related Impacts", in S. Colombo (ed.), *Bridging the Gulf: EU-GCC Relations at a Crossroads*, Roma 2014, p. 275.

[28] J. Nye, "Propaganda Isn't the Way: Soft Power", *International Herald Tribune*, 10 January 2003, at https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/propaganda-isnt-way-soft-power, 15 May 2021.

state can shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction and therefore enable a change of behavior of foreign publics. The defining feature of 'soft power' is that it is non-coercive, not competitive, and free of conflict; the means of 'soft power' include culture, values, norms, and lifestyle, among other things. Hence, the concept of soft power is close to the liberal tradition, even if there is no contradiction between realism and 'soft power.'[29] The major distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' power is that the latter leans towards cooperation, the potency of ideas and dialogue instead of the potential threat of war.

The concept of 'soft power' fits well into the subject of this paper as European Union is more likely to use culture, values, or dialogue instead of military or economic coercion in achieving its goals and priorities in the external actions. As indicated by Patryk Kugiel,[30] the EU identifies itself as a global norm-setter by guarding human rights and promoting democracy as well as providing official development assistance. Additionally, the EU is seen as the model of regional integration and the most successful international organization. Such a perspective complies with the concept of normative power by Ian Manners, which delineates the special role of the EU values and principles that constitute the uniqueness of the EU. As the author argues, the EU's external policy very often refers to the values and principles underlying the integration process and to the norms that are important for the EU.[31] As a result, diverse soft power tools such as cultural diplomacy are being developed by the EU to exert its influence in international relations. Cultural diplomacy is often described as a subcategory of public diplomacy which serves as a foreign policy tool.[32] Some scholars, however, define cultural diplomacy as exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture between nations that serves mutual understanding.[33] The latter definition fits better into the logic of this paper as it presents less state-centric approach to the phenomenon. Furthermore, the European Union explicitly expressed its interest in cultural diplomacy by mentioning it in the strategic documents such as EU's 2016 Global Strategy[34] as well as in the 2016 Joint Communication "Towards an EU Strategy for EU International Cultural Relations." The importance of culture for EU's external relations was also underlined by the former High Representative Federica Mogherini: *When the Europe engages with the world, the culture has to be at the core of our foreign policy. Culture can help us fight and prevent radicalization. But it can also foster economic growth, it can strengthen diplomatic relations and mutual understanding.*

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[29]   J. Nye, *The Future of Power*, New York 2011, p. 82.

[30]   P. Kugiel, "End of European Soft Power? Implications for EU Foreign Policy", *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2017), p. 59.

[31]   I. Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2002), pp. 235-258, at http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353, 30 May 2021.

[32]   N. Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Lessons for the Past*, Los Angeles 2009, p. 19.

[33]   M.C. Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government. A Survey*, Washington 2003, p. 1.

[34]   *Shared Vision, Common Action…*, p. 52.

Therefore, Joseph Nye's theory seems adequate to explain why the EU is using cultural and public diplomacy, emphasizing visibility and communication requirements as inclusive part of such activities, while engaging in external relations with the third countries. Nevertheless, exposing norms, values, and culture may not suffice to gain recognition and influence in the international sphere. To complement this approach further, the concept of EU actorness is evoked, which allows to draw a bigger picture of the complex process of building global EU presence. This is done in the following section by looking into the constitutive elements of the EU actorness in the instances where competent communication of the EU Delegation or implementing partner is one of them.

1.2 The EU Actorness

The concept of 'EU actorness' is a kind of response to a state-centric approach of the international relations scholars, who underestimated the role of European Union in the global politics claiming that the EU is not an actor at the international scene.[35] One of the most popular and widely debated variants of the 'EU actorness' was developed by Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler,[36] who by employing social constructivist approach, focused not on the scope and influence of Union's external activity but rather on the extent to which EU became an actor in global politics. The crucial questions they were asking addressed internal and external factors which have permitted, promoted, or constrained the development of the EU's roles in global politics as well as the extent to which the EU was perceived as an actor by its various audiences. Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler used three constitutive features of the 'EU actorness': *opportunity*, which *denotes factors in the external environment of ideas and events* and *signifies the structural context of action*[37]; *presence – depicting the EU's capacity by virtue of its existence, to exert influence beyond its borders*[38]; and *capability, which refers to the internal context of EU external action or inaction that are constituted by those aspects of the EU policy processes that, by constraining or enabling action, govern the Union's ability to capitalize on presence or respond to opportunity*[39] Therefore, the 'EU actorness' depends on a favorable external structure (opportunity) plus favorable internal EU structures of being (presence) and having (capability).[40] Hence the answer for the question of why EU enters IR may be that it wants to underpin its actorness and recognition as an actor of global politics. In that case, the features of opportunity, presence and

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[35]　J. Zielonka, *Explaining Euro-paralysis: Why Europe Is Unable to Act in International Politics*, Basingstoke–London 1998; C. Hill, "The Capability–Expectations Gap or Conceptualizing Europe's International Role", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3 (1993), pp. 305-328.

[36]　Ch. Bretherton, J. Vogler, *The European Union as...*

[37]　Ibid., p. 24.

[38]　Ibid.

[39]　Ibid., p. 27.

[40]　S. Schunz, Ch. Damro, "Expanding Actorness to Explain EU External Engagement in Originally Internal Policy Areas", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2020), pp. 122-140.

capability would represent in this paper, respectively: the socio-political context of the whole Arabian Peninsula and especially Saudi Arabia, including EU-Saudi and GCC relations. Also a trend to use non-coercive means to exert influence in the global politics would be perceived as part of this element (opportunity); the emergence of Treaty of Lisbon, its implications for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, development of foreign policy tools as well as establishment of the EEAS and EU Delegations in the researched region (presence); finally, effective use of available instruments including public and cultural diplomacy, competent communication resulting from compliance with the visibility and communication requirements in the pursuit of the EU priorities in its external actions (capability).It becomes clear that all three elements are interrelated and have a potential of affecting one another. Simon Schunz, Chad Damro, and Sieglinde Gstohl[41] offered a very interesting method of assessing EU actorness by evaluating all three components in the course of interpretation of empirical evidence and assigning them with the relevant degree: strong, moderate, or weak. This translates into the degree of EU actorness which could be described as high, medium, or low. [F]*or the degree of actorness to be considered as high, at least two of its components have to be strong, while the third one should be at least moderately developed. A medium degree of EU actorness would at least need to rely on two moderate components. Finally, the degree of EU actorness can be considered as low if at least two of its components are weak*. The method proves the importance of each of the constitutive components of the EU actorness but furthermore it shows that only by improving the degree of at least one of them we can significantly reinforce the extent of the EU actorness. The aim of this paper, however, is not to measure the degree of EU actorness in the Arabian Peninsula. The purpose of applying the concept of the EU actorness is to show that compliance of the EU Delegation's activities with the C&V requirements may play a key role in enabling EU actorness in the indicated region.

Thus, the concept of the 'soft power' may explain for what reasons the EU decided to use non-coercive means instead of force and inducement and why it puts much of its efforts to develop such tools in its external relations. The examples of countries such as Qatar prove that in case of lack of efficient 'hard power' means, the 'soft power' tools may well serve to replace it and efficiently exert influence and presence on the global scene. Although the EU represents strong economic power, the imposition of sanctions by the EU requires unanimity amongst Member States. The military power is also limited. Therefore the natural consequence would be to use soft power tools to uphold Union's international position. In light of poor availability of the hard power means and EU's struggle to fully use its soft power, also the concept of Smart Power as defined by Ernest J. Wilson III[42] does not fit the EU reality. According to Wilson III, it is *the capacity of an actor to combine elements of hard power and soft power in ways that are mutually reinforcing such that the actor's purposes are advanced effectively and efficiently*.

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[41]   Ch. Damro, S. Gstohl, S. Schunz, *The European Union's Evolving…*, pp. 17-18.

[42]   E.J. Wilson III, "Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 616, no. 1 (2008), p. 110.

Unfortunately, when two of the major types of EU power are still underdeveloped, I assume it is hard to generate third type, namely, smart power.

The EU actorness, on the other hand, explains why the EU is active in the international sphere and with what *modus operandi*. It simply indicates the willingness to be recognized as an actor of IR and to have an impact on the global politics. It relies upon much wider context of external and internal factors which may result in building the EU capability. It also highlights the importance of each component in achieving desired degree of actorness and hence links the subject of this research with the theoretical framework of international relations.

2. VISIBILITY & COMMUNICATION

Effective communication facilitated through raising awareness of the external policies and actions of the Union is crucial for the success of EU-financed projects and programs. Among others, it is inscribed in the Foreign Policy Instruments, namely, Objective 4 of the Partnership Instrument which is aimed at [e]*nhancing widespread understanding and visibility of the Union on the world scenes by means of public diplomacy, education/academic cooperation & outreach activities*.[43] As such it resulted in the publication of two manuals which indicate criteria to be followed while planning, facilitating, and evaluating communication and visibility activities. *The Communication and Visibility Manual for EU External Actions* of 2010[44] applies to actions launched before the end of 2017. The updated *Communication and Visibility in EU-financed external actions requirements for implementing partners*[45] came into force on January 1, 2018 and replaced the one of 2010. The document encapsulates legal obligations and the mandatory elements of the communication and visibility measures that must be followed while facilitating EU-financed external actions by the implementing partners.[46] The general purpose of the manuals is to ensure that any communication on EU-funded external actions is consistent with the Union's values and political priorities. Among the themes which are covered in the 2018 manual, the focus is on three main categories: "planning," "implementing," and "reporting" of the C&V activities. For creating a framework aimed at the assessment of the level of compliance by the EU Delegation in Riyadh, some of the communication and visibility criteria indicated in section 2.1.1. of the manual were used. The criteria are as follows:

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[43]   Regulation (EU) No 234/2014 of The European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a Partnership Instrument for cooperation with third countries, at https://eur lex.europa. eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2014:077:0077:0084:EN:PDF, 16 May 2021.

[44]   *The Communication and Visibility Manual for EU External Actions of 2010*, at https://ec.europa.eu/ international-partnerships/system/files/communication-and-visibility-manual_en.pdf, 16 May 2021.

[45]   *Communication and Visibility in EU...*

[46]   Implementing partners: all grant beneficiaries, contractors, organizations, and agencies involved in the implementation of partly or wholly EU-funded actions.

- – *must be people-centered, adopting where appropriate a story-telling approach that emphasizes the impact of the action on individual lives, rather than administrative milestones or budgets*;
- – *must allow for the local context, customs and practices, but without compromising the EU's fundamental values and principles*;
- – *must use (the) local language(s) wherever possible*;
- – *must be appropriate to the channels used (e.g. social media) and the audience targeted (e.g. young people) in terms of style and register*;
- – *must be leveraged where appropriate through partnerships with individuals and organizations with a potential multiplier effect.*[47]

In the paper, the above criteria are translated and abbreviated into the following qualities: people-centered, local context, local language, communication channels, and partnerships. This set of qualities is also reaffirmed by the guidelines designed to serve as a manual for the EU Delegations in the third countries and international organizations (*Information and Communication Handbook for EU Delegations in the Third Countries and International Organizations* published in 2012[48]). Contrary to previously discussed manuals, these guidelines are for the exclusive use of the EU diplomatic missions, but their provisions are in accordance with the manual of 2018.[49] The document also indicates crucial aspects for the appropriate implementation of the information and communication activities including visibility, giving the working staff tips on how, with whom, and by what tools the effective communication process could be established. Hence, the guidelines consist of : 1) "Working with partners" section with a detailed description of Embassies of Member States, Academic and Cultural Circles, Private sector, Civil society, etc.; 2) "Public diplomacy and Communication tools" with the emphasis on social media, websites, events, publications, prizes, grants and others; 3) "Budget," informing on the sources of funding for undertaken actions; and 4) "Visibility of cooperation projects," which relates extensively to previously mentioned manuals. Importantly, the introductory part to the document also indicates its aim, which in light of the "EU actorness" would be defined as growing "capability": *The EU Delegations play a crucial role in communicating the EU's values, policies and results of its projects towards third country stakeholders. Their work is vital in explaining the EU and promoting a positive image of it in the world, and their role in communication has grown even greater in the post-Lisbon context. The former EC Delegations have now become EU Delegations and this new role should be reflected in all their actions and activities including communication.*[50] To better understand why there are two different documents to be followed in order to comply with the (C&V) criteria, we need to have a look at founding sources for activities undertaken in the EU external actions.

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[47] *Communication and Visibility in EU…*, p. 8.

[48] *Information and Communication Handbook…*

[49] Ibid., pp. 7, 18.

[50] Ibid., p. 3.

3. PARTNERSHIP INSTRUMENT & EEAS INFORMATION
AND COMMUNICATION BUDGET

The Partnership Instrument (PI) was created in 2014[51] to finance cooperation of the European Union with the third countries. Over the period of 2014-2020, it had a budget of 954.8 million EUR.[52] It replaced the previous Industrialized and High-Income Countries Instrument. Different forms of support are offered under the PI globally (including Arabian Peninsula). Its main objective is to encourage cooperation and alliance building on the issues of EU or mutual interest. It fulfils the provisions of EU foreign policy included in the Treaty on European Union,[53] EU Global Strategy,[54] the Commission's six political priorities,[55] the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.[56]

The Partnership Instrument supports EU foreign policy both to pursue mid- to long-term objectives as well as to react fast to new, urgent political needs. This is done through Policy Support Facility (PSF) and the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange, drawing on EU Member States experts.

The Partnership Instrument supports trade negotiations, policy dialogues, and political agreements. Public diplomacy is a crucial element of work to increase EU's visibility.

Interestingly, expenses on public and cultural diplomacy from the Partnership Instrument in the period of 2018-2020 were increasing gradually and reached the highest amount among other areas of expenditure with total of 14.5 mln EUR in 2018, 16.8 mln EUR in 2019, and 23.25 mln EUR in 2020.[57] This, however, was spent globally and not only in the Gulf Region. Unfortunately, the author was not able to obtain data on P&C diplomacy expenses exclusively for the Gulf region. In the corresponding period expenses for the other actions undertaken exclusively in the GCC states reached only 6 mln EUR. There were also some other forms of support, such as Policy Support Facility, but it was divided among all of the third countries where EU is involved.

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[51] Regulation (EU) No 234/2014...

[52] European Commission, *Partnership Instrument for Cooperation with Third Countries (PI)*, p. 4, at https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/about_the_european_commission/eu_budget/db_2021_programme_statement_partnership_instrument_for_cooperation_with_third_countries_pi.pdf, 30 May 2021.

[53] *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, Tittle V, Articles 21-46, at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:115:0013:0045:EN:PDF, 16 May 2021.

[54] *Shared Vision, Common Action*...

[55] U. von der Leyen, *A Union that Strives for More. My Agenda for Europe*, p. 17, at https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en_0.pdf, 16 May 2021.

[56] *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* A/RES/70/1, at https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf, 16 May 2021.

[57] R. Bussi, *State of Play Partnership Instrument 2014-2020*, Power Point Presentation, pp. 19-24, at https://ec.europa.eu/fpi/sites/fpi/files/pi_state_of_play_2014-2020_committee.pptx, 16 May 2021.

The importance of public and cultural diplomacy activities financed from the PI was aptly explained in the Annex 11 of the Commission Implementing Decision on the 2020 Annual Action Program for the Partnership Instrument: […] *the way the EU engages with citizens in third countries needs to adapt. Public diplomacy under the Partnership Instrument supports the implementation of EU Foreign Policy objectives by strengthening the EU's ability to engage meaningfully with selected audiences in third countries (i.e. students/academics, multipliers/influencers, civil society and cultural operators/artists) in order to increase mutual understanding, improve the perception of the EU and of its policies and, ultimately, identify and nurture like-minded allies for future cooperation.*[58]

The (EEAS) Delegations' Information and Communication budget is managed by Foreign Policy Instrument Service and Public Diplomacy and Elections Observations Unit. The Delegations propose an annual communication plan, which, once approved by Headquarters, is assigned a budget covering the following activities: websites, relations with the media (press conferences, seminars, radio programs, etc.), information products (other publications, graphic material, etc.), organization of events, including cultural activities, newsletters, information campaigns.[59]

It is important that for the activities funded from the PI the *Communication and Visibility in EU-financed external actions – requirements for implementing partners*[60] will apply whereas for the actions financed from EEAS Information and Communication budget the *Information and Communication Handbook for EU Delegations in the Third Countries and International Organizations*[61] is binding. These documents, however, are not contradictory, which will be demonstrated in the following section *Methodology and Analysis*. The Partnership Instrument would also fit into the constitutive element of EU actorness, the "presence."

4. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

To examine compliance of the EU Delegation and GFA Consulting Group activities with the criteria and requirements indicated in *Communication and Visibility in EU-financed external actions* of 2018 and *Information and Communication Handbook for EU Delegations in the Third Countries and International Organizations* of 2012, the communication which took place online via webpages and social media platforms in 2018-2021 concerning projects in question will be analyzed. The period of four years was selected because the C&V manual became valid in 2018. The research is based on case study methodology. As indicated by Robert K. Yin, […] *case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over*

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[58]   *Annex 11 of the Commission Implementing Decision on the 2020 Annual Action Programme for the Partnership Instrument Action Document for Public Diplomacy (and cultural relations)*, p. 2.

[59]   *Communication Handbook for EU Delegations...*, p. 17.

[60]   *Communication and Visibility in EU...*

[61]   *Communication Handbook for EU Delegations...*

events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.[62] The "why" question was already addressed in the previous sections. This section is aimed to answer how the EU Delegation and the implementing partner fulfill aforementioned requirements. Two cases are established, one for the EU Delegation and one for the implementing partner. Equally, to address the question whether culture gives Delegations more opportunities to meet the C&V requirements (competent communication) than mere economic, trade, and business matters, the comparative case method was applied. The data for the research were collected using online resources comprising: the EU Delegation in Saudi Arabia website including newsletters and reports,[63, 64] PDF brochures published electronically,[65] and its social media accounts.[66]

The proposed set of qualities amounts to qualitative factors, which allows to verify in the course of interpretation the compliance of the EU Delegation and GFA Consulting Group activities with the C&V requirements. The qualities are as follows:

– *people-centered*;
– *local context*;
– *local language*";
– *communication channel*;
– *partnerships*.[67]

The qualitative part is supported by quantitative data such as number of "likes," "shares," and "comments" on the social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. "The EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification Project," "Europe Month in Saudi Arabia," and "The EU Film Festival in Jeddah" are examined. The first project is financed from the Partnership Instrument. Hence, the criteria indicated in the *Communication and Visibility in EU-financed external actions* 2018 manual[68] apply. The two other cultural projects are organized and financed mainly by the EU Delegation in partnership with the Member State embassies and for this reason, the criteria of *Information and Communication Handbook for EU Delegations in the Third Countries and International Organizations* of 2012 are biding. Nevertheless, they are in line with the offered set of qualities developed over the criteria mentioned in the previous section: "people-centered" is addressed in section 2 of the *Handbook*, which

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[62] R.K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods, Applied Social Research*, Thousand Oaks 1994, p. 1.

[63] EU Delegation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Webpage, at https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/saudi-arabia_en, 16 May 2021.

[64] EU Delegation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Webpage, EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification Project, at https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/saudi-arabia/87855/eu-gcc-dialogue-economic-diversification-project_en, 30 May 2021.

[65] EU Delegation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Webpage, Europe Month in Saudi Arabia, April-May 2019, at https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/europe_month_brochure_v7_08.04.19_small.pdf, 30 May 2021.

[66] Twitter (@EUintheGCC), Facebook(@EUinKSA), Instagram (Euinksa).

[67] *Communication and Visibility in EU...*, p. 8.

[68] Ibid.

states: *Delegations should target their public diplomacy efforts towards a variety of audiences: think tanks, academia, opinion makers, NGOs, Parliamentarians and other politicians, Civil society, beneficiaries of EU development cooperation, a range of stakeholders including the business community and the general public.*[69]; the importance of the "local context" is to be found in the following provision: *EU Delegations are invited to set up local communication strategies defining their target audiences, key priorities and messages, timeline and main activities according to the local context and the EU agenda*[70]; "local language" is mirrored in section 5 *Translation*: *Delegations are encouraged to translate into local language the relevant press releases of the EU institutions and circulate them through their journalists' networks*[71]; "communication channels" including social media is indicated in section 5.2.3: *Digital age communication tools and platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and blogs allow us to engage a wider audience in the work of the EU's foreign policies. Citizens, opinion makers, global influencers, bloggers and journalists are active on social media, and we need to ensure our presence*[72]; for the "partnerships," there is whole separate section no 4 *Working with Partners*.[73] Thus, we can see strong parallels between the two documents even though they were drafted and published with a six-year interval.

4.1 The EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification Project

The project has been run since 2018 by the implementing partner, GFA Consulting Group, German consulting company based in Hamburg and specialized in development cooperation sector. The value of the project is 2,999,560 Euro and it is expected to be finalized in 2021.

Its aim is to support trade and investment links between the EU and GCC member countries. It is done through the promotion and networking of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) including start-ups, with a particular focus on activities providing support to GCC stakeholders in SME promotion. The participation of female stakeholders from both the EU and GCC is also ensured, for example, through disseminating successful business cases of women entrepreneurs. Among other specific goals of the project, we can identify support of the climate friendly trade, investment, and economic affairs in the context of the GCC economic diversification processes. The project's activities are focused around three output areas:

- strengthening cooperation and dialogue between the EU and GCC countries in the areas of trade, investment, and economic affairs;
- strengthening policy analysis related to EU-GCC trade, investment, and economic affairs;

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[69]   *Communication Handbook for EU Delegations...*, p. 3.

[70]   Ibid., p. 4.

[71]   Ibid., p. 7.

[72]   Ibid., p. 12.

[73]   Ibid., pp. 5-7.

   – ensuring a steady flow of enhanced information between EU and GCC stake-
holders in the fields of trade, investment, and economic affairs.[74]

In terms of communication, there are several channels used to inform about the ac-
tivities undertaken as part of the project, including social media accounts on Twitter
(@EU-GCC Dialogue), Instagram (eugccdialogue), Facebook (@EUGCCDialogue),
and LinkedIn (company/eu-gcc-dialogue-on-economic-diversification), as well as the
webpage www.eugcc.eu.

Social media accounts reach 809 followers[75] in total, among which Twitter has 190,
Facebook 43, LinkedIn 294, and Instagram 239. It is not surprising that the biggest
number of followers come from LinkedIn as it serves as business and employment-
oriented platform which fits into the thematic scope of the project. Still, 294 follow-
ers is hardly impressive. The second highest number of followers (Instagram) could
be explained by the easy accessibility of content in the form of pictures or short vid-
eos although the question remains whether Instagram is an appropriate network to
communicate and disseminate information on the EU economic engagement in the
GCC countries. Facebook report finds that the top interests on Instagram are travel
(45%), music (44%), and food and drink (43%).[76]

When it comes to the content, sadly to say all the social media feature nearly the
same information without any adjustments to the interests and target groups of individ-
ual social networks. Among posts there are announcements of the publication of new
issues of the newsletter, news digest, upcoming events, events such as "Europe Day," etc.
The webpage of the project is still under construction, although it was launched three
years ago. The narrative and contents available on social media do not take a storytel-
ling format with the emphasis on individuals' lives but amounts rather to scattered raw
facts and figures or announcements of events and webinars. I did not get the impression
that it represents the EU values and norms in a way which is clear and friendly to the
user. There are some exceptions, like the Instagram post of 5.01.2019 with a picture of
Saudi women followed by the text: *Two Saudi #engineering graduates have become the
first #Saudis female firefighters after completing the required certifications. Their joining
reinforces the kingdom's wish to increase female participation in the workforce. to read the
full article please visit our #Twitter page.*[77]

The support for the project of the EU Delegation in Riyadh does not seem very sig-
nificant in the digital sphere, either. For instance, there has only been one share of the
project tweet between beginning of January and the end of April 2021.[78] There were no
shares on Facebook. Improving cooperation with the Delegation in that respect could

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[74] *EU GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification – Project*, The EU Delegation in the Kingdom of Sau-
di Arabia Webpage, at https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/saudi-arabia/87855/eu-gcc-dialogue-eco-
nomic-diversification-project_en, 13 May 2021.

[75] Estimated for 14 May 2021.

[76] "How to Take Your Instagram Content to the Next Level", *Facebook for Business*, at https://www.face
book.com/business/news/insights/how-to-take-your-instagram-content-to-the-next-level, 16 May 2021.

[77] Instagram post from 05 January 2019, at https://www.instagram.com/p/BsQo8jmAG8B/, 16 May 2021.

[78] EU Delegation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Twitter account (@EUintheGCC), twit of 27 April

increase the visibility of the actions undertaken because the Delegation's social media have many more followers (Twitter 8709, Facebook 198 Instagram 575[79]). There is, however, a subsection of the Delegation website dedicated to the project which fills the gap of the absent project's proper website. The elements of these subsection appear very useful and interesting by revealing the substantial value of the project, for example, a general overview of the project goals and priorities; policy papers and research; country fiches of the 6 GCC states which include key facts on their trade and economic policies and indicators, investment opportunities, demographics, and lists of important contacts; "digital news," which is a monthly news digest from the region and the EU, selected by the project staff (interestingly, listed publications are available both in English and Arabic); "Newsletter" with issues edited on the monthly basis which *features articles on EU-GCC trade, investment and economic matters as well as events and initiatives being undertaken by the project in support of the key target groups, SME's, business and industry stakeholders particularly women entrepreneurs.*[80] Unfortunately, the analytical data of the EU Delegation webpage, such as number of visits and sections visited, is not available in open access.

As mentioned above, the "people-centered" approach with the EU storytelling is not fully followed. Moreover, "local context" is nearly non-existent in the communication. The exceptions are limited to, for example, sparse "Happy Month of Ramadan" posts.[81] "Local language" is rarely used in communication in the social media. It is more widespread in the contents of the EU Delegation webpage (i.e., "digital news" and sometimes the "newsletter"), but for the immediate reaction of the users, it would be good to use Arabic in the social media, too. "Communication channels" technically embrace very wide range of means, however, it would be desired to adjust posts to the target groups of each of the social media platforms and thus make the content more attractive. Finally, "partnerships" are not explicitly visible. The data available online do not show whether the GFA Consulting Group is involved in any partnerships.

The quantitative data seem to confirm the above picture. Since the beginning of 2021, 34 out of total of 865 tweets have been published on Twitter. These 34 tweets encountered 1 comment, 28 shares, and 50 likes.[82] There have been 30 out of total of 130 posts on Instagram. These 30 posts were liked 77 times and met with 0 comments.[83] 19 posts have appeared on LinkedIn (total number of posts is not available). These got

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2021: *Are you interested in the #circulareconomy? Join this webinar tomorrow, April 28, to know more about the developments in the #GCC region and opportunities for collaboration with the #EU.*

[79] Estimated for 30 May 2021.

[80] *EU GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification – Project*, The EU Delegation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Webpage, at https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/saudi-arabia/87855/eu-gcc-dialogue-economic-diversification-project_en, 13 May 2021.

[81] Instagram post from 05 May 19, at https://www.instagram.com/p/BxFuqN4Anvb/, 16 May 2021.

[82] Estimated for 29 May 2021.

[83] Estimated for 29 May 2021.

1 comment and 18 likes, but only one of these posts got 8 likes.[84] 39 posts have been up-loaded on Facebook (total number of posts is not available). They got 10 likes, 0 shares, and 0 comments.[85]

This numbers are not satisfactory. They show very limited range of generated content. It is even more worrying when we acknowledge the popularity of social media as communication tool in the Middle East.[86] This outcome may be a result of incompetent communication linked to the lack of sufficient compliance with the C&V requirements. It could be due to inexperience of the implementing partner that is based in Germany and not from the region. It is also possible that other type of content, i.e. cultural, might generate better results. Finally, the result may have been caused by the combination of all indicated factors. To further verify the possibility of cultural content giving more opportunities to the EU Delegation in its pursue of C&V requirements, the analysis of two cultural projects is provided below.

4.2 "Europe Month" in Saudi Arabia & The EU Film Festival in Jeddah

"Europe Month" and European Film Festival in Jeddah are two biggest cultural encounters organized on the annual basis by the EU Delegation in Saudi Arabia in cooperation with the Member State embassies. These projects are financed from the EEAS budget with a participation of the Member States diplomatic missions.

"Europe month" is a month-long series of events which culminate on the 9th of May with the "Europe Day"; on this occasion the EU Ambassador usually organizes the reception in their residency. The project is run in cooperation between European diplomatic missions with the local authorities and coordinated by the EU Delegation in Riyadh. According to the data available online, the first edition was organized in 2013 and the last in 2019. The events consisted of concerts, exhibitions, film screenings, conferences, seminars, and many others.

The European Film Festival in Jeddah has had 13 editions with the last one in 2019. It aims to build a cultural bridge between the EU and the Kingdom through the eyes of Europe's cinematographers. One of the goals is also to increase the understanding of European languages; however, all screened productions have only English subtitles. The festival also showcased the similarities between European and Arab heritage. It is organized by European Consulates General in Jeddah, i.e., Italian, French, and German, and is coordinated by the EU Delegation.

The projects were organized annually (last time in 2019). The communication process embraced much more diversified content than the EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification Project, such as information on artists and their work as well as European history and values. There were also more stakeholders and entities involved: the EU Delegation, Member State diplomatic missions, cultural institutes (French Institute, Goethe

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[84] Estimated for 29 May 2021.

[85] Estimated for 29 May 2021.

[86]

Institute) together with local partners such as Centre for International Communication in Riyadh. The information about "Europe Month," and EU Film Festival in Jeddah was not disseminated through as many social platforms as in case of the EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification Project. The EU Delegation mostly used its Twitter account to inform about the events. However, numerous partners and stakeholders shared Delegation's contents and produced their own on their social media accounts, which significantly increased the range and visibility of the EU. For example, Twitter account of the German Embassy in Riyadh has 49,929[87] followers, whereas Delegation has 8,379.[88]

One of the major limitations of this paper is that in the indicated period of 2018-2021 only Twitter communication on aforementioned projects could be analyzed since the Facebook and Instagram accounts of the EU Delegation were only opened very recently, in January 2021. On top of that, the Delegation does not use LinkedIn. It also seems that the Delegation does not fully utilize the potential of its webpage to disseminate information. Although there are featured stories on the past events, for example, *Celebrating Europe Day in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*,[89] it is really hard to find them; in fact it is only possible through the "search" option. Fortunately, this is complemented by the publications on other websites of the European embassies which are partners of the projects such as *Concert Trio d'Iroise à la Résidence de France*[90] on the French Embassy in Saudi Arabia webpage. The major method used to inform about the yearly program of the projects, either the "Europe Month" or EU Film Festival, is a brochure published electronically on the yearly basis prior to the events.[91] It presents the list of events chronologically with a short description of the venue, information about contact, booking possibilities, and the organizers. The main disadvantage of the brochure is that all its contents is only given in English.

How does the cultural content affect the EU Delegation compliance with the C&V requirements? In terms of "people-centeredness," the narrative seems more adequate with a message including information on intercultural cooperation between local people and EU citizens or about norms and values respected within the EU. A good example is a tweet of 21.05.2021 *The EU is committed to preserving & promoting culture, and making it accessible to all, both in the #EU & globally*,[92] which was published on the

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[87] Estimated for 14 May 2021.

[88] Ibid.

[89] *Celebrating Europe Day in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, The EU Delegation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Webpage, at https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/algeria/45877/celebrating-europe-month-kingdom-saudi-arabia_he, 13 May 2021.

[90] *Concert Trio d'Iroise à la Résidence de France*, French Embassy in Riyadh Webpage, at https://sa.amba-france.org/Concert-Trio-d-Iroise-a-la-Residence-de-France-30-avril-2019, 16 May 2021.

[91] EU Delegation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Webpage, Europe Month in Saudi Arabia, April-May 2019, at https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/europe_month_brochure_v7_08.04.19_small.pdf, 30 May 2021.

[92] EU Delegation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Twitter account (@EUintheGCC), twit from 21 May 2021: *The EU is committed to preserving & promoting culture, and making it accessible to all, both in the #EU & globally*.

occasion of the World Day for Cultural Diversity or a Facebook post from 01.05.2021 *How well do you know the #EU? Challenge a friend, test your knowledge, and get a chance to win an #Ipad. Tag 5 of your friends, challenge one another and you might be the lucky winner.*[93]

When it comes to "local context," the cultural character of the events where Saudi artists are invited to perform together with their European colleagues (Saudi German Jazz Fusion Concert[94]) or which show elements of local culture as part of European heritage or identity (exhibition "Tradition and Contemporaneity of Taters – The Polish Muslims"[95]) are the strongest pillars of the EU communication and visibility activities in the field of culture. The local newspapers are keen to cover such stories. "The Arab News" and the "Saudi Gazette" report most intensively on European cultural events and they tend to present the content in a positive light: '*I am so amazed to experience this exhibition and I learnt some interesting facts about the brilliant history of the Polish Muslims,' said by one of the visitors.*[96]

Surprisingly, use of the "local language" is the weakest part of the communication activities undertaken by the EU Delegation in the researched period. Most of the communication via the Internet in 2018 and 2019 took place in English. This, however, has started to improve as evidenced by the Delegation Facebook account, where majority of posts uploaded in May 2021 were available both in English and Arabic. Furthermore, many Instagram posts and Twitter tweets have been translated into Arabic since the beginning of 2021. The year 2021 also marked a significant expansion of the "communication channels" used by the EU Delegation, which until recently were practically limited to its Twitter account.

The "partnerships" with variety of entities are visible online. The list of partners includes European diplomatic missions, which often share the information or produce their own contents on both projects (Germany, Hungary, Ireland Italy, Netherlands), local newspapers and news services (The Arab News, Saudi Gazette, Diplomatic Quarter Living Magazine), and local Saudi institutions such as King Fahad Cultural Center and Centre for International Communication in Riyadh.

Quantitative data present more optimistic results, even though the actual numbers are far from impressive. Between 2018 and 2019 on the EU Delegation Twitter account, 26 tweets informed about both "Europe Month" and, the EU Film Festival in Jeddah (2018 and 2019 editions). They earned altogether 111 likes, 41 shares, and 6 comments.[97] Although these numbers are summarized over the period of two years,

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[93]   EU Delegation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Facebook account (@EUinKSA), post from 01 May 2021: *How well do you know the #EU? Challenge a friend, test your knowledge, and get a chance to win an #Ipad. Tag 5 of your friends, challenge one another and you might be the lucky winner.*

[94]   "Saudi German Jazz Concert to Be Held in Riyadh", *Saudi Gazette*, 25 April 2018, at https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/533531/Life, 16 April 2021.

[95]   "Tatars, the Polish Muslims featured in the Exhibition", *Saudi Gazette*, 24 April 2018, at https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/533451, 16 April 2021.

[96]   Ibid.

[97]   Estimated for 29 May 2021.

in fact the publishing time does not exceed four months when all the researched projects took place. Therefore, it is possible to compare them with the GFA tweets, which were published from mid-January until mid-May 2021. The numbers clearly show that EU Delegation communication reached more than double of Twitter users more: 111 vs. 50 likes, 41 vs. 28 shares, 6 vs. 1 comment.[98] This gap grows even bigger, once we compare communication on other social media platforms (Instagram and Facebook) in 2021. Importantly, the numbers do not exclusively include cultural content of the researched projects, but all the posts of diverse subjects published since the beginning of 2021. Thus, on Facebook, the EU Delegation published 136 posts vs. 39 by the implementing partner. Delegation posts gained 860 vs.10 likes, 44 vs. 0 comments, and 22 vs. 0 shares.[99] On the Delegation's Instagram, 67 vs. 30 posts of GFA Consulting Group appeared in 2021. These were liked 876 times and commented 487 times in the case of Delegation vs. 70 likes and 0 comments in the case of GFA.[100]

First, the analysis demonstrates there is significant disproportion between effectives of communication undertaken by the EU Delegation and the GFA Consulting Group. Second, there could be a correlation between level of compliance of the EU Delegation's and implementing partner's communication with the C&V requirements (competent communication) and its impact on the social media users. An impact of this kind is understood as ability to engage wider audience, which is visible in the number of likes, shares, and comments on social media platforms. Third, the research results indicate a possible link between the use of culture-related contents and a higher level of communication compliance with the C&V requirements. The existence of this link would be a proof of a crucial role of the soft power tools such as cultural diplomacy in the pursuit of the EU actorness. The paper also shows an optimistic trend in the Delegation's attitude towards online communication, especially with the aspect of the local language usage. Gradually increasing number of posts translated into Arabic are visible on the new Delegation's accounts on Facebook and Instagram, which shows the willingness to tackle the major Delegation's weakness. One of the causes that explain differences between the Delegation and the GFA is that the former have been operating locally for many years. This may result in a better knowledge of the customs or habits and in well-established relations with the local partners such as governmental institutions and the media. It can be very difficult to reach the same level of knowledge and credibility for the consulting group based in Germany as the EU Delegation, even though it acts on behalf of the European Union. To reaffirm the findings of this paper, further research on similar projects run by the implementing partners, i.e. *The Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach* project,[101] should be conducted.

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[98]   Estimated for 29 May 2021.

[99]   Estimated for 29 May 2021.

[100]   Estimated for 29 May 2021.

[101]   European External Action Service, *The Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach project,* at https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-Homepage/94420/enhanced-eu-gcc-political-dialogue-cooperation-and-outreach, 29 May 2021.

CONCLUSIONS

The EU interest to engage in the external relations could be understood as its willingness to be recognized as an actor of international relations with the ability to exert influence on the global politics. Due to insufficient "hard power" means, EU develops its "soft power" tools such as public and cultural diplomacy complemented by diverse communication and visibility criteria to be able to reach societies globally and thereby execute its normative power. This soft power toolbox may be understood as one of the constitutive elements affecting the extent of EU actorness: "capability." Its interdependence with two other elements, that is, "opportunity" and "presence," highlights the importance of competent communication for the EU actorness. Therefore, the questions of who (what entity) and how (by what means, with what contents) the communication process is conducted seem to be fundamental in designing EU communication and visibility campaigns in its external relations. The V&C requirements do not explicitly deal with these questions. The consequence of neglecting this issue may lead at best to a lack of proper visibility of the EU actions in the third countries. In the worst case, however, it may result in little mutual understanding, prevalence of stereotypes, and stalemate in dialogue. The analysis results presented in this paper are an important signal for the research from both IR and Communication perspectives as well as for the European policymakers.

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