

A joined-up Union in counterterrorism and public diplomacy: Let's stay on the right track!

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Abstract

The search for a more effective method of work has been explicitly mentioned in the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) through the joined-up Union concept, which refers to a better coordination among policies, institutions and the Member States. This idea is not new for a Union that has been seeking more coherence for many years now. This paper offers an initial assessment on the implementation of the EUGS guidelines on these institutional working aspects. To do that, it analyses two specific policy areas mentioned in the 2016 Roadmap on the follow-up to the Global Strategy, and selected as a priority by the Foreign Affairs Council: counterterrorism and public diplomacy. The analysis suggests that the most recent initiatives are following the EUGS aspirations but they should be considered the product of a process that started many years before the Strategy, and has been backed by institutional innovations and events. However, this is not to detract from the merit of the EUGS in strongly reaffirming a process that was already ongoing, and helping the EU to keep on the right track.

The search for a more effective method of work is explicitly mentioned in the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), through the joined-up Union concept, described by the High Representative and Vice President of the Commission (HR/VP) Federica Mogherini as the quest to become “more joined up across our external policies, between Member States (MS) and EU institutions, and between the internal and external dimensions of our policies”.¹ This idea, of course, is not new for a Union that has for many years been seeking greater coherence between its policies, institutions and MS.²

The EUGS is a strategy document containing general guidelines, without a list of initiatives or goals to achieve within a given time. Bearing in mind this aspect, it is nevertheless possible to give a first assessment on what has been done already. The aim is to provide an initial assessment to the following questions:

- To what extent has EU action related to the establishment of a truly joined-up approach following the EUGS guidelines?
- Which has been the added value offered by the EUGS?
- Which have been the obstacles to its implementation?

To this end, this paper analyses two specific policy areas mentioned in the 2016 Roadmap on the follow-up to the Global Strategy, and selected as a priority by the Foreign Affairs Council: counterterrorism and public diplomacy.³ Both deal with the so-called horizontal coherence, which refers to the internal coordination of EU institutions and policies, without directly involving activities on the part of MS. The first can be considered a classic internal–external issue that has drawn renewed attention since the recent terrorist attacks within Europe.⁴ The second has increasingly received greater attention – and EU money – since the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and, more recently, the Ukraine crisis.⁵

¹ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, Brussels, 24 June 2016, p. 11, https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/regions/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.

² Simon Duke, “Consistency, coherence and European Union external action: the path to Lisbon and beyond”, in Panos Koutrakos (ed.), *European Foreign Policy. Legal and political perspective*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011, p. 15-54.

³ EEAS, *From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy Year 1*, Bruxelles, 13 June 2017, https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/full_brochure_year_1.pdf; EEAS, *Implementing the EU Global Strategy, Year 2*, Bruxelles, 2018, http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2018/EU_Global_Strategy_Jun2018.pdf; EEAS, *Roadmap on the follow-up to the EU Global Strategy*, Bratislava, 16 September 2016, <https://club.bruxelles2.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/feuilleteroute-strategieglobale@ue160922.pdf>.

⁴ Mai’a K. Davis Cross, “Counter-terrorism in the EU’s external relations”, in *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 39, No. 5, 2017, p. 609-624.

⁵ Mai’a K. Davis Cross, “The Public diplomacy and the role of the EEAS: Crafting a Resilient Image for Europe”, in David Spence and Jozef Batora (eds.), *The European External Action Service. European Diplomacy Post-Westphalia*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 341-355.

Counterterrorism

Counterterrorism has two dimensions: the external one, which refers to the context outside the EU where the terrorist threat arises and prospers; and an internal one, the European territory where the terrorists operate. The internal–external nexus ideally implies a consideration of these two dimensions together, as well as the design and implementation of initiatives that involve in close collaboration all the EU actors who deal with the external dimension of counterterrorism (e.g., EEAS, EU delegations, Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, etc.) and those who do the same internally (e.g., Europol, Eurojust, etc.). The momentum created by the EUGS has brought several initiatives that have strengthened the cooperation with a number of “priority partners” in the EU’s surrounding regions, such as third countries in the Middle East, North Africa and the Western Balkans, or international organizations like the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League.⁶ These counterterrorism political dialogues involve many different EU institutional actors – the High Representative, the Commission, the EEAS, the Counterterrorism Coordinator, relevant Justice and Home Affairs Agencies, EU Delegations – in order to enhance the internal–external nexus. This has also been further strengthened through the secondment of counterterrorism and security experts in EU delegations and CSDP missions.

The launch of these initiatives has largely followed the plan outlined by the EUGS Roadmap.⁷ At the same time, it has to be noted that the commitment to build a more consistent Union in the fight against terrorism is not new and was formulated – in general terms – before the EUGS and the Lisbon Treaty in the EU Counterterrorism Strategy.⁸ Now, inherently, the EUGS has focused attention on the external dimension of counterterrorism, backing a new level of coordination between those who operate outside and inside the EU. Even if these specific efforts can be partially brought back to the activity of the EU Counterterrorism Coordinator,⁹ what has been done in the last two years is in line with the aspirations of the EUGS. But the extent to which these ambitions could be fully realized in a more efficient working approach to counterterrorism remains an open question.

Two obstacles stand in the way of this result. Firstly, the EU institutional architecture may become a problem because of the divisions and limits of mandates and capacities among the EU bodies. Work-

⁶ EEAS, *From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy Year 1*, op. cit.; EEAS, *Implementing the EU Global Strategy, Year 2*, op. cit.

⁷ EEAS, *Roadmap on the follow-up to the EU Global Strategy*, op. cit., p.3.

⁸ Council of the European Union, *The European Union Counter-terrorism Strategy*, Brussels, 30 November 2005, <https://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2014469%202005%20REV%204>. See also: David Spence, “International terrorism: The quest for a coherent EU response”, in D. Spence (Ed.), *The European Union and Terrorism*, London, John Harper, p. 1-29.

⁹ Alex Mackenzie, et. al., “The European Union Counter-terrorism Coordinator and the External Dimension of the European Union Counter-terrorism Policy”, in *Perspective on European Politics and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2013, p. 325-338.

ing for more horizontal coherence means dealing with EU actors that do not share the same nature (supranational or intergovernmental), decision-making processes, and sometimes the same willingness to cooperate (turf wars can be kept under control but cannot be avoided). The HR/VP has some new instruments and powers to face these issues, but in order to achieve a radical improvement a simple strategy – such as the EUGS is – may not be enough. Secondly, any initiative on counterterrorism may not exclude the MS. Working on the internal–external nexus at the horizontal level is important, but doing the same at the vertical level – strengthening the cooperation between the EU countries and the EU agencies – has to be prioritized as well.¹⁰ On this point the implementation of the EUGS has yet to begin.

Public diplomacy

The way in which the external actors look at and consequently perceive the EU is a relevant component of its external actorness and effectiveness. In the past, the EU has shown structural shortcomings in sharing a common strategic communication among its bodies and implementing it effectively.¹¹ Today, the diffusion of foreign propaganda and disinformation within and outside Europe is presenting new challenges to EU public diplomacy. While the establishment of the EEAS has brought a new voice to the already crowded EU public diplomacy stage, it has also introduced an actor with an “extensive (but vague) coordination role”.¹² This helps to understand the attention given by the first post-Lisbon HR/VP, Catherine Ashton, to strategic communication and media operations.¹³

The EUGS keeps to this path, stating a general commitment towards “joining-up public diplomacy across different fields” that should improve “the consistency and the speed of messaging on... [EU] principles and actions”, offering “rapid, factual, rebuttals of disinformation”.¹⁴ The essential limit of the EU strategic communication has never been the simple absence of initiatives, but their coherence among the plethora of institutional voices, the quality of the message, and – again – the lack of cooperation and coordination with the MS. In light of this, the list of public diplomacy and communication initiatives that have followed the publication of the EUGS has to be welcomed, but cannot be

¹⁰ EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, op. cit., p. 21.

¹¹ Simon Duke, *The European External Action Service and Public Diplomacy*, Discussion Paper in Diplomacy, No. 127, Clingendael, 2013, https://www.eipa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/20131009144127_TheEuropeanExternalActionService-1.pdf; Egidijus Barcevičius, et. al., *Analysis of the perception of the EU and EU's policies abroad*, Final Report, PPMI, NCRE, NFG, December, 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/documents/showcases/eu_perceptions_study_final_report.pdf

¹² Simon Duke, *The European External Action Service and Public Diplomacy*, op. cit., p. 13.

¹³ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁴ EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, op. cit., p. 23.

taken as an expression of a more consistent and effective message *per se*.¹⁵ To ascertain these results, the most recent developments affecting the EU's method of work and dissemination strategies should be investigated.

In the absence of recent and detailed studies, it is probably too early to understand to what extent the last communication initiatives carried out by the EU have benefited from a better and more effective horizontal coherence promoted by the EUGS. However, the increasing attention paid to stronger cooperation among the EU institutions – especially between the Commission and the EEAS – the coordination role assumed by the EEAS Strat Com team, and the extensive communication undertaken by the EU delegations worldwide seem in line with the vision framed by the EUGS and the initiatives expected in the Roadmap.¹⁶ In the next months (and years), it will be possible to verify if a real change in the internal EU way of work materializes and what impact it will have on public diplomacy and strategic communication effectiveness.

Until that day, two things must be not forgotten. Firstly, the success of EU public diplomacy is not a simple matter of horizontal coordination or the amount of money allocated to it,¹⁷ but is also contingent on a tailored-made design and dissemination of the message as well. Secondly, the MS remain extremely important in echoing and reaffirming the European voice, as without their support the European strategic communication will not be able to reach EUGS expectations.

Conclusion: Let's stay on the right track!

The quest for more horizontal coherence started many years before the Strategy and has primarily benefited from a number of institutional innovations, such as the creation of a double-hatted HR/VP and the EEAS. Even the political consequences of significant events such as the recent terrorist attacks in Europe and the renewed Russian propaganda can be considered push factors in the implementation of a joined-up Union as addressed by the EUGS. Nevertheless, this does not downplay the merit of the EUGS in strongly reaffirming a process that was already ongoing, thereby speeding up it.

In general terms, it is still premature to assess the consolidation and efficiency of these new work practices of coordination among institutions and policy sectors. According to the EUGS Roadmap, the EU appears to be heading in the right direction, but the implementation of the Strategy's guidelines is probably still in its infancy. In days to come, the next HR/VP with the new President of the Com-

¹⁵ EEAS, *From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy Year 1*, op. cit., p. 30-32; EEAS, *Implementing the EU Global Strategy, Year 2*, op. cit., p. 16.

¹⁶ EEAS, *Roadmap on the follow-up to the EU Global Strategy*, op. cit., p.3.

¹⁷ For a critical op-ed on the EU Strategic communication: Shaun Riordan, *The EU is wasting money on strategic communication*, CDP blog, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, December, 2017, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/eu-wasting-money-strategic-communication>

mission will be tasked with consolidating or revising the Union's current way of work. In this perspective, the EUGS may serve as a shared point of reference to keep the EU on the right track. Hoping – as always – that the MS will accept and support this.

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