

Jean Monnet Chair RCx-EU Policy Brief #1

EU Foreign Policy from the 'Outside In' Perspective: EU external reception, perceptions and communication (RCx-EU)

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Jean Monnet Chair RCx-EU Policy Brief #1 reflects on the main goal of the RCx-EU Jean Monnet Chair programme: to provide understanding of how the EU's leadership is *recognised* and *received externally* at times when the changes in the EU and globally impact and pressure EU external relations.

Focusing on EU foreign policy from the "outside-in" perspective, Policy Brief #1 invites its readers to consider the importance of *communication* and *information flows* in EU external affairs. More specifically, it tackles a relatively novel perspective in EU foreign policy practice – the importance of reaching to the "*narrators*" of the EU in the 3rd countries. There is a range of practitioners who are in business of communicating the EU in 3rd countries to their domestic constituencies, either intentionally or by chance. Among them are government institutions and officials, education professionals, prominent individuals, and even celebrities. One cohort is believed to exert a key influence on the external public opinion on the EU and the process of European integration – newsmakers. These include journalists and news writers, as well as editors and directors of news as information gatekeepers. These media professionals may work for mainstream press, broadcast agencies (television or radio), or online media (e-outlets, e-editions of mainstream media, e-news portals, or blogs and social media). The EU includes media professionals on the list of *key targets of its public diplomacy*. RCx-EU Policy Brief #1 proposes a set of policy recommendations on how to maximize the EU's outreach to the media cohorts. The recommendations are based on the RCx-EU Chair research in Year 1 of the Action. The leading theme of Year 1 research is "EU Global Strategy. EU International Leadership and Global Governance: EU Projection and External Reception" (see <https://jeanmonnet.nz/rcx-eu> for the full description of the RCx-EU JM Chair programme).

RCx-EU JM Chair research in Year 1 focused on images and perceptions of the EU following the release of the EU Global Strategy and with a special focus on the EU's neighbourhoods facing the conflict. At the age of fake news and post-truth debates, the importance of the shared information spaces is at the forefront of the discussion. The online technology gave second life to traditional press and broadcasting media, as well as created a range of new genres, including e-news portals. Social media is intentionally not in the focus of the Policy Brief #1.

1. Media professionals are argued by relevant literature to provide a unique opportunity for domestic audiences to learn about a complex EU, familiarise themselves with EU external action and reflect on their country's relations with the EU. As such, newsmakers have a real power to influence behaviours that matter in international relations. It is critical for EU Delegation to 3rd countries to **identify leading media authors who commit to reporting the EU (across media channels) and engage with them in a meaningful way**. It is also critical to **update the list of the motivated newsmakers on the regular basis. Systematic media monitoring** on the ground (or from a *central* and/or *regional* hub) is paramount in this respect. A human factor is critical for the EU's international with any external location. Newsmakers in the RCx-EU JM Chair research repeatedly stressed the importance of social interactions when it comes to the EU's diplomatic outreach (e.g. **invite leading newswires and editors to the events, receptions, round tables organised by the EU Delegations in 3rd countries**). Journalists thrive on networks, and socialisation facilitated by the EU is appreciated by the local media professionals.
2. The EU external action practitioners committed to working with 3rd country media professionals should undertake **regular reviews of media environments in 3rd countries and track their evolutions**. A nuanced understanding of (changing) media environment should include monitoring of the media market dimensions, critical awareness and analysis of levels of journalistic professionalism, understanding the levels of political parallelism and role of the state dimensions. Nuanced understanding of unique combinations of *political, ideological,*

business/financial and *professional* factors in newsmaking in respective 3rd countries – all informed by a peculiar media environment – will assist EU Delegations to craft a more refined outreach towards local opinion-formers.

3. In any media environment, newsmakers possess agency that comes with skills, networks and tools to exert power and control over content and directions of information flows. RCx-EU JM Chair research indicates that **regular surveys of journalists and editors to track their opinions on the EU and EU news** is of critical importance. These individuals possess skills, knowledge and reputation to co-shape the *reception* of the EU in a given society alongside other opinion-makers (local government and policy-making elites, education sector, as well as elites from non-government and civil society sectors). Sometimes, media actors are more powerful in the spread of ideas than official actors.
4. Irrespective of the media system, newsmakers are trained and conditioned to choose and mix information inputs of different origin. They search for relevant information among experts and official figures (local and from Europe), diplomatic communications, press conferences/press releases by their own government and by the EU, international agencies who provide services for the newsmakers' media outlets, and of course a range of online resources – from official EU websites to social media. As such, EU public diplomacy should continue **to invest into collaborative projects with individual newsmakers**. These could include regular information sessions with EU Delegation in 3rd countries, regular invitations to the press conferences and discussions with visiting VIPs from the EU as well as fully-supported exchanges of the journalists (from 3rd country to the EU, and from the EU to 3rd country). JM Chair research points that newsmakers in many locations stressed importance and appreciation of a chance to meet top actors from the EU (when they come to 3rd countries with official visits). Journalist stressed that an opportunity to engage with the VIP visitors in a frank open discussion – rather than in scripted and formal press conferences -- is invaluable. **EU Delegations should commit to the organisation of the open and engaging roundtable formats with the EU VIPs coming to 3rd countries.**
5. RCx-EU Chair research demonstrates that *financial* factors are the leading ones when it comes to the coverage of international actors, including the EU. International news sources remain influential in supplying information about the EU. Special foreign correspondents based in the EU (Brussels or EU member states) have become a luxury for 3rd country media, and for poorer countries specifically. Pursuing cost-savings, news media resort to the use of international news sources increasingly. RCx-EU JM Chair research indicates that the "Anglo-Saxon" news agencies – from the UK and the US – remain the leading sources of EU news globally. Their use is often supported by historical "special deals" to sell the news. These agencies possess reliable reputation -- external information gatekeepers perceive them typically as professional and objective. There is no indication that these agencies will not be used now or in the future. However, both UK- and US-based news agencies render a particular perspective on the EU – often Euro-sceptic and/or Euro-distant. The ongoing Brexit saga and the Trump Administration's attitude to Europe impact the framing of the EU in the 'Anglo-Saxon' sources. The EU external action on the ground should **monitor local media regularly to track the influence of the US and UK news sources on the local EU news production and EU-related news flow in particular.**
6. It is unrealistic that the EU will create an "EU news agency" in the nearest future. However, poorer countries in RCx-EU Chair research displayed readiness and interest in such service by the EU. EU external action practitioner may **consider some sort of the multilingual "EU news agency"**. This recommendation is of distant character. There are no indications that such news agency is on the agenda of the EU/its EEAS. The costs may be prohibitive, and the investment is definitely a long-term one. Nevertheless, with Europe increasingly becoming a space where narratives clash and battle, the EU should consider an option of multilingual outreach to the world communicating its main news and positions.
7. Among other news agencies used in 3rd countries, the most popular are German and French news wires. German agencies are often used due to their reputation of "objective and fair". French agencies are used firstly in the Francophone locations. When they are used in other locations, they are used due to "simpler" English – non-English speaking locations find it helpful. RCx-EU JM Chair research indicates that what escapes the attention of the 3rd country newsmakers who use these agencies is the fact that their reports are inevitably influenced by the topics and interpretations of the EU circulating in their respective states. The absence of attention to other continental news sources is wide-spread globally and of concern. The lack of diversity robs global readership of nuances when learning about the EU. **The "EU news agency" can potentially address this – by profiling news from different EU member states translated (at least) into English**, it could provide international readers with a range of European reactions and interpretations. Once again, this recommendation is of a distant character. EU Delegations in 3rd countries face the reality without such an "EU news agency".

8. Yet, the trend of using international news agencies to learn about the EU is not universal. The RCx-EU Chair research indicates that there is a range of 3rd countries' attitudes towards using international news. Some locations do not use them due to high costs associated with subscription and/or lack of language skills (e.g. Ukraine). Some locations (e.g. China, Russia, Japan) remain relatively closed for inputs from international news wires. Different strategies should be developed in the latter case. Here, *political* and *ideological* factors come to the forefront. In certain media environments, the newsmakers may feel uncomfortable to engage with the EU Delegation or cooperate with European experts/VIPs directly. In this context, one recommendation for the EU is to **invest into journalists exchanges to Europe**. Personal experience and inter-personal contacts are argued by the relevant literature to be a prime factor in shaping opinion and attitudes.
9. In conclusion, the Brief reiterates that there is no "one size fits all" solution. **Every 3rd country situation must be approached with a media outreach strategy that takes into account local priorities, contexts, needs and cultural practices**. Every location will have its own set of the most influential media voices and channels. EU external actions practitioners may prioritise dealing with these outlets and their staff first. Modern technology offers a range of software packages to monitor media in language-specific environment. Yet in order to understand nuances which may escape machine-led analysis, EU Delegations in 3rd countries may **employ existing know-how and expertise, involving collaboration with scholars in the field**. EU Delegations have accumulated a significant bank of their own best practices and they could **share the practices across** (of course, stressing the need to modify them to local needs and socio-cultural discourses). Finally, EU Delegation should **monitor how other diplomatic missions of states and organisations communicate themselves in the same 3rd country and learn from their best practices**.

These recommendations follow the JM Chair's specialization on political communication studies and reflect on her of scholarly expertise, methodological know-how and practice connections. The Chair's concluding argument is that it is paramount to incorporate a variety of theoretical, methodological and disciplinary perspectives into the study of information flows to communicate the EU. Recommendations above are research-informed. They are designed to provide a toolkit to boost the understanding of EU *international leadership* and *global governance, justice and normative pull*, EU broader *'soft' power appeal* and *impact of EU public and cultural diplomacy* from the perspective of the receiver of EU messages. This follows EU Global Strategy that prioritises "partnership, reciprocity, mutual learning and co-creation" in EU dialogue with the world.