**The Evolution of the EU’s Public Diplomacy Tools: From Joint Declarations to Master Messages to Social Media**

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*In 1970, the member states agreed to European Political Cooperation (EPC) in foreign policy in order “to demonstrate to all that Europe has a political vocation”, in other words, to gain visibility as an international political actor. How have the methods, by which member states communicate their foreign policy to European citizens and the world, evolved over the past fifty years? From joint declarations, to billboards, to pamphlets, to social media, this study evaluates the communication strategies of the EU in foreign and security policy. The paper begins with a discussion of the EU’s need for visibility in the international arena.  Next, it explains how the basis of intergovernmentalism in European foreign and security policy results in slow, stodgy, and risk averse communications.   Then, the authors explore how the resulting lowest-common denominator, garbled statements play out in a media world disrupted by the Internet.  The EU’s culture of slow deliberation leaves it out of sync with social media’s incessant demand for information.*

For nearly fifty years, the European project has attempted to use foreign policy as a way to gain visibility as a political actor. In the Davignon Report of 1970, the member states agreed to cooperate on foreign policy in order “to demonstrate to all that Europe has a political vocation”.[[1]](#footnote-1) Twenty years later, in 1993, the Maastricht treaty established the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSDP) with the similar goal, “to assert its identity on the international scene.”[[2]](#footnote-2) In the Cologne Presidency Conclusions in June 1999, the member states echoed Saint-Mâlo declaring they were resolved that “the European Union shall play its full role on the international stage.”[[3]](#footnote-3) In 2003, the fledgling European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) launched its first crisis management missions, demonstrating to the world the EU’s ability to act. By 2010, the European External Action Service, the EU’s ‘foreign ministry’ had coordinated all the different tools of EU external policy under one roof. Yet, in 2011, the Greeks circulated an unpublished document to the Political and Security Committee (PSC) proposing ways to better coordinate EU external policy in order to increase visibility as did the Austrians in 2013.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The same problems that plagued the EPC continue to plague the EAS today: intergovernmentalism in a culture of secrecy and risk aversion. EU foreign policy is dominated by member states whose deliberations are hidden behind closed doors. As a result, the EAS’s High Representative does not make a press statement until all 28 PSC ambassadors agree. The subsequent press statements are technical and reactive, as well as slow in coming. In a 24/7 news context, EU press statements are almost no news at all. In other words, the intergovernmentalism, secrecy, and risk aversion may be good for the member states, but it does not benefit the EU per se, and damns much, if not all, of the EU’s communications, no matter what its form.

This study traces the evolution of EU communications in foreign and security policy. The article begins with a discussion of the EU’s constant need for visibility in the international arena, and argues that the problem is not coordination, but rather intergovernmentalism itself. Next, it explains the basis of intergovernmentalism in European foreign and security policy, and its ramifications of EU communications. The following section then catalogs the different public diplomacy tools, especially social media, and evaluates their success in light of intergovernmentalism, and how the resulting lowest-common denominator, garbled statements play out in a media world disrupted by the Internet.

*“Asserting its Identity on the World Stage”: Visibility and Public Support*

The European Union’s foreign and security policy has long been conceived as a way to increase the profile of the EU both at home and abroad. In 1975, Leo Tindemans remarked that, while doing research on the subject, he “was struck by the widespread feeling that we are vulnerable and powerless.” At the same time, “Our peoples are conscious that they embody certain values which have had an inestimable influence on the development of civilization. Why should we cease to spread our ideas abroad when we have always done so?” His solution was a both a European foreign and security policy. Presenting a united front in world discussions would offset public malaise; “our vulnerability and our relative impotence are in the thoughts of everyone.” As a result, “external relations are one of the main reasons for building Europe, and make it essential for the European Union to have an external policy.” [[5]](#footnote-5)

This goal has been reiterated time and again in the Davingon Report of 1970, the Document on European Identity (1973), the Klepsch Report in 1978, the Davignon-Greenwood Report of 1980, and the Delligent Report of 1981, as well as in the Maastricht treaty. The Saint-Mâlo Declaration in December 1998 continued the tradition allowing the formation of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)[[6]](#footnote-6) “in order that Europe c[ould] make its voice heard in world affairs.” According to the 2003 Concept for EU Monitoring Missions, one of the “basic principles” was to “enhance EU visibility”. In 2006, the Commission proposed to the Council “Europe in the World — Some Practical Proposals for Greater Coherence, Effectiveness and Visibility.”[[7]](#footnote-7) In 2010, the European External Action Service was established with the same goal in mind: to “increase the Union’s political and economic influence in the world.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Commission spokeswoman Pia Arkenhilde explained “it's obvious that visibility is part of being effective. It's important for the recipients of the aid to know who they are dealing with and for the European tax payer, the donors of the aid, to see the actions on the ground, in terms of their future engagement.” [[9]](#footnote-9)

*European Union Public Diplomacy*

The EU recognized a need for more public diplomacy as a significant gap existed between EU achievements and EU public perception.[[10]](#footnote-10) When polling people regarding how favorable you view an institution based on their contribution in humanitarian aid, the EU was thought to be the weakest when compared to the United Nations, World Food Program, and United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, with only 41 percent of those polled expressing a favorable opinion on the relative contribution of the EU. The EU is the largest humanitarian and development aid donor in the world for numerous years now, comprising over 55 percent of global contributions.[[11]](#footnote-11) Overcoming the lack of global awareness of the EU is challenging due to a struggle between member states and the EU with regards to public diplomacy.

EU public diplomacy includes various elements from advocacy and public persuasion. Much of their public diplomacy projects to media and policy-makers through communication mediums such as the internet, social media platforms, publications, and more. The common theme of all definitions for EU public diplomacy is the goal of enhancing the public perception/awareness of a world stage actor.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Public diplomacy, that is communication aimed at the outside world, seeks to create a favorable environment in which foreign policy can flourish. In 2006, External Affairs Commissioner Benito Ferrero-Waldner wrote in an unpublished draft communication on the subject: “The task before us is therefore to build on this positive image [third countries have of the EU] and to better inform a broader audience in third countries about the Union’s policies, but also about its underpinning values and objectives as global actor.”

With the birth of the European External Action Service (EEAS), Greece sponsored a non-public, white paper in 2010 to the Political and Security Committee titled “Enhancing the EU’s public diplomacy: Better visibility and efficiency in EU’s foreign actions The role of the E.E.A.S. and of the PSC”. In it, the Greek government called upon the EEAS to take measures to increase the visibility of the EU on the world stage. The Greek paper suggests the EEAS increase coordination of foreign policy actors:

The EEAS, under the auspices of the High Representative/Vice President of the Commission, and with the contribution of the PSC, should immediately start elaborating this comprehensive public diplomacy strategy, fixing targets, priorities and major policy lines concerning horizontal issues, regions of enhanced European interest, countries, or even specific entities, of concern. This strategy should be formulated in a manner that will allow its full and flexible implementation by all the actors involved.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The solution suggested by the Greeks is more coordination of all actors within the EEAS: the Council/PSC, the Commission, and the HR in as many areas as possible, with the proviso that the public diplomacy strategy should be formulated in such as way as to allow both full and flexible implementation. In other words, all the actors should be in lockstep with a common message, but one that can be implemented in different ways. This was always the ideal of the ‘common’, rather than ‘single’, foreign and security policy.

Nonetheless, are the Greeks wrong in their assessment; is a lack of coordination really the problem, especially in light of the formation of the EEAS? Why has (in)visibility continued to plague European foreign and security policy since its establishment? Certainly, Europe was eclipsed by the superpowers during the Cold War and the EU often finds itself in competition with the member states for press attention,[[14]](#footnote-14) but is there another reason? With the advent of social media, the EEAS and the High Representative can by-pass the member states and even journalists to communicate directly with the people. With more than sixty million followers, US President Donald Trump has demonstrated the power and versatility of Twitter.[[15]](#footnote-15) The EEAS has 286,000 followers, much less compared to other European foreign ministries such as the French foreign ministry, with one million, the UK Foreign Office (900,000), the German foreign ministry (660,000) or compared to the US State Department, which has about five million.[[16]](#footnote-16) The author argue that a culture of secrecy and risk aversion, and an emphasis on message control damns EU foreign policy communication, no matter what its form, and has done so since its inception.

*Secrecy, Risk Aversion, and Message Control and their Effect on EU Communications since the birth of the EPC*

Part of the impetus for the 1970 Davignon Report was the difficulty the member states had in 1967 agreeing on a response to the Six-Day War. The European Political Cooperation (EPC) process was supposed to facilitate the formation of common positions through the use of confidential consultations with the member state foreign ministries. Linked by COREU, a confidential telex, the exchange of rapid and security information among the foreign ministries was guaranteed. Decisions would be made via consensus. Although the first meeting in Munich successfully led to an agreement to produce a joint paper on the Middle East, the resulting 1971 Schumann document, also called the Schumann Secret Report, was leaked to the media. The political maelstrom that ensued “revealed the risks that EU states assumed by virtue of their participation in EPC, even though common position statements had no legal force and EU states assumed they could strictly control the secrecy of the process.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

EU communications in foreign and security policy is still characterized by intergovernmentalism and fear of leaks or even statements that could unleash similar maelstroms. The emphasis on a united front creates an environment of risk aversion, for fear of embarrassing an official or -- worse yet – a government, that ties the hands of press officers. Whether in the form of a common position, magazines and brochures, or even just press statements, EU communications are the product of LCD negotiations, and therefore, wooden, technical, reactive, slow, and unappealing to the press. Such a communication strategy works very poorly in the context of 24/7 media.

Although the media environment of the twenty-first century is quite different from its predecessor, the bread and butter of communication remains the press statement. This common position, rendered through consultations among all the member states, is communicated through press briefings, brochures, master messages, EU leaders, and today, social media. In the past, the slow nature of the press, that is a morning paper or the nightly news report, could hide the length of time it took for the member states to come to that common position. Today, any response is expected to be Tweeted instantly. Wikileaks and others, including Brusselsleaks[[18]](#footnote-18), have published classified government documents. The following section details the evolution of the EU’s foreign policy communication instruments, with particular emphasis on social media, and how they have been affected by the continuing culture of intergovernmentalism and risk aversion.

European Political Cooperation and Joint Declarations

Although EPC was independent from the Community, at the Paris summit of 1972, the member states recognized the necessity of close cooperation between EPC and the Community, “on matters which have a direct bearing on Community activities, close contact will be maintained with the Institutions of the Community.”[[19]](#footnote-19) The member states realized that the EPC needed to work more closely with the Commission to ensure the success of EPC declarations. If EPC wanted the Community to back up its foreign policy resolutions with sanctions or the suspension of aid, the member states needed the support of the Commission, which had the power to initiate Community measures in trade and aid. Member states, such as France in the early 1970s, and later Denmark and Greece, were especially reluctant to use Community instruments to implement EPC policies because they wanted to keep “the inter-governmental nature of Political Co-operation unsullied.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Gradually, over a period of two decades, the EPC grew to use the Community to execute its policy through trade sanctions and aid grants more regularly.[[21]](#footnote-21) This relationship between EPC and the Community was officially recognized by the Single European Act (SEA) of 1987 which gave the Commission the shared responsibility with the Presidency to ensure that the external policies of the Community were consistent with those agreed upon in EPC.[[22]](#footnote-22)

To evaluate the achievements and failures of EPC, in 1990 the European Council adopted the following criteria[[23]](#footnote-23):

1. *Efficiency with regard to the internal decision-making structure of EPC.* Is there an increase, a halt or a decrease in the twelve's ability to consult each other and to formulate common positions? Which role can be attributed to the Presidency and to the EPC Secretariat in this respect?

2. *Effectiveness with regard to the twelve's external posture.* Have the twelve been increasingly able to translate common viewpoints into joint actions? How far do they participate in international diplomacy

3.  *Consistency with regard to the interrelations between EPC and the EC's external relations.* Have the EC/twelve made progress towards presenting themselves internationally as a unitary actor? Do they dispose of efficient communication channels inside? Which role can be attributed to the Presidency and the EC Commission in this respect?[[24]](#footnote-24)

Using these criteria, the EPC performed poorly in the Gulf War. The Gulf War was particularly significant in evaluating the performance of Europe's foreign policy cooperation as it was the first major crisis to take place in the post Cold War world, as it occurred just before the start of the 1991 Intergovernmental Conference, and as it brought to the forefront Europe's problems in influencing the course of international events. To rectify EPC's shortcomings, the member states put forth a number of reforms. The CFSP was, in part, a response to these shortcomings, and was designed to “render [the EU's] institutions more efficient, -- to ensure the unity and coherence of the union's economic, monetary and political action, define and implement a common foreign and security policy.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

For the Belgians, one of the main goals of the CFSP was that the new political co-operation “must endeavour to pursue a policy rather than produce endless declaration.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Many academics had commented on the capacity of the EPC to produce foreign policy declarations accompanied by little else. Desmond Dinan called the member states' response to international events

uninspiring and banal. The rhetoric of EPC is crammed with clichés: elections should always be 'free and fair' (Statement on Nicaragua, February 28, 1990); political settlements and solutions should always be either 'comprehensive, just and lasting' (Declaration on the Middle East, June 26, 1990); or 'just stable and lasting' (Declaration on Central America, June 26, 1989); and peace should always be based on 'sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity' (Declaration on Cyprus and Lebanon, June 26, 1989).[[27]](#footnote-27)

When decisions are made by consensus, foreign policy declarations are easier to produce rather than a response or an action to an international event. Such was the case during the Gulf War; quickly the Twelve condemned the invasion, but they did not then act in unison. They could agree on the goals, but they could not agree on the means. Christopher Hill argued 'EPC is not particularly well-suited to hand handling international crises, even those in which the Europeans are themselves directly involved.'[[28]](#footnote-28)

The EEAS: Same wine, different bottle?

Nevertheless, the CFSP did little to change either the type of foreign policy statements or actions produced. Even twenty years later, with the establishment of the EEAS and the High Representative, EU declarations stated that Russia should hold ‘free and fair’ elections (Ashton, 2012a), and that the EU is committed to ‘the unity and sovereignty of Mali’ (Ashton, 2012b). The contexts may change, but the words remain constant: they represent the approved language of European compromise. When translated into 24 languages, the message ossifies even further. Even these tidbits take time: ‘Events in the Arab world may be moving with dizzying speed, but the job of building a European Union foreign policy will continue to travel at its own, glacial pace’ (Castle, 2011). That’s because intergovernmentalism hobbles quick response, and by-passing the procedure could embarrass the parties involved.

In 2007, the Council secretariat decided to make use of YouTube because it was cheap and easy. Javier Solana’s video statement, unfiltered and direct to the people, was criticized by older officials who feared the transparency would hurt the Union as a whole. In the words of one official, “What are you doing? We are discreet diplomats. We cannot go public like that. We need to come to agreement with the 27 member states first.” A public environment hurts the chances of a diplomatic agreement being negotiated.

In many cases, member states cooperate, but agree to disagree, for example, in EULEX Kosovo, where several MS (Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia, Spain, and Romania) do not recognize Kosovar independence. Were it to become public that one or two member states were stymying proceedings, that government in question would be vulnerable to an onslaught from the press and public. Such a spotlight would put the national government in an awkward position: it is legally responsible to its own people and practically must follow its national interest, but it may also find itself under international pressure to change its views. Under these circumstances, the member state might find it prudent not to participate in European foreign policy at all. Therefore, deliberations must remain confidential until the member states can agree on a compromise position.

Although the EAS is nominally independent, the High Representative must still represent the common position of the member states. In one example, High Representative Catherine “Ashton's standing was itself damaged when one of her spokespersons portrayed her as very skeptical about a no-fly zone [in Libya]. At a stroke, that annoyed Paris and London, the bloc's two big foreign-policy powers.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Perhaps it is understandable that “The repeated questions about her suitability have fostered have a bunker mentality in Ashton's inner circle.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Ashton Spokesman Michael Mann defended Ashton in a letter to the *Economist*:   
“The idea that the high representative for foreign affairs can forge her own foreign policy against the will of member states is unrealistic. She can prod, push and pull, as she often does, but she cannot charge ahead without the backing of the 27.”[[31]](#footnote-31) In other words, the High Representative has an impossible task: She is to promote the EU’s foreign and security policy, but, at the same time, is hostage to the negotiations of the Political and Security Committee (PSC) ambassadors.

And those negotiations take time. The 28 member states are constantly in the process of negotiating policy behind closed doors. By definition, diplomatic negotiations require both time and privacy, hence the regular Gymnich meetings where foreign ministers take weekends in state-owned palaces to discuss matters in seclusion. Understandably, the EEAS puts a great deal of emphasis on ‘message control’ to ensure that the on-going negotiations are not compromised. For example, in February 2011, Brigadier General Jukka Savolaine in an interview with Judy Dempsey of the *International Herald Tribune* and *New York Times* countered the carefully negotiated EU policy towards Afghanistan, embarrassing the member states.[[32]](#footnote-32)

One of the main jobs of the strategic communication unit of the EEAS, or StratCom, is coordinating the EU message so that all entities are singing the same songsheet regarding the EU position. The former RIC – RELEX Information Committee has been changed to the External Relations Communications Committee. It coordinates the communication for all groups, including the member states. In turn, the small, three-person StratCom unit keeps the EU delegations/embassies all over the world to a common position on as many issues as possible. If these delegations are asked a question not addressed by the handbook or the common position, the delegation is to seek out an approved answer from Brussels. Heads of mission, ambassadors, and commission officials are not allowed to speak to journalists without prior approval. The PSC negotiates “master messages” for civilian missions originally drafted by the CPCC, and “communication strategies” for military missions drafted by the EUMS, to be approved by all the member states in order to guide press officers in Brussels and on the ground when dealing with journalists. All Facebook pages must be approved ahead of time. The broadcasting of pre-approved messages is acceptable, but not public interactions that could derail delicate negotiations. As one member of StratCom explained, it is not about putting words in people’s mouths, but “about getting the facts right.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

The main goal of StratCom is message control to avert risk of embarrassment. Member state governments cannot be embarrassed. One EEAS official said he had thought security was supposed to be the area of ‘high’ politics where states did not give in. Having worked in both security and communications in the EU, he said it was communications. States would not give up any of their power in this area.[[34]](#footnote-34) As a result, the EEAS employs a one-way communication strategy that requires pre-approval before information is released. The situation is so dire, it sometimes seems comical: at the bottom of every EU Security and Defence newsletter that the EEAS used to publish on a weekly basis is the disclaimer: “The views expressed are not to be taken in any way to represent the official position of the European External Action Service.”

As one EEAS official explained, when he began at NATO, there were fifty press officers and two lawyers. Later, when he moved to the Council secretariat under Solana, he was struck that there were only two press officers and fifty lawyers. He used this example to demonstrate how the EU is much more concerned with risk aversion than self-promotion.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Therefore, the EEAS communication strategy emphasizes broadcasting information to the public, rather than engaging it. The ultimate goal is to stay on message. The EEAS handbook lays out priorities and themes where the promotion of EU values must inspire communication on the EU's external action and based on delivery of peace, security, and prosperity.[[36]](#footnote-36) Delegations are encouraged to focus on messaging and action around five overarching priorities and in cooperation with the member states:

* Promoting the EU as a major partner in democratic transition in its wider neighborhood.
* Promoting the EU as a major aid and development donor in the world.
* Promoting the EU as a global economic power responding to the crisis and using trade as an engine for change.
* Promoting Human rights through high level political dialogue with partners and strategic operation programs.
* Promoting the EU as a security provider responding to global security threats.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The idea is, through the dissemination of information on EEAS operations, acting as a tool of the EU’s public diplomacy, creates a consciousness of common representation by the EU in foreign affairs and, consequently, a consciousness of collective European identity and interests. However, this policy requires a great deal of micromanagement to ensure all parties stay on message.

Wooden Messages in the 24/7 Media Context: The Rise of Social Media

Wooden messages, one-way communications, emphasis on averting risk, the slow pace of response, and message control have alienated the press. If journalists need to wait for a position before they can report it, or if turned away because there is “no news” as of yet, they will not spend their time, money and effort reporting on EU affairs. In 1999, there were more journalists accredited to the EU than to the White House, about one thousand. In 2011, there were only about 300.[[38]](#footnote-38) Ten years ago, every Wednesday, the Commission had a press conference. The room was overflowing. Today, one journalist estimated that only twenty show up.[[39]](#footnote-39)

In a day of limited resources, the press choose to put their best people in the national capitals where they are more likely to get ‘hot’ news and clear and quick answers to their questions. In Brussels, the answer will be “see our Website for our official position” or “let me get back to you”. For the first answer, there is no need to be in Brussels. For the second, the answer always takes several days, at which point the deadline has passed. Not surprisingly, the press is leaving Brussels in droves. That makes the EU more dependent on social media, but its instant and public nature does not fit well with the EU’s culture, especially in the realm of foreign policy.

Social media have disrupted traditional forms of communication. Twitter allows politicians to speak directly to the people without the disadvantages of time and space: it removes journalists as intermediaries for politicians; it allows politicians to take a collective pulse; and it allows the masses to communicate in real time to coordinate demonstrations. As David Carr of the *New York Times* explained, ‘I’ve come to understand that the real value of the service is listening to a wired collective voice’ (Carr, 2010). Twitter can give EU politicians immediate feedback on different proposed policies, a quicker and less expensive alternative to Flash Eurobarometer.

According to a study by Pew: ‘Facebook users are much more politically engaged than most people’ (Pew 2011, pp. 4, 33, and 39). Eurobarometer polls on social networks show that Europeans are relying on them more and more for their news. 47 percent see them ‘as a modern way to keep abreast of political affairs,’ a ‘good way of getting people interested in political affairs’, and ‘a good way to have your say on political issues’.[[40]](#footnote-40) Facebook provides the EU with a transnational, multilingual interface and 340 million users[[41]](#footnote-41) who spend, on average, more than half an hour a day receptive and trusting of unfiltered information brought to their attention by their cohort. In the era of ‘personalized politics’, participation is channeled through social media enabling “individuals to become important catalysts of collective action processes as they activate their own social networks (Bennett 2012, p. 22). Moreover, political social media use, especially among youth, increase political engagement over time, (Holt et al, 2013, p. 19), meaning the knock on effects could affect political turnout for generations.

Social media are a recent addition to the EU’s communication toolbox. The EP was the first institution with a social media presence beginning with a Facebook page in May 2009. The Commission followed suit in 2010 and the Council and the EEAS in 2011. However, message control is a major risk factor (Gueorguieva, 2008, Mangold & Faulds 2009). In what Kazys Varnelis calls ‘network culture’, once published on social media, the message no longer belongs to the author, but rather to the community, taking on a life of its own. It can go viral, become a meme, be interpreted or misinterpreted, and ultimately transformed (Varnelis, 2008). Therefore, EEAS officials are at a severe disadvantage: they must control the exact wording to ensure governments are not embarrassed. Deliberating behind closed doors, they are slow and cautious, the antithesis of social media. As a result, all public statements must be approved ahead of time. All Facebook pages must be approved ahead of time. The broadcasting of pre-approved messages is acceptable, but not public interactions that could derail delicate negotiations. As a result, their messages are wooden, like previous generations of joint declarations, and do not attract much attention despite their ubiquitous presence on the Web.

Broadcasting versus Engaging: EU Social Media Goals

According to Helen Dunnett, eCommunications manager at the European Crop Protection Association, “Communications in Brussels still tends to be one-directional, with a stoic resistance to using online tools to enrich press conferences, releases and events” (*EurActiv,* 2009). People are most likely to ‘de-friend’ someone when there is only one-way communication (Van Belleghem, 2011). In one of the most influential blogs in Brussels,[[42]](#footnote-42) and on Twitter, Jon Worth wrote of the EEAS’s Twitter account, “Following 4 people says ‘We just broadcast’. Look at what @number10gov does, aspire to that! Follows 400k’. In contrast to the EEAS, Downing Street uses Twitter as a two-way street: by following so many people, the UK prime minister can take the public’s pulse on many issues. Dick Nieuwenhuis, Head of Sector Information and Communication, EU Foreign Policy Service in the European Commission, responded ‘and if all we do for the moment is ‘broadcasting’, what’s wrong with that?’[[43]](#footnote-43) What is ‘wrong’ is losing touch with the people. Worth recommended,

@EU\_EEAS should be following a couple of hundred relevant people, and should be following hash tags as world issues develop, ready to step in when positions of the EU are made clear. It would not be resource intensive and it would mean – on the web at least – the EEAS could gain favour with a lot more people than it has to date.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Just a few months later, Megan Kenna of the European Policy Centre wrote ‘Despite the obvious communication value of social networks, as seen in the Arab spring, the European External Action Service is still behind the curve’ (Kenna, 2011b). The EEAS needed many more Facebook pages and Twitter accounts for delegations and to make better use of the ones that existed. She found the Twitter posted statements ‘too formal and restrictive’. She advised, ‘If HR Ashton were to open a personal Twitter account, instead of speaking through a spokesperson or in formal statements, it would greatly improve her image and perceived engagement, and offer the chance for increased accessibility and needed insight into her work’ (Kenna, 2011a).

Conclusions: Calculated Risk Taking?

The EAS does not disguise the intergovernmental nature of EU foreign and security policy. The member states are in the driver’s seat, and, structurally, the EU is designed to minimize risk and embarrassment. The member states want to look good. The Commission president wants to look good. The Council president wants to look good. These people have to work together; they do not want to embarrass each other. As a result, EU officials work to control media messages rather than to release information, let alone to engage with the public on social media. Despite fifty years, European foreign and security policy is still hostage to the fragile, intergovernmental process established under EPC. Therefore, there is very little transparency and tremendous message control in the name of preserving the Union.

The risk averse nature of the EAS works very poorly in the context of the new media climate. Political communications overall have been destabilized by the Internet.[[45]](#footnote-45) Newspapers are losing market-share to the Internet and have less money to spend on reporting. Media outlets are cutting down on reporters and reporting, especially in Brussels, at the same time as the EU as a whole, and the EEAS in particular, have clamped down on all its officials to speak to the press only in prescribed sound bites, which are less interesting to cover.

In other words, fear of failure becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy: To protect itself, the EU uses one of its few powers – one way channels of communication -- to do message control and avert risk, which, in turn, alienates the press and the people who use social media, thereby undermining public support for the EU.

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21. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Nuttall, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
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35. Interview with anonymous EU official, Brussels, 4 October 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Interview with anonymous EU official, Brussels, 3 October 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Interview with anonymous EU journalist, Brussels, 7 October 2011, but also corroborated by an interview with anonymous EU official, Brussels, 3 October 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
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