



Global Governance, Regionalisation and Regulation:  
The Role of the EU  
6th EU Framework Programme

# Have you heard of the EU?

## An analysis of global images of the European Union

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# Garnet Policy Brief

Number 7, September 2008

## HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE EU? AN ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL IMAGES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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### Introduction

The European Union (EU) is increasingly described as a global power. The growing number of articles analyzing the EU's global role or the amount of post-graduate courses on EU foreign policy created in the past decade reinforce this notion. The EU has also been reflecting on its global ambitions: recent official documents and public statements make frequent reference to the Union's 'global responsibilities'. According to this self-representation (largely endorsed by a relevant academic literature) the EU is not just a global power, but also a profoundly 'different' one. The EU's 'distinctiveness' is supposedly derived from its cultural roots, history and institutional framework. According to this view, the EU adopts a different approach to foreign policy according to the paradigm of "structural prevention" (Keukeleire 2004; Telò 2006), underpinned by fundamental values (e.g. democracy and human rights, equality, the rule of law, sustainable development, solidarity – see also Art. 1-2 of the proposed Constitution for Europe), as well as innovative practices including multilateralism, constructive engagement, partnership, regional integration, institutionalization.

This 'distinctiveness' thesis suffers from two relevant shortcomings: it is deeply Eurocentric and permeated by the assumption that being 'different' means being a 'better' global actor. In an attempt to test this assumption, a number of analysts have started assessing whether the EU's foreign policy is actually as distinctive (and effective) as claimed (see, among others, Lucarelli and Manners 2007). Nevertheless, these studies limit themselves to analyzing the consistency and impact of EU policies and do not capture an important element of the relationship between the EU and the rest of the world, that is, how the EU as a global actor is perceived by non-European societies.

The dynamics generated by these 'perceptions' have relevant policy implications for what the EU can realistically achieve in contemporary world affairs, since mutual perceptions are important factors affecting the behaviour of international actors. In a nutshell, one can arguably claim that the perceived environment is as important as the 'real' one, because it represents the context in which decisions are taken.

Despite the importance of these dynamics, the EU has not paid specific attention to external perceptions, attracting criticism of being a short-sighted global player "that focuses on telling the world what it should think about it, but quite deaf to what the world actually thinks" (Lynch 2005: 31). Limited recognition of what the rest of the world 'thinks' of the EU might have a negative effect on its external relations and the actual impact of its policies. In turn, such a 'cognitive dissonance' with the rest of the global community might reduce the EU's credibility both abroad and at home.

Given the importance of the topic, we launched a research project in 2005 on the external image of the EU. The project was developed in the framework of the Network of Excellence on *Global Governance, Regionalisation and Regulation: the Role of the EU* (GARNET). This research project examined views of the EU through public opinion, political elites, civil society organizations and the media in a sample of countries from various regions around the world. The first research phase, from 2005 to 2006, included Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Egypt, Japan, India and South Africa. All data sources and references were organized into a GARNET Working Paper (Lucarelli 2007a) and some articles were published in a monographic issue of the *European Foreign Affairs Review* (Lucarelli 2007b). The second research phase, from 2007 through 2008, is still underway. The preliminary results have been discussed in an international symposium held in Florence in March 2008. The countries included in this second round are: Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Mexico, Palestine, Russia and the United States. Other ad hoc case studies deal specifically with the perceptions of organizations and institutions such as the World Bank, the African Union, the TV network Al Jazeera, a selection of international social movements and NGOs, as well as a number of interviews with non-European diplomats operating in Brussels. This Policy Brief mainly relies on data from the first research phase, though certain findings from the second research phase are also discussed.

For each country, researchers used a set of sources: popular newspapers (usually distinguished along the left-right continuum or the pro-government/pro-opposition classification); existing opinion polls, often regional surveys, but also local ad hoc polls; governmental websites and documents; civil society press releases and publications; and occasionally face-to-face interviews. The multiple sources and various constituencies consulted allowed a broad range of views to be represented in each case study. In order to deepen the analysis, our studies took into consideration the socio-political culture of each country/region.

This policy brief is organized in three sections. The first section focuses on general knowledge of the EU, drawing mainly from public opinion surveys and secondary sources. The second section looks at the most common 'images' of the EU collected in the various country case studies and compares them with relevant self-representations of the EU. The final section provides some key policy recommendations for EU institutions and other relevant stakeholders drawn from information gathered during the two-phase research project.

## 1. Who has heard of the EU? Limited knowledge and coverage outside of Europe

Despite the growing popularity of the Euro, the overwhelming presence of the EU starry flag dominating the entrances of the many EU delegations and the recurrence of the EU logo on thousands of booklets and brochures summarizing aid programmes in developing countries, very few people outside the European continent are aware of the Union. Even less, do they know about EU's policies and objectives, as confirmed by a comparative analysis of international opinion polls such as the World Values Survey, the Afrobarometer, the Latinobarometro and the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA).

A particularly low degree of knowledge of the EU is registered among citizens in emerging markets. In China, South Africa and Brazil, only a minority of citizens know enough to have an opinion about the EU: 23% of Chinese in 2001 ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)), compared with 45% of South Africans in 2002 ([www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)) and 43% of Brazilians in 2005 ([www.latinobarometro.org](http://www.latinobarometro.org)). While in South Africa citizens are comparatively more familiar with international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank or regional institutions such as the African Union (AU), in Brazil, the EU is more widely known than the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

India remains a country deeply influenced by American culture and despite new prospects generated by a common Erasmus programme with the EU, the bulk of Indian students still look towards the US to further their studies and professional careers (see, for instance, Lisbonne de Vergeron 2006: 25). Similarly, public awareness of the EU in Egypt is rather moderate and largely confined to intellectual, political and economic elites.

In Mexico, knowledge of the EU has grown in the past ten years. Currently, only about a fourth of citizens do not have an opinion about the EU. Moreover, appreciation of the EU and support for a closer relationship between the central American country and Brussels have grown. Nevertheless, an opinion poll presented at the EU-Latin America and Caribbean summit in 2004 showed that only 32% of respondents expressed a positive appreciation for the EU while the US was given a 51% approval rate (*Associated Press*, 26 May 2004). In another Latin American country such as Venezuela, the level of knowledge of the EU has remained relatively low over time: in 2004, only 21% of citizens had some knowledge of the EU ([www.latinobarometro.org](http://www.latinobarometro.org)).

While knowledge of 'Europe' is rather widespread in industrialized societies such as Australia, Canada, Japan and the US, some confusion arises with respect to what the 'EU' actually is. In Japan, for instance, familiarity with the 'EU' as a political and institutional entity is very low. In spite of a general awareness of Western European countries and the idea of 'Europe', only a slim majority of Japanese (51%) feels some degree of affinity with their Western European counterparts ([www8.cao.go.jp/survey](http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey)).

All in all, only a minority of those citizens who have an opinion about the EU believe it is a politically effective and credible international actor. For instance, in 2002 only 15% of South Africans believed the EU was an effective institution ([www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)). Similarly, when asked to assess the contribution of global actors towards democracy, development, peace and free trade in 2004, only a small minority of Brazilian citizens consider the EU as the most effective actor in supporting 'development' (12%) and 'democracy' (22%), whereas the US is believed to be slightly more effective. The only exception is 'global peace,' for which the EU is seen as the best promoter by 22% of citizens *vis-à-vis* 17% for the US. Interestingly, Brazilian opinion polls reveal that better educated people consider the EU to be a much more effective contributor to global peace, free trade, democracy and development than the US, with percentages ranging between 29% and 53% for the EU, and dropping to 7% and 21% for the US ([www.latinobarometro.org](http://www.latinobarometro.org)).

In a 2004 Youth Aspiration Survey conducted in Egypt, only 18% replied 'Europe and the Mediterranean countries' to the question 'what is *the best orientation* for Egypt in its relations with neighbouring areas?' while 34% replied 'the Middle East' and 93% 'the Arab region'. A more positive case for the EU is China, where confidence in the EU rose from 30% in 1990 to 40% in 2001 ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)). In 2004, 77% of Chinese who had an opinion about the EU believed that its role in world affairs was mainly positive ([www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/EvalWorldPowers/LeadWorld\\_Apr05/LeadWorld\\_Apr05\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/EvalWorldPowers/LeadWorld_Apr05/LeadWorld_Apr05_rpt.pdf)).

From a general perspective, looking at the 2006 survey *World Powers in the 21st Century*, it is interesting to note that only a small minority of citizens see the EU as a significant world power, ranging from 7% respondents in India to 25% in Japan. Astonishingly, these percentages fall even further when respondents are asked what their projected estimate of the EU power would be in 20 years. On the contrary, the US is overwhelmingly perceived as the only super power across the board, though respondents firmly believe that China will catch up in the near future ([www.cap.lmu.de/download/2006/2006\\_GPC\\_Survey\\_Results.pdf](http://www.cap.lmu.de/download/2006/2006_GPC_Survey_Results.pdf)).

In general, the degree of knowledge of (and appreciation for) the EU rises along with an individual's level of education, socio-economic background and professional status. Perceptions of the EU are often filtered through images of some leading European countries, due to former colonial ties, specific cultural relations, intense bilateral cooperation and trade-related factors. In most cases, the UK, France and Germany are the key countries through which citizens around the world view Europe and, in turn, the EU as a political/institutional actor. In some countries such as South Africa and China, interest is growing around the post-2004 enlargement members of the EU, which contributes towards projecting a much less 'Westernized' image of Europe, devoid of colonial connotations and more clearly multicultural.

An analysis of the media coverage of the EU shows very similar results. In general, the EU is not viewed as a 'sexy' topic by media outlets outside Europe. Media reviews reveal that the EU is typically granted a rather small space in the main newspapers, when compared to other international actors. In general, financial newspapers present the highest number of articles and reports on the EU, relating to the common view of the EU as a mainly economic power. A case study on how the EU is viewed by the Arab TV Al Jazeera also confirms the difficulty media encounters in making EU-related events more accessible for regular viewers. In 2005, Al Jazeera's Europe-focused programme 'From Brussels' (which was created to counterbalance the already-existing 'From Washington') encountered numerous problems due to the lack of media appeal of EU-related news and was eventually terminated.

## 2. Images of the EU

### *Trade opportunity or protectionist bloc?*

"The EU is one of the most open economies in the world and is committed to free and fair trade in an open global economy." Peter Mandelson, EU Trade Commissioner ([ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/newround/pr260207\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/newround/pr260207_en.htm))

It comes as no surprise that the most recurrent images of the EU in the press and in the discourse of elites somehow relate to the EU's economic might. In general, the EU is widely seen as a strategic opportunity for development and economic growth. For instance, in the words of the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, the EU is "not only India's largest trading partner, but also our largest source of foreign direct investment" (*The Hindu*, 8 November 2005). For Brazil, according to its former Secretary General for External Relations, De Seixas Corrêa, the partnership with the EU is of "primary importance" since it "represents the largest market for Brazilian exports and the main source of foreign direct investment" ([ftp.unb.br/pub/UNB/jpr/rel/discsg/1999/3131.pdf](http://ftp.unb.br/pub/UNB/jpr/rel/discsg/1999/3131.pdf)). President Lula praises the commercial attitude of the EU by describing it as "Mercosur's only trade interlocutor that shows a positive disposition towards negotiations bit putting all relevant offers on the table" ([www.mre.gov.br](http://www.mre.gov.br)). If Chinese officials also view the EU (and its member states) through the lens of "economic complementarity," the Japanese press emphasizes the role of the EU as a commercial actor, often presenting the EU enlargement process as a key opportunity to expand Japanese exports to Europe.

Mexican newspapers also attribute significant importance to the economic relations between their country and the EU, echoing the overall positive discourse of their government about the EU-Mexico free trade agreement. Such positive views are not shared by several representatives of local business associations who, on the contrary, believe that the trade relationship has fundamentally benefited the subsidiaries of European companies and has had only a marginal impact on national industry, due to the lack of a national development policy. And in the case of Japan, the press criticizes the unfair European protection of agriculture and fishing, perceived as detrimental to the Japanese economy.

In 2001-2002 issues regarding trade negotiations, tariffs and agriculture made up the bulk of EU-related news in South Africa. Yet, the recognition of the EU as a trade giant and a key market is not tantamount to an across-the-board appreciation for the EU's trade policies in South Africa. On the contrary, numerous disputes during the bilateral trade negotiations in the late 1990s seem to have left a negative impression on several South African constituencies: from political elites to civil society groups, the common image of the EU as an 'economic giant' is something more similar to a 'protectionist bloc'.

The image of the EU as a protectionist market is very common among politicians, trade unionists and business organizations in developing economies and in the civil society sector across all countries. Criticisms target particularly agricultural subsidies and non-tariff trade barriers, which are thought to be distorting international trade and penalizing emerging markets. The Brazilian president Lula da Silva describes the EU as a "great protectionist agricultural power" ([www.radiobras.gov.br/integras/03/integra\\_301003\\_01.htm](http://www.radiobras.gov.br/integras/03/integra_301003_01.htm)). His Venezuelan counterpart, Hugo Chavez, complains that "each cow grazing in the European Union receives in its four stomachs \$2.20 dollars a day in subsidies" ([www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/27a/155.html](http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/27a/155.html)). The South African president Thabo Mbeki blames the EU for double standards, since it promotes social welfare and protectionist policies at home, while forcing developing countries to open up their markets and rely only on free trade (ANC Today, 12 November 2004). Most trade unions and local associations, as well as European NGOs echo these sentiments and perceive the EU's agricultural policy as another component of longstanding unfair practices imposed on Africa, Asia and Latin America by the former colonizers.

### ***Security seeker and democracy promoter***

"To combat terrorism is to defend human rights. We must do so with vigor and determination. But we must also take care to select only those instruments that are compatible with the rule of law. [...] In defending our societies against terrorism we must make sure not to compromise the values which terrorists seek to destroy. We must protect our security – but in doing so we must be equally determined to preserve our liberties." Gijs de Vries, former European Union Counter-Terrorism Co-ordinator ([www.liberal-international.org/contentFiles/files/de%20Vries%20Speech.pdf](http://www.liberal-international.org/contentFiles/files/de%20Vries%20Speech.pdf))

Our survey reveals that the EU is often associated with peacemaking/peacekeeping processes and democracy promotion. In the Indian press, the EU is often mentioned with regard to the peace processes in Jammu-Kashmir and Sri Lanka and various newspapers deal with the EU's diplomatic initiatives to avoid direct confrontation in Iran and North Korea, while Indian political elites often describe the EU as a key ally in the fight against terrorism. The EU's 'mediation' approach to the Iranian crisis was also appreciated by Venezuelan governmental elites, with President Chavez commending the decision of European countries not to endorse the US invasion plans in Iran (*The International Herald Tribune*, 20 November 2007). Between 2001 and 2002, a significant amount of EU media coverage in South Africa related to the developments of the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe and the personal sanctions Brussels imposed on the representatives of the ruling ZANU-PF party. As mentioned above, Brazilian public opinion views the EU as one of the global actors that contributes most to international peace (after the UN, but before the US).

In Lebanon, the majority of respondents to a 2005 opinion poll deemed the EU to be a positive force in achieving freedom and democracy (54%), as well as respect for human rights (53%) (Delegation of the European Commission, Beirut 2005). The same year, an internet poll conducted in Egypt revealed that the majority of respondents believed that the Euro-Mediterranean partnership had the potential to positively affect the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. Interestingly, though, in Palestine the view of the EU as a key peace promoter and a supporter of the Palestinian cause seems to have weakened in the past few years. Thus, while the Palestinian Authority's Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, maintains that "without Europe's financial support during our times of need, we would have definitely witnessed a much more impoverished nation [...] and with it, a faltering political situation", the EU's inability to use its financial power to put pressure on Israel and its refusal to interact with Hamas have been seen as critical weaknesses of the EU's role in the peace process ([www.passia.org/conferences/2007/SalamFayadPaper.pdf](http://www.passia.org/conferences/2007/SalamFayadPaper.pdf)). In this regard, it comes as no surprise that top aides to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas believe that only the US has the power to influence Israel's policies in the occupied territories (*Palestine Times*, 2 February 2007).

### ***Multilateralism or multipolarism?***

"The European Union's commitment to multilateralism is a defining principle of its external policy. [...] The EU has a clear interest in supporting the continuous evolution and improvement of the tools of global governance." European

Commission, *The European Union and the United Nations: the choice of multilateralism*, COM (2003), 526 final, 10.9.2003 ([eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52003DC0526:EN:HTML](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52003DC0526:EN:HTML)).

Political elites in various countries generally approve of the EU's approach to global governance issues, with the only exception of international trade. What is commonly praised is the multilateral approach the EU promotes in various fields, from human rights to environmental standards. Yet, this perception is rather ambivalent, with the EU being appreciated for promoting multilateralism in certain instances, and multipolarism in others.

For instance, Shyam Saran, former Indian Foreign Secretary, acknowledged that the "EU represents a very important pole in a multipolar world" (*The Hindu*, 6 November 2004). A similar reference to 'multipolarism' is also recurrent among Brazilian political elites, who see the EU as a contributing force towards a world order in which Brazil could gain its place among the great powers.

It must be underlined that the multipolarism/multilateralism debate often mirrors the critique of the current global governance system, characterized by the US administration's unilateral approach in international politics. Such a discourse often occurs against the backdrop of a general reflection on the 'common values', which permeates the speeches of those governments that sign strategic partnership agreements with the EU (e.g. Brazil, China, India, Japan and South Africa). As a consequence, the reference to multipolarism/multilateralism is generally laden with diplomatic rhetoric, which makes it rather difficult to gauge the extent to which the multipolar/multilateral role of the EU is genuinely appreciated or if it is just invoked as part of a political strategy. Thus, it should not surprise that the EU's quest for multilateral global governance is most ardently appreciated by the Chinese government. As reported by *China Daily* in 2004, the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao maintained that "China and the EU are important forces for world peace and stability and both are committed to multilateralism and actively promoting democracy and the rule of law in international relations" (*China Daily*, 9 December 2004). Some understand 'multilateralism' as tantamount to preserving state sovereignty against unilateral policies (at times, through hierarchical control of the UN Security Council), for others it means access to the small club of those powers that have a say in world politics, while in the original EU's rhetoric it is seen as a practice of coordination that goes beyond state power and has largely changed the very concept of sovereignty.

### ***A model of regional integration?***

"In the EU, we like to think that we are a model example of international integration on the hand, while having a growing role as an international player on the other." Benita Ferrero-Waldner, speech given at the City University of New York, 15 September 2005 ([www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article\\_5029\\_en.htm](http://www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_5029_en.htm)).

There is no doubt the EU is the most successful example of regional integration in contemporary world. The Commission itself has developed initiatives to support regional integration processes in other regions of the world and one can find a significant amount of political speeches and official documents in Africa, Latin America and South East Asia describing the EU as a 'best practice' to learn from. In countries such as Brazil and South Africa, with which the EU has recently agreed on a 'strategic partnership', the reference to the European integration process is inevitably integrated into a long-term commitment to being the 'engines' of regional integration processes within their own geographic spheres of influence. Also in Mexico, the EU is viewed as a key example of regional integration for countries of Latin America that have reached a certain level of democratic stability and economic development. On the contrary, in Venezuela the EU's approach of pushing towards integration through free trade agreements has been heavily criticized by government elites, whereas the system of structural funds (which has helped underdeveloped parts of Europe to bridge the gap with the most advanced economies of the EU) is widely regarded as playing a positive function of harmonization and equity.

Interestingly, in Egypt the EU is also discussed as an important example of integration and possibly and a realistic alternative to the failing pan-Arab projects, though intra-Arab economic cooperation continues being the best option for the wider public as well as for the elites. Even in Japan, where regional integration is not on the agenda, some of the most popular newspapers devote a number of articles to EU internal affairs and most of them highlight the EU's enlargement as a positive example of the peaceful benefits of regional cooperation.

Against this background, it is interesting to note that, following the dire negotiations of the Economic Partnership Agreements, a number of political leaders in Africa have started arguing that the trade agenda proposed by Brussels would undermine social development and regional balances in many African countries thereby hampering regional integration in the continent.

### ***Balance of power and growing cooperation?***

"We have had a fair amount of adversity, as well as our periods of prosperity. Certainly, our relations have not been easy over the last couple of years." Benita Ferrero-Waldner, speech on the EU-US relations at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington (DC), 13 January 2005 ([www.eurunion.org/news/press/2005/2005006.htm](http://www.eurunion.org/news/press/2005/2005006.htm)).

A final issue relates to whether the EU is seen as a potential source of balance in world affairs (perhaps strong enough to counter the hegemonic role of the US) and the extent to which more cooperation between third countries and the EU is thought to have a positive impact on global politics.

Perhaps surprisingly for some euro-enthusiastic analysts of transatlantic dynamics, our research did not generate enough evidence to argue that the EU is perceived as a relevant counterforce to the US in global affairs. Particularly in the field of international trade, the EU and the US are often mentioned as two 'allies' that impose restrictive norms on weaker economies, especially in less industrialized societies. Even in the case of Venezuela, where the government has adopted an anti-US rhetoric in public statements and documents, the EU is simply described as a 'better option' (in particular regarding the use of diplomatic means in the Middle East and Iran), but is not perceived as a potential counter power.

Nevertheless, calls for more EU initiatives to counterbalance the US were rather frequent in the countries analyzed by our research. To corroborate this evidence, the 2005 PIPA/Globescan survey found that citizens in 20 states out of 23 would see it as 'mainly positive' if Europe were to become more influential than the US in world affairs, with a world average (excluding European countries) of 53% of positive responses, as opposed to a world average of 25% who see it as mainly negative ([www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/EvalWorldPowers/LeadWorld\\_Apr05/LeadWorld\\_Apr05\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/EvalWorldPowers/LeadWorld_Apr05/LeadWorld_Apr05_rpt.pdf)). An opinion poll conducted in Iran in January 2007 shows a positive view of the EU by about half respondents, who also call for a stronger Europe vis-à-vis the US ([www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jan07/Iran\\_Jan07\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jan07/Iran_Jan07_rpt.pdf)). Similarly, the 2006 survey *World Powers in the 21st Century* reveals that the majority of citizens in Brazil (67%), China (96%), India (83%), United States (77%), Russia (89%) believe that greater cooperation with the EU would benefit global politics as well as their own country ([www.cap.lmu.de/download/2006/2006\\_GPC\\_Survey\\_Results.pdf](http://www.cap.lmu.de/download/2006/2006_GPC_Survey_Results.pdf)).

### **3. Summing up**

This analysis has largely confirmed that the EU is not a particularly relevant topic for public debate in most countries around the world. The EU's cultural and social image is still fragmented, while the European project remains vastly unknown to citizens of non-European countries.

Moreover, there seems to be a significant 'gap' between how the EU perceives itself and how it is perceived by citizens, governmental elites, civil society groups and the media in other countries outside Europe. It also appears as if the 'distinctiveness' of the EU as a global actor upholding values such as solidarity, human rights and sustainable development does not necessarily reverberate in the set of most common external perceptions. In this regard, it must be emphasized that we did indeed find some evidence that the EU is beginning to be perceived as a progressive environmental actor, which is likely to grow in the future provided that the EU will be able to take the lead on finding a credible global strategy against climate change.

Some of the data presented in this policy brief points to a potentially inverse relation between 'positive image' and 'policy effectiveness.' The policy areas in which the EU's self-representation is closer to its external image – such as multilateralism, diplomacy, promotion of democracy and the like – are also those in which the EU's unitary decision-making is less developed and its effectiveness deemed quite low. By contrast, the policies in which the EU could make a real difference due to its 'common voice' and economic leverage – such as international trade – are those for which the EU is often criticized.

Fragmentation, poor communication and lack of a symbolic message are all crucial factors accounting for the skewed image of the EU as shown by the results of this multi-country survey. In order to overcome such weaknesses, European institutions and policymakers should improve not only the coherence of various EU policies, but also their consistency with the fundamental values the EU affirms to promote. At a more general level, it is paramount to develop a socio-cultural message able to explain to the citizens of the world—and also to European citizens—what the EU's global ambition is and how it can be accomplished. Therefore, we have identified several recommendations to help EU institutions achieve such a result.

The external images of the EU that we analyzed are the result of complex dynamics stemming from long-term structural factors (e.g. political identity, historical memories, socially-shaped conceptions of world order) and more short-term variables (e.g. role and interests of the country, the specific political interaction with the EU or with other major powers, specific interaction with EU's Member states, EU's communication practices). For all these reasons, an EU strategy aimed at avoiding misperceptions and improving positive images should go beyond reforming public diplomacy (which is just one element of what needs to be reformed) so as to tackle crucial political and institutional weaknesses. The areas to be reformed/improved can be summarized as follows:

***Recommendation 1: Improve policies***

It would be a great mistake to believe that all the problems associated with the various EU's images derive from misperceptions. Some 'misperceptions' are common to many countries and cannot be reduced to a simple matter of communication. Coherence and effectiveness in EU's foreign policy are not easy targets and there is still a long way to go, as recognized by analysts and policymakers during and after the Constitutional process. Whereas the Lisbon Treaty can be regarded as a good step towards creating an institutional framework able to foster coordination among EU's institutions and the Member States, there are still many sources of incoherence that can only be addressed as a result of **political choices**. For instance, it was found that the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** attracts the greatest criticism and threatens EU's credibility as an actor concerned with fairness and injustices. In light of the current food emergency, which also risks triggering social conflicts and political instability, the EU should commit itself to drastic reforms regarding not only the CAP but also its overall approach to international trade. As a matter of fact, the EU, a recognized global economic power, cannot avoid taking a clear stance on what type of **global economic governance** it supports. In particular, it should state clearly how it intends to reform the multilateral trade regime. Another area likely to have a dramatic impact on EU's international credibility is **climate change**, which has seen governments failing to find a common and credible agreement. The EU has presented itself as a leading progressive actor in so far as climate change is concerned; therefore, disappointing expectations could have disastrous consequences on the EU's credibility. Finally, though the list could be much longer, the EU must clarify what **intercultural dialogue** actually means in today's Europe. European states are gradually reinterpreting their **migration** policies in light of security concerns and the EU is increasingly accused of islamophobia and anti-Semitism. The simple statement that the EU is the land of tolerance is no longer sufficient: more coordination and mutual control among Member States is necessary in order to avoid adopting double-standards and regressive policies.

***Recommendation 2: Better communication***

*Improve information* – EU's communication strategies have been long criticized for failing to promote a better understanding and appreciation of the EU both inside and outside Europe. It must be acknowledged, however, that EU institutions have started addressing this issue through the "**Plan D**" initiatives, which came into effect after the failure of the Constitutional referenda in France and the Netherlands. At the same time, though, innovative tools should be encouraged on a large scale. For instance, new generation web-designers can be commissioned to overhaul the EU portal in order to make it more easily accessible to the common public (e.g. by adopting a 'google' approach). An interesting initiative is constituted by the new audiovisual policy launched in April 2008, which could contribute to enhancing the EU's visibility both inside and outside Europe, also among the young public (this is particularly the case of audiovisuals distributed through EUtube).

*Improve clarity of aims and reformulate symbolic message* – Informing citizens about 'what the EU does' is not sufficient. The overall goals underlying all EU policies should be stated clearly. The objectives of each policy should be outlined in detail and aligned with the overall goals of the European project. At the same time, an overall message on the EU's global role and aspirations is paramount. However, the EU should refrain from presenting itself as an 'ethical power.' Nobody likes empires, not even of a 'normative' type. As any power, the EU has values and interests and should not be afraid of '**normalizing**' its power. Its overall message should describe the EU as a **complex actor** characterized by **interests** and values as well as **global responsibilities** that are line with an increasingly complex world. There is no simple solution to the problems that this combination creates, but there is equally no other option for a quasi-post-westphalian entity like the EU, which aims at endorsing a different stance in world affairs but is still hampered by many inconsistencies.



### **Recommendation 3: Improve visibility**

Due to the EU's multi-centre and multi-level institutional setup, it is almost impossible to identify a 'single face' for Europe. In the Lisbon treaty, the reforms concerning the High Representative (HR) for EU's foreign policy was aimed at creating one single institution able to work across pillars in order to enhance coherence within the system of external relations. However, the creation of a permanent Presidency in the same Treaty might vanish the effort as both the HR and the President would work as external representatives of the Union, with the risk of perpetuating the image of an institutionally-fragmented Union. Given this complex institutional architecture and the overburden that will characterize the HR's office, the latter will actually be able to rise EU's visibility and coherence only insofar as:

- it will be guaranteed that the HR will have political legitimacy to function as 'the face of the EU';
- the new European External Action Service (EEAS) will work as a real support-office for the HR with a set of **deputies to the HR**, who will assist this institution overcome the many challenges associated with its task;
- the system of **EU delegations** – which should develop as an integral part of the EEAS – will constitute a real *saut qualitatif*, compared to the current unsatisfactory network of Commission's delegations. The EU delegations will need to perform the double role of 'representatives' of the EU abroad but also 'channels' of local expectations, misperceptions and criticism.
- the HR will keep a close **coordination** not only with the Member States, but also with relevant Directorates General at the Commission, which will most probably not be moved to the EEAS (particularly DG Communication, Trade and Development).

### **Recommendation 4: Listen more**

Good communication rests on the ability to know one's interlocutors, their expectations and preferences. The EU is often accused of not listening to its counterparts. Its communication strategies and policies have suffered from a limited understanding of what the non-European world wants and expects from Europe. Such listening 'skills' should be improved and new channels should be made available to those actors who want to communicate with the EU. The new system of **EU delegations** designed by the Lisbon treaty—which might include also personnel from the Member States' diplomacies—might play a key role in getting the EU closer to the ground, an ability which the EU has lacked for a long time, both inside and outside its borders. It is a positive sign that the EU has become increasingly concerned with external perceptions as evidenced by the recent inclusion of a research area concerned with the EU 'external image' in the 7th Framework programme for **research**. In order to broaden the analysis of popular attitudes towards the EU, the Commission should support the inclusion of a set of two or three key questions regarding the EU in each of the existing **regional barometers** (Asiabarometer, Latinobarometer; Afrobarometer etc.) and support the creation of **Neighbourhood barometers** covering all countries included in the European Neighbourhood Policy.

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