

Dyria Aloussi:
Making better use of Europe's soft power

Over the past years, the field of diplomacy and political communications has undergone drastic changes due to a changing global environment; a changing context marked by a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Arab Spring and all the instability that has resulted such as the diffusion of power and the rise of non-state actors in Europe's peripheries. Adding to this plight, some European economies are hitting bottom in crisis or are facing fiscal constraints.

Meanwhile, wireless communication and technology has exploded globally, and one can say that humankind is now almost entirely connected; in this new normal, state actors have to coin effective policies and communicate more strategically with a global outlook. In the new normal the populace must be communed around soft topics they can care about and emotionally engage with. Such topics can range from Sport to Art and Culture, Entertainment, Music, Education, Trade, Foreign Aid or Civil Society.

In order to create credibility around the 'brand Europe', its soft power equity must be in synchronicity with its policies. Another aspect is to keep an authentic trajectory, which then ultimately manifest the brand Europe in the hearts and minds of all Europeans. As a rule of engagement, Europe shall communicate and engage emotionally, not stiff or bureaucratic. Europe shall create innovative messaging with empathy and solidarity to keep people truly engaged. As a third point Europe shall advocate and realize that in the new normal it is not about Europe as an institution but about all Europeans with whom the EU has to build meaningful relationships.

Gandhi, who coerced power by non-verbal and symbolic communication, proved decades ago how effective soft power can be. Martin Luther King coerced power with empathy and solidarity. In psychology only 20% of traditional (hard) IQ accounts for success but the ability to apply emotional (soft) intelligence is the most crucial aspect for success. Europe has a strong soft power arsenal with global reach (ie its football teams, quality brands, music, films, art etc). In the new normal, it is about the strategic application of soft power equity in diplomacy and policy making.

The bottom line remains the fact that the dynamics of politics are affected by state branding and that a new normal of politics has already emerged – not about trade routes but about emotional engagement and soft power. For Europe it is vital to manifest a new, postmodern raison d’être that keeps inspiring its own populace and also appeals to the wider world.