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Reinventing NATO's Public Diplomacy

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This paper examines some of the public diplomacy challenges that national governments and international organizations like NATO are increasingly facing. While new media technologies have become a powerful enabler in the globalised information environment, international security issues no longer remain 'close-hold' subjects reserved to foreign and security policymakers. Analyzing some of the current public trends in transatlantic themes in Europe and the United States, the author takes a closer look at NATO's evolving communication policies and activities. Evidently, public diplomacy has its limits. No matter how skilfully designed, it cannot replace political messages and contents. A serious political crisis or the loss of human lives cannot (and must not) be turned into a positive news story. However, if public diplomacy aims at establishing a trustful and interactive relationship between the seekers of information and the respective organization or government, public diplomacy requires political will, strategy and resources to be effective and credible.

New Media Technologies

Contemporary international relations have become increasingly fractured. This trend has been exacerbated by growing economic competition for markets, resources and opportunities; political polarisation; concerns about climate change; the ongoing war on terrorism; and many other worrisome realities. The rapid development of new information technologies is not only a result of wider globalisation – it is also one of its key drivers. In particular, the Internet has fostered new forms of communication, including hundreds of thousands of blogs, chat-rooms, special-interest websites and social media applications such as YouTube and MySpace. New or previously relatively silent actors from civil society, the private sector, national bodies, activist and militant groups, criminal organizations and terrorist cells are all taking advantage of new media technologies to disseminate their products, policies, opinions and propaganda. Never before was our information environment so speedy and diverse.

Today's media environment vividly demonstrates the importance of personalisation, customisation and interaction for, by and with audiences.



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Private-sector companies learned quickly that the traditional organization-audience relationship no longer works in just one direction. From McDonald's and the BBC to Bono and Greenpeace, everyone is eager to communicate directly with the public, leaving relatively few areas of human activity unaffected by the new technologies. In particular, Web 2.0 tools allow direct, customised, interactive, multifunctional and often audiovisual communications across the globe.

While it is true that traditional television and radio broadcasts are still received by mass audiences throughout the world, it is also true that in Western countries online news has become the top source of information, and that new social media applications are rapidly on the rise around the world. By 2013, one in six people (i.e. one billion), will watch web videos. Many of those viewers are now and will continue to reside in the world's more developed economies.

The new, globalised information environment is a particularly difficult one for governments and international organizations to adapt to. Old-style state-to-state relations and one-way flows of information are no longer the only recipe for successful policy-making.

For governments, communicating national policies in a convincing manner to constituents – and to audiences abroad – has become more essential than ever before. This, in turn, puts a premium on political persuasion and communication to the public that the policy in question is legitimate, right and noble.

This may at least partially explain why Joseph Nye's concept of *smart* or *soft power* has gained in popularity. Public diplomacy and branding practitioners are increasingly solicited by political clients seeking expert advice on promoting governmental and/or party policy programmes.

US Public Diplomacy Efforts

In the international arena, the outgoing Bush administration has undertaken considerable efforts to boost US public diplomacy. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Washington invested significantly in communication tools, programmes and policies to advance US interests abroad. As America's image in the Middle East and other parts of the world suffered considerably, the US administration doubled its efforts to win back hearts and minds. These efforts were accompanied by a lively debate between the Pentagon, State Department officials, information agencies and communication experts over how to best reinvigorate US public diplomacy.

With President Bush making public diplomacy a top priority and appointing a number of senior officials to revamp America's image abroad, traditional broadcasting programmes like the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty were redesigned with bipartisan support and increased federal budgets. 'Listening tours' through the Middle East, 'rapid response units' and 'media hubs' in Brussels, London and Dubai, as well as new broadcast services, were created mainly to target audiences in the Middle East, and to a lesser degree in Europe.

Some of the new projects – such as *Al-Hurra*, the Arabic-language satellite TV network that Congress created as a counterweight to the Qatar-based *al-Jazeera* in 2003 – have become increasingly controversial. With US\$350 million dollars already spent on *Al-Hurra*, its journalistic competence and political judgement have been questioned, particularly when in 2007 a Hezbollah leader appeared on the TV channel.²

New Washington-funded tools have not prevented terrorist networks from disseminating their propaganda. On the contrary, *al Qaida* has significantly improved its communications skills in recent years. Taking advantage of the new media technologies, they have managed to build an increasingly powerful propaganda operation, enabling them to communicate constantly, relatively securely and in numerous languages to and with loyalists and potential recruits around the world.

A December 2007 online chat hosted by Ayman-al Zawahiri – with a US\$25 million bounty on his head, easily one of the world's most wanted fugitives – provided a vivid illustration of this point. The chat provoked 1,888 written queries from journalists and others. Seemingly, it was impossible to interrupt this propaganda machine and prevent a large number of curious viewers from watching al Zawahiri respond to questions.

At this point, these and other US communication efforts have clearly demonstrated their limits, no matter how skillfully designed. The US image has remained predominantly negative in Muslim countries. The Pew Global Attitudes 2008 survey, for example, found that 80% of Shia Muslims consider the US "to be more of an enemy" – a view shared by 70% of the Turkish public and 60% of respondents in Pakistan.³

To counter this, today's US Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy has been mandated to lead all US inter-agency public diplomacy efforts and programmes – including those of the State Department, the

² The Director of *Al-Hurra*, Larry Register, resigned accordingly. Associated Press / Seattle PI.com.

³ Pew Global Attitudes 2008, www.publicdiplomacy.org/92.htm.

Pentagon, the Intelligence offices and the Department of Homeland Security – via the *Policy Coordination Committee*. The latter comprises a number of sub-bodies such as a Counter Terrorism Communications Center, a Global Strategic Engagement Center and a Digital Outreach Team. At first glance the synchronization of all governmental communication activities, supported by an impressively large budget, seems to a logical way ahead, but then again entails the risk of lengthy bureaucratic procedures among all agencies to agree on important messages and programmes with a long-term effect. If anything, the US image abroad could become more positive once the new US Administration is in office.

European Public Trends In Transatlantic Issues

European countries, with perhaps the exception of Great Britain, have lagged behind in the discussion about public diplomacy. Many of them do not have global image ambitions, nor has public diplomacy historically played an integral part in pursuing foreign policy objectives. In some countries, the term public diplomacy is not even part of the established political vocabulary (apart from routine media and press activities, and cultural outreach programmes).

But changing public attitudes on international security issues have obliged many European governments to start reconsidering public diplomacy. The war in Iraq has prompted European publics – both mass and élite – to take an increasingly critical look at the US and its global leadership role. This, in turn, has also impacted on NATO as the organization of transatlantic security cooperation. Moreover, former Defence Secretary Rumsfeld's remarks about the value of old and new European Allies and the need to turn NATO into a toolbox in the fight against terrorism have spurred heated public discussions about solidarity and trust among the Allies.

But the reasons for weakening public support for the Alliance have much deeper roots than the transatlantic rift of 2003-2004. Almost 20 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, significant proportions of most NATO-country populations still have vague ideas about the Alliance, its purpose and its roles. This particularly applies to the generation born after the end of the Cold War that relates NATO's *raison d'être* to readings in their schoolbooks only. But not only the below-40 generation views NATO primarily as a US-led military organization. Not having followed NATO's transformation over the years, the average reader of a national newspaper bases his perceptions more on

Cold War stereotypes than political realities and knows little about NATO's performances in the field of current operations and missions, crisis management, partnership relations, or civil emergency planning.

For sure, the Alliance has changed faster than its image has. Moving from simply 'being' into 'doing' is, by definition, bound to create either more diffuse perceptions and controversial discussions, and not only within the traditional groups of security and defence experts but larger segments of the publics, too.

Not surprisingly, public support for the Alliance is higher in many of the new member countries than in the older ones. Given these countries' recent communist history, the democratic mainstream parties in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, the Czech Republic, the three Baltic countries and, to a lesser extent, Slovenia and Bulgaria generally enjoyed strong public support for their bid for NATO membership. Most of the new Allies organized professional information awareness campaigns in their countries, working out communications strategies and dedicating financial and human resources for the preparation of either a referendum or parliamentary approval.

This picture is clearly different in most of the older Allied countries in Europe. Since 2002 the GMF Transatlantic Trends⁴ and other international surveys have been demonstrating that, *grosso modo*, support for the Alliance has faded in many European countries, for example:

- in Great Britain from 76% in 2002 to 65% in 2007
- in Turkey from 53% in 2004 to 35% in 2007
- in Spain from 63% in 2002 to 59% in 2007 and
- in Germany from 72% in 2002 to 55% in 2007.

It is certainly good news now that in 2008 European support for the Alliance has begun to increase again. According to the 2008 Transatlantic Trends⁵, an overall 57% of Europeans agree that NATO is still essential to their country's security, which is an increase of 4 percentage points since 2007. Increases were found in 8 of the 12 countries surveyed, with a surplus of 11% in Spain, 7% in Germany and 7% in France. Even in Turkey, where public support for the Alliance has dropped significantly since 2004, support rates have slightly increased (by 3%).

After the election of Barack Obama, the new US President and his European colleagues will be able to rely on a strong public feeling on both sides of the Atlantic that transatlantic relations need to become closer and international threats and challenges should be addressed in partnership with each other. This

⁴ Transatlantic Trends 2007, www.transatlantictrends.org.

⁵ Transatlantic Trends 2008, www.transatlantictrends.org.

includes, for example, majorities of Poles (77%), Germans (75%), Irish (70%) and Spaniards (67%). The exception is France, where only 39% said they would favour closer European-US relations. Americans, on their part, overwhelmingly favour closer relations with Europe (91%).

Transforming Nato's Public Diplomacy

The NATO Alliance is not only the central collective defence and security organization linking the two sides of the Atlantic; it is also the first address when it comes to public reactions and sentiments on transatlantic security issues. NATO's Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) in Brussels is a rather young body, as it was only created in 2003 by the former NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson. As such, it succeeded the NATO Office of Information and Press, a body primarily responsible for daily press and media operations and communication activities in support of Allied and Partner countries, and was merged with the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme. After being challenged by the public repercussions of the transatlantic rift, PDD started to transform its public diplomacy posture in 2004. Based on a mandate to complement the Allies' own communication efforts, PDD's programmes are meant to educate and inform public audiences about transatlantic security issues and promote the Alliance's policies and objectives in a truthful, accurate and responsive way. Beyond daily press relations and website management, most of PDD's activities are intended to have long-term effects. They are designed to:

- build both relationships and networks with opinion-formers and journalists;
- facilitate dialogue among security experts, policy-makers and NGO representatives;
- generate interest in transatlantic issues among larger segments of the population, in particular the successor generation.

In this vein NATO PDD has elaborated dedicated communication strategies for the home front, a variety of Partner countries, including Russia and Ukraine, the Balkans region and in support of the countries participating in the Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (MD/ICI) in the past years. It has intensified NATO's outreach programmes for critical target audiences such as journalists, opinion-makers and parliamentarians in Allied nations, established Information Centres in several Partner countries, diversified its audiovisual products and tried to create attractive programmes for younger audiences such as summer schools, simulation exercises, university and school competitions and many other initiatives of this kind. PDD has also successfully tested some cultural public diplomacy activities – for example, organizing NATO 'half-marathons' in Hungary, which

attracted thousands of participants and generated broad local media coverage - as well as some modest image-building activities such as NATO exhibitions for the broader public.

These efforts could have had a more profound effect were it not for three hindering factors. First, NATO's public diplomacy planning and programming did not become an integral part of the Allies' political discussion and decision-making early enough. Until 2006, the Council discussed public diplomacy issues only occasionally and showed little enthusiasm for looking at public diplomacy as part of a holistic political effort. Second, few Allies reinforced their national communication activities in support of the Alliance. In some cases, governmental financial support for local transatlantic NGOs and security institutions was even reduced. And third, given limited budgetary and technological means, NATO PDD was not in a good position to make use of new media applications to reach out to broader audiences.

In 2006, however, NATO's operation in Afghanistan gave a wake-up call to Allied governments. Increased fighting against the Taliban in the south and east of the country, growing numbers of casualties and public concerns about NATO's ability to succeed in Afghanistan made governments realise that public diplomacy is a critical instrument to sustain public and parliamentary support for operations there.

Increasingly, national surveys have demonstrated that public support for the ISAF operation cannot be taken for granted in many European countries and in Canada. While solid majorities of Europeans and Americans (73% and 79% respectively) support contributing troops to international reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, assisting with the training of the Afghan police and military forces (76% and 68% respectively) and combating narcotics production (70% and 76% respectively), Europeans, by and large, continue to disapprove of committing troops for combat operations against the Taliban.

Moreover, NATO's operation in Afghanistan underlines the critical importance of clearly communicating a political objective to publics at home. When NATO took over responsibility of the ISAF operation in 2003, political leaderships in many European countries communicated only vaguely about the objective and nature of the operation. In Germany, Great Britain and many other countries, the ISAF mission was primarily introduced to the public as a reconstruction and democracy-building effort, and the notion of combat operations was carefully avoided. Growing numbers of civilian and military casualties, as well as increasing attacks by the Taliban on international forces, have made it less and less possible to maintain this line of argument. Explaining to national electorates why ISAF has to constantly adapt to its difficult mission in Afghanistan and faces an enemy that sees itself as



being at war with the international community is clearly more difficult now than five years ago.

At the same time, it has become obvious that the NATO-led operation involves enormous coordination challenges. Although the NATO Secretary General, his spokesperson in Brussels, the ISAF commander and his military spokesman, should be the principals carrying agreed NATO messages to the outside world, in reality a large number of civilian and military officials in their national capacities and senior military officers in the ISAF chain of command offer a steady stream of public commentary about the conduct of the operation, its achievements and problems. Often, their remarks are not aligned with NATO's politically agreed positions. This makes it extremely difficult for NATO to offer a unified vision or convincing message to external audiences.

On the military/operational level, ISAF struggles with an insufficient number of well-trained PIOs. Indeed, ISAF has tried to reinforce its information and psychological operations aimed at fostering Afghan confidence in the ISAF mission, but these efforts cannot and should not be a substitute for political communication efforts. And while Afghan communication capabilities are still in their infancy, Taliban propaganda finds its way easily into the new media distribution channels – their “spokesmen” quickly disseminate false information to local and international news outlets, often within minutes of a military incident involving the loss of human life. This puts ISAF on the defensive, often under brutal time pressure to investigate the facts and prepare an accurate and truthful response. At the speed with which today's media world operates, developing an effective, credible and accurate response quickly enough to make a difference is a huge challenge.

That said, NATO Allies are gradually coming to grips with this challenge. In May 2007, the Allies agreed to invest jointly in upgrading the Alliance's communication capabilities, both civilian and military. A Media Operations Centre (MOC) was created in Brussels to foster cooperation between NATO Headquarters, ISAF in Kabul, and the troop-contributing countries. The MOC also manages media planning activities and monitors local, regional and international press coverage of the ISAF operation.

The package agreed by the nations to enhance NATO's communication capabilities also includes support for developing Afghan communication skills and techniques – for example, by training press officers, and by providing internet connectivity for the Afghan Government Media Centre. In addition, NATO's public

diplomacy programmes in Allied countries have been geared strongly towards the operation in Afghanistan, by taking journalists and key opinion-makers to the country, by engaging political decision-makers and other target groups with tailored programmes and by offering a greater variety of multimedia and web-based information products about NATO's operations and other relevant subjects.

At the April 2008 gathering of Alliance leaders in Bucharest, public diplomacy was mentioned in the Summit declaration for the first time ever. The Allies pledged their support for enhancing NATO's strategic communication capabilities in order to communicate with local and international audiences in an “appropriate, timely, accurate and responsive” manner.⁶

This is good news, but much remains to be done. Many NATO Allies have only recently realised that if they want to carry the Alliance's messages convincingly to global audiences, they cannot afford to limit their efforts to their national élites, ignoring the rest of the population. The Allies have also come to acknowledge that traditional messaging and influencing models are outdated. In today's media world, organizations can no longer afford to preach and assume that the public is listening.

Organizations must instead interact with audiences through the audience's preferred channels of communication, and in the formats the audience prefers to receive. This, in turn, implies that formats and tools will have to be tailored, too. National Parliamentarians, for example, are unlikely to spend much time watching videos on the web. They need to be engaged in face-to-face discussions. On the other hand, delivering NATO's messages about its policies and operations via web-based videos and other audiovisual and new media tools will be key to reaching out to younger demographic groups. It would be equally important to communicate with the under-40 generation via web 2.0. technologies, for example through blogs and chat rooms. In order to do so effectively, NATO must come rapidly up to speed in understanding the communications technologies of the 21st century – and then decide how best to turn the new tools to its advantage.

What Needs To Be Done?

Public diplomacy requires *political will, strategy and resources*. Needless to say, this is easier said than done. For NATO's communication efforts to succeed and become sustainable, individual Allies and the

⁶ Paragraph 10, Bucharest Summit Declaration, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-049e.html>.

Brussels Headquarters need to vigorously pursue the modernisation of their national and the organization's communication policies, tools and techniques. The NATO 2008-2009 Public Diplomacy Strategy⁷ points in the right direction, as it suggests key priorities as well as new approaches to effectively meet the outlined challenges. As such, the document represents a viable framework for the Alliance's future communication efforts, in particular in view of the forthcoming Summit in Kehl/Baden-Baden and Strasbourg in April 2009 to mark the 60th anniversary of the Alliance. Both the Allies' gathering at the Franco-German border and the Alliance's jubilee year are high-profile communication opportunities that should help get NATO's messages across convincingly. But the challenges that NATO is facing in the field of public diplomacy are much more profound.

1. To start with, Allied governments need to have the will to use public diplomacy as a political instrument. The successful application of soft power does not come for free but requires careful strategic planning, professional staff and adequate financial resources. At the moment, too many Allies still lack all or part of this and mainly focus their activities on managing the 24h media cycle, hoping to achieve short-term effects on local constituencies.

This approach is clearly not sufficient to garner and sustain public support in today's globalised information environment. Instead, public diplomacy needs to become an integral part of national foreign and defence policy planning, and consequently, of national decision-making at the highest level. Ultimately, investing in professional communication expertise will not only help Allied governments get their messages across more effectively; it will also help foster the Alliance's overall ability to plan and execute public diplomacy programmes and dedicated campaigns before a particular crisis hits the organization.

2. What is the overarching political message of the Alliance that its members seek to convey collectively to the outside world? What should be the organization's 'brand'? These and other questions lead to the core of NATO's public diplomacy, namely NATO's current, and more importantly, future strategic focus. ISAF's operation in Afghanistan will certainly remain a critical issue on NATO's agenda for some time to come and will oblige the Allies to pay unwavering attention. But NATO's transformation reaches far beyond the operational realm. The wide array of political issues

facing the Alliance - from NATO's partnerships and enlargement policy, its contribution to the Comprehensive Approach, international arms control regimes and the fight against terrorism through to the evolving relations with Pakistan - are not only important deliverables of the transatlantic community, but should, together with NATO's operations and missions, be translated into a compelling public narrative. Such a narrative needs to portray the Alliance as a strong, committed and competent transatlantic community of like-minded democracies that preserves peace and security for its members and, wherever possible, seeks to contribute to stability and security in the entire Euro-Atlantic region. Traditional master messages or Summit declarations listing a wide array of themes and crafted in typical diplomatic language have proved to resonate very little with the media and the larger public. A discussion of NATO's narratives at the senior political level need not keep the Council busy every month. An APAG-style meeting⁸ twice a year, for example, could help frame an informed discussion among NATO Ambassadors or even Ministers. It could also usefully complement the work of the Committee on Public Diplomacy and the Senior Political Committee, with the latter usually deciding on master messages. It is more important, however, for the nations to agree on a narrative that may serve as a building block for any long-term public diplomacy planning. The forthcoming Summit in Kehl/Baden-Baden and Strasbourg and the 60th anniversary campaign in 2009 are perfect opportunities to develop such a narrative.

3. In the context of overhauling NATO's soft power policies and capabilities, the organization's military and civilian approaches to communication need to be better harmonised. Following the introduction of 'strategic communications' as a new concept geared to ISAF's operation in Afghanistan, there is a strong need to discuss NATO's information policies and the related terminology in more fundamental ways. Strategic communications, although not a NATO-agreed concept, proposes to advance NATO's objectives in Afghanistan through the holistic use of all information tools such as public diplomacy, military public affairs and information operations, and also advocates a key role for NATO's military in reaching out to civilian target audiences in Member and Partner countries. This approach still needs to be formally discussed by the political-civilian side of NATO and to be linked to already existing public diplomacy strategies and information policies on the military side. More

⁷ The 2008-2009 Public Diplomacy Strategy was formally approved by the NATO Committee for Public Diplomacy in March 2008 and subsequently endorsed by the North Atlantic Council in May 2008.

⁸ APAG (Atlantic Policy Advisory Group) meetings are informal gatherings of Political Advisors or/and Directors from NATO capitals and/or members of the NATO Senior Political Committee that normally take place twice a year in an Allied and Partner format.

importantly, the suggested approach raises the question whether strategic communications can help to overcome NATO's growing problem to speak with one voice. At the end of the day Allies have already agreed on a joint vision for Afghanistan.

4. Obviously, a one-size-fits-all strategy will not work for all NATO members. The specific politico-historical, socio-economic and cultural environment within which individual Allies operate needs to be adequately addressed when engaging audiences on transatlantic issues. However, the need for traditional, country-by-country communication approaches must not prevent the Allies - individually and collectively - from pursuing non-traditional approaches to public diplomacy such as branding, reputation-building and cultural diplomacy more ambitiously.

To be clear: As a non-governmental organization, NATO cannot and should not advertise its policies by means of costly TV spots in the manner of a 'Heineken' or 'Pepsi' publicity spot. But as a transatlantic *'peace protector and security provider'* across the Euro-Atlantic region, the Alliance does possess a unique brand and reputation that could be better promoted. Applying some of the more widely used reputation-building techniques, in particular aimed at raising interest in transatlantic security issues among young target groups, would not do any harm to NATO's reputation as a serious organization. By contrast, the digital world offers vast opportunities to introduce NATO's brand to a global audience, thus reaching far beyond the organization's traditional community of followers. Like many other new tools, these approaches come with a price tag. However, working with external experts who help design branding activities tailored to NATO's needs would certainly be a worthwhile investment.

5. It is absolutely mandatory for NATO's public diplomacy to be able to analyse the underlying motives of public trends and attitudes towards the Alliance and to assess the impact of its communication activities. Asking each and every Ally to survey national perceptions may not always be an easy sell politically, and on top of everything it would require funds that governments may wish to spend for other purposes, but trying to engage people on transatlantic themes without knowing *how* they view NATO and *why* they think in a particular way is like flying blind. The same rationale applies to the assessment of communication programmes. Only if the success or failure of activities is objectively assessed can communication strategies be sufficiently corrected or adapted.

For too long, too many NATO Members have ignored these two imperatives or have made only half-hearted efforts to assess their communication

activities from the starting as well as the end point. Only a few months ago, Allies agreed to a pilot study mandating PDD to conduct a focused survey on images and perceptions of the Alliance among the successor generation (aged 25-40) in ten Member countries. This is certainly a start. But public trends need to be surveyed much more systematically in all Allied countries in order to generate valuable and comparable data that can guide outreach activities. The best way forward would be if nations agreed to establish a joint survey and evaluation mechanism that would help track down public attitudes towards and perceptions of NATO's overall transformation agenda.

6. NATO's senior military leadership has rightly pushed the Allies for more and better trained military personnel able to deal professionally with the media and broader communication aspects of NATO's operations and missions. At present, only a handful of nations have the capability to train their military staff to a higher standard. But the lack of Public Affairs Officers (PAOs), related support staff and communication capabilities in theatre does not only hamper NATO's operational performance: expertise training is much needed on the civilian side, too. Be it among NATO's International Staff or in NATO capitals, only a few individuals have ever received public diplomacy training of some sort, including in very basic competencies such as public speaking skills, media handling or website management – and yet they are expected to speak and interact convincingly in a highly pluralistic information environment.

The time may be ripe to create a NATO Training Centre (or Centre of Excellence) where both military and civilian Allied as well as NATO staff can study the dynamics of today's information networks, strategic planning, the application of new techniques and the wider approaches to public diplomacy. Alternatively, special public diplomacy courses for Allied officials and NATO staff could be organized at the NATO Defense College in Rome or the NATO School in Oberammergau. Ultimately, it does not matter where such training takes place. What matters is that NATO Allies comprehend that public diplomacy-related skills require adequate education. As a minimum, nations and the Brussels Headquarters should develop a cadre of trained public diplomacy practitioners.

7. For the moment, NATO's connection to the digital world is reduced to its website, including a web-based NATO TV Channel. The website features videos, podcasts, photos, audiovisual files, a virtual exhibit, an e-bookshop and many other interesting pieces of information, but hardly offers any form of direct interaction with the visitor. Related sites (ACO, ACT, ISAF, ATAs) leave more or less the same static impression. One reason behind this is

an outdated data management system that has been ignored for too long. Another reason, however, is the organization's reluctance to adopt a personalised and interactive approach, for example by offering blogs and chat rooms and linking NATO to some of the new social media applications like FaceBook or YouTube pro-actively.

But there is also room for improvement when making use of some more traditional communications channels. Surprisingly, NATO ignores radio broadcasts, including the many regional radio channels in Member countries, almost entirely, and thus millions of people listening to radio rush-hour shows. Another untapped tool

is human interest stories. NATO's official face must become more diversified than featuring male senior diplomats or military officials to attract a larger public.

The 21st century communication toolbox offers plenty of opportunities for the Alliance to inform the publics, advocate its policies and establish interactive relationships with a global audience. NATO nations simply need to take advantage of them. If they take the challenges outlined seriously and start tackling them, public diplomacy could effectively and successfully contribute to the Alliance's legitimacy and to a better public understanding of why the transatlantic security community will continue to change.