

**EU-China Soft Diplomacy:  
Public Diplomacy and Communication**

**Piecing the Puzzle Together:  
Why a bigger picture seems necessary to  
unleash Europe's soft power towards China**

By Verena Nowotny, M.A.  
(research support by Isabella Schulner)

Vienna, March 2013

In February 2012, the European Union and China agreed to establish the EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue. The first meeting was held on 18 April 2012 in Brussels. Ms Androulla Vassilou, EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, and Ms Liu Yandong, State Councillor of the People's Republic of China, defined the objectives<sup>1</sup> for the EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD) as follows:

- “ (...) to contribute to the knowledge and common understanding between the EU and China, through the enhancement of contact between people on both sides;
- to open a new channel for the informal discussion of strategic societal issues of common interest to the EU and to China, through informal contacts;
- to identify opportunities for cooperation based on mutual interest and reciprocity, to trigger concrete actions based on the full exchange of information, and to support the positive evolution of our societies through concrete actions in the full respect of our highly valued diversity.”

Apart from these general goals, some concrete activities were also agreed upon.<sup>2</sup> They range from the increase of scholarships for Chinese and EU students and the expansion of language study facilities to intensified cultural exchange especially throughout the 2012 EU-China Year and, ultimately, to the promotion of scholars mobility and partnerships between Chinese and European youth organisations.

The EU-China HPPD brings new and fresh attention to the field of “public diplomacy”, a process by which an international actor (country, multinational organization) conducts foreign policy by engaging citizens and public opinion stakeholders in a different country or region. The structure of public diplomacy works with the policies, culture and values of the society conducting it – all factors which the American political scientist Joseph Nye has labelled an actor's “soft power”. According to Nye, a first of five foundational elements of public diplomacy is *listening*—engaging people by collecting and analysing their value debate(s) and opinion formation. The second is *advocacy*—the direct presentation of policy and information. The third is *cultural diplomacy*—the facilitated export of or participation in the cultural realm, including sports. The fourth is *exchange diplomacy*—mutual exchange of personnel, especially students and scholars, with a foreign partner. The fifth is *international broadcasting*—engaging citizens through direct broadcasting, in particular of news and current affairs. A more recent approach adds a sixth element—the possibilities created by the Internet to *engage publics* and establish a two-way conversation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joint declaration of the first round of the „EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue“, 18 April 2012, Brussels. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc/china/joint12\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc/china/joint12_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Follow-up Actions Of The First Round of the EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD), 18 April 2012. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc/china/follow\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc/china/follow_en.pdf)

Public diplomacy thus covers a number of well-established activities that have been in use for many years. However, it was not until the events of September 11, 2001, that the field has regained renewed attention in modern diplomacy, especially in the United States. On that day, it had become gruesomely evident that traditional diplomatic channels were not sufficient to involve non-state actors and the public in general. As Jan Melissen, Director of the Clingendael Diplomatic Studies Programme at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, states, most countries' interest in public diplomacy were triggered by some kind of crises<sup>3</sup>: "The rising popularity of public diplomacy was most of the time a direct response to a downturn in foreign perceptions. Most successful public diplomacy initiatives were born out of necessity. They were reactive and not the product of forward-looking foreign services caring about relationships with foreign audiences as a new challenge in diplomatic practice." Numerous countries have experienced such a wake-up call at some point in their recent history. Examples are The Netherlands when foreign opinion seemed shocked by the Dutch ethical consensus on euthanasia, or Denmark, when Danish newspaper cartoons depicting the Islamic prophet Muhammed led to a wave of protests in Muslim-majority countries, including violent ones, in 2006.

While national or regional image crises act as emergency drivers of public diplomacy, a more gradual, underlying and concurrent driver has been technology. Never before have so many people had the chance to articulate their opinions, needs, and criticism. This has made an alert, proactive and modern government's outreach to the general public in other countries an imperative if a nation-state wants to position itself well in the global arena.

### Why image matters to a country

Still, one could ask why it is relevant whether people in other countries rate one country more attractive than others. As Joseph Nye says, it all boils down to the question of power<sup>4</sup>: "A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it. In this sense, it is also important to set the agenda and attract others in world politics, and not only to force them to change by threatening military force or economic sanctions. This *soft power* – getting others to want the outcomes that you want – co-opts people rather than coerces them." Therefore, a lack in trust or a tainted reputation have or can have effects on a country's economy, its attractiveness for skilled labour, its innovative capacity, and political standing in the global arena.

---

<sup>3</sup> Melissen, Jan. *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*. Studies in Diplomacy and International Relations. Palgrave, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Nye, Joseph. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

These considerations become even more decisive if the country or organization in question lacks the means to wield its hard power, usually defined as military and economic power. As the great majority of governments lack the U.S.'s military might, and China's economic clout, governments and organizations have been realizing that their brand or reputation are of strategic importance and thus an integral part of a country's or organization's competitiveness.

The "mother toolbox" of public diplomacy has therefore led to the emergence of a number of related disciplines in the last decade, labelled e.g. as nation branding, place branding, or niche branding. All these concepts aim to measure, build and manage the reputation of countries, cities, or regions via a painstaking reflection process tied to the policy process. Eventually, distinctive characteristics or products are given renewed emphasis. The process of nation or place branding is distinct from public relations, actually it encompasses a broader array of instruments. Places cannot construct or manipulate their images with the classic tools of advertising and PR but need to develop a "competitive identity" in order to win the approval in international public opinion, underlines Simon Anholt, a British policy advisor who is today considered a founding father of nation branding. Also Peter van Ham, a Dutch expert in the field, concludes: "Branding goes beyond PR and marketing. It tries to transform products and services as well as places into something more by giving them an emotional dimension with which people can identify. Branding touches those parts of the human psyche, which rational arguments just cannot reach."<sup>5</sup>

### **The Status of Europe's Public Diplomacy towards China**

Where are the EU and China on the map of place branding in general and public diplomacy in particular? – In principle, the establishment of a third pillar of EU-China relations in form of the EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue that will complement the two existing pillars – the High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue and the High Level Strategic Dialogue – have been warmly welcomed by key stakeholders and researchers on EU-China relations. However, they tend to share a certain disillusion with the EU's part in the game.

Kerry Brown for instance, Team Leader of the Europe China Research and Advice Network (ECRAN) at the Chatham House think tank in London, points out that there already *is* ample talk between the EU and China – China has no less than 56 separate strategic dialogues with the EU – "but what seems to be lacking, strangely enough, is political will and focus on the side of the Europeans, who profess to be seeking a broader global voice".<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Ham, Peter van. Branding European Power. Place Branding, Vol. 1. Henry Stewart Publications, 2005.

[http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2005/20050400\\_paper\\_vanham.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2005/20050400_paper_vanham.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Brown, Kerry. European Union and China – Groping toward a relationship in the new world order. August 2011. <http://www.europeaninstitute.org/EA-August->

Charles Grant, Director of the Centre of European Reform, recalls that “the EU and its member-states have a poor record of getting China to do what they want”<sup>7</sup>. While the Chinese were skilled at using their economic leverage to promote or defend their interests, “EU governments fail to understand that pooling their efforts through the EU would give them more clout. Furthermore, the EU fails to take a ‘strategic’ approach to China, in the sense of focusing on a small number of key objectives,”<sup>8</sup> says Grant.

Also Shada Islam, an Asia policy expert at the Brussels think tank Friends of Europe, doubts a tangible effect of the new dialogue initiative. She says that the EU, contrary to China, “has yet to hammer out a complete strategic vision on the role of culture in EU-China relations or indeed, more generally, on the role of cultural cooperation and cultural diplomacy in EU foreign policy. A joint EU strategy to promote European cultural interests would go a long way in boosting Europe’s soft power in China.”<sup>9</sup>

While one has to take these shortcomings on the European side seriously, one should at the same time look at the vast number of initiatives in the field of public diplomacy that *are* taking place and *are* already today contributing to a closer network between Europe and China. These activities and efforts have often developed bilaterally, and hardly any have been coordinated. There seems a lot of success involved, but also a lack of overview. Comprehensive knowledge, exchange, and coordination on EU-China activities are missing – although they would precondition any strategic assessment.

### Mapping Europe’s public diplomacy efforts

It is a key purpose of my research in general and this paper in particular to map existing public diplomacy efforts between the EU, selected member states (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, United Kingdom), and China. I conducted my research on the basis of the six elements of public diplomacy presented earlier. Although the list of activities does not at all claim to cover all initiatives of the past few years, it serves as a starting point to provide an overview in terms of thematic emphasis and audiences addressed.

Let me summarize my findings in seven observations.

---

[2011/european-union-and-china-groping-toward-a-relationship-in-the-new-world-order.html](http://www.cer.org.uk/print/3252)

<sup>7</sup> Grant, Charles. How can the EU influence China? Published on CER, 7 January 2013. <http://www.cer.org.uk/print/3252>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Islam, Shada. EU, China in soft diplomacy. Dawn.com, opinion. 28 April 2012. <http://dawn.com/2012/04/28/eu-china-in-soft-diplomacy/>

A *first observation* concerns today's public perceptions on both sides. The starting point is low, and opportunities are vast. The two regions in question do not seem to know nor like each other quite yet. Europeans are weary of China, and the Chinese are weary of Europe. According to a survey of the PewResearch Institute<sup>10</sup>, only about a third of the Chinese public see the European Union positively (33%), compared to more positive perceptions of the U.S. (43%) and Russia (48%). Chinese scepticism is met by similar mixed views the European public holds of China. Europeans are clearly impressed by China's rise but opinion polls across Europe also show continuing public unease about the country's political system, human rights, increased military spending and trade practices. For almost a decade, European public opinion toward China has been the most negative in the world, but that is now matched in America and Asia.<sup>11</sup> However, an illuminating analysis of David Shambaugh, author of "China Goes Global: The Partial Power", states one decisive point: "While the decline in China's image may be global, the reasons differ from region to region".<sup>12</sup> To conclude building on Shambaugh's point: EU-China relations as such have not yet gotten the scope of attention that a putative scope of action might ask for in the future. Today's lack of a political vision might explain the relative niche existence of EU-China public diplomacy both as a field of study and a body of activities.

The *second observation* concerns the direction of this thread of relations as of today. Both as a field of study and a body of activities, Chinese public diplomacy towards Europe dwarfs Europe's public diplomacy efforts towards China. We know curiously little of the EU's or European member states' flurrying activities towards China.

China's policymakers have indeed been apt practitioners in public diplomacy. Just like in other countries, it was a major crisis that propelled the need for top-flight public diplomacy to the centre of decision makers' attention. This was the bloodbath on Tian'anmen Square in 1989. It prompted the Chinese government to jumpstart a coordinated effort to improve the country's image abroad, in particular through public diplomacy efforts. The State Council Information Office (SCIO) was founded as China's coordinating platform for international communication under Minister Zhao Qizheng, a pioneer of Chinese public diplomacy. Three major goals in China's public diplomacy efforts can be identified according to Ingrid d'Hooghe, a senior research associate with the Clingendael Diplomatic Studies Programme at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations. She says: "First, China wants to be seen as a country that works hard to give its people a better future and seeks understanding for its political system and policies.

---

<sup>10</sup> PewResearch Global Attitudes Project. Growing Concerns in China about Inequality, Corruption. October 16, 2012. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/10/16/growing-concerns-in-china-about-inequality-corruption/>

<sup>11</sup> Shambaugh, David. Falling Out of Love with China. The New York Times, March 18, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/19/opinion/falling-out-of-love-with-china.html? r=0>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Second, China wants to be seen as a stable, trustworthy and responsible economic partner, a rising economic power that does not have to be feared. Third, China's leaders want China to be seen as a trustworthy and responsible member of the international community, capable of and willing to contribute actively to world peace."<sup>13</sup> While one might argue whether the success of China's proliferating public diplomacy initiatives is proportional to the impressive amount of resources dedicated to these activities, China obviously succeeds in defining clear strategic goals and target audiences for its public diplomacy efforts. To sum up, China has set the agenda so far, while EU players in the field have been rather few in numbers, subdued in voice and budget, and cautious in agenda-setting.

A *third observation* concerns the EU actors in the field. Their activities have so far focused on cultural diplomacy and student exchange, i.e. on the very traditional means of public diplomacy.

Most of the activities on EU level or carried out by member-states focus on joint cultural projects, ranging from art festivals to film promotion, exhibitions design cooperation etc. Joint cultural activities are also comparatively well documented – organizations such as culture institutes or foundations have engaged in providing mapping exercises and putting together extensive overviews of cultural cooperation projects (e.g. "Mapping Asia-Europe cultural cooperation" published in July 2010).

Similar efforts to get a deeper understanding of the current state have also been undertaken in the field of student exchange as a joint study between the European Commission and the Ministry of Education in China illustrates<sup>14</sup>: The research again reveals the lack of consistent statistical data across EU member-states and thus poses severe challenges as to correctly assessing the scope of student mobility as well as duration and qualitative elements of the student exchange. Against this backdrop, according to the data collected from national authorities in the EU member-states the total number of Chinese students in the EU in 2010 was around 120,000 – about six times more than in 2000. Regarding mobility from the EU to China, there were over 22,600 EU students in China – twice as many than 2005. Even though the increasing numbers of students studying either in Europe or in China are encouraging, the number of European students going to China – considering that the EU population is about a third of China's – still seems appallingly low. Summarizing, one could call EU-China people-to-people relations surprisingly conservative and underperforming compared to what economic relations might suggest.

---

<sup>13</sup> d'Hooghe, Ingrid. Public Diplomacy in the People's Republic of China. Published in *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*. Studies in Diplomacy and International Relations. Palgrave, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> EU-China Student and Academic Staff Mobility: Present Situation and Future Developments. April 2011. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc/china/mobilitysum\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc/china/mobilitysum_en.pdf)

The *fourth observation* is that “cooperation in science” is particularly important in EU-China relations (yet also comparatively under-promoted to the wider public). A large quantity of activities takes place on the basis of cooperation agreements in science and research, involving student and scholar exchanges, educational programmes and joint research projects. These activities frequently address specific, timely, and inter-disciplinary challenges such as renewable energies, urbanization, biotechnology, health etc. They thus foster collaboration on issues that reflect core aims of the European Union (e.g. sustainability) or pose challenges that need to be tackled in a particularly responsible manner (e.g. urbanization). Within these frameworks of scientific cooperation the EU and its member-states have the opportunity to promote European values and priorities, which allows qualifying them also as advocacy efforts in the sense of public diplomacy. Indeed, one might classify cooperation in this field as “hidden champion” of European efforts in public diplomacy towards China.

Although one might concede that practically all public diplomacy efforts imply some kind of “listening” as well, it is evident, as a *fifth observation*, that the elements “listening and engaging the publics” as well as “international broadcasting” are underrepresented in the current array of Europe’s public diplomacy initiatives. Listening in the sense of engaging people by collecting and analysing their value debate and opinion formation rarely goes beyond cultural exchange so far. Even among Europe’s most renowned think tanks, only very few undertake a consistent endeavour to present Chinese thinking in Europe and to allow the European public to comprehend the intellectual discussions that are taking place in China. Mark Leonard, director of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), was one of the first who managed to reach a broader audience with his book “What Does China Think?” in 2008. This book provided a first insight into the vivid debate among the Chinese academia and government representatives about the future economic and social policies, thus fostering a deeper understanding for Chinese attitudes and values. In late 2012, the ECFR published a further collection of essays written by China’s most prominent thinkers, “China 3.0”, who outline the current challenges the new Chinese leaders face. Publications like these represent rare examples of genuine listening endeavours that aim at reaching a broader European public. To conclude, the EU and its member-states have yet to open their rich toolkit in public diplomacy towards China, especially in areas Europeans have a solid learning curve to show and remarkable existing bodies of practice, experience and international success.

The *sixth observation*: EU actors have a tendency to “preach to the converted” in China. Narrow target audiences are engaged, while large parts of the Chinese population are left out. The failure to engage a broader public in China should be taken into account when evaluating public diplomacy efforts. The EU has a “huge reservoir of goodwill” in China to tap into, according to research conducted by the



China Policy Institute of the University of Nottingham. For example, 70 per cent of Chinese officials said their knowledge of the EU was insufficient.<sup>15</sup>

Although it does not come as a surprise, the nature of public diplomacy initiatives between Europe and China is worth a final *seventh observation*: current public diplomacy efforts are usually based on formalised cooperation agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding or bilateral agreements. These are the most visible face of cooperation between China and the EU or a EU member-state and serve as a legal instrument and standard vehicle for public diplomacy. This has advantages but also disadvantages. On the one hand, government-sponsored cooperation agreements are most likely to guarantee continuity decoupled from the ups and downs in daily political relations. On the other hand, such formalized terms of engagement might entail certain restrictions in terms of outreach and impact.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

In view of the vast number of public diplomacy activities directed towards China, the general conclusion is that Europe is punching way below its weight. Opportunities are not seized, existing activities are not coordinated, and tangible success stories not built on sufficiently.

This does not mean that the current public diplomacy efforts are in vain or should be suspended, quite the contrary. Public diplomacy can and should facilitate the dialogue between citizens in a way that traditional diplomacy or hard power areas such as economy or military will never allow. “Public and cultural diplomacy can play a key role in transforming a territory into a shared public space. We need spaces that expose us to the new understanding about ‘us’ and ‘others’”<sup>16</sup>, as Gerhard Sabathil, Director for Foreign Policy Strategy and Coordination at the European Commission points out. In his plea for a branding initiative for the EU, Peter van Ham zealously stresses that “now that the EU is going through a similar period of change, we should not be surprised that its ‘old image’ no longer reflects today’s European reality. Geopolitically, Europe is reaching adolescence and needs to think carefully about its role as a mature global player. This aversion to branding Europe is also a shame, since the EU’s soft power derives as much from style as from substance”.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Brown, Kerry. European Union and China – Groping toward a relationship in the new world order. August 2011. <http://www.europeaninstitute.org/EA-August-2011/european-union-and-china-groping-toward-a-relationship-in-the-new-world-order.html>

<sup>16</sup> Sabathil, Gerhard. Common Spaces in Culture Report, EUNIC Yearbook 2011. [http://www.ifa.de/pdf/kr/2011/kr2011\\_en.pdf](http://www.ifa.de/pdf/kr/2011/kr2011_en.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Ham, Peter van. Branding European Power. Place Branding, Vol. 1. Henry Stewart Publications, 2005. [http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2005/20050400\\_paper\\_vanham.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2005/20050400_paper_vanham.pdf)

In order to improve efficiency of public diplomacy efforts and to strengthen Europe's soft power in China, the following recommendations cover three aspects:

- First, the EU and its member states have some homework to do in terms of coordination and cooperation;
- secondly, as long as Europe does not address the current lack of strategy and vision when it comes to EU-China relations all activities will remain scattered, incoherent, possibly lukewarm, and surely meagre in their effect;
- thirdly, having defined some goals and respective target audiences combined with the willingness to dedicate reasonable resources to this endeavour will allow to orchestrate a coherent outreach to the Chinese public.

#### *Coordination and cooperation within Europe*

In January 2011, the European Union agreed to sponsor a project called ECRAN, the European China Research and Advice Network, to provide advice on China to European policy makers. It is designed to enhance the capacity of policy-makers in Europe to monitor and assess current developments in China and their impact on the EU and on EU-China relations. The ECRAN project now encompasses about 300 European researches and research institutes; they conduct regular policy recommendations and policy briefings to inform European politicians about current developments in China and, above all, to foster a common European position on these developments. This effort to support a coherent European policy towards China is a step in the right direction; however, it should not be limited in time (currently three years) but remain a continuous service for the EU institutions and all member-states.

Since the European External Action Service (EEAS) has come into existence not before 2011, it would be a lot to ask that the EEAS already served as a coordinating platform also for all public diplomacy activities. In the near future, however, it would certainly be a desirable development if the EEAS assumes such a role and sets up structures and mechanisms for coordination, e.g. with the DG for Culture and Education. The EEAS would thus also serve as a point of contact for public diplomacy departments in the EU member-states.

The observations from the mapping exercise clearly indicate Europe's shortcomings in having an overview what kind of public diplomacy activities are taking place and whom they are targeting. Such an uncoordinated approach makes it almost inevitable that the EU institutions and the member-states either target the same audiences or ignore other parts of the Chinese public altogether. Obviously, the awareness of these deficiencies is gradually increasing as for example the studies and mapping exercises about cultural and student exchanges show. Yet there is further need for basic groundwork in order to get a clearer picture of the current public diplomacy efforts during the last years, their focus and outreach, as well as an honest evaluation of the efficiency of these efforts.

### *Strategy and vision*

Good brands combine great performance with respect; they combine hard and soft power. Europe – theoretically – has massive hard power in economic terms combined with globally acknowledged, partly admired, and even expected, soft power due to its diversity, its ways towards social equity, and its governance model of sovereignty pooling. A European strategy for public diplomacy towards China might take into account economic aspects that are relevant from the EU perspective and foster exchange on these issues with Chinese counterparts. One example for such an approach is the China IPR Helpdesk for SMEs that has been established by the European Commission in 2010 and supports European small and medium sized enterprises to both protect and enforce their Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in or relating to China, through the provision of free information and services. At the same time the experts of the China IPR Helpdesk engage in a vivid dialogue with Chinese authorities and the Chinese business community in order to raise awareness about the European standards of IPR and the necessity to implement the respective rules and laws accordingly.

### *Defining potential tactics and target audiences*

The competition for attention across the globe has become huge, also for public diplomacy initiatives. Europeans are currently competing with each other for similar audiences in China, thereby reducing their impact and efficiency. By focusing mainly on cultural, scientific and student exchange Europeans are not using other established tools of public diplomacy such as listening, international broadcasting or engaging the public. The Chinese efforts in international broadcasting could easily turn any European pale in comparison: CCTV9, the English channel of the Chinese broadcasting company, has displaced CNN as the prime foreign feed in several African markets. In 2007, French and Spanish language channels were added, followed by Arabic and Russian language channels in 2009. The Chinese news agency Xinhua operates 140 offices worldwide and celebrated the grand opening of a new office in New York at the prime location Times Square in 2011.

Establishing a vast media network like this certainly involves substantial resources. However, social networks and new technologies can help to reduce the financial burden and still be extremely effective. At the same time, Europe does not start from zero but can build on existing networks in various areas that have not been exploited so far for public diplomacy efforts. Examples for such efforts could be:

- Twin towns and sister cities in China:  
A vast number of European cities enjoy special relations with Chinese towns and cities, e.g. Beijing is partnered with Madrid, Ile-de-France, Cologne, Riga, Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, Paris, Rome, Athens, Bucharest, Budapest, Helsinki, London, and Lisbon; Nanjing has twin city agreements with Birmingham, Eindhoven, Florence, Hauts-de-Seine, Leipzig, Limassol, Sunderland (UK).

As urbanization is and will be one of the major issues in China in the years to come, these existing partnerships could serve as a launching pad for targeted public diplomacy initiatives.

- **Twin/Partner universities:**  
Similar to the twinning projects between European and Chinese cities, a great number of educational institutions (schools, universities) across Europe have formed partnerships with Chinese counterparts. In addition, quite a number of European enterprises support a faculty or a professorship at a Chinese university. A comprehensive overview of the current partnerships and business-to-university relations could help to identify joint action by European actors.
- **Public discourse in China:**  
The language barrier between Europe and China significantly reduces the possibilities of Europeans to engage directly with Chinese citizens and foster a meaningful dialogue on a broad basis. Still, there are numerous Europeans capable of conversing in Mandarin who should be enlisted as translators/mediators to convey the public discourse that is taking place in China on Social Media platforms such as SinaWeibo. SinaWeibo is one of the largest micro-blogging platforms in China with approximately 300 million users. On-going issues such as forced relocation, one-child-policy and forced abortions, hardship of migrant workers are all discussed publicly on these fora – which is barely noticed in Europe. These platforms not only offer a great opportunity to engage in a direct conversation but also to foster a deeper understanding between European and Chinese citizens.

### Concluding remarks

Headlines about revolutions triggered by Social Media have caught the public imagination, however, it is almost impossible to allocate who and what was driving the change as in most of the cases various factors came into play. But this also explains why public diplomacy and nation branding are considered viable new approaches to study the impact of publics to influence decisions. The European Union and its member-states have not yet made sufficient use of these new channels to get their messages across and influence the agendas of big actors like China. Europe also needs to become comfortable with the concept of combining hard and soft power, sometimes using economic diplomacy to address its concerns and demands.

While the EU and its member-states seem to have embraced in general the idea and necessity of public diplomacy, the most pressing issue is now to equally embrace the need for a strategic approach and coherent, bold, and visionary action.