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Event Report

Introduction

The PROTAGORAS Masterclass “The Communication of EU Power: towards a narrative turn” took place on the 8th of June 2023 onsite at Loft 58, Rue de l'Etuve 1000 Bruxelles, and was streamed online via Twitch.

The event was sponsored by GOPA Com. and aimed to explore how in recent years, the European Union has increasingly emphasised its role as a global power through public communication campaigns targeting its citizens and how the general framing of the European Commission has also shifted from an administrative body to a political superpower. The discussion was centred around questions such as: what does this mean in terms of the EU's positioning on the global stage? And to what extent has Ursula von der Leyen been successful in imprinting an image of the EU as a geopolitical leader?

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the Masterclass, highlighting its key aspects.

The Masterclass can be watched again [in-full on Twitch](#).

Summary

Before

Preparations for the Masterclass kicked-off at the end of March 2023 with a meeting between the EPAC students, the PROTAGORAS organising team, and an IHECS Academy representative. During this meeting, the students were divided into two teams: Team Logistics and Team Communication. Shortly after, both teams began preparing deliverables in consultation with the PROTAGORAS organising team and the IHECS Academy representative.

For Team Logistics, this included booking the venue, preparing a budget, identifying and confirming sponsors, preparing a logistics script for the dry run and the event itself, setting up and managing the registration desk, as well as managing technical aspects (camera, microphones, etc.) during the event.



For Team Communication, this involved developing the event's visual identity, drafting all communication material (emails, social media posts, a blogpost), compiling a list of stakeholders, setting up the registration page and developing the event's press pack.

Shortly before the event, approximately 80 registrations were recorded on the dedicated Eventbrite page.

On the day of the event, two members from Team Logistics were present onsite to assist in setting up the venue and capturing behind-the-scenes pictures for social media.

During

The Masterclass opened at 18:30 with a welcome and registration, which was followed by the main panel discussion from 18:45 – 20:00. Participants were then invited to a networking drink with catering from 20:00 – 20:30.

Approximately 30 participants joined the event onsite, with a peak of 7 online viewers.

The discussion was moderated by PROTAGORAS Director **Nicolas Baygert** and featured a distinguished panel of experts including:

- **Olivier Le Saëc**, Administrator at the EU Parliament and former Political Adviser on External Affairs at the EU Parliament

- **Camille Gessant**, Deputy Editor-in-Chief at Agence Europe, specialist on EU External Affairs
- **Alvaro Oleart**, Postdoctoral Researcher at Cevipol/IEE (ULB)

Nicolas Baygert opened the event by welcoming and introducing each member of the panel and, after a short introduction to the background of the topic, he started the discussion with three questions: are we really witnessing a shift in the communication of the EU institutions? Are we witnessing institutions that are reframing themselves as a global power? Are we witnessing institutions that are trying to have a bigger impact on the world stage?

In his opening remarks, Olivier Le Saëc argued that this trend was normal because when von der Leyen expresses a position, she does so as the head of executive power in the EU political system. It is also normal, according to Olivier, that EU leaders communicate in a political way as the EU is increasingly involved in political debates in the same fashion as Member States.



Camille Gessant complimented this in her opening words by outlining how the increasing use of social media by the EU institutions may not be the best method to have an impact on EU citizens, citing an example from her recent visit to Ukraine when people most remembered the actions of Roberta Metsola as being the first EU leader to visit the country since the outbreak of war. Communication is important but showing what you're doing is even more so - action is more important than sentences and tweets.

Alvaro Oleart opened by rephrasing the question, proposing that while it's true the EU has gained communicative power, it is more important to ask *who* in the EU has gained this power. He continued to outline that the EU does not function as a monolithic entity; rather, certain institutions possess more communicative power than others, and some institutions (the Council and Commission) are currently experiencing success in this regard, while others (the European Parliament) are encountering setbacks. When Brussels is mentioned, it is most often in reference to the Council and the Commission.

After these opening remarks, the discussion touched upon several aspects closely related to the topic, including the dynamics of power both between the EU institutions and between the EU Member States, the complex and sometimes-conflicting relationships between EU institutions and their respective powers, as well as explorations of the legitimacy of the election process for the Commission's Presidency.

Questions surrounding the reputational impact of *Sofagate*, consensus versus conflict in the



EU political sphere, crafting narratives in the context of the upcoming European elections in 2024, and balancing the need for plurality of voices between the 27 Member States and reconciling this with EU institutions that are trained to speak with one voice, were explored.

After the panel discussion, the floor was given to Q&A with

the audience, who explored whether the efforts of von der Leyen to connect with citizens are actually working, whether there is an imbalance between Eastern and Western European voices in these debates, and a recent Eurobarometer report on perceptions of the EU and engagement in the European elections.

The full Masterclass is available [on Twitch](#).

After

The event closed with a networking drink where participants had the chance to meet with the speakers.

Post-event actions include the present report, which is complimented by an article in both English and French, as well as [a follow-up post on social media](#) with images from the event.

Conclusions

In summary, the Masterclass concluded successfully, providing participants with an opportunity to explore the latest trends in EU communication, foster knowledge, and gave attendees the opportunity to engage with experts on the topic at hand. The event featured a diverse range of speakers, each bringing their unique perspectives and expertise to the forefront. The panel discussion covered a wide range of topics, aiming to explore the recent changes and challenges for the EU to communicate as a credible player on the global stage.

We extend our appreciation to the sponsors, speakers, and participants for their valuable contributions in making this event a success.

