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EU and member state diplomacies in Moldova and Ukraine: Examining EU diplomatic performance post-Lisbon

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Abstract: The Lisbon Treaty proclaims the need for a stronger, more efficient, more coherent European Union (EU) in the international arena. In the area of external relations, the post-Lisbon EU embraces the unification of the diplomatic efforts of the European Commission, the Council Secretariat and that of the EU member states with the aim of achieving greater coherence. This vision is one of cooperation not only in Brussels but also in third countries. While the Brussels-based part of the European External Action Service (EEAS) has captured the attention of both academic and non-academic literature, the development of the relationship between the EU and national diplomatic services in third countries has received less attention. This article assesses the nature of interaction between member state embassies and the EU delegations in Moldova and Ukraine, two Eastern European countries on the EU's immediate border, where EU ambitions are high. By deploying concepts of efficiency and effectiveness, the article examines how this interaction takes place and whether it adds to the EU's aim of achieving greater coherence in external relations. The empirical analysis shows that EU diplomatic performance has reached a certain degree of administrative efficiency, yet there are several challenges to be addressed on the level of effectiveness.

Keywords: CFSP; Lisbon Treaty; civil society; international relations; policy coordination; civil society; East-Central Europe; political science.

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Introduction

The emphasis on good performance is a recurrent theme in the EU's policies, treaties and strategies (Council of the EU 2010; European Commission 2013). These highlight the need for enhanced coherence and internal coordination as the basis for projecting the EU's values and interests externally with greater efficiency. The Lisbon Treaty¹, with the introduction of the European External Action Service (EEAS), reinforces the aim of a stronger, more efficient and coherent European Union. This is to be achieved, inter alia, through the unification of the diplomatic efforts of the European Commission, the Council Secretariat and the EU member states (MS). Outside Brussels, the EU's diplomatic capacity remains represented by member state embassies and the EU delegations (now under the EEAS). The latter two represent the EU diplomatic actors in third countries and international organisations. While the Brussels-based part of the EEAS has captured the attention of both academic and non-academic literature (Duke 2014; Pomorska and Juncos 2013; Henökl 2014; Balfour and Raik 2013; Bátorá 2013; Merket 2012; Allen and Smith 2012; Hocking and Smith 2011; Vanhoonacker and Reslow 2010, and others), the development of the relationship between the EU and national diplomatic services in third countries has received less attention (Maurer and Raik 2014; Hanses and Schaer 2012; Austermann 2012, 2014; Drieskens 2012; Wouters and Duquet 2011; Rijks and Whitman 2007). The issue of coordination between EU diplomatic actors in neighbour countries is not unrecognised, however. At the end of 2011, this issue was addressed through the joint letter from the Foreign Ministers of several member states² to the EEAS, which called for the optimization of the cooperation and communication infrastructure between EU delegations and member state embassies in order to improve the coherence of EU external action (Eurotradeunion 2011).

In practice, member states seem reluctant to embrace this new setting of cooperation in pursuing their foreign policy objectives (Comelli and Matarazzo 2011; Petrov, Pomorska and Vanhoonacker 2012; Blockmans 2012). Research has emphasized that EU performance remains constrained by member states' willingness to cede competences in one issue area or another or by a clear lack of a unified position (Van Schaik 2011; Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2011; Blockmans 2012). The empirical evidence presented in this article presents a more nuanced picture: in contrast to being *administratively efficient* in setting up institutional coordination mechanisms and thus achieving administrative coherence, the *EU lacks effectiveness* in acting collectively and thus achieving operational coherence. Furthermore, overall effectiveness in achieving the goal of greater coherence in external relations is undermined by member states clustering into groups of interest, some embracing "go it alone" tactics, which further results in overlapping agendas and duplication of efforts. Such a finding is significant to the further exploration of coherence in more general terms and in other areas of operation.

¹ Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, OJ C 306/1-271, 17.12.2007, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2007:306:FULL:EN:PDF>, accessed 20.08.2014.

² The joint letter was addressed to the EEAS and signed by the Foreign Ministers of the following member states: Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden.

The level of institutional interaction that this article explores is that of inter-level cooperation (Vanhoonacker and Neuhold 2015, *this special issue*). The main aim of our contribution is to uncover how EU delegations and national embassies cooperate with each other on the EU's immediate border, where EU ambitions are high, and whether this adds to the EU's aim of achieving greater coherence in external relations. We examine the inter-level cooperation between member state embassies and the EU delegations post-Lisbon on the matter of providing support to local civil society organisations (CSOs) in Moldova and Ukraine. In this respect, the analysis focuses on the activities of the EU diplomatic actors in their role as donors, specifically within the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) that accompanies it. The reason for this focus is two-fold. Firstly, this research focus is of interest due to the centrality and role of civil society attributed through EU policy in these countries. It is the ENP and the EaP that frame EU strategy in the region. In ENP countries, promotion of good governance by the EU happens, inter alia, through supporting civil society organisations; the latter became important players in the reform processes in these countries. Moreover, the Commission attributes a pivotal role to civil society in monitoring the reform process (European Commission 2011). Research has pointed to the fact that in the EaP countries such as Moldova and Ukraine in particular, the EU has explored the potential role of civil society organisations in the reform process since cooperation solely with the governments has not been seen as sufficient (Raik 2006; Böttger and Falkenhain 2011).

Secondly, there is little research on the EU diplomatic actors as donors in this context, although there is significant research on the issues of foreign policy and development in Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere (Smith 2013; Delputte 2013; Furness and Vollmer 2013; Delputte and Söderbaum 2012). In contrast to the EU's development policy in general, the European Neighbourhood Policy is a distinctive policy. Within the current frame of the ENP and the Eastern Partnership, countries such as Moldova and Ukraine have a highly institutionalised relationship with the EU where issues such as promotion of democracy and good governance are central. In Eastern European countries, EU transformative power as reflected in the reform processes in these countries is seen as a mark of successful performance (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009; Freyburg et al. 2009). Both the EU delegations and the national embassies in these countries play a central role in these reform processes through exercising a donor function for local civil society organisations. Interviews with local donors and civil society organisations representatives emphasize that civil society in these countries has demonstrated the capacity to bring about change, especially when it is involved in lobbying, advocacy and monitoring activities (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 21, 22). Thus, a focus on the ways in which the EU can act collectively in pursuing relationships with civil society organisations in key eastern partner countries is an important area through which to examine coherence in external relations.

The analysis in this article is undertaken through the lenses of performance literature (Lusthaus et al. 2002; Gutner and Thompson 2010) and with reference to the issue of inter-level coherence in EU external relations, as explored in the Introduction to this Special Issue. Although the analysis that follows investigates the activities of the EU diplomatic actors specifically in their role as donors within the European Neighbourhood Policy, it opens up the complex world of inter-level diplomatic cooperation in general post-Lisbon. The article is

structured as follows: *first*, EU performance is discussed in relation to the two dimensions of efficiency and effectiveness; *second*, a brief overview of the EU diplomatic actors in their role as donors in Moldova and Ukraine is presented. In the subsequent sections, the empirical evidence is analysed whilst the concluding section re-evaluates the framework and raises broader questions about inter-level coordination.

1. Evaluating European Union performance

Acknowledging the difficulties of defining performance, this article conceptualizes performance in broader terms incorporating both the outcome and the process by which the outcome is achieved. Performance is about both, completing a task at macro or micro level and the way in which the task is achieved. It is characterized by two traditional dimensions – efficiency and effectiveness. This analytical framework borrows from the organizational performance framework developed by Lusthaus et al. (2002) and Gutner and Thompson (2010). It couples it with the literature on EU international actorness that addresses the issue of EU performance in external relations (Jupille and Caporaso 1998; Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Laatikainen and Smith 2006; Jørgensen, Oberthür and Shahin 2011). Through incorporating in its conceptualization of performance both the process and the outcome, the framework enables us to examine the specifics of the administrative set-up among the EU diplomatic actors and to investigate whether it is effective in achieving established goals (see below Figure 1). The dimensions of efficiency and effectiveness remain particularly relevant to the EU since as already noted the most recent changes to the Treaty³ aim at greater coherence (i.e. strengthening EU coordination in external relations) to be achieved specifically through cooperation between the member states' diplomatic missions and the EU delegations in third countries (Article 32 and 35 TEU and 221 TFEU). Furthermore, a more coherent post-Lisbon EU in external relations, as the review of the ENP claims, allows the Union to strengthen the delivery of its foreign policy objective of deeper democracy in ENP countries in an integrated and more efficient manner (European Commission 2011).

1.1. Efficiency: Sharing diplomatic resources and inter-level coherence

In general terms, the term *efficiency* refers to the resources of an organisation and evaluates the cost-effective production of results (Behn 2003; Lusthaus et al. 2002). This article employs a more focused dimension of efficiency emphasized by Lusthaus et al. (2002) that will facilitate the exploration of cooperation procedures and institutionalized communication - *administrative efficiency*. Lusthaus et al. (2002) suggest that the dimension of administrative efficiency is useful in examining how well the work of an organisation or a system is arranged and managed. For the analytical purposes of this article, a focus on administrative efficiency

³ Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union OJ C 115/13-47, OJ C 115/47-328, 09.05.2008, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2008:115:FULL&from=EN>, accessed 01.12.2014.

links to both *diplomatic cooperation*⁴ and *inter-level coherence*. The post-Lisbon EU implies enhanced cooperation with member state embassies in neighbour countries. Here, diplomatic cooperation involves sharing diplomatic resources. Examining administrative efficiency will show whether there is an infrastructure enabling this dimension and how it works in practice. In order to share diplomatic resources one needs to be able to jointly use communications infrastructure, and to pool information on administrative or practical matters. To share diplomatic resources implies a high degree of cooperation, key not only in the conduct of diplomatic relations but also a central principle of coherent EU governance (Tietje 1997; Christiansen 2001; Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008). As an institutional process, inter-level or vertical coherence is directly concerned with the degree to which there is a coordinated framework of cooperation between EU and national institutions (Christiansen 2001; Nuttall 2005).

This leads us to explore two areas of EU diplomatic performance in third countries:

- a.) whether the EU diplomatic actors have set up a common framework for cooperation and if so
- b.) to what extent it functions on the basis of institutionalized common practices (rules and procedures).

1.2. Effectiveness: Joint diplomatic action and inter-level coherence

Effectiveness is generally defined by the extent to which an organisation achieves its goals/objectives (Behn 2003; Lusthaus et al. 2002; Gutner and Thompson 2010). In the broader literature, EU performance in external relations in terms of effectiveness is seen as dependent on the capacity to act collectively (among others, Bretherton and Vogler, 2006; Laatikainen and Smith, 2006; Portela and Raube 2009; Jørgensen, Oberthür and Shahin 2011). Thus, the focus is on whether EU diplomatic actors act collectively in achieving EU-set objectives. This article considers the Lisbon Treaty provisions relevant for the case of cooperation between member state embassies and EU delegations in neighbour countries as reference points in this regard. The Treaty's provision identifies that: "[...]The diplomatic missions of the member states and the Union delegations in third countries and at international organisations shall cooperate and shall contribute to formulating and implementing the common approach" (Article 32 and 35 TEU). Whereas under administrative efficiency we can identify the existence (or not) of a common framework for cooperation and identify institutionalized (or not) common practices, examining effectiveness shows how this framework contributes to implementing the common approach. Analysing effectiveness thus also links both to *diplomatic cooperation* and to *inter-level coherence*. Here

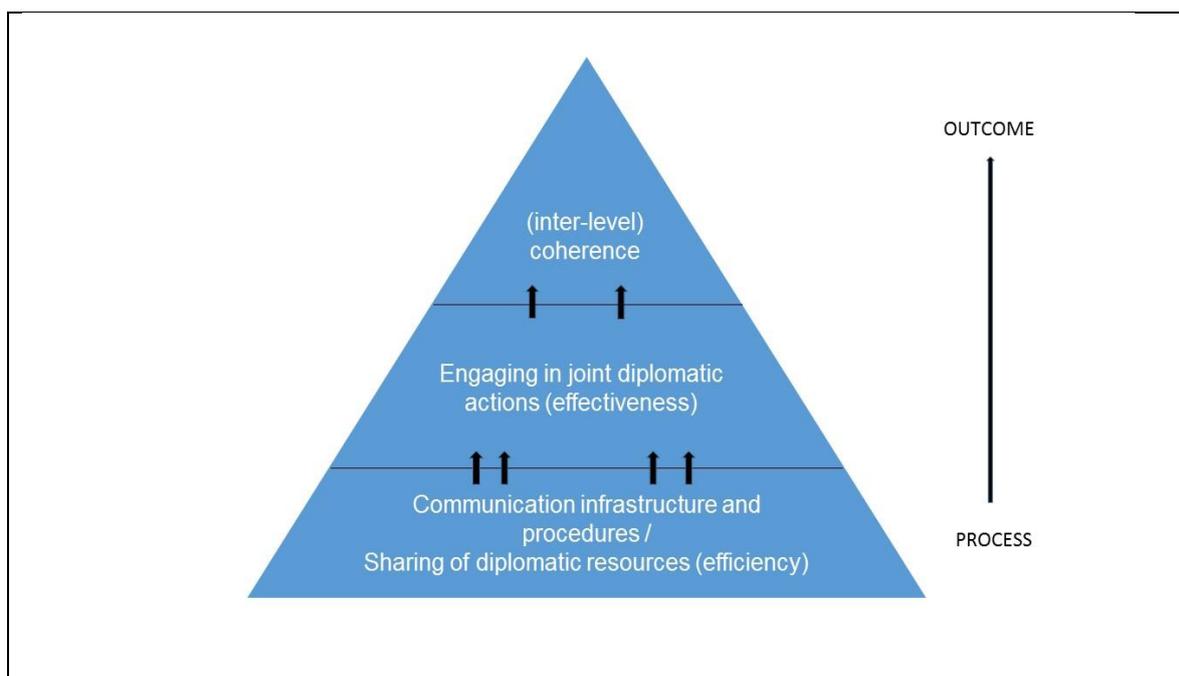
⁴ This article borrows from Rijks and Whitman (2007) the conceptualisation of diplomatic cooperation. In discussing joint diplomatic representation in third countries the authors distinguish between two dimensions of diplomatic cooperation – (1) sharing of diplomatic facilities and (2) sharing of diplomatic capabilities. The first dimension involves shared use of embassy premises, joint use of communications, pooling of information on administrative or practical matters and mutual assistance. The second dimension implies sharing of diplomatic and representative tasks in third countries. Hence, the first dimension refers to sharing resources and the second to engaging in joint actions.

the second dimension of diplomatic cooperation, i.e. engaging in joint actions is relevant. This entails sharing and carrying out certain tasks jointly. Engaging in joint actions implies linking issues tactically through actions, thus projecting external coherence as Tulmets (2008) explains. For better coherence in external relations, avoiding institutional competition, thematic overlaps and duplication between EU and member states' activities is key. As Nuttall (2005) defined it, coherence can be seen as the process of correlating actions between two actors that apply different procedures. In order to assess effectiveness as conceptualised above, we examine two issues:

- a.) how EU diplomatic actors engage in joint activities and
- b.) what degree of coordination of joint activities they achieve.

To sum up, we are interested in capturing the internal mechanisms of diplomatic cooperation through discussing efficiency, and the external dimension - the ability to deliver on the goals set by the Treaty - through discussing effectiveness. In short, efficiency refers to the overall framework (communication infrastructure and procedures) of inter-level diplomatic cooperation, while effectiveness reflects the collective action of EU diplomatic actors (joint actions and decision-making). Whereas efficiency and effectiveness are traditionally conceptualised as separate dimensions of performance; we are interested to observe performance in both process and outcome terms as portrayed in Figure 1. Even though Gutner and Thompson (2010) explain that process performance does not necessarily translate into outcome performance, through our analysis we also identify a level of interdependence between the two dimensions of performance in achieving effective cooperation.

Figure 1: Pyramid of EU performance: The relationship between EU and national diplomacies



Source: Adapted from Gutner and Thompson 2010: 236

2. EU diplomatic actors as EU donors in the Eastern neighbourhood

Today diplomatic interaction is highly diverse and the functions of diplomacy have expanded beyond representation, communication or negotiation in times of war and peace. Nowadays diplomats are involved in public relations, in trade, scientific and cultural relations, in regional and international fora (Leguey-Feilleux 2009; Berridge 1995; Walker 2004; Barston 1997). Besides their traditional diplomatic role of representing, being a node of communication, dealing with bi- and multi-lateral relations in traditional ways, national embassies and the EU delegations have become very active in their relationship to civil society organisations. In Moldova and Ukraine this implies a highly institutionalised relationship, including organising events with and for civil society organisations, organising grant competitions as well as consulting them in their areas of expertise or delegating to them the organisation of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.⁵

To exemplify, the European Union has designed instruments that foster the relationship with civil society such as the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI). With the ENPI an amount of €12 billion was made available for funding by the EU for the 2007-2013 period (ENPI Info Centre n.d.). Between 2007-2010, Moldova and Ukraine were allocated €209,7 million and €494 million respectively (*ibidem*). In 2009, the Eastern Partnership increased the ENPI budget for 2010-2013 with an additional €350 million for multilateral activities among six partner countries, including Moldova and Ukraine (European Union External Action 2010). Member states also have bilateral strategies and instruments designed for their relationship with local civil society. To name just a few: in Kiev, the Swedish embassy budgeted around €25 million for projects between 2011-2013 via its Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden 2009). In Moldova, through the same agency, Sweden has allocated €13 million for 2011-2014 (State Chancellery of Moldova 2013). Between 1999 and 2011 the United Kingdom has funded bilateral projects in Moldova in the sum of c. mil. €44 (British Embassy Chisinau 2011). In Ukraine, data reveals that UK has funded between 2008-2013 bilateral projects for civil society in the amount of ca. €1,350,000 (British Embassy Kiev 2013).

The numbers above indicate the general picture of EU and member states' activity. In the following sections our empirical analysis opens up the complex world of inter-level diplomatic cooperation in their relations with local civil society. EU delegations are present in both Moldova and the Ukraine; the latter hosting most member state embassies. In Moldova there are 12 national embassies and in Ukraine, 25. Interviews⁶ were conducted with diplomats in both delegations and with selected national diplomats representing two sample

⁵ The Eastern Partnership Forum is a regional civil society platform facilitating democratic reforms. For the first time such a Forum was organized outside of the EU country holding the Presidency in 2013, when it was decided to be organized in Chisinau, Moldova.

⁶ The evidence presented here is based on a study of literature, documents and 23 (semi-structured) interviews with 10 diplomats (based in the EU delegations and member state embassies), 6 representatives of the national embassies (diplomats' advisors and managers) and 7 civil society representatives conducted in Moldova and Ukraine in 2011 and 2013. The interviews focused on two dimensions: (1) common EU member states' institutional settings of coordination post-Lisbon and (2) common actions/projects post-Lisbon. All interviews are coded and anonymous. The list of interviews is available in the references section. In the article, interviews are coded as Interview 1, 2, 3, etc. in chronological order.

groups in relation to civil society. One representative sample is the group of embassies selected because they have invested in the democratic development of these countries for a longer period of time and are now experienced representatives of the donor community (such as Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany or the UK). The other group is selected on the basis of the opposite consideration, embassies that have developed their relationship with civil society in Moldova and Ukraine more recently, but that have close historic ties with this region and are actively supporting transformation processes in these countries (such as Poland or the Czech Republic). As both groups are interested in deeper democracy in European Neighbourhood Policy countries, the expectation is that these are more open to acting collectively and to engaging in cooperative actions.

3. Administrative efficiency: Sharing diplomatic resources in theatre

Recent policy papers on the EEAS highlight that the task of EU diplomatic coordination in neighbour countries is regarded by observers as a positive process of change (Balfour and Raik 2013). Whereas this may be a valid argument from the view point of external observers, practitioners highlight that there is considerable variation in this respect on the ground (Hanses and Schaer 2012; Interviews 8, 9, 10, 13, 20, 23). In this section we present the framework for diplomatic inter-level cooperation that has developed in Moldova and Ukraine and discuss to what extent it functions on the basis of institutionalized common practices (rules and procedures). In Moldova and Ukraine, empirical information collected on the institutionalised forms of interaction between the EU diplomatic actors in their relationship to civil society organisations reveals two frameworks: a general and a more specific one. The first framework is a broader one, in which both EU and non-EU diplomats participate (see Table 1). The second one is specific for EU diplomatic actors (see Table 2).

3.1. General framework

The data collected during the field-trips can be used to construct a typology within the communication infrastructure. This typology groups meetings based on level (participation based on diplomatic rank), focus (participation based on topic), membership (participation based on group affiliation), and formality (degree of ceremonialism of the meeting). Whereas data were initially collected in 2011, these meetings continue to take place under the same heading today (Interview 23) as presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Diplomats' communication infrastructure in Moldova and Ukraine:
General overview**

<i>Typology</i>	<i>Heading</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Diplomatic ranking	(1) EU-MS	Moldova: once in 2 months → 6/year Ukraine: 1/month → 12/year
	(2) Weekly meetings of Heads of delegation (HoD)	every week on political issues, occasionally on civil society issues, ca. 2-3/year
Topic	(1) Thematic (EU) donor meetings	called based on necessity
	(2) Consultations with other (EU) donors	
	(3) MS' round-tables	
Group affiliation	(1) EU (donor) meetings within regional frameworks of cooperation	varies per country as follows:
	Visegrad group	Moldova: 1/year; Ukraine: 2/year formally to several times/year informally
	Nordic Plus group	Moldova: occasionally Ukraine: 2/year
	(2) Big donors' meetings	1/month → 12/year
Formality	(1) Formal events	Organised based on the early agendas of EUDs and MS embassies, at least one event per actor
	(2) Non-formal events	<i>Information not disclosed</i>

Source: authors' compilation

Participation based on *diplomatic ranking* reflects the diplomatic ranking of the attendees and refers to regular EU-MS meetings and the weekly meetings of the Heads of delegations (HoD). The regular meetings are hosted by the EU delegation; when they refer to relations with local civil society it gathers together representatives of the diplomatic missions (except the HoD) as well as the representatives of MS aid agencies. The HoD meetings are more frequent, are arranged in relation to most important developments in these countries and usually require unanimity (Interviews 6, 8, 10, 12, 13).

Participation based on *topic* reflects the focus of the diplomatic meetings. The thematic (EU) donor meetings have a specific agenda and are narrow in scope. The consultations with other (EU) donors are meetings distinctive for the EU delegation called before launching its regular local calls for proposals for civil society project funding. National embassies host round-tables, a type of meet and greet event, where civil society actors are invited in order to get acquainted with the diplomatic donor community and vice-versa.

Group affiliation participation is based on membership of a particular group. In Moldova and Ukraine these have been identified as regional groups such as the Visegrad Group and the Nordic Plus group (discussed in greater detail in the following section). The Big donors' meeting refers to the larger donor community in these countries (World Bank, United Nations

Development Programme, Council of Europe, Soros Foundation, EUDs, MS embassies and others). Such meetings are usually hosted by the World Bank.

Last but not least, the EU diplomatic actors also interact within formal and non-formal events such as events organised by relevant stakeholders in each country as well as lunch, dinner or an “occasional coffee”. Participation is not mandatory, nor is it exclusive to EU counterparts only. These events provide an opportune framework to exchange recent information or brainstorm on new activities, thus mainly a networking possibility (Interviews 10, 11, 18).

3.2. EU framework

Overall, however, only five types of meetings are common for EU diplomatic actors (see Table 2 below). These represent the infrastructure through which EU donors share information vis-à-vis the local civil society. They constitute the formalised practice of interaction between national embassies and the EU delegations. Here, national and EU diplomats present the goals and activities regarding their support for local civil society. In both countries these meetings are considered important by the diplomatic actors in exercising their mandate in consolidating the relationship with civil society (Interviews 7, 8, 17).

Table 2: The infrastructure for sharing EU diplomatic resources on civil society

Typology	Diplomatic ranking	Topic	Group affiliation
Meetings	(1) EU-MS	(2) Thematic EU donor meetings	(5) EU (donor) meetings within regional frameworks of cooperation
		(3) Consultations with other (EU) donors	
		(4) MS' round-tables	

Source: authors' compilation

Despite differences in typology, according to the interviewees, all these meetings aim at sharing information, presenting strategies, programmes and projects, insights from consultations with local organisations and other activities pertinent to civil society support; the participants “aim at coordination” (Interview 6). This coordination is to be achieved through sharing of diplomatic resources; the meetings represent the primary mechanism for this. National diplomats explain that the purpose of all five settings is to exchange information vis-à-vis the local civil society (Interviews 7, 8, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18): “communication about our individual activities presented in the form of oral reports is the main activity” (Interview 8). Yet this brief account of the types of meetings shared by EU diplomatic actors in Moldova and Ukraine does not account for the challenges faced by them while jointly accessing this communication infrastructure; which we further discuss.

3.3. Centralisation, intensity and frequency of diplomatic meetings

In terms of administrative efficiency, it seems that a system under which pooling of information on matters relevant to support for civil society happens is in place and is increasingly managed by the EU delegations. Our research reveals that most of these settings (with the exception of thematic EU donor meetings) were in operation even pre-Lisbon (Interviews 6, 17, 23). So what did the Lisbon Treaty add? The post-Lisbon change comes in relation to intensity and frequency of meetings as well as an increased role for the EU delegations. Data collected in this project show that there is more reporting, and a higher number of meetings. The evidence also emphasizes that the location and initiator of the meetings post-Lisbon is the delegation: “we always meet within the EU delegation on EU donor issues” (Interviews 7, 8, 14, 15, 16, 17). Pre-Lisbon, diplomats would meet sporadically at the initiative of one of the member states - usually the one most involved in supporting civil society. The meetings did not necessarily involve all EU actors and were convened topically, on those issues which were top-priority for the member states involved (Interviews 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 18). Centralised reporting was not a common procedure within these meetings.

Unlike pre-Lisbon, EU diplomatic actors now engage in a high degree of information sharing, including written and oral reports, formal and informal data exchange as well as relying on each other’s personal channels of communication – phones and emails. Even more, the practice of regular reporting has been institutionalised: “post-Lisbon, the EU delegation sends out a centralised matrix to be filled in by us, through which we (the national embassies) supply information on our (individual) projects” (Interview 12). A more central role for the EU delegation implies involving all national embassies, convening and coordinating all meetings. This is increasingly visible since post-Lisbon there is no rotating Presidency, the role of the chair has been taken over by the delegations (Interviews 7, 8, 14, 15, 16, 17).

Today, these meetings provide a common communication infrastructure and account for some degree of institutionalised practices: regular meetings, information-sharing and reporting. Meeting in these setting has been part of the yearly strategies of member state embassies and the EU delegations both pre- and post-Lisbon. The change today is that this objective is pursued via participating within the EU framework meetings. Even more so, diplomats recognize that these meetings can enable them to develop more coordinated and harmonised practices on civil society issues (Interviews 7, 8, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 23).

3.4. Administrative efficiency: How well is the communication infrastructure managed?

In multilateral diplomacy, such as that pursued within the EU framework, where a large number of diplomats intersect, effective procedures must be devised (Leguey-Feilleux 2009). The diplomatic exchange carried out thus depends on the established communication infrastructure that affects the mode of interaction, techniques and strategies used. In order to share diplomatic resources one needs to be able to jointly use communications infrastructure, and to pool information on administrative or practical matters. In their cooperation on support to civil society, this implies that the EU framework allows participants to make full use of their respective comparative advantages, but also to jointly execute programmes or even to

delegate responsibility for them (Delegation to Ukraine 2009). The high frequency of meetings implies that diplomats intersect at least once a month; the effects of socialization became unavoidable: having a common EU framework contributes to the growth of trust and responsiveness among participants (Interview 6, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20). Delegations bring together all EU actors and meetings are no longer perceived as voluntary as in the pre-Lisbon setting (Interview 23). Today, participants in the meetings have to present reports (mainly orally). As noticed by some, reporting has definitely become coordinated. At the same time, these meetings are a useful tool for re-strategizing, for avoiding duplication and extra (unnecessary) work, as diplomats emphasize (Interview 6, 20). And lastly, having the EU delegations take over the burden of the Presidency allows national diplomats to structure and prioritize their workload in a more efficient manner. Hence a growing network of information exchange among participants and trust-building within the community.

Yet, it seems that the infrastructure is not utilized to its maximum potential. These meetings help identify opportunities. Nonetheless, our findings show that the EU diplomatic actors only use the information jointly with the aim of common actions on a limited number of occasions. More often than not, the high number of meetings and information-sharing make the EU delegations look good on paper when they report back to Brussels. The interviewees emphasize the quantity of meetings and less their quality. The EU delegations, after the Lisbon Treaty, became more insistent on using different tools for achieving enhanced cooperation (surveys, consultation on strategies or common planned activities; including the matrix generated by the delegations to be filled in by member states). According to some interviewees, these efforts actually increase inefficiency as the result is more paperwork than practice (Interview 12, 13). Another source of inefficiency is technical incompatibilities. According to MS' opinion, aligning programmes in practice presents problems due to the differences in the ways diplomatic missions work with civil society. Because of the differences, sharing of resources is also a challenge. As result, the common framework offers: (a) a framework of correlation for the EU diplomatic community on donor issues and (b) some sort of feeling of coordination (Interviews 8, 11, 12). As noted, the pursuit of inter-level cooperation has emphasised the coordination reflex, whereby member states build practices of consultation (Interviews 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18). Yet, leading member states on supporting civil society, argue that such frameworks should make use of each other's comparative advantage and facilitate joint implementation of programmes, activities and tasks (Interviews 12, 18).

In Moldova and Ukraine, diplomats consider that current procedures of information exchanges should be further regularised and better centralised (Interviews 8, 10, 11, 12, 17). They identify two outstanding challenges when it comes to sharing resources. First, some suggest the need for a secretarial unit within the delegation that would *de facto* coordinate the civil society agendas of all EU actors. Such an institutional arrangement would facilitate dealing with "fluidity", i.e. the rapidly changing character of a situation, a characteristic of multilateral diplomacy. This in turn could lead to coordinating activities and the meetings would thus not be perceived as simply a well-rehearsed practice of just attending meetings (Interview 8, 12). Second, member state diplomats note that these meetings are neither mandatory nor binding; whatever is commonly agreed upon can be changed or disregarded at any time (Interviews 9, 10, 23).

It is clear that some positive trends vis-à-vis administrative efficiency can be discerned, especially in relation to the growing centrality of the EU framework for the pooling of information on matters relevant to support for civil society. But this raises the question whether there is progress towards diplomatic joint action. In light of the injunction in the Lisbon Treaty that EU diplomatic actors should contribute to implementing a common approach abroad, the emphasis in the following section is on effectiveness, i.e. achieving common goals.

4. Joint actions in theatre: Drivers and dividers of effectiveness

While it might be expected that cooperation will move forward from information-sharing to coordinated joint activities, examples from the field-trips are scarce and the data reveals more challenges than opportunities. What forces drive EU diplomatic actors to engage in joint activities and fulfilment of common goals? And which factors hamper this? In this section, we analyse the degree of coordination of joint activities among the EU diplomatic actors and explore the “drivers” and “dividers” in this process.

4.1. Bloc diplomacy

There are different modes of diplomacy; in large settings, as scholars explain, participants form coalitions or blocs, based on regional affinity, shared interests or common ideology (Leguey-Feilleux 2009; Berridge 1995; Walker 2004; Barston 1997). Even though “pooling resources with others is often an effective way of achieving your own objectives” (Walker 2004: 17), EU diplomatic actors in Moldova and Ukraine are less enthusiastic than might be expected about engaging in joint EU action. In fact, their interactions result in a range of different interest constellations; when it comes to formulating and implementing a common approach they cluster into different groups which have a regional or topical affinity. It is the EU (donor) meetings within regional frameworks of cooperation that offer the platform for doing so. Two groups in particular can be identified:

- 1) The Visegrad Group (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia), commonly known as the V4, collaborate in several areas of common interest in relation to European integration (Visegrad Group 2013). Its strategy for Moldova and Ukraine aims at developing broader regional cooperation with these countries through implementing projects there (Visegrad Fund 2013).
- 2) The Nordic Plus Group, represents a group of “like-minded donors” (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands) that are committed to enhancing aid effectiveness, on the basis of which has been conceived the principle of “good donorship” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark 2011; Interviews 18, 19; Norad, 2006). This implies a joint action plan on harmonization and alignment of donor activities.

In addition, it may be that member states cluster non-formally, under certain themes. For example, in Moldova, Poland, Sweden, Romania and on occasions Lithuania coordinate together on Eastern Partnership related issues.

According to the interviewees both the Visegrad and the Nordic Plus groups meet with the aim of achieving closer coordination in their activity on civil society matters. These two groups exhibit various examples of formulating a common approach and implementing it, i.e. sharing resources and engaging in joint projects. The V4 has set a common Fund (Visegrad Fund 2013). This Fund is another example of strategic cooperation based on similar interests: “there are meetings planned for strategic coordination and redirecting funds to both projects and individuals” (Interview 17). As noted above, the Nordic Plus group is leading on the matter of the “good donorship” principle. This principle refers coordination as the main goal between them on sharing similar standards, on logistical aspects in particular (similar reporting, auditing etc.) and on complementing each other’s work. So, there is a vision for engaging in joint action.

The strategies that both V4 and Nordic Plus members adopt can be interpreted as both drivers and dividers in terms of effectiveness. Drivers, because bloc diplomacy involves a high degree of communication and negotiation among the capitals of these countries to foster bloc cohesion. This means that on a regional level, both groups have a high degree of interactions that generate solutions to common problems, generate bloc support and provide them with an advanced expertise on bloc coordination. Empirical data shows that within these two groups, member states reach a level of agreement on common procedures and are able to link efforts on offering funds to civil society (Interview 8).

Dividers, because the choice of bloc diplomacy comes with the incentive for smaller powers to unite in order to take a stand against those who are tempted to run the show. In other words, some countries might be uncomfortable with the EU’s central role. These groups do not include the EU delegations, which are not invited even as observers. During the common meetings under the auspices of the EU delegations, these groups do not report on their collective activities, strategies or plans. The delegation in Ukraine is aware of the existence of the Nordic Plus Group. Yet, the representative of the EU delegation in Kiev did not find it appropriate that Nordic Plus should report on the group’s activities, as the EU-MS meetings are a forum for the EU and individual member states (Interview 20).

4.2. Common EU infrastructure, different member state interests

Inter-level cooperation between the EU and member states on supporting civil society on donor issues has led to the development of regular communication channels, but is clearly constrained by the existence of different clusters of national interests. While meetings at the delegations are inclusive and officially state that they unite all EU diplomatic actors, some diplomatic missions emphasize that member states tend to cluster around common interests. Some member states, such as France, Germany and the UK were identified by interviewees as often clustering and pursuing their joint interests. As a result, the agenda is shaped according to the vision of the bigger member states. The old-time criticism of EU actors not acting collectively remains a challenge; there is evidence of a strong pattern of division among EU

diplomatic actors instead of unity among them. This division or in some instances isolation is visible through the refusal of some member states to participate in the common meetings (Interview 9, 10, 19, 23). In most cases interviewees confirmed that they follow their national orders (or those from Brussels, in the case of the delegations). Consequently, within EU framework meetings each member state gives priority to its own agenda and is preoccupied by the end-results of the projects on their agenda, according to which they will be evaluated in their capitals (Interview 8, 10, 11, 12, 20).

In the EU member state tandem, national interests remain a crucial element when it comes to taking actions at European level (Petrov, Pomorska and Vanhoonacker 2012; Rijks and Whitman 2007; Smith 2003; Whitman and Manners 2000); and can serve both as a driver or a divider. It may not be realistic to expect the ideal situation of an EU-28 speaking with one voice through its actions and it may seem more efficient for MS to unite in smaller groups. However, in practice, the result of this is counterproductive. There is no information sharing among the groups themselves or between them and the delegations; the meetings are not interconnected, so there is little room for sharing common practices across all meetings. The principle of cooperation is embraced by these groups separately and does not contribute to a unified EU front (Interviews 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 21, 23).

4.3. Personal, not multilateral diplomacy

Engaging in multilateralism is a strong driver for inter-level cooperation in achieving common goals. Multilateral diplomacy serves several purposes such as coordination, building consensus, providing mutual assistance, finding solutions to common problems, managing fluidity and unpredictability of diplomatic situations and achieving common goals (Barston 1997; Berridge 1995; Leguey-Feilleux 2009). Contrary to these expectations of multilateral diplomacy, EU diplomatic actors clearly do not always choose to cooperate, share resources or act together to project their interests in third countries. Some member states initiate projects, within which they take a leading position in coordinating the diplomatic community, outside of the common EU infrastructure, (Interview 9, 23). This leads to institutional competition, duplication and thematic overlap between EU actors. Poland for example, even though involved at the EU level in all communication settings, as well as in the regional ones, prefers not to pursue multilateral cooperation and instead embraces the “go it alone” tactic (a label reflecting the actors’ propensity to act individually and in competition with the EU). The EU framework brings forward the centrality of the Union delegations, but the downside of claiming leadership in this case can be the exclusion of some major EU actors in third countries (Interview 11, 19).

Today scholars explain that the key principle of multilateral cooperation is mutuality, implying participation in joint decision-making to foster legitimacy and capacity of the other (Van Langenhove 2010). In their relation to civil society, in certain cases, EU diplomatic actors are not led by the solidarity imperative, but rather by national interests, personal agendas or strong personalities (who are more competitive and ambitious to raise the profile of their national embassies). Member states are guided in their actions by political will - or more precisely, the lack thereof. To cite one interviewee, “donor meetings became an arena

for promotion and marketing of each other's activities and on top of that there is lack of political will to strategically coordinate" (Interview 9).

If there is no pressure from the national capitals for further cooperation, no steps towards joint projects are made. As interviewees argued, "as long as the purpose (of a project of one counterpart or another) is being reached, not so much joint programming takes place, but rather a showcase of one's unique expertise" (Interview 9).

Diplomats emphasize that another reason for the patchy inter-level cooperation is also the human factor (Interview 8, 10, 11, 12, 20). In the diplomatic communities in Moldova and Ukraine everyone knows their counterparts, and personalities may clash. Some heads of mission come with their own agendas that do not include multilateral cooperation, others may be interested in increasing their profile vis-à-vis their capitals or Brussels, so their pro-activity can do more harm than good (Interview 8, 10, 11, 12, 23). The human factor in this case does not play in favour of cooperation. This is rather typical for personal diplomacy, the major goal of which is projection of national images (Barston 1997); which clearly is a divider. Despite the general rhetoric on cooperation and coherence, in practice there is institutional competition, and a strong overlap of areas of interest and duplication of activities is not uncommon (Interviews 8, 9, 12). In the rare cases where projects are undertaken by two or more EU donors in the same area, this happens simply because their yearly or multi-year programmes coincide or overlap in that particular area. As result, in order to avoid conflicts among each other (and diplomats tend to avoid them) EU actors try on their own to find a niche in which they can specialise.

4.4. From efficiency to effectiveness?

Our findings show that post-Lisbon, achieving common goals (effectiveness) in Moldova and Ukraine is dependent on the communication infrastructure (administrative efficiency). Information gathering and pooling is only one of the many purposes of multilateralism that the meetings within the EU framework address. Interviewees emphasize that as the infrastructure for sharing information on individual projects is in place, the next step should be to use this infrastructure to set up multilateral projects (Interviews 6, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20). One EU-MS donor meeting in Moldova, for example, would gather around 13 actors (12 member state embassies and the EU delegation) which provide them with the opportunity for exercising multilateral diplomacy. Since the EU diplomatic community is rather small, it provides an intimate setting, ideal for subject-focused interactions under the coordination of the delegation (that should have a vested interest in the success of the meeting). Having a permanent character, these meetings have become a standing diplomatic resource for activities on supporting civil society.

Our findings indicate that the frequency and centralised reporting on support for civil society facilitated that meetings within the common EU framework reach the degree of consultation. *Consultation* refers to the most general degree of coordination (Disch 2006). It is reached as the meetings are focused on information sharing, and do not imply any formal decision making or commitment even though they may lead to some informal development of plans or

agendas. This is in fact pertinent to the meetings within the EU framework discussed in this article.

Whereas the evidence indicates that effectiveness is dependent on efficiency, empirically we cannot argue that reaching administrative efficiency will inevitably lead to overall effectiveness. In order to reach effectiveness, EU diplomatic actors would have to address the challenges facing joint action and transform the above-identified dividers into drivers. Furthermore, in coordinating their support offered to local civil societies, diplomatic actors would have to reach cooperation. *Cooperation* is provided by settings that are more strategic in nature; it implies strategizing, planning and implementation of negotiated activities/projects. Unlike consultation, under cooperation there might be formal or informal agreements made. Also, a degree of consensus must be reached and trust built among actors. Examples of the Visegrad and Nordic Plus groups activities are instances of bilateral and within-bloc cooperation that does not translate to the EU level. EU diplomatic actors seem on the whole to achieve consultation, but not cooperation.

Conclusion

Unpacking the notion of performance into an examination of efficiency and effectiveness facilitates a more comprehensive assessment of interaction between the EU and member states in third countries. One of the central themes of the Lisbon Treaty is that of stronger EU coordination in external relations. In addition to examining the process of diplomatic coordination in Brussels under the European External Action Service, it is important to examine how in practice similar processes take place in third countries. This article has analysed the relationship between EU member state embassies and EU delegations in Moldova and Ukraine in their donorship role within the European Neighbourhood Policy. In third countries, member state diplomatic missions and the EU delegations are expected to cooperate, formulate and implement a common EU approach; this implies the sharing of diplomatic resources and engaging in joint actions with the aim of enhancing EU coherence.

Overall, it appears that in Moldova and Ukraine the EU has reached a certain degree of administrative efficiency, yet there are still more challenges than success stories. Whereas the framework for sharing EU diplomatic resources is in place, they do not translate into joint actions. This framework has been in place since before Lisbon, so it would have been expected that this framework of cooperation could have been used as an opportunity for formulating and implementing a common EU approach. Post-Lisbon, the EU delegations in Moldova and Ukraine claimed their leadership role in coordinating a variety of meetings. This has resulted in an increased amount of reporting. The meetings follow a specific agenda, organised by the EU delegations most of the time, and are considered of high importance by all parties attending. The prerequisites for being administratively efficient are definitely in place.

Despite this development, challenges remain at the level of effectiveness. Instead of strategic operationalization of the common framework, EU diplomatic actors more often than not choose to cluster, duplicate activities and compete with each other. Despite the presence of favourable conditions for cooperation (the well-established communication infrastructure), the

diplomatic missions do not take advantage of them to the fullest potential. Even though the EU diplomatic actors interact and correlate some of their actions, member states do not upload their know-how to the EU level in terms of cooperation. The fact that most EU meetings were present in these countries before Lisbon should represent the main argument for facilitation of cooperation. It would imply that diplomats have engaged in multilateral cooperation on a continuing basis. However, the Union delegations have not yet fulfilled their full potential as managers of these meetings, making small steps in their leadership positions that sometimes leave more room for member states to choose “go it alone” tactics. Alternatively, some member states take the lead of coordinating their positions and actions through engaging in bloc diplomacy via regional groups such as the V4 and Nordic Plus.

This central finding raises important questions concerning the extent to which EU diplomatic actors can support the progress in the European Neighbourhood Policy countries towards “deep democracy” when there is such a lack of effective cooperation and collaborative action among them. Firstly, it is questionable how the EU can achieve better coherence in its actions externally if it has deficiencies in engaging in joint actions. Or, secondly, when reaching a common position is not even on the agenda. And finally, when there is divergence of member states’ opinions that can lead to clustering or “go it alone” tactics. All parties are willing to engage in an increased level of communication through reporting and information-sharing, yet substantive cooperation happens outside the common EU framework. It seems that, to quote one interviewee, “as long as there is no political will”, not much advancement on both dimensions of performance can be achieved (Interview 8). Such a conclusion is not only relevant for the European Neighbourhood Policy, Moldova and the Ukraine – it also has resonance for the more general analysis and evaluation of EU external relations “in theatre” rather than in Brussels, and thus to the prospects for future cooperation between the EU and the member state level.

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1. Interview civil society representative, Chisinau, 11 March 2011.
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19. Interview national diplomat, Kiev, 23 March 2011.
20. Interview EU official, Kiev, 23 March 2011 and 12 November 2013.
21. Interview donor representative in Moldova, by skype, 14 March 2013.
22. Interview civil society representative, Kiev, 14 November 2013.
23. Interview advisor to national diplomat, Chisinau, 20 November 2013.

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