

Science Diplomacy in the Western Balkans and beyond

Effective Science Diplomacy for Europe

Science diplomacy refers to the use of scientific, technological and academic collaborations to address challenges, promote understanding and build strong partnerships between countries, regions and societies. It encourages the use of scientific know-how and evidence to inform and support foreign policy objectives, facilitate international scientific and technical cooperation and foster and strengthen foreign relations.

The European Commission calls for the development of effective science diplomacy (SD) for Europe. In such a context, an initiative, titled “[InsSciDE – Inventing a Shared Science Diplomacy for Europe](#)” responds to this call with a hypothesis: Member States have a great capital of experience on which to draw. Domestic and transnational initiatives have long used science in global diplomatic engagements, in a diversity of ways and contexts. But this practice is fragmented, unrecognized, or lacking an overall model for leveraging and consolidation. InsSciDE will reveal, formalize and communicate this intangible capital, develop its conceptual bases and elaborate tools to help European SD emerge and blossom.

Current and future European science diplomacy is additionally supported by another project: [S4D4C “Using Science for/in Diplomacy for addressing global Challenges”](#). It implements activities for the benefit of European capacities, EU foreign policy goals and especially the development of solutions for global challenges. In order to achieve this, S4D4C brings together scholars of foreign and science policy, advisors, science diplomacy professionals and diplomatic training institutions. Recently an interesting policy brief was made available by this initiative: [Towards effective science diplomacy practice](#). The authors suggest here that governing mechanisms for science diplomacy in Europe must observe specific premises that lead to governance practices that do not pre-define what science diplomacy is, but give interested stakeholders the guidance they need to develop effective science diplomacy mechanisms themselves.

Science Diplomacy in the Western Balkans

Closer interactions between science and diplomacy is key to strengthening cooperation and addressing challenges in the Western Balkans region.

Partly, the [Western Balkans Process – also known as the Berlin Process](#) – can be seen as an example of science diplomacy. It is a joint initiative of 16 European countries and the European Commission and supports the efforts to integrate the region into the European Union and foster regional cooperation. The Process covers areas such as the resolution of bilateral disputes, endorsement of rule of law, connectivity, and economic development as well as strengthening the cooperation in education, science (research and innovation) and inter-societal dialogue. Another example of SD is represented by the [Steering platform on Research and Innovation for the Western Balkans](#). Established in 2006, the Platform facilitates the interaction between the Western Balkan Countries, the EU member states, the candidate and potential candidate countries and other states associated to the Framework Programmes for RTD and the European Commission. Its main objective is to support the enhanced integration of the WBCs in the European Research Area.

It is namely through science diplomacy that bridges between countries can be built as seen in the case of the South East European International Institute for Sustainable Technologies (SEIIST) that could be considered as the [finest example of science diplomacy after CERN and SESAME](#). SEIIST is an example of how a region is building bridges through science by creating a place for scientists from all over the world to exchange knowledge, ideas and new perspectives.

Addressing the [European Research and Innovation Days](#) on 25 September 2019, Montenegro’s Science Minister Sanja Damjanovic, said: “This institute that not only has the objective to promote science, technology and industry but also has the special mission to decrease the tension between the countries in our region. The mission of our institute is not only science for society, but also science for diplomacy.”

CEI Ministerial Meeting on Science / Science Diplomacy in CEI Member States

Striving for science diplomacy, the [Central European Initiative \(CEI\) Ministerial Meeting on Science](#) took place in Trieste on the 13 December 2019. Ministers of research, innovation and higher education gathered to discuss ‘*How can regional cooperation in science and technology foster sustainable development in CEI Member States?*’

Minister Damjanovic, as part of the plenary discussion on [Science Diplomacy and Capacity Building](#), presented SEEIIST and highlighted how this project provided the region, for the first time, science diplomacy means. Ms Damjanovic explained: “Due to its multidisciplinary nature, the project would enhance the cooperation of the sectors of science, technology and the economy and would present a platform for professional development of scientists, engineers, and technicians based on the transfer of knowledge and technology from European centres such as CERN and others. Furthermore, it would stimulate the development of complementary technologies, such as the use of alternative energy sources, development of advanced digital systems, etc.”

CEI Secretary General *Roberto Antonione* also stressed that for effective international scientific cooperation, strong political and diplomatic support was needed. He noted that the study of science diplomacy is generating interest in Europe and that the establishment of a CEI network of experts in science diplomacy could help gather inputs and knowledge to promote networking, research and training in this field.

The main outcome of this conference was the adoption of the [Trieste Declaration on Science](#). **This document provides a framework to promote shared actions in favour of international cooperation and science diplomacy. The conference also encouraged the establishment of a CEI Network of experts on science diplomacy, to explore the concept further including through the implementation of trainings, capacity building actions, research activities and networking.** It further expressed its support of improving cross border and transnational cooperation fields and welcomed initiatives that would promote knowledge on the challenges of sustainable development in the schooling systems of CEI countries.

More recently, the Central European Initiative collaborated with the University of Trieste (Italy) to explore the state and prospects of SD focusing on the CEI Member States encompassing also Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The ultimate objective of this research was to provide a first overview able to map how SD is approached by these countries.

Results of this “[Science Diplomacy in CEI member states](#)” study suggest that the notion of Science Diplomacy (SD) is diffused in most of the surveyed countries. However, such a distribution does not correspond to a balanced institutionalisation of SD in the structure of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs). Moreover, while inter-ministerial coordination does exist and is frequent, such coordination is primarily achieved on a case-by-case basis, rather than by creating ad hoc offices, bodies or structured coordination mechanisms. The promotion of national science systems and their achievements appears paramount in terms of motivations for implementing SD-related activities, though aspects such as gaining access to technologies, knowledge and market opportunities, as well as influencing policymaking are almost equally highly rated.

Looking at the instruments of international scientific cooperation and the existing links those instruments helped establish within the CEI constituency, the authors have noticed that the collaboration between and among CEI countries is organised around two sub-regional clusters: countries from Central Eastern and Eastern Europe, on one side; countries from Southern and Southeastern Europe, on the other.

Despite this differentiation, thematic priorities are quite similar across CEI Members, and health, circular economy and climate change are ranked equally high on a scale measuring the importance of these various policy areas. Through the elaboration of this report, several aspects related to the concept of SD have emerged as possible areas of further research as well as an interest in building institutional capacities in the SD field.

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