Discussion material

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Inventing a shared Science Diplomacy for Europe

# Strategic Objectives to Strengthen Science Diplomacy for Europe

*Fägersten's Six Strategic Objectives to Strengthen Science Diplomacy for Europe for discussion*

## DESCRIPTION

**Introduction**

In the InsSciDE report on science diplomacy strategy, Björn Fägersten outlines six objectives that Europe could undertake to strengthen capacities for science diplomacy. These objectives can be used as discussion material by themselves or within the framework of a case study or a regional perspective. The below segment is an extract from a full report on science diplomacy strategy.

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## What to do? Strategic objectives and practitioner recommendations

The above section analysed the relevance of science diplomacy to key European foreign policy interests, gave examples of what is already happening and reflected on the insights from science diplomacy history. Against this backdrop, what can or should the EU and its member states do to further its science diplomacy agenda[57] and enhance its contribution to European foreign policy? Existing research suggests that the EU, as a diverse but collective actor, requires three basic characteristics to strengthen itself as a strategic actor: coherence, or the ability of EU member states and institutions to work in tandem; capacities, or the material and institutional resources that enable action; and context, a permissive setting for EU policymaking.[58] This section makes suggestions on what the EU could do in relation to these basic strategic needs in order to increase the contribution of science diplomacy to the foreign policy interests discussed above. Six strategic objectives are suggested below, along with related recommendations.

### 1. Strengthen a free and vibrant European scientific community

- The primary objective for the EU in strengthening its science diplomacy is to safeguard a free, vibrant and outstanding scientific community that can generate excellence in scientific results as well as support EU foreign policy through science diplomacy. The Commission's 2022 Strategy for Universities states clearly that these actors "play a vital role in generating the evidence that underpins Europe's foreign and security policies, international agreements, and multilateral action".[59] A strong scientific base ensures the EU access to expertise and valuable support for all the above foreign policy goals. Investment in basic research needs to increase both at the EU level and in member states.

- Academic and scientific freedom – fundamental aspects of the functioning of the EU as well as its nascent science diplomacy – are under threat. This threat comes from efforts to root out theories and perspectives that are deemed inappropriate and from the general deterioration in liberal democratic principles in some member states. The principles of the 2020 Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research, signed by all the EU member states, needs practical backing. European research support structures such as the EU Horizon programme must be accompanied by and linked to active measures against member state suppression of free and independent research.

[57] See point 34 of the European Council conclusions on a "Global approach to Research and Innovation: Europe's strategy for international cooperation in a changing world", 3813th meeting, 28 September 2021.

[58] On the development of the framework see Fägersten, B. (2020). "European autonomy in a changing world order". In: Bakardjieva Engelbrekt A., Bremberg N., Michalski A. and Oxelheim L. (eds), *The European Union in a Changing World Order*: Cham: Palgrave Macmillan).

[59] European Commission (2022). Communication from the Commission on a European Strategy for Universities, Brussels, 18 January.

## 2. Agree principles on scientific cooperation in an era of regime divergence and competition

- The geo-economic era of regime competition and rivalry in innovation and research puts the EU in a different place compared to the familiar post-Cold War position. While globalisation might not have delivered change in closed and authoritarian systems, attempts at full decoupling between democratic and authoritarian regimes would be a fruitless endeavour. In addition, full decoupling would deprive Europe of scientific progress and opportunities to influence and assemble knowledge about foreign entities. Hence, European actors must establish a middle ground between naivete (remaining open to any sort of cooperation) and decoupling, in particular for scientific cooperation with non-democratic systems.

- General principles must be further developed for academic interaction with non-democratic regimes, for example with explicit red lines on issues such as censorship and discrimination. Grey area situations will also need further elaboration and collegial discussion. Voluntary principles on funding, for example, would facilitate scientific cooperation on several of the above foreign policy goals. In particular, it would facilitate cooperation on global challenges where no state or bloc of states can manage the task alone.

- When working with partners in non-democracies, European researchers encounter challenges such as infringement of academic freedom and attempts at political influence. EU research funding instruments should increasingly finance support structures for researchers collaborating with counterparts in non-democratic countries, such as training sessions on risk management, assistance with the translation of key documents and facilitation of sharing of best practice among research and higher education institutes.[60] Further measures that research and education institutions can take, for example, on cybersecurity and partnership policies are suggested in a 2022 Commission document on tackling foreign interference.[61]

- Considering that much relevant research and research collaboration today takes place in research technology organizations (for example in the much hyped semiconductor field[62]), science parks and private-public innovation partnerships, the EU should inspire corresponding discussions and principles in this fields and not only in traditional academic environments.

[60] See Tardell, M. (2021). "Swedish experiences of research collaboration with China: Challenges and the way forward", Swedish National China Centre.

[61] European Commission (2022). Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, "Tackling R&I foreign interference", staff working document.

[62] Rühlig, T. and Kleinhans, J-P. (2022). "Should the EU be concerned about high-tech research collaboration with China? Lessons from the case of semiconductors". CHERN, available at <https://china-in-europe.net/should-the-eu-be-concerned-about-high-tech-research-collaboration-with-china-lessons-from-the-case-of-semiconductors-by-tim-ruhlig-chern-stsm-host-jan-peter-kleinhans-chern-stsm-grantee/>.

### 3. Foster capabilities and culture of scientific advice in foreign policymaking

- The diplomatic arm of the EU machinery – the European External Action Service (EEAS) – would benefit from a more inclusive culture of knowledge infusion. One positive recent development is the fact that the EEAS has employed a dedicated science and technology adviser since 2020. Further progress could be made by way of training modules, staff mobility schemes with academic sabbaticals for relevant staff members, a policy planning process with more openings for scientific expertise and a bureaucratic process that has the time and resources to absorb the knowledge provided by experts. The work of the European Academies Science Advice Council (EASAC) could serve as an inspiration and resource.

- The EU delegations around the world should be able to benefit from staff with the competences to build and facilitate research and innovation networks, and coordinate member state efforts where possible.[63]

- In an era of geo-economic rivalry where Europe's corporate sector is key to its foreign policy objectives, the EU should also work to spread scientific advice and knowledge beyond the governmental sector. Digital Innovation Hubs – "one-stop shops" to help organisations and companies, including small and medium-sized enterprises, take advantage and make use of new digital transformations (Artificial Intelligence, AI, digital skills and cybersecurity) by providing boot camps, traineeships, exchanges of curricula and training materials – have been one suggestion to help corporations adopt up-to-date transformative technologies and become more competitive.[64]

### 4. Increase cohesion of EU level efforts

- Cohesion among the various EU bodies and institutions will be a key factor in increasing foreign policy clout. This is also essential for the successful exercise of science diplomacy. One example of inadequate levels of cohesion can be found in the European Commission's new research and innovation programme, Horizon Europe. The programme uses a mission strategy to steer efforts in relation to specific goals. While some of these goals are linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the links between the missions and the EUs overarching foreign policy goals are tenuous.

- For a self-styled "geopolitical Commission" aiming to learn the language of power, it is striking that international research activities are discussed in isolation from today's major political questions and rivalries. While more geopolitical considerations are included in the Global Approach to Research and Innovation strategy, further policy cohesion must mean that the parts of the Commission that deal with areas other than foreign policy address the EUs overarching

[63] For a discussion, see the forthcoming research by Pierre-Bruno Ruffini, "Relations between national science diplomacies and European science diplomacy", https://www.insscide.eu/about/case-study-pitches/article/science-diplomats-pitches, and <https://www.insscide.eu/results/publications/>.

[64] Cagnin, C., Muench, S., Scapolo, F., Störmer, E. and Vesnic-Alujevic, L. (2021). *Shaping and Securing the EU's Open Strategic Autonomy by 2040 and Beyond* (Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg).

international interests. In addition, general foreign and security policy strategies will also need to address the field of science diplomacy.

- One way to ensure such coherence could be the formulation of a joint agenda on Science Diplomacy by Mariya Gabriel, the Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, and Josep Borrell Fontelles, the Commissioner leading the work on "A Stronger Europe in the World".

- Another measure would be to designate SD focal points within relevant EEAS departments and Commission directorates. Together with the SD staff in the EU's external delegations, this group would form the internal stakeholders for European SD and elevate its role in everyday EU policymaking.

- On financing, more initiatives could be envisaged like the "Team Europe Initiative" with greater involvement from the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development– expanding alliances on key priorities such as healthcare, infrastructure and critical technologies.

## 5. Increase cohesion of EU and member state efforts

- Cohesion among its disparate member states is often highlighted as a lever for the EU for managing its international relations. EU-level science diplomacy will be strengthened if it is supported rather than undercut by individual member state strategies. This requires that member states develop congruent national strategies that, at a minimum, do not conflict with common European efforts. For example, many national strategies are focused on securing national innovation goals and establishing bilateral research cooperation with third actors. Minimal coordination would ensure that these national efforts do not undermine common policies on innovation or weaken the EU's hand in relation to third parties.

- The EU should consider establishing a Science Diplomacy Coordinator, modelled on the Counter Terrorism Coordinator, that could monitor member states' activities and act as a focal point for cooperation. The coordinator should seek a stronger role for EU delegations, in cooperation with the holder of the EU presidency, to take a more central role in coordinating European science diplomacy efforts in third countries. The process for coordinating National Risk Assessments, where EU member states submit risk assessments according to a common template, could also be a guide here.

- On financing, coordinating efforts across member states could reduce disparities and fragmentation within the bloc, allowing for more cohesive development in the digital arena. In the current digital transformation, combining initiatives and pooling resources could not only reduce duplication but also lead to more efficient technical advances, notably in the cyber, quantum or AI spheres. For instance, a "quantum-web" is a genuine possibility involving coordinated efforts between EU research programmes, member states and the private sector to develop a connected network of quantum computers, simulators and sensors. Good

examples are the NIS Directive and the cyber diplomacy toolbox, which provides interoperability and a common framework for member states.

## 6. Leverage potential science diplomacy stakeholders

- This report has focused on the science diplomacy of the EU institutions, and to some extent its member states. This was motivated by the definition of science diplomacy as a conscious and even instrumental activity. It should be noted that other forms of interaction and cross-fertilisation between the scientific and diplomatic world can also affect science diplomacy, especially from a long-term perspective.

- The EU should therefore aim to build bridges and platforms of interaction with surrounding actors that can function as facilitators and, with time, leverage more official science diplomacy efforts. This could engage cities, NGOs, the academic world and the private sector, all of which possess power potential in this field. The new "EU Science Diplomacy Alliance" could act as a bridge or partner in this regard.[65]

- However, these surrounding stakeholders – and scholars in particular – would also need to consider their role and agenda in the science diplomacy field. As argued above, science diplomacy serves an end that is usually tied to wider foreign policy goals. The extent to which scientists and experts will want to engage in and facilitate this form of statecraft, and how this could be done while respecting their integrity, merits thorough discussion in Europe's academic environments.

[65] See https://www.science-diplomacy.eu/about/eu-science-diplomacy-alliance/.