

Report about the 1st European Science Diplomacy Conference: Towards a European Approach to Science Diplomacy, 18-19 December 2023, Madrid, Spain



The 1st European Science Diplomacy Conference took place in Madrid, Spain, from 18 to 19 December. The conference was organised by the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU together with the European Commission and took place on the premises of Fundación Ramón Areces, providing an impressive backdrop to the discussions both in the plenary, where seats were in high demand, and in parallel rooms for side-events.

The aims of the conference included:

- Taking stock of the development of a European framework for science diplomacy
- Progressing the draft framework and discussing the way ahead
- Offering space for dialogue, co-creation and participation by a broad range of stakeholders and fostering science diplomacy outreach, also beyond the EU
- Enhancing motivation amongst science diplomacy stakeholders to get actively involved and creating visibility for the ongoing process.

The conference **brought together a dynamic and thriving science diplomacy community** especially from Europe, but also from beyond, fostering a vibrant environment for crucial exchanges among the key stakeholders in European science diplomacy. Participants included representatives from embassies, foreign ministries, science and research ministries, European and international institutions, national academies, research institutions, and civil society.

The event not only **reflected on the evolution of science diplomacy in Europe** but also reunited established actors who have been integral to the field since its inception. It also embraced a diverse array of new voices expressing growing interest in science diplomacy and actively involved them in the discussions. Both on the conference floor and in the online sphere, **the passion and enthusiasm for science diplomacy were palpable**. The necessity for such a forum was clearly recognized.

The conference was preceded by the General Assembly of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance and a meeting of the Network of Science Diplomacy Coordinators in EU Ministries of Foreign Affairs (which discussed EU-NATO relations with the NATO Chief Scientist). **Both meetings helped attract key people from the science and diplomacy spheres to the conference.**

Over the two days of the hybrid conference, **almost 250 people joined on-site** and almost 100 people joined the conference online, actively participating by submitting numerous questions and comments through Slido. 77% of the registered onsite participants came from the European Union with the remaining 23% coming from outside of the EU. Strong delegations from the UK and Switzerland were particularly noteworthy.

In terms of background of the participants, the conference was able to **attract a broad range of stakeholders**. Of the registered participants, 29% came from government, 21% from academia, 18% from the NGO sector, 10% from diplomatic services, 10% from European or international organisations, and 4% from the private sector.

The conference **concluded with main outcomes of discussion** in the form of [12 concrete suggestions for a European framework for science diplomacy](#). The video recordings of the conference are also available on the [conference website](#).

Opening ceremony

During the **opening ceremony**, **Commissioner Iliana Ivanova** reminded the audience of key examples of successful science diplomacy, but stressed also that times are changing and that we live in an increasingly fragmented and polarised world. In this new context, science diplomacy has become even more important. She cautioned to be as open as possible, but also as closed as necessary in relation to (scientific) cooperation.

Also speaking at the **opening ceremony**, DG **Marc Lemaître** described the evolution of science diplomacy in the European Commission and pointed to the steps taken in the past two years to develop a European framework for science diplomacy. **H.E. Nasser Kamel** (Secretary-General of the Union for the Mediterranean), **Antón Leis** (Director of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign affairs, European Union and Cooperation), and **State Secretary Juan Cruz Cigudosa** (State Secretary for Science, Innovation and Universities, Spain) echoed these words and provided further examples emphasising a call for concrete actions.

The road from Madrid to Madrid

This session provided an overview of the journey of European science diplomacy. The Madrid Declaration on Science Diplomacy was agreed in Madrid in December 2018, the conference thus marking its 5th anniversary. **Ana Elorza Moreno** (Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology, Chair of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance) highlighted the history of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance, which was established in 2021 as a legacy of three Horizon 2020 science diplomacy projects (S4D4C, InsSciDE and EL-CSID). She called for additional collaborative efforts, drawing on the collective intelligence of various stakeholders in order to create a new mindset for scientists and for diplomats and new career paths in the area of science diplomacy.

High-level panel: A new European framework for science diplomacy

The high-level panel consisted of **Juan Cruz Cigudosa** (State Secretary for Science, Innovation and Universities, Spain), **Maria Cristina Russo** (DG RTD), **Lina Gálvez Muñoz** (Member of the European Parliament and Vice-Chair of the ITRE Committee), **Marek Konarzewski** (President, Polish Academy of Sciences), and **Éric Tallon** (General Director of the Institut Français in Spain) and was moderated by **Jan Marco Müller** (DG RTD).

The panel focused on the relevance of a European framework for science diplomacy:

- Addressing global and societal challenges and bringing the worlds of science and diplomacy together effectively
- Strengthening the role of science in policy and improving public policy
- Strengthening the European Research Area and research ecosystem
- Agreeing on common principles and values
- Achieving greater impact through collaboration
- Promoting multilateralism
- Responding to democracies under threat
- Ensuring the strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty of Europe

The panel also stressed that the size and speed of current challenges is unprecedented. Since no country can address these challenges alone, cooperation is needed. Science diplomacy is also a tool to support scientific refugees from Ukraine and the rebuilding of Ukraine.

Parallel hybrid session: Science diplomacy in the relations between the EU and the Mediterranean

This session was moderated by **Zehra Sayers** (SESAME) and featured as panelists the SG of UfM **Nasser Kamel**, **Maria Cristina Russo** (DG RTD), **Octavi Quintana Trias** (PRIMA), **Slim Khalbous** (AUF) and **Bernd Gawlik** (JRC).

Science diplomacy in the making was showcased in this session, not only presenting the outcomes of the first Euro-Mediterranean conference on science diplomacy in October 2023 but also announcing the Council and EU Parliament agreement to continue the EU's participation in PRIMA.

In tackling the collective challenges of climate change, water and food security – issues that are especially threatening for the Mediterranean area - science diplomacy is an imperative tool. Science is needed in implementing solutions. Communities of practice must be established and supported by

- Enabling broader access to research infrastructure
- Offering training and education
- Building channels for exchange between scientists, diplomats and policy makers.
- Ensuring ownership for enabling projects to have impact
- Promoting win-win (scientist and public policy) cooperation with countries of the south and of the north.

Culture and language are key elements in implementation and need to be recognised as part of the solution.

Parallel hybrid session: Science diplomacy in the relations between the EU and Latin America

Science diplomacy between Latin America and the European Union represents a strategic link that transcends geographical borders promoting cooperation in the fields of research and innovation and building stronger and more sustainable relations across the Atlantic Ocean.

In this session, a diverse group of science diplomacy experts from both sides of the Atlantic discussed challenges and opportunities and elaborated on how to promote strategic attention to science diplomacy to achieve effective collaboration in the region. The panel was moderated by **Melania Guerra** and **María Estelí Jarquín** (Costa Rica) and had as speakers **Carlos Nobre** (Brazil), **Alma Hernández** (Mexico), **Marcella Ohira** (IAI), **Xavier Barcons** (ESO), **Pedro Figueroa** (DiploCientífica) and **Felix García Lausín** (Iberoamerican University Council).

- Speakers highlighted examples of joint EU-LAC science diplomacy activities like the Large-Scale Biosphere-Atmosphere Experiment in the Amazon and cooperation in astronomy with Chile.
- New approaches were presented, including the establishment of the first Iberoamerican science diplomacy network as well as the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research that is currently building the first science diplomacy curriculum based on case studies from LAC.
- Panellists stressed the role of civil society to provide a neutral space to advance informal relations, and called for the establishment of robust institutions to create trust for long-term relations and learn from each other, including the moral duty to support new initiatives from young people.
- The recent CELAC summit, which put the role of science as a tool to promote cooperation high on the agenda, was perceived as a strong signal.

Session I: Using science diplomacy strategically to tackle geopolitical challenges in a fragmented, multipolar world

In this panel the high level of interdependence and the decline of the unipolar era served as the backdrop for discussion. After the keynote by **Björn Fägersten** from the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, a panel consisting of **Bryan Wells** (NATO), **Stéphanie Balme** (Sciences Po), **Luk Van Langenhove** (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), **Muriel Helbig** (DAAD) and **Rasmus Bertelsen** (Arctic University of Norway) as well as **Johanna Ketola** (University of Turku) as moderator discussed the following aspects as implications for European science diplomacy against the background of a changing global world order:

- A European science diplomacy needs to carefully balance openness and increased cooperation on the one hand, against the due consideration of risks, including restrictive and protective measures on the other hand.
- Cooperation with like-minded states needs to increase.
- It is important to recognise that science diplomacy can affect diverging interests among EU-member states.
- Open Science remains important as well as science mobility in the EU.

Europe should

- Strengthen its free and vibrant EU science community as forming the foundation of EU science diplomacy
- Explicitly include the social science and humanities in all its science diplomacy activities
- Increase cohesion of EU and member state efforts
- Leverage science diplomacy stakeholders, including the private sector
- Promote academic self-reflection and integrity
- Strengthen collaboration with the European neighbourhood
- Capitalise on Europe as a science and innovation power house
- Use its soft power potential.

Session II: Making European diplomacy more strategic, effective, and resilient through scientific evidence and foresight

Following an inspiring keynote by JRC Director General **Stephen Quest**, the panel moderated by **Dovile Gailiute-Janusone** (Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and composed of **Alexandre Fasel** (State Secretary in the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs), **Alessandra Tognonato** (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), **Nebojsa Nakicenovic** (EC Group of Chief Scientific Advisors) and **Tarmo Soomere** (Estonian Academy of Sciences) emphasised the crucial role of science in international policy making and discussed important measure to support science to play out its role even more effectively:

- Scientific insights contribute to well-informed decision-making, foster more cohesive responses, and enhance the ability to anticipate challenges effectively at the EU level through the science advice mechanism.
- Robust networks and established routines of systematic exchanges among researchers, as well as between researchers and policymakers, are essential to effective science advice and science diplomacy.
- Develop anticipatory capacities in order to keep abreast of technological (and potentially disruptive) evolutions.
- Co-create and prepare for governance frameworks of future technologies in order to ensure fair participation and regulation among all involved stakeholders.
- EU science diplomacy needs to adopt a horizontal, integrative and at best holistic approach to dismantle silos and disciplinary boundaries in science.

Keynote: Alar OLLJUM

Alar OLLJUM (Senior Policy Advisor, Policy Planning and Strategic Foresight Division, European External Action Service) stressed the heightened geopolitical instability and rising polarisation and fragmentation. The world has clearly turned multipolar and, unfortunately, less multilateral. In this situation, the European responses should include the following points: De-risking the economy, renewing and relaunching multilateralism, working with partners to reshape the international order and to give the Global South their legitimate role, a more integrated approach to security and the recognition of interlinkages between security and other fields, promoting trust in science to respond to the populist tendencies, the need to learn the language of power, and diplomats engaging more effectively with scientists.

Session III: Strengthening science diplomacy in delegations and embassies and fostering the EU's global science diplomacy outreach

Following a keynote by **Pierre-Bruno Ruffini** (University of Normandie-Le Havre), **Santiago Sierra** (Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs), **Martina Hartl** (Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Research), **Kim Montgomery** (AAAS), **Laurent Bochereau** (EU Delegation to the AU) and **Katalin Alföldi** (COST) plus **Mostafa Moonir Shawrav** (MCAA) as moderator joined to discuss how to strengthen science diplomacy in delegations and embassies and foster the EU's global science diplomacy outreach. The findings and recommendations included:

- With twelve EU science counsellors to date, less than 10% of EU delegations worldwide benefit from the presence of a counsellor dedicated to STI. Geographical choice is driven by scientific, strategic, and geopolitical reasons.
- Approx. 500 science/tech attachés in member state embassies worldwide represent a huge potential to foster EU's science diplomacy outreach. A Team Europe Approach should be explored further to strengthen the EU's competitiveness.
- The recently adopted AU-EU Innovation Agenda is a success story of European science diplomacy.
- Networks like COST or MCAA can be means to convey messages and values and serve as vehicles to create long lasting trustful partnerships.
- Organisations like AAAS have shown that they can play a key role in maintaining informal relations when official relations are tense (e.g. regarding Cuba and the US).
- More strategic engagement of the EU with its scientific diaspora is needed.
- The ongoing Multilateral Dialogue on Principles and Values in international R&I cooperation highlights the need to listen more carefully to our international partners and their perception of values and principles.

Session IV: Building capacity for European Science Diplomacy

The keynote was provided by **Izaskun Lacunza** (FECYT and Chair of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance). The panel moderated by **Marga Gual Soler** (GESDA) and composed of **Dirk-Jan Koch** (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), **Martina Schubert** (Diplomatic Academy Vienna), **Angela Liberatore** (ERC), **Jean-Christophe Mauduit** (University College London) and **Maria Josten** (EU Science

Diplomacy Alliance) discussed current trends, needs and priorities in science diplomacy capacity building and highlighted the following aspects:

- Efforts in science diplomacy training must not only increase but must be accompanied by institutional change and changes in the knowledge system to facilitate science diplomat career paths more holistically (current approaches focus on support of individuals).
- The EU should take integrative leadership in this systemic change.
- Demand for science diplomacy related studies in higher education is consistently increasing; focused academic programmes are currently installed and expanded.
- Trainings and guidelines for researchers collaborating with researchers from authoritarian states need to be provided.
- Science diplomacy needs to be pursued especially where it is difficult and where relations are tense.
- It can be important to stick to people-to-people approaches in science diplomacy: i.e. distinguish people from institutions and decouple scientists from the constraints they face in certain countries in order to facilitate meaningful exchanges.

Wrap-up session, outlook to the Belgian EU Council Presidency, and closing ceremony

During the **wrap-up session**, **Ana Elorza Moreno** (Chair of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance) and **Jan Marco Müller** (Coordinator for Science Diplomacy and Multilateral Relations, DG Research & Innovation, European Commission) shared the main outcomes of the conference. These can be found on the conference website: [European Science Diplomacy Conference](#)

Lionel Bonjean (Director General of the Walloon Public Service for Economy, Employment and Research, Belgium) provided the **outlook to the Belgian EU Council Presidency**. He stressed that over the past fifteen years, science diplomacy has emerged as a distinct focus within public policies and has become an emerging theme in academic research spheres. He highlighted three priorities of the Belgian EU Council Presidency: Open strategic autonomy, the valorisation of research results, and the reinforcement of R&I in our societies. He also stressed the importance of the Multilateral Dialogue on Values and Principles as a global platform for constructive and collaborative engagement in a changing world and highlighted concrete next steps in this regard.

In the **closing ceremony**, **Maria Cristina Russo** (Director for International Cooperation, DG Research & Innovation, European Commission) thanked the forthcoming Belgium Council Presidency for calling for the continuation of the Multilateral Dialogue on Values and Principles. Russo lauded the expertise and the passion for science diplomacy that the participants expressed during the course of the conference. She thanked the Spanish Presidency for its great commitment to bringing science diplomacy forward and organising this first conference on science diplomacy.

Santiago Sierra (Head of the Department for Coordination of International Cultural and Scientific Relations, AECID) also thanked the Commission for its support of the conference and to the organising teams. Stressing that science diplomacy will remain a Spanish priority and that they will continue to strengthen alliances and to increase activities with the private sector and civil society.

Gonzalo Arévalo Nieto (Director General for Research Planning, Ministry for Science and Innovation, Spain) closed by stressing that the conference was only the beginning.