

## Final Report of the Seminar on “A Science Diplomacy Approach for Belgium?!” Second EL-CSID Dissemination Conference 1 December 2016, Brussels

### Executive Summary

Climate change, migration, pandemics and conflicts are just some of the numerous grand societal challenges, which we are faced with today. Not only are they pressing, they are transboundary and global. To address such challenges, there is a need for international cooperation, in which scientific research plays an important role. But how can science and diplomacy reinforce each other to strengthen international cooperation?

This question that was raised during the seminar on “A Science Diplomacy Approach for Belgium?!”, co-organised by the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (BELSPO), the department Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie (EWI), Wallonie-Bruxelles International (WBI) and the Institute for European Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (IES-VUB). The discussion addressed the three dimensions of “Science for Diplomacy”<sup>1</sup>, “Diplomacy for Science”<sup>2</sup> and “Science in Diplomacy”<sup>3</sup>. The event linked up to the European political agenda in which Science Diplomacy (SD) is gaining momentum, both in the domains of Research & Innovation policy and External Relations strategy.

### Opening Address and Introduction to the Belgian context

**Johan Hanssens**, Department Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie (EWI), welcomed the participants on behalf of the organisers. He stressed the complexity of the endeavour of developing a Science Diplomacy approach for Belgium given the diversity and internal structure of the country. In federal Belgium, the competency of science and innovation has mostly been devolved to regions, while the federal level remains responsible for scientific institutes, space research and nuclear energy. Designing a Science Diplomacy strategy for Belgium will require a common understanding of how the various levels can reinforce each other and will necessarily be a delicate balancing act aimed at reconciling the different levels’ priorities.

### The EU Approach to Science Diplomacy

**Dr Kostas Glinos** (European Commission, DG Research & Innovation) stressed that Science Diplomacy is becoming a priority issue at EU level, both in the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Research & Innovation and the European External Action Service. He mentioned the common approach being developed by

<sup>1</sup> Science for Diplomacy (S4D): Scientific cooperation can improve international relations.

<sup>2</sup> Diplomacy for Science (D4S): Diplomacy can facilitate international scientific cooperation.

<sup>3</sup> Science in Diplomacy (SiD): Science can provide advice to inform and support foreign policy objectives.

Commissioner Moedas and High Representative Mogherini, while referring to their recent policy notes:


- Moedas: [Open Innovation, Open Science, Open to the World](#)
- Mogherini: [A Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy](#)


He argued that scientific collaborations with the rest of the world contribute to building bridges and to further developing international relations, especially in situations where traditional diplomacy fails. By facilitating the exchange of knowledge and data, trust can be built, thereby leading to further cooperation endeavours. This type of approach can be labelled “Science for Diplomacy”.


Science diplomacy is complex as it brings together different types of actors, namely traditional diplomatic actors and scientific communities. The Iran nuclear deal can be labelled as a science diplomacy negotiation, where the scientists involved in the talks also endorsed a diplomatic role.

The European Union (EU) is investing massively in research and the EU funding significantly contribute to knowledge development. With the EU investing 20% of the global research while producing 32% of the knowledge, still 2/3 of the knowledge development is done outside of the EU. More can be done on that front, and the EU will continue considering its engagement towards open innovation, open science and open to world as well as international cooperation and dialogue as key priorities.


## Concepts and Best Practices

**Prof Pierre-Bruno Ruffini** (Université du Havre, FR) started by introducing the basic concepts related to Science Diplomacy. He defined Science Diplomacy as standing at the intersection of science and foreign policy. In practice, Science Diplomacy brings together scientists and diplomats and always relates to the interest of a government, be it explicitly or tacitly. His view on whether there exists a European Science Diplomacy strategy is clear: “The EU’s political diplomacy is weak, but its research policy is effective and influential. Attraction, cooperation and influence are the drivers of any Science Diplomacy approach.”  [Presentation available online](#)

**Prof Zehra Sayers** (Sabanci University, TR) presented the SESAME Project, the international centre for Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East. SESAME is a remarkable example of “Science for Diplomacy”. On top of being the first synchrotron centre vested in the Middle East and the Mediterranean region, this project is using the language of science to bring together people from different backgrounds. SESAME (re)builds trust and promotes understanding between countries that sometimes have tense relations. The project offers research collaboration opportunities in many different fields, from physics and material sciences to health and archaeology. The enhancement of the research and innovation capacity also holds potential for improved quality of life in the region. “It [SESAME] is a light that we need for the future”  [Presentation available online](#)

**Dr Guillermo Orts-Gil** (Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT), ES) opened his address by claiming that “anyone who believes in science is potentially an ambassador for science”. He shared the experience and importance of Spanish science coordinators endorsing the role of science diplomats in different capitals in the world. He emphasised the need to support the scientists, whose role in science diplomacy is pivotal given their scientific expertise, but also to build trust and promote collaboration among scientists, diplomats and policy-makers. For that purpose, FECYT recommends investing in the set-up of a worldwide network. FECYT’s bottom-up strategy for science diplomacy is outlined in its “*Report on science, technology and innovation diplomacy*”.  [Presentation available online](#)

## Presentation of the Horizon 2020 EL-CSID Project

**Dr Luk Van Langenhove** (Institute for European Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (IES-VUB), BE) presented the Horizon 2020 project “European Leadership in Cultural, Science and Innovation Diplomacy” (EL-CSID). The project analyses the relevance of cultural, science and innovation diplomacy for EU external relations in the evolving global context and aims at formulating recommendations on how to develop EU strategies in these domains. According to Van Langenhove, it is essential to develop such strategies for science diplomacy at the national and European levels, based on the identification of existing as well as new science diplomacy tools. These strategies should be supported by adequate structures. Further, science diplomacy actions should be geared towards mobilising science and technology in support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.  [Presentation available online](#)

## Panel Discussion on a Science Diplomacy Strategy for Belgium

The panel debate brought together representatives of different Belgian and governmental entities and funding agencies as well as international organisations, namely:

- [FPS Foreign Affairs](#), Belgium’s Federal Public service (FPS) Foreign Affairs
- [Internationaal Vlaanderen](#) (IV), Flanders’ Department of Foreign Affairs
- [Wallonie-Bruxelles International](#) (WBI), Wallonia-Brussels’ Agency for international relations
- [Flanders Investment and Trade Agency](#) (FIT), Flanders’ Agency for international entrepreneurship
- [Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique](#) (FNRS), Wallonia-Brussels’ Scientific Research Fund
- [SwissCore](#), Switzerland’s Liaison Office for European Research, Innovation and Education
- [UNESCO](#), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

The presentations ([available online](#)) and discussion were aimed at gaining practitioners’ insights into the existing and developing science diplomacy approaches. An important preliminary remark to make is that science diplomacy is not (yet) the generic term used by all stakeholders, some of whom prefer referring to academic diplomacy.

This is the case of **Belgium's Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs** whose perceived role is to support the various stakeholders at the federal, regional and communal level in the efforts to promote *academic diplomacy* and foster internal coordination among these actors. Support is also provided to the internationalisation of Belgian universities with a view to promoting their competitiveness.

**Internationaal Vlaanderen** also prefers using the concept of *academic diplomacy*, understood as being at the interface between the academic world and foreign policy. Priority goes to supporting Flemish universities in their international interactions and to involving Flemish public research institutions in the implementation of the foreign policy of the Flemish government.

**Wallonie-Bruxelles International** promotes Wallonia-Brussels and supports its entrepreneurs, while the **Agence Wallonne à l'Exportation et aux investissements étrangers** (AWEX) deals with the promotion of foreign trade and the attraction of foreign investments. WBI and AWEX have networks of diplomatic delegates and trade commissioners abroad. These are complemented by the scientific liaison officers that provide a scientific and technological watch from their host country, identify new opportunities for cooperation, and negotiate institutional agreements to support collaborative research.

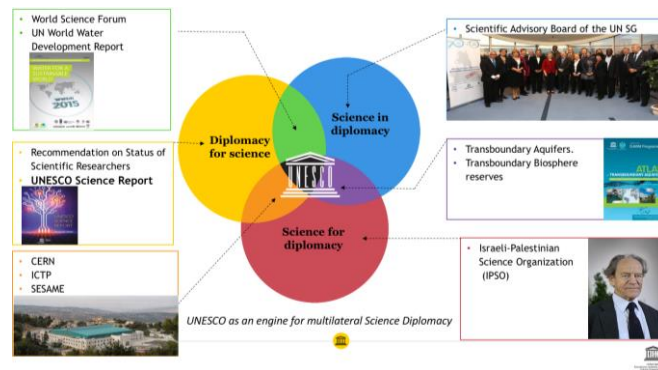
**Flanders Investment and Trade Agency's** strategy is based on the postulate that science, technology and innovation (STI) and internalisation lead to economic growth and jobs. The strategy is therefore aimed at building international STI linkages. In this context, the STI community is perceived both as a trade customer and as an investment accelerator. Its internationalisation is supported by a network of technology attachés and diplomatic actors.

The **Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique** aims to stimulate knowledge development in scientific research. It deploys actions along the three dimensions of the science diplomacy spectrum. The FNRS is in favour of informing (foreign) policy objectives with scientific advice (*science in diplomacy*, SiD). In practice, it advocates for the set-up of a Belgian Science Advisory Mechanism – a light structure bringing together scientists, the academies and the funds for scientific research and maintaining an organic link with the government – for more transparent and evidence-based decisions. The FNRS promotes international scientific collaborations to meet global challenges, through the set-up of large research infrastructures (*diplomacy for science*, D4S), which in turn contribute to the reestablishment of bridges between nations (*science for diplomacy*, S4D).

The objectives of **SwissCore** are to enhance the visibility of the Swiss education, research and innovation landscape and to support internationalisation by connecting actors. Thanks to its knowledge of the education, research and innovation actors, it strives to bring together offer and demand. The SwissCore network is composed of offices vested in priority regions/countries and innovation hotspots, which also provide information about the latest developments in these target countries.

**UNESCO** describes itself as an engine for multilateral science diplomacy. The organisation has been supporting multifarious initiatives that can be labelled as science for diplomacy, science in diplomacy, and diplomacy for science, but also – and mostly – endeavours that are better understood at the intersection of two

types, that is, serving multiple goals. The *UNESCO Science Report* provides a unique vision of the global scientific landscape.



The panel's **take-away messages** are threefold:

- Science diplomacy can be used as an important leverage to build partnerships where collaborations would have seemed impossible at first. It can also be a tool towards empowering developing countries through the enhancement of their research, technology and innovation capacities.
- Numerous initiatives and actions that can be labelled as science diplomacy are being deployed. In order to have significant impact, it is essential to move from isolated science diplomacy initiatives to a more comprehensive science diplomacy strategy, supported by a range of mechanisms and tools, as well as by a solid structure.
- Policy-makers increasingly tend to resort to scientific advice to formulate evidence-based policies. This is a practice to be encouraged. At the same time, there is a need to reflect on the extent to which researchers should be trained to provide scientific advice.

## Conclusions

The second EL-CSID dissemination conference focussed on the prospects for a Science Diplomacy strategy for Belgium. It brought together key science diplomacy stakeholders from various countries, projects and organisations to share experiences and discuss best practices.

With this seminar, the first steps were taken towards better linking research and innovation to political strategy and diplomatic action with a view to addressing today's major societal challenges, promoting our knowledge and fostering international cooperation.

In his concluding remarks, Prof. Richard Higgott (Institute for European Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel) drew a comparison between federations like Australia, where science policy and funding are centralised competences and where the states cooperated in implementing and reaching the set strategic objectives and targets, and Belgium, where the situation is far more complex. Indeed, there are clear elements of competition between the regional and central governments, and funding is diffused. He advised Belgium to adopt a joined-up strategy and to speak with one voice to the world if it is to successfully internationalise in the domain of

science. Prof. Higgott also cautioned against assuming that scientists will necessarily sign on to a passive role as science diplomats, as most of them are principally interested in their own research and the organic relationships they develop with partners around the world. The key here lies in bringing together two communities with very different aims and perspectives, namely scientists and diplomats.

The conference laid the foundations for the development of a Science Diplomacy strategy for Belgium that will require concerted action of all key players at different levels of governance. While developing convergent policies that serve simultaneously different objectives, we may contribute to a more prosper future in an inclusive and resilient society on a sustainable earth.