

1st Conference on Science Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe

An open debate on Science Diplomacy governance and capacity building

Report

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Introduction

The “1st Conference on Science Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe” was held in Trieste (Italy) on 20-21 November 2024, jointly organised by the [University for Continuing Education Krems \(UWK\)](#) and the [Central European Initiative \(CEI\)](#), in cooperation with the [European Union Science Diplomacy Alliance \(EUSDA\)](#) and with the financial support of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region (RAFGV).

The main objective of the Conference was to encourage an open debate on the prospects of Science Diplomacy (SD) in the target area through an enhanced involvement of the diplomatic community. To this aim, the event gathered an interdisciplinary group of SD experts and practitioners, including representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Ministries responsible for science, education and research of the following fourteen countries: Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Germany, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine¹.

The programme envisaged a combination of keynotes, interactive workshops and thematic panels, focused on three main topics:

1. capacity building, knowledge, and skills: what should be done to develop skills for SD (training a new generation of “science diplomats” in the target region),
2. governance and institutionalisation: how SD works in the countries of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (national approaches to SD),
3. multi-stakeholder partnerships for effective SD: what should be done to strengthen SD in the target area through enhanced multi-stakeholder cooperation.

Speakers and participants engaged in lively discussions, whose main insights are summarised in this Report. Based on the information exchanged and the inputs collected, the co-organising institutions CEI and UWK drafted a set of Key Take-Aways, which will steer the design of future SD-related activities targeting Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

Day 1 – 20 November 2024

Day 1 of the “1st Conference on Science Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe” was dedicated to an informal exchange among speakers and participants aimed at facilitating their mutual knowledge (*Get-to-know session*), while introducing the topics of: a) knowledge and skills needed for effective Science Diplomacy (*Interactive Workshop A*, with a main focus on *persons*); b) Science Diplomacy governance and organisational arrangements in the target countries (*Interactive Workshop B*, with a main focus on *institutions*).

Welcome and opening session

Following a brief welcome address by Alessandro Lombardo (CEI) and Christina Hainzl (UWK), two opening statements were made. Prof. Viktoria Weber, UWK Vice-Rector, gave a short presentation of the University for

¹ A full List of Participants is provided in Annex 1.

Continuing Education Krems and its strong engagement in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, also thanks to a close collaboration with the [Danube Rectors' Conference](#). She stressed the importance of science not only in terms of knowledge generation for tackling global societal challenges, but also as a tool for connecting people, creating relationships and building trust – a decisive aspect in the current geopolitical scenario. Ketty Segatti, Central Director for Particular Functions in the fields of Research and Innovation at the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region (RAFG), provided the audience with a short overview of the regional [Scientific & Innovation System](#), an example of multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation involving two Italian Ministries (Foreign Affairs; University and Research) and one regional administration, in which context bilateral and multilateral relations for Science Diplomacy can be nurtured. Moreover, she described some initiatives promoted by the RAFG at the interface between science and diplomacy, such as the recent [“Big Science Business Forum”](#), held in Trieste from 1-4 October 2024.

Get-to-know session

During the “Get-to-know session”, all participants presented themselves and shared their observations by answering the question *What is Science Diplomacy for you?*

As easily predictable, the concept of Science Diplomacy (SD) lends itself to multiple interpretations and avoids a one-size-fits-all definition. Yet, broad agreement emerged on some issues that recurred quite frequently in participants' interventions, irrespective of their affiliation to the world of science or diplomacy. First, the necessity to facilitate encounters between the scientific and diplomatic communities. The dialogue, even the “collision”, between these different, yet complementary perspectives and mindsets can generate innovative solutions to global societal challenges. Moreover, SD is essential to help science play its traditional bridging role, which acquires an even more important meaning in times of geopolitical crises. At the same time, the universalism of science needs to be balanced with the concept of interest, being it national or multilateral. Logically, this aspect, which highlights the inherent “tensions” of SD (national vs. international; competitive vs. cooperative), belongs to the viewpoint of diplomats much more than to those of scientists.

Several participants highlighted interdisciplinarity as one of the main features of SD, which was defined as a policy area where scientific knowledge, diplomatic skills and cultural awareness converge. Furthermore, SD is viewed as a tool to negotiate on emerging S&T-driven areas, such as Artificial Intelligence, where regulations are yet to be developed. Finally, SD is seen as a platform where scientific knowledge can be put at work, thus moving beyond research to produce change through knowledge. From this perspective, SD supports the valorisation of research results and their transfer to the political sphere to foster evidence-informed policies, both at domestic and international level.

The “Get-to-know session” was also useful to better understand how SD is perceived and managed within the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) of the target area. As mentioned above, one of the main scopes of the “1st Conference on Science Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe” was to enhance the involvement of diplomats in the debate on SD, which was possible thanks to the participation of high-level officials from twelve MFAs, including some from the respective Diplomatic Academies (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Germany, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia and Ukraine). When dealing with SD, diplomats seem to be fully aware of its two-fold dimension: on one side, SD is a tool to

capitalise on the assets and resources of their countries in the domain of Science, Technology and Innovation, as well as to acquire new ones. It is therefore a component of each country’s foreign policy; on the other, though, SD plays a key role in advancing international cooperation, thus helping establish multi-stakeholder alliances to address global challenges that could not be solved through uncoordinated national efforts.

Furthermore, it seems that a tendency is emerging towards institutionalisation of SD within the MFAs administrations, including through the appointment of officials dealing directly with science diplomacy. This tendency may seem more visible in EU countries, although the participation of several EU candidates prove that similar paths could be followed in the next future. In this regard, knowledge circulation and exchanges of practices related to the governance of SD in the various MFAs could be of help to ensure that more countries benefit from a strategic use of SD.

Overall, the views expressed by the participants can be consolidated in a general understanding of SD as an effective tool able to:

- facilitate encounters between scientists and diplomats,
- connect, coordinate and channel interdisciplinary knowledge and skills originating from various sources,
- support cross-border and transnational scientific collaborations useful for bridging between the countries,
- balance between national and international interests to be pursued through scientific cooperation,
- support negotiations on emerging S&T-driven topics of global interest,
- valorise research results and their use in the elaboration of evidence-informed policies.

Interactive Workshop A

Interactive Workshop A - “Knowledge and skills for building strong capacities in Science Diplomacy” - was mentored by Katharina Höne, Scientific Officer at [DLR Projektträger](#), German Aerospace Centre. Its scope was to encourage an open discussion focused on participating countries’ needs in terms of Science Diplomacy (SD) capacities, knowledge and skills, bearing in mind the emerging professional profile of the “science diplomat”. To facilitate interactions, two questions had been circulated among the participants prior to the Conference: *a) Have you ever participated in any training activity which touched upon SD, either explicitly or implicitly – and if yes, could you describe briefly what might be taken up from this experience on a broader scale? b) Do you perceive any need related to capacity building on SD in your country?*

Considering the different level of knowledge and involvement in SD within the audience, Interactive Workshop A attempted to highlight both perceived challenges and potential options in the domain of skills and capacities that could be tackled through joint future initiatives. Participants were asked to report on their previous SD-related training experiences, if any, and to present both the pros and the cons of these capacity building paths. The main insights are collected in the table below.

CHALLENGES
- diplomats are typically generalists while scientists highly specialised; yet they are called to cooperate on a growing number of topics, which are nowadays part of each foreign policy agenda

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - several areas of diplomacy (i.e., “sectoral diplomacies”) are rooted in science (e.g., climate diplomacy, energy diplomacy, digital diplomacy, health diplomacy, etc.) - such growing interactions between the world of science and the world of foreign policy requires the improvement of diplomats’ understanding of the scientific process, as well as of scientists’ understanding of policy-making processes and political cycles - mutual knowledge through joint networking and training opportunities needs to be balanced with the recognition that the mindsets are different (thus, the two groups might need tailored trainings)
OPTIONS
<p><i>Mainly for the diplomatic community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to raise the awareness of diplomats on SD and specific science-driven challenges (e.g., climate change) - to make use of specific case studies where the added value of science-diplomacy collaborations is clearly visible - to map existing capacity building actions provided by Ministries of Foreign Affairs to train their diplomats before being posted abroad - to facilitate knowledge transfer and exchange of practices from countries where SD has already been embedded in the diplomatic apparatus <p><i>Mainly for the scientific community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to increase the knowledge on drafting and negotiating texts, as well as on conflict resolution mechanisms through practical exercises and role playing - to develop policy-making awareness and policy-relevant communication skills - to enhance the knowledge on politically sensitive topics (e.g., research security, scientific/academic cooperation with non-like-minded countries, etc.) <p><i>For both communities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to prepare trainings in advance, e.g., through the provision of reading material to help understand the basics of SD (see for instance the online course developed in the context of the Horizon project “Using Science for/in Diplomacy for Addressing Global Challenges - S4D4C”) - to mainstream SD knowledge across various courses and trainings (beyond those specifically dedicated to SD) - to enhance the understanding of multi-stakeholder processes - to establish channels or platforms for continuous exchange of views, and spaces for mutual learning between scientists and diplomats - to develop “shadowing” opportunities for diplomats and scientists - to develop an understanding of SD and its opportunities in the civil society and the public

Interactive Workshop B

Interactive Workshop B - “Governance and institutionalisation of Science Diplomacy in the target area” - was mentored by Simone Arnaldi, Professor of Sociology at the [University of Trieste – Department of Social and Political Sciences](#). Its scope was to encourage an open discussion focused on the functioning of Science Diplomacy (SD) in the target countries. To facilitate interactions, two questions had been circulated among the participants prior to the Conference: a) *What is your experience in the domain of SD?* b) *How have the*

institutional/organisational arrangements for SD in your country changed since you became involved in this field?

While a general agreement exists on the fact that SD is not a new practice, its institutionalisation within the public administrations is a more recent phenomenon. Different systems and organisational arrangements are in place in the target countries, which raises the question whether a standardised approach to SD or a non-standardised approach based on specific national contexts would lead to improved cooperation. Moreover, if we look at SD from the perspective of a multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder endeavour, coordination has been generally highlighted as key to strengthen SD governance.

CHALLENGES

- different systems and organisational arrangements of SD are in place in the target countries, also based on the size of the country and the availability of resources
- Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) are key players in the domain of SD; therefore, it is essential to analyse how SD is organised within MFAs (both in the headquarters and in the diplomatic network, including the deployment abroad of science *attachés*)
- yet, SD is a multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary endeavour requiring efficient coordination mechanisms at both national/transnational level
- it may be difficult to understand which are the (many) stakeholders involved in SD, as some of them could implement “implicit” rather than “explicit” SD-related actions
- developing a standardised approach to SD vs. matching different SD approaches based on specific national contexts

OPTIONS

- to analyse how SD is organised within the MFAs of the target countries, as well as to identify possible trends in terms of institutionalisation (e.g., through the establishment of specialised organisational units)
- to map the community of actors and stakeholders involved in SD at national level, both implicitly and explicitly
- to explore formal/informal coordination mechanisms for effective multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary SD (e.g., inter-agency policy coordination, expert networks for science advice, structured interactions from research institutions to policymaking, multilateral fora)
- to make use of existing international networks (e.g., [the European Science Advisors Forum](#), [the International Network for Governmental Science Advice](#), etc.)

Day 2 – 21 November 2024

Opening Session

Dr. Jan Marco Müller (European Commission):

Dr. Jan Marco Müller, Team Leader Global Approach, Multilateral Dialogue and Science Diplomacy at the European Commission, addressed the significance of evolving Science Diplomacy. Dr. Müller emphasised the historical roots and recent formalisation of Science Diplomacy in Europe. He noted its critical role in fostering trust and integrating countries into the EU. Highlighting a paradigm shift, Dr. Müller pointed to geopolitical changes and disruptive technologies as key drivers. He stressed the need for Europe to strategize collectively, with global competitors like China, the US, and India advancing their Science Diplomacy efforts. In 2021, EU Member States tasked the European Commission with developing a comprehensive Science Diplomacy agenda. Supported by EU Research Ministers, this initiative aims to create a unified European framework.

Dr. Müller acknowledged the challenges in aligning scientists and diplomats, given their differing perspectives and the EU's complex institutional structure. To address this, a bottom-up approach was adopted, forming a Science Diplomacy steering team and five working groups. These groups, co-chaired by scientists and diplomats, have been working on recommendations for the development of such a unified European framework, with a final report expected in January 2025. Looking ahead, Dr. Müller announced plans for a coordination and support action in the next Horizon Work Programme and invited attendees to the second European Science Diplomacy Conference in Copenhagen next 17-18 December 2025. He concluded by underscoring the strategic importance of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe in the EU's foreign and security policy, expressing anticipation for the workshop's outcomes to further develop the European Science Diplomacy framework.

Keynote – “Scanning Science Diplomacy – On Some Peculiarities, Paradoxes and Pending Questions”

Prof. Pierre-Bruno Ruffini (University of Le Havre, Association pour la Valorisation des Relations Internationales Scientifiques et Techniques - AVRIST, Chair of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance - EUSDA):

In his keynote, Prof. Pierre-Bruno Ruffini provided an in-depth analysis of the fundamental aspects, contradictions, and open questions surrounding Science Diplomacy. He described Science Diplomacy as both a specialised area within diplomacy and a space where science and diplomatic practice intersect. Ruffini highlighted two key approaches to Science Diplomacy: a state-focused approach, which prioritises national interests, and a globalist approach, which aims to address cross-border challenges. He noted that while scientists often play a leading role in initiating Science Diplomacy efforts, it is diplomats and international governance structures that tend to derive the most benefit. Prof. Ruffini also explored the dynamic between science-driven and diplomacy-driven approaches, emphasising that political considerations frequently obstruct the implementation of scientifically informed solutions. He concluded by advocating for stronger

collaboration and the joint training of scientists and diplomats, which he argued would significantly enhance the impact and efficiency of Science Diplomacy.

Panel A – Knowledge and skills for building strong capacities in Science Diplomacy

Mag. Martina Hartl (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, Austria) introduced the speakers of Panel A and provided a summary of the interactive workshop A held on Day 1.

Dr. Katharina Höne (DLR, German Aerospace Centre):

Dr. Höne emphasised the growing demand for Science Diplomacy at EU and national levels, alongside increasing publications and training activities in the field. She referenced a new [Policy Brief](#) by the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance focused on Capacity Building, developed by the Task Force on Capacity Building and informed by an initial survey. Despite progress, gaps in Science Diplomacy training remain in effectiveness, particularly in addressing emerging topics like AI and research security, and in training future science diplomats to integrate certain values and principles into their work. Dr. Höne stressed the need for more research on how to conduct Capacity Building in Science Diplomacy, including identifying effective tools and approaches. She highlighted the importance of fostering cooperation through concrete examples and exchanges to bridge the worlds of science and diplomacy. Enhancing the visibility of the Science Diplomacy Alliance and exploring opportunities for future networks was also deemed critical. A call was made for tailored and specific interdisciplinary approaches that blend online, hybrid, and in-person formats. Co-creation and recognition of individual expertise were seen as essential factors for advancing capacity-building efforts in Science Diplomacy.

Ms. Payal Patel (The World Academy of Sciences, TWAS):

Ms. Patel highlighted TWAS's long-standing capacity-building programmes, with the [Science Diplomacy training programme](#) established in 2014 together with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). She described the success of their pairing model, launched in 2021, where applications are accepted jointly from a scientist and a policy maker, encouraging continued collaboration after training. With 950 participants from 114 countries, the courses focus on skills in listening, negotiation, collaboration in difficult times, and science communication. Role modelling exercises involve participants taking on the roles of countries to negotiate and argue from their assigned perspectives, fostering a deeper understanding of diplomatic processes. Additionally, the courses address critical topics such as the SDGs, sustainability, and the stewardship of global commons like space and oceans, emphasising their importance in fostering international collaboration and protecting shared resources.

Panel B – Governance and institutionalisation of Science Diplomacy in the target area

Prof. Simone Arnaldi (University of Trieste, UNITS) introduced the speakers of Panel B and provided a summary of the interactive workshop B held on Day 1.

Prof. Pierre-Bruno Ruffini (University of Le Havre, Association pour la Valorisation des Relations Internationales Scientifiques et Techniques - AVRIST, Chair of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance - EUSDA):

Prof. Pierre-Bruno Ruffini highlighted the dynamic relationship between scientific communities and government institutions in shaping national Science Diplomacy strategies. While academic and research institutions provide the foundation for Science Diplomacy, government ministries—particularly those for foreign affairs and research—play critical roles in its implementation. The Ministry of Research focuses on defining and advancing national priorities in science and technology, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs handles the geographic and strategic dimensions of international relations. Aligning these priorities requires close dialogue between the two ministries to ensure coherent policies. Prof. Ruffini noted that global approaches to Science Diplomacy vary, with some countries employing chief science advisors to bridge the gap between the scientific community and government. These advisors are instrumental in aligning research priorities with national and international goals. He further observed that scientifically advanced nations tend to formalise Science Diplomacy strategies more effectively, while others may lack structured approaches, leading to disparities in how science is integrated into diplomacy. Additionally, not all nations have dedicated science attachés; in some cases, diplomats from cultural or economic sections assume this responsibility, depending on the country's size, history, and strategic priorities.

Mag. Sebastian Schäffer (Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe - IDM):

Mag. Schäffer emphasised the importance of connecting research with practical policy-making through innovative policy advice and regional collaboration. Highlighting Austria's engagement in the Danube region, he focused on the Danubius Awards, a joint effort of the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research as well as the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM). These awards are part of the Danube Rectors' Conference (DRC), a network of almost 70 member universities fostering higher education, cooperation, and democratic development in Europe. The DRC has been active since 1983 in connecting academia in the region, particularly during times when diplomacy was less able to bridge divides. The Permanent Secretariat of the DRC is located at IDM, and the awards are presented during a ceremony at the DRC Annual Conference.

The growing network of 150 young researchers, many of whom are recipients of the Danubius Young Scientist Awards, exemplifies the long-term impact of interdisciplinary exchange and collaboration. Established in 1983 to bridge divides between East and West, the Danube Rectors' Conference continues to advance European integration and regional cooperation, engaging with diplomats from 20 countries and think tanks to translate research into actionable policy advice. IDM has 20 target countries and provides cooperation and expertise in the region, including academic policy advice since 1953. Mag. Schäffer underscored the need for a solid scientific foundation in policy-making, while addressing regional disparities in valuing scientific evidence, and stressed the importance of fostering unified acceptance of science across cultures and governments to tackle shared challenges.

Keynote – “Science Diplomacy in a New Era”

Ambassador Vito Cecere (German Federal Foreign Office):

In his keynote Germany's Ambassador to Austria Vito Cecere outlined Germany's strategic vision for Science Diplomacy as a fundamental element of its foreign and cultural relations policy. He emphasised its dual role as both a tool to achieve foreign policy goals and a means to facilitate international scientific cooperation. Germany's key objectives include safeguarding academic freedom, tackling global challenges, promoting the exchange of knowledge and mobility, and fostering partnerships that bridge science, society, and foreign policy. These initiatives aim to support global problem-solving, ensure the openness of scientific exchange, and contribute to sustainable development.

Amb. Cecere highlighted Germany's significant international presence, which is supported by a network of 230 diplomatic missions and 40 science counsellors stationed at scientific hubs around the world. He emphasised that Germany's approach to Science Diplomacy is guided by five key principles: it should be value-based and aware, responsible, interest-driven, regionally adapted, and mindful of potential risks. This framework ensures that ethical considerations, strategic interests, and regional needs are balanced in pursuit of global cooperation. He also discussed how Science Diplomacy could serve as a platform for bilateral and multilateral exchanges of scientific and political objectives, fostering a space where evidence-based decision-making and diplomatic goals can converge. Through these efforts, Germany aims to strengthen its role as a key actor in addressing global challenges via Science Diplomacy.

Panel C – Multi-stakeholder partnerships for effective Science Diplomacy

Panel C focused on multi-stakeholder partnerships for effective Science Diplomacy, posing the guiding question: *What actions are needed to strengthen Science Diplomacy in the target area through enhanced multi-stakeholder cooperation?* The following speakers were part of the panel:

- Mr Samuel Partey, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe
- Mag. Martina Hartl, Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, Austria
- Couns. Alessandro Garbellini, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy (MAECI)
- Prof. Emanuela Colombo, Politecnico di Milano (POLIMI)
- Dr Mounir Ghribi, National Institute of Oceanography and Applied Geophysics (OGS), Italy, Euro Mediterranean University (EMUNI)

Mr. Samuel Partey emphasised the critical role of integrating national science programmes across the region (Austria, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovakia) to foster collaboration and build trust through shared platforms. He highlighted the need for sustained funding and cited successful examples like water management, where common scientific standards and reporting mechanisms have driven progress. He referenced UNESCO's Science Diplomacy activities in Europe and its efforts to strengthen collaboration through shared training initiatives and frameworks. Training initiatives were presented as critical, particularly those shared with neighbouring countries to build capacity and demonstrate effective collaboration. Funding should align with the needs and capabilities of recipients, distributed equitably across institutions. He also

stressed the importance of follow-up opportunities after training to avoid disconnecting young scientists from professional pathways, ensuring continuity in their development.

Mag. Martina Hartl discussed the evolution of cooperation between Austria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Research and Science, emphasising the value of leveraging long-standing contacts and infrastructure within both ministries where Science Diplomacy is formally established. Initiatives such as stakeholder mapping and involvement in state visits have strengthened these efforts. She highlighted the growing role of universities and research organisations in actively advancing Science Diplomacy. Responding to points raised by other speakers, Mag. Hartl stressed the importance of co-creating frameworks to ensure sustainable and effective cooperation, particularly in capacity-building efforts. She also referenced the development of the EU Science Diplomacy Framework as a significant initiative for aligning national and regional efforts. She also addressed the tension between openness and research security in international collaboration, citing China as an example where cultural and security challenges must be navigated carefully. Science Diplomacy, she noted, can serve as a tool to manage these tensions while fostering constructive engagement.

Couns. Alessandro Garbellini highlighted the challenge of balancing diverse stakeholders, including diplomats, scientists, funders, local authorities, and institutions, in multi-stakeholder Science Diplomacy efforts. Platforms are key to coordinating these efforts, exemplified by a successful "roadshow" initiative, jointly promoted by MAECI, CEI and the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, that integrated science, diplomacy, and economic development stakeholders to raise the awareness of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern European stakeholders on the Big Science Business Forum, held in Trieste at the beginning of October 2024. He emphasised the role of political will in sharing information, which not only improves collaboration but enables innovative approaches to aligning goals and securing funding. He referenced the Scientific and Innovation System of the Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (SIS FVG) as a model of multi-stakeholder cooperation involving ministries, regional administrations, and research centres. Couns. Garbellini noted the critical need to address brain and labour drain by investing in researcher access to post-study opportunities, particularly for the Global South.

Prof. Emanuela Colombo provided insights from the perspective of a technical engineering institution, emphasising the importance of aligning Science Diplomacy efforts with practical, real-world applications. While POLIMI has been effective within its own projects, such as those developed under the EU's Global Approach and AU-EU Innovation Agenda, she highlighted the need for a more proactive approach to engage with the broader science and Science Diplomacy landscape. She underscored the institution's role in capacity-building initiatives within the AU-EU partnership and the importance of equipping researchers with competencies to contribute effectively to Science Diplomacy. This involves working independently on institutional priorities while simultaneously contributing to wider collaborative initiatives to advance global Science Diplomacy goals.

Dr. Mounir Ghribi highlighted Italy's longstanding contribution to strengthening educational opportunities in the region, including the development of new master's programmes. He referenced his experiences with the Western Mediterranean Forum (5+5 Dialogue), emphasising the lessons it provides for fostering multi-national cooperation. However, he emphasised that educational initiatives must be complemented by job creation to

provide graduates with opportunities, particularly in a region where employment levels are often tied to multinational efforts and state-building processes. This underscores the critical link between education, employment, and broader regional development to ensure sustainable Science Diplomacy outcomes.

Key Take-Aways

Based on the outcomes of the interactive workshops, thematic panels and keynote speeches held during the “1st Conference on Science Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe”, the following proposals for future actions are formulated with the aim to enhance the use and effectiveness of Science Diplomacy (SD) in the target region.

1. ***Exploring the possibility of establishing a SD network in the target region***

Several SD networks are already in place in Europe, as well as on a global scale. Yet, no SD networks are explicitly focused on the target region, which includes both EU members and EU accession countries. Therefore, a SD network in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe would not overlap with already existing initiatives. In addition to the specific geographical outreach, it would be important to focus on a limited number of target groups, which are seen as instrumental in the development of SD, namely: a) the diplomatic academies of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the target countries; b) institutions providing trainings and capacity building for professionals.

2. ***Promoting the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance in the target region***

Over the past few years, the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance (EUSDA) has quickly become a well-established platform involving several members and global networking partners involved in SD. Yet, as also discussed during the above-mentioned Conference, the participation of stakeholders from this part of Europe is more limited. Extending the SD debate to the diplomatic and scientific communities of the target region could encourage the participation of new actors in the EUSDA. Moreover, it could encourage the establishment of new [EUSDA Thematic Entry Points](#) on relevant topics, like for instance the contribution of SD to the accession process of EU candidates.

3. ***Designing a series of thematic webinars for the diplomatic community***

Open discussions during the interactive workshops and thematic panels of the above-mentioned Conference highlighted the need for providing diplomats with evidence-informed knowledge on those most pressing science-driven issues having an impact on the international relations. To be effective, this knowledge transfer should: a) highlight the added value of science-diplomacy collaborations by making use of practical examples and case studies; b) focus on priority topics identified with/by the beneficiaries.

4. ***Increasing the knowledge on the functioning and governance of SD in the target region***

Institutionalisation of SD within the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) of the target region seems to be a growing trend. An analysis and understanding of these processes, as well as of the different approaches and organisational arrangements currently in place, could facilitate an exchange of practices between and among the MFAs. Moreover, it could help identify specific gaps in terms of knowledge and capacities that could be tackled through tailored trainings.