Perspective

Science Diplomacy in the Context of the EU-India Strategic Partnership: Looking Beyond the European Sandbagging Contest

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This article takes stock of the recent science diplomacy debates hosted in Europe in order to distil what components of this somewhat peculiar sandbagging contest are relevant for the EU-India strategic partnership. The first part introduces the recently named fourth component to the existing set of three varieties of science diplomacy. The second part highlights the proponents of the sandbagging competition and other prolific voices of science diplomacy. The third part concludes with remarks on these intellectual dynamics in the context of the EU-India Roadmap.

Science diplomacy entails four taxonomies, varieties or dimensions: diplomacy for science, science for diplomacy, science in diplomacy and diplomacy in science. 'Diplomacy for science' refers to classical tools of diplomacy that "are put to use to support the scientific and technological community".[1] 'Science for diplomacy' is understood as "science used as a tool to build and improve relations between states".[1] 'Science in diplomacy' corresponds to the intricacies of the science-policy interface and science advisory services.[#] "Policy advice is also not science in itself. Its conditions, rules, and risks are of a very specific nature".[2]

'Diplomacy in science' is a latecomer to the overall typology.[3,4] 'Diplomacy in science', on certain occasions being referred to as 'knowledge diplomacy', points towards "the use of diplomatic skills and tools in advocating for global scientific knowledge: the translation of science into societal impact".[4]

Interlinkages between 'diplomacy in science' and 'knowledge diplomacy' is slightly problematic. The term 'knowledge diplomacy' is making its own career as a term associated with diverse contexts and understandings emanating from various parts of the world.[5-7] Besides the referenced Indian interest in the term that follows the reasoning of Knight (2019)[8], Hernandez (2021)[9] presents his definition of the term

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and may not represent the position of the UN, UNU or UNU-CRIS.

[#] National examples from Europe outlined by Tyler & Akerlof (2019).

as "an orchestra of collaborative and negotiation processes that aim to establish consensual knowledge on various issues". Intermingling 'diplomacy in science' with 'knowledge diplomacy' might create some unnecessary confusion between the bubbling ideas associated with each of the terms that are advocated by diverse voices worldwide.

In the context of earlier laments of invariably rare deeper exchanges between European academics and practitioners[10], three EU funded science diplomacy projects stand out as intellectual sites that progressed towards narrowing this gap.[11] The attempts to articulate science diplomacy on the basis of "shared, cosmopolitan interests"[12] has resulted in a remarkable diversity of thematic avenues. Ocean[13] and its futures explored via sociotechnical imaginaries[14], transnational policy actors referred to as "global managers" and "new diplomats"[15], global environmental governance after the 1972 Stockholm Conference[16], climate change, Arctic and internet governance[17] are just some examples that help to illustrate in an extremely concise manner how remarkably broad is the thematic scope that has recently fed into the European science diplomacy discussions.

This all embracive approach has not been always well received. Following a typical cycle of a buzzword[18], science diplomacy has been referred to as a "slogan".[19] It has been criticised for its "solutionist hype", "a mellow anything-goes formula", "an all-inclusive concept operating at the loss of distinctiveness"[20], "concept valise" ready to fit anything into it".[4] It risks ending up as "a hollow concept and an empty signifier".[17] This article does not offer a clear-cut solution to this challenge. It is not a unique one. Academics and policymakers have fuelled a considerable bonfire of disillusionment over resilience and the EU approach to it as well.[21] Thus, the recently expressed harsh critique should not discourage some science diplomacy aficionados from further engagement with the European reflections on the term. It seems to be the traditional European way of ornating a promising idea with a sufficiently gruelling rite of passage.

On a more positive note, the comprehensiveness of the European approach to science diplomacy results in inclusiveness and receptiveness towards diverse proponents. The general types of stakeholders of science diplomacy are categorised as follows: governmental, intergovernmental and supranational organisations, private sector, research and academic stakeholders, and civil society.[22]

These are good grounds for further exploration of 'science for multilateralism'. It stands apart from the overall set of four taxonomies, varieties or dimensions. The term refers to "science that supports the evidence needs of multilateral policies but also speaks up and supports diplomacy when multilateral approaches come under fire, whether by domestic or foreign actors".[23] The value for bringing 'science for multilateralism' into the picture is the support (re-confirmed in Porto)[24] that the EU and India lend to the strategic partnership via joint support expressed towards enhanced exchanges in the frameworks of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) a joint recognition of the growing importance of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in the context of the ocean governance.[25] Likewise, several EU member states and India have joined forces as participants of the Alliance for Multilateralism.[26,27] Thus, the EU-India Roadmap should be praised as having the potential to serve as a nodal element of the policy architecture weaving a thick science diplomacy fabric. The potential is there irrespective of the number and configurations of taxonomies, varieties and dimensions.

However, for the identified science diplomacy potential to become a tangible asset it requires proper brainpower to turn eloquent ideas into actions that would meet the aspirations enshrined in the Roadmap and provide visible results to individuals in the EU and India. The effort of crowding in of the necessary talent and skills to deliver against the defined policy goals was made by putting considerable hopes in investing in youth expressed during the 2nd meeting of experts hosted by the EU-India Think Tanks Twinning Initiative.[28] If the recommended measures would be implemented, then, hopefully, it would result not only in a renewed collective propensity towards gathering the so-to-say intellectual timber for yet another European bonfire of despair (similar to the ones described in this article about science diplomacy and resilience).

More importantly, it should embrace the hands-on spirit enshrined in several of Roadmap's passages. More attention towards a broad and increasingly targeted diffusion of scientific and technological solutions that would match the most pressing needs faced by the EU and India in their overall shift towards sustainability and addressing climate change might be one viable pathway.

All in all, it might not be the classical[29] or updated constellation of taxonomies that will define the future legacy of EU science diplomacy. Instead, it might be the specific actions taken labelled with a science diplomacy tag that might count the most. Fortunately, the EU-India Roadmap provides no shortage of recommended directions for tangible actions. The self-proclaimed science diplomats have plenty of room for thematic manoeuvres to find for their partners in action among the circles contributing to the EU-India Roadmap to translate their 'talk the walk' towards a much more hands-on 'walk the talk'.

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