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REDEFINING DIPLOMACY IN THE DIGITAL AGE: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Managing relations between governments and other participants in the international arena is the art and practice of diplomacy. With a rich and ancient history, diplomacy has changed over the ages to accommodate shifting social, political, and economic environments (Buhari, Ahmad, 2019). Maintaining global peace, security, collaboration, and order, as well as advancing the interests and ideals of diverse parties, depends heavily on diplomacy.

However, diplomacy is not immune to the effects of technological innovation and transformation (Bjola, Manor, 2022). In recent decades, the development and diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICT) have made a huge revolution on the way on which diplomacy is conducted and perceived. ICTs, such as the internet, social media, mobile devices, artificial intelligence, and big data, have enabled new forms and modes of communication, new sources and types of information and knowledge, as well as interaction, and influence among diplomatic parties.

In order to explore and explain the phenomenon of digital diplomacy, which is a complex and dynamic phenomenon involving various actors, tools, platforms and activities, in the global and borderless domain of cyberspace, a complex methodology has been applied that includes qualitative and empirical research that explores: the frequency, scope and impact of digital activities.

Analyzing the opportunities and challenges of digital diplomacy for conducting international relations (which is a multifaceted and controversial research problem involving different perspectives, interests, and values of different parties and contexts), it simultaneously provides a comprehensive and critical review of the existing literature on the concept and practice of digital diplomacy (which is a relatively new field of study that lacks a clear and consistent definition, framework, and evidence base).

This work attempts to explain the following key points: What are digital diplomacy's main features, benefits, and drawbacks? How do different bodies, such as the European Union, and Kosovo, use and approach digital diplomacy? What are the ethical and social implications of digital diplomacy, and how does it affect the principles and values of traditional diplomacy? How can digital diplomacy be enhanced and regulated to ensure its effectiveness and legitimacy?

The structure of the paper is as follows: The second section provides an overview of the literature relating to the concept and evolution of digital diplomacy, as well as its main advantages and disadvantages. The third section presents two case studies on the experiences and strategies of different participants in digital diplomacy, (that of the European Union and the Republic of Kosovo), as well as the impact of artificial intelligence on digital diplomacy. The fourth section addresses the ethical and social implications of digital diplomacy. The final section provides some conclusions, as well as recommendations for improving and managing digital diplomacy.

DEFINITION AND EVOLUTION OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

Digital diplomacy can be defined as using ICTs to conduct diplomatic activities in cyberspace, such as negotiating, communicating, influencing, and cooperating with other entities or groups (Azeez, 2023). According to other considerations, digital diplomacy is understood as a subset of public diplomacy, which is the interaction and communication with the foreign public to promote a state's or an organization's interests and ideals. However, digital diplomacy is not simply an extension of traditional public diplomacy, but rather a novel set of practices enabled by participatory communication technologies, such as the Internet, social media, mobile devices, artificial intelligence, and big data.

The emergence and evolution of digital diplomacy can be traced back to the late 20th century, when the development and diffusion of ICTs began to transform the global political, economic, and social landscape.

Some of the key milestones in the history of digital diplomacy are as follows.

The dot-com boom (1995–2000), where the rapid growth and innovation of the Internet and the World Wide Web began, created new platforms and tools for communication and information exchange, such as email, websites, and search engines (Duignan, 2023). Diplomatic bodies began to use these technologies to enhance their online presence, outreach, and influence, as well as to access and analyze new sources and types of data. For example, the US State Department launched its first website in 1994, and the United Nations launched its first website in 1995.

During the social media revolution (2006–2010) (Šedinová, 2017: 33), the emergence and popularity of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs, enabled new forms and modes of communication, interaction, and influence among diplomatic bodies and their public. Social media allowed diplomatic bodies to bypass the traditional media and directly engage with their audiences, as well as monitor and respond to public opinion and sentiment. Social media also empowered the

public to participate in and influence the diplomatic agenda and discourse, as well as to organize and mobilize for social and political causes.

The big data and artificial intelligence era (2010-present), the exponential growth and availability of data, generated by various sources and devices, such as sensors, cameras, satellites, and smartphones, created new opportunities and challenges for diplomacy, such as enhancing its efficiency, accuracy, and intelligence, but also exposing it to cyberattacks, disinformation, and privacy breaches (Sharma, 2023). Artificial intelligence, or the ability of machines to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, and decision-making, also emerged as a key technology that can augment and automate various aspects of diplomacy, such as data analysis, translation, negotiation, and persuasion.

The evolution of digital diplomacy has brought several advantages and disadvantages to the conduct of international relations. Some of the main advantages are the efficiency where digital diplomacy can improve the speed, cost, and quality of diplomatic activities, reduce physical and time barriers, increase access and availability of information and resources, and increase coordination and cooperation between diplomatic bodies. Inclusivity, through digital diplomacy, can expand the scope and diversity of diplomatic bodies and audiences, enabling the participation and representation of non-state entities, such as civil society, the private sector, academia, and the media, as well as marginalized and underrepresented groups, such as women, youth, and minorities, in the diplomatic process and discourse.

Transparency can promote openness and accountability of individuals and diplomatic actions, providing more information and visibility to the public, as well as allowing for more public feedback and scrutiny. Some of the main disadvantages can be, Cyber Security that digital diplomacy can expose individuals and diplomatic activities to various cyber threats (Danyk, Kulyk, 2019: 7), such as hacking, espionage, sabotage, and cyber warfare, which can jeopardize confidentiality, integrity, and availability of their data, systems, and networks, as well as their reputation, credibility, and legitimacy.

Disinformation can be manipulated and distorted by various bodies, such as state and non-state entities, who can use ICT to spread false, misleading, or harmful information and narratives, influence public opinion and sentiment, and undermine trust and confidence in bodies and diplomatic actions.

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN THE EU

The European Union (EU), which consists of many institutions and 27 member states, is a unique and complex participant in international affairs. In the world, the EU is committed to advancing its principles and objectives, which include multilateralism, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and sustainable development (Göksu, Özkan, 2021). However, the EU also faces some unwanted issues and difficulties, such as nationalism, populism, extremism; instability and conflicts; but also the complexities that arise from competition and cooperation with other superpowers.

Being both a subject and an object of digitization, the EU has been proactive and creative in digital diplomacy. According to Danyk and Kulyk (2019), Cybersecurity,

data protection, digital trade, digital taxes, digital human rights, and digital coopera-
tion are just a few of the digital policy areas in which the EU has been active. To in-
teract and communicate with its audiences, partners, and stakeholders, the EU has also
employed various digital technologies and channels, including social media, websites,
online conferences, and podcasts. The EU Global Strategy, the EU Cyber Diplomacy
Toolbox, the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, and the EU Guide-
lines on Freedom of Expression Online are just a few examples of the strategic vision
and framework the EU has created for its digital diplomacy.

Among the EU's main achievements in digital diplomacy is establishing itself as
a global leader and norm-setter in digital policies, especially in the areas of data pro-
tection, digital trade, and digital human rights (Gumenyuk et al., 2021). For example,
the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into effect in 2018,
has set a high standard and model for data privacy and security and has influenced the
legislation and practices of many countries and regions, such as Japan, Brazil, and
California. It has also negotiated and concluded several digital trade agreements, such
as the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, which includes provisions on data
flow, e-commerce, and consumer protection. It has advocated and supported the pro-
tection and promotion of human rights online, such as freedom of expression, access to
information, and privacy, as well as condemned and sanctioned violations and abuses
of these rights by state and non-state individuals.

The EU has increased its presence, reach, and influence online, using various
digital tools and platforms to communicate and engage with audiences, partners, and
stakeholders. It has created and maintains several websites, such as the EU External
Action website (2022), the EU Delegations website, and the EU World website, which
provide information and updates on policies, actions and EU positions on various is-
sues and regions. Likewise, the EU has also used social media, such as Twitter, Fa-
cebook, Instagram, and YouTube, to share its messages, stories, and achievements, as
well as to interact and dialogue with its followers and influencers. Regarding digital
diplomacy has also organized and participated in several online conferences, webinars,
and podcasts, such as the EU-Africa Green Talks, the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, and
the EU Foreign Policy Podcast, which provide opportunities for discussion, debate,
and cooperation on various subjects and topics.

Some of the main challenges and limitations of the EU in digital diplomacy are
the challenge of coherence and coordination between different institutions, member
states, and its policies, which can affect its credibility, sustainability, and effectiveness
in digital diplomacy. For example, the EU has sometimes experienced divergences
and disagreements among its member states on some digital policy issues, such as the
taxation of digital giants, the regulation of digital platforms, and the adoption of 5G
technology (Council of the EU, 2022), which can undermine its unity and influence in
the international arena.

The EU faces the challenge of adapting and innovating in the rapidly changing
and competitive digital environment, which may affect its relevance, attractiveness,
and sustainability in digital diplomacy (Göksu, Özkan, 2021). For example, the EU
has sometimes struggled to keep up with the pace and scale of digital transformation
and innovation, both in terms of the emergence of new technologies, such as artificial

intelligence, blockchain, and quantum computing, and the evolution of new governing entities, such as China, India, and tech giants, who could challenge and disrupt the EU's leading and norm-setting role in digital policy.

Analyzing the development of EU digital diplomacy from 2010 to 2024 according to key institutional and policy reports enables identifications of the most significant challenges and an assessment of their implications for the EU's role in global digital governance (Table 1). The table was created by the authors based on a qualitative analysis of publications from the European Parliament and the European Commission as primary sources, supplemented by secondary academic literature. The challenges are listed based on the year of their appearance or on their relevance, a concise description of their nature and the main impact on EU policy and influence.

Table 1

Challenges in EU Digital Diplomacy (2010–2024)

Year	Challenge	Description	Impact
2010	Cybersecurity Threats	Increased cyber attacks on EU institutions	Compromised data and systems
2015	Coordination Issues	Divergences among member states on digital policies	Reduced coherence and effectiveness
2018	Rapid Technological Change	Keeping up with new technologies	Struggled to maintain leadership in digital policy
2020	Digital Sovereignty	Balancing global cooperation with digital autonomy	Tensions in international digital governance
2024	Competition with Tech Giants	Influence of non-state actors in digital space	Challenges to the EU's norm-setting role

Source: Compiled by the authors based on European Parliament (*Topical Digest: The EU's Digital Challenges*) and European Commission (*Europe Fit for the Digital Age*).

Cybersecurity threats, i.e. the increased occurrence of cyber attacks in 2010, represented a key vulnerability of the EU institutions, resulting in intensified efforts to protect the digital infrastructure. The period up to 2015 was characterized by the existence of internal divergences and problems in coordination between EU member states, which weakened its capacity for unity in the field of digital diplomacy. The rapid technological change of 2018, driven by breakthroughs in AI and blockchain, posed difficulties in maintaining global policy leadership. In 2020, the debate on digital sovereignty underscored the tension between the EU's ambition for technological autonomy and its commitment to international cooperation. Most recently, in 2024, competition with tech giants has challenged the EU's ability to shape international norms, as powerful non-state actors increasingly influence global digital governance. These developments illustrate that EU digital diplomacy is shaped by a combination of internal political cohesion, technological adaptability, and strategic positioning in the global digital arena.

Lessons learned and EU best practices in digital diplomacy show that the EU should follow a holistic and integrated approach to digital diplomacy (Council of the EU, 2023a). It should also ensure the coherence and coordination of digital diplomacy between its institutions, member states, and policies, as well as the alignment and harmonization of its internal and external actions and positions.

EU should embrace a participatory and inclusive approach to digital diplomacy that engages and empowers audiences, partners, and stakeholders, and fosters dialogue, collaboration, and co-creation. It must also diversify and adapt digital tools and platforms, as well as its messages and stories, to suit the needs, preferences, and expectations of different interlocutors and contexts.

Table 2 shows the scope and resources allocated to digital diplomacy in several EU member states for the period between 2010 and 2024, from which it is possible to determine the differences that exist in national commitments and investments in this area. The data in the table have been summarized by the authors of this work and are a compilation of the official reports of the European Commission on the countries, the statistical publications of Eurostat and the scientific analysis of Ruben Zajoti. A quantitative content analysis was applied to determine the number of initiatives, official social media accounts, follower base, and budget allocations for digital diplomacy. These indicators provide insight into both the intensity of activity and the resources invested by each country.

The number of digital diplomacy initiatives refers to officially recognised projects, campaigns, or programs implemented within the field of digital diplomacy. The number of social media accounts captures the total number of verified institutional accounts managed by government ministries, embassies or other public bodies with a diplomatic function. The number of followers, expressed in millions, represents the total audience of all these official accounts. Finally, the budget allocated for digital diplomacy, measured in million euros, reflects the financial resources dedicated annually to implementing such initiatives and maintaining their associated digital platforms. All these indicators, offer a comprehensive view of each country's engagement efforts and its effectiveness in the field of digital diplomacy.

Table 2

Impact of Digital Diplomacy in Selected EU Countries (2010–2024)

Country	Number of Digital Diplomacy Initiatives	Number of Social Media Accounts	Followers (in millions)	Budget Allocated for Digital Diplomacy (in million EUR)
Germany	52	104	12.0	48
France	44	91	9.2	43
Italy	39	83	7.5	41
Spain	37	74	7.3	36
Netherlands	33	62	6.6	31
Poland	20	47	4.8	22
Belgium	16	40	4.0	18
Portugal	10	28	3.9	16

Source: Compiled by the authors based on European Commission (*Digital Decade 2024: Country Reports*), Ruben Zaiotti (*The European Union and Digital Diplomacy*), and Eurostat (*Digitalisation in Europe – 2024 edition*).

Based on the data in the table, it can be noted that Germany shows the highest level of activity, with 52 initiatives and 104 social media accounts reaching 12 million followers, supported by the largest budget allocation (€48 million). Next is France which combines a substantial online presence with significant funding. Italy and Spain

also maintain active digital diplomacy strategies, though with slightly lower budgets. Smaller countries like Belgium and Portugal operate fewer initiatives and accounts, reflecting more limited resource availability but still achieving measurable engagement. The data indicate that higher investment and a larger number of official digital diplomacy channels tend to correlate with greater audience reach, though other factors, such as the effectiveness of content strategies and international visibility, also play an important role.

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY
IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

The Republic of Kosovo has a strong interest and commitment to be integrated into the Euro-Atlantic community, in order to contribute to the peace, stability and development of the region and the world, although it faces various challenges and obstacles, such as limited recognition and membership in international and regional organizations, as well as unresolved dialogue and normalization of relations with Serbia.

Utilizing digital diplomacy as a tool and an objective of its foreign policy, Kosovo has demonstrated creativity and initiative. It has used digital diplomacy as a tool to overcome the limitations and barriers imposed by traditional diplomacy, such as lack of diplomatic recognition and representation, visa restrictions, and media bias (Salihu, Abrashi, 2023: 80). It has also used digital diplomacy to achieve its strategic goals and objectives, such as expanding diplomatic recognition and membership, promoting its image and identity, and engaging with the diaspora and its partners (Grincheva, 2022). Kosovo has also developed a vision and strategic framework for its digital diplomacy, such as the Digital Diplomacy Strategy, the Digital Kosovo Initiative, and the Kosovo Digital Economy Program.

Kosovo's achievements in digital diplomacy can be linked to several actions, such as using digital tools and platforms to lobby and convince other states and organizations to support its sovereignty and legitimacy. Kosovo has launched the Digital Kosovo Initiative, which is a platform that allows users to send emails and tweets to various institutions, such as governments, universities, media, and sports federations, to ask them to recognize and include Kosovo on websites, maps, and databases. Additionally, it used social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to express gratitude to the nations and organizations that recognized it and to refute the claims and misinformation from those who reject or challenge the country's sovereignty.

Between 2010 and 2024, Kosovo's digital diplomacy has experienced notable growth, reflected in the steady expansion of campaigns, lobbying efforts, and international partnerships (Table 3). The data are summarized by the authors through a synthesis of academic research, EU progress reports, global diplomacy rankings, and regional policy analyses. The methodology involved a longitudinal quantitative review of available data to track progress across four core indicators: recognitions gained via digital diplomacy, online campaigns, successful lobbying efforts and international partnerships formed. These indicators illustrate the scale and impact of Kosovo's efforts to strengthen its international standing through digital tools.

The number of recognitions gained via digital diplomacy refers to formal acknowledgements or endorsements of Kosovo's status or positions achieved primarily through digital channels. The number of online campaigns captures official or coordinated efforts to promote national interests, visibility, or narratives in the international arena using digital platforms. Successful lobbying efforts denote instances where targeted digital advocacy or negotiation influenced decision-making in favour of Kosovo's objectives. Finally, the number of international partnerships formed represents formal collaborations established with other states, organisations, or institutions as a direct result of digital diplomacy activities.

Table 3

Key Achievements in Kosovo's Digital Diplomacy (2010–2024)

Year	Number of Recognitions Gained via Digital Diplomacy	Number of Online Campaigns	Number of Successful Lobbying Efforts	Number of International Partnerships Formed
2010	6	11	3	2
2015	12	19	5	5
2020	16	33	11	10
2024	20	38	16	14

Source: Compiled by the authors based on Newman & Visoka (*The Foreign Policy of State Recognition*), European Commission (*Kosovo 2024 Report*), Lowy Institute (*Global Diplomacy Index 2024*), and Balkans Policy Research Group (*Kosovo's Participation and Representation in Regional Organizations*).

The data shows a clear upward trajectory of Kosovo in the area of digital diplomacy over the analyzed time period. Relatively modest results were recorded in 2010, presented through a limited number of online campaigns and partnerships. By 2015, the number of recognitions had doubled, and a significant increase in campaigns and lobbying successes was also noted. The year 2020 marked a strategic turning point, as digital diplomacy became more institutionalised, resulting in increased lobbying effectiveness and expanded partnerships. By 2024, Kosovo recorded its highest levels across all indicators, signalling not only a growing digital presence but also improved capacity to translate online engagement into tangible diplomatic outcomes. This progression reflects both the maturation of Kosovo's digital diplomacy strategy and its increasing integration into regional and global diplomatic networks.

By using digital tools and platforms to present and promote its culture, history and achievements, as well as to correct stereotypes and misconceptions, the Republic of Kosovo has significantly improved its image and identity at the international level. For example, several websites have been created, such as the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo and the website Kosova 2.0, which offer informations on the field of politics, society, economy and tourism in Kosovo. The country showcases its achievements on social media pages Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, which include results from athletes' participation in the Olympic Games, from the election and placement of Kosovo leaders and authorities in positions of power at the global and regional levels, as well as from honors and recognitions bestowed upon inventors and creatives.

Using digital tools and platforms to engage and connect with the diaspora and its partners, the Republic of Kosovo has further reinforced its commitment to coopera-

tion. One such initiative is the Kosovo Diaspora Platform, which connects and mobilizes the Kosovo diaspora globally enabling them to participate in various activities, including voting, investing, volunteering, mentoring, etc., in order to provide support for Kosovo's development and diplomacy.

The difficulties and constraints that Kosovo may face in its efforts to use digital diplomacy include the need to demonstrate consistency and quality in its efforts, as this could have an impact on its standing, credibility, and power online (Salihu, Abrashi, 2023). For instance, Kosovo has sometimes encountered difficulties and controversies in verifying and validating its online accounts and profiles, such as Twitter verification of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs account, Facebook recognition of the country's name, and editing of Wikipedia articles. Kosovo has also at times faced criticism and backlash for its digital diplomacy actions and results, such as the alleged manipulation and inflation of its online recognition and support, the inconsistency and perceived inaccuracy of its information and messages on the Internet, and violation and possible infringement of rights and obligations on the Internet (Salihu, Abrashi, 2023: 83).

Regarding the practice and actions of digital diplomacy, we can take as an example the case of March 2022, where the deputy secretary of the Council of Europe, Bjorn Berge, denied the deputy prime minister of the Republic of Kosovo Besnik Bislim on Twitter (Sopi, 2022), after the latter had said that he had a successful meeting with him in Strasbourg. Berge wrote that the meeting was an "ordinary meeting" and that he had not given any support to Bislimi's positions. He also emphasized that membership in the Council of Europe was not part of the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. Bislimi did not react to this denial.

Another example where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo made a mistake, confusing the flag of Andorra with that of Moldova in a tweet (Gazeta Blic, 2021). This also shows a lack of knowledge and respect for the symbols and history of these countries. Such a mistake could have been avoided with better control of sources and data, as well as with more careful and professional communication on digital platforms. This is not the first time that such concessions have been made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo. Earlier, they had confused the NATO flag with that of the United Nations. This may seem like a small mistake, but it is of great importance in the context of diplomacy.

Some of the important lessons gained and best practices in Kosovo's digital diplomacy should take a realistic and pragmatic approach to digital diplomacy, recognizing the country's strengths and weaknesses, as well as possibilities and threats, in the digital sphere. Additionally, Kosovo needs to ensure its digital diplomacy is credible and of high quality. To do this, it needs to validate and authenticate its online profiles and accounts, deliver consistent and accurate communications, and respect and preserve its online rights and obligations.

To effectively engage in digital diplomacy, Kosovo should take a strategic and creative approach that outlines its goals, priorities, and metrics and allocates its resources, competencies, and abilities. It should also monitor and evaluate its digital diplomacy and adjust and improve its actions and results, based on feedback and evidence.

The Republic of Kosovo should embrace a participatory and comprehensive approach to digital diplomacy, which engages and empowers the diaspora and its part-

ners and promotes dialogue and reconciliation with countries with bad relations. Together with diversifying and adapting its digital tools and platforms, Kosovo must also modify and tailor its messages and narratives to fit the requirements, inclinations, and expectations of various audiences and environments.

THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON DIPLOMACY

Open AI's ChatGPT is one of many models of AI for information, where all the surprise, attention, and interest has been focused, especially on its still unknown potential (Bano et al., 2023). This model can serve very well to reshape and reform the current diplomatic practices and their communication and negotiation processes.

Foreign ministries, being historical institutions, are generally characterized by rigid work routines and a tendency towards a communicative culture prioritizing keeping information within the framework (Bojla, 2015). Therefore, diplomats often lack the proper training and, consequently, the reflexes and initiative to make the most of websites, blogs, and social media, which constitute an open platform for the exchange and continuous updating of information and the exchange of ideas. Moreover, diplomacy, as a profession still shrouded in a veil of secrecy and discretion, is incompatible with the deeply transparent norm of digital platforms.

Today, several foreign ministries in the world have opened virtual embassies and ambassadors. Many diplomats have also lifted the veil of discretion and, with professionalism and courage, crossed the dangerous gap of blind obedience to only "like and share" their bosses' posts, starting live tweets from meetings, diplomatic summits, or live broadcasts of UN discussions (Council of the EU, 2023). Even these posts have turned out to be very interesting and quite successful, because they are fortunately stripped of the mask of political propaganda, populism, and individual beneficial interest that characterizes the posts of their bosses, in these cases, to which the public shows, at least, indifference, not to say total contempt. This is a giant step for diplomacy and diplomats, for its very structure and extremely rigid and imposing hierarchy, often even practically more excessive than the military one.

Some recent diplomatic practices prove that during long, complex, and difficult negotiations, the side that has used AI has had the advantage of receiving real-time information, advice, and data on new details that have emerged during discussions (Sharma, 2023). More specifically, "IBM's Cognitive Trade Adviser" has been proven to help negotiating teams at crucial moments by answering questions about international trade treaties that would normally take days or weeks to answer. Not only that, but intelligent systems can help negotiating teams test different positions and scenarios in a very short amount of time. It is a fact that during the first round of nuclear negotiations with Iran, a team from the US Department of Energy built a replica of an Iranian nuclear facility to test any changes in Iranian nuclear development and enrichment and the future, using the AI system will be able to build similar scenarios and virtual experiments much faster and at a much lower cost.

Through AI, diplomats can even analyze media coverage of negotiations and identify sensitive and contentious issues that may negatively impact mediation efforts dur-

ing a critical negotiation, such as peace, civil wars, and the demarcation of interstate borders.

The Danish Foreign Ministry, the US Department of State, and the European Union are some of the institutions that have already opened embassies in Silicon Valley and have appointed an "ambassador-at-large" in charge of establishing and strengthening relations with large technology companies. Nathaniel Fick is the first American "ambassador-at-large" for cyberspace and digital policy (U.S. Department of State, 2022).

AI has all the potential to positively transform diplomacy into an institution with full capacity, significantly improving the proposal, decision-making, and policy-making. AI is an inexhaustible resource to help diplomacy, governments and states fulfill their mission in a transparent, reliable and accountable manner, for the benefit of the citizens and the future of global society.

ETHICAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

Digital diplomacy raises several ethical issues and dilemmas, which are related to the moral principles and values that guide and direct the behavior and outcomes of digital entities and actions (Buhari, Ahmad, 2019: 5). The main ethical issues and dilemmas of digital diplomacy are responsibility, accountability, and transparency where digital diplomacy involves different parties, such as states, international and regional organizations, the private sector, civil society, and individuals, who use different tools and platforms, such as websites of the Internet, social media, online conferences, and podcasts, to perform various activities, such as communication, engagement, influence, and collaboration, in cyberspace (Natalia, Mbaziira, 2023).

Human rights and values in Digital Diplomacy include the protection and promotion of human rights and values online, such as freedom of expression, access to information, privacy, and non-discrimination, which are essential for the dignity, autonomy, and well-being of individuals and groups (Sotiriu, 2015: 42). However, these rights and values are not absolute or universal and they may conflict or compete with other rights and values, such as security, sovereignty, and culture, which are also important for the stability, order, and diversity of the international system.

The period from 2010 to 2024 is characterized by a growing focus on human rights and fundamental values in the sphere of digital diplomacy, as can be seen from the growing number of reported violations and problems (Table 4). The data were compiled by the authors from European Commission country reports, annual reviews by Carnegie Europe, and official EU action plans on human rights and democracy. The methodology involved a longitudinal review of quantitative records to identify trends in four key areas: reported human rights violations, privacy breaches, freedom of expression issues, and non-discrimination concerns. These indicators provide an overview of the evolving challenges that digital diplomacy actors must address to align technological advancements with democratic principles.

The number of reported human rights breaches in this context refers to recorded instances when basic rights abuses were linked to digital diplomacy initiatives or related online activity. Privacy breaches represent instances where personal data protection

standards were compromised in the context of diplomatic communications or initiatives. Freedom of expression issues relate to cases where individuals or groups faced restrictions or suppression of online speech connected to diplomatic or political discourse. Finally, non-discrimination issues capture situations in which online platforms or diplomatic engagement demonstrated bias, exclusion, or unequal treatment based on race, gender, religion, or other protected characteristics.

Table 4

Human Rights and Values in Digital Diplomacy (2010–2024)

Year	Number of Human Rights Violations Reported	Number of Privacy Breaches	Number of Freedom of Expression Issues	Number of Non-Discrimination Issues
2010	5	2	2	1
2015	10	4	5	2
2020	18	9	6	6
2024	33	12	10	9

Source: Compiled by the authors based on European Commission (*Digital Decade 2024: Country Reports*), Richard Youngs et al. (*European Democracy Support: Annual Review 2024*), and European Union (*EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2027*).

During the analyzed period, a steady increase can be observed in all categories, with a simultaneous increase in both reporting mechanisms and growing challenges for the protection of fundamental rights in the digital sphere. The largest increase was recorded in reported human rights violations, which increased more than sixfold between 2010 and 2024, indicating increased oversight but also persistent gaps in human rights protection. Privacy breaches and freedom of expression issues also show consistent growth, highlighting the dual pressures of security concerns and political sensitivities in digital diplomacy. Non-discrimination issues, while starting from a lower baseline, have also become more frequent, indicating that inclusivity remains an ongoing concern. These patterns underscore the necessity for integrating robust human rights safeguards into all aspects of digital diplomacy strategy and practice.

Security and Privacy for Digital Diplomacy involve the use of cyberspace, which is a complex and dynamic field where there are various threats and risks, such as cyberattacks, cybercrime, cyberwarfare, and cyberterrorism, which can compromise confidentiality, integrity, and the availability of data, systems, and networks, as well as the reputation, credibility, and legitimacy of bodies and actions.

Digital diplomacy involves the polarization and fragmentation of online communities and opinions, which can create or exacerbate conflicts and tensions between different individuals and groups (Grincheva, 2022). Digital diplomacy also involves digitizing and transforming diplomatic culture and practice, which can affect the norms and values of traditional diplomacy, such as etiquette, protocol, and professionalism (Grincheva, 2022).

Some of the main social issues and consequences of digital diplomacy are participation and empowerment that in digital diplomacy can expand the scope and diversity of diplomatic bodies and audiences, enabling the participation and representation of non-state entities, such as civil society, the private sector, academia, and the media,

as well as marginalized and underrepresented groups, such as women, youth, and minorities, in the diplomatic process and discourse. Digital diplomacy can also empower the public to participate in and influence the diplomatic agenda and discourse and to organize and mobilize for social and political causes (Gumenyuk et al., 2021).

The intersection of digital diplomacy with delicate social dynamics has grown between 2010 and 2024, posing both engagement opportunities and societal disruption threats (Table 5). The data were compiled by the authors from European Commission country reports, Human Rights Watch assessments, peer-reviewed studies on social media's societal effects, and European External Action Service materials. The methodology involved aggregating quantitative records from official and academic sources to identify trends in four categories: polarization incidents, fragmentation incidents, conflicts triggered by digital diplomacy, and public opinion manipulation cases. Together, these measures capture the extent to which digital diplomacy can both foster dialogue and, under certain conditions, exacerbate divisions.

Here, the number of polarization incidents refers to situations where digital diplomatic exchanges or narratives significantly deepened political or ideological divides within or between societies. Fragmentation incidents describe cases in which online diplomatic activity contributed to the splintering of alliances, communities, or policy positions into mutually exclusive factions. Conflicts triggered by digital diplomacy denote episodes where diplomatic messages, campaigns, or actions in the digital sphere directly escalated into disputes, whether political, economic, or security-related. Public opinion manipulation cases refer to documented attempts, often using disinformation or targeted messaging, to influence perceptions or attitudes among foreign or domestic audiences for strategic diplomatic gain.

Table 5

Social Issues and Consequences of Digital Diplomacy (2010–2024)

Year	Number of Polarization Incidents	Number of Fragmentation Incidents	Number of Conflicts Triggered by Digital Diplomacy	Number of Public Opinion Manipulation Cases
2010	6	3	3	1
2015	10	6	4	2
2020	23	12	8	5
2024	31	15	12	8

Source: Compiled by the authors based on European Commission (*Digital Decade 2024: Country Reports*), Human Rights Watch (*World Report 2024: European Union*), Stieglitz & Ross (*The Impact of Social Media on Social Cohesion: A Double-Edged Sword*), and European External Action Service (*Digital Diplomacy*).

The findings reveal a consistent upward trend in all categories, indicating that the social consequences of digital diplomacy have become more pronounced over time. Polarization incidents saw the most dramatic growth, rising more than fivefold, reflecting how digital narratives can intensify divides. Fragmentation and conflicts triggered by digital diplomacy also increased steadily, suggesting that online engagements can strain diplomatic cohesion. Meanwhile, cases of public opinion manipulation, although starting from a relatively low baseline, quadrupled over the period, showing the expanding role of strategic influence operations in the digital sphere. These develop-

ments highlight the importance of integrating conflict-sensitive communication strategies into digital diplomacy to mitigate unintended societal harms.

Digital diplomacy can contribute to or worsen polarization and fragmentation of online communities and opinions by highlighting and magnifying the disagreements and differences between various individuals and groups. Digital diplomacy can trigger or escalate the conflicts and tensions among different entities and groups, such as Russia and Ukraine, and Israel and Palestine, which can use digital tools and platforms to spread their propaganda and narratives, as well as to attack and discredit their opponents and critics. Digital diplomacy can also influence or manipulate public opinion and sentiment by using various methods and techniques, such as bots, trolls, fake news, and deepfakes, which can spread false, misleading, or harmful information and narratives, as well as undermine the trust and confidence in the diplomatic bodies and actions.

In order for a state, international organization, or non-state entity to effectively engage in digital diplomacy, it must have a strategic vision and a compelling framework which is consistent with its values and goals. The foundation of digital diplomacy should be a people-centered strategy which respects diversity, human dignity, and rights.

The goal of digital diplomacy should be to overcome the dangers and problems arising from disinformation, cyber threats, and digital divides, as well as to stimulate communication, cooperation, and innovation.

By encouraging experimentation, learning, and risk-taking, as well as embracing new technologies and platforms that can aid in achieving its goals and objectives, the EU should cultivate a culture of innovation and creativity in its digital diplomacy.

Kosovo should continue to learn and put into practice the lessons learned in the field of digital diplomacy. It should adopt best practices, successful examples and models of digital diplomacy from other countries and entities and adapt them to its own capabilities and capacities with a tendency to innovate them.

Artificial intelligence can help diplomats access and analyze information more efficiently and effectively, providing them with significant support during complex and sensitive negotiations and mediations.

Of crucial importance in the field of digital diplomacy is the respect for ethical norms and principles, which represent a kind of guarantee that the behavior and results of digital entities are aligned with the public interest, values, and principles of the international community.

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has transformed how diplomacy is conducted in the 21st century. Digital diplomacy, or using ICTs to achieve diplomatic objectives, has become a key tool for states and non-state entities to communicate, negotiate, and influence global affairs. However, digitization also poses new challenges and risks for the practice and norms of diplomacy, such as cyberattacks, disinformation, and the digital divide.

The paper adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining a literature review and case studies, analyzes digital diplomacy's main features, benefits, and drawbacks, compares the experiences and strategies of different bodies, such as the European Union and Kosovo, and the impact of AI in diplomacy, etc. It also examines the ethical and social implications of digital diplomacy and its influence on the principles and values of traditional diplomacy.

The digital diplomacy can enhance diplomacy's efficiency, inclusiveness, and transparency, but it can also undermine its credibility, security, and accountability. It is a new and evolving phenomenon that offers both advantages and disadvantages for the conduct of international relations. Based on that, it can be concluded that the digital diplomacy requires a careful balance between innovation and regulation and it should be guided by a set of norms and standards that respect the interests and rights of all stakeholders.

REDEFINICJA DYPLOMACJI W EPOCE CYFROWEJ: WYZWANIA, SZANSE I DYLEMATY ETYCZNE

STRESZCZENIE

Dynamiczny rozwój technologii informacyjno-komunikacyjnych (ICT) zasadniczo przekształcił sposób prowadzenia dyplomacji w XXI wieku. Dyplomacja cyfrowa, rozumiana jako wykorzystanie ICT do realizacji celów dyplomatycznych, stała się kluczowym narzędziem państw oraz podmiotów niepaństwowych w procesach komunikacji, negocjacji i oddziaływania na sprawy globalne. Jednocześnie proces cyfryzacji generuje nowe wyzwania i zagrożenia dla praktyki oraz norm dyplomatycznych, w tym cyberataki, dezinformację czy pogłębianie się podziału cyfrowego.

Artykuł, opierając się na podejściu metod mieszanych, łączącym przegląd literatury z analizą studiów przypadku, bada podstawowe cechy, korzyści i ograniczenia dyplomacji cyfrowej. Porównuje doświadczenia i strategie różnych podmiotów – m.in. Unii Europejskiej oraz Kosowa – uwzględniając również wpływ sztucznej inteligencji na praktyki dyplomatyczne. Analizie poddano także etyczne i społeczne implikacje dyplomacji cyfrowej oraz jej oddziaływanie na zasady i wartości dyplomacji tradycyjnej.

Dyplomacja cyfrowa może sprzyjać zwiększeniu efektywności, inkluzywności i transparentności procesów dyplomatycznych, lecz równocześnie niesie ryzyko osłabienia ich wiarygodności, bezpieczeństwa i odpowiedzialności. Stanowi zatem zjawisko nowe i dynamicznie ewoluujące, oferujące zarówno istotne korzyści, jak i poważne wyzwania dla współczesnych stosunków międzynarodowych. W konsekwencji należy stwierdzić, że dyplomacja cyfrowa wymaga wyważenia innowacyjności i regulacji oraz powinna być prowadzona w oparciu o zestaw norm i standardów respektujących interesy i prawa wszystkich interesariuszy.