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## ***Digital diplomacy in the European Union***

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## Digital diplomacy in the European Union

The development of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) initiated the need to change the way traditional diplomacy is conducted around the world. Globalization and the growing number of Internet users facilitated worldwide communication and created an environment in which authorities can reach citizens through new channels. The impact of information technologies on traditional diplomacy has already been noticeable for many years. According to a report created in 1998 by Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, “Westphalian world in which modern diplomacy was born is no longer recognizable”<sup>1</sup>. Time and borders no longer have impact on spreading ideas and information. Hierarchy is exchanged for networking, while secrecy and exclusivity are replaced by transparency and openness. Ideas, as well as capital and information, are able to circulate freely in a global network of governments, corporations and non-state actors. As it is stated in the report, in a world where information is easily and instantly accessible, diplomacy is struggling to survive. Information technologies are the main factor behind these changes<sup>2</sup>. However, ICT should not be considered as a threat to traditional diplomacy, but as an opportunity to conduct it in a new way, in the form of digital diplomacy. Furthermore, the aim of contemporary diplomacy should not only be to adjust to the modern world, but also to take part in shaping it<sup>3</sup>. New information and communication technologies change the environment in which diplomacy is conducted, as well as provide new instruments to perform basic diplomatic functions. Therefore, the emergence of digital diplomacy is a natural implication of the changes in the modern world.

Digital diplomacy, which is also known as digiplomacy, twiplomacy, as well as virtual, cyber, tech, net or e-diplomacy, can be described as the use of the internet and social media to strengthen relations and to achieve diplomatic goals. The main aspects that differentiate digital diplomacy from traditional diplomacy are greater emphasis on access to information, interaction among individuals and organizations, as well as transparency<sup>4</sup>. Social media give its users a chance to speak freely and to connect with people with the same views and ideas. They give an opportunity to draw attention to problems that are not often mentioned by traditional media. The development of open communication through social media resulted in the utilization of cyberspace in diplomacy, not only by countries, but also by international organizations, such as the European Union. It can be performed through a wide

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<sup>1</sup> Reinventing Diplomacy in the Information Age. A Report of the CSIS Advisory Panel on Diplomacy in the Information Age (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 1998), p. 8

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem

<sup>3</sup> Kosienkowski, M., Piskorska B., ed. (2014). *Dyplomacja cyfrowa jako instrument polityki zagranicznej XXI wieku*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, p. 7

<sup>4</sup> Chakraborty, K., ed. (2013). *Cultural Diplomacy Dictionary*. Berlin: Academy for Cultural Diplomacy.

variety of channels, such as for example Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or Youtube. According to the Twiplomacy project, which was created in order to monitor activity of the world leaders in politics on official social media profiles, Twitter is the crucial channel of communication for digital diplomacy, as foreign ministries pursue expanding their digital diplomatic networks and encourage their missions and ambassadors around the world to establish their presence on social media. 97% of United Nations members are active on Twitter and all of the European governments are present on Facebook<sup>5</sup>.

The European Union, as it is a relatively young creation, has much less experience in traditional diplomacy than the governments of its members. It does not have its own, well-established diplomatic channels and the tools with which it conducts foreign policy may often be rather unconventional. Therefore, the implementation of digital diplomacy in the EU's foreign policy is easier than in its member countries, which have been using traditional diplomatic methods for a much longer time. The intensity and frequency of using new, digital methods differs depending on a particular country within the EU, politician or representative of the EU. It is also worth noting that the European Union is only taking its first steps in forming a unified digital diplomacy strategy as a foreign policy tool. In 2011 new possibilities for the European diplomacy were introduced, by establishing the European External Action Service, which aims to "make EU foreign policy more coherent and effective, thus increasing Europe's global influence"<sup>6</sup>, mainly by managing diplomatic relations with non-EU countries and conducting EU foreign and security policy. Moreover, in 2010 the Digital Agenda for Europe was introduced, which is considered as one of the most important initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy adopted by the European Commission<sup>7</sup>. Its main goal is to provide a better access to digital goods and services for consumers and businesses across Europe, create the good conditions for digital networks and services, as well as to maximize potential and growth of the digital economy. However, there are no international law regulations in the area of digital diplomacy that could be applied universally.

The image of the European Union could be characterized by a lack of coherent strategy, specified goal and concept of how it should be addressed. Moreover, EU is not always able to present a consistent image internationally, as well as a unified stance in the international area. In addition, it is often incomprehensible how the organization operates and what are its aims and purposes<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, the most important goals of digital diplomacy in the European Union are to improve communication with the outside world, by creating tools of image and direct communication with the environment, mainly society, and to improve the image of the EU on the international arena. The third aim is to improve the effectiveness of European diplomacy by searching for new, better methods. Further goals include creating a clear message of what the EU has to offer, especially to non-EU citizens, as well as activation of digital diplomacy<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, it may focus on topics that engage wide groups of

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<sup>5</sup> <https://twiplomacy.com> accessed: 28.04.2020

<sup>6</sup> [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/eeas\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/eeas_en) accessed: 28.04.2020

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/64/europejska-agenda-cyfrowa> accessed: 28.04.2020

<sup>8</sup> Kosienkowski, M., Piskorska B., ed. (2014). *Dyplomacja cyfrowa jako instrument polityki zagranicznej XXI wieku*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, p. 115

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 115-117

Europeans. The interactivity of digital diplomacy enables the European Union to unify the shape of foreign policy, emphasizing the most important problems overall<sup>10</sup>. Digital diplomacy may be also a useful tool in analyzing how particular efforts are being received by the society.

Over the past few years, the activity of the European Union and its institutions in the field of digital diplomacy has increased significantly. It is conducted for example within individual departments of the European Commission and the European External Action Service, which is currently headed by Josep Borrell, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. One of his predecessors, Catherine Ashton, was often criticized for her slowness and lack of visible involvement, also in the field of e-diplomacy<sup>11</sup>. The position was later held by Frederica Mogherini, whose presence on social media was more visible and she established a foundation to build a new foreign policy agenda. Borrell's activities are difficult to assess yet, as he has been the new head of the EEAS only for a few months. Moreover, in 2018 the European External Action Service was acclaimed the best-connected government institution by the Twiplomacy Study for the third time in a row. The most important institutions of the European Union, such as for example the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council, not only maintain their official websites but they perform their activities in social media as well<sup>12</sup>. Currently Charles Michel, European Council President, is considered as the most important account holder in the European Union. On the official Twitter channel @eucopresident he has over 1 million followers, while on his private, personal accounts he has gathered over 249.000 followers on Twitter, 69.000 on Facebook and 31.000 on Instagram. EU Council holds the third most important EU accounts (after both official and private accounts of Charles Michel) and is present on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn, Periscope and Snapchat. Next place is held by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (287.000 followers on Twitter), followed by European Commission (over 1 million Twitter followers, as well as page likes on Facebook), and previously-mentioned High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell<sup>13</sup>. The most often used hashtag by world leaders is #EU, which reflects the importance and the growing role of the European Union in the digital diplomacy on Twitter<sup>14</sup>.

Despite the advantages arising from conducting diplomatic activities in cyberspace, the widespread use of modern technologies and online communication carries significant risks. One of them is the problem of credibility of information posted online and the lack of certainty in terms of who is the sender of the message. The reason for such doubts may be the occurrence of hacker attacks. Another issue in the context of the European Union is the problem of inconsistencies in the activities which are being carried out. The main reason behind it is the lack of one entity to deal with this issue from the beginning to the end.

New information and communication technologies became an intrinsic part of modern diplomacy and foreign policy, in a form of digital diplomacy. Although the European Union

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<sup>10</sup> Kuszykiewicz, A. (2017). Dyplomacja cyfrowa – nowa forma polityki zagranicznej Unii Europejskiej. *Studia z Polityki Publicznej*, vol. 2, no. 14, p. 110

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 113

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 108

<sup>13</sup> <https://twiplomacy.com/info/europe/eu/> accessed: 3.05.2020

<sup>14</sup> <https://twiplomacy.com> accessed: 28.04.2020

only begins to use the digital diplomacy tools, its aim is not only to improve the image of the EU and effectiveness of its foreign policy, but also to create an information society in Europe, as well as to promote values and rules<sup>15</sup>. Although there are many opportunities arising from conducting diplomatic activities in cyberspace, there are also many threats and risks. Nevertheless, I believe that benefits, such as the possibility of strengthening international relations, fast and effective communication, relatively low cost of conducting diplomacy digitally, as well as interaction with audiences outweigh the risks. Furthermore, the role of digital diplomacy is likely to further increase in the future and change the way we perceive diplomacy.

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<sup>15</sup> Kosienkowski, M., Piskorska B., ed. (2014). *Dyplomacja cyfrowa jako instrument polityki zagranicznej XXI wieku*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, p. 127

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