

BELSPO CLOSING WORDS (Science Diplomacy event 01/12)

BELSPO regards science diplomacy as a tool for 'joining forces'. We fully recognise the importance of linking science and diplomacy in our research and foreign policy and we believe that scientists can play a crucial role as bridge builders in the 20th century's globalised world. The greatest challenges we face today (such as climate change or pandemics) go beyond national boundaries and are at the interface of international relations. Given the current complex reality (world disorder), we believe that there is a need to rethink the way we collaborate, take decisions about challenges that affect everyone, everywhere, and shape our responses to risks that threaten our world.

BELSPO is actively involved in the follow-up of the Antarctica treaty, in Space cooperation programmes and in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (among other things). In such activities as well as via our R&I national programmes, BELSPO is used to engage with other departments. At the same time, dealing with research topics such as biodiversity loss, natural disasters, cyber security, migration, heritage or intercultural dialogues, we invest in international cooperation in and beyond Europe. Here too we use the 'openness of our programmes' as well as bilateral or bi-regional channels for collaborative research projects. We are convinced that joint investments in global large research infrastructures can empower people (in Europe or in third countries), decrease brain drain, and contribute to building resilience and peace. We also believe that reinforced cooperation in social sciences may increase understanding of conflicts and contribute to preventing future ones. By supporting research partnerships or infrastructure, investing in international researchers' mobility, empowering the federal scientific institutes and contributing to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals we complement the efforts of other entities to contribute to the EU's 'global strategy'.

BELSPO hosts the intra-Belgian concertation platform for science and thus serves all entities, what may certainly be the case for science diplomacy, since this topic is at the interface of different policy areas. Within the specific subgroup for international science and innovation cooperation (the so-called 'CIS-Inter'), BELSPO contributes to bolstering Belgium's position as an international player and makes efforts to enhance the visibility of our external dimension of Science and Innovation - as set out in the ERA(6) roadmap. We may increase and better structure interaction with our science advisors or liaison officers in key third countries.

Building on the rich exchanges of today, CIS-inter may be an appropriate format to further reflect on and target a follow-up action, to address science diplomacy opportunities and challenges or to take supportive actions that may contribute to Belgium's and the EC's strategy for science diplomacy, in its 3 dimensions.

Indeed, we strongly believe in the added value of platforms where different institutional levels and departments (in particular the ones for 'science and innovation', 'foreign affairs', 'economic affairs' and 'development cooperation') can exchange, build bridges, mutually reinforce each other and raise the profile of our country and the federated entities in the international context. While developing convergent policies that serve several objectives at the same time, we may contribute to a more prosperous future in an inclusive and resilient society on a sustainable Earth.

I would now like to invite you to the networking lunch, where you will have the opportunity to continue to exchange views on 'science diplomacy' and 'international cooperation' in R&I.