

Science Diplomacy

I. A new strategy in research and academic relations policy

Research and academic relations policy is a key part of Germany's foreign policy. In the past decades, the Federal Government's policy focused on making Germany a world player as a location for education and research, and developing international networks for academics and researchers and their institutions. A new strategy is needed for the 2020s. For this we use the term science diplomacy. This science diplomacy has to respond to the central challenges of the 21st century, create and protect a space for academic endeavour, and promote and safeguard academic research as a necessary condition for democratic action. It must also preserve the current strengths of research and academic relations policy, in particular its international networks and the exchange they foster.

A democracy relies on debate between well-informed citizens and their representatives. The European idea and, deriving from it, what has long been considered a "western" model of science and evidence-based policymaking, follows the tradition of the Enlightenment. The COVID-19 pandemic is an urgent reminder that we need to breathe new life into this tradition of man's emergence from immaturity.

This relates, first and foremost, to the phenomenon of shrinking spaces. Spaces within which academia and society are free to pursue their endeavours are increasingly being undermined by communication strategies (fake news), diminished in real terms – not least by underfunding – and endangered by regulatory restrictions (controls and legislation).

This also has an impact on Europe's strength – its ability to take responsible, science-based political decisions and to protect science and research, and likewise art and culture, as spaces for exploration and discovery which support public decision-making. In view of the global, planetary challenges of the 21st century, this is a key task for foreign policy as the embodiment of international public policy.

German science diplomacy should always be viewed within a European frame of reference, and as a national contribution that promotes European sovereignty and solidarity in geostrategic terms and helps forge our identity at home and abroad.

The pandemic has driven home to us the fact that a sovereign Europe based on the principle of solidarity needs resilience if it is to endure in the face of authoritarian narratives. It has however also made it obvious that we have to explain what the European model has to offer and that we need to redefine our responsibility for academic freedom, mobility and multilateralism. Even in the pandemic, Germany's attractiveness as a place to study and pursue research remains high, given its outstanding academic programmes and facilities. We



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want to enhance this strong position as we continue to compete for students and researchers. We want to emerge stronger from this crisis, but we will only succeed if we engage in more exchange and teamwork, not least in order to drive the European Green Deal forward and to promote qualitative growth. We welcome the willingness of science organisations to advise the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union on questions of scientific freedom and European science and research policy.

Willy Brandt once said that “foreign policy is too important to be left to governments alone.” This insight is truer than ever in a decade in which not a single challenge can be resolved solely at national level. The challenges of the Anthropocene require international responses to combat climate change, preserve biodiversity, really understand the impact of human activities on ecosystems and on technological change, and to rethink sustainable economic activity and issues of diversity in individual countries’ societies.

International public policy is thus a necessity, as is the strengthening of multilateralism as a space in which international understanding between equal partners can be practised. Therefore, even issues that genuinely fall within the purview of foreign and security policy must be examined under the microscope of international scientific discourse and subjected to any criticisms that may result.

This is what science diplomacy is about. Having seen how the COVID-19 pandemic has been dealt with in Europe and around the world, it is all the more urgent for us to put science diplomacy into action. Wherever policy was guided by facts and science, trust in political decisions has been enhanced. This method stands in clear contrast to ideology-driven thinking, post-factual narratives and disinformation, and must be adhered to.

Science can provide the fact-based foundations for political decisions. Politics involves a difficult and sometimes painful weighing up of values and interests. Clear guidelines are therefore needed for policymakers who have to reconcile academic freedom, social responsibility and political action. Ideally, scientists and policymakers are in constant communication with, and consider themselves an integral part of, civil society, and this interaction serves to increase mutual understanding and the legitimacy of value and evidence-based policies.

Against this background, the rethinking of research and academic relations policy, strategically reframing it as science diplomacy, will anchor cooperation between the fields of foreign policy, science, citizen science and scientific communication with engaged citizens in sustained international processes. Science diplomacy thus extends the meaning and field of action of academic and research relations by broadening citizen science to include input from foundations through to activist civil society. Science diplomacy is thus also to be viewed as a contribution to international scientific endeavour that is aware of its social responsibility, and as a contribution to international policymaking that listens to and gives

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serious consideration to scientific advice. It thereby creates new potential options for foreign policy.

For this reason, the German Bundestag and the relevant ministries, in particular the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), are key partners in implementing the new strategic direction. The BMBF has already taken some first steps, above all in the sphere of scientific communication. These include launching a prize for science diplomacy. The German Bundestag is assisting the Federal Government in “further developing research and academic relations policy to forge a new kind of science diplomacy”.¹ This expressly includes expanding and defending academic freedom, raising the international profile of Germany as a country for science and innovation and improving institutional networks, developing scientific exchange and making Germany’s contribution to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

II. Guidelines and fields of action for science diplomacy

The following guidelines provide the framework for the shift from research and academic relations policy to science diplomacy. Normative aspects (1) and thematic and regional priorities (2) will be linked in a matrix with general structural changes (3) and organisational changes within the Federal Foreign Office (4). It is these connections that reveal both the potential for foreign policy to serve science and the potential of science to define and gain acceptance for European interests and values.

1. Strengthening academic freedom worldwide

Science diplomacy draws potential options for action from basic tenets. These include a common European academic ethos and the principles of multilateralism, which are embedded particularly strongly in research and academic relations policy and which are indispensable when it comes to tackling global challenges.

- 1.1. In the European social model, academic success is closely entwined with our understanding of academic freedom. That is why science diplomacy supports and promotes the free pursuit of science and research and the freedom of all those involved in that endeavour. Programmes for at-risk academics such as the Philipp Schwartz Initiative and the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) thus form an integral part of science diplomacy, as do political efforts to defend academic freedom and ensure the necessary institutional and financial support is available. Indeed, academic institutions in Germany can only make their

¹ Cf. Decision by the German Bundestag: The evolution of cultural relations and education policy – new requirements and challenges for timely action, 28 January 2020, printed paper no. 19/16834.



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full contribution to progress and innovation if they are part of an international academic community that is allowed to operate freely.

- 1.2. It is therefore both in our interests and in line with our values to champion global academic freedom and emphasise the importance of basic research and unhindered academic exchange, not least because this serves Germany as a location for business and innovation and because it serves to strengthen a European community of values (cf. Erasmus and Horizon programmes) and an international community of values. This normative component is a significant extension beyond the current scope of research and academic relations policy. It is necessary to combat nationalistic and autocratic forces on the international stage and to fight conspiracy theories and fake news in Germany and Europe.
 - 1.3. These normative components supplement enhanced engagement in the sphere of student and academic exchanges. This is foreign policy at the service of science and academia, creating the best conditions possible for their work. The success of Germany as a location for business and innovation and the international reputation of our country rest in no small part on international networking. Close relationships between international students and researchers and political and business leaders, and the promotion of physical and digital mobility by means of scholarships and other support programmes are more necessary than ever today as a counterweight to national egoisms. These should be used to actively promote international knowledge production, as well as studying and working in Germany and Europe – also having regard to the shortage of skilled workers – and should be adjusted to new global balances.
 - 1.4. Strengthening academic freedom also involves scientific communication and knowledge transfer between academia, society and foreign policymakers. In an age where de-globalisation, ignorance of scientific facts and the spread of “alternative facts” or fake news have a massive influence on public communication spaces, it is a central task of science diplomacy to combat disinformation by means of active, strategic communication and fact-based argument, and to campaign for open communication spaces. Knowledge transfer also means doing more to integrate academic expertise into core foreign policy spheres such as peace policy, the international economic order and special expertise on regional issues. In particular, competence on Chinese and African issues should be fostered and, by means of Communication Labs and Science Weeks, combined with civil society knowledge and media expertise. We will therefore work together with the Alliance of Science Organisations and Science Foundations to make both scientific communication and knowledge transfer a top priority.
2. Tackling global challenges



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German foreign policy has to find responses to the increased demands placed on our country and Europe as global players. The pandemic has once again proven Europe's strength lies in taking rational, responsible fact-based political decisions in a spirit of serving the public good. But it has also made clear how urgent the need for a more modern form of science diplomacy is.

- 2.1. Germany and Europe can only live up to their international responsibility if they face up to the central challenges of the 21st century. Questions of climate change, resource management, a just and sustainable economic order, public health (especially in cooperation with the Berlin School for Public Health), diversity, causes of refugee movements and migration are thus the substantive issues to be addressed by science diplomacy. When new invitations to tender are issued for programmes and projects, these will reflect the above strategic priorities and should, like our mobility programmes, be designed to be climate neutral. By introducing environmental soundness standards, we seek to adapt our project funding to the challenges of the Anthropocene.
- 2.2. Addressing the global nexus of peace and security is at the core of German and European foreign policy and requires greater international scientific expertise than ever before. Our first international pilot project in this field is the German-Colombian Peace Institute CAPAZ, which has been established and now needs to be expanded. In this context we seek to decisively strengthen peace and conflict research in its international dimension, as recommended by the German Council of Science and Humanities.
- 2.3. Science diplomacy advocates the systematic development of digital structures and concepts. Not only because the digital transformation will facilitate access to services and information, has the potential to bridge geographical divides and will contribute to climate neutrality, but also because we have to ensure that the digital space is a public space where the same freedoms are enshrined as in analogue space. Our partners and intermediary organisations are a long way behind other actors in this field, including commercial tech firms that operate globally, and we need to catch up.

Our regional priorities for the next decade include, above all, strengthening European sovereignty and solidarity, also with regard to difficult partners such as Russia; our neighbouring continent Africa, with which we must tackle the challenges of the Anthropocene together; and China, an actor without whom no globally effective action is possible. To this list of priority regions we should add Latin America, with which we share similar interests and close cultural ties, as well as India and, with a view to diversifying our relations, the Indo-Pacific region.



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International top talent programmes and the establishment of young academies should be a key focus in this context. A Leadership for Africa programme should put an emphasis on talented people from our neighbouring continent. The establishment of a German-Chinese Young Academy would further promote scientific exchange with China. We seek transparent cooperation between equals, avoiding asymmetries and a one-way knowledge drain, and fostering reciprocity.

3. Having the courage for structural change

In the field of research and academic relations policy, the systemic lessons from the crisis are above all that we should rethink mobility and knowledge structures. Academics and scientists today move between analogue and digital worlds, forming networks and identifying the tensions that arise. Germany is predestined to explore new avenues at the interface between science and foreign policy.

- 3.1. The intermediary and partner organisations that implement our research and academic relations policy, above all the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the German Archaeological Institute, play a crucial role in enabling student and staff mobility. They continue to build strong international networks that create long-lasting ties with Germany. They and other organisations in the Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany should be given more support for their mobility programmes. Substantive criteria relating to the above-mentioned global challenges must be taken into account in this context.
- 3.2. We seek to strengthen the international co-production of knowledge by ensuring that individual scholarship holders will in future work closely with existing fora for cooperation such as transnational educational establishments or centres of excellence, increasing the allure of these as hubs for collaboration. Cooperation between intermediary agencies and civil society initiatives such as “Falling Walls” should be further enhanced.
- 3.3. We are strengthening synergies between language course providers such as the Goethe-Institut, partner schools abroad, sur-place scholarships and academic and scientific institutions with the aim of facilitating transition-free educational experiences and encouraging greater diversity and gender equality. The creation of an interoperable alumni platform by a consortium led by the DAAD is a first step in this direction, as is an increase in the number of scholarships for graduates of German schools abroad.
- 3.4. Since being reformed, the German Centres for Research and Innovation have become a success story as regards cooperation between educational and research institutions abroad. We want to further expand this network, first of all in the



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United States of America. We should also move forward with the establishment of a German Centre for Research and Innovation in China when the minimum conditions for its successful operation are in place.

- 3.5. Cooperation programmes and joint infrastructure are the vehicles for building international knowledge. Expanding them is a key element of science diplomacy. Smaller bi-national cooperation projects between individual higher education institutions contribute to this, as do large EU consortia or multilateral projects and research networks. Particular regional focuses are to be placed on Africa, especially in the applied sciences, and on Latin America. Centres of excellence and Humboldt research hubs should focus above all on the subjects of climate change, health research, resource management, urbanisation, and peace and conflict research.

4. Making the Federal Foreign Office a laboratory for science diplomacy

Germany's nascent science diplomacy, embedded in Europe, can only be successful if European expertise is obtained and listened to from the outset. We intend to create a panel of European scientific experts who will advise the Foreign Minister on the above issues and consult with international specialists on their topics. It is our express intention to make this expertise and advice available to other German ministries, and their participation is keenly sought. We will discuss this proposal within the framework of the Trio Presidency with Portugal and Slovenia.

The Federal Foreign Office will call for the creation of a State Secretaries group on science diplomacy to improve coordination within the Federal Government. It is thereby also pursuing science diplomacy as a horizontal task and will provide for the necessary systemic coherence that has so far been lacking.

The interchange of ideas between science and foreign policy should be further fostered through the continued development of innovative models and forms of cooperation with the scientific community (e.g. through topic-based knowledge-transfer hubs), as well as by expanding the network of science officers at missions abroad, expressly also by reaching out to members of science organisations, and through exchange and further education programmes.