

*The EL-CSID project is coordinated by the Institute for European Studies (IES)*



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 693799.

# The rhetoric of “science diplomacy”: Innovation for the EU’s scientific cooperation?

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Issue 2018/16 • April 2018

## Introduction

In the recent years, the EU policy discourse has endorsed the notion of “science diplomacy” that points to the interaction between scientific research and foreign policy as instrumental in the societal and political progress. Commissioner for science, research and innovation Carlos Moedas is particularly keen on seeing “the EU play an increasingly active and visible role in international science diplomacy” (Moedas, 2016). In doing so, the EU is part of, and perhaps leading among, those global actors that have jumped on the “science diplomacy” bandwagon, where the activities concerned with scientific cooperation (such as part of the work by UNESCO or The World Academy of Sciences – TWAS) are framed as “science diplomacy”.

But while the EU, for reasons that are both interest and norm-driven (López de San Román and Schunz, 2017; Geeraert and Drieskens, 2016), is promoting its ambitions in the field of “science diplomacy”, the Commission admits to lack an implementation agenda. It is also openly interested in documenting and evaluating its “science diplomacy policy” with the view of improving it (see a call INT-11-2015). That is, the EU is keen on understanding how successful have its activities been in building desired relationships and what these activities are. However, across the policy discourses and academic literature dealing with the policy nexus of foreign and science policy (Flink and Schreiterer, 2010; López de San Román and Schunz, 2017; Ruffini, 2017; Van Langenhove, 2017), there is a disconnect between the quest to reflect on the actions invoking “science diplomacy” on the one hand, and a critical questioning of the concept itself on the other. To date, the continuous reference to the term has outpaced the demonstration of its value-added.

The puzzle was sketched by Flink and Schreiterer (2010) who have looked into the practices and approaches followed by states in their international use of science and considered them all “science diplomacy” only to conclude that the character of “science diplomacy” is fuzzy. There remains a considerable scope for understanding the relevance of the discursive innovation of “science diplomacy”. Is the concept identifying a novel practice and if so, what is it? If not, what is the reason for this new rhetoric? Fundamentally, what policy implications for the EU does this rhetoric generate? Questions of this kind arise despite or precisely because of the popularity of the concept of “science

diplomacy". Not only has this survived, but reinforced the assumption that the term is precise, and as such reflective of existent policies and capable of shaping future ones.

Yet, this assumption is largely untrue. The improvement of the EU – or indeed anyone else's – exercise of its external policy in science, from the design of the tools to their implementation, can only come about through a more exact debate. This article probes into the rhetoric of "science diplomacy" by first, critically engaging with its definition, and second, by tracing the official EU policy related to science and foreign policy (mostly missing the reference to "science diplomacy") in the Euro-Mediterranean (EU's Southern neighbourhood) region.<sup>1</sup> In this latter part, the analysis asks what place have policy domains of science, technology, research and innovation had in the EU's relations in its neighbouring region, how have they shaped or been shaped by the EU's foreign policy and whether the ideas introduced by "science diplomacy" have brought or promise to bring any novel approaches or progress to the agenda.

Within the EU, the policy field that has been renamed a few times – from science and technology (S&D) to research and development (R&D) until in roughly 2010 science has become inseparable also from innovation (Science and Public Policy, 2002; Borrás, 2002). The choice of the Euro-Mediterranean region is very pertinent because this is a region with a turbulent history of relationships with the EU and now being particularly targeted by the recent EU "science diplomacy" endeavours (EC, 2017). Since its institutionalisation in 1995, the ambition of creating "an area of peace, prosperity, and stability in the Euro-Mediterranean region" (Barcelona declaration, 1995) has continually been challenged and attempted at by also scientific cooperation.

In the review, I refer to the policy documents determining the EU's policy towards the region and look for the ultimate aspirations of the EU and the role of science in accomplishing those objectives. Noting that the EU's cooperation between science and foreign policy has been far from systematic (Stein, 2002), I seek to identify tendencies to mention science in the EU's foreign policy documents as well as to note references to an international dimension in the EU's science policy. The overview is structured around individual phases of the Euro-Mediterranean relationship, as shaped by the EU's policies and seen from the EU's point of view. It is worth point out that the literature on the EU's neighbourhood policy (Bicchi and Lavenex, 2015; Bicchi and Gillespie, 2011; Gillespie and Volpi, 2017) has paid only marginal attention to the impact on/of scientific relations in the political relations.

### Conceptual vagueness of "science diplomacy"

The popularity of "science diplomacy" has been on the steep rise since the frames of the debate were set by the UK Royal Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (RS/AAAS) with their 2010 report *New frontiers in science diplomacy – navigating the changing balance of powers*. In it, three dimensions of "science diplomacy" are presented. "Science in diplomacy" is a label for the use of scientific evidence in formulating foreign policy; "diplomacy for science" describes the deployment of diplomatic channels to enhance research capacities and quality in at least one of the countries involved, and "science for diplomacy" relates to the use of science and cooperation between scientists (including from countries with strained political relationships) to promote international understanding, peace and prosperity (RS/AAS, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> The region is composed of states surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. The coverage of Turkey is not as detailed in this paper as it would deserve to be. Turkey is part of the EU's foreign policy for the Mediterranean, but it has also pursued a bilateral relationship with the EU. Its Accession negotiations started in 2005 and are currently stalled, subject to the EU's condition that Turkey applies the Additional Protocol of the Ankara Association Agreement to Cyprus. In the context of this overview, it is interesting that the only chapter that has been closed is the one on Science and Research.

In itself, the typology is imperfect. One shortcoming is the concept's premise that international scientific relations are conducive to win-win situations. In fact, these relations are both cooperative and, increasingly, also competitive (including among the EU countries themselves) (Flink and Schreiterer, 2010). They are based both on a positive-sum game diplomacy, where scientific cooperation is capable of pursuing a common good, as well as a zero-sum game diplomacy, where economic and reputational gains of one actor accomplished through scientific cooperation come on the account of another. Having said that, it could essentially make more sense to distinguish between an actor's intention to make the scientific cooperation with partners its foreign policy **objective** and an actor's intention to use (or exploit) cooperation in science as a **tool** for another foreign policy goal, e.g. dominance.

The second problem with the RS/AAAS model is that frequently, clear-cut cases are not possible. Provision of mobility schemes for scientists, for example, require first some diplomatic (or bureaucratic) activity to be established (by securing funding and visas), and as a second step allow scientists to collaborate productively on their disciplinary domains and in turn nurture intercultural understanding. In such instances, "diplomacy for science" quickly turns into "science for diplomacy". Perhaps even "science in diplomacy" could be considered here, if researchers from mobility schemes produce policy recommendations that are taken up. Similarly, Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Agreements are both a product of diplomacy and their tool (Dolan, 2012; EC, 2014). Indeed, despite the breakdown into the three categories in theory, in practice the differentiation between the three rarely occurs and "science diplomacy" functions as a proxy for all.

The third problem with the typology is the lack of nuance for creating a close link between improved intercultural understanding among scientists and conflict management or conflict prevention among states. While the former can (but not necessarily do) flow from genuine cooperation among people, the latter is a much less certain product of that cooperation, especially because scientists as individuals may have no direct access to and interest in the political decisions. That some political repercussions easily, even automatically, result from scientific cooperation, can be neither demanded nor predicted. The collaboration between individuals as a psychological or anthropological matter has little to do with relations between states, in times of peace or conflict. The key features of foreign policy – hierarchy, history, political borders and tradition are foreign to the world of science (Wagner, 2002).

The fourth weakness of the typology is that it discounts the role of factors, other than the official policy, which also play a role in international cooperation among scientists. The policy of the EU particularly supports partnerships. But international linkages in science are not evenly distributed and regional relations remain strong, often (but not always) explained by historical relationships, colonial ties and geographical proximity (Wagner and Leydesdorff, 2005). Increased international cooperation happens in many areas, not only science, and is not always a result of active policy interventions but also attitudes and broader globalisation processes. The typology obscures instances when international cooperation in science evolves without diplomatic purposes or involvement of classic diplomats, perhaps even explicitly away from them. With "science diplomacy", the notion of "diplomacy" – which has always been a distinct ritual, subject to certain specific rules and customs – hijacks those apolitical efforts.

Finally, there is the lack of evidence to support individual categories of the typology. Only a handful of examples continue being invoked in the discussion. For instance, a synchrotron light SESAME or a cooperation between Soviet-US scientists remain popular illustrations of the ability of science and research to bring diverse nations together in a sensitive region and used as examples of "science for diplomacy". Instances of "science for diplomacy" that may not have worked as expected are much less discussed. Also, how to make sense of the Iranian nuclear deal, that was first hailed as success

of “science for diplomacy” (The Atlantic, 2015), but is seriously threatened in 2017 by the US president?

Despite the identified shortcomings, the term has been on the rise. The academic literature seems complacent with the RS/AAAS categorisation and while engaging with it conceptually to some extent (López de San Roman and Schunz, 2017; Ruffini, 2017), its circulation remains secure. As a result, the popularity of pointing to interactions between science and foreign policy, even international relations, has hardly translated into a more nuanced discourse of the types of such interactions. Instead, “science diplomacy” has been understood in broadest terms as any activity at the intersection between foreign policy and science, capturing ambitions as diverse as those of increasing visibility of science globally, exerting economic influence on other major actors and using scientists to enhance peace. It has also caused that a number of critical presumptions tacitly linger in the academic and policy literature. Some of these are that “science for diplomacy” can be pre-arranged and scientists programmed for political purposes, that intercultural understanding can be engineered by political action, that establishing or advancing scientific ties depends on diplomatic efforts and that scientific evidence is not an underlying principle of *any* sound policy process.

These assumptions are impeding a more forward-looking discourse in the context of any actor, including the EU. Namely, the discussion of what to do with “science diplomacy” from the point of view of the EU will in large part depend upon what “science diplomacy” is understood to be (Flink and Schreiterer, 2010). I try to enlighten the debate by a study of evolution of a policy that has turned into “science diplomacy”.

### **Euro-Mediterranean Partnership**

Although the early attempts by the European Community to coherently engage with the Mediterranean date into 1970s, when Global Mediterranean Policy encompassed a series of bilateral trade and co-operation agreements with most third Mediterranean countries, it was the 1995 Barcelona Declaration and the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) that represents a milestone for the EU’s relations with the Southern Mediterranean countries.<sup>2</sup> The EMP was a foreign policy initiative running in parallel to the process of preparing Central and Eastern European States for accession, replacing bilateral relations between the EU Member States and the South Mediterranean countries with a multilateral policy and a common approach to the region. The EMP can be praised not only for conceiving ‘neighbours’ beyond those linked to the EU by land (Barbe, 1996), but also for its ambition of conducting friendly and truly cooperative Euro-Mediterranean relations. The principles of joint ownership, dialogue and co-operation stood at the centre of the policy, with the objective of creating a Mediterranean region of peace, security and shared prosperity (Barcelona declaration, 1995).

The ambition of the EMP encompassed scientific cooperation. This was enshrined in the EMP both as a means for advancing science and socioeconomic development, and as conducive to bringing “peoples closer, promoting understanding between them and improving their perception of each other” (Barcelona declaration, 1995). Cooperation in science between the EU and the South Mediterranean countries was built, “taking account of the principle of mutual advantage”, and envisaged instruments, such as “joint research projects”. Although the then valid Framework Programme 4 (FP4) was offering a platform for cooperation, the EMP states no obvious preference for EU’s instruments and appears to leave the policy open to a joint vision. This is fully in line with the principle of “mutual benefit” which was central to the FP4 in relation to third countries and international organisations (EC, 2009).

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<sup>2</sup> The intention to establish a new framework for its relations with Mediterranean countries was launched at the European Council in Lisbon in June 1992.

The EMP's conception of science both as an end in itself and as a medium to foster people-to-people relations is reflective of the optimistic political outlook at the time and was possible because of that context. A truly fruitful multilateral scientific cooperation, as could be read into the EMP, was dependent on and a product of a considerable political effort. The launch of the EMP coincided with the hopes for the Arab-Israeli reconciliation, attempted through the later ill-fated Oslo Peace accords. It was just then that the idea of the Arab-Israeli scientific collaboration was born, eventually leading to the region's first synchrotron light source – SESAME (Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East)<sup>3</sup>, modelled after the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) (Sesame, 2018).

The commitment to promote scientific and technological cooperation internationally, both to reinforce Community capacities and those of the partners, was scaled up in the subsequent Framework Programme (FP5, covering the period between 1998 and 2002) with more instruments, funds and vigour. The Mediterranean countries constituted a specific group among the “third countries” and science and technology represented the core of the EMP (EC, 2009). The thematic priorities for research were selected through a dialogue between all the countries involved and encompassed themes, such as socio-economic modernisation, preserving and using cultural heritage and regional environmental sustainability. Expected outcomes of cooperation in this period were increased training opportunities for researchers, research in support of regional collaboration activities as well as tools and decision support systems, all geared towards a progress of a region as a whole.

### European Neighbourhood Policy

The EMP was supplanted by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2003.<sup>4</sup> At first glance, the ENP presented a semantic change in foreign policy approach that came as a response to the EU's future internal changes, determined by its biggest enlargement, to come in 2004.<sup>5</sup> The stated ultimate objective of the ENP was similar to the one of the EMP: the new policy aspired to create in the neighbouring region “a ring of friends” – sharing everything with the Union but institutions (Prodi, 2002). The ultimate aim was a “zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood” (EC, 2003). With the exception of Turkey, which had the prospect of the EU's membership, the status of the countries in the Mediterranean (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia) remained unaffected.

Nevertheless, the ENP represented also a change in style. The approach in accomplishing the same policy goals was different from the partnership-centred one, drawing largely from the enlargement and association policies (Prodi, 2002). Heavily influenced by the security issues and political events in the aftermath of the 9/11 (2001), the ENP was built on the premise that “[t]he EU has a **duty**, not only towards its citizens and those of the new member states, but also towards its present and future neighbours, to ensure continuing social cohesion and economic dynamism” (EC, 2003). Contrary to the language of cooperation propounded in the Barcelona declaration of 1995, the tone reflects a stronger sense of EU's determination to deliver its pre-set goals. Reflective of this approach are the propositions, such as “the EU must act to promote...”, “the EU can and should work to spread the

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<sup>3</sup> SESAME is a partnership between Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Iran, Jordan, Pakistan, the Palestinian Authority, and Turkey that aims to create top research career opportunities in the region and serves as a prime model for interstate scientific collaboration.

<sup>4</sup> In parallel with the ENP, the EU conducts bilateral policies with the neighbouring countries. They can be parties to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) (some of them to become parties to Association Agreements with the EU) or to Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements (EMAA).

<sup>5</sup> The enlargement to Bulgaria and Romania that followed in 2007, was also already foreseen.

benefits...”, “the EU expects of its partners” etc. Rather than built on a cooperative dialogue, the EU’s policy in the Mediterranean became much more prescriptive and more of a one-way process. While the principle of common ownership continued to underlie the drafting of the principal instrument in the ENP – the so-called “action plans” – there was effectively limited space for their bilateral negotiation. Both the objectives and means of cooperation needed to originate from within the framework of the EU’s offer. In addition, the EU introduced a much contested “conditionality” (or “more for more” approach), on which better compliance was rewarded with more funds (Kelley, 2006).

Scientific cooperation within the ENP played a role of a tool in achieving regional and sub-regional cooperation, whose final purpose was to contribute to stability, security and sustainable development (EC, 2003), with the first two objectives increasingly taking the lead (EEAS, 2003). The primary tool for implementing the cooperation with neighbouring countries in the field of science and technology was the opening of the European Research Area (ERA), which was being built as a vision for the future of research in Europe. ERA was also at the focus of the 6th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (RTD), covering the period 2002 to 2006, in which the Mediterranean states continued to be eligible for funding. This was an extension, rather than an introduction of their cooperation in the ERA. At the general level, support was to be concentrated on the structural and institutional capacity-building activities. The implementation of the EU’s ambition in scientific cooperation revealed its clear preference to deploy its own structures in that policy field and thereby to retain full control over that cooperation.

The ENP expressed a commitment to a common political language of “shared values”, namely “democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law” (EEAS, 2003, 4). But the EU *presupposed* that the shared values underlie all of the actions and goals in the ENP, rather than sought them through policies. Only gradually, the EU came to recognise that the achievement of ultimate objectives – political association, deeper economic integration, access to the EU internal market, increased mobility and more people-to-people contacts – depended precisely “on the extent to which common European values [were] effectively shared by the neighbouring countries” (Petrov, 2015: 291). The potential role of scientists for advancing those shared values was however long unnoticed; it was not even when the EU resorted to a more cooperative tone in the implementation of the ENP in 2004 (EC, 2004) that the EU recognised the potential of scientists in building trust. Furthermore, when the EU sought alternative ways to conditionality in order to advance fundamental reforms in countries that lacked political will, it relied on civil, economic and social actors as the more obvious partners (EC, 2015), but interestingly, not the scientists.

During the process of bilateral negotiations between the EU and the Mediterranean countries during 2003-2005, research and development (or science and technology) were regularly flagged a priority of the neighbouring countries. The Commission committed to developing an “ambitious” cooperation in this field with the ultimate goal being “sustainable and equitable economic development” (Commission, 2005). To achieve it, the priorities for the Commission were the integration of the partner countries’ research entities in the ERA, education reform, university exchanges and scholarships (ibid.). Among those harmonising actions, the Commission had a curious diplomatic plan for “integrat[ing] former weapons of mass destruction scientists into the international science communities and support[ing] the civilian application of their sensitive knowledge” (ibid.). These can be seen as the first shapes of the Commission’s active attempt to situate the scientific cooperation within its high politics and the security issue.

As the ENP progressed, the Commission expressed the desire for the policy to move beyond being a matter for officials and politicians and to have also a “human face”. The idea was that the ENP should offer opportunities for citizens of the EU and of the neighbouring countries “to interact, and to learn more about each other’s societies and understand better each other’s cultures” (EC, 2006: 6-8). In the context of this more “popular” foreign policy, the main focus of the Commission in implementing the

ENP in science, research and innovation was in mobility of researchers and academics (EC, 2010a). However, it is striking to note that the EU was focused only on ways of making “it easier, cheaper and faster for our neighbours to enter the EU” and on promoting those tools that attract the partners to the EU, rather than interested in pursuing any more balanced exchange to occur more equally in both ways (ibid.). The potential of mobility was conceived exclusively in terms of mobility *into* the EU, without this being problematised or even recognised.

In line with the trend of ever increasing cooperation, the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme covering the period 2007-2013 (adopted in 2005) contained the goal of increasing the number of agreements in the fields of science and technology between the EU and neighbouring countries. It also sought to ensure a more comprehensive support of “scientific diasporas” of European researchers abroad and foreign researchers within Europe. Overall, some years into the ENP and at the outset of the FP7, international research programmes gradually gained new roles. These existed to expand the interaction of the EU with the researchers from the third countries (both through a further general opening up to international cooperation and through dedicated actions), based on the belief that there is mutual benefit in addressing specific global or regional issues. But besides that, international research programmes were increasingly serving also the European research excellence and competitiveness, and bolstering the image of the EU as a global actor. The Lisbon Treaty (signed in 2007) constitutionally enshrined this ambition (TEU Arts 3.3 and 3.5) and defined the tools to attain it (TFEU Title XIX; Arts 179-190).

## **The Arab Spring**

In 2008/2009 the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), an intergovernmental organisation composed of the 28 European Union Member States and 15 countries from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, was established, with the aim to reinforce the Euro-Mediterranean multilateralism. However, much more than the set-up of the UfM, it was the events of the Arab Spring in 2011 to constitute the next milestone in the implementation of the ENP. The Arab Spring was interpreted by the EU as an opportunity and a message “for a qualitative step forward in the relations between the EU and its Southern neighbours [...] rooted unambiguously in a joint commitment to common values” (EC, 2011a). Although the EU committed to “faster and more ambitious political and economic reforms” through the launch of the “Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity” (ibid.), neither the pace nor the change has become substantively different.

The most significant impact of the renewed approach was that the EU policy effectively became divided between one led in relation to the governments and another one in relation to the civil society (EC, 2011b). The EU’s determination was to “curtai[] relations with governments engaged in violations of human rights and democracy standards, including by [...] strengthen[ing] further its support to civil society” (EC, 2011b). Interestingly, the scientists were not considered to form part of the civil society – a parallel sphere that is institutionalised but not authoritative and an alternative to civil society. Also fostering science itself was clearly not the top priority of the EU in the region, unlike democracy, growth, job creation, microfinance and higher education (EU, 2011).

## **The emergence and implementation of “science diplomacy”**

From this position of science as “low politics”, a milestone in the process of mainstreaming international scientific cooperation was the launch of the Europe 2020 strategy (EC, 2010b). The strategy entails a comprehensive package of the EU’s policies, buttressed by research and innovation. These were continually highlighted by the Commission as a source of renewed growth out of the economic crisis (Ulnicane, 2016). With science having moved to the heart of the EU’s mission, the Commission launched the strategy to “use international cooperation in research and innovation as an

instrument of soft power and a mechanism for improving relations with key countries and regions” and labelled it “science diplomacy” (EC, 2012). The EU’s proposal to the neighbouring countries concerned the development of a “Common Knowledge and Innovation Space” in order to improve the research and innovation competences of these countries. Mobility and people-to-people contact continued to play a fundamental role.

Of the Commission’s expectation about “science diplomacy” (ibid.), the part that good relations between countries facilitate effective cooperation in research seems to be much easier to validate than the proposition that international cooperation in research and innovation have improved relations with key countries and regions. The analysis so far confirms that cooperation in science and research between the EU and the Mediterranean countries appears to be highly susceptible to the political relations. But scientific cooperation was contingent on politics, rather than impacting it. When political climate in the region was good or relations with certain countries stable, scientific cooperation was also thriving and retained a more genuine nature, as for instance with Tunisia. On the other hand, in case of an intricate political situation in a country, such as with Libya after 2011, scientific community is short of the same level of cooperation and also the ambition that they could be part of a resolution.

The latest framework programme, Horizon2020 (covering the period of 2014-2020), is heavily geared towards cooperation with third countries and international organisations. More than any previous framework programmes, it demonstrates an ever-closer interplay between individual policies. A number of expectations about international cooperation in science are enshrined in Horizon 2020: that it contributes to achieving the Europe 2020 strategy (strengthening the EU’s excellence), that it will resolve global societal challenges and explicitly, also that it will support the EU’s external and development policy objectives (EU, 2013). The latter is a striking proposition limiting the independence of scientific enterprise.

Among the key activities to foster international cooperation is a full integration of four countries from the Mediterranean into Horizon2020 under the same conditions as EU Member States, namely Turkey, Israel, Algeria and Tunisia. Another key action is the launch of the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA). This is a €400 million partnership between some EU and certain non-EU Mediterranean countries,<sup>6</sup> aiming at supporting research and innovation actions that will result in sustainable water management and food production. PRIMA is devoted to the principles of mutual benefit, equal-footing partnerships, co-ownership, co-decision, and co-financing, as well as excellence and added value (EC, 2018/online). It is a role model of co-financing, as it is financed in just under 50% from the EU’s Horizon 2020 funds, while the rest comes from all other participating countries. These themes for cooperation had been selected jointly as being of common interest and mutual benefit. The participating states recognised the initiative’s significant potential for enhancing the stability of the region and its sustainable economic and social development (CEU, 2014).

### **A new stage in scientific cooperation?**

These most recent EU’s endeavours are characterised by the following features. The EU has articulated a new era of “science diplomacy” shortly preceding the mandate of Commissioner Moedas and heavily promoted it during his mandate (Moedas, 2015; Moedas, 2016; ERC, 2016; EC, 2017; see also the Hearing of Carlos Moedas, Commissioner-Designate). In the same period, none of the previously used major approaches, such as mobility and cooperation on joint research projects have been replaced, and no new substantively new approaches introduced.

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<sup>6</sup> There were initially 14 countries participating, but the number has since grown to 19.



The most recent EU diction (EC, 2015; EU, 2013a) seems to be pulling into contrasting directions. On the one hand, the EU takes differentiation and mutual ownership much more seriously by advocating the development of a Common Knowledge and Innovation Space between the EU and its neighbours, as well as joint research and innovation priorities through joint programmes, such as PRIMA. On the other hand, the EU does not shy away from promoting to its neighbours its own concepts (such as ‘smart specialisation’)<sup>7</sup>, initiatives (such as the Enterprise Europe Network) and tools (such as Horizon 2020). While mutual interest is pursued and sustainable development represents the overarching goal, this is matched, if not overridden, by the “critical need to reinforce, widen and extend the excellence of the Union’s science base and [...] to secure Europe’s long term competitiveness and well-being” (CEU, 2013). There is a clear expectation that “activities at international level enhance the competitiveness of European industry by promoting the take-up and trade of novel technologies, for instance through the development of worldwide standards and interoperability guidelines, and by promoting the acceptance and deployment of European solutions outside Europe” (EU, 2013b). Thus, the EU has recently taken a most assertive approach to international scientific cooperation that admits a competitive nature. It has also added the expectation that its research policy supports its external and development policy. The documents are drafted to ensure not only that the language of science is universally adopted and that strong and comprehensive international scientific knowledge is supported, but also that the EU is positioned in such a way that it would be able to influence the direction of global policy.

Without a clear indication as to the way in which the new goals will be attained, “science diplomacy” will be limited to a rhetorical innovation capturing unavoidable processes. An ever-closer connection between science, an essentially internal policy of the EU, and foreign policy, are an empirical fact. This is because to some extent, international activities have always been the outcome of pursuing excellent science (Wagner, 2002), and the globalisation processes have further encouraged them. On the level of individuals, people’s attitudes are more open to international cooperation (Bucham, 2009). On the systemic level, the EU has been gradually expanding the EU’s external competence and activity (Bretherton and Vogler, 2004) and thus integrating also research objectives into EU external relations. The EU’s efforts to flesh out a coherent foreign policy (CEU, 2001; EC, 2006; EEAS, 2016) has culminated in the Lisbon Treaty, which states that a multitude of the EU’s values, objectives and interests should be consistently implemented (Arts 3 and 13, TEU) and that research and technological development should contribute towards the economic goals of a more competitive industry (179 TFEU). These instructions are consistent with the EU’s growing ambition of becoming a global actor (Jupille and Caporaso, 1998; Ginsberg, 1999; Bretherton and Vogler, 2006; Koehler, 2010).

There is also a political motivation for ensuring that science has a place in external relations. In the context of the EU, the interests in the field of science and research were constitutive to the integration project and were driving the interaction between the European and national dimensions (Guzzetti, 1995). Science has been promoted as a driver of the EU’s progress over the past two decades. The concepts of “knowledge society” (introduced by the 2000 **Lisbon Strategy**) and “Innovation Union” (associated with the launch of **Europe 2020 Strategy** in 2010) position the policy field of science to the heart of today’s EU integration project and its ambitions. The rising prominence of science is also part of the latest (Junker’s) Commission’s effort to create a more political role for itself. In this context,

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<sup>7</sup> The EU’s concept ‘smart specialisation’ was developed in the EU’s regional policy as a tool for designing innovation and investment strategies of regions, relying on an entrepreneurial and bottom-up collaboration between various sectors where they have competitive advantages. European Commission (EC) **Regional Policy contributing to smart growth in Europe 2020**, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 6.10.2010, COM (2010) 553 final.

mainstreaming science into “high politics” certainly goes a long way towards empowering the Commission vis-à-vis member states and the EU vis-à-vis other global players.

Yet, it should be clear that despite the close interplay between the EU’s foreign policy and science (or research) policy, the message about their significance is mostly propounded by the Commissioner of research, science and innovation. He may insist that “cooperation in research and innovation with our Middle East partners is a priority for the EU” (Moedas, 2015). However, his efforts hit the reality in a broader political context: the role of science in foreign policy continues to rank low. Both the 2015 ENP Review (EC, 2015) and the launch of the most recent foreign policy strategy in 2016 (EEAS, 2016), which interestingly does not use the term “science diplomacy”, reveal a supporting role for science as a platform for engagement, rather than a transformative factor in the accomplishment of the major goals. The renewed ENP may see research, science and innovation as crucial in the creation of decent and sustainable jobs. But stabilisation remains “the most urgent challenge” and the “main political priority” of the new ENP (EC, 2015). Among the factors affecting stabilisation in the EU’s belief are poverty, inequality, a perceived sense of injustice, corruption, weak economic and social development and lack of opportunity (EC, 2015). Science may contribute towards resolving those concerns, but in a rather marginal way.

## Conclusion

Across the board, “science diplomacy” has so far been used as an umbrella term to describe highly dissimilar efforts. Normatively, it also represents a categorical label for justifying and enhancing science in policy, including in external policy. The emptiness of the term “science diplomacy” has gone unnoticed because in principle science is good for everyone, so nobody opposes its promotion.

Yet, this buzzword has hardly any value. This paper has demonstrated that the EU’s conception of its own “science diplomacy” encompasses many of the goals that have already been pursued in the history of the Euro-Mediterranean relationships since the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, but also a more politically ambitious approach and more assertive attitude to attain its competitive advantage not as strongly expressed so far. In contrast to widening the objectives, the EU has not substantively broadened the tools it avails of, implying that its actual policy in regional scientific cooperation might nevertheless stay the same. To make sense of the new rhetoric, the paper has finally highlighted the political drive for endorsing “science diplomacy”.

Understanding the circumstances might go some way to alleviate the pressure of implementing all the objectives stuffed within a single policy. However, there is hardly any good reason to continue defending an uncritical use of “science diplomacy” in both policy and academic discourse. To be able to reflect on the performance by the EU at all and meaningfully orient it, more precision is needed on what we are describing or targeting. At best, the promotion of “science diplomacy” risks not delivering the promise on the resources being spent. At worst, inducing political expectations in the work of scientists may burden the scientists’ primary responsibilities with the pressure of the need for that genuine cooperation to result in higher, more strategic outcomes. This is very likely to, and indeed has, invoked a backlash (Moro-Martín, 2017).

An immediate recommendation for policy-makers would be to acknowledge that “science diplomacy” can be a harmful mantra. Avoiding the euphemism of “diplomacy” when “cooperation” could often be more appropriate both as a means and the goal, could be an appropriate first step. Once we break the myth of “science diplomacy”, we would be better to ask how, realistically, to continue benefitting from science. Are cases where scientific cooperation does not ease the political tensions really less successful? What if scientific cooperation, in which the EU is involved, positively impacts people’s everyday lives in the neighbouring counties without resolving the political tensions? What if the EU’s

emphasis of the significance of science per se impacts on the perceptions of the political actors and civil society in the region, who influence the policies? (Pace, Seeberg and Cavatorta, 2009)

Mutually beneficial forms of technical cooperation might bring exactly those practical impacts for citizens that justify the advancement of science, for instance in water management or food production, as tackled by the PRIMA initiative. In fact, this would seem to align with the decision of the EU to pursue in the neighbouring region, now indeed, more real co-ownership and genuine cooperation, rather than assistance, control and prescriptiveness that have marked periods of the past engagement (EC, 2015). Following this guidance, the new generation of cooperation in the field of research and technology would need to refrain from the majority EU funding, determination of objectives and beliefs that high politics emerges from it. Scientific cooperation offers a unique avenue for exercising principles that foreign policy is formally endorsing but often forgetting in practice.

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The EL-CSID project  
is coordinated  
by the  
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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 693799.