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BRIEF

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## Climate Diplomacy: Challenges for the Future

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### Introduction

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, and our involvement in new global policies on the national and global level that relate to this extremely demanding and complex area - climate policy - also largely depends on the well-prepared and set-up foreign policy of any country. Increased water shortages, floods, wildfires, and extreme weather directly affect the lives of millions of people around the world and in some cases coerce people into migrating or causing violent conflicts, with the aim of occupying new territories less threatened by extreme climate

change. In 2007, the independent organisation International Alert published a report which identified 46 countries at risk of violent conflict and an additional 56 countries facing a high risk of instability as a result of climate change.

Another issue not to be disregarded is the growing risk of armed conflict that we are facing today in some of the most sensitive areas of the world, linked to, among other factors, the aforementioned consequences of climate change. In addition, climate change has the potential to pit the developing world against the developed world, potentially

leading to a global catastrophe of unimaginable proportions. Internal problems within some already impoverished states, caused by poverty and lack of resources, will be further aggravated in many poor countries. Most of the problems brought about by climate change will affect countries whose geographical placement puts them in a position of having the most dire of environmental conditions including the island countries as well as countries with a long coastal area. Countries that have difficulty accessing basic goods such as food and water, as well as countries often affected by natural disasters, are also on the list. Diplomacy and negotiation will have to overcome complex and pressing problems and disputes in areas affected by conflict, instability, terrorism, and poverty. All this calls for a stronger role of the foreign policy of individual countries in international climate politics, which can only be achieved through well-organised climate change diplomacy.

### **Does climate change diplomacy exist in a formal sense?**

The term *climate diplomacy* became established in the last several years, having developed from the state and dynamics of relations between key actors of world climate policy as well as the fundamental problems that world politics has faced since the middle of the 20th century. At that time, the issue of climate change first

appeared as the cause significantly affecting the life and survival of people on Earth. Since then first attempts by scientists to warn of the growing and runaway problem for the whole world were made, and today the development of a comprehensive international climate regime is underway. The definition of the term ‘climate diplomacy’, as a compound made up of two terms, namely: Climatology (from Greek, science that studies the climate based on meteorological data) and diplomacy (from French, branch of politics that deals with relations between states; the art of representing the interests of a state, government, ruler abroad, in international negotiations, in foreign policy in general). Unfortunately, expert literature gives us too little data for it, therefore making us resort to the available definitions of individual terms in order to clarify the meaning of the term ‘climate diplomacy.’

*Climate diplomacy should be developed now so as to avoid difficulties in the future.*

From this attempt to define the term, it derives that climate diplomacy would be a branch of politics which deals with relations between states; the art of representing the interests of a country in international negotiations, which relate exclusively to issues related to mitigating the impact of climate change on life on planet Earth. Modern diplomacy, as we consider it

today, has its foundations in old Venice in the 15th century, when diplomacy became a permanent activity. However, the appearance of the term climate diplomacy is connected with the history of international climate change policy, and looking back, it goes back to the last 30 years, with its status being affirmed more seriously with the United Nations' 1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change. Climate diplomacy as a term, but also as an activity, gained increasing importance, and is closely related to diplomatic protocol. Climate diplomacy as well as protocol should be developed now so as to avoid difficulties in the future, but also to overcome challenges more easily, because it is unquestionable that lances will break in the future over the issue of climate and energy security. For this reason, if we want to understand political relations in the field of climate change and policies at a multilateral level, a good knowledge of climate diplomacy is important, because it is a well-known fact that without a good knowledge of climate diplomacy and diplomatic protocol, it is almost impossible to participate in international negotiations on equal footing with other countries.

### **What role does climate diplomacy play and what should be done to improve it?**

Undeniably, the best situation for an individual country is one in which the best results at

negotiations are achieved precisely by experts in climate change and politics who have upgraded their knowledge with knowledge of international relations and diplomatic protocol. However, one of the important questions that imposes itself is - what is the purpose of climate diplomacy and why it is gaining increasing significance in the modern world of multilateral and bilateral relations, as well as, what are its expected achievements? In order to understand the role of climate diplomacy, we must firstly understand two very important international documents in the field of climate change:

#### **A.UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**

The UNFCCC is the first and fundamental document in solving the issue of climate change at the global level, which for the first time unequivocally raised the issue of climate change and provided ways to resolve it. It was adopted in New York in May 1992, and signed at the summit in Rio de Janeiro in June of the same year. UNFCCC entered into force on 21 March 1994, and has been ratified by 197 countries (parties) to date. When we talk about that Convention, we must keep in mind that the basic goal set by the Convention is the following: "To achieve stabilization of the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous anthropogenic effects on the climate system.

*UNFCCC entered into force on 21 March 1994, and has been ratified by 197 countries.*

Such a level should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened, and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.” It is certain that climate diplomacy, with all its negotiation and communication techniques, will play a major role to achieve such a highly-set goal. Primarily, it took convincing the signatory countries - 166 initially - for the situation today being favourable to speak of successful climate diplomacy, because currently 197 world countries are parties to the Framework Convention. At the beginning, mostly all developed countries of the world and countries with economies in transition joined in. These countries were even allowed some flexibility in terms of fulfilling their obligations under the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol, in order to strengthen their ability to solve the issue of climate change.

#### **B. PARIS AGREEMENT 2015 as a significant milestone and a significant victory for multilateral diplomacy**

When reflecting on the Paris Agreement, we ask ourselves about its real meaning - is it the content

it brings, or the obligations foreseen for the countries, or the attempt to bring the majority of world countries to one negotiating table and unite over one document. It is precisely the third element in which lies the greatest significance of the Paris Agreement. Namely, after all unsuccessful attempts to have member states undertake to reducing emissions, the 2015 Paris Agreement was the one to come closest to that goal. The Paris Agreement actually represents a significant milestone and a significant victory for multilateral diplomacy. But what is it that makes us consider that the Paris Agreement supports the thesis about the necessity of a well-prepared climate diplomacy? One of the basic characteristics of the Paris Agreement is its pragmatism; namely, it is an agreement of states that brings everything necessary, i.e. the behaviour of states required for them to be considered responsible for the global reduction of emissions and for developing ambitions to reduce these emissions - over time. Like any other agreement, the Paris Agreement will produce its first results only in the next ten years, but the novelty it created is precisely its global approach.

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In any case, the fact that this agreement was

adopted represents a triumph for international diplomacy and can result in global solutions to the global challenges that lie ahead. Actually, the Paris Agreement as such is a confirmation that even the most complex global problem, which climate change surely is, can be mitigated and solved through smart climate diplomacy. Reaching a consensus on climate change among 195 countries was a huge challenge. It was as if the collective will prevailed and the desire to showcase the negotiations and the Agreement as a unity of the 'world', both regarding the solution of global problems related to climate change and the issue of the safety of the negotiators.

In analysis of the strategic documents that set the guidelines for climate diplomacy, it is observed that the goal of strategic documents is not only their theoretical existence, but above all their implementation. Hence, it can be concluded that the purpose of climate diplomacy, or the reason it has been gaining at increasing significance in the modern world of multilateral and bilateral relations, is the desire for states to unite as soon as possible in fight against climate change and to solve pressing problems diplomatically.

Climate change is primarily a global issue and a 'global problem' because of the uniqueness of the atmospheric envelope that surrounds the Earth and protects it, but at the same

time absorbs the most harmful emissions of various gases thus causing climate change. From the point of view of the pollution of the Earth, it is irrelevant where this pollution originated. It is clear that, like any other area of life, climate change is regulated by certain strategic documents, and the purpose of climate diplomacy is to 'convince' as many countries as possible to join these treaties, i.e., to undertake obligations from such documents with the purpose of achieving 'global realization' of the goals set in the documents.

*Climate change is primarily a global issue and a 'global problem.'*

The negotiators in Paris had to show all their negotiating skills while trying to reconcile the interests of different countries, developing countries and underdeveloped countries, whose interests are mostly completely different. This created an added pressure on the negotiators in Paris, because if the negotiations failed and climate diplomacy did not show all its skills, the collective world efforts could have been ruined and the world left without fair and concrete means to solve climate change. Moreover, the world could have started preparing for a disaster, because without urgent action, it is predicted that the increase in the average global temperature will reach an unprecedented level of increase of as much as 5°C compared to the pre-industrial period - a level that would mean



the disappearance of life on Earth as we know it.

### **What else is specific about climate diplomacy?**

Climate diplomacy has another specificity that distinguishes it from others, namely the negotiations on climate change under the auspices of the UN represent a type of negotiation at the highest state level, where an individual state's size or GDP has no influence. The specificity, therefore, lies in the fact that the UNFCCC is one of the last remaining forums in the world where all countries, regardless of their size, are represented on the same basis and have an equal right to vote with the world's largest economies and the world's largest states. Most modern diplomacy takes place in small, selective groups dominated by richer countries – G7, G20, OECD, OPEC – but the specificity of climate diplomacy is that all 195 countries have equal representation in the UNFCCC. Moreover, an agreement can only be accepted by consensus. Because of this, the whole negotiation process is very complicated and requires diplomats' great expertise and training for complicated negotiations, further aggravated by the fact that they involve members of different peoples and different cultures of the world. Even the poorest countries in the world, which are often left out of international negotiations, and which have contributed the

least to the problem and emit the least amount of greenhouse gases, participate most faithfully in the negotiations and contribute the most.

### **Challenges for climate diplomacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond**

In order to ensure that the commitments made in the Paris Agreement are performed, active involvement is needed to fully implement the National Determined Contributions (NDCs) and to accelerate ambitions in the coming years. Moreover, at negotiations in Glasgow in 2021, the EU announced much greater and more ambitious goals regarding the increase of national contributions, all in light of the fact that the EU is the leader in reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and setting high goals for the reduction of emissions, and therewith closely related climate policies and methods of financing that policy. Diplomats will therefore have to convey another key argument more convincingly than ever before: if we compare the costs and all the benefits, it is clear that climate action is imperative because it simply makes economic sense. Fuels, resources, and processes of intense carbon pollution come with a great cost to human lives, the environment, and the economy. Diplomacy can significantly contribute to the creation of conditions for a sustainable transition. The issue of 'financing' climate change is the greatest issue that will open up

in the near future and become a 'stumbling block', thus requiring a well-prepared climate diplomacy of any individual country. Namely, the issue of finance and technology transfer is also becoming more and more contentious in the relationship between developed and developing countries, as well as the EU and Asian countries.

### *As for the EU, climate diplomacy gained momentum in 2018.*

Climate change, as the most comprehensive common environmental challenge in the world, illustrates the necessity of international cooperation on global environmental protection issues, but also security policy, in which each country tries to build its position, and it is no longer a question of when it will happen, but whether it is too late for adequate involvement in such policy developments and what is the position of our country. As for the EU, climate diplomacy gained momentum in 2018, focusing on the security implications of climate change. Numerous procedures and relevant steps serve to resolve the issue of the link between climate and security, as well as systematic negotiation. Recently, activities have intensified, including the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Parliament, the preparation of a parliamentary report on climate diplomacy, and a high-level debate.

As the need for comprehensive climate diplomacy is growing, so the draft report of the European Parliament calls for the development of a comprehensive climate diplomacy strategy that specifically relates to the connecting of climate and security. Such a plan should include increased capacity in the European External Action Service (EEAS) to address issues and improve systemic efforts to integrate climate security issues into mainstream policy action. Evaluating the achievements of the draft report itself, it can be observed that it is a necessary and welcome step by which the EU's policy moves in the right direction - supported by a joint approach to drafting by both the EU Committee on the Environment (ENVI) and the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET).

### *European Parliament calls for the development of a comprehensive climate diplomacy strategy.*

Increased engagement of parliamentarians is truly in the interest of climate diplomacy. It is clear that the climate diplomacy of the EU is becoming more and more involved and promises to participate even more, and already in April 2019, the European Economic and Social Committee convened a broad consultation conference to launch a European dialogue on non-state climate action in Brussels. The event "seeks to promote the collective voice of non-state actors" and is intended to encourage

bottom-up initiatives. Ultimately, the EU must ensure, at least as far as its members are concerned, to satisfy its desire and effort to be a global leader in solving the problem of climate change, and that the European dialogue does not only mean a well-conducted dialogue and a well-told story, but that this story and dialogue lead to the preservation of the Earth.

The reality of climate change will require a thorough adjustment in the conduct of international relations and will also change much of the focus of international security policy. That will change strategic interests, alliances, borders, threats, economic relations, comparative advantages, and the nature of international cooperation. It is certain that climate diplomacy, with all its negotiation and communication techniques, will play a major role to achieve such a high set goal, and it can make a significant contribution to creating the conditions for the sustainable transition we

need. Therefore, only through a well-prepared foreign policy and diplomacy can we timely and adequately get involved in new global trends on the international map of climate and energy policies, meaning that an early diplomatic engagement by qualified diplomats of individual states is imperative for dealing with the geopolitical consequences and security implications of climate change.

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