

BELSPO CLOSING WORDS (Science Diplomacy event 01/12)

BELSPO regards science diplomacy as a tool for 'joining forces'. We fully recognize the importance of linking science and diplomacy in our research and foreign policy and 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 others). 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. Heretoo we use the 'openness of our programs' 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 3rd 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 collaborations or infrastructure, as well as by investing in international researchers' mobility, or by 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 hence is serving all entities, what may certainly be the case for a topic as science diplomacy as it is at the interface of different policy areas. Within the specific subgroup for inter-national 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 visibility of our external dimension of Science and Innovation - as is pointed in the ERA(6) roadmap. We may increase and better structure interaction with our science advisors or liason officers in key third countries.

Building on the rich exchanges of today, CIS-inter may be an appropriate format to further reflect on and to 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 wherein different institutional levels and departments (in particular the ones for science and innovation, for foreign affairs, for economic affairs and for development cooperation) can exchange, build bridges and 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 simultaneously different objectives, we may contribute to a more prosper future in a inclusive and resilient society on a sustainable earth.

With this final words, let me invite you to the networking lunch, while giving youthe opportunity to continue exchanges on 'science diplomacy' and 'international cooperation' in R&I. * * *