

Changing patterns of representation and digitalization in European diplomatic practices

Tuesday 22 June 2021 18:00 (1h 30m)

Panel proposal BISA 2021

The expansion of information technologies and the increasing pervasiveness of social media in politics paired with ongoing changes in the international order, some of which seems to be exacerbated by the current Covid-19 pandemic, begs a range of questions about the role of digital diplomacy and diplomatic representation. This panel brings together a number of scholars to discuss how digital diplomacy and changing patterns of diplomatic representation are affecting European diplomatic practices.

Conveners: Federica Bicchì, London School of Economics (f.c.bicchì@lse.ac.uk) and Niklas Bremberg, Stockholm University (niklas.bremberg@statsvet.su.se)

Chair: Niklas Bremberg, Stockholm University (niklas.bremberg@statsvet.su.se)

Discussant: Jérémie Cornut, Simon Fraser University (jcornut@sfu.ca)

Paper abstract

Tracking the demise of multilateralism? The evolution of the COREU network and communications in the EU foreign policy system

Federica Bicchì, London School of Economics (f.c.bicchì@lse.ac.uk) and Marianna Lovato, University College Dublin (Marianna.lovato@ucdconnect.ie)

This paper will analyse the evolving practice of EU diplomatic communication via the COREU network, to show how it mirrors challenges to multilateralism in EU foreign policy. Created already in the 1970s as a way to pursue multilateral communications in-between EPC/CFSP meetings, the COREU network became crucial during negotiations for the 2004 enlargement. It experienced a dramatic decline in traffic since then, but the decline has not led to the system's demise. Rather, the COREU system has evolved into a more targeted bureaucratic practice, with the EEAS using it predominantly to negotiate low-key declarations (via the silent assent procedure) or to spread low-key information. Plans for reform and increased security have been drafted for over two decades, but are not close to come to fruition, as diplomats use instead more flexible forms of communications that are both more user-friendly and less inclusive than the original COREU system.

Paper abstract

EU Diplomacy in the Washington Twittersphere: Multilateralism on Social Media?

Elsa Hedling, Lund University (elsa.hedling@svet.lu.se)

European Union (EU) external representation in third countries is performed by both the member states and by the EU delegations. This hybrid system of representation is enacted through both formal and informal practices of combining bilateral relations with multilateral cooperation. As social media are increasingly important channels of state representation, these practices also take place online. This paper explores how the member state embassies and the EU delegation perform EU representation on social media in their practices of digital diplomacy. It investigates the practices of coordination and maps emerging routines of EU multilateralism on social media. The United States's capital provides a context of both strong bilateral relations and of member state interests in defending multilateral cooperation in light of anti-EU sentiments during the Trump administration. The study draws on observations in the Washington Twittersphere during major political events of relevance to the transatlantic relationship between 2019 and 2021. The study will contribute to advance our understanding of the role of digital diplomacy in contemporary practices of multilateral representation and in the coordination of EU foreign policy beyond Brussels.

Paper abstract

Adapting to crises and change: EU representation at the OSCE in an eventful 2020

Daniel Schade, Cornell University (daniel.schade@cornell.edu)

2020 was a year of crisis and change for the European Union's and its member states' representation at the OSCE. With an organizational leadership crisis and the effects of the Covid pandemic on organisational business, the functioning of the international organisation itself was heavily impacted, all while the EU's representation was altered with the formal effects of Brexit coming into force. This paper studies how the representation of the EU and that of the member states have adapted to this set of extensive changes affecting their posting. As an international organisation setting where the EU's diplomatic coordination and burden sharing practice is particularly developed, an analysis of changes to representation can provide broader insights into EU diplomatic adaptation. The analysis in this paper is based, amongst others, on research interviews with EU and member state diplomats posted at the organisation. The temporal scope of the analysis ranges from the UK's formal withdrawal from the EU to the nomination of the EEAS Secretary General Helga Schmid as the OSCE's Secretary General at its annual Ministerial Council in December.

Paper abstract

Digital Diplomacy in the time of pandemic: The case of the European Union

Corneliu Bjola, University of Oxford (corneliu.bjola@qeh.ox.ac.uk) and Ilan Manor, Tel Aviv University

The outbreak of Covid-19 constituted a major challenge for the European Union (EU) as its capacity to manage the pandemic and to coordinate member states' responses to the crisis was severely put to the test. This paper seeks to analyze the EU's use of social media during the outbreak. Specifically, the paper will examine which issues the EU addressed online and how these issues changed as the pandemic spread across the continent. Using thematic analysis, all tweets published by the EEAS and the President of the EU commission between March and August of 2019 will be analyzed so as to identify the issues addressed by the EU throughout different pandemic stages (e.g., spread of Covid19 to Spain and Italy, Germany, UK and Eastern Europe). In a second stage, social network analysis will be applied to map the clusters of member states' responses to the EU digital campaign (e.g., supportive, critical, passive). In so doing, the study will provide a comprehensive account of the EU digital crisis management during the pandemic and discuss a set of conditions by which digital collaboration between the European Commission and the member states can be improved in times of crisis.

Track Classification: Foreign Policy Working Group