*Advanced Training Course*

# Challenges and Perspectives of Science Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe

Edition 2026

*Terms of Reference*

*co-financed under the CEI-FVG Joint Work Programme 2026-2027*

*in cooperation with*

## 1. Background

The rising influence of Science & Technology (S&T) in public policy and international affairs and the quest for international collaborations in this domain have drawn increasing attention to the interdependence between science and diplomacy. For the modern sovereign state, increased international interconnections represent both a challenge and an opportunity to tackle ever more pressing common global challenges. This has accelerated the convergence of science and diplomacy, and the emergence of Science Diplomacy (SD) as a policy field of international relations where the interests of science and foreign policy intersect.

SD has become an important new area of research and practice that recognises diplomacy as an essential asset to advance international scientific cooperation in research and technology (*diplomacy for science)*, acknowledges the potential of scientific cooperation to overcome deadlocks in traditional diplomatic relations (s*cience for diplomacy)*, supports evidence-based policymaking in complex areas such as agriculture and food security, public health, biodiversity loss, climate change and energy (s*cience in diplomacy*), sees the widespread use of diplomatic skills and tools in and by science so that scientific institutions become diplomatic players in their own right (*diplomacy in science*).

In times of geopolitical turmoil, understanding the impact of science on diplomacy, and *vice versa* that of diplomacy on science, is necessary to optimise the use of SD. Indeed, SD may represent a valuable tool to balance national priorities and global goals through building partnerships around shared needs and challenges. Broad consensus on this view has been growing over the last years: SD is currently high in the agenda of several countries and international organisations, as proved *inter alia* by the recent European Commission's Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Union framework for science diplomacy (February 2026).

The Central European Initiative (CEI) acknowledged the importance of SD in its Plan of Action 2024-2026 under goal 2.10 "Boosting research and innovation through science diplomacy". CEI intends to act "as a facilitator of science diplomacy, based on the assumption that this policy tool is fundamental to help find science-based solutions to complex, transboundary challenges, as well as to connect research infrastructures and optimise their synergies [...]". Training and capacity building activities are identified among the instruments to be used to elevate the role of science in foreign policy, so that each CEI Member State can draw benefit from this emerging tool and use it to multiply its opportunities and enhance its impact in the field of international cooperation.

## 2. Focus of the Advanced training course

While the interest in Science Diplomacy (SD) has rapidly grown over the last years, both at EU and global level, its potential in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe received more limited attention.

Therefore, the Advanced training course "Challenges and Perspectives of Science Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe" aims at contributing to fill in this gap, based on the assumption that this region, which combines EU members and EU candidates, is of strategic importance for the future of Europe. By encouraging a stronger involvement of this broad portion of Europe in the debate on SD, the target countries will acquire useful competences and capacities to take full advantage from a smart use of SD.

Content-wise, this training project will introduce the basic notions of SD, and its applications to real-world examples and case studies in the current geopolitical context. In doing so, the course will examine the potential and challenges for SD in fostering international cooperation and effective actions in fields as different as sustainable development and development cooperation, cultural heritage and

agriculture, energy and research security, with a focus on the impact of disruptive technologies on international relations.

As the world order becomes ever more fragmented and multipolar, SD needs to evolve and adapt to new roles to face environmental, demographic, technological and geopolitical challenges, and to keep pace with emerging dimensions such as research security, technological sovereignty, competition over the global commons, and the increasing involvement of non-state actors, including large tech companies, in international affairs.

Based on the above, the Advanced training course will seek to equip a multidisciplinary audience with a set of instruments helpful to understand the role and potential of SD in the current geopolitical context, ultimately encouraging a more efficient use of SD across the target region.

## 3. Learning outcomes

The composite, hybrid, and articulated nature of Science Diplomacy (SD) requires roles, organisational configurations, and professional profiles that do not align with traditional scientific careers or the typical training path of diplomacy and international relations. The emerging profile of the science diplomat works to align scientific information with values and interests, to clarify which options can be adopted to achieve which objectives, and ultimately to reach consensus decisions through compromises based on solid scientific knowledge. The science diplomat mediates between science and diplomacy, crossing the boundaries between these two fields and different (but complementary) types of knowledge. Above all, for science diplomats to effectively carry out their action at the interface of science and diplomacy, it is necessary to provide training opportunities able to establish a common knowledge base for professionals, current and future, coming from different and distinct specialist contexts and educational paths.

This feature of the science diplomat, as well as the tasks it is supposed to perform, requires an original set of skills, including, among others, the ability to quickly acquire sufficient knowledge in different scientific fields, the ability to synthesize and communicate complex information, the ability to listen to counterparts and understand their expertise, goals and needs.

Accordingly, the learning outcomes of the Advanced training course “Challenges and Perspectives of Science Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe” address three crucial knowledge areas that are instrumental to provide diplomats and civil servants - but also those individuals and groups who professionally engage with diplomats, or seek to enhance their comprehension of topics related to diplomacy - with the ability to cross the boundaries between science and diplomacy. These areas are:

- the knowledge of the theory, practice and institutions of Science Diplomacy.
- The relation between scientific knowledge and policy, with a specific view to international relations.
- The application of scientific knowledge to international policymaking, including a privileged perspective on a set of major challenges affecting the current geopolitical context.

## 4. Contents and study programme

The course has four parts:

1. an introduction to Science Diplomacy (SD): the module will introduce SD as a field of policy and study, presenting a comparison of main national approaches to SD in Europe, as well as the evolution of SD in the EU and global context.

2. An overview on the knowledge and skills needed in SD: the module will focus on skills' development for training the new generation of science diplomats, as also envisaged in the report "A European Framework for Science Diplomacy – Recommendations of the EU Science Diplomacy Working Groups" (European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2025). It will also examine training needs and knowledge gaps to be addressed for fostering SD in CEI Member States. Finally, it will illustrate how research can feed science advice in international policymaking.
3. An overview on SD in the current geopolitical context: the module will include a focus on cross-border and regional approaches to SD and cover a set of policy areas which are impacted by SD and which SD can help manage. Topics discussed in the module will encompass disaster management, cultural heritage, sustainable agriculture, energy transitions, research security, space, water diplomacy.
4. A focus on disruptive technologies: the module will be dedicated to the role of SD vis-à-vis the challenges posed by disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Quantum Technologies.

Overall, the course will include 15 lectures, 3 roundtables, 3 interactive sessions, and 1 study visit to research infrastructures, for a total of 25 hours. For each module[1], an indicative title is proposed.

| **DAY 1** | |
|---|---|
| **PART** | ***MODULE*** |
| Part 1 – Fundamentals of Science Diplomacy and its evolution in the European and global context | *Fundamentals of Science Diplomacy* |
| | *Recent developments and future trajectories of Science Diplomacy in Europe: towards the implementation of the European Union framework for science diplomacy* |
| | *The European Union Science Diplomacy Alliance* |
| Part 2 – Knowledge and skills in Science Diplomacy | *Knowledge and skills for Science Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe* |
| | *Tools, opportunities for training and skills development in Horizon Europe projects and COST actions (2 lectures)* |
| | *Interactive session: What are the training priorities in Science Diplomacy for your Country?* |
| **DAY 2** | |
| **PART** | ***MODULE*** |
| Part 3 – Thematic perspectives, geographic approaches and case studies | *Demographic trends, climate change and sustainable agriculture* |
| | *Scientific Advice and international policymaking: the case of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)* |
| | *Science Diplomacy from the perspectives of higher education institutions* |
| | *Science Diplomacy and the UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable development* |
| | *Increasing the participation of women in S&T research through effective Science Diplomacy* |
| | *Interactive session: How have the views of Science Diplomacy changed in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe?* |

[1] Lectures are indicated in green; Interactive sessions are indicated in light blue; Roundtables are indicated in orange.

| DAY 3 | |
|---|---|
| **PART** | ***MODULE*** |
| Part 3 – Thematic perspectives, geographic approaches and case studies | *Science Diplomacy and the energy transition* |
| | *Space Diplomacy* |
| | *Using Science Diplomacy for effective water governance in Europe* |
| | *Science Diplomacy and Cultural Heritage* |
| | *Roundtable: Regional and cross-border approaches to Science Diplomacy*<br>➢ *UNESCO global vision and regional approaches to Science Diplomacy*<br>➢ *Science Diplomacy and sustainable development in the Mediterranean*<br>➢ *Enhancing the resilience to disasters for sustainable development through stronger science-policy interactions*<br>➢ *The North Adriatic Hydrogen Valley (NAHV) project* |
| | *Interactive session: What policy fields can benefit from Science Diplomacy actions in your country?* |
| **DAY 4** | |
| **PART** | ***MODULE*** |
| Part 4 – Disruptive technologies and their impact on international relations and foreign policy: which role for Science Diplomacy? | *Study visits to research infrastructures of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Scientific and Innovation System* |
| | *Roundtable: The Quantum Race: Science Diplomacy and the Geopolitics of Quantum Technologies* |
| | *Roundtable: Artificial Intelligence and Science Diplomacy: Governing the Next Frontier of Global Power* |

## 5. Teaching modalities and practical information

The lessons will take place for four consecutive days from 24.11.2026 to 27.11.2026.

The teaching methods will combine:

- introductory lectures for various teaching modules, including analysis of case studies.
- Interactive sessions with professionals and practitioners in the field of Science Diplomacy.
- Roundtables and open discussions.

The course will be conducted in English, exclusively in person, in different venues located in the cities of Trieste and Gorizia (transfer between the two cities will be arranged by the organisers). In addition to mobility grants (see point 6 below), the organisers will cover participants' meals (lunch and coffee breaks plus two networking dinners).

Participants will receive a certificate of attendance.

## 6. Application process and mobility grants

The course is seeking applications from the following **applicants who must be affiliated to organisations based in the Member States of the Central European Initiative (CEI)**[2]:

[2] https://www.cei.int/member-states.

- diplomats and other civil servants working in international relations who want to explore Science Diplomacy (SD) as a field of professional practice.
- Scientific officers and administrators in research and higher education institutions who have a role in developing the international portfolio of their organisations.
- Journalists, non-governmental organisations' employees, business professionals, graduate students, and anyone else who professionally engage with diplomats, or seek to enhance their comprehension of topics related to SD.

Applications must be submitted via email by the deadline set on 30 June 2026, at 5 PM CET, to the following address: sciencediplomacy@cei.int.They must include:

1. the Application Form, using the template prepared by the organisers, which can be downloaded from the CEI website at www.cei.int.
2. A CV in English (in .PDF format).
3. A motivation letter in English of max 4.000 characters including spaces (in .PDF format). Motivation letters should include a short presentation of the applicant's career path and its connection with the topics of the course.

   *Possible guiding questions: What is your experience in the domain of Science Diplomacy and your knowledge of the Science Diplomacy landscape in your country? Would your professional career benefit from building stronger capacities in the domain of Science Diplomacy? If yes, how?*

Although not mandatory, candidates may attach to the application package a reference letter (in .PDF format) signed by their employers or supervisors.

*Important: applicants are kindly requested to avoid last minute submissions, as technical issues or different time zones could prevent from meeting the deadline indicated above.*

All candidates will be notified via email by 22 July 2026. Moreover, a reserve list will be established, which will be referred to in case of withdrawal of selected candidates.

Applicants from CEI Member States, excluding the host country, are eligible for a mobility grant in the form of reimbursement of travel and accommodation costs up to €600. Admission to the course and award of mobility grants will prioritise applicants currently serving in the diplomatic service of CEI Member States. In particular, mobility grant priority will be given to applicants from non-EU CEI Member States. Moreover, among all applicants, preference will be given to junior professionals.

The course will admit a maximum of 30 participants.

## 7. Use of Personal Information and contacts

During the course, photos may be taken, and videos may be recorded solely for educational, promotional, and documentation purposes, in accordance with the CEI Privacy Policy.

Should you need additional information, do not hesitate to contact the organisers by writing an email to Mr Alessandro Lombardo (lombardo@cei.int).