Cyber Diplomacy -
Challenges and Opportunities

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I take the liberty to welcome, from the traditionalist point of view of a diplomat, the dynamic expansion of the opinions in favour of the accentuated configuration of cyber diplomacy. I understand it as an evolution that offers the dedicated practitioner of the discipline multiple opportunities. Briefly inventoried, they indicate the potential open both to the practitioner and to those with an appetite for conceptual refinement, regarding the opportunity to revitalize, reconnect and update the diplomacy. The optimistic perspective may offer false impressions but it also includes a more persistent invitation to consider the realities - or, more pragmatically, a careful dissection of the challenges.

Diplomats should recognize the significance and complexity of the new field of sensitive interactions, a space of cooperation or competition, of state and non-state international relations actors. The cyber dimension appears to be the overwhelming ferment of this century. In fact, the cyber dimension, in all its complexity, confirms one of the geopolitical truths that carries uncomfortable conceptual virtues and disagreeable theorizations at least for certain doctrinal orientations (almost resonating in the significance of the world configuration with what happened in the second half of the last century by triggering the confrontation in the nuclear weapons field). Currently, the international community is overwhelmed by the multiple effects of entering a multicentric world, with the cyber environment being one of the most blatant confirmations of the perspectival multipolarity.

Nurtured by analogue situations from other fields, I dare to reflect upon a few aspects:

Once invited to interpose in an environment of evolving technical complexity, highlighted by a constantly developing set of technical specificities, diplomacy risks a plausible erosion of its virtues. Inevitably, the instant temptation, naturally generated by the legitimate respect for the expansion of technological sophistication, will cast a focus on the technical potential of action and reaction, probably with the undeclared hope that from the "game" and the balance of capabilities will also implicitly result a natural ordering of relationships in the cyber environment. Being aware of such "temptations", the ideal formula would probably be a combination of expertise and resources placing specialists on the same line with diplomats. Only then the balance between technology and politics stands a chance. However, the circumstances are not simple. On the contrary.

The connection with diplomacy, gradually formed almost a decade ago, was inspired by multiple evolutions and by the gradual recognition of the ways to manage them, beyond the purely technical aspects. Asymmetries in the real or virtual world have become more and more acute; inequalities felt as unacceptable together with the temptations to expand the political competition by calling for a new arsenal of media offered by the cyber environment, have incited the multitude of protagonists to act. Invited to contribute to managing the impact of these developments on international society, diplomacy cannot afford to ignore the specificity of current circumstances. A brief overview of the trends, or even of the changing and reconfigured

features of the international context can only highlight our sobriety and lucidity: the strong comeback of competition and tensions between powerful actors in the field of international relations; the temptation to resort to polarizations and division; the inclination to resort to force and punitive actions at the expense of resolving disputes through political negotiations.

The post-war experience and that of the Cold War era affirmed the validity of multilateralism, the valences of building structures, norms and rules for international interactions and regulation, the need to de-ideologize relations between states. The current international society is facing divergent options compared to the respective experiences. Conversely, as two legal experts remarked, "the foreign policy of the states seems to have been inclined rather to security concerns and not to cordial relations through trade and investment ..." In these circumstances, judgments predominantly nuanced by certain geopolitical considerations, as well as the turmoil induced by the more than occasional dismantling of the global order backed by the fabric of international conventions can determine a more than circumspect look at diplomacy - probably rather a rushed pessimistic assessment of the chances to effectively manage today's hot topics.

An already apparent trend that is further complicating the diplomatic efforts regarding the cyber space, is the polarization in opposing camps – like that consumed mainly during the sad memory of the Cold War. Multiple government and expert meetings in recent years have made this trend visible.

As political observers and experts have repeatedly noticed, "if national deterrence policies can apparently offer some short-term solutions, their long-term effect is questionable. National cyber-deterrence policies involve the risk of a current cyber-arming race and a cycle of escalation between potential cyber opponents. Diplomacy may offer less results in the short term, but it is more promising in the long run." Such an evolution is likely in the light of the experience gained by the diplomatic action regarding the creation of the international regime on weapons of mass destruction and is illustrated directly by the virtues of diplomacy in two respects: confidence building measures (CBMs) and the agreement of international norms.

Equally, the existing deficit in one of the essential components of the landscape of interstate relations - mutual trust - is become clearer! As if contaminated by the situation of supplying rare earths in international trade, but metaphorically on a similar scale of values, cultivating and maintaining trust between states crosses an episode of shortage and even of crisis. During the Cold War, the set of CBMs and the rules agreed within the OSCE allowed the relatively calm navigation of a period of unstable turbulence. Similarly, the dynamics of technology development strongly stimulates the acceleration and progress of the diplomatic negotiation process meant to set up a framework of stability in the cyber ecosystem. The agreement of norms and CBMs can generate trust and cordiality among the international main actors - as demonstrated by the United Nations framework entitled "Advancing responsible State behavior in cyberspace in the context of international security".

It is worth noting that the Director of the EU Institute for Security Studies announced in November 2019 a "Reflection Group on the future of EU cyber diplomacy", a group that will develop and present, in July 2020, a plan to configure the respective diplomacy.

Such an approach focused on updating the relevance of diplomatic action and, implicitly, generating norms and values appears to coagulate in an increasingly evident process within the European Union. The need to strengthen cyber security is recognized as "a new fundamental infrastructure": as a collective actor, the EU can reaffirm its continued role in establishing "rules of thumb" in the field of cyber security, as a legitimate effort to promote and defend European values and principles. Given that Europe itself is exposed to the increased geopolitical competition and to the clash of different perspectives on Internet governance, multiple issues call for the cooperation of EU and Member States in order to position themselves firmly within the global cyber space. The respective answers, the early phase policies regarding the crucial aspects of the benefits and vulnerabilities of the digital age (the implementation of 5G infrastructure, the protection of personal data, the response to significant attacks on the European critical infrastructure), prove the direct application of aligning the development of cyber capabilities progress with the general principles of EU foreign and security policy.

More frequently subject to implicit or explicit questioning processes, is repeatedly called to demonstrate its ability to adapt to the new demands and expectations of national and international communities. Opening the cyber space is without doubt a chance and an opportunity to engage the potential of diplomacy, to demonstrate the relevance of its practices and methods in responding to this new space of human interaction, to the need for consensus, the use of the ability to conclude coalitions, as well as to negotiate and agree norms of interstate interaction.

Once again, the golden rule of classical dance of elegant attire is confirmed - as in tango, in order to reach the potential virtue of choreography, in diplomacy we need to act as partners! Let us wish that, within the choreography of cyber diplomacy, the dynamics and spirit of the partnership shall prevail.

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The Ambassador has spent most of his diplomatic career, after joining MOFA in 1978, working on Asian affairs. He has been the Head of the Romanian Embassy in PRChina (2002-2011) and, respectively, in RoK (2000-2002). In 2011, he was selected as the Head of the Asia-Pacific Department in the newly established European External Action Service in Bruxelles and, in 2014, was appointed as Head of the EU Delegation in Japan. Back in Bucharest, he was appointed, from September 2018 to October 2019, DG level, Ambassador-at-large for Asian Regional Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.