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## **TEN QUALITIES/CHALLENGES OF A DIPLOMAT IN BRUSSELS**

Being a diplomat in Brussels means taking a risk. It means accepting complexity (from Latin *cum plectere*, to tangle, intertwine) of giving collective solutions to issues defining international relations in our time. Here we disentangle this complexity by discussing the ten challenges facing a diplomat in Brussels and the qualities to successfully address them.

**1. Complex environment**—Exit the logic of a national diplomat. Embrace a new logic, and be ready to deal with a complex environment. European External Action Service (EEAS) has no agenda of its own. It is a Service for member states and other EU institutions: parliament, commission and council. Each one of these has overlapping agendas and competences in foreign policy. Armed with patience, a diplomat in Brussels disentangles this complexity, connects agencies and people, work within the scope of common denominators and translates words into action. This may be time-consuming, frustrating and at times boring. Impatience is not prized. Self-control and persistence are.

**2. Connectivity**—Alone you can reach nowhere. Networking is all you have. Nobody in Brussels can decide anything unilaterally. So, put your ego aside. You can only move things forward by building united fronts. Investing time and energy in building alliances at the margins of the multilateral table is key to get to yes. Master with flawless knowledge of your file (treaties and their provisions for decision-making, consensus, exceptions to consensus, qualified majority and minority blocks) and work behind the scenes to build alliances. These are much-needed rehearsals for a successful performance. Improvisation would not work.

**3. Compromise**—Master the art of agreeing on common denominators. Diplomats represent, report and defend national positions. A European diplomat instead removes walls between national positions, identifies common denominators and transform it into multilateral action. Remember: member states have always the last word. A diplomat in Brussels oversteps the *raison d'Etat* and yet is limited by it. So, compromise first with yourself. Be ready to achieve less than what you had wished. As Konrad Adenauer puts it: “you have to take people as they are, because there are no others”. An imperfect agreement is better than no agreement.

**4. Consensus**—Getting to yes is the goal of a European diplomat. Foreign policy in the EU means to achieve consensus. The entire work of a diplomat a Brussels is about building consensus in areas and on issues where consensus does not exist. A European diplomat is entitled to express views strictly on matters where there is consensus. So, master persuasion. A good negotiator always tries to see things the way the other side does. The more you succeed in building consensus the larger space of manoeuvre you may have. Practice with periodic failures and successes. Don't forget to take note of them.

**5. Competence**— in working transversally across specific themes and institutions. Master global issues shaping international relations in our time (e.i. green transition, climate, energy, digital as well as security and defence). Know the position of all stakeholders. There are 27 different views. Plus, those of relevant players: United States, Russia, Turkey, China etc... Each one is relevant by definition. Only by knowing them all, you can negotiate well and spot the common denominator and the right position to take. Know which EU institution to mobilise to translate common interests into common action.

**6. Crisis-management**— Today’s world presents complex challenges that no member state can address unilaterally. The conflict in Ukraine required a 360-degree response ranging from military support, humanitarian assistance, sanctions & accession process. Use your knowledge of EU crisis-management tools & member states positions’ to piece together solutions. Swiftly connect relevant EU agencies dealing with the different aspects of a problem, and shape timely responses to complex challenges.

**7. Clarity**—when you think, write and speak. With 27 at the multilateral table, you have no time to waste. Keeping up their attention is a must. If people start checking their phones as you speak is no good sign... Prepare your points clear of the outcome you want to achieve. Write them down. Choose the right words: short and incisive. Reading classics helps your imagination. Share it with colleagues before the meeting. Your preparation in clear written points helps you thinking, strengthen connections and helps achieving consensus. Rehearse before a public speech. Never read from a paper. Be assertive, engaging and enjoy it while you are speaking. There is only one way to say a certain thing in the right way. A good diplomat always needs to find that way.

**8. Concise reporting**—If you cannot write well diplomacy is not a job for you. Reporting others positions’ (especially when they are 27) concisely helps identify space for consensus. Concise reporting follows a clear logic: positions, conclusions and most importantly forecasts. Unclear reporting raises questions and disagreement, instead. Churchill’s memo on “Brevity” is your *vade mecum*.

**9. Care**—Carefully manage information-sharing. Knowledge is power. A diplomat in Brussels is exposed to a lot of sensitive information. Know what to share and what not. To develop good sensors, know what is most sensitive to each of the 27 states. Transparency and confidentiality are both key to build trust. Transparency helps your connections and credibility. Protecting sensitive data too. It wins you trust and continued access to information. Balancing transparency and confidentiality will gain you trust and access to more knowledge.

**10. Cultural awareness**—There is no hierarchy among cultures and identities. Be careful with words, jokes and metaphors you choose. In a multi-cultural context is easy to make mistakes. What is innocuous to you may be offensive for others. Be passionate about Europe, knowing that nationalism brings war, internationalism peace. Think of Europe as a day-to-day practice of do things together beyond each one identities. Within this common dimension, what we do together is more important than who we are.

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