

THE IMPORTANCE OF HIGH-QUALITY TRAINING FOR DIPLOMATIC STAFF AS A GUARANTEE FOR A SUCCESSFUL FOREIGN POLICY

Few would challenge the idea that the work of a diplomat has changed over time. Nobility gathering abroad in search of a mission between hunting and dancing the waltz at a ball has given way to information management and matching interests in the digital age, where everything is on-line. At the Congress of Vienna the French foreign minister Charles Maurice de Talleyrand remarked that “a diplomat does not get angry – but he takes notes”; today, the demands of the internet, Facebook and twitter seem to have taken over the central role. Yet, is the modern diplomat somebody who no longer takes notes but is merely a pusher of the twitter-button?

Certainly, 21st-century diplomacy is not only concerned with lengthy in-depth reporting (analysis unquestionably still has its place) but also about fast connections between people and the capability of negotiating and acting swiftly between partners in the bilateral and multilateral fields.

The key factor for having the right staff at the right place at the right time is to create additional skills on top of the qualifications of a carefully selected team, one that is motivated to adapt quickly to a changing environment and to implement policies efficiently.

Language skills, negotiating training, the art of public and business diplomacy, protocol and many other applied techniques of modern diplomacy running parallel to a profound knowledge of the history of international relations, international law and the multilateral system have to be regularly trained and updated with the latest downloads.

The top graduate schools in the field of international relations such as the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna have subscribed to this “diplomacy 3.0” of the social media era, in which, in order to be up to date, the professional diplomat has to adapt to the demands of cyber-diplomacy while attending dancing lessons for salsa (as well as the waltz), and all this via the app on their smartphone.

However, we should never forget where we come from and what we stand for. It is no accident that sometimes the virtual training on the internet and the theory of international relations give only a picture of a certain setting at a certain point of time and is no match for reality. In a real situation, often messy and difficult, after a moment of paralysis, training has to kick in, mechanised basics of both practical and academic skills have to ensure swift and prompt action. This can only be achieved when with highly qualified people receive the best available training. The point of modern diplomacy is not about how many troops you could muster to back up your argument, but can you swim fast enough to be a match for the competitors in your field? Does a person know what to do and, perhaps more importantly, when to do it? Could they, for example, anticipate developments and alert their headquarters in time for a UN Security Council session?

The qualification of its diplomatic staff is a crucial factor for the efficient shaping of the foreign policy of a country. Governments are responsible for finding the best people for this task and for making sure they have every opportunity to refresh their skills and knowledge through regular training. Only then are they truly equipped to take on the challenges that lie ahead.