**The Importance of Digital Diplomacy**

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Hello everybody!

My name is Özgün ERLER BAYIR, I am a professor at Istanbul University, and I am the coordinator of the **Digital Diplomacy: Building the Common Future with Technology (DD-Tech)** project. This is an Erasmus+ project within the programme Key Action 2 (Cooperation partnerships in higher education). This project highlights the importance of digital diplomacy and for this purpose, we have built a module with colleagues from six higher education institutions located in five countries.

Digital diplomacy is the use of new information communication technologies, the internet and social media to help achieve diplomatic goals, strengthen diplomatic relations and solve foreign policy issues.

New trends in digitalization and digital communication technologies have revolutionized the nature of diplomacy by transforming the communication medium in which traditional diplomacy was conducted. In today’s world, it is a necessity for governments to adapt their understanding of diplomacy to ‘the digital’. Digital diplomacy should not only be considered as the digitalisation of diplomatic tools, but it should be also understood as the change of a different perspective on diplomacy concerning its focal points namely the digitalisation of the political sphere and cybersecurity. This fundamental change in practices, dimensions, and procedures of diplomacy should not be neglected by the states, particularly by those that aim to empower their soft power instruments and embrace a proactive diplomatic perspective.

The empirical studies in the field illustrate the fact that even though several states, one way or another, have realized the importance and the potential of digital diplomacy, just a limited number of states have been able to undergo the necessary digital transformation. Therefore, globally speaking, diplomacy remains conventional and state-centric. However, some farsighted states have been trying to make necessary changes. As the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated several times, states, needing digital diplomacy tend to change to being obliged to consider digital diplomacy.

How will states respond to all these technological changes? Which strategies should be developed based on new technologies for more effective diplomacy? How the social and political dynamics at different levels – local/national/regional/international – have been affected by digitalization? How can we address the (mis)use of digital tools and social media in diplomatic networking? These questions cry out for answers in order to generate a global common view via technological response and solutions. In this regard, students as future leaders/policymakers/stakeholders who will be affected by global problems, inevitably, need to learn digital diplomacy tools to enhance their digital and communication skills with an innovative approach.

In teaching digital diplomacy, we aim to provide students with an opportunity to develop their abilities, to identify and analyze key problems and the risks of digitalization, cyberspace, artificial intelligence, and internet governance, as well as how diplomatic mindsets and techniques can be applied to managing them.

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