Toledo Declaration

on

A New European Initiative for Technology Diplomacy and Artificial Intelligence in Conflict Prevention and Mediation

Technology innovation, in particular in the area of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital transformation, is having a widely acknowledged impact on global diplomacy and in shaping a new global order. The workshop held in Toledo in June 18th-19th 2021, has focused on the intersection between digital governance and AI, and the practice of mediation and conflict resolution, to raise awareness among diplomats, experts, academics and mediators about the importance of technological diplomacy, and AI's influence on mediation practices and initiatives. This encompasses on the one hand, how it can help peacemaking and conflict resolution, and on the other, the stakes it represents in international relations and the challenges and risks it poses to humanity in a future-oriented perspective. The workshop is a starting point, which sets out to explore potential synergies and avenues of cooperation between mediation actors and the diplomatic and technological communities.

Implications of the unequal access to information and communication technologies and the resulting dependency, pose extremely serious challenges since they question the basic tenets of national sovereignty and democratic principles. The recent experience of COVID and extended global lockdowns have highlighted the role of technology in our work as well as the challenges that the new digital tools pose at many different levels. AI presents risks to democracy, cybersecurity, cyber-diplomacy, human rights and human control of technology, considering the fabrication of fake news or AI usage in autonomous lethal weapons. Still, there is no way we can dismiss it or avoid its use; we can only learn to cope with its flaws and promote its facilitating potential when beneficial for most if not for all. As a generic toolset and capability, just like other technologies, (e.g., traditionally, nuclear technologies, sky and submarine communication infrastructures, or more recently, vaccine property rights and cyber-attack ceasefires), AI is part of a fierce worldwide competition. AI develops across a multi-dimensional battlefield in which the diverse participating players have very unequal means when it comes to promoting its dissemination or protecting themselves against its most undesirable deployments. In sum, AI has become a political stake.

In the diplomatic sphere, AI is already changing the face of conflict dynamics. With regards to security and defence — including the management of insurgencies and organized non-state actors— AI technology can alter the costs of conflict, facilitate the fabrication and dissemination of false information, accelerate the operational tempo and

raise the risk of escalation, increase the perceived risks of surprise attacks, enhance access to intelligence among warring parties, and shift public opinion about involvement in (armed) conflicts. It also brings new stakeholders into the crisis management process. AI and machine learning are dependent on the quantity and quality of the data they work with. There is an imperative for those specialised in the recording and digitisation of cultural heritage, whose role in conflict mediation has been recognised by the European Council (Art.4 of conclusion 9837/21 of the 21st of June 2021), to train, equip and create local economies based on both high resolution and high volume data recording. With the recent change in the EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in conflicts and crises, new opportunities are emerging. Heritage preservation, recording and sharing create new potential for the successful application of diverse forms of technology both in data recording and data analysis.

As an obvious competence-supportive tool valid for a broad array of diplomatic activities, AI can be successfully used by mediators. It can in particular: (i) enhance knowledge management and background evidence (e.g. pattern detection in the global data on conflicts, ceasefires and peace agreements); (ii) improve practitioner understanding of specific features in conflicts and the "actorness" of the context under investigation (e.g. through social media data sentiment analysis based on natural language processing and other text mining techniques); and (iii) broaden the inclusivity of the peace process by gauging the views and opinions of the wider population (e.g. through computerised social simulation and policy modelling approaches).

Thus, AI changes the framework conditions of how data and information are produced and circulated, which has major implications for conflict dynamics. Peace practitioners need to take a proactive rather than a reactive stance on AI and develop a comprehensive and strategic understanding of what role AI can play in peace building. We thus need to explore ethical, responsible and transparent AI applications and identify their possible downsides and threats to society.

From a European perspective, international cooperation, structured by means of organizations and institutions where governments, civil society, private companies, and academic institutions participate, is firmly engaged in contributing to general welfare and helping avoid technology becoming an instrument for dominance and control. Mitigating and managing irresponsible use of AI in situations where people face or are at risk of violence is of paramount importance. International cooperation should also focus on strengthening innovative multisectoral coalitions to ensure that data, AI, etc, are used more deliberately as a means to build trust, resolve conflicts and support mediated approaches to ending armed conflict.

Precisely because technologies such as AI already have a considerable effect on our lives, new and stronger forms of cooperation and diplomatic relations are needed, enabling us to integrate the challenges of a global governance with those from technology, society, and economy. This is exactly what multi-layered technology diplomacy represents, as a support tool for formal Diplomatic actors, so as to contribute to the debate about difficult policy challenges and incorporate results of dialogues, often referred to as "back channel" diplomacy, into their strategies.

The participants of the *Toledo Workshop on Artificial Intelligence, Technological Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution*, have summarized in ten guidelines, the constituents of a new European initiative for "Technology diplomacy and Artificial Intelligence for conflict prevention and mediation":

1. The initiative should focus on **building trust** among all stakeholders as the core value, mitigating the effects of current breakdown of confidence and the abuse of digital technologies for spurious or unethical aims.

2. The initiative would build **multidisciplinary communities of practice with real commitment** to effectively contributing to resolving existing problems and anticipating future risks and emerging challenges.

3. The initiative should further the role of **cultural heritage recording and documentation** as a key element to inform the development of machine learning applications in the field of conflict prevention and mediation.

4. The initiative would be based on the concept of **data and knowledge spaces as new global goods**, including the free-flow of public, private and personal data (always respecting fundamental rights and freedoms of natural persons), as well as sharing use cases through building catalogues of technologies, qualified algorithms, opacity mitigation and consent channels, ex-ante auditing and privacy-by-design mechanisms for accountability of results and governance schemes. There is a need for a neutral and trusted space providing all parties in the negotiation and peace-building process with verified and transparent digital tools, data, models, reference cases and analyses.

5. AI may be used at as many **appropriate stages in conflict resolution as it is useful**, such as to systematically analyse information flows and contexts of conflicts, build and preserve reputation, ensure the inclusion of underrepresented voices, and increase public communication, always promoting multidisciplinary team working. It is suggested to include the characteristic multistakeholder model of Internet governance. The same that has served to develop the work around the use of technology at a global level

6. **The values from The Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,** as well as the European principles for building a Digital Democracy with a Purpose at the international level, will be the building blocks of the initiative with cyberpeace, **digital sovereignty and strategic autonomy provisions** as a foundation, and considering the potential negative impact of AI *by design* as well as *in concrete usage* in the lifecycle of the AI use for conflict mediation, rather than considering it as an afterthought.

7. **Capabilities, social knowledge, education for and governance of technological diplomacy** and AI in particular appears as the most demanding framing conditions when discussing open issues regarding the governance of the digital landscape at a global level. The new initiative should thus focus on **building concrete actions, making sure they can deliver results and promote innovative governance mechanisms** for peer-learning exchanges and replicability/scalability.

8. The initiative will contribute to the debate on promoting the set of **harmonised standards and convergence of regulatory approaches and practices in mediation and conflict resolution**, including guidelines (e.g. soft law, recommendations) for the deployment and use of digital technologies in vulnerable settings (e.g. as a measure to respond to the weaponization of information). The initiative could also foster the development of safe and secure AI.

9. **Experimenting with particular high-potential technologies** appear to be required and should be based on the respect of human security, dignity, and equity, and on multicultural cooperation in the definition and establishment of e.g. digital twins, natural language processing, sandboxes, sentiment analysis, anomaly detection, contextual/personalized display of complex information, specific platforms and assistive services for mediation, and problem-solving strategies, among others.

10. **AI** can contribute new tools for mediation and conflict resolution but also belongs to a **new hybrid environment** — physical (with its own particular craft) and virtual (with above-mentioned technological support), that is already part of the context. Investigating the implications of current living "in-between" the physical and online spheres is needed to better understand this new hybrid context and deploy appropriate solutions.

11. It is recommended to establish an interdisciplinary and multistakeholder **Working Group** to implement the initiative, drawing on experience from policy, research and practice, and defining both an experimental "hands-on" approach using state of the art technologies and a broader dialogue on a framework for action at theoretical and methodological level, with case discussions and dissemination at high-level in scientific and policy events and fora.

Even if **challenges remain** in the usability and deployment of technologies, non-state / internal conflicts, preservation of respect, human dignity, discretion, privacy, existence of digital divides, cybersecurity risks, biases, false predictions and fake news fabrication, along with hate speech, the weaponization of information and, as a result, the erosion of trust, the time is ripe for Europe to build a technological governance framework and a European conflict resolution initiative. This initiative should embrace universal and European values and priorities, and promote the creation of a neutral and trusted space providing all parties in the negotiation and peace-building process with verified and transparent digital tools, data, models, reference cases and analyses.

ENDORSEMENTS

This declaration is endorsed on a personal capacity by the participants in the Toledo Workshop on Artificial Intelligence, Technological Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution as per the following list:

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