The Rome Declaration on Media Ecology and Technology Diplomacy

Outcome of the Special Event held on November 17th 2022, alongside the International Forum on Digital and Democracy (IFDaD2022)

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"You can't build a society purely on interests. You need a sense of belonging"

- Valery Giscard d'Estaing

On November 17th, 2022, Re-Imagine Europa, Inspiring Futures, and the Jean Monnet Chair on Technology Diplomacy of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid convened a Special Event on Media Ecology and Technology Diplomacy as part of the work of the Re-Imagine Democracy in a Digital Society Task Force. Hosted by the Institute of Future and Innovation Studies at the John Cabot University in Rome, alongside the 2nd Edition of the International Forum on Digital and Democracy (IFDaD2022), the special event brought together selected experts from diverse disciplines and institutions to discuss the intertwined and interdependent paths of these two emerging concepts in the current fast-changing geopolitical landscape and to inspire much-needed solutions to the pressures that democratic values face globally.

Technology diplomacy is, for the purpose of this discussion, defined as a comprehensive approach that encompasses a wide range of activities and considerations related to technology. The concept goes beyond just utilising digital tools to enhance diplomatic operations and promote peace or conflict resolution. It considers emerging technologies' complex and ever-evolving landscape as the locus of new and necessary global diplomatic relations. These diplomatic relations are essential to address, regulate and negotiate a multitude of socio-technical dimensions associated with these emerging technologies in order to align the interests of various stakeholders and address the concerns of multi-stakeholder groups.

Technology diplomacy represents a new multi-dimensional concept in diplomatic relations and praxis that demands a comprehensive understanding of the impact and implications of technological systems such as AI and synthetic media on international relations, as well as other future and emerging technologies.

Based on these considerations, as a first step towards what we hope will become a globally shared endeavour in Technology Diplomacy, we propose the creation of a European Technology Diplomacy Agency, with the goal of fostering technology-oriented international relations, negotiations and specific diplomacy expertise. The new European Technology Diplomacy Agency should be guided by shared values and rooted in the Declaration of Digital Principles and Rights signed by European representatives on December 15th, 2022. The European Technology Diplomacy Agency, while encompassing all aspects and fields of technology diplomacy, should prioritise addressing the challenges posed by misinformation and disinformation in contemporary and emerging media to fact-based information and democracy. This includes focusing on digital technologies that support an independent, trustworthy and accountable media ecosystem, as well as the technological infrastructures that support these democratic systems, and promote the type of skills needed for a variety of actors to engage more effectively in the art of technology diplomacy. Ensuring a reliable and trusted information media ecology is essential for the preservation and advancement of democracy, which depends on a shared understanding of its principles and an independent media system. The event attendees discussed how technology can promote and sustain democratic values in a multipolar and complex global media sphere characterised by adversarial goals and authoritarian claims. In a tense multipolar international environment where unusual mediations occur even among groups with opposing values, new skills for managing multi-stakeholder technological media configurations are necessary to empower citizens and advance the resilience, sovereignty, and solidity of the democratic public debate.

In conclusion, participants in the Rome Special Event on Media Ecology and Technology Diplomacy came to the following consensus to stimulate further discussion and spark practical solutions to re-imagine a future media and digital ecosystem developed in accordance with the values and principles embedded in the European Union's vision and approach to a human-centric digital transformation:

1. We live in a time of uncertainty and growing mistrust, making the use of technology in support of social cohesion, democratic values and peace increasingly necessary. The interdependencies between the policies and regulatory conditions under which the Media and Digital ecosystem operate and how technologies are adopted in society and impact citizens are the fundaments of technology diplomacy.

2. As technology *per se* is not good or bad regarding the values that democracies want to promote, an extra work of discriminating technology usages which might be detrimental to its principles and privileging on the contrary human-centric and auditable usages, leaving as much room as possible to social innovation, is constantly needed. It is time to re-design the data infrastructures of our governance systems, leveraging on open data solutions to support alternative networks of power against data asymmetries, empowering people with access to and control of the use of their own data.

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3. Promoting democracy and peace in the complex and multipolar world we live in, with a number of countries openly encouraging adverse ideas, is both an activity of being assertive on key values to nurture and preserve while devising, when necessary, tactical conversations with unfriendly or intermediating parties in order to advance the solution or at least the mitigation of acute problems.

4. Media ecology, in this context, requires attention to be paid to the tendency of deviating from human-centric and democratic objectives in favour of the propagation of hatred, misinforming content and fake or even alternate reality fabrications, which are, in all cases, ingredients likely to undermine peaceful values and social cohesion, and in particular the respect of fundamental and human rights.

5. Successful experience in legacy media to keep a plurality of sources of information while providing objective and trusted media is recalled. Public lies and intentional misinforming practices have always been a dark side of open democratic debates, but the global-scale social media capacity to diffuse unregulated content is pushing this human twist to a new and threatening level of impact, requiring more effort, attention, means and expertise to cope and mitigate the risk associated with it.

6. Artificial intelligence is already used in nearly all domains of activity in our society and is, noticeably or not, part of our lives; it often reproduces biases introduced by its human instigators and is even capable of generating deep fakes and increasingly confusing outcomes resulting from data analysis. As it unfolds, this evolution asks for stronger collective discerning and assessing skills and, with the support of specialised bodies, a more in-depth ethical review and systematic value-checking assessment.

7. Big Data and Artificial Intelligence rely on algorithms that have to be scrutinised through the filter of democratic and peace-seeking values for transparent and traceable practices. However, as AI has integrated processes such as deep learning and adversarial competition among different systems, the instrumental difficulty in making these algorithmic schemes transparent and traceable requires the development of new forms of expertise based upon the human-centric assessment of the entire workflow and the overall objective of maintaining a value-driven balance in the handling of these methods, so difficult to forbid, in particular in the private sector and non-democratic countries.

8. There is a solutionist fantasy that technology can easily solve the biggest problems of humanity and create open democracies in and by itself. Social media have embodied that hope, especially in countries where the local population is trying to get more freedom. A short life span of how this can open the public space for free expression has already demonstrated how it could produce just the opposite, with socially exacerbated cleavage, exclusion and supremacism. In fact, the democratic effort cannot be by-passed, even by supposedly instant, transparent and decentralised voting capacities that technologies like blockchain, for instance, can help operationalise, as the need for open deliberative space-time, freedom of speech, respect for minorities, separation of powers, to make it short, is not contained in these fast-track proposals.

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9. Good governance practices conceived to maximise efficiency, transparency and auditability are key tools to tackle hate speech and fake news. Education is the vital *humus* to make them effective and sustainable to establish and maintain governance mechanisms at the necessary level of value-driven processes ensuring the practical implementation and trustworthiness that democracy requires.

10. We need to build bridges between the different stakeholders, thus fostering the collective capacity, including multilateral negotiating skills, enabling us to address the problems and societal challenges of our complex world today and in the future. Civil servants and policymakers ought to be trained on what can be achieved through technology to establish a virtuous circle of practices useful for the public good. Engineers and tech developers are usually unaware of what a public space for discussion should look like; generally, they are not prepared to cope with the implications of these technologies in the public sphere and the international context, to which media ecology is particularly paying attention.

This Declaration on Media Ecology and Technology Diplomacy has been prepared and signed by the following participants in the Special Event of the Re-Imagine Democracy in a Digital Society Task Force, convened by Re-Imagine Europa, Inspiring Futures and the Jean Monnet Chair on Technology Diplomacy of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid and hosted by the Institute of Future and Innovation Studies at the John Cabot University on November 17th, 2022 in Rome:

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