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THE EUROPEAN UNION'S EXTERNAL ACTION: THIRD STATE PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS - INTRODUCTION

Eva Kassoti and Ramses A. Wessel*

Although the EU's diplomatic activity can be traced back to the early days of the European integration project, the discussion on the EU as a 'diplomatic actor' only begun in earnest post-Lisbon with the setting up of the European External Action Service headed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP). At the same time, the coming of age of the Union as a global actor and the expansion of its activities in a wide range of fields of international governance have created a demand for EU diplomacy (such as representation and negotiation) and exposed the Union's diplomatic machine to exacting demands about what it must realize. Recent challenges such as the Russian war on Ukraine, energy dependency, the instrumentalization of migrants, the retreat of democratic freedoms, foreign intervention campaigns, and cyber-space attacks have confirmed the need for the Union to speak with one voice at the international stage in order to defend and promote its fundamental interests.

In this light, 'diplomacy' is an important, yet still under-researched, dimension of the ever-burgeoning debate on the EU's international actorness. How are we to assess the EU's efforts as an emerging diplomatic actor? While a few studies have been published recently on the topic,¹ an outside perspective on the Union's emerging system of diplomacy is still an important gap in the relevant literature. We are acutely aware of the fact that diplomacy does not exist in a vacuum. Diplomatic action takes place in a broader context of structures, rules, institutions and (importantly) distinct cultures and perceptions. In other words, identity is predicated vis-à-vis *another* identity. The EU's actorness only acquires its fullest meaning when compared to 'others' that do not share the same identity.² In this sense, weighing up the scope and nature of the EU as a diplomatic actor necessitates taking into account the perspective of the Union's diplomatic counterparts.

This set of short policy papers aims to draw lessons from the perspectives of third

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¹ See for example J. Koops, G. Makaj (eds.), *The European Union as a Diplomatic Actor*, (Palgrave: Macmillan 2015). G. Butler, *The European Union and Diplomatic Law: An Emerging Actor in Twenty-First century Diplomacy*, in P. Behrens (ed.), *Diplomatic Law in a New Millenium*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 319-340.

² See also the contribution by Natalia Chaban in this edited issue.

states on the performance of the Union in its external activities and diplomatic affairs. The policy papers have been written in the context of Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Network on *The European Union in International Diplomatic Relations*³ and discussions with the experts took place at a conference on 20 October 2023 at the T.M.C. Asser Institute in The Hague, co-organised with the Department of European and Economic Law of the University of Groningen. The policy papers have three main parts: They contain: a. a brief description of the third country's diplomatic relations with the EU. b. The country's /region's perspective on the EU and the reasons underpinning this; and c. Concrete recommendations for EU policy-makers on how to further develop the Union's engagement with that third State/region.

We trust that these papers provide a framework for better understanding and evaluating the wide range of the Union's diplomatic interaction with third states and regions and that they will pave the way for more sustained engagement with the topic.

3 See EUDIPL0 - PROJECT DESCRIPTION.