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**Structural Diplomacy, Contextual Difference, and the Process of Learning.**

*(Draft – Work in progress: comments are welcome)*

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## **Introduction**

Structural diplomacy refers to the process of dialogue and negotiation by which actors in the international system seek to influence or shape sustainable external political, legal, economic, social and security structures in a given geographic space. The need to restructure became particularly pertinent for those regions and countries where long-standing structures disappeared, such as the countries that until the late 1980s were organized on the basis of the communist ideology, or the countries and regions for instance in the Mediterranean or Africa that were ‘disciplined’ through their belonging to either the ‘Western’ or ‘Eastern’ camp during the East-West conflict. Within this changing context, the capacity to ‘structure’ other countries, regions and the global environment and to influence long-term structural changes became and remains a core element in the international diplomacy (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008: 14-15).

However, contexts and endogenous factors and realities constitute major differences between societies, countries or regions. Yet, this is not a recurrent theme in the analyses nor in the literature on international diplomacy, and even more in general in the international relations and foreign policy literature. Or, to put it even stronger, “theory and practice aimed to contain, domesticate, or destroy difference – to establish an ‘empire of uniformity’” (Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004: 3). International relations and diplomacy studies are indeed dominated by Westphalian paradigms as constitutive for contemporary international relations. This tendency has been facilitated by the lack of development of an international relations perspective that concentrates on ‘difference’ and confronts mainstream IR concepts with socio-cultural and contingent diversity.

We argue that the structural diplomacy framework takes these endogenous factors and realities based on contextual and conceptual differences into account. In this paper the authors elaborate first upon structural diplomacy and analyse the main building blocks of this framework. In the second place, we analyse the diplomatic systems of the European Union and its target countries and classify them as two separate diplomatic subsystems that are both guided by specific belief systems. Third we argue that structural diplomacy is a two-way process in which interaction and negotiation between the two diplomatic subsystems can lead to learning and a mutual understanding of each others’ contexts and belief systems. Finally the paper ends with drafting a research agenda to investigate the EU’s structural diplomacy towards these two main regions in world politics and in EU diplomacy, the Balkans and the African Great Lakes region.

## 1. Structural Diplomacy<sup>1</sup>

Structural diplomacy refers to *the process of dialogue and negotiation by which actors in a system seek to influence or shape sustainable structures in the various relevant sectors (political, legal, social, economic, security and other) and on the various relevant levels (individual, societal, state, regional, global)*. It is an instrument of a wider structural foreign policy, which is directed towards the same goals, but refers to the policy at large, including the use of a wide array of other instruments (such as economic, financial and technical support measures, institution building, rule of law missions, etc.).

**Figure 1:**

STRUCTURES		SECTORS				
		Political	Legal	Socio-economic	Security	[other]
L E V E L S	Individual					
	Individual-state					
	Individual-society					
	Society					
	State					
	Society-state					
	Regional					
	Inter-state					
	Inter-societal					
	Inter-regional					
	Global					

### *Structural*

In the above-mentioned definition of structural diplomacy, the qualification *structural* refers to three key aspects: the objective to influence or shape structures, the objective to have effects that are structural or sustainable, and the enduring character of the objectives and diplomatic efforts.

First, ‘structural’ refers to the objective to influence or shape *structures*. These structures consist of organizing principles, rules of the game and institutions that shape and order the political, legal, economic, social and security fields in a given geographical space. Structures entail both general organizing principles and rules of the game (such as ‘capitalism’, ‘democracy’, ‘rule of law’ or ‘peaceful resolution of conflicts’) and the operationalization of

<sup>1</sup> This section is to a large extent based on Keukeleire, Thiers and Justaert, 2009: 146-152.

these principles through a complex constellation of institutions, laws, habits, etc.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of structural diplomacy is to change or strengthen these specific constellations of rules of the game, institutions, laws and habits in a country or, more far-reaching and ambitious, to promote the adoption of new organizing principles (for example: ‘democracy’ in case of a non-democratic country) and the subsequent operationalization of these principles. When systemic changes occur (as was the case with the fall of the communism in 1989-1991) or a vacuum exists (for instance after a war, such as after World War II, the Balkan wars or the war in Iraq), the objective of a structural diplomacy can be to *shape* new structures. When a more or less established set of structures already exists in a specific geographic setting, the objective of a structural diplomacy will be to *influence* these structures. In our analysis, we mainly present structural diplomacy as aiming at structural changes. However, structural diplomacy can also aim at assuring structural stability, status quo and continuity. The objective is then to support and maintain existing structures and to avoid structural changes from occurring.

Second, the qualification ‘structural’ refers to the objective to have effects that are *sustainable*. The structures that are pursued should not only be viable in the short term, but should equally be sustainable in the long term, including when the intensity of the structural diplomacy diminishes or when the activities in the context of structural diplomacy are concluded. The purpose of the process of dialogue and negotiation is thus not simply to shape or influence structures, but to shape or influence structures in such a way that these structures obtain an enduring character and become relatively permanent. Only then it becomes possible to speak of *structural changes* or *structural reforms* caused by structural diplomacy (alongside other factors – see below). Both material and immaterial or ideational factors can contribute to the sustainability of structures and thus to the long-term success of a structural diplomacy. The material factors are related to the practical operationalization and functioning of the structures that are promoted and to the context in which they are embedded. The immaterial factors are related to issues such as the interiorization of principles, legitimacy and to what we label as ‘mental structures’ or ‘mindsets’. These various factors are discussed in the following section, as they affect the chance of success of a structural diplomacy.

The objective of influencing structures in a sustainably way requires *enduring* and *intensive* efforts, with the attention for structures becoming a constitutive part of the diplomatic efforts. Continuity and consistency in the activities of all diplomatic actors

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<sup>2</sup> This also points to the difference between structural diplomacy and development cooperation or development policy. The latter are in the first place focused on poverty reduction and other UN Millennium Development Goals. Traditionally, the development cooperation approach of the EU and European countries was to pursue these goals within (and thus without questioning) the existing political, economic and security structures of the third country. However, this development policy/cooperation increasingly obtain a structural dimension, with Western actors in the contacts with Southern countries increasingly pointing to the need to pursue structural changes as a complement to or condition for development aid. To the extent that this is the case, development policy remains distinct but can nevertheless be part of a structural diplomacy (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008: pp. 215-216).

engaged are therefore the third element of structural diplomacy. *Intensity* points to the active approach which is required in a structural diplomacy and which implies more than the often merely ritual repetition of general values and principles. One might indeed observe that the promotion of rule of law, human rights etc. are the subject of many diplomatic actions of the West and the EU in particular. However, very often, these are subject of a merely declaratory diplomacy, which is not supported by an active process of dialogue and negotiation aimed, first, at convincing other actors about the need, desirability and feasibility of creating or changing the various relevant structures and, second, at supporting, advising and steering them in the translation of general organizing principles into concrete institutions and rules. The intensity also implies that the frequency and profundity of contacts between the actors that are involved in the structural diplomacy need to be high. It also implies that a dialogue with a wide range of actors in the third country is needed, as the goal is not only to convince the diplomatic and political counterparts about the general principles of the proposed structural changes, but also to interact with those responsible for translating these principles into concrete operational terms. The required *long-term approach* refers to the time dimension. A structural diplomacy is dependent on sustained diplomatic efforts: changing structures is a long-term process and therefore demands a continued dialogue and follow-up. This also explains why this process of dialogue and negotiation can become institutionalized, either formally or informally. In this context, it is useful to emphasise that influencing or shaping structures within which actors operate can thus be harder and take more time than just influencing or changing the behaviour of actors. However, if successful, the impact of such a structural diplomacy can be both more profound and more enduring.

### *Sustainability*

In order for a structural diplomacy to be sustainable, i.e. viable in the longer term, two determinants seem to be crucial: (1) the comprehensiveness of the external diplomatic activities and (2) their embeddedness in endogenous realities and alignment to local structures.

The *comprehensiveness* and interrelatedness results from the close relationship between and interdependence of the various relevant structures (political, legal, social, economic and security structures) and levels (individual, societal, state, regional and global). Consequently, to be effective, structural diplomacy generally needs to focus simultaneously on various relevant structures and levels, and at least has to take into account the impact of structural changes on other levels or structures. Neglecting one or more relevant levels or sectors can undermine the achievements at other levels and structures. Here we can refer once again to democracy promotion efforts. As Linz and Stepan (1996) have argued, a structural change towards democracy cannot be successful when only focusing on the tenure of free and fair elections. In the absence of functioning rule of law structures or a civil society that is willing

to participate in political democratic life, all diplomatic democratizing actions may fail in the long term. Another example are diplomatic actions aimed at promoting specific changes in the macro-economic structures of a specific country. If one neglects to take into account the existing micro-economic structures and the societal level (e.g. the patriarchal and/or self-sustaining agricultural nature of a society), diplomatic efforts are very likely to fail in the long term.

Next, the factor of *comprehensiveness* points to the need for a structural diplomacy to be embedded within a broader range of structural and traditional foreign policy initiatives. A structural diplomacy needs to be backed up by a broader structural foreign policy, which employs all instruments available and considered as necessary in order to pursue the objective of structural changes (or of supporting existing structures) outside the own borders (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008: 25-28, 335-338). In order to be effective, the process of dialogue and negotiation needs to be complemented and supported by a process of technical, material, financial, economic and other assistance to the third country, in order to allow them to practically transform (or maintain) their structures. This assistance can vary from merely sending experts to assist in developing a judicial system, to carrying out comprehensive and long-term assistance programmes. As structural foreign policy aims to influence political, legal, social, economic and security structures on various levels, a wide and diverse range of instruments are needed in function of the specific nature and requirements of each of these structures and levels. Besides providing assistance, structural diplomacy can also be supported, complemented or preceded by other types of foreign policy measures, including carrots (such as promising and providing major rewards or compensations) and sticks (threatening with or adopting coercive measures in case structural changes are blocked). However, as will be explained later on, whereas these carrots and sticks can be quite instrumental in effectively influencing or shaping structures (the first key aspect of 'structural'), they can be detrimental in terms of sustainability of these structures (the second key aspect of 'structural').

The second building block for the sustainability of a structural diplomacy is the consideration of the *endogenous, local context* of the target country, region or society in the formulation of approaches and the diplomatic negotiation. In mainstream IR or foreign policy literature endogenous factors refer to processes or factors internal to the actors conducting diplomacy, both at the level of the individual states and at the level of states operating in international organisations or multilateral fora (Smith, K.E., 1999: 177). In the context of a structural diplomacy, however, it refers to the contingent and contextual factors that characterize the target. Diplomatic actors do not only act differently towards separate targets based on the interests or nature of the relationships at stake, but these targets also *require* various approaches based on their specific – endogenous – characteristics and structures. The historical, sociological, political and other characteristics and structures constitute and the

environment in which the local actors are embedded and thus determine the specific nature and structure of their diplomacy.

In the elaboration of an international structural diplomacy, sustainability depends on the alignment (High Level Forum, 2005: 3-6) to the existing institutions, structures and to these endogenous factors, which in turn has an influence on the ownership and the legitimacy of the structural diplomacy (See Keukeleire, Thiers and Justaert, 2009: 151-152). The existence of contextual and conceptual differences between target countries also implies that the application of general blueprints or approaches in the elaboration of diplomacy is not that evident. The degree to which endogenous actors, factors, processes, values, traditions, sensitivities and *mindsets* in the target country, society or region at stake are taken into account is therefore a crucial variable in structural diplomacy. It is also in this context that the recognition of 'difference' becomes essential, together with a learning process aimed at recognizing potential difference.

## **2. Diplomatic Communities as Policy Subsystems**

### ***The EU's Diplomatic System***

Diplomatic communities can be perceived as subsystems in which specific values, principles and codes are shared as well as certain policy belief systems that structure their behaviour, interactions among them and with target actors, policy convictions, etc. As argued by Inayatullah and Blaney (2004) 'Western' systems, such as diplomacy, are guided by Westphalian and modernisation paradigms. International as well as European diplomatic systems are indeed based upon and directed towards a nation-state division as primary organising principle in world politics perceiving diplomacy essentially as an institution for the conduct of inter-state relations (Jönsson, 2002: 212). The perspective on 'diplomacy' and 'diplomatic actors' broadened gradually with the introduction of new actors in diplomatic processes, such as international organisations, non-governmental organisations, enterprises and private consultancy, and thus the emergence of new labels such as private diplomacy and paradiplomacy (Melissen, 1999; Meerts, 1999). More recently diplomatic systems also expand towards sub state diplomacy between regions (Criekemans, 2010).

The EU's diplomatic system is thus in fact a multi-level diplomatic level which further elaborates on the Westphalian system: the national diplomatic level, the EU diplomatic level (in which national diplomacies do still play a major role, despite the post-Lisbon reforms) and the international multilateral level (in which the national diplomatic actors do still play a central role, despite the growing role the EU's diplomatic actors). The gradual strengthening of the EU level leads to the observation that the nature of diplomacy is gradually changing too

and is going beyond the traditional Westphalian model (Hocking and Spence, 2005; Batora 2005; Hocking, B. and J. Batora 2009). However, what is often neglected is that this emerging diplomatic system of the EU does still fit within a political, economic and societal context which is based on the Westphalian paradigm and modernisation paradigm that are also shared by the member states. The state remains the core unit or at least the central point of reference with regard to both authority and legitimacy (with regions being embedded within this state system in federalized countries), while the economy, the institutional and legal system and the society at large are characterized by a far-reaching process of modernisation and economic development.

In short: the diplomatic communities in the target countries or regions can be characterized by a subsystem that does incorporate the ‘Western’ diplomatic systems, values, principles and codes, but that does not necessarily mirror an equally ‘Western’ internal reality. This also means that diplomatic actions by the EU vis-à-vis these countries or regions can resonate in a different way than expected in that country or region - or can resonate not at all. It is against this background that ‘dialogue’ and ‘learning’ emerge as crucial dimensions of a structural diplomacy, as an effective structural diplomacy is only possible when the existence of different endogenous local contexts is known, recognized and taken into account. These dimensions of dialogue and learning are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

### ***The Target Country’s Diplomatic System***

The latter is not true, or not to the same extent true, for the diplomatic system of a major part of the world, as many countries in the South are characterized by a dual system. Formally, all countries in the world are part of the international system, which consists of sovereign states that are also formally recognized by the other states, that as an ultimate recognition of their existence are also member of the UN, and that are represented by their government (independent of the democratic character of the political system). And in view of their inscription in the Westphalian state-based system, they also adopted the institutional forms, principles and codes linked to diplomacy as the central institution for the conduct of inter-state relations – reflecting the transferral of Western codes to the rest of the world.

However, what is generally neglected in both the conduct and study of diplomacy and of international relations in general is that this formal ‘Western’ system is often paralleled by traditional or non-Western political forms and by pre-modern systems or non-Western forms of modernization (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 96-97; Delanty and Rumford, 2005: 41-42), the effects of which are often further reinforces (and often also caused) by substantially lower levels of economic development. This implies, for instance, that other systems of authority and legitimacy can exist, such as kingdoms, chiefdoms, tribes, clans, extended families or

other forms based on kinship, and also religion or ethnicity. These systems or smaller but structural / structuring entities, such as the Kurds, the 'Fon' (kingdoms) in Cameroon, or the Pashtun tribes in what is now Pakistan or Afghanistan (with these tribes being further subdivided in an extensive set of smaller sub-tribes and extended families).can be found throughout the entire world, but play significantly different roles in different places, especially in pre-modernised societies. By including the societal level in our conceptualization, we also try to avoid at least to some extent what the 'territorial trap', being the geographical assumptions of international relations theory (Agnew 1994; Fitzpatrick, 1998). The societal level can, but indeed does not necessarily correspond to a geographical entity, which in its turn can but does not necessarily correspond with the territorial borders of one or more states. Or as Delanty and Rumford point out (thereby referring to Urry 2000): the social 'is not a territorially bounded entity, but shaped through dynamics and processes that can take variable forms'.

This also implies that what in the West are label as 'pre-modern' rationalities can play a predominant role in the societies and political systems of third countries, just as also so-called universal principles and concepts can be given a different interpretation.

### **3. Conceptual Learning in and between Diplomatic Subsystems**

#### ***Diplomacy as a Two-Way Process***

In his now classical definition of 'diplomacy', Adam Watson (1982: 10) already indicated that diplomacy is a 'process of *dialogue* and negotiation'. Within the context of a structural diplomacy this dimension of 'dialogue' is particularly important. Structural diplomacy cannot just consist of negotiations, of putting pressure on other actors, and of actually convincing the other. The 'stronger' part of diplomacy needs to be accompanied by a dimension of *dialogue*. This dialogue has to precede and support negotiations, as this is crucial for understanding the contextual and conceptual differences between both diplomatic communities, the endogenous processes and preferences of the target country, society or region and to understand how the structures promoted through a structural diplomacy can take these into account. Moreover, it implies as well that, in order to be effective, this dialogue has to be a two-way and not just a one-way process. Although a structural diplomacy implies a certain degree of inequality as it is about influencing structures towards one side's preferences, these aspects point to an important level of mutual dependency. The structural diplomacy concept therefore emphasizes the importance of 'communicative action in world politics' (Risse, 2000: 1-40). Alignment implies dialogue and negotiation with all the actors involved in the target country, also and especially with those responsible for translating diplomatic efforts and initiatives into concrete operational terms and action. Consequently, not only is there a need for intense

contacts at a high political and diplomatic level, but also at other levels - such as lower governmental officials, technical experts, parliamentary contacts, non-state actors, etc. - frequent contacts and dialogue form an indispensable aspect of a well developed structural diplomacy. A structural diplomacy stresses the continuity, frequency and profundity of contacts and interactions.

### *Learning Contextual and Conceptual Differences*

A crucial dimension of structural diplomacy is that this dialogue does not only consist of two-way communicative interaction, but is also preceded, nourished and characterised by a process of learning (see Grin and van de Graaf, 1996; Schofield and Sausman, 2004; Grin and Loeber, 2006). Grin and van de Graaf argue that “different actors and different contexts may yield different meanings” (1996: 298), but also that “congruency in meanings will only arise and last when some form of learning occurs between policy actors and target groups” (1996: 308). The various contexts thus lead to different understandings or meanings of specific concepts creating a cleavage between the diplomatic actors and the local actors and their rationalities. ‘Western’ diplomatic discourse and activities does often disregard or even neglect these contextual and conceptual differences.

Analytically, three dimensions or stages can be discerned in this process of learning: learning that learning is essential; learning the different contexts, concepts and structures of the other; and learning through the actual dialogue;

First, as an essential prerequisite and on the most fundamental level, this process of learning requires that the diplomatic actor recognises the importance of learning and, related to this, recognizes the existence of ‘difference’. What is needed is a readiness to learn, based on the consciousness that this learning is essential in view of the remaining character of difference (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 95). This recognition of ‘difference’ also implies a recognition that other countries or societies can have “alternative developmental schemas” and be subject of different transformative mechanisms and processes (Delanty and Rumford 2005: 15). For Western diplomats (but perhaps also for the elites and diplomats in other parts of the world), this learning process also amounts to the challenge formulated by critics of the modernization theory which is implicit in most Western thinking and diplomatic activity: that is to learn not seeing all other cultures and societies through the lens of a natural and universal developmental modernisation process which they all have to pass through - with the eradication of difference as the ultimate (though implicit) final stage. (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 94-95). For European diplomats (and analysts), in particular, this also amounts to a challenge pointed out by Chakrabarty (2007) in his “Provincializing Europe”: that is to learn

not generalizing developments specific to European processes and European assumptions about space, time and sovereignty to the rest of the World.

Second, preceding and parallel to the diplomatic interaction, the diplomatic actor has to make efforts by his own to learn the differences that exist between the contexts of different diplomatic subsystems and on the way in which this will have an impact, first, on the interactions and the patterns and processes between them and, second, on the structures that the diplomatic actor wants to influence. This is not just a matter of learning basic facts about the third country. As Tilly and Goodin (2006) emphasise in their *Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, what matters in these contexts is etymology, history, culture, ideas, place, demography, technology, and many more. Knowledge of a historical context provides a tool to analyse more systematically contemporary political processes. Also knowledge of culture, of ideas and of etymology contribute to a better understanding of contextual and conceptual differences, for instance in the political processes between post-industrial and pre-industrial societies. Such a profound learning process is even necessary when the differences are on the first view not that large, because - as Tilly and Goodin argue (2006: 27) - “culturally embedded ideas, relations, and practices profoundly affect the operation of superficially similar political processes”. The same is true for the terminology and concepts that are used: words or concepts used and shared by all actors (such as, for instance, ‘law’ or ‘solidarity’ can hide significantly different or even opposed meanings, and can have different practical connotations in view of the different material and immaterial contexts.

Part of this learning process also consists of learning how the interconnected structures in the various sectors and on the various levels are linked to each other in a different way in other parts of the world than in the context of the own diplomatic sub-system. We can again use an example related to our case-studies: if the legal structures on the state level are the subject of the structural diplomacy of the EU and thus of the dialogue between the European diplomats and the diplomats of the target country, then it is essential that the European diplomats learn and try to understand, first, in what way the endogenous political, social, economic and security structures and contexts have an impact on this legal structures and, second, how these various relevant structures on the state level are influenced or co-determined by those on the individual, societal and other levels.

The third dimension of learning – which is based on the first dimension and informed by the second dimension – is the actual learning during the dialogue with the actors from the diplomatic sub-system of the other country or region. In the context of the ‘communicative inter-action’ between the two diplomatic subsystems, learning can occur through the dialogue between the ‘Western’ diplomatic actors and their target groups that are both characterised by

their own contexts and rationalities. Applied on the EU's diplomatic actions, this implies that the European diplomats in their interactions with their counterparts explicitly use time and energy to try and learn from their counterparts about the different contexts and concepts that characterize the structures of the countries and societies that they represent. This also implies that they have to be ready to conduct the diplomatic conversations on the basis of a different agenda and to take the different concepts than those that belong to the mainstream Western diplomatic codes into account.

### ***Illustrating Contextual and Conceptual Differences: Rule of Law / Security Sector Reform in Kosovo and the DR Congo***

Some examples from the cases studies of this research can illustrate the contextual and conceptual differences and thus the importance of the learning process, that is the object of our future research (see section 4). The examples aim to illustrate the different contexts and concepts of rule of law and of security in (1) Kosovo and (2) the DR Congo by pointing at some remarkable dimensions that are often disregarded in the 'Western' policies and diplomatic activities towards these countries, resulting in a misfit between the Western diplomatic actors and the target groups.

The main objective of the EU's large EULEX mission in Kosovo is to promote the rule of law in Kosovo. However, both immaterial and material factors and contexts explain why the role of 'law' in shaping societies is quite different in Kosovo than in most other European countries and why concepts such as 'law' and 'lawyer' have a different resonance in Kosovo than in the Brussels's headquarters of the EU (see Keukeleire and Thiers 2010; Keukeleire, Kalaja and Çollaku 2010)..

First, the creation of new legitimate judicial structures is hindered by the long-term legacy of viewing state structures and judicial structures as both alien and hostile to the domestic context, as these were identified as a tool in the hands of 'the other' (the Yugoslavian state or the Serbian rulers) - which also had implications to individual safety and security. For decades, security implied that the legal and judicial structures were had to be distrusted and shunned of. It is clear that this mindset cannot be changed quickly. This is particularly the case as the situation in Kosovo is still characterised by an important grey zone between war crimes, criminal networks and current political and economic leadership, making it very difficult for local judges and prosecutors to objectively uphold the rule of law without taking personal risks. Moreover, some of the local judges or prosecutors have been appointed to these functions precisely because they had close links with or were part of the dominant political, economic and/or criminal networks.

Equally important is that both this historical background and the current linkage between lawyers and ambiguous leadership also results in an often very limited respect for the function of judges, which is also reflected in the limited attractiveness of the function of judges, with lawyers preferring to use their skills in the private sector or the many international organisations in Kosovo. This immaterial dimension (the limited status of the function of judge) is also related to a material dimension which is too easily neglected by the international community in Kosovo: the very low salaries which make the profession of judge or prosecutor rather unattractive, and thus leads to a large turnover of judicial personnel (in many cases working as an independent lawyer is more profitable). This also explains the limited number of young Kosovars studying law at the University of Pristina, which is problematic in view of the EU's long-term objective to strengthen the rule of law in the country. Taken together, the limited credibility of both 'law' and 'judges', the low status of and low salaries linked to the function of judge, and the limited popularity of the study of law at the university, all point to a very different context compared to the 'normal' Western and modern context in which concepts of rule of law are used.

This differences in contexts and concepts are even more visible on the African continent, and more specifically in post-authoritarian countries that radically transformed their legal system towards a 'republican' or 'liberal' legal democratic system, often under pressure and close supervision of the international community. However, the newly introduced constitutional provisions and orders do often not reflect the realities. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for instance, the 2006 'republican' constitution, drafted by the transitional assembly and under the strict supervision of the International Committee to Accompany the Transition (known by its French acronym, CIAT), introduces a National Congolese Police (PNC) with a 'republican' nature, i.e. subordinated to civil control and, in case of infraction of its role subject to civil courts. In reality, the PNC is still organised following a military logic, including the ranks, and the accountability system. This also reflects the actual functioning of the PNC as well as perceptions of the Congolese police officers on their role and responsibility. History and culture matter in this respect. Police officers have different backgrounds, knowing that the PNC is not only compiled of new recruited police officers, but also of former combatants from rebel groups and officers that served under former (also dictatorial) police or security structures. This creates important differences between police officers in terms of level of engagement and perception on its role.

Neo-patrimonialism is also an important characteristic of African societies. Not only at the political level but also in the security structures personification and patrimonialism of power and roles is a culturally embedded phenomenon (Clapham, 1992; Englebort, 2000; Blundo

and Le Meur, 2009). This is often also related to kinship-based systems of power, where roles and functions become inherited.

Another remarkable contextual and conceptual difference when it comes to the Congolese (in)security, is the importance and presence of psychological insecurity. For many Congolese superstition and sorcery are a bigger personal threat and source of insecurity than physical or active dangers or threats (Longondjo Djela, 2010). This is also the case for the Congolese police officers that themselves often fear sorcery and are reluctant to intervene in insecure situations when sorcery or superstition is at stake. This however, is a less evident dimension in the 'Western' (in)security perception and therefore almost completely ignored in the elaboration of the EU's security sector reform policies in the DR Congo.

Finally, both in the case of Kosovo and the DRC knowledge and recognition of the essential 'value' (and even 'norm') of responsibility for and solidarity with kins or clan members (and the resulting preferential treatment that has to be given to kins or clan members), combined with a knowledge of the often problematic economic situation and/or dramatic human security situation (which can imply that support by kins can be essential and even a matter of survival) can provide a different view on practices which are labelled as 'corruption' and which are thus rejected by Western and European diplomats and civil servants but which are perceived completely in these countries. In short: knowledge of both immaterial and material contexts can lead to a different, and more realistic view on various concepts and interpretations which are used by Western and European actors.

#### **4. A Research Agenda for the EU's Structural Diplomacy**

Further and in-depth (field work) research on the contextual and conceptual differences in international relations and the role of learning between diplomatic subsystems is therefore a crucial but often disregarded dimension in foreign policy analysis and international diplomatic relations research. We therefore propose a research agenda that concentrates on these contextual and conceptual differences and that can investigate how and to what extent the theory and practice of learning can contribute to their recognition, understanding and integration in the diplomatic agendas and activities.

As has been mentioned, this paper is only one step in the research on the EU's structural diplomacy that will be applied to the Balkans and the African Great Lakes region. Based on the further elaboration of the structural diplomacy framework the research aims to provide a contribution to the ongoing debate and research on the nature of the diplomatic system of the European Union. In various academic publications, the patterns and processes of the EU's diplomatic system have been labelled as a strategic diplomacy (Hocking, Allen, Smith...),

public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005) or as a para-diplomacy. In this research we investigate the degree to which the EU manages to conduct a structural diplomacy towards the Balkans (Kosovo) and the Great Lakes region (DRC) can be classified as a structural diplomacy in which the EU makes simultaneously use of its wide array of instruments to shape sustainable structures at multiple levels. Therefore we subsequently focus on the EU's diplomatic representation and coordination of its activities in both countries, the way in which these diplomatic actors and activities are situated in relation to the social and political structures of the target countries, and the degree of alignment with endogenous concepts and realities in different contextual environments.

### ***Conceptual Learning in and between Diplomatic Subsystems***

The first part of the research concentrates on the recognition and understanding contextual and conceptual differences between players of the international community, and on the relations between the EU's diplomatic actors and the local societal and political actors and structures. Both the EU's diplomatic actors and the local actors (governmental and societal) involved can be considered as policy subsystems that interact within and with each other. The question therefore arises *whether these interactions and negotiations between different diplomatic subsystems lead to learning and conceptual understanding and convergence in both subsystems*. In this way we will analyse "the relation between learning and the reproduction and transformation of institutions" (Bennett and Howlett, 1992; Grin and Loeber, 2006: 202), which is at the core of a structural diplomacy. Policy learning can as such provide a tool to propel changes in diplomatic policy belief systems and in this way help to understand 'the other', the 'differences' and the diverging concepts – or conceptual minefield.

### ***The EU's Diplomatic Minefield***

The second part of the analysis is to map the actors involved in the EU's structural diplomacy and the way in which they are related to each other, both in Brussels and in the field. A structural diplomacy perspective broadens both the nature and number of the diplomatic actors involved (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008; Keukeleire, 2008; Keukeleire Thiers and Justaert, 2009; Keukeleire, 2010). The focus does not solely lie on 'traditional' diplomatic actors emanating from foreign ministries, but on comprehensiveness and interrelatedness of diplomatic actors and policy domains at multiple levels of governance. In addition, the preceding analysis of contextual differences also leads to a broadening of the nature of the actors involved in the target country, where actors that are less evident from a 'Western' perspective, can be involved or even play a major role in specific structures and their reform.

The first research question in this project relates therefore to this comprehensiveness: *to what extent does the EU conduct a comprehensive structural diplomacy that takes into account the interrelated actors, sectors and levels?*

In our analysis of the EU's structural diplomacy towards Kosovo and the DR Congo, we will analyse the patterns and processes of EU diplomacy both in Brussels and in the field, focussing on the fragmented representation, the EU diplomatic coordination and its impact on the role and the position of these European diplomatic actors in relation to each other. The cases of the Balkans and the Great Lakes region provide important insights in this respect since the EU is represented in these regions through multiple ways, in multiple sectors and at multiple levels, making the external representation of the European Union almost a diplomatic minefield. Based on intensive field work research we will also be able to analyse and to assess the impact of the changes the Lisbon Treaty introduces in this respect in the field, hereby complementing literature and ongoing research on the EU diplomatic system after Lisbon that in the first place focuses on the Brussels arena (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Dijkstra, Duke...)

### ***Conceptual Alignment***

The final aspect of this research then concentrates on *the extent to which the EU conducts a structural diplomacy that is aligned with the contextual and conceptual differences of the target country*. The local contexts and concepts urge us to move beyond Brussels, European or more general 'Western' navel-gazing and conceptualisations Inayatullah and Blaney (2004).

### **5. Methodological Challenges:**

This study also entails a challenge for scholars in the processes of conceptualisation, operationalisation, data collection and data analysis. It is important to overcome a "methodological nationalism" (Grin and Loeber, 2006: 205) and to move beyond Brussels, European or 'Western' approaches and research techniques.

### ***Overcoming Western Ethnocentrism***

Mirroring the importance given within structural diplomacy to dialogue based on learning and reflexivity, also the scholar has to establish a dialogue with 'the other'. Or following Inayatullah and Blaney (2004: 124) in their interpretation of Todorov's 'Knowledge of Others' (1995: 15), "[s]uch a dialogue requires a heightened consciousness of the dependence of our knowledge on prior judgements (that is, "prejudice"), the relativity of our own

categories, and the historical and cultural (perhaps “ethnic”) specificity of our understanding”. Also the scholar thus has to be willing to learn and to go beyond the limitations and constraints of ‘Western ethnocentrism’ which characterised the study of diplomacy and of international relations in general (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 96). Because, as Tickner and Waever emphasise, ‘the discipline of International Relations (IR) is ironically not “international” at all’ (2009: i).

This willingness also implies that also the analyst of structural diplomacy has to avoid to generalizing developments specific to Europe to the rest of the World, has to accept that modernization is not a general phenomenon, that alternative developmental schemas, and that the nation-state is not to be seen as the horizon of possibility when studying social transformation. Most importantly, the analyst has to accept an antireductionist ontology and epistemology (Delanty and Rumford 2005: 14-15, 188). It in any case points to the importance to take more seriously the input from reflective approaches and critical theory in particular

Starting from this willingness to overcome Western ethnocentrism, the analyst also has to question the resources and knowledge which is available to him or her. Analysts of structural diplomacy must particularly become conscious of the impact of what is effectively a Western academic hegemony (Waever 1998; Aydinli and Mathews 2000). The question is whether the on the first view voluminous academic literature on international relations and on other parts of the world is actually valid given the very limited input from non-Western scholars. The limited input of Asian, Arab, African or Latin American academics is problematic considering that Western diplomacy is to a large extent directed towards these continents and that, consequently, insights, concepts and approaches developed by these scholars might be indispensable for a serious assessment of Western diplomacy. Doubts are also raised about the validity of academic research if the researcher is not able to understand, read and speak the languages used in the country, society or region which are the subject of both structural diplomacy and academic research. To what extent can a scholar indeed gain an in-depth understanding in the structural diplomacy of the EU towards China, Arab countries, DR Congo or Kosovo, if he or she does not understand Chinese, Arab, Lingala or Albanian?

### ***Data collection and analysis***

This is also linked to the problem of data collection and data analysis – beyond the quite fundamental problem of different conceptualisations which was already mentioned before. Assessments cannot just be based on an analysis of Western primary and secondary literature, but in the first place needs information obtained in the target country. Official documents and

immediately usable information from the target country can be scarce due to the lack or bad shape of archives or 'political disappearances' or can only be found in an 'uncommon' language.

In order to obtain relevant information, the researcher has to leave Brussels and the EU and has to do field work in the regions or countries that are subject of the EU's foreign policy. This is also important in order to gain a better insight in what the contexts and who the relevant actors precisely are and in order to be able to talk with these various relevant actors – particularly actors from the third country. This need to move away from the Brussels and European perspective, to conduct field research and to take into account a wider variety of actors beyond those that are traditionally analysed obviously makes research on EU foreign policy more complicated and also more costly (Justaert and Keukeleire, EIOP 2010). Important in this field work are interviews and – even more essential – informal contacts with the various relevant participants. The relevant players will indeed often provide more easily sensitive information during informal contacts than during formal interviews. Methodological problems though also arise in interviews, informal contacts and participatory observation, e.g. in the sometimes complex relationship between researcher and respondents. To illustrate the latter, a white researcher in the DR Congo will often generate 'most desired' answers when interviewing local actors who see in the interviewer rather a problem-solver than a neutral researcher. This different research context also explains why the standard guidelines for conducting academic interviews are largely useless for part of this research. Involving local researchers in the research projects can be part of the solution, although also this approach does have its own problems and limitations.

The analysis of structural diplomacy - and of the related wide range of structures (political, legal, social, economic, security) and levels (from the individual up to the global) – point to the importance of analysts adopting an interdisciplinary approach. A sound understanding of the EU's structural diplomacy means analyses and concepts from other academic fields such as economy, law, history, psychology, sociology or anthropology must be more systematically incorporated. In order to be able to learn about the other, new approaches and research techniques are also to be learned from other disciplines such as anthropology (de Sardan, 2008; Geertz, 2000; Amit, 2004). This is also important in order to take into account and incorporate conceptualizations and factors that do not fit within the predominant academic approaches in IR and, thus, to value and accept 'difference'. Equally, our understanding would be heightened through greater cooperation with specialized subfields of International Relations and political science, such as globalization studies, security studies, democracy studies, development studies and (post-)modernization studies. Diplomacy analysis now too often occurs in isolation from these subfields, without the much needed intellectual cross-fertilization.

Particularly crucial to understand the different contexts is a cross-fertilization with area-studies. What is needed are not only (or even not in the first place) specialists in for instance EU-China relations, but China specialists; not specialists in the Israel-Arab conflict or in Western policy towards this conflict, but specialists in the Arab world and in the Israeli society and state, etc. Or to link it to our two case-studies: what we need are not in the first specialists in the EU's policy towards the Balkans and Central Africa, but specialists in all dimensions of the Balkans and Central Africa – who can give inside in the contexts that are essential for our understanding (cf. Tilley and Goodin 2006) and who then can feed the scholars specialized in the EU' diplomacy towards these regions, who in their turn can subsequently integrate this knowledge in their analysis. This is essential in order to “contextualize” all data, which means they all data must be related to, and situated within, the social environment in which they were gathered, in order to understand their meaning (see Hopf, 1998). This input from area studies seems to be a prerequisite to complement the generally predominant inside-out analysis by an outside-in perspective, in which it is not the EU but the other region or society are to be the point of departure for analysing EU diplomacy.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper the authors focus on one specific aspect of the structural diplomacy framework, the consideration of endogenous realities in the elaboration of ‘Western’ structural diplomacy. Based on the assumption that significant differences exist between countries that are the target of diplomatic activities, contextual and conceptual differences exist between different diplomatic subsystems.

We went one step further: when analysing the EU's diplomacy towards a third country or region, it is also important to complement the ‘EU perspective’ or ‘Brussels perspective’ with a ‘third country perspective’ or ‘target-country perspective’. A political analysis from a purely EU angle contains the risk of one-sided assessment, which takes for granted the paradigms which constitute the basis of the EU's diplomatic approaches and initiatives. Adopting such an outside-in approach—looking at the EU's diplomatic efforts from the third country perspective—makes it possible to question the foundations of this policy as such, to discover the underlying paradigms, to position them *vis-à-vis* other possible paradigms, and to reveal paradoxes in the EU's diplomacy itself (see Keuleleire, Kalaja and Collaku, 2010).

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