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## ***Diplomatic Training in response to a Dynamic International Scene***

Interview with Ron Ton

**Mr. Ton, the year 2013 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute, and you are one of the people who have participated in the process of its creation and development ever since its beginnings. How would you define the Institute ten years later and what prospects it has within the region of Southeast Europe and within the wider European context?**

BDI was created in September 2003 to provide the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria an institution to support the professional development of diplomats and internationally working officials. I had the honour to take part in the establishment and, in later years, the further development of the institution. In hindsight, BDI has proven in the last 10 years to be a sustainable factor in the training of internationally working staff. One can conclude that BDI has matured and offers better quality in the training of Bulgarian diplomats. The training of junior diplomats has become fully institutionalized in the MFA and work is also progressing on the training of midcareer, senior and other staff. Most importantly, BDI undertook action to extend trainings to other ministries and groups in the Bulgarian society. I personally believe strongly in the added value of diplomatic institutions as an instrument to promote the dialogue among countries and the sharing of knowledge on foreign issues in the Bulgarian and foreign societies. BDI fulfils this role by offering a platform for incoming foreign delegations and taking part in foreign networks. The networking element relates, in first instance, to the Balkan region and in particular BDI can share experience as a member of the European Union to other countries in the region who are in the process of joining the EU. Secondly, regional and European networks are important to share educational knowledge on diplomatic professional trainings and on foreign politics. BDI is well positioned to bring into the discussions specific expertise on, for example, Eastern European politics, energy issues, regional security issues and the Middle East.

**What is the significance of regional cooperation for diplomatic training?**

In my view there are important motivations and drivers to strategize on a regional or multilateral level in diplomatic training, on top of national diplomatic training:

1) International politics has become deeply involved in the solution of domestic problems the effects of which have spilled over borders demanding regional, if not global solutions, for example to environmental threats, energy resources, fight against crime and food security;

2) In the case of training programmes based on sharing memberships of regional organizations, the goal is to provide participants with the opportunity to understand better the role of the specific regional organization at stake, to understand each national position towards the organization and to improve synergies to better implement the various programmes of the organization, for example the EU, OSCE and NATO;

3) Another logic behind regional diplomatic trainings is the creation of a culture of trust, dialogue and better understanding among the neighbors and other countries in the world;

4) A fourth motivation could just be a division of labor or creating added educational or didactical value: sharing best practices or specialized knowledge on specific interactive diplomatic training exercises like negotiation simulations or case studies.

**As director of a diplomatic academy, your work is primarily focused on training of officials who work in the field of foreign policy and international relations. In**

**your opinion, which are the main challenges that the diplomatic profession faces today, and how does qualification training provide adequate answers to these challenges?**

For answering this question we have to analyse the rapidly changing international environment, and consequently the new dynamics in which diplomacy and diplomats have to play their role. At the global level, the fast changing economic order offers new opportunities to promote economic interests and attract foreign investments. Economic work is not a new phenomenon to diplomats and diplomatic missions, but training and awareness is needed on bringing a sharper focus on economic diplomacy, the relationship with the private sector and the organisation of foreign missions.

Another challenge that diplomats are facing today are issues related to sustainability and securing the availability of natural resources, in particular on the nexus of climate, food, water, environment and energy. It raises the question to what extend diplomatic services can absorb knowledge and skills on issues which did not belong to the traditional work of diplomats. New forms of specialised diplomacy have to be created. Most importantly, it results in a new way of thinking about the cooperation between ministries of foreign affairs and other ministries within the governments. The new international agenda requires an open and constructive inter-ministerial cooperation and coordination. Diplomats are excellently positioned to provide their services in policy coordination, networking, negotiations and understanding diplomatic culture and protocol.

Thirdly, diplomacy is not limited any longer to interstate communications. Today's diplomat is interconnected to a wide variety of organisations and peoples: private companies, employer's organisations, trade unions, NGO's, universities, the arts sector, journalists, media, and others. Diplomats have to become excellent networkers with a good political antenna.

Finally, the world has become more transparent. Digital sources and the social media supply an abundant amount of information which is accessible in a short timeframe. It demands a different approach of diplomats towards digesting information for policy advising and places public diplomacy even stronger into the heart of the work of a diplomat.

Diplomatic institutes have more than ever to play a pivotal role in meeting all of these challenges. In my view, it will be essential to design and decide on clear qualifications indicators on the different roles and levels diplomats have to act: at the junior, mid-career and senior level; bilateral or multilateral; and generalist or specialist. Based on a competence model, training has to be implemented and supported within the entire ministry. Quality training should be focussed on the professionalization of skills and on more efficient work processes. Therefore, investment in the design of interactive and practical oriented trainings is a necessity.

**Has the notion of diplomacy in Europe changed after the establishment of the European External Action Service?**

The European External Action Service is still a work in progress. So far, the establishment of the EEAS did not have a major impact on changing national diplomacy. However, there are potential signs which are affecting diplomacy. In Brussels attempts are made for a better adjustment among the member states and the EEAS on pre-post trainings, preparing for detachments to Brussels and promoting a common diplomatic culture. In major capitals in the world the cooperation between the national embassies of the member states and the EU representation is growing, for example in reporting on local developments. Host countries sometimes look upon EU missions as „EU embassies“ with an „EU ambassador“ who can create dynamism between host countries, the EU and national embassies. This year's review must make clear to what extend more cooperation in shared services or even transfer of

services, for example in the field of consular policies, will be possible.

**What are the most important skills and knowledge that a successful present-day diplomat needs? How are they covered in Clingendael Academy's curriculum?**

The Clingendael Academy has six sub-divisions: Diplomacy; European integration; Security and crisis management; Skills programmes; Capacity building and consultancy; Open enrolment courses.

We conduct 30 courses for foreign diplomats' training covering 50 countries and 500 diplomats each year. For the NL Ministry of Foreign Affairs we conduct the training for junior diplomats in a three-month programme and offer pre-post training and specialized courses. The Clingendael Academy also offers diplomatic training to expert ministries and local government like the municipality of Rotterdam. Next to diplomatic training, we offer courses in the security sector (justice, police, defence) and EU affairs. Our skills training programmes are focussed on negotiations and mediation. Two special activities are a three-month postgraduate course for recently graduated students, and in cooperation with the Leiden University we offer a Master's programme on international relations and diplomacy. Special reference has to be made to our capacity building section which provides training and advice on the development of foreign diplomatic institutions. In total we offer 80 programmes per year for more than 2 000 participants.

Our training philosophy is based on four pillars: 1) the trainings should be policy relevant; 2) analysing current international dilemmas from a policy perspective; 3) the trainings are skills and work process oriented and 4) the trainings are organised in an attractive interactive environment. In trainings, as part of a career development programme, we provide a specialized methodology on assessing personal development and qualifications.

Of course, a choice among the most important skills and knowledge for a successful present-day diplomat relates to the context of his or her work. However, in general terms my view is that a modern diplomat has to understand very well the domestic political dynamism, must be able to develop an integrated view on core tasks of foreign policy and understand which actors and organisations influence and dominate the international playing field.

A successful present-day diplomat is in essence a network diplomat with outstanding communicative and analytical skills, a fine policy coordinator of complex issues, a good negotiator and lobbyist on behalf of his or her country and – a personal preference of mine – having a good sense for active listening skills and empathy.

**Which are the current priorities in Clingendael Academy's educational agenda in terms of qualification training and international cooperation?**

Our current priorities are innovation and diversification. We have to renew all the time our efforts in simulating the practical diplomatic environment in our trainings. One of the most well-known core competences of the Academy is our capacity to design and develop simulation games and case studies in international relations and negotiations. We will continue to invest in new products. Besides more general diplomatic trainings we would like to design products in specialised diplomatic trainings, for example in economic, water or climate diplomacy. In that respect, we have planned to increase our offer in the training of a wide variety of skills. We also believe that other ministries and local governments are in need for diplomatic training, for example for attaches and city diplomats. In the security field a mix of trainings for police, justice and defence is promising. In our international cooperation we have empowered our trainings and consultancies to strengthen foreign (diplomatic) institutions, for example in "train the trainer" programmes, curricula development, the design of interactive working forms and strategic development. Lastly, I would like to mention our newly designed methodology for

coaching and guidance of diplomats in training based on competence development.

**Which, in your experience, are the greatest challenges that diplomatic training faces today?**

Clearly, diplomatic training cannot be delivered anymore in isolation of domestic affairs and public opinion. Also, the relationship between the ministries of foreign affairs and other ministries has changed dramatically. Each ministry consists of substantial international affairs departments and, accordingly, has built on specific international networks. Both developments have reference to today's training of diplomats.

The challenges for diplomats have been evolving. More demands are made on the role of diplomats in their abilities to coordinate complex policy issues into a single point of interest for a country, to lobbying and networking, to public diplomacy and to strategically influencing other parties and peoples. Diplomatic training should be based on performance indicators to reach the required level of qualifications. Increasing the level of skills and promoting efficiency in the work processes are the keys to work toward a more effective operating diplomatic service.

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*Ron Ton is Director of the Clingendael Diplomatic Academy. He is also Secretary of the Clingendael Advisory Council and Chair of the Clingendael Training Group. At Clingendael he manages courses in International Relations for Dutch civil servants, private groups and foreign diplomats. He is a consultant to a number of diplomatic academies abroad, where he advises on international training and capacity building. Before joining the Clingendael Institute he was a Senior Lecturer and manager of international projects at a number of private business schools. He graduated from the University of Utrecht with a Master's in Contemporary History.*