

“Diplomacy, cooperation, and responsible technology governance can mitigate risks and promote a more peaceful and collaborative future”

CHRISTINA STEINBRECHER-PFANDT

Christina Steinbrecher-Pfandt is the CEO of the Tech Diplomacy Network in the Bay Area, developing a new tool in diplomacy globally. Her private sector expertise is a key aspect of the work for the network.

As a serial entrepreneur, she has more than 15 years of expertise in building marketplaces worldwide. Before coming to the Bay Area, she co-founded an art marketplace in Vienna, Austria; Moscow, Russia; and London, UK. She is a pioneer in the blockchain and art space; she founded Blockchain.art in 2019 in San Francisco and lobbied early for a regulatory framework. Born in Kazakhstan, she studied International Business in Maastricht, Netherlands, and Art History in London, UK.

The following is the interview given to CEBRI-Journal in September 2023.

When we consider the impact of technology globally today, many people believe great-power competition has been pushing the world toward a dangerous path of growing mistrust among

the major players. Is conflict inevitable in the future?

CHRISTINA STEINBRECHER-PFANDT: We are in the middle of many conflicts simultaneously. Further and deeper divisions are on the horizon. However, the

diplomatic community’s responsibility for managing these conflicts in the future is growing. We suggest tech diplomacy as a tool in this field—the recognition of the tech sector as leveling governments regarding the impact on people and people’s lives. Diplomacy, cooperation, and responsible technology governance can mitigate risks and promote a more peaceful and collaborative future.

U.S.-Chinese relations are especially tense on many fronts. What is Europe’s perspective in this regard? Can European countries help build trust? Or are we bound to see a world divided into two opposing blocs?

CSP: Many countries, particularly in the Global South, see themselves as a bridge between these giants. I cannot speak for Europe, but the European Union is rooted in its strong belief in human rights and the transatlantic alliance. These values are particularly true regarding new technologies, where both blocks have deepened their collaboration in recent years. However, there are nuances between Europe and the U.S.; sometimes, the two are competitors. Europe often functions as a global trendsetter on tech regulation, while the U.S. relies more on self-regulation of its dominant private tech sector. Ultimately, neither Europe nor the U.S. would benefit from an utterly bipolar world or a total decoupling from China, as they all have developed deep

and numerous trade, investment, and technology ties. In addition, Europe wants to maintain its dependency on the U.S. technology sector rather than ramp up its innovation ecosystem. So, I guess Europe can help build trust among all countries and should aim to be an honest, powerful, and innovative player in the international system. However, if forced to choose, most likely, Europe will choose to stand by the United States.

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You are the CEO of the Tech Diplomacy Network. Please tell us more about this initiative. What are you trying to achieve?

CSP: Tech diplomacy is an emerging field in international relations and diplomacy. The Tech Diplomacy Network was founded in February 2023 by two practitioners in the field, a senior diplomat and a science diplomacy expert. It fosters dialogue between States and the tech industry and was spurred by the rise of tech companies and their influence in areas beyond national borders. The network connects the Bay Area tech diplomats, the diplomatic community, the private sector, academia, and civil society. We work with various partners, like the Bay Area Economic Council, the World Economic Forum, and the DiploFoundation.

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Our values are:

Collaboration: We believe in the power of collective action and are committed to forging partnerships across borders and sectors to address global technology challenges and capitalize on opportunities.

Knowledge sharing: We encourage exchanging ideas, best practices, and expertise across our network, fostering a collaborative environment that drives innovation, capacity-building, and mutual learning.

Multi-Stakeholder Approach: We believe in diversity, equity, and inclusivity of perspectives and representations, mindful of geographical and gender balance.

Technology for Good: We believe in the potential of technology to bridge divides and develop solutions to global challenges by bringing people together and making them overcome their differences in search of the common good for all society. We believe in the responsible use of technology in accordance with the relevant multilateral agreements, recommendations, principles, and norms.

Convergence: We believe in achieving pragmatic solutions for a world drifting apart by competing ideological narratives, geopolitical ambitions, and conflict. Diplomacy is at its best when finding openings and common ground in seemingly unbridgeable differences to achieve lasting solutions.

Our main goal is to set up a network of practitioners that exchange best practices in the field. We foster open conversations and expand the network by engaging with specialists, practitioners, and researchers via easy access to our network. We are working with other NGOs, practitioners, and institutions to achieve conceptual clarity and building capacity. We have co-authored two courses on tech diplomacy this year; we compile a monthly newsletter on global tech diplomacy matters and organize topical conferences and in-person events for the community to come together.

Tech diplomacy has emerged in Silicon Valley to connect and bring together governments, private companies, and civil society. How do you make this conversation more global and inclusive? Can developing countries make a difference in this debate?

CSP: We have much interest in tech diplomacy from practitioners and the diplomatic community in the Global South, from where many course participants hail. However, their local governments need more resources

for a structural setup. The research conducted by the Diplo Foundation and the Tech Diplomacy Network on The Tech Diplomacy Practice in the Bay Area shows that none of the African countries has career diplomats in the Bay Area. That is a big miss on all ends. As a first step, it would help if developing countries appointed tech diplomacy representatives and defined responsibilities, even in their capitals, to which global companies and networks could reach out.

How do you see the role of Latin America in this context? Any suggestions for those countries in this region trying to navigate successfully through the technological challenges of the twenty-first century?

CSP: As resources are a critical missing aspect in many countries, collaboration and communication are essential for the early stage. Pull resources into a Latin Tech Diplomacy Council, identify relevant and key topics, and name clear tech diplomats by country and main interests. Make it researchable—demand global conversation. 🇳🇮

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