

Diplomatic Deviation: Ruptures and Changes in/via Diplomatic Encounters

Call for Papers

11th European Workshops in International Studies (EWIS)

Istanbul 3-5 July 2024

Convenors

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Contrary to popular wisdom, diplomacy can be a site of much weirdness. Think of Mao's meeting with Khrushchev in 1958, which the Chinese leader held in a swimming pool knowing too well that Khrushchev never learned to swim properly. Or think of Putin's press conference with Merkel in 2007, remembered mostly for Merkel's discomfort as Putin brought his massive black Labrador to the encounter. Then there was Jean-Claude Juncker greeting Viktor Orbán saying 'hello, dictator'. Most recently in 2021, US and Chinese representatives shunned protocol and went into an undiplomatic frenzy of mutual accusations. This is diplomacy at its most awkward.

While this weirdness is often just the result of a *faux pas* in a particular situation, at other times it is produced performatively for the purpose of signaling to the other and to a wider observing audience. It can also be deployed with the objective of disruption, of upending existing hierarchies and social relations, or of initiating a broader recasting of order and international politics. But it may also emerge unexpectedly, as a result of a variety of aspects affecting diplomatic intercourse, either as fleeting, irrelevant diplomatic incidents, other times fueling old rivalries or provoking new ones.

This workshop is focused on diplomatic deviation. We welcome, first, empirical investigations of how and why diplomacy goes awry, gets destabilized and fragmented. These are incidents characterized by diplomacy ruptured, with practitioners competing for valuable objectives (political, symbolic, normative etc.) in their attempt to re-constitute the diplomatic space.

Second, we welcome conceptual attempts of how best to understand what makes such diplomacy strange in the first place, particularly regarding its effects (abnormality, embarrassment, humiliation, condescension, mockery, trolling etc.) and the modes of engaging 'strange' otherness they reveal. We are especially interested in historical and post-colonial explorations of diplomatic strangeness showing the cultural, social, and political logics of case-specific deviations at play.

Finally, papers examining the long-term effects and afterlife of out-of-place diplomatic incidents are also welcome. We seek to understand the way diplomatic relations are reconstituted, and with what success, following such ruptures, and whether abnormalcy and deviation is neutralized by a re-narrativization of normal diplomatic intercourse.

We thus invite prospective participants to focus on the following themes. However, because we stress ruptures as our focus and which encompass a broader set of cases than deviation alone, we invite interested colleagues to feel free to creatively deviate, as it were, from the list below.

- a) Conceptualizing abnormality/weirdness/strangeness in diplomatic practices
- b) Theoretical contributions to the stranger, estrangement, and diplomacy
- c) Deviant diplomatic performances in contemporary, historical, post-colonial etc. settings
- d) Out-of-place diplomacy and its social effects (embarrassment, humiliation, condescension etc.)
- e) Ruptures and changes in and through diplomatic encounters
- f) Diplomacy and the culture of encounters