



clingendael
netherlands institute of
international relations



1st International Conference on Business Diplomacy

December 4th 2015 – The Netherlands

Venue: Windesheim University of Applied Sciences – Zwolle (The Netherlands). In collaboration with Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, Ghent University (Belgium), Diplomacy Dialogue (Geneva)

Theme:

Global legitimacy challenges for international companies and strategic business diplomacy

Introduction to the theme:

Multinational enterprises (MNEs) experienced 'golden days' during the 1990s and 2000s, they expanded globally and were major players in globalization. Today they have become powerful actors in the global economy. CEOs of international businesses are welcomed by heads of state as their counterparts, they are invited by governments to help solve global issues such as climate change and poverty, and they are facing dilemmas comparable to those of other international actors.

However, MNEs are facing global legitimacy challenges. They are suspected of tax avoidance, using low wage countries for corporate benefits only, disrespecting privacy regulations, abusing consumer data, violating local community rights, exploiting natural resources, ignoring basic human rights, and employing too many lobbyists targeting national and international political decision-making processes for their own corporate interests.

Although many of these challenges are not new, they have resurfaced and become more apparent during the past couple of years, partly due to the economic recession that many developed economies have faced and to the broader awareness of increasing global inequality and the importance of sustainability.

How can international business respond? Strategic business diplomacy may be the answer. *Business diplomacy involves developing strategies for long-term, positive relationship building with governments, local communities, and interest groups, aiming to establish and sustain legitimacy and to mitigate the risks arising from all non-commercial or exogenous factors in the global business environment.*

Business diplomacy is different from lobbying or strategic political activity; it implies an (strategic / holistic) approach of an international business to look at itself as an actor in the international diplomatic arena. Representation, communication and negotiation are key in such an approach.

One of the consequences is that MNEs are able to operate in and show respect for an international business environment that consists of multiple stakeholders. This demands a strategic perspective and vision on the sector and the business environments in which the company wants to operate, and requires a specific set of instruments, skills and competences.

This conference brings together international business representatives, practitioners and researchers in a one and a half day-event. Insights into business diplomacy presented by leading international companies are seen as important input for the conference. Researchers who have contributed to the development of the field and who have worked with business leaders will address what strategic business diplomacy looks like from their perspective, and how it impacts the legitimacy challenges that international business faces.

GOAL OF THE CONFERENCE

Addressing and discussing the global legitimacy challenges of international business in today's global economy and how strategic business diplomacy can help to deal with those issues.

DATE: December 4th (full day) & 5th (morning) 2015 – The Netherlands. (December 4th morning: key notes; afternoon: round tables with research presentations; December 5th morning: conclusions/agenda setting/wrap up)

HOST and ORGANIZING UNIVERSITY: Windesheim University of Applied Sciences – Zwolle (The Netherlands)

PARTNERS: among others: The Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, Ghent University, Diplomacy Dialogue (Geneva).

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE: Jan Melissen (University of Antwerp (Belgium)/Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael), Shaun Riordan (Clingendael), Jennifer Kestelyn (University of Ghent (Belgium)), Raymond Saner (Diplomacy Dialogue, Geneva & Sciences Po, Paris), Donna Lee (Bradford University – UK), Doudou Sidibe (Novancia Business School, Paris), Huub Ruël (Windesheim UoAS, The Netherlands)

OPTIONAL SUBTHEMES FOR ROUND TABLES

(the round tables will consist of business representatives, government representatives, ngo-representatives and researchers)

International Business and global legitimacy challenges

International Business, Business diplomacy and the OECD guidelines
International Business, Business diplomacy and mitigating risks
International Business, Business diplomacy and sustainable development
International Business, Business diplomacy and the impact and potential of digitalization
International Business, Business diplomacy and fragile states
International Business as international political actors
International business and inequality
MNEs, business diplomacy and tax avoidance schemes
International Business, business diplomacy and ethical dilemmas
International Business and public-private partnerships

PROGRAM PLAN:

1. Morning session with keynote speakers (morning the 4th)
2. Roundtable sessions (afternoon 4th)
3. Conclusion and agenda-setting (5th - morning)

Keynote speakers from major international company, keynote speaker from an international NGO, key note by international scholar, key note by international consultant, and key note by politician.

Target audience: international business representatives, scholars, consultants in the field of business diplomacy (government relations, international stakeholder management), NGO representatives, politicians.

OUTCOMES TO TARGET:

- Policy and strategy outcomes
- Policy/Practitioners press
- Proceedings
- Inputs for international book
- Special issue for international journal

WEBSITE INFO WILL FOLLOW – for further information please contact:
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