

**ARBEN CICI**

Mediterranean University of Albania, Albania

*arben.cici@umsh.edu.al*

ORCID: 0009-0005-6369-9917

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**THE BOUNDARIES OF HUMAN  
RIGHTS: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN  
DUTIES AND FREEDOMS IN 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY DIPLOMACY**



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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the boundaries of human rights in the context of 21st century global diplomacy, focusing on the dialogue between freedoms and obligations. It analyzes how tensions between ethical universalism and global realpolitik have produced new challenges for the protection and promotion of fundamental rights, especially in humanitarian crises, migration policy and multilateral diplomacy.

The study follows an interdisciplinary theoretical-empirical approach, combining conceptual analysis with concrete cases (Kosovo, Syria, Ukraine, Rwanda), as well as a comparative examination of diplomatic discourse and documentation of international institutions. Primary and secondary sources are used to identify patterns of balance between freedoms and duties in diplomacy.

The main findings indicate a shift in global diplomacy from universalism to selective pragmatism. Human rights are often used as a diplomatic instrument with double standards. Meanwhile, the concept of duty remains undervalued in Western discourse, while other cultural approaches offer more balanced models.

This article argues that to maintain the legitimacy and effectiveness of international human rights diplomacy, an ethical reconceptualization of the relationship between freedom and responsibility is necessary. It suggests the creation of an intercultural and international ethics that goes beyond technical standards and includes a common code of duties, in addition to rights. This approach can help increase diplomatic coherence and strengthen international consensus on global justice.

**KEYWORDS:** Human rights, global diplomacy, collective pragmatism, ethical universalism, cultural relativism, freedom and obligations

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Human rights have occupied a central place in the normative architecture of the international order since the Second World War. In response to the Nazi genocide and the failure of existing laws to protect human dignity, the international community articulated for the first time a codified global morality through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which became a reference point for international treaties and the foreign policy of many states (United Nations, 1948; Donnelly, J., 2013.). In this sense, the human rights were no longer just an internal matter of the states, but a standard of international behavior.

This universalist approach laid the foundation for a liberal international order, which in the following decades was institutionalized through treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966) and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR 1966), as well as through the establishment of supervisory mechanisms within the United Nations and regional organizations such as the Council of Europe and the European Union.

However, developments in the 21st century have brought fundamental challenges to this universal order: the rise of authoritarianism, migration crises, growing social inequality, technological disruption, ideological clashes between cultures, populism and the political instrumentalization of human rights have called into question not only the applicability of existing standards, but also the meaning of *rights* themselves in different cultural and political contexts (Moyn, S., 2018; Mutua, M., 2002).

In this new context, international human rights diplomacy faces a profound paradox: it seeks to promote universal norms in a deeply pluralistic and fragmented world. While the concept of rights is built on individual freedom and individual autonomy, diplomatic practices often face the need for compromise, pragmatism, and the preservation of national interests, producing tensions between ethical idealism and global realpolitik (Ignatieff, M., 2001; Bellamy, A.J., 2011).

This article argues that a normatively rigid approach to human rights is no longer sufficient, but a balanced analysis between freedom as a right and duty as a responsibility is needed, in the interest of a more sustainable and ethical global order.

### **CONCEPTUALIZATION: HUMAN RIGHTS DIPLOMACY**

Human rights diplomacy represents one of the most complex and delicate elements of contemporary international practice. It involves the use of diplomatic means, whether bilateral or multilateral, to promote and protect fundamental human rights at the global level. Since the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations in 1945 and further with the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, diplomatic activity has served as a bridge between ideals and moral values and institutionalized international norms. In this regard, diplomacy has become a vital mechanism for transforming universal values into tangible political and legal commitments (Thakur, 2006).

Human rights diplomacy practices encompass a wide range of tools and approaches: from bilateral diplomatic pressure to the imposition of political and economic sanctions, strong political statements, diplomatic isolation of rights-violating actors, and engagement in multilateral forums such as the United Nations Human Rights Council. These tools constitute a diplomatic arsenal that can be used to influence the behavior of states and other actors towards fundamental rights and freedoms.

However, as Michael O'Flaherty (2011) notes, human rights diplomacy often appears in practice as a fragile and unstable concept. He has defined it as a form of *normative negotiation*, where states face complex dilemmas between upholding human rights standards and protecting their strategic and geopolitical interests. This tension between moral idealism and *realpolitik* is central to any serious analysis of rights diplomacy.

On the other hand, George Ulrich (2012) describes human rights diplomacy as an instrument that aims to expand the scope of international norms through everyday diplomatic practice and experience. This perspective determines

diplomacy not only as a mechanism for protecting the normative status quo, but also as a means for promoting and developing human rights in an increasingly complex global landscape.

An important critique comes from Kang Kyung-wha, former UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, who warns of the risk of human rights diplomacy becoming a tool of foreign policy, where ethical values are used to disguise less noble national interests. Her provocative question, *Is it diplomacy in the service of human rights, or is it human rights as a tool of diplomacy in pursuit of foreign policy goals?*, remains a central point in contemporary discourse and raises legitimate concerns about the instrumentalization of human rights in geopolitical contexts.

In this context, it is essential to recognize that human rights diplomacy does not operate in a moral vacuum. It is positioned between two strong poles: universalism of norms and cultural and political relativism, between global ethics and state interests. As David Griffiths (2023) argues, in an era of deepening global polarization, the challenge for human rights diplomacy remains not only in affirming norms, but in managing the tensions arising from the clash between liberal universalism and alternative models of governance that reject the Western moral hierarchy. Griffiths emphasizes that in such a fragmented environment, human rights diplomats must develop *more flexible and context-sensitive strategies* to avoid delegitimizing the cause they represent.

This necessitates a conceptual review of human rights diplomacy, treating it not only as an instrumental practice, but also as a dynamic process where the definition of rights is closely linked to the responsibility, duty and cultural and historical context of international actors. Only in this way can be avoided the risk of *moralization* of international relations and a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to human rights be promoted.

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND COMPARATIVE HYPOTHESES

### I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: BETWEEN NORMATIVITY AND DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE

This article builds the analysis on an interdisciplinary theoretical-empirical approach, combining normative, discursive and comparative elements to discover how the concept of human rights develops in diplomatic practice of the 21st century. In a context where the tension between universalism and cultural relativism is not only theoretical, but translates into real international decision-making, it is necessary to use a methodology that reflects this complexity.

Rather than operating on a closed conceptual system, this research considers human rights diplomacy as a negotiating space, where norms, interests, cultures and crises are constantly intertwined. For this purpose, four methodological dimensions are used:

#### a. Theoretical-normative approach

The theoretical-normative approach begins with the analysis of the paradigms of thought that have shaped the understanding of rights and obligations in political philosophy, international law, and international relations. This analysis aims to follow the traces of ideas on the relationship between the individual and the community, universalism and relativism, ethics and realpolitik. In this way, a comparative conceptual framework is built, which puts into dialogue three major theoretical orientations:

- **The Western liberal tradition** (Donnelly, 2013; Ignatieff, 2001; Slaughter, 2007; Bellamy, 2009), which emphasizes the universalism of rights and the primacy of the individual as a moral subject. Joseph Slaughter (2007), in *Human Rights, Inc.*, offers a narratological critique of liberal universalism, arguing that literary narrative and human rights function in parallel in the production of the *global moral subject*. This perspective helps us to understand that international law is also based on cultural forms that naturalize its ethical claims.

- **Postcolonial approaches and culturalist critiques** (Mutua, 2002; Chakrabarty, 2000; Said, 1978), which challenge the normative hegemony of the West and reveal the ways in which the universalism of rights has often served as an instrument of cultural power and control. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (1990) also contributes to this debate, proposing an intercultural dialogue to reconceptualize rights so that they are more acceptable in different cultural contexts.
- **Non-Western models of harmony and balance** (Bell, 2006; Sen, 1999), which suggest a more intertwined relationship between rights and obligations. Amartya Sen (1999), for example, proposes an understanding of freedom as a developmental process that includes social responsibilities and obligations. Daniel A. Bell (2006) in his analyses of Confucian thought argues for a communitarian approach, where right and duty are not in tension, but part of an ethical balance.

This theoretical dialogue places human rights diplomacy in a complex landscape where universalism is challenged by relativism and where new intercultural models are required to uphold fundamental values.

## **b. Discursive analysis of diplomatic practice**

Critical discourse analysis is used to examine how rights and obligations are articulated in concrete diplomatic contexts. By analyzing documents such as UN resolutions, speeches by political leaders, statements by international institutions, and state responses to human rights crises, the aim is to uncover not only the content of the principles and norms proclaimed, but also the narratives and rhetoric that accompany them, as well as the rhetoric that hides behind political decisions. As Griffiths (2023) points out, in an era of polarization, human rights diplomacy has become an arena where rhetoric often disguises strategic interests, raising questions about the sincerity and coherence of international commitments.

### c. Comparative empirical cases study

This approach is applied through an extensive comparative analysis of cases that have been selected to reflect profound political, geographical and diplomatic contrasts that include:

- **International interventions in the name of rights** (Kosovo 1999)
- **Refugee crises and different diplomatic approaches and responses** (Syria 2015, Ukraine 2022)
- **Cross-cultural debates on the limits of freedom of expression and blasphemy** (France and Islamic countries)
- **Non-Western models of the balance between right and duty** (Singapore, Rwanda)

This comparative study not only illustrates the theory, but also tests the coherence between diplomatic discourse and real diplomatic practice.

### d. Coordination of primary and secondary sources

Primary sources such as international treaties, United Nations reports, Council of Europe documents are used, as well as secondary academic sources that provide theoretical, historical and ethical analysis. These sources are placed into interactive dialogue to build an interpretive narrative that is not simply descriptive, but critical as well, evaluative and normatively engaged.

### Overall methodological objective

The objective of this approach is to examine whether international diplomacy is functioning as a mechanism of international justice, or as a selective strategic instrument, where rights serve more for legitimacy than for ethical transformation.



## II. COMPARATIVE HYPOTHESES – INSTRUMENTS FOR CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

In function of this methodology, the article builds three comparative hypotheses, which aim to reveal the dimensions of the dilemma between freedom and duty, universalism and relativism, ethics and pragmatism in global human rights diplomacy.

**Hypothesis 1:** Double standards are a permanent feature of human rights diplomatic practice.

- **Theoretical argument:** According to Samuel Moyn (2018), rights diplomacy is often more of a rhetorical than a moral instrument, especially when used by Western powers to legitimize interventions or justify differential treatment. Michael Ignatieff (2001) considers this as the crisis of the *idolization of rights*, where they are transformed into an ideological tool.
- **Illustrative case:** Refugees from Syria and Ukraine. While Ukraine benefited from a discourse of solidarity and broad political involvement by the EU, Syrian refugees were treated with exclusionary measures and harsh border controls. This selective discourse of humanitarianism suggests a different use of the same standards, based not on need but on political and cultural perceptions.
- **Intermediate conclusion:** The double standard is a persistent phenomenon that undermines the credibility of human rights diplomacy and creates the perception of normative hypocrisy.

**Hypothesis 2:** Western discourse on rights overvalues freedom and neglects duty.

- **Theoretical argument:** The liberal tradition has produced a model of rights based on the autonomous subject and individual self-determination. However, this model often conflicts with the cultural and normative realities of the rest of the world. Makau Mutua (2002) criticizes this model as a continuation of moral colonialism, while Bellamy (2011) suggests the need for a more collectivist concept of global responsibility.

- **Case study 1:** The blasphemy debate in international forums, where Islamic countries often demand restrictions on free speech in the name of social harmony, while the West advocates unrestricted freedom. This tension is not simply political, but philosophical and ethical, reflecting the void of duty in liberal doctrine.
- **Case study 2:** During the pandemic crisis (COVID-19), many Western countries faced difficulties in reconciling personal freedom with collective health duties, while some Asian countries managed the crisis through an internal culture of social discipline and civic duty.
- **Intermediate conclusion:** Only by re-establishing duty as an ethical component of rights can be built a more coherent and internationally acceptable diplomacy.

**Hypothesis 3:** Non-Western models often offer more integrated approaches between rights and duties.

- **Theoretical argument:** In many non-Western cultures, duty is not seen as a limitation of rights, but as its foundation. Asian, African, and Islamic philosophical traditions have conceived of right as a relationship between the individual and the community, not as an absolute individual attribute.
- **Case Study 1:** Singapore. The government emphasizes the importance of stability and harmony over unrestricted freedom of speech. (Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, Article 14(1), 14(2) This has produced a political order that privileges duty to society, without excluding right as a concept, but conditioning it within a responsible framework.
- **Illustrative Case 2:** Rwanda after the genocide. Traditional reconciliation mechanisms (gacaca) were not based solely on punishment, (2023 U.S. Department of State, Country reports) but on the moral obligation to contribute to collective recovery, building a model of transitional justice that is both ethical and functional.
- **Intermediate conclusion:** Non-Western models should not be seen as deviations from universalism, but as valuable contributions towards a more integrated and fair global ethic.

## 3. THE BOUNDARIES OF RIGHTS IN THE GLOBAL ERA

### 3.1. RECONCEPTUALIZING UNIVERSALISM IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the idea of rights as universal, unconditional, and inherent to all human beings, regardless of nationality, culture, race, or political regime, has been represented as the normative basis of the liberal international order. This approach, rooted in Enlightenment philosophy and the legal tradition of natural law (*ius naturale*), includes the principle that the individual is an independent bearer of rights, which he or she possesses beyond the authority of the state (Donnelly, 2013). But in practice, the universal application of these rights has clashed moral ideals with cultural and political realities that do not follow the same normative logic.

In recent decades, globalization, mass migration, digital technologies, and security crises have produced situations where the principles of rights have been constantly called into question. It is not simply a question of *what are rights?* but rather *how and to what extent can they be exercised without harming others?* This is where the idea of *boundaries of rights* arises, not as authoritarian restrictions, but as legitimate frameworks to ensure social coexistence and international order.

**This demand for reassessment manifests itself in several forms:**

- **Freedom of expression vs. national security:** The case of blasphemous cartoons in Europe, the terrorist attacks in France (2015) have shown that absolute freedom of expression can face the challenge of hate speech, disinformation and a risk to national security and can be perceived as a threat to certain religious communities, causing global protests. If a word provokes hatred, is it still protected by the principle of free speech?

- **Freedom of movement vs. border management:** The refugee migration crises have highlighted the tension between the right to seek asylum and the duty of states to maintain order and security. The approach of states such as Poland and Hungary to reject the EU quota system for refugees was justified by the protection of national sovereignty and *cultural identity*. At this point, the tension between the right to seek asylum and the duty to maintain social integrity remains universally unresolved. Instead of universalism, countries often adopt a *conditional humanism* that privileges refugees according to geographic, cultural, or political proximity.
- **Individual dignity vs. collective duties:** In multicultural societies, individual freedom can clash with the cultural sensitivities of communities. This tension requires domestic diplomacy that builds consensus on the balance between the right to be different and the duty not to harm others.

The debate over the right of Muslim women to wear the headscarf in public spaces in France has highlighted the challenge between personal autonomy and the state's aspiration for secular neutrality. Martha Nussbaum (2012) emphasizes the importance of *mutual respect* in a political order that aims to harmonize individual dignity with the collective duties that derive from coexistence in a culturally diverse society.

Thus, the demand for *responsible boundaries* does not imply relativization, but the need for a contextual ethics that places freedom in relation to responsibility. The boundaries of rights are not a denial, but an ethical definition of autonomy, through a dialogue with responsibility and social context. Today's global dynamics require an ethical balance, where rights are not simply individual maximum demands, but part of an ecosystem of justice that also includes obligations to society and the international order (Ignatieff, 2001).

### **3.2. HUMAN RIGHTS DIPLOMACY AS A STRATEGIC INSTRUMENT: BETWEEN NORMS AND INTERESTS. MORALITY OR REALPOLITIK?**

Human rights have increasingly been used not only as a moral standard, but also as a strategic instrument in foreign policy. Diplomacy, as the art of managing international relations, is built on negotiation, interest, and compromise. Human rights, on the other hand, represent ethical norms that do not admit easy relativism. When diplomacy and rights meet, a space of tension is created, where norms are often absorbed by interests, and ideals are used for strategic legitimation (Ignatieff, 2001; Krasner, 1999).

Modern diplomacy is not free from interests – it involves calculations of influence, reputation, and power. For this reason, some authors argue that human rights diplomacy is not a purely moral process, but a selective mechanism of legitimizing foreign policies, depending on power relations and coherence with geopolitical interests. (Moyn, 2018). This tension is clearly evident in several cases:

**a) Kosovo (1999):** The failure of the international community to respond adequately to the mass atrocities committed in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s prompted the need for immediate action and mechanism against regimes in flagrant violation of human rights. The failure of the UN Security Council to authorize immediate action to halt ethnic cleansing in Kosovo forced NATO to undertake *humanitarian* intervention, despite the lack of a clear mandate from the UN. This deeply divided the international community, confronting those who denounced the intervention as illegal action against others who argued that legality mattered less than the moral imperative to save lives. The failure of the SC meant: either states could remain passive and allow mass killings right before their eyes while adhering strictly to international law, or they could bypass the UN Charter and unilaterally carry out an act of war on humanitarian grounds. This intervention set the precedent for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, the use of which was made despite strong oppositions from Russia and China, who saw it as

an instrument of selective use of rights for the purposes of hegemony and expansionism of the West.

**Myanmar (2017):** The systematic persecution of the Rohingya minority, (Pogge, Th. 2002) which the United Nations has described as *ethnic cleansing* and potentially *genocide*, has provoked strong reactions from international actors at the declarative level, including limited sanctions against some military leaders. However, there has been a lack of coercive and concrete diplomatic or economic measures against the military junta. The main reason remains in the strategic interests of the great powers: China has supported the Myanmar government to protect investments in energy corridors and to maintain influence in Southeast Asia, while India has avoided intervention so as not to push Myanmar further into the Chinese orbit. This case shows that human rights diplomacy remains limited when it conflicts with long-term geopolitical and economic interests. As David Chandler (2002) argues, this shows that the liberal international order often appears to be based more on interests than on universal values.

These cases demonstrate that human rights diplomacy operates in a field of declared norms and diverse practices, where the lack of uniform standards risks undermining even the institution of rights in the international order. The label of human rights is often more of a *diplomatic costume* than a moral compass, which risks stripping diplomacy of its ethical content and turning it into an instrument of power politics.

### **3.3. HUMANITARIAN CRISES AND REFUGEE POLICY: SELECTIVE DISCOURSE OF COMPASSION DIVIDED BY NATIONAL BORDERS**

The humanitarian crises of the last decade have exposed the structural weaknesses of the diplomatic system in guaranteeing the basic rights of refugees, including the right to asylum, protection against refoulement and the right to dignified treatment. Refugees and displaced persons represent one of the clearest evidences of the authenticity of the international commitment to human rights. If rights are universal, then they must be applied without

exceptions on geographical or cultural grounds. However, the handling of various crises has shown a flagrant discrepancy between declarations and practice.

**a) Refugees from Syria:** The lack of a coordinated response by the international community to the use of chemical weapons and the humanitarian catastrophe has often been justified by the *need to respect Syria's sovereignty*, while neglecting international humanitarian law. In 2015, waves of refugees from Syria were faced with wall construction, closed borders, an overburdened asylum system, and stigmatizing public discourse. States like Hungary presented their rejection as a defense of *European identity* and a responsibility to internal order.

**b) Refugees from Ukraine (2022):** Ukrainian refugees were treated with special care by EU states, with immediate assistance, access to the labor market, housing, and supportive policies, including accelerated measures for legalizing residence and access to services. Solidarity was justified by cultural proximity and the geopolitical risk of conflict with Russia. This differentiated treatment shows that diplomatic-ethical humanism is conditional and selective, and that even compassion has its limits.

This ethical asymmetry has been strongly criticized by human rights organizations (Human Rights Watch, 2023), emphasizing that humanitarian aid cannot be based on ethnic origin, cultural affinity, or political advantage, but must be common and universal. Refugee diplomacy has become the most concrete test of the ethical sincerity of the global order. Refugee crises are a reflection of the crisis of global ethics, where values are often applied selectively and diplomacy loses its moral guiding function. Therefore, human rights diplomacy will remain dysfunctional as long as it does not address the invisible discrimination in the application of ethical principles.

### 3.4. UNIVERSALISM VS. CULTURAL RELATIVISM IN MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY

International forums, especially the UN Human Rights Council, have become an arena of powerful paradigmatic clashes over the nature and implementation of rights. These clashes are not only academic, but they produce institutional deadlocks and diplomatic polarizations as well. Here, countries are divided into two logics:

**The liberal-universalist model:** Represented mainly by Western countries. It is based on the concept of rights as values that transcend cultures, religions and states and expresses an ideal of moral equality, guaranteed to every human being (Donnelly, 2013), which believe in a common core of rights and that transcend cultural contexts (e.g. EU countries, USA, Canada).

**Cultural-relativist model:** Countries such as China, Iran, Russia, but also many Islamic states, oppose these standards by emphasizing culture, history and national norms as legitimate sources for the regulation of rights. China, for example, articulates the so-called *collective rights to stability*, where social stability and economic development are considered greater priorities than individual freedom. According to this logic, Western criticisms are ideological interference. Islamic countries seek international regulation of blasphemy, as a way to maintain social harmony. They have in many cases demanded that blasphemy be treated as an international crime, emphasizing the importance of religious sensitivity closely linked to community harmony. Cultural relativists see the concept of rights as a product of a Western history, inappropriate for other contexts and that absolute freedom of expression is perceived as a threat to shared values.

These tensions and clashes emphasize that a single concept of rights is not sufficient to build a global ethical order. This division cannot be resolved through the dominance of one paradigm, but requires platforms for common ethical definitions, where pluralism does not translate into extreme relativism and universalism does not degenerate into imposition. Thus, diplomacy must integrate models of dialogue and normative translation between cultures, instead of unifying imposition.



## 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has attempted to illuminate the conceptual and practical boundaries of human rights in 21st century diplomacy, highlighting the inevitable tensions between individual freedom and collective obligations in an increasingly fragmented global order challenged by various geopolitical forces. The study's findings reveal that, although human rights have maintained their status as universal norms since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), their practical implementation is often conditioned by the dynamics of strategic interests, political pragmatism and cultural relativism (Moyn, 2018; Mutua, 2002). This trend has produced a diplomatic reality where double standards and the instrumentalization of human rights rhetoric for political purposes have become commonplace, undermining the legitimacy of the liberal international order and the transformative potential of these rights (Ignatieff, 2001; Chandler, 2002).

Analysis of concrete cases, from Kosovo and Syria to Ukraine and Myanmar, confirms that human rights diplomacy often operates in a controversial ground, where normative ideals clash with calculations of power and interest. Moreover, there is a persistent underestimation of the concept of duty in Western discourse, where freedom is considered the main ethical pillar, while collective responsibilities are often neglected. This has created normative gaps that have been exploited by authoritarian actors to challenge the universalism of rights and promote alternative narratives about the global order (Bell, 2006; Sen, 1999). Non-Western models, such as the approaches in Singapore and Rwanda, offer a perspective that seeks to integrate rights and duties into a more coherent intercultural ethics, thus prompting a critical review of existing paradigms.

In this context, human rights diplomacy faces a dual crisis: a lack of coherence in the implementation of standards and the urgent need to redesign this approach in according to a more inclusive and ethical global order. To address these challenges, it is recommended to build a national strategy for

human rights diplomacy that integrates the promotion of these rights as an essential element of foreign policy, aiming to balance individual freedoms with collective responsibilities. This requires serious investments in strengthening institutional and legal capacities, through the creation of strong supervisor and executor mechanisms, in order to avoid the political instrumentalization of rights and increase their credibility in the international arena.

Another essential step is the promotion of an intercultural ethic in diplomacy. This can be achieved through multilateral initiatives that encourage intercultural dialogue on rights and obligations, including the proposal of a *Declaration of Universal Responsibilities* as a much-needed complementary document to the existing Declaration of Human Rights. In order to having a more sensitive diplomacy to the new global challenges, it is also vital to develop training modules for diplomats and public officials, with the aims to be better prepared to mediate between national interests and universal values. Also, increasing transparency and accountability in policy-making processes through the involvement of civil society actors can serve as a safeguard mechanism against double standards and lack of credibility.

In terms of future research, it is suggested that research focus on international comparative analyses to identify best practices and lessons learned from countries with similar post-transition challenges. Another important area is the study of the role of non-state actors and the impact of digital technology in shaping the diplomatic discourse on human rights. Similarly, assessing the effectiveness of EU policies on human rights standards, both for member states and aspiring ones, would help to understand the boundaries and possibilities of integrating diplomatic ethics into contemporary practices. Finally, the challenges posed by ethical diplomacy in an era of *realpolitik* require in-depth analysis to assess to what extent ideals can survive in an international system dominated by strategic rivalries and power calculations.

Finally, it feel necessary and immediate a deep reflection on the relationship between universal norms and diplomatic practice and a return to a more ethical, more balanced and more inclusive approach, where freedom and duty are no longer considered as opposite poles, but as complementary components

of a more stable international order. In an increasingly fragmented world, only such diplomacy can offer a way out of current tensions and contribute to building a system where human rights remain the undisputed foundation of international relations.

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