



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AND
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS AND TRADE

A Digital Diplomacy Profile for Malta

April 2024



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	04
Introduction	06
A framework for engaging with the digital world	12
An action plan for Maltese digital diplomacy	16
Glossary	20
Appendix	24

Foreword

The digital world is increasingly intertwined with the physical world. In the 21st century no one can seriously cast doubt on the transformative – and largely positive – effects that have flowed from the ability of all citizens to connect to an effectively infinite library of information, entertainment, and connections. In much the same way, the world is realising that nation states, in the same way as their citizens, benefit most by embracing the digital world fully.

Beyond the necessity of integrating digital tools into a government's workflow and communications strategy, we are now aware of the wealth of opportunities that lie in making "digital" a whole part of our country's overall diplomatic strategy. The present document, the inaugural Maltese Digital Diplomacy Profile, aims to give a blueprint for how Malta can use its intrinsic strengths to safeguard the interests of its citizens, make a mark for itself by engaging with the digital world, and promote values and norms that we believe will create a safer, more stable, and more open cyberspace that works for the benefit of everybody.

The need for digital diplomacy is therefore largely self-evident, but here we explore this question in greater detail. It is essential to raise awareness of digital topics that are of national interest, such as protecting the rights of our citizens in the digital world. By way of example, large technology companies now influence our lives in myriad ways; the regulation of such platforms, as well as of artificial intelligence, is of paramount importance. Conversely, by engaging more broadly with other nations in developing and deploying new digital technologies that help us achieve our aims, we will also be encouraging the growth of new economic niches for Malta. Taking a broader view of our potential involvement in multilateral fora, Malta can bring to bear its experience in spearheading initiatives to safeguard aspects of the physical world as the common heritage of mankind; a similar perspective may be applied to the global digital infrastructure as global digital commons.

Having developed the rationale for engaging in digital diplomacy, we present a **framework for engaging with the digital world**. We must act decisively to champion the many ongoing processes, particularly at United Nations level, that can help us promote a secure and global digital world.



Thinking globally does not exclude the national interest; we need to continuously identify niches of national importance which we can push forward through our international engagements. We must also freely express our national identity, values, and norms by contributing to the development of a free and open Internet architecture and promoting the establishment of this digital architecture as a public good. We must also consider the positive effects that this framework will have on our diplomatic activities. Our pursuit of digital diplomacy will help to bring about a stronger and broader diplomatic footprint for Malta, one which extends far beyond the reach of our physical diplomatic activities.

This document also presents **an action plan for Maltese digital diplomacy**. We need to be diligent in taking up the use of the digital to promote our diplomatic goals, including by making best use of existing assets, like our involvement in the DiploFoundation as well as by making use of tools like artificial intelligence for the pursuit of diplomacy itself. Given the pervasiveness of digital issues in modern foreign policy, our diplomatic corps needs to be well-versed in digital matters that often have a bearing on matters that are considered firmly in the realm of traditional diplomacy. We need to engage globally on diplomatic affairs that arise from the growth of the digital world as a new realm that often necessitates diplomatic solutions. In working closely with our European counterparts and with the United Nations, Malta can expect to contribute substantially and meaningfully to the global dialogue on digital matters.

In today's geopolitical environment, Malta depends strongly on the digital world. In fulfilling the goals set out inside this Digital Diplomacy Profile, we will help to bring forth a better digital world for our citizens, strengthen our country's role in leading matters of global importance, and leave a positive legacy in the governance of the global digital infrastructure. Malta is ready to step up to the plate and take a leadership role in digital matters.

Hon. Ian Borg

Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade



Introduction

The world has become connected. Engaging in digital diplomacy has become a necessity. By doing so, Malta aims to benefit from new digital technologies, work with other nations to create a safer and more secure world, and maintain an open dialogue with leading actors in the digital world.

This section presents the rationale behind our digital diplomacy profile, in line with [Malta's Foreign Policy Strategy \(2022\)](#) and having three overlapping areas of interest.

This profile serves the interests of the **citizens of Malta** as well as those of the **country as a whole**, and allows Malta to contribute to ensure a **global, open, stable, and secure cyberspace** for all.

FOR THE MALTESE

The digital world presents an unrivalled opportunity to engage with the world beyond our shores. The twenty-first century has brought a sharp increase in the time people spend online as well as the digital footprint of everyone from nations to individual citizens. The present Maltese digital diplomacy profile aims to promote the interests of individual Maltese citizens in several ways.

Raising awareness and contributing to topics impinging on our lives in the digital world that are of national interest.

Avoiding the misuse of personal data and [protecting rights](#) is of utmost importance in the digital world. We are engaging in efforts to combat the spread of mis- and disinformation as well as hate speech online. *Artificial intelligence (AI)* presents [opportunities](#) as well as regulatory challenges. We will engage in discussions on *lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS)* and ethical guardrails in the use of AI.

Regulating technology companies particularly in the over-use and abuse of user data.

Malta stands ready to engage in concerted efforts and explore how to better protect rights related to data sovereignty and personal data. Without impinging on the right of businesses to operate, Malta aims for a digital world where the use of personal data – for example, which relate to health, location, and habits – by private entities is restricted and within the control of the data subjects.

Promoting open standards to minimise dependencies and lock-in.

It is essential to ensure that Maltese citizens cannot be cut off from *global communication systems* run by private companies. We aim to encourage the development and use of *open standards* at all levels. Malta believes that this will contribute to digital sovereignty and to narrowing the digital divide within and between nations.

“

Develop a digital diplomacy profile for Malta, based on legacy pilot projects and the country's potential to leverage geography, size, expertise and openness to emerging technologies.

Malta's Foreign Policy Strategy (2022)
Strategic Objective 1.8

FOR THE COUNTRY

Beyond individual citizens, the digital world brings opportunities for Malta as a whole. Raising our profile in digital diplomacy would confer greater soft power in our dealings with other nation states and the technological giants. Malta's aim is to grow its diplomatic footprint and create economic opportunities for the country.

Collaborating with other nations for the protection of our country.

All critical data and infrastructure are accessible through computer networks, particularly the Internet. We are collaborating closely with fellow nation states to improve the protection of these assets; while ensuring their proper auditing, we shall deploy [new technologies](#) to protect our critical infrastructure. Together with our partners we are also working to counter foreign information manipulation and interference.

Using digital technologies to engage more effectively with other countries.

Malta has been expanding its diplomatic reach, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South America. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven the capability for the digital world to bring peoples and countries together. We will make greater use of technology and give greater exposure to existing digital tools like [online consular services](#) in order to reach out to other countries, creating new opportunities for Malta and the Maltese.

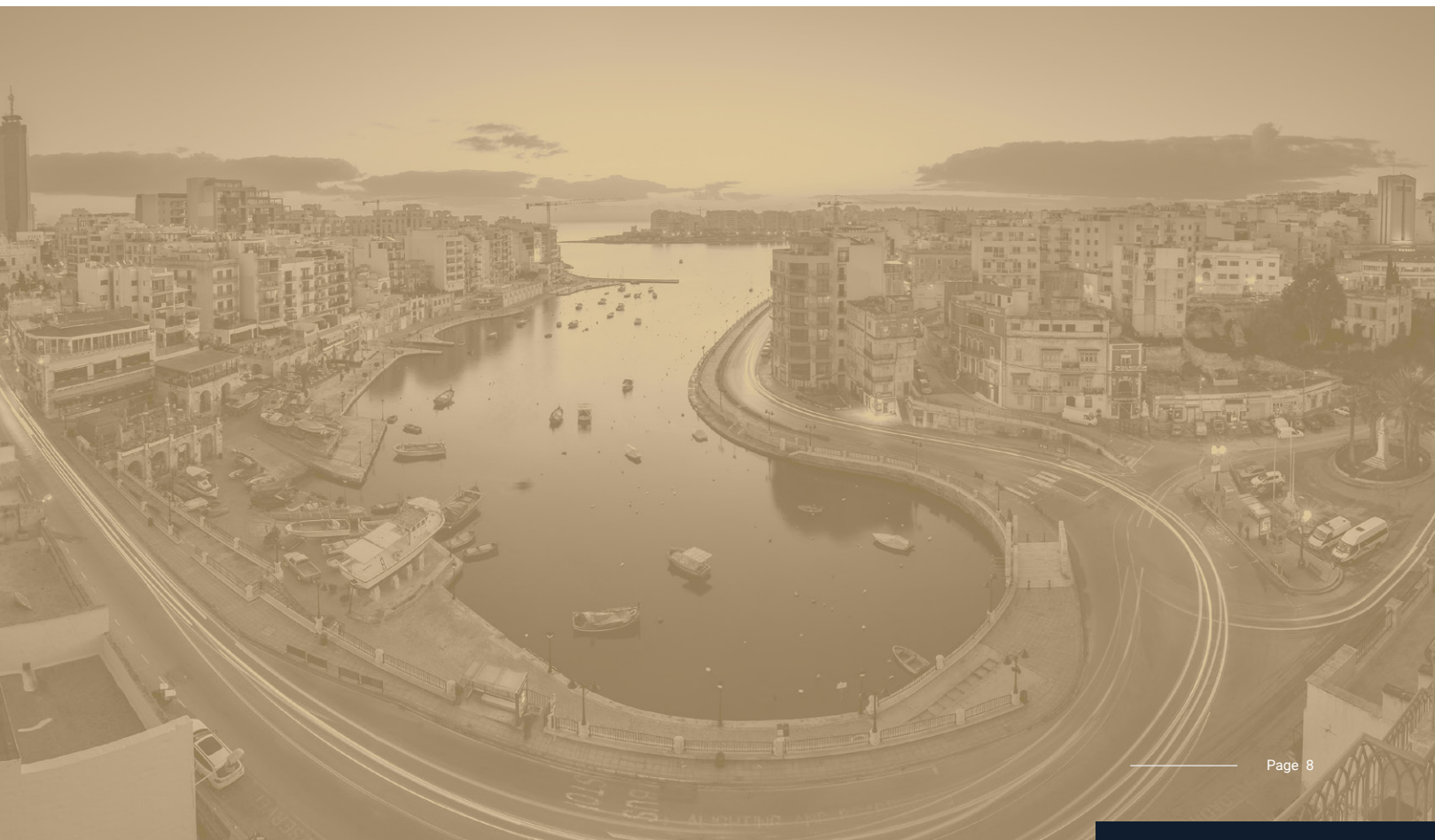
Reinforcing existing and finding new economic niches for Malta.

A stable Internet is vital for the Maltese economy, particularly in the tourism and service industries; engaging with technological giants and other nations is critical for our social and economic interests. Deploying new digital technologies, such as through pilot projects, is essential to help increase Maltese research and innovation capacity.

“

Engage in relevant bilateral, multilateral and multistakeholder fora that seek to promote a global, open, stable and secure cyberspace.

Malta's Foreign Policy Strategy (2022)
Strategic Objective 2.7



FOR THE WORLD

Malta has a proven track record in contributing to global stability and of acting as a neutral third party. Reprising this role is of the utmost importance in the digital world. Malta is engaged with EU Member States and fellow nations, including within the United Nations and the [Geneva Internet Platform](#), in promoting a *global, open, stable, and secure cyberspace*. Malta will ensure to safeguard and improve the multistakeholder model of Internet governance and avoid a fragmented Internet – with a human-centric model on one side and a competing state-controlled architecture on the other.

Treating the global digital architecture like the high seas.

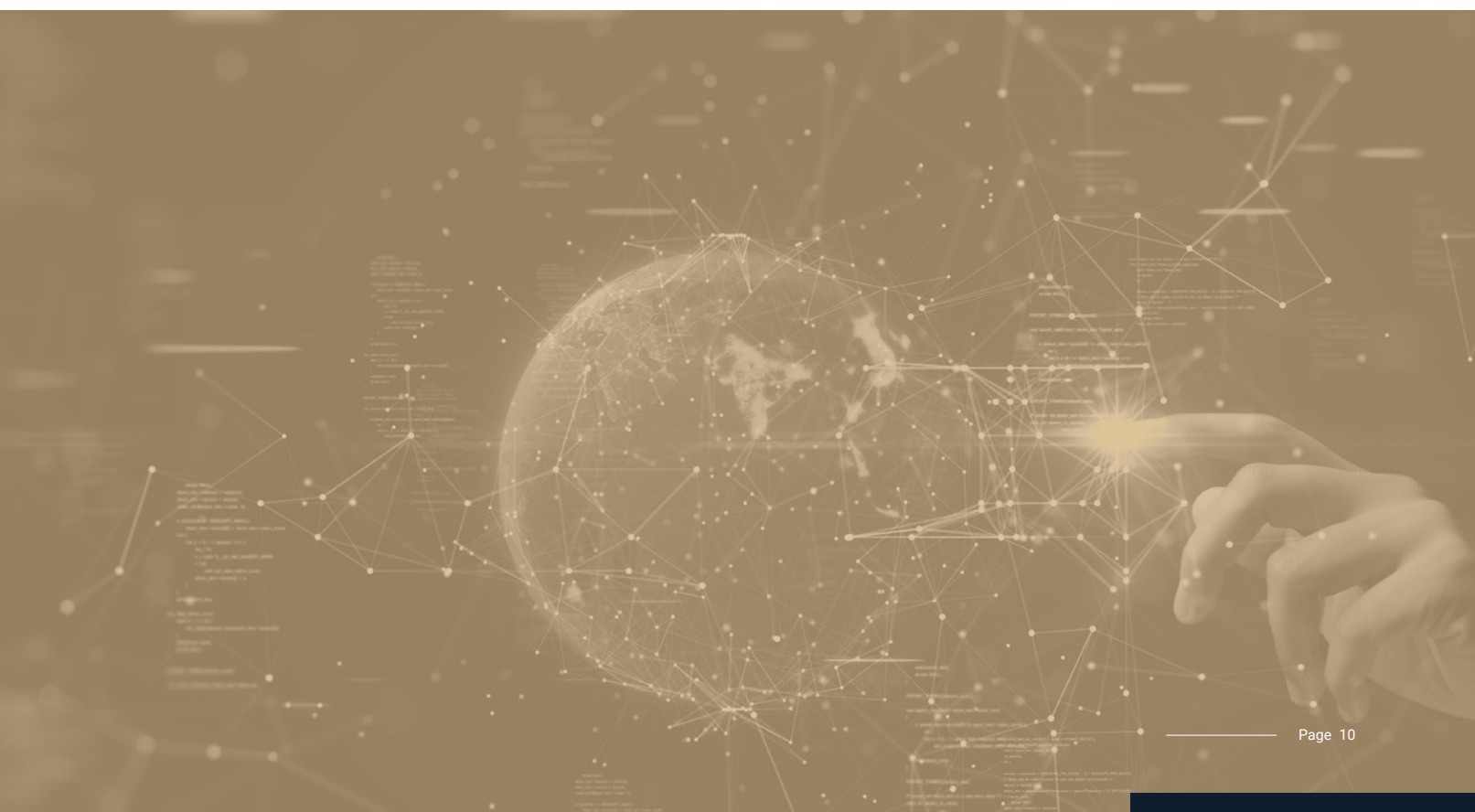
Parallels have been drawn between the high seas and [key aspects of the digital world](#). We will offer our experience and take a leadership role in developing the concept of digital global commons. Malta will work to ensure that any framework dealing with the cyber domain respects our values and guiding principles.

Increasing cooperation on cyber issues and on sharing threat indicators for international security.

Threats against the stability of nations increasingly come in a fully digital or hybrid form. Malta should explore ways to take a leading role in improving the timely dissemination of information and compromise indicators with other nation states.

Taking leadership in exporting Digital diplomacy.

Malta has been pushing the forefront of digital diplomacy for several decades through its support of [DiploFoundation](#). Malta will further its leadership in this sector by exporting the concept and practice of digital diplomacy to Africa, Asia, and Latin America through capacity-building sessions with local leaders.



FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGING WITH THE DIGITAL WORLD

Malta diplomatically engages with the digital world, both to promote its values and to further its foreign policy interests.

This requires engaging in a number of digital diplomacy activities; vocally working towards an open, stable, secure, and inclusive digital world; and increasing Malta's diplomatic reach by *exporting the practice of digital diplomacy*.

This section presents a high-level framework for digital diplomacy that promotes global social and economic interests, as well as Malta's diplomatic principles.

In deploying this framework, Malta is developing a **comprehensive digital diplomacy profile** which expresses the **Maltese identity and values** such as openness and inclusivity, and which helps Malta **grow its diplomatic footprint**.

ENGAGING COMPREHENSIVELY IN DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

To engage effectively in digital diplomacy, Malta is adopting targeted measures to contribute towards building a secure digital world, including by working closely with the private sector.

Championing processes that promote a secure and global digital world.

The digital world is not immune from the geopolitical issues that affect the physical world. To work towards a globally acceptable governance model for the digital world, we aim to play an active role in discussions in international organisations that have a bearing on the governance and operation of the digital world.

Identifying specific niches of national importance.

As a small island nation lying on the border between two continents, Malta faces unique challenges. To leave a stronger and more positive mark on the digital world, our strategy is to identify and focus on niches that are of particular importance to us, including those identified in [Malta's Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021–2027](#), which promotes the strategic allocation of investment in our competitive strengths. We aim to spread digital diplomacy globally as well as to promote technologies, regulation, and digital architectures that align with our national and [European values](#); through the [Malta Digital Innovation Authority](#), Malta has a broadly applicable framework in place for regulating innovative technologies.

Working directly with the technology giants.

A small number of private technology companies own, operate, and fully control the digital platforms used by a vast number of Internet users. A recent trend has seen governments or supranational entities like the European Union engaging directly with these platform companies in a bid to ensure that their operation conforms with local norms and regulations. Malta aims to identify avenues to engage with these companies, both for the purposes of economic growth and to help work towards a free, open, and secure digital world.

EXPRESSING THE MALTESE NATIONAL IDENTITY

In the twentieth century, key global resources were identified as physical commons; the digital architecture should similarly be identified as a global commons. The global digital ecosystem should be used to promote peace.

Contribute to a free and open Internet architecture.

For the continued existence of the digital ecosystem, and to ensure that the third of the world's population that have never been online may benefit from the opportunities that it provides, it must remain free, open, and interconnected. By working closely within the technical and governance structures surrounding the digital world, Malta will vocally advocate for the maintenance of open protocols, systems, and Internet architecture. Malta also aims to oppose the emergence of national *splinternets* and monitor private *metaverses* that restrict digital freedom of movement.

Use the digital world as a tool to promote peace.

An essential part of our national character and identity is to maintain friendly relations with all nations. However, this does not mean shying away from promoting our values; Malta will take every opportunity to vocally support initiatives that use the digital world as a means for promoting peace globally. Together with fellow nations, Malta aims to spark international conversations on how digital tools and digital diplomacy can be used to bring peoples and nations together.

Promote the idea of the digital architecture as a public good.

Malta has a rich history of taking initiatives to protect the global physical commons. Within the United Nations, Malta pioneered both the Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Arguments regarding the seas outside any national jurisdiction and global weather as common heritage of mankind can be rephrased to apply to the digital domain. Malta will help to pioneer the move to regard the global digital architecture as a *global digital commons*.

GROWING THE MALTESE DIPLOMATIC FOOTPRINT

Engaging effectively with the digital world is an opportunity to grow our presence worldwide, giving us considerable soft power and leading to a better cyberspace.

Export digital diplomacy to regions beyond the Global North.

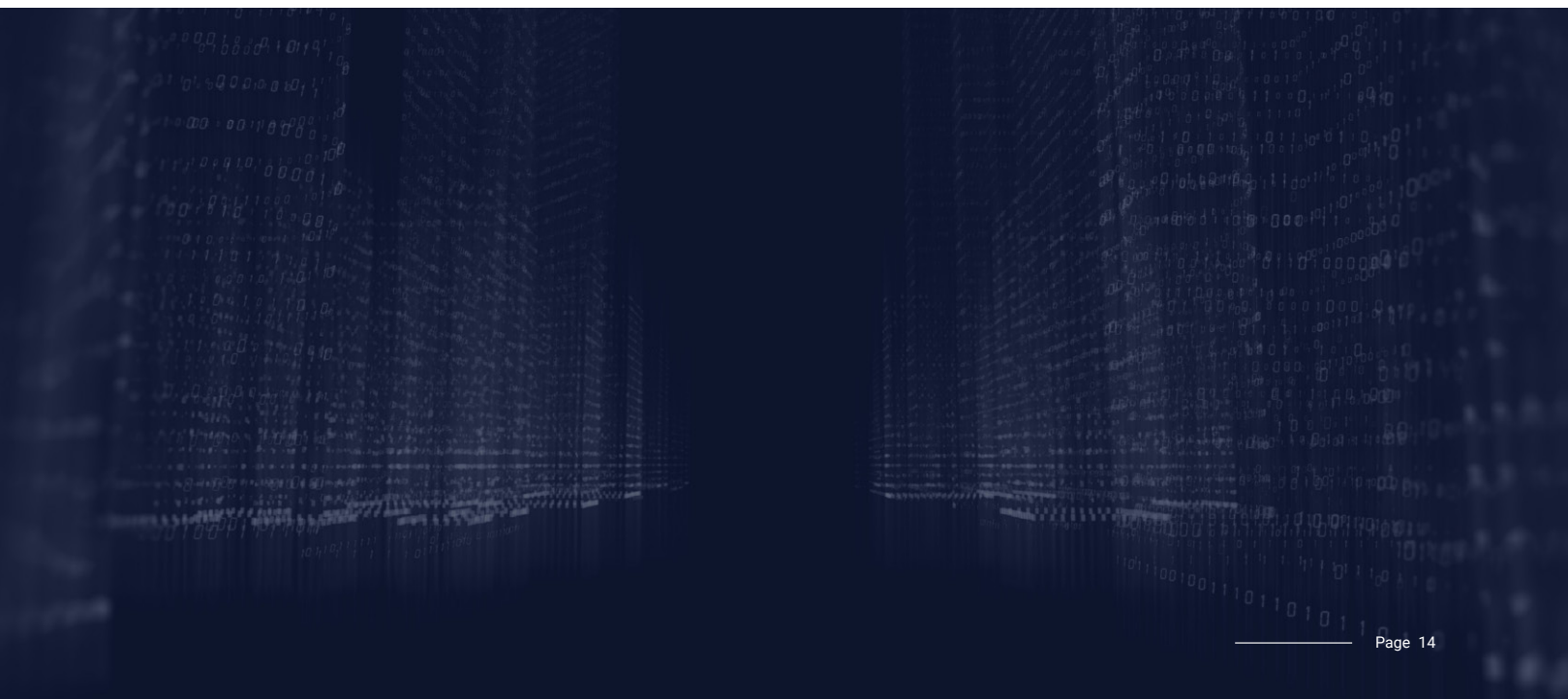
As a convinced multilateralist, Malta underscores the need for engaging with the world beyond our traditional partners, including by engaging in the training of digital diplomats. Malta and [DiploFoundation](#) have already engaged capacity-building efforts in Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Namibia. Building on this and the appointment in 2021 of its first thematic ambassador for digital affairs, Malta thus aims to play a key role in growing the global cadre of digital and technology diplomats.

Establish means for citizens and diplomats globally to better engage with Malta.

The Maltese diplomatic service cannot be physically present in every corner of the world; although our diplomatic presence is growing it still lags behind due to our small size. The digital ecosystem can help level this playing field, bringing Malta virtually to countries in Africa and elsewhere in the region where it currently has no representation. Malta should embrace artificial intelligence and other emerging digital technologies as means to connect with citizens and diplomats across the world.

Lend support to initiatives and international networks that promote a better digital world.

The increasing reliance that every country has on cyberspace has brought with it issues ranging from governance of the global digital ecosystem itself to the ever-present threat of cyberattacks. Several initiatives exist worldwide that promote a more open, safer, and more inclusive digital world. In order to contribute positively to these developments Malta should maintain a continuous dialogue with the Geneva Science Diplomacy Anticipator (GESDA), the International Network for Governmental Science Advice (INGSA), and similar organisations.



AN ACTION PLAN FOR MALTESE DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

Our action plan borrows from *science diplomacy* to propose three lines of action that link the digital world with diplomacy.

First, the digital world is a tool to facilitate diplomacy. The notion of **digital for diplomacy** compels us to ask which digital technologies we can use to interact more effectively in our diplomatic endeavours.

Second, issues surrounding the digital world are a topic of much debate, particularly on topics of governance. Being **digital in diplomacy** is essential for maintaining a cyberspace that is accessible to all and which works to further global unity.

Third, the digital world is itself a new environment which influences and requires diplomatic solutions. This **diplomacy for digital** tackles issues that impinge on geopolitics in the digital age.

DIGITAL AS A TOOL “DIGITAL FOR DIPLOMACY”

The digital world has allowed new actors to emerge rapidly and shape the global conversation. Malta has a special role to play in digital diplomacy; like other small nations, Malta quickly grasped the potential that the digital field has for increasing its soft power.

Malta now has the opportunity to position itself as a digital champion on the world stage. We already have the infrastructure in place to bring digital diplomacy to the Global South, consistent with our Foreign Policy Strategy, and thus to grow our diplomatic footprint.

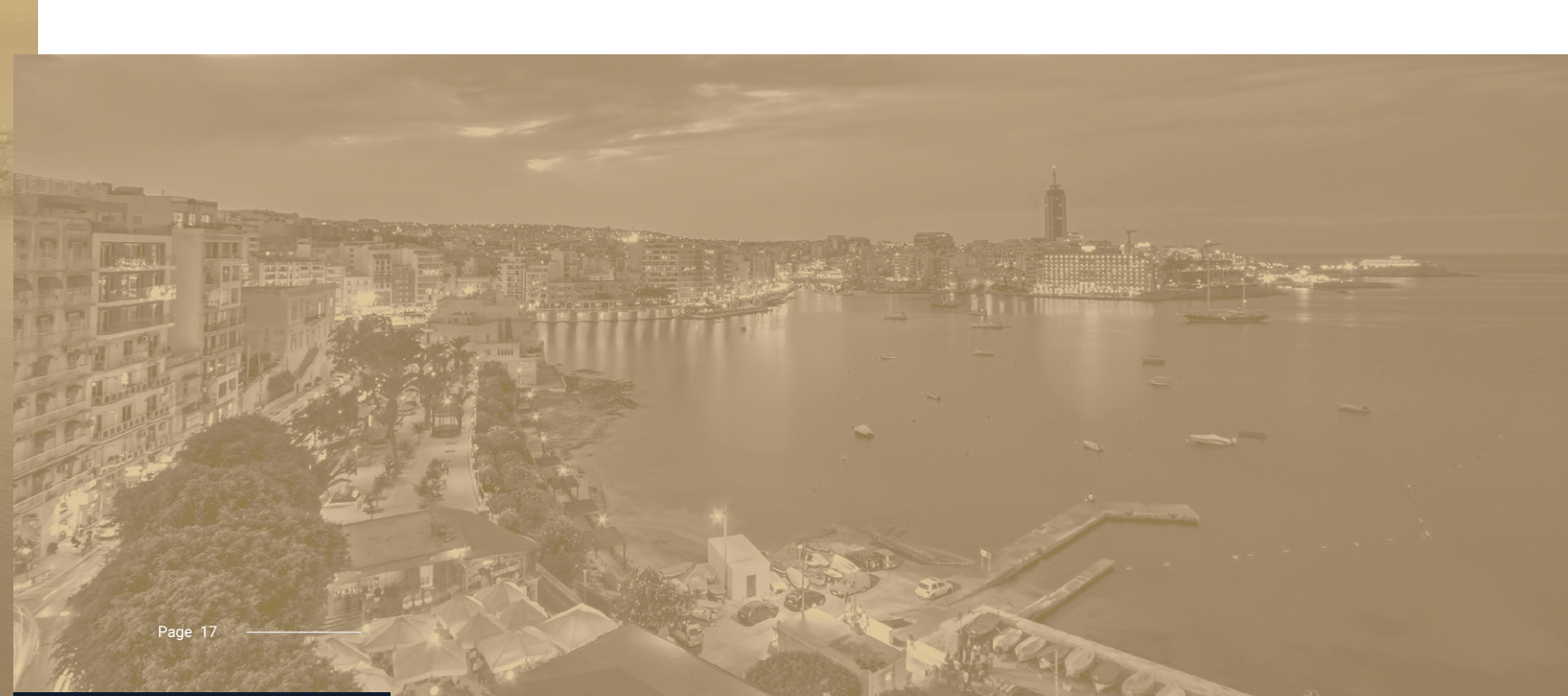
We aim to ensure that all our communications with nations, supranational organisations, and even the private actors that run digital platforms emphasise our strengths in the field. We will also stay at the forefront of new developments, keeping an eye on, adopting, and using digital technologies to both facilitate our diplomatic efforts and help to shape the future of diplomacy itself.

Communicate Malta’s digital strengths.

To build and sustain a reputation as a point of reference in the field of digital diplomacy we aim to develop a communication strategy that continuously emphasises our strengths in this field. For instance, already two decades ago Malta was at the forefront in part by helping to establish [DiploFoundation](#), which has become one of the leading diplomatic academies globally, particularly for small states and for topics of a digital nature. Through its Malta Scholarship Fund, Malta will continue to be instrumental in the digital training of government officials from small and developing countries.

Lead developments in the use of digital technology in diplomacy.

Artificial intelligence and big data are technologies that can assist in informing diplomacy and foreign policy; in particular, they can help sort through large amounts of information to extract trends and likely future developments. Malta aims to contribute to updating diplomacy for this new era, taking full advantage of big data and AI.



DIGITAL AS A TOPIC

“DIGITAL IN DIPLOMACY”

Digital technologies, together with the many issues surrounding them, have dominated international discourse in recent years. Malta will continue to participate in the policy debates around new technologies, ensuring that ours is a strong voice that promotes our shared values.

The involvement of any country in the digital world rests on training its diplomats in a whole host of digital issues and policy debates. We aim to take full advantage of our resources in the teaching and development of digital diplomacy to promote a more global perspective of digital diplomacy throughout Europe and globally.

Debates on digital policy and new technologies are likely to continue taking centre stage on a multilateral level; a good grasp of digital issues thus becomes an imperative as well as a means for taking a leading role.

Build capacity amongst Maltese diplomats in digital diplomacy.

Digital technologies interface with practically every aspect of foreign policy. An essential step forward is to embark on a comprehensive capacity-building effort throughout the Maltese diplomatic corps, ensuring a level of familiarity not just with our foreign policy strategy in its digital aspects but also with contentious issues and topics of discussion more broadly. We will ensure that our diplomats have a solid grasp of digital policy issues from the legal, security, and economic points of view, together with cross-cutting aspects such as data governance and ethics.

Engage with Brussels-based diplomats in digital diplomacy.

EU Member States look to Brussels and the [European External Action Service \(EEAS\)](#) to keep abreast of digital policy developments. In positioning Malta as a hub for digital diplomacy, we will explore setting up training for the diplomatic community in Brussels, helping to shift the focus of the conversation to the dynamics that influence and shape digital policy.

DIGITAL AS AN ENVIRONMENT

“DIPLOMACY FOR DIGITAL”

Like every new world discovered or opened to exploration, the digital field presents a new environment within which to conduct geopolitics. Malta can bear on decades of experience cultivating or helping to grow expertise on digital diplomacy and this new facet of global politics.

Directly and together with external partners, Malta helped develop a large body of work on digital diplomacy. Malta aims to use this wealth of experience to take a leading role in digital foreign policy on the European level, particularly by working closely with the European structures, such as the European External Action Service (EEAS), which led this discussion.

On a global level, Malta further aims to contribute to processes within multilateral organisations to advance the state of digital diplomacy. In doing so Malta would be in a position to help architect a truly global and open digital world and a twenty-first century digital diplomacy.

Take leadership in digital foreign policy on the European level.

Digital foreign policy requires nations to rethink how they interact with one another; it requires a new set of skills and approaches, as well as an understanding by diplomats and others involved in foreign policy. Malta will work closely with the EEAS, assisting in the continuous mapping and monitoring of the ongoing digital transformation of international organisations and the multilateral system. Malta will also aim to bolster its reputation by helping to establish a resource that lists and explains core concepts such as cyber diplomacy, digital diplomacy, and digital sovereignty.

Work with the office of the UN Tech Envoy to contribute meaningfully on a global level.

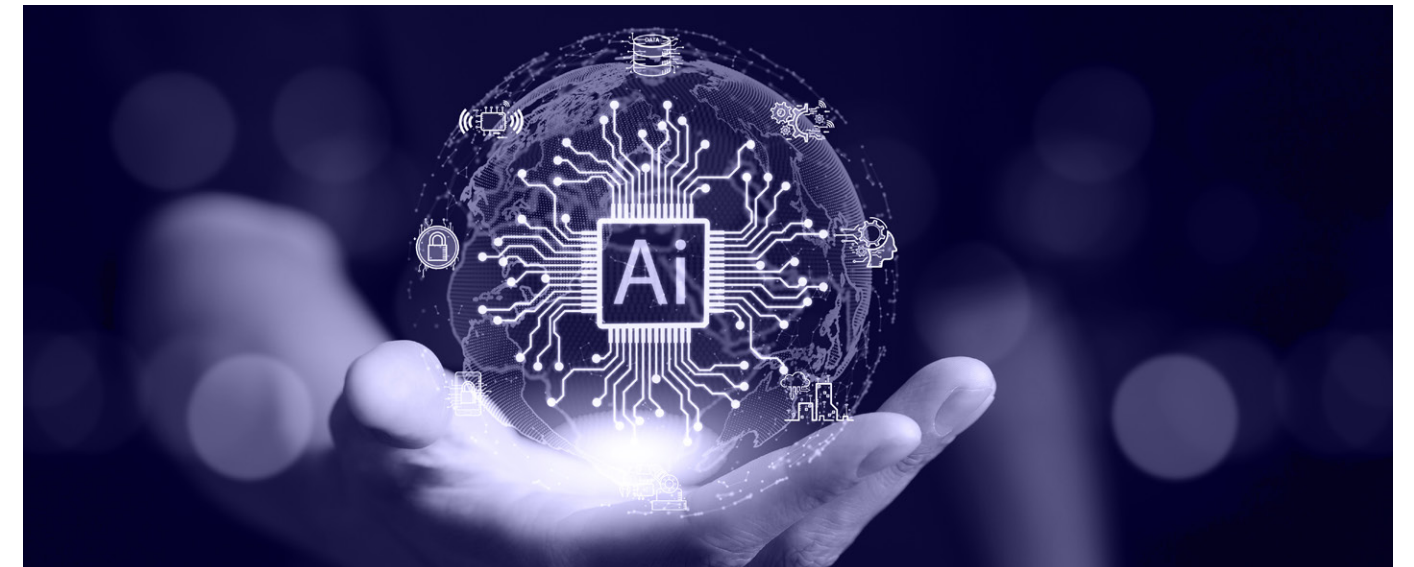
Much attention is being given by the UN to the digital field. Malta aims to contribute to the *Global Digital Compact* which is intended to promote an open, free, and secure digital future for all. Malta will also provide support to the UN Tech Envoy to help bridge the digital divide and promote capacity-building efforts.

GLOSSARY

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The technology behind [artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#) has been around for decades. It is only in recent years, however, that the immense amount of data available on the internet and the exponential increase in computational power have made it possible to create useful applications of this technology that can be made accessible to end users in almost real time.

At its core, AI is an application of what computer scientists refer to as machine learning. This is a class of algorithms that allows computer systems to ingest large amounts of training data in order to find patterns in those data. Common applications of machine learning are therefore in pattern recognition. By way of example, a computer system trained on a set of images of street signs could be asked to classify a set of images on the basis of which kind of sign is visible in each image. A development which has recently entered common consciousness can be termed generative AI, wherein a user prompt is fed into a computer system that produces a piece of text, image, or even video based on that prompt. Although seemingly very different, generative AI is still based on the same premise as other kinds of machine learning combined with technology similar to the predictive text feature that has existed on most phones for many years.



The speed with which AI can classify inputs – or take decisions – brings with it several [ethical issues](#). First, it is very difficult for humans to vet the training data fed into the algorithm. If taken from the broader internet, or even published texts, such data tends to be biased or at the very least exclude input from several population segments. Being based on such input means that much AI output will inherently reproduce these biases or blind spots. Such biases bring with them another issue which, although not restricted to AI, is exacerbated by the widespread use of this technology: the digital world is a product of the societies and cultures that have created it, whose values are therefore incorporated into it. This makes it all the more important to draw attention to these issues on the international stage. Another example of the issues surrounding the use of AI is from the theatre of war, where it has become common practice to use drones (unmanned aircraft) to perform reconnaissance and even offensive missions during wartime. Such systems may have the capability to eliminate targets, even humans, autonomously and without human intervention.

The spirit of our approach to the opportunities and concerns raised by AI is enshrined in the Joint Statement on Artificial Intelligence of the Malta MED9 Digital Ministerial Meeting, which took place on the 20th of September 2023 in Malta.



Digital Commons

As defined in the [Declaration by the Presidency of the Council of the European Union calling for a European Initiative for Digital Commons](#), issued during the Digital Assembly in 2022:

Digital commons are non-rivalrous and non-exclusive digital resources defined by shared production, maintenance and governance. Wikipedia, Linux, OpenStreetMap, and Open Food Facts, of which three are European, are some of the most visible examples. Under the right conditions, digital commons contribute to the preservation of the collective control and valuation of data, and consequently to improve the security of digital tools and innovations.

Promoting the use of digital commons thus allows both citizens and states to reduce their dependence on proprietary software and devices. It also reduces the hold of big tech companies on everyday life.

Global, open, stable, and secure cyberspace

Malta is in favour of promoting a cyberspace that is:

- global: accessible to everyone, everywhere, regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, or political leaning;
- open: based on open standards and therefore not beholden to specific technologies or companies for its operation;
- stable: not interrupted for political or similar reasons; and
- secure: built using privacy-enabling technologies which preserve the individual freedoms of those making use of the internet.

More information can be found in the press release, [New EU Cybersecurity Strategy and new rules to make physical and digital critical entities more resilient](#), issued by the European External Action Service.

Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS)

Artificial intelligence systems endowed with the capability to autonomously choose and eliminate targets are sometimes referred to lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) or “killer robots,” particularly in theatres of war.

Malta regards LAWS as inherently problematic because of the bias inherent in AI and because we believe that important decisions should always involve a human in the decision-making loop. Malta additionally supports the push towards ethical AI, which tries to minimise the bias in training data as well as bringing additional transparency to the otherwise automated algorithmic decision-making process.

Metaverse

The term “metaverse” gained popularity in recent years and refers to an evolution of the virtual reality worlds that have been in use or development in recent decades. Broadly speaking, a metaverse refers to a virtual world in which one can perform activities that mirror those of the real world. Most metaverse systems use highly immersive technologies, such as virtual reality headsets, to give their users the illusion of living in this virtual world.

It is important to realise that the term metaverse does not refer to one specific instance of such a virtual world. Various implementations of this concept exist, including some high-profile ones (e.g., Meta’s Horizon Worlds and Decentraland); importantly, there is no concept of interoperability between these metaverses, with users of one metaverse and their associated property being tied to that specific virtual world.

From the point of view of the user, metaverse technology necessitates bespoke software and hardware components as well as high-bandwidth internet connectivity. It is in principle not related to what is commonly termed “Web 3.0” or blockchain technology and is, instead, a standard application that can run on today’s internet.

The European Commission’s stance on virtual worlds and “Web 4.0,” including what issues are at stake and economic implications, is presented in the [Communication from July 2023](#).

Open standards

Standards are that which eliminates barriers between different systems. In the case of digital technologies, standards are required to ensure that users of different computer systems in different parts of the world can communicate and interact successfully. Sticking to standards owned and controlled by private entities is problematic in several ways. First, it carries with it the risk that individuals or states are locked into specific vendors. Second, on a global scale it makes it harder to narrow the digital divide since private entities can price entire regions or populations out of using a particular technology or service. Third, it means that the technology relied upon by a state could be under the control of a foreign third party, calling into question the sovereignty of the state.

Open standards are publicly available and can be adopted by anyone, anywhere, without requiring the payment of license fees. They allow individual states to preserve their sovereignty and help to narrow the digital divide.

Splinternet

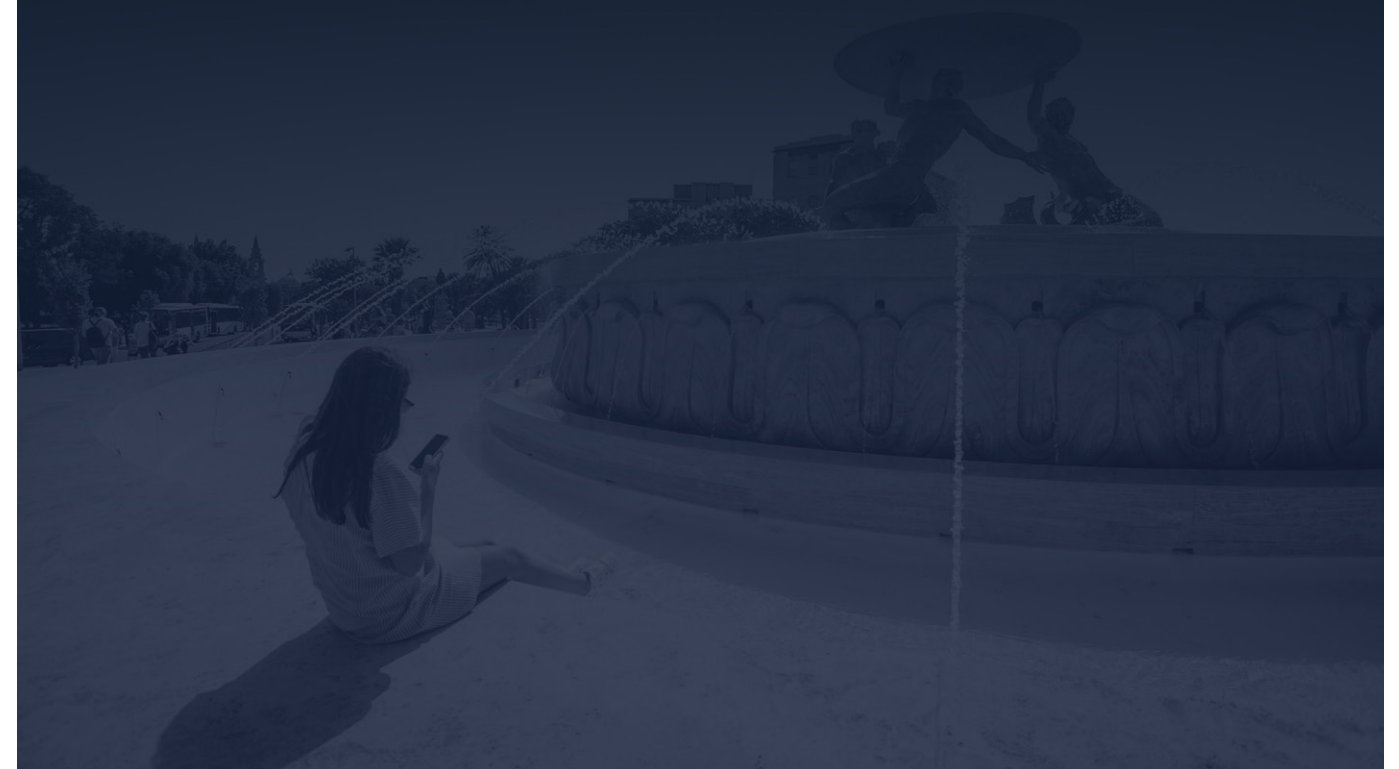
The internet is, both by its design and in its execution, tolerant to failure of individual nodes or links. It has, however, become possible for state actors to act on all the links between a specific region, or an entire state, and restrict the flow of data on all these links simultaneously. This effectively splits the internet into multiple networks between which data cannot flow freely, creating what are often called splinternets.

APPENDIX

01 Mobile connectivity in Malta

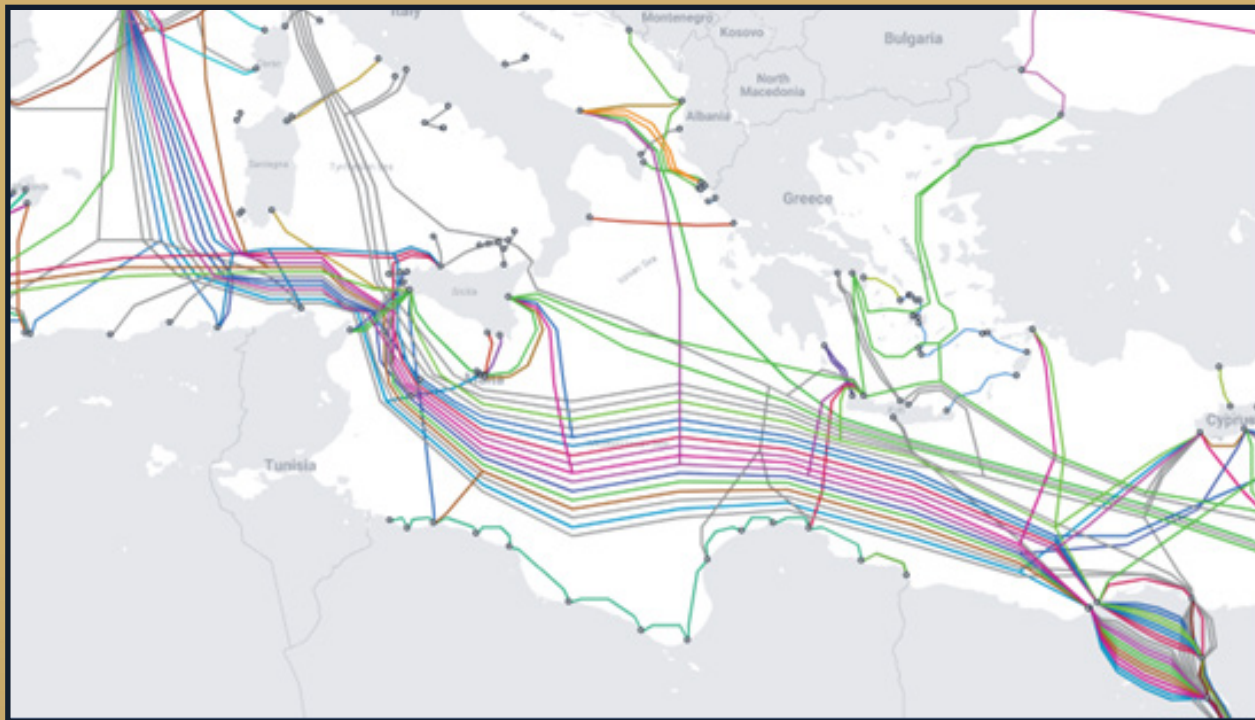
Few technologies have done as much to connect us as mobile telephony, in the first instance, and mobile access to the Internet, in the second; the trend in Malta largely mirrors that observed across the world.

Mobile phone connectivity has improved drastically since first being introduced in the 1980s. The first generation (1G) of networks only supported analogue voice calls, subsequently switching to digital voice with the second generation (2G) and adding data to create the mobile internet with the third generation (3G). The fourth (4G) and fifth (5G) generations have added more and more capabilities and bandwidth to mobile devices, giving mobile internet speeds that rival those of many homes. Advances brought by 5G also enable service providers to better service the “internet-of-things” (IoT), using large numbers of low-power devices to collect data and interact with the world. The predicted pervasiveness of 5G devices, amongst other reasons, prompted increased cybersecurity concerns regarding the provenance of the telecommunications infrastructure used by telecommunications operators to provide their services. Other concerns around 5G centre around ill effects on human health; the consensus of relevant institutions such as the World Health Organisation and the European Commission’s Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks is that provided that the overall exposure remains below international guidelines, no consequences for public health are anticipated.

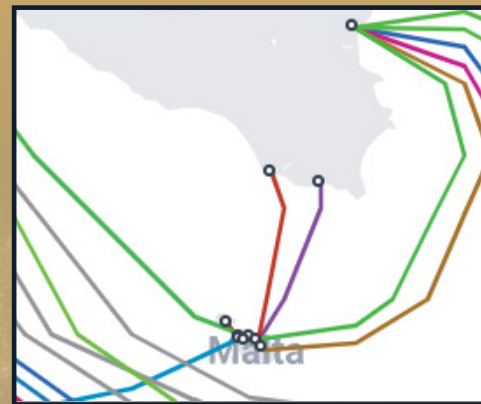


02 Connecting Malta to the world

Although wireless networks enable us to communicate with each other constantly, these networks ultimately route all our data through the fibre-optic cables that carry massive amounts of data around the world. Malta has a growing number of fibre-optic links (see figure), mostly owned and operated by the private sector, which together connect the country to the global telecommunication system.



Map of the submarine telecommunications cables in the Mediterranean and connecting Malta (inset), taken from submarinecablemap.com



03 Exporting digital diplomacy

Malta has been active in developing and formalising the very concept of digital diplomacy as well as in exporting it, particularly to Africa. Recent highlights include:

- Participating in various panels at the 2021 [Internet Governance Forum in Katowice \(Poland\)](#);
- Supporting the organisation of the [Summit on Digital Diplomacy and Governance](#), held in Malta in 2022;
- Supporting the creation of a course, [Capacity Development for Namibian Diplomacy](#), held virtually in 2022;
- Participating in a French-led working team to promote the creation of a [European Initiative for Digital Commons](#);
- Participating in an [initiative by the Commonwealth Secretariat](#), launched in 2023, to close the global gap in Artificial Intelligence; and
- Contributing a short lecture to the [AAAS-TWAS Course on Science Diplomacy](#) in 2023.
- Holding a four-day training and capacity building program on Cyber Diplomacy, together with DiploFoundation, in November 2023.

04 New forms of diplomacy

New forms of diplomacy appear to keep emerging. What are the differences between [science diplomacy](#), tech diplomacy, e-diplomacy, and cyber diplomacy?

Different prefixes – same meaning? Subtle trends in the use and implications of prefixes have started to emerge in relation to the digital world. The prefix 'e-' is used typically for commerce, 'cyber' for security and crime, and 'digital' for development divides, to name a few. These trends are confirmed by a recent study analysing nine years of Internet Governance Forum (IGF) transcripts. For example, the study shows a clear trend for the use of 'cyber' in discussion on security-related issues. There is a potential risk if the entire internet policy field comes to be framed through one lens, such as security. For example, although the EU has the Digital Agenda as its core Internet-related document, the EU Council introduced the concept of cyber-diplomacy.

Adapted from [DiploFoundation](#).

05 Big tech and diplomacy

With the advent of a truly global Internet, the line between international relations as performed by nation states and the global involvement of tech giants has been blurred. Evidence of this can be seen on both sides. On the one hand, we see individual nations ([Denmark](#), for example) as well as the [European Union](#) operating diplomatic missions in Silicon Valley, with the express aim of fostering deeper relationships with the private sector operating in that region. On the other hand, there are private corporations ([Microsoft](#), for example) recruiting diplomats to serve in senior roles dedicated to government affairs.

06 The Global Digital Compact

The United Nations Secretary General, in his report Our Common Agenda, proposed a Global Digital Compact to be agreed at the Summit of the Future in September 2024 through a technology track involving all stakeholders: governments, the United Nations system, the private sector (including tech companies), civil society, grass-roots organizations, academia, and individuals, including youth.

The Global Digital Compact is expected to outline shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all. Issues that it might cover include digital connectivity, avoiding Internet fragmentation, providing people with options as to how their data is used, application of human rights online, and promoting a trustworthy Internet by introducing accountability criteria for discrimination and misleading content.

The European Union, in its contribution to the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, asserts that it expects the Global Digital Compact to be anchored in respect for human rights and serve as a roadmap for a human-centric, global digital transformation. The Global Digital Compact should be ambitious and express a clear vision that provides a framework for the increasing activity across the UN family and be anchored in robust support for Human Rights. The European Union expects the Global Digital Compact to support an internet that is open, stable, free, inclusive, global, interoperable, reliable, secure and sustainable.

Adapted from the [United Nations](#) and the [European Union External Action Service](#).

