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Scandinavian, Baltic & Caucasus Dialogue 2026

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Youth-led Dialogue and Cultural Diplomacy

How young people are reshaping the architecture of international dialogue

Intercultural Dialogue

Youth Networks

Gender Equality

Cultural Diplomacy

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Intercultural Dialogue | Youth Networks | Gender Equality



What Is Cultural Diplomacy?

Cultural diplomacy is the exchange of ideas, values, traditions, and other aspects of culture among nations and peoples with the aim of fostering mutual understanding and cooperation.



Knowledge Exchange

Sharing educational, scientific, and intellectual traditions across cultures to build mutual literacy.



Arts & Heritage

Using music, film, literature, and cultural heritage as bridges that bypass political barriers.



People-to-People

Direct human contact — the most durable form of diplomacy — through mobility and exchange programs.

Why Dialogue Must Be Led by Youth?

Youth-led is not a label of convenience. It is a structural necessity.

Longest stake in the future

- 01** Today's youth will live with the consequences of today's foreign and cultural policies for 50+ years. They must have a hand in shaping them.

Different access points

- 02** Young people enter communities, digital spaces, and peer networks that no diplomat or minister can access authentically.

Language of peers

- 03** Peer-to-peer dialogue carries a credibility that top-down messaging cannot replicate — especially on contested or sensitive topics.

Innovation in form

- 04** Youth bring new media, participatory methods, creative arts, and digital tools that make diplomacy visible, shareable, and relevant.

Counter-narrative capacity

- 05** Young people are on the frontlines of disinformation, polarization, and identity conflict — and are best positioned to counter them.

The Diplomacy Gap: State vs. People

Formal diplomacy and lived cultural reality often move at very different speeds — and young people live in that gap.

State Diplomacy

- Operates through official channels and protocols
- Slow, state-paced timelines
- Restricted to trained career diplomats
- Influenced by political interests and alliances
- Measured in treaties and agreements

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Cultural / People's Diplomacy

- Operates through networks, events, and shared experiences
- Agile, community-paced timelines
- Accessible to any motivated young person
- Driven by shared values and human curiosity
- Measured in relationships and mindset shifts

Intercultural Dialogue: More Than Conversation

True intercultural dialogue is not politeness. It is a disciplined practice of mutual transformation.

01 Genuine Curiosity

Approaching difference with interest rather than anxiety.
Suspending judgment long enough to actually listen.

02 Power Awareness

Acknowledging that not all participants enter a dialogue on equal footing — and designing for that reality.

03 Willingness to Change

Dialogue that leaves everyone unchanged is meaningless.
Authentic encounter shifts perspective on all sides.

04 Inclusive Design

Marginalized voices are not guests at the table — they are co-architects of the conversation itself.

The Arts as a Diplomatic Medium

Art does what political speeches cannot: it moves people before they have decided whether to agree.

Music



Musical expression is one of the universal forms of self-expression seen in many cultures.

Visual Arts



Cross-border exhibitions and collaborative art projects create shared aesthetic experiences.

Literature & Poetry



Translation projects and literary exchanges build empathy across linguistic boundaries.

Theatre & Film



Co-productions create shared narratives that travel without diplomatic visas.

Youth Networks as Diplomatic Infrastructure

A youth network is not a mailing list. It is the connective tissue of people-powered diplomacy.



Build before you need it

Networks built in peacetime function when tensions rise. Diplomatic relationships must precede diplomatic need.



Formalize connections

Memorandums of Understanding, joint programs, shared governance. Structures outlast enthusiasm — and they signal seriousness to institutions.



Sustain beyond events

Alumni programs, online communities, annual summits. Diplomacy is not a one-time meeting — it is an ongoing relationship.

Digital Tools and Youth Diplomacy

Digital platforms have democratized diplomacy — removing the barriers of geography, budget, and formal accreditation.



Virtual Exchange

- Online intercultural dialogue series
- Cross-border peer mentoring programs
- Digital youth councils and forums



Media & Storytelling

- Youth podcast networks across borders
- Collaborative documentary projects
- Multilingual content creation labs



Platform Organizing

- Shared project management tools
- Secure cross-border communications
- Digital coalition-building platforms



Advocacy & Campaigns

- Joint digital advocacy campaigns
- Real-time multilingual petition tools
- Social media diplomacy training

Honest Challenges in Youth Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy is not free of friction. Naming barriers honestly is the first step to navigating them.

! Tokenistic inclusion

Response: Youth are often invited to speak, not to decide. Demand co-design rights, not just a platform slot.

! Political restrictions on civil space

Response: International visibility creates protective value.

! Language and translation barriers

Response: Invest in multilingual facilitation and translation infrastructure. Language exclusion is diplomatic exclusion.

! Sustainability after the event

Response: Embed follow-up structures from the design phase: alumni networks, joint projects, shared accountability.

Cultivating a Diplomatic Mindset in Youth

Diplomacy is a learnable skill — and youth organizations are its most agile training ground.

1 Epistemic humility

The willingness to not know — and to let that not-knowing be the starting point of conversation, not a weakness to hide.

2 Principled pragmatism

Holding firm on values while remaining flexible on methods. The diplomat who can't adapt is not diplomatic — they are just stubborn.

3 Active listening

Listening not to respond but to genuinely understand. Most dialogue training focuses on speaking; we focus on hearing.

4 Conflict transformation

Not conflict avoidance — conflict transformation. The ability to hold tension productively is the core diplomatic competency.

5 Long-term thinking

Diplomacy plays out over decades. Training youth to think in generational timescales rather than news cycles is one of ADSAYO's distinctive contributions.

6 Intercultural empathy

The imaginative capacity to experience the world from inside another cultural logic — without losing your own.

Measuring the Impact of Youth Diplomacy

What gets measured gets taken seriously — and youth diplomacy must be taken seriously.

Reach

- Number of participants / countries / sessions
- Number of content pieces produced & shared
- Media coverage and social reach

Learning

- Pre/post knowledge and attitude assessments
- Percentage reporting changed perspectives
- Number of new intercultural competencies gained

Action

- Number of cross-border partnerships formed
- Number of joint projects launched post-program
- Number of youth in new leadership/institutional roles

Policy Change

- Number of policy submissions influenced by programs
- Number of laws/frameworks citing youth input
- Number of cultural diplomacy agreements signed

Recommendations for This Forum

Concrete asks from ADSAYO to the Scandinavian, Baltic & Caucasus Dialogue 2026:

1 To All Participants:
Leave this forum with one cross-border partnership commitment — not a business card, but an agreed collaboration with a timeline.

2 To Youth Organizations:
Formalize existing relationships. Memorandums of Understanding and joint program agreements are not bureaucracy — they are diplomatic infrastructure.

3 To This Forum:
Establish a permanent youth-led working group with a mandate to produce one concrete joint policy recommendation before the 2027 dialogue.

ADSAYO's Vision: Triregional Youth Diplomacy by 2030

What if we planned for the long term? Here is ADSAYO's vision for what this triregional partnership could look like in four years.



Triregional Youth Assembly

An annual youth parliament across all three regions with a rotating chair, shared agenda, and formal liaison to the Council of Europe.



Joint Cultural Diplomacy

Pooled media resources — contributed by Scandinavian, Baltic, and Caucasus NGOs



Intercultural Diplomacy Fellowship

A competitive fellowship sending 30 youth per year to live and work in partner-region organizations for six months.



Shared Media Network

A trilingual youth media platform producing content that travels across all three regions — countering disinformation and building shared narratives.



Youth Policy Tracker

A cross-border tool monitoring youth policy commitments made by governments in all three regions and holding them publicly accountable.



Culture of Reciprocity

A documented and funded norm of bidirectional learning — where every exchange is designed to produce equal value for all sides.

What You Can Do — Starting Today

The most powerful diplomatic act is a deliberate decision to connect.

01 Have one real conversation

Not a panel Q&A — a genuine 30-minute conversation with someone from a region you know least. Exchange contact details. Follow up.

02 Pitch a joint project

Identify one specific collaboration — a shared event, a co-produced video, an exchange visit — and pitch it to someone in this room before you leave.

03 Commit to being changed

Enter the rest of this forum willing to hear something that shifts your view. Name what you expect to hear — and stay open to being surprised.

04 Share your story publicly

Document your experience at this forum and share it with your community. Every story that travels is an act of cultural diplomacy.

Diplomacy has always been about
who gets to speak
and who gets to be heard.

Young people are changing that equation.

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