Q. According to DiploFoundation, what are the main challenges that developing countries are facing/will have to face to further engage in e-commerce and make it more inclusive to foster development?

A. Despite the fact that developing countries are assuming a more prominent role as both buyers and sellers of goods and services online, some challenges still persist. On the level of infrastructure, lack of connectivity is an issue. The digital gap is narrowing, but at a slower pace than initially expected. The business environment also needs to improve. Access to enabling services, such as e-commerce platforms, e-payment systems, and shipping services, should be facilitated. On national level, an enabling regulatory environment is key. This includes the simplification of procedures related to customs and taxation, but also the development of regulatory frameworks that will enhance online security, data protection, and consumer protection, for example.
New technologies such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of things and 3D printing will bring other new challenges, so discussions that take place in organisations such as United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) are key for the sustainable growth of eTrade. The sustainable growth of eTrade requires substantive knowledge and understanding of the policy issues at stake.

Q. Please provide a short overview of DiploFoundation’s main activities and highlight how they address the above-mentioned challenges/opportunities?

A. Since 2002, DiploFoundation has addressed the gap between the limited capacities and rising needs of developing countries to foster effective participation in today’s increasingly complex global policy processes. Diplo does so by providing capacity development and conducting research. We believe that effective, substantive knowledge sharing and understanding of key digital issues are pre-conditions for the sustainable development of digital society. Access to knowledge is key to empowering countries to make and implement sound and informed policy decisions. Diplo is committed to an impartial approach to knowledge, reflecting a variety of opinions and positions.

One of our recent courses on e-commerce run in partnership with the International Trade Centre (ITC), CUTS International Geneva, and UNCTAD, was offered to diplomats who follow e-commerce negotiations on multilateral and bilateral levels. The course provided interdisciplinary coverage of e-commerce from both the digital policy and trade policy perspectives. Diplo also offers specific in-depth courses on issues of relevance to e-commerce, such as Cybersecurity, Economic Diplomacy and Internet Governance. We have more than 5,000 alumni of these capacity development programmes from 191 UN member states, in particular from small island states and developing countries. Many of our alumni have formed communities of practice around key emerging issues.

Diplo operates the Geneva Internet Platform (GIP), which comprises an observatory of digital policies (Digital Watch), including issues such as e-commerce and online taxation. Regular monitoring of developments in eTrade and related areas such as privacy, data protection, and net neutrality provides a transversal view of developments and the GIP Digital Watch is the go-to public resource for interested stakeholders.

Q. What prompted your organization to join eTrade for all?

A. eTrade for all and Diplo have the common mission of increasing the capacity of small, developing, and least-developed countries (LDCs) in the eTrade field. The eTrade for all platform provides a hub for actors to find informa-
tion, offer resources, build partnerships, and receive the support they need to strengthen e-commerce. Leveraging e-commerce is a challenge that requires a joint multi-stakeholder effort and the initiative provides the perfect framework for collaboration. Diplo provides the resources and training needed to achieve these goals.

Q. What do you expect and what do you look for in such a partnership?

A. eTrade for all can help all of us to exchange information, to build on our comparative strengths, and to avoid unnecessary duplications of efforts. In particular, we hope to address the related non-trade aspects of eTrade such as cybersecurity and data protection. For example, cybersecurity incidents reduce trust on the Internet and endanger eTrade. The question of data protection is at the core of many eTrade activities. We hope to increase shared understanding of eTrade and other digital policy issues with our eTrade partners.

Q. Is there anything else you would like to share with the eTrade for all family?

A. Diplo is very proud to open applications for the second edition of our online digital commerce course, which will start on the 25th of September and will run online over 8 weeks. This course assists stakeholders from different sectors in developing countries and LDCs to increase their knowledge and capacity to engage in multilateral digital commerce-related discussions. The course will cover trade and digital policy issues such as consumer protection, cybersecurity, taxation, e-payment, the impact of emerging technologies on e-commerce, including 3D printing, Bitcoin and the Internet of things, and the key processes of negotiation – regional trade agreements and multilateral discussions at the WTO. The course is delivered by DiploFoundation and CUTS International Geneva, in partnership with ITC, the GIP, and UNCTAD. Fellowships are available for participants from developing countries. The online application is open until the 7th of September on the course webpage.

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Short bio

Dr Jovan Kurbalija is the Founding Director of DiploFoundation and the Head of the Geneva Internet Platform. A former diplomat, Dr Kurbalija has a professional and academic background in international law, diplomacy, and information technology. He has been a pioneer in the field of cyber diplomacy since 1992 when he established the Unit for Information Technology and Diplomacy at the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies in Malta.
Dr Kurbalija was a member of the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Internet Governance (2004-2005), special advisor to the Chairman of the UN Internet Governance Forum (2006-2010) and a member of the High Level Multistakeholder Committee for NETmunidal (2013-2014).

Since 1997 Dr Kurbalija’s research and articles on cyber diplomacy have shaped research and policy discussion on the impact of the Internet on diplomacy and international relations. His book, *An Introduction to Internet Governance*, has been translated into 9 languages and is used as a textbook for academic courses worldwide. Dr Kurbalija lectures on e-diplomacy and Internet governance in academic and training institutions in many countries, including Austria (Diplomatic Academy of Vienna), Belgium (College of Europe), Switzerland (University of St. Gallen), Malta (University of Malta) and the United States (University of Southern California).

You can consult his text at: [Huffington Post](https://www.huffpost.com) and [DiploFoundation](https://www.diplofoundation.org).