

Chapter 8

Citizen diplomats and public relations diplomacy: popularization of diplomacy

Institutions and practices of diplomacy are spreading at the same rate as transnational relations are developing within a new global system. Change and transformation are therefore the dominant themes of modern diplomacy.

We have already developed the aspects of Para- und proto-diplomacy of sub-state entities, track-two diplomacy by non-governmental representatives and corporate diplomacy by transnational companies. Let us now turn to a further extension of diplomacy: citizen diplomats. Two basic types can be distinguished in practice:¹

- 1) The citizen diplomat as a lobbyist or advocate of a particular international cause (for example humanitarian or political)
- 2) The citizen diplomat as an autonomous agent in international relations (for example world-renowned figures who act in a private capacity representing their own economic or political interests –celebrity diplomacy). From Marco Polo to Bill Gates and Ted Turner, business professionals have acted as diplomats and as a global force for good citizenship because of their cultural sensitivity to their own environment as well as to the world at large and the global enterprise they are heading.

This new relational paradigm is based on the following perceptions of politics:

- citizens as political actors capable of influencing the course of events
- civil society as the complex of associations that active citizens form and through which they interact with other groups (networking)
- politics as a cumulative, multilevel, open-ended process of continuous interaction involving these citizens and associations
- connections between citizens outside and inside government creating whole body politics. Politics is thus coming back into society.

The popularization of access to information has turned citizens into independent observers as well as assertive participants in globalized relations, and the new agenda of diplomacy has only added to the leverage of such groupings.² Globalization has taken foreign affairs out of the Chanceries and taken it into the heads and hands of the people.

This political concept of the twenty-first century has been called the “Citizen’s Century”³. Citizen Diplomats can and should learn from modern diplomacy as practised by professional representatives of sovereign states. The parties learn, test and introduce practices that seem to ease or enhance the conduct of the relationships. These codes of conduct or principles correspond to those of traditional diplomacy.

All human activity and interchange involve some aspects of diplomacy in form of courtesy, respect, tact. This personal diplomacy corresponds, in fact, only to the rules of etiquette in social behaviour. They are neither legally nor morally required. Yet, there is some sense of obligation to perform these rules. On the other hand, there are the rules of international protocol, though not legally binding with legal sanctions, yet their violation can carry grave political consequences.

In 2005, a group of former diplomats has formed an organization called “Independent Diplomat” (ID) in London and New York which is consulting governments of non-recognized states such as Kosovo, Somaliland and Westsahara.

The relational paradigm and its actions of private diplomats on the international stage pose no real threat to the state system of diplomatic discourse but add to the mixed system of stakeholders within the international system. Since diplomacy emerges wherever individuals or groups conduct cross-border relations with one another, it is therefore not exclusively linked to the sovereign state system. Diplomatic communication, historically based on government-to-government and diplomat-to-diplomat interactions, has expanded to include government-to-people and people-to-people contacts.

Citizen diplomats can and should learn from modern diplomacy as practised by professional representatives of sovereign states and benefit from the knowledge and insight from social scientific research (sociology, psychology, anthropology, language and communication) on human behaviour.

Within some modern societies a new phenomenon of “public relations diplomacy” is appearing which results in a certain popularization and even vulgarization of diplomacy: Apart from traditional diplomatic titles modern society is creating more and more innovative pseudo-diplomatic denominations. Awarded sometimes to well-respected personalities and celebrities, they are

seen as a way to interest the public via the media in commercial, charity or social purposes and actively promote these causes. The increasing use of pseudo diplomatic titles in the non-diplomatic world reflects the attraction the world of diplomacy exercises within the general public. The examples range from UNESCO-goodwill-Ambassador to beauty/beer/wine-Ambassadors. Since diplomacy is about representation the wide variety of purposes such as advertisement for products, public entities, cities or humanitarian organizations also exemplifies the popularization of diplomatic titles in modern society. Traditional diplomatic and consular titles are legally protected by the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic and Consular Relations in connection with domestic law which should combat against any misuse of diplomatic or consular institutions and prevent any pretexting in the diplomatic arena.⁴

The following criteria can serve as guidelines distinguishing between traditional and pseudo-diplomatic titles:

- a genuine state representation
- a diplomatic/consular mission
- the authority to legally bind a state or an International Organization.

References

- ¹ **Paul Sharp**, Making Sense of Citizen Diplomats, in: **Jönsson/Langhorne**, Diplomacy, vol.3, p. 343
- ² **Jan Melissen**, The new public diplomacy. Soft power in international relations, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan 2005) p.3
- ³ **Harald H. Saunders**, Politics is about relationship. A blueprint for the Citizen's Century, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2005) p. 20, 85
- ⁴ **Wilfried Bolewski**, Misuse and protection of diplomatic and consular titles, in: The Australian Law Journal 2003, p.750