

# **Political sciences**

## **DIPLOMACY IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES**

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### **Abstract**

Diplomacy is one of the main tools for the implementation of the foreign policy of states. In international politics, it has a great mission as a way to resolve the goals and strategies set by the states in a peaceful way. Accordingly, the study of the mentioned issue has always been of great importance. At the stage of rapid development of modern digital technologies, when all fields are undergoing digital transformation, naturally, the diplomatic service is not an exception, and this increases the relevance of the issue to be studied even more. The mentioned topic (due to its practical importance) is of a public nature. Because the modern reality, overcoming the existing challenges is possible only through unified universal cooperation, which serves and is directly its prerogative of digital diplomacy.

The aim of the paper is to analyze the issues of the origin and introduction of digital diplomacy (the case of the USA) and evaluate its practical importance; In particular, what role does digital diplomacy play in the world at the current stage and what place does it have in international relations together with traditional diplomacy, to present the advantages and disadvantages of digital diplomacy.

The paper is presented with a qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources.

**Keywords:** State, Digital Diplomacy, Digital Technologies.

### **What is digital diplomacy?**

In the modern world, digital technologies have become an integral part of everyday life. Along with the development of technologies, the frequency and scale of their use increases.

In the wake of changes in time, classical diplomacy acquired two new forms: digital diplomacy and cyber diplomacy. Which does not always have the same load and result. However, peaceful cooperation is successfully used by different countries.

Digital diplomacy refers to the use of social networks and other digital platforms, including artificial intelligence, and the determination of foreign policy goals based on it. One of the positive aspects of digital diplomacy is its comprehensive character, when contacts are equally available at all distances. Digital diplomacy has facilitated communication between the diplomatic corps and ambassadors who are stationed in different countries. Unlike traditional diplomacy, digital diplomacy is preferred by the majority of the population. If earlier diplomatic meetings were kept secret and topics were not discussed publicly, now the social world has seen a great transformation in this area. Most of the population is involved in social diplomacy, for which only a personal social page is required, on such platforms as: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter... The existence of a social network means that any citizen of any country can participate in forming a common opinion, ask questions regarding international issues and receive constantly updated information from the first source<sup>12</sup>. Diplomacy has never been so public and democratic. The digital world is not limited by geographical boundaries. The digital industry has a huge space and opportunities that cannot be limited. Digital diplomacy is a recent concept, so it has a short history. Digital diplomacy is a blend of social media and foreign diplomacy. Its innovative character opens up new ways and provides special opportunities in international relations. Digital diplomacy, as a product of globalization and the fruit of new public diplomacy, is considered one of the main trends in diplomatic communication of the twenty-first century. Influenced by the extraordinary advances in ICT, (Information and Communication Technology) Internet and social media, the way diplomacy is practiced and presented has changed radically and is increasingly moving away from traditional diplomatic elements. The importance of digital diplomacy is based on the use of ICT, the Internet and social media, which at the same time constitute its basis for strengthening diplomatic relations. However, the process of digitization is not isolated from cyber risks, as the freedom of the Internet and social media is repeatedly abused for various

<sup>12</sup> Manor, Ilan, (2018), The Digitalization of Diplomacy: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Terminology, DigDiploROx Working Paper, No 2, Jan., <https://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/sites/www.odid.ox.ac.uk/files/DigDiploROxWP2.pdf>

purposes, which may have both state and non-state actors. The digital revolution has affected all aspects of life, including international relations. States express their identity and foreign policy interests in the international system in new ways.

### **The origin and development of digital diplomacy in the USA**

Digital diplomacy is defined as the use of the Internet and new information communication technologies to achieve diplomatic goals. There is an ambiguous definition around digital diplomacy. According to one definition, it is a new tool in conducting public diplomacy. According to another opinion, digital diplomacy increases the ability to interact with foreign people and actively engage with them, which allows the transition from monologue to dialogue. So, the best definition of digital diplomacy might include both of these perspectives. Digital diplomacy is the increasing use of ICTs and social media platforms by a country to achieve foreign policy goals and practice public diplomacy.

The first foreign ministry to create a special diplomacy unit was the United States Department of State, which in 2002 created a task force on e-diplomacy. The emergence of social media as a diplomatic tool has enabled states to establish two-way or "dialogical" communication with other diplomatic actors and their publics. Traditional diplomacy is conducted in a confidential environment, mostly in closed meetings. And online diplomacy has allowed states to give a greater role to the people in the development of foreign policy, and with the help of the online platform to increase public opinion on the foreign policy agenda. All this makes modern diplomacy even more democratic, which increases the interest in this field and the factor of trust in people working in the foreign ministry<sup>13</sup>.

This method of diplomacy additionally allows different actors to engage in multilateral diplomatic campaigns to cooperate with influential people and organizations. Digital diplomacy allows states, diplomats, and citizens to receive information from states or even the online networks of first-person countries with whom they do not have or have severed diplomatic relations and ties. For example, a similar platform is "Twitter", where all important state actors write opinions in the form of statuses, and their few-sentence statements and statuses can be seen by millions of people. I think this once again emphasizes the democracy of diplomacy and a new opportunity. Previously, diplomacy was carried out only by diplomatic services and diplomats, but today it has been replaced by digital diplomacy<sup>14</sup>.

Digital diplomacy has taken over everything. Diplomats, heads of state, people working in different systems, as well as ordinary citizens are involved here<sup>15</sup>. Digital tactics can be understood as diplomats' attempts to use digital tools to reach large online audiences, create online content that can go viral, and build a large online following. Digital tactics are measured by simple engagement metrics, such as the number of website visitors, the number of likes and shares on social media, and the total number of followers. Digital strategies use digital platforms to achieve a specific diplomatic goal. Digital strategies therefore aim to achieve a predetermined and measurable goal. The objective defines the target audience, and the target audience defines the platform to be used. Digital strategies require a connection between the "front end" and the "back end" of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The front end consists of individuals who write and distribute online messages. The back end consists of those who evaluate the effectiveness of messages through quantitative and qualitative metrics. Over the past several decades, public diplomacy has been widely viewed as a transparent means by which a sovereign country communicates with the public of other countries, with the goal of informing and influencing audiences abroad, promoting national interests, and advancing foreign policy goals. In this traditional view, public diplomacy is seen as an integral part of state diplomacy, which refers to the conduct of official relations, usually private, between official representatives (leaders and diplomats) of sovereign states. In this sense, public diplomacy includes such activities as educational exchange programs for scientists and students; visitor programs; language teaching; cultural events and exchanges; and radio and television broadcasting. Such activities are usually focused on improving the image or reputation of the "sending" country, as well as on establishing a broader political cooperative environment in the "receiving" country<sup>16</sup>.

To understand the scope of the digital diplomacy phenomenon, one needs to examine the State Department's digital diplomacy machinery, which includes more than 288 Facebook profiles, 200 Twitter accounts, and 125 YouTube channels. This mechanism is referred to as a global media empire. Recently, and especially after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, public diplomacy has attracted

<sup>13</sup> Verrekia, Bridget, (2017), Digital Diplomacy and Its Effect on International Relations, Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection, Spring, [https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3619&context=isp\\_collection](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3619&context=isp_collection)

<sup>14</sup> Rashica, Viona, (2019), The benefits and risks of digital diplomacy, DOI: 10.2478/seeur-2018-0008, Volume & Issue: Volume 13 (2018), <https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/seeur-2018-0008>

<sup>15</sup> Smolnik, Franziska, The Strategic Partnership between Georgia and the United States: Vision Wanted, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, SWP Research Paper 15 December 2020, Berlin, [https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research\\_papers/2020RP15\\_Georgia\\_UnitedStates.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2020RP15_Georgia_UnitedStates.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> There...

increasing attention from many parts of the world, both from practitioners and scholars. In contrast to the "narrow" traditional, state-based concept of public diplomacy mentioned above, recent scholarship has proposed a "broader" concept of the field by developing a new concept of public diplomacy that defines public diplomacy more broadly than as an activity specific to sovereign states. This point of view aims to capture the emerging trends in international relations, where a range of non-state actors with a certain position in world politics - supranational organizations, sub-national actors, non-governmental organizations and even private companies (according to some) - through communication and significant engagement with the foreign public and makes it possible to develop and promote the policy and practice of public diplomacy<sup>17</sup>. Advocates of the new public diplomacy point to the democratization of information through new media and communication technologies as a new force that has greatly empowered non-state actors and elevated their role and legitimacy in international politics. As a result, the new public diplomacy is seen as a place in a system of mutually beneficial relations that is no longer state-centered, but consists of multiple actors and networks that operate according to new issues and contexts in the global environment. This new diplomacy will not in the short term replace the traditional state diplomacy practiced by foreign ministries, but will affect the various activities of these ministries, as more than ever, foreign ministries and diplomats will need to build and manage relationships with new global actors beyond bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. In recent years, the increased interest in public diplomacy has been fueled by conceptual developments in other fields. Marketing and public relations concepts such as branding have been incorporated by public diplomacy scholars to include countries, regions and cities. Similarly, the concept of soft power developed by international relations scholar Joseph Nye has become for many a core concept in public diplomacy studies. Nye defines soft power as the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment. In other words, soft power is the degree to which a political actor's cultural assets, political ideals, and policies inspire respect or affinity from others. Thus, soft power is considered as a resource, and public diplomacy is a mechanism that tries to use the resources of soft power<sup>18</sup>.

Like many other technologies, digital platforms present a dual-purpose challenge, i.e. they can be used for peace or war, good or evil, offensive or defensive. The "dark side" of digital diplomacy, which refers to the strategic use of digital technologies as tools by governments and non-state actors to counter disinformation and propaganda in pursuit of strategic interests, has expanded in recent years to the point where it has serious implications for the global order. For example, before the 2016 presidential election, more than 150 million Americans were exposed to the Russian disinformation campaign, nearly eight times the number of people who watched the evening newscasts of ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox in 2016. A recent report to the US Senate found that Russia's disinformation campaign around the 2016 election used every major social media platform to broadcast words, images and videos tailored to voter interests to help elect President Trump, likely working even harder to support him. Russian disinformation campaigns are also very active in Europe, mainly in order to increase social tensions in different countries, especially in situations of intense political polarization, such as during the Brexit referendum, during the separatist vote in Catalonia or during the protests - the "yellow vests" movement in France. Ignoring misinformation is often the default option for digital diplomats working in embassies, for reasons that exist. Digital tactics can keep the discussion focused on the key message, or can prevent escalation by denying trolls attention; Which deprives controversial issues of "publicistic oxygen" and can serve as psychological protection of digital diplomats from verbal abuse or emotional distress. In the face of misleading statements, lies and "fake news" often spread by people in authority, diplomats, journalists, the general public needs and demands accurate information in order to make reliable decisions. Thus, it behooves embassies and foreign ministries to attempt to correct false or misleading statements and use factual evidence to protect themselves and the policies they support from deliberate and toxic distortions. The #EuropeUnited campaign launched by the German Foreign Ministry in June 2018 in response to the rise of nationalism, populism and chauvinism aimed to do just that - to correct the misperceptions and lies spread online about Europe by presenting verified information about what European citizens have achieved together with members of the European Union<sup>19</sup>.

### **Traditional diplomacy in the footsteps of digital diplomacy**

Diplomacy has existed for many centuries, its main function as a tool of foreign policy is to find common interests between the parties and clarify conflicting issues in order to resolve them peacefully. Diplomacy is a means of conflict resolution. Good diplomacy and the diplomatic corps can avoid many conflict situations and

<sup>17</sup> Gegeshidze, Archili, (2017), Georgia and America: the main features of the evolution of modern bilateral relations, expert opinion, Foundation for the Research of Strategy and International Relations of Georgia, <https://gfsis.org.ge/files/library/opinion-papers/74-expert-opinion-geo.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy, (2019), (A series of papers showcasing the latest research and critical thinking on the study and practice of public diplomacy), Public Diplomacy, Magazine, issue 22, winter, [https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/sites/uscpublicdiplomacy.org/files/PD-MAG-FINALIZED-VZ-LAYOUT-web\\_NB%20EDITED.pdf](https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/sites/uscpublicdiplomacy.org/files/PD-MAG-FINALIZED-VZ-LAYOUT-web_NB%20EDITED.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Bjola, Corneliu, The "Dark side" of digital diplomacy, Jan., 22, 2019, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/dark-side-digital-diplomacy>

confrontations between states. Diplomacy in the international system is carried out through many channels, one of the most famous ways is diplomatic missions. The way in which diplomacy carries out its activities is called "traditional diplomacy". At this time, we get the impression that diplomats are meeting each other in a specially selected, closed place, the details of their meeting are not public and are mostly secret<sup>20</sup>.

Traditional diplomacy deals with negotiations between state actors. They try to solve a specific problem through diplomatic means. In the realistic concept of international relations, it is clearly described that the main goal of states is peace and protection of state sovereignty. The feeling of insecurity prompts states to engage in world diplomatic relations and create a stable international environment<sup>21</sup>.

The development of the Internet has caused a great change in the world. The Internet and various computer systems provided the first opportunity for instant access to new information and the ability to send a written message in seconds. Initially, the Internet was used at the government level, it was a state-controlled process. Since the 20th century, the Internet has become available to public officials at a lower level, and then to the general public as well<sup>22</sup>.

The 21st century is characterized by the latest technologies, smart phones and phones. Through them, people have 24-hour access to the Internet and people. It is the Internet communication that led to the establishment and development of social, digital diplomacy. Although digital diplomacy is becoming more and more important in the world, it still lacks formal definition and meaning. Researchers-scientists agree that the beginnings of digital diplomacy are in the United States of America. Interestingly, during her tenure as Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton created the State Department of Social Networks.

Modern diplomats use social media in their daily activities to carry out their activities. Such platforms as, for example, Twitter Diplomacy, Facebook Diplomacy. In the 21st century, meetings are held on online platforms, on a specific site with the help of the Internet. During the COVID-19 pandemic, diplomacy has shifted to online conferencing platforms such as Zoom. In addition, online meetings allow diplomats to communicate in the shortest possible time, meet partners and meet from different cities. All this makes meetings easier and also reduces costs. Online meetings have many pros and cons. As the pandemic crisis has shown, they ensure business continuity. They also increase inclusion by allowing participation without physical presence, often due to travel and other costs. Among the main disadvantages of online meetings is the lack of physical contact, which is important for building trust and empathy, which is necessary especially when dealing with controversial and political issues. Twitter and Facebook are currently the most popular electronic tools used by diplomatic services around the world, as we mentioned, the US headquarters is considered the birthplace of digital diplomacy. Then it was followed by Great Britain, France and many developed countries. However, it should be noted that there are countries where digital diplomacy is not yet available. One such continent is Africa, where the digital industry has yet to be introduced. The fact that digital diplomacy has brought diplomats closer to the public is also interesting. Before the digital world, diplomacy was partially demystified<sup>23</sup>. Diplomats had no contact with the population and actually only a small circle knew about their activities, such as the authorities and the government. The digital world has made diplomacy more public. Diplomats' letters and their opinions posted on social platforms can now be shared, liked, and even expressed. That is why they say that digital diplomacy is different from traditional diplomacy and the interaction has changed from monologue to dialogue.

The growing popularity of digital diplomacy is enough to justify its use, so it is important to analyze what its benefits are. One aspect of digital diplomacy that is most appealing is its ability to facilitate two-way communication. Another advantage of digital diplomacy is its simplicity. People post their personal information almost every day, and it is now possible to see the daily life of the first persons, their activities, where they go, who they meet, etc. Naturally, at first it was not easy for diplomats to move to a new platform, because their activities were mostly confidential<sup>24</sup>.

Necessity requires diplomats to accept the new social world and evolve with it, so constant progress and development is essential. In addition, they will give the ordinary population the opportunity to actively participate in diplomatic activities, express their opinion and feel more important. For example, we can take the

<sup>20</sup> Kekeliani, Giorgi, (2020), Georgia-US Relations: The Dynamics of Diplomatic Relations After the Rose Revolution, [https://www.academia.edu/41787726/Georgiana\\_Ashsh\\_Urtihertobbe\\_Diplomatyuri\\_Unyebis\\_Dynamica\\_Rose\\_Revolution\\_Shemsedeg](https://www.academia.edu/41787726/Georgiana_Ashsh_Urtihertobbe_Diplomatyuri_Unyebis_Dynamica_Rose_Revolution_Shemsedeg)

<sup>21</sup> Verrekia, Bridget, (2017), Digital Diplomacy and Its Effect on International Relations, Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection, Spring, [https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3619&context=isp\\_collection](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3619&context=isp_collection)

<sup>22</sup> Riordan, Shaun, Cyber Diplomacy VS. Digital Diplomacy: A Terminological Distinction, May 12, 2016, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/cyber-diplomacy-vs-digital-diplomacy-terminological-distinction>

<sup>23</sup> Ittelson, Pavlina, Digital Technologies and the Environment: a Synergy for the Future, 17 February, 2022, <https://www.diplomacy.edu/resource/digital-technologies-and-the-environment-a-synergy-for-the-future/>

<sup>24</sup> Stanvropoulos, Agathangelos, (2019), Digital Diplomacy in Asia: Should developing countries in Asia follow the lead of the digitalization in Diplomacy? Dissertation, University of Bristol, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347563199\\_Digital\\_Diplomacy\\_in\\_Asia\\_Should\\_developing\\_countries\\_in\\_Asia\\_follow\\_the\\_lead\\_of\\_the\\_digitalization\\_in\\_Diplomacy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347563199_Digital_Diplomacy_in_Asia_Should_developing_countries_in_Asia_follow_the_lead_of_the_digitalization_in_Diplomacy).



period of Donald Trump's presidency in the USA, when he published a daily post about who he was meeting, what he was doing, and thus he attracted the attention of his followers, who constantly followed his activities and meetings. While social diplomacy has many benefits, it also comes with challenges. From there, I realized that the social platform implies having many subscribers and followers who like or comment on the activities of the first persons or famous people every day, their activity towards diplomats is much less. Ambassadors and other government officials have a smaller following than the common man. Their activity is not so interesting that they interest many people and follow them on a daily basis. It is interesting that the social media brought people who have nothing to do with politics to the fore. For example, actors, singers, athletes. They have a very large audience and many of them are a higher priority than any country's ambassador or government official. Their speech, appeal or any activity is seen by many more people than diplomats. Accordingly, diplomats have certain challenges in this regard. Digital diplomacy is a challenge because there is no specific protocol on how to use social media. It is known that various government officials and diplomats specially hire someone who is qualified to manage social media and help promote their page. How to post, how to joke about what's trending at the moment, etc.

### **Conclusion/recommendation**

Communication technologies in the modern world play an important role in policymaking, including diplomacy. The so-called Digital diplomacy significantly contributes not only to the increase of public awareness in the field of international relations, but also ensures its active involvement, which is one of the important signs of the establishment of democracy. It is noteworthy that in developed countries, a new position has been introduced in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - the ambassador of digital diplomacy. It is desirable for developed countries to cooperate and support developing countries in order not to lag behind the development standards of digital platforms in the world, by carrying out relevant effective measures and reforms in the direction of updating digital diplomacy, so that their ministries of foreign affairs implement changes in this direction and, like other developed countries, introduce and appoint digital diplomacy Ambassadors, who will coordinate their diplomatic service and missions.

We will find here that when discussing digital diplomacy, we should not forget about cyber security, which requires the selection of specific cadres and coordinated action to protect digital bases and create a perfect security system. In this case, too, developing countries need help to collaborate with developed countries, and collaboration in this regard will improve the reformability of their digital industries.

The digital industry is developing at an unprecedented speed and it is changing all the rules and norms that have existed in the world so far. This limitless potential for change is fueled by the growing development of fields such as robotics, artificial intelligence, biotechnology and computers. The digital revolution has affected all aspects of life, including international relations. States express their identity and foreign policy interests in the international system. The digital industry holds the most important place for the functioning of the global international system. That is why most of the democratic governments of the modern world make the biggest financial investment in strengthening cyber infrastructure.

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