Effects of Information and Communication Technology on Diplomacy and Foreign Policy Administration

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development in information and communication technologies had a multiple effect on the tools, forms and overall nature of diplomacy. The work with information has a major share in the activities of foreign service and in those of a diplomat. Over the past decades, however, the collection and processing of information underwent major changes as a result of the revolution in ICT. The approach to and use of information itself changed and the analytical approach to information processing in diplomacy has become crucial. Despite the initial incompatibility of the internet and social networks with diplomatic activities – unlike diplomacy, social media tend to be a more informal communication tool – a number of examples in diplomatic practice show synergy possible also in this field. The ICT is not an end in itself, but represents a means and/or communication tool for a ministry of foreign affairs to increase efficiency in some of its operations. The innovation process in eDiplomacy and within the context of progressive development in new ICT is likely to continue to affect the future of diplomacy considerably.

Keywords: Ediplomacy, Information and Communication Technologies, Innovations In Diplomacy, Public Diplomacy, Social Media, Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION

The revolutionary development in information and communication technologies (ICT), also known as the information revolution, has recently reached and affected a vast spectrum of society, including international relations and diplomacy. Technological progress in high-speed computers, software and communication technologies, particularly in terms of their global mass expansion have forced government agencies and, through them, the ministries of foreign affairs to introduce ICT applications in their portfolio.

Because of the progressive information and communication technologies, diplomacy has not only gained a new label – eDiplomacy, but also an entirely new dimension and dynamics.

That is also why it is important today to perceive diplomacy from the new perspective
and to reflect the changes in its internal transformation within this context.

TRANSFORMATION
OF DIPLOMACY INTO
EDIPLOMACY

Along with the developments, diplomacy as an official activity of state agencies, which is responsible for international relations that implement national foreign policy, advocate rights and national interest, has changed over the years.

According to Pajtinka (2008), the need for reform measures or “modernisation of diplomacy has been largely determined by the accelerating globalisation, and diplomacy has been confronted with some of its attributes – particularly the progress in science and technology.” (Pajtinka, 2008, p. 185).

The installation of telegraphic, teleprinter, telephone, fax, radio, television or satellite connection had an effect on major acceleration of the communication connection and overall information flow. Some of these technologies have either grown obsolete over time and had been replaced with new ones, or are in decline. Fax machine, for instance, remains quite often present in offices, yet is gradually turning into an artefact of the past as it is being used less and less.

The speed of information transfer has been most significantly affected by the dawn of the internet and overall affordability of computers. The speed and exchange of information that has been made possible by the advanced information and communication equipment has caused that, as Rana (2011) suggests, a ministry of foreign affairs “is running now a 24x7 affair. That adds to demand on its personnel, and the skill sets they need, especially communication ability and quick thinking. Every single diplomat needs a modicum of media skills and needs to be trained” (Rana, 2011, p. 201).

Traditional diplomatic work and diplomatic personnel use information and data gathering, analysis and evaluation concerning individual countries and regions in form of information, intelligence and analytical searches that focus on specific areas. Information gathering in diplomacy in terms of the means of collection is set out in the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Article 3 paragraph 1d) stipulates conditions for identification of developments in the host state by “any legal means”. The work with information has an internal character – thus it is not aimed at the general public, but rather serves the state administration as a background for further reference when formulating official positions, conceptual decisions, etc..

Information thus acquired has lost its former purpose, particularly in terms of the speed and currency. In the recent decades its former exclusive status among information and communication activities of diplomatic missions has come to face direct competition with the new information technologies and equipment which enables relatively fast and accessible forms of information gathering. Yet the speed is not directly linked with any thorough exploration of the local environment, reading between lines and particularly understanding the wider context where the diplomatic missions retain their stronghold.

In the era of the advanced global information networks, information itself has an ever-growing value. Similarly to other fields, information is not seen merely as a means, but also a product. All of these factors contributed to the changing nature of the role of intelligence in diplomacy to the benefit of analytical work and practical use of information, and to the detriment of the traditional factual reporting.

The digital information volume that currently reaches users is overwhelming and, in comparison with the past, unprecedented. Nye (2011) summarises the data as follows:

By one estimate, 161 billion gigabytes of digital information were created and captured in the year 2006 alone (that is about 3 million times the information in all the books ever written). In 2010, the annual growth in digital information is expected to increase more than six-fold to 988 billion gigabytes. At the beginning of

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