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***Round Table II: Public Diplomacy Strategies for Marketing a Nation***

**Title of the paper:**

**SLOVENIA - BRANDING A SMALL NEW EU NATION**

**Abstract:**

The very ability to competently and convincingly communicate in international and diplomatic relations can importantly compensate the shortcomings in physical capabilities and potentials of small states, like Slovenia. It seems that Slovene foreign policy makers are aware of the fact in general principle, while mentioning the soft powers of Slovene cultural, civilisation and economic achievements that exceed its actual size. In particular one points to the importance of communication within the framework of the European Union, its common policies and the new European diplomacy. Slovenia at the EU doorsteps is surely not a nation without an image and known identity, however it has to figure out how to build on its communicative powers and how to improve its brand as a trust-worthy, constructive, principled and unproblematic partner Member State. The paper will explore the role of Slovene public diplomacy in national image building within the European Union.

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## **Introduction**

*"Place de la Concorde, Paris, July 1, 2015, 0900 Euro time.*

*Mr. and Mrs. Bridge approach the majestic iron fence protecting the American embassy and its entrance parking lot. It seems that a festival is going on. Red, white, and blue bunting is everywhere, LED and laser signs of a tasteful and stylish variety exhort readers to "Visit the U.S.", "Hunt buffaloes with Red Indians", "Descend into Grand Canyon on mules", "Smell the cool breezes of Banff", "Try a real American Tamale!" (Schmitz, 2001)*

Does this imaginary story depict how the U.S. or any embassy of the 21st century will look like? And does it actually show the direction in which the contemporary diplomacy and its future role will develop - merely to market a state/a nation while the technology will take over the ordinary diplomatic functions and consular services? In this context, can one talk about "the rise of the brand state with geographical and political settings that seem trivial compared to their emotional resonance among an increasingly global audience of consumers" (Ham, 2001)?

At the core of this puzzle lies a paradigm shift in the diplomatic environment influenced by the advent of revolutionary information and communications technologies. The paper will first introduce the renewed understanding of contemporary world politics and further discuss how (public) diplomacy has adapted to the prevailing trends of global communication and media interdependence. This will allow us to give a concrete and relevant estimations of how a small state like Slovenia can and should communicate within the international relations, in particular within the European Union.

## **Brave New (Media) World**

Today's world is characterised by frammegration, "a concept that juxtaposes the processes of fragmentation and integration occurring within and among organizations, communities, countries, and transnational systems such that it is virtually impossible not to treat them as interactive and causally linked" (Rosenau, 1999: 3). Contemporary international relations and diplomacy take place within global networks of interdependent info-, media-,

cyber- and idea-spaces which have spilled over the borders of states'/nations' territories whereby challenging the traditional concepts of sovereignty and power. "The (metaphor for the) international system which is now developing...is of an egg-box containing the shells of sovereignty, but alongside it a global community omelet is cooking." (Booth, 1991 in Rosenau, 1999: 6) More accurate than an old metaphor about realpolitik with states-billiard balls moving around on a pool table, would be a so-called post-Newtonian metaphor of the world politics. "The new metaphor should not only add balls for nonstate actors, but also show that what happens on the table depends on the dynamics of the table fabric as well as the interaction among the balls. And, metaphorically speaking, that fabric is changing in ways that make it-the fabric itself-a new and important factor." (Ronfeldt and Arquilla, 1999: 8)

The very fine weaving of contemporary world politics is communication, or even more so imagination, which is today "a staging ground for action, and not only for escape."(Appadurai 1996 in Rosenau, 1999: 7). New modes of production and networks of information have erased old and created new demarcations of power and identity, reality and virtuality. Within the converged "Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment" network, it is prevailingly important what and how is communicated, represented, virtualised and imagined, "how reality is seen, framed, read and generated in the actualization of the event" (Der Derian, 2000: 786-787) Therefore, contemporary international relations are also more and more led by soft power, i.e. "the ability to achieve desired outcomes in international affairs through attraction rather than coercion. It works by convincing others to follow, or getting them to agree to, norms and institutions that produce the desired behavior. Soft power can rest on the appeal of one's ideas or the ability to set the agenda in ways that shape the preferences of others." (Nye and Owens, 1996: 9) In such a common globalised context, any state can take on the potential of convincing, appealing communication and compensate for its limited sovereignty: "What states lose in control, they could regain in influence." (Brown and Studemeister, 2001: 3)

One of the important threads in the world politics' fabric are media, not merely reacting to the international political events and developments, but rather increasingly being a part of the communication process between governments and publics about international politics. "The mass media of communication have broken into traditionally exclusive sphere of diplomacy and have themselves become an instrument of international conciliation and

mediation as also of conflict." (Kunczik, 2003: 409) Furthermore, with expansion of global communications international politics is more or less media represented and medialised, taking place in real-time, with a so-called CNN effect "where in international crisis situation global television has become the dominating actor in the conduct of foreign policy, replacing elected and appointed policy makers" (Gilboa, 2002: 732). World leaders and other actors in international relations have adapted to such a "media reality", often bypassing established diplomatic channels and using the new technologies of global communication to transmit nonsecret messages directly to leaders of state and nonstate actors as well as to their respective publics (Gilboa, 2002: 738). In a so-called "wag-the-dog" foreign policy formulation and implementation one attempts to improve not only the content, but even more so the image of their policies. "What too often counts is how well the policy will "play", how the pictures will look, whether the right signals are being sent, and whether the public will be impressed by the swiftness of the government's response - not whether the policy promotes America's long-term interests." (Gergen, 1991: 48-49) However, past experience often prove that at points of policy uncertainty, in the absence of clear policy line or persuasive government strategy media can have disastrous impacts (Robinson, 2001: 532; Hoge, 1994: 138).

### **Contemporary communicative diplomacy?**

Also contemporary diplomacy has adapted to such circumstances where "valuable information, observation, and suggestions from overseas diplomatic and intelligence sources may no longer arrive in time to have the desired influence on decisions, and, when information does arrive in time, it can hardly compete with dramatic televised images and ongoing reportage of crises and foreign policy issues." (Gilboa, 2002: 737). Modern diplomats are inevitably locked in a specific relation of inter-dependency with the media: on one side they rely on media transmitted information, whereas on the other, they use media as efficient communication means supplementing the classical diplomatic channels. They have not merely adapted to work with the media hand-in-hand, but have also learnt how to work with the media, stepping toward a more active involvement and management of media and communication to one's country purposes and advantages guided by national interests. Therefore, diplomatic profession nowadays resembles the profession of a public affairs practitioner, as it implements reasoning, tools and techniques of media and public relations (Plavšak, 2002: 116-117). It is argued that contemporary diplomacy takes on forms of various

media formats and it is described in terms of "media diplomacy", "tele(di)plomacy", "foto(di)plomacy", "soundbite-", "instant-" and "real-time diplomacy" (Ammon, 2001; Gilboa, 2001). Most critical authors claim that particularly in the age of media wars "Western diplomacy has become sophisticated in packaging public information in a visually astute fashion, and television networks, which often operate in a symbiotic relationship with authorities, tend to conform the geo-political agendas set by powerful governments" (Thussu, 2000: 5).

All in all, contemporary diplomacy as such actually is public diplomacy, defined as "as the way in which both government and private individuals and groups influence directly or indirectly those public attitudes and opinions which bear directly on another government's foreign policy decision." (Signitzer and Coombs, 1992: 138) However, roles are not completely interchangeable between contemporary diplomacy and media, each of the professions, diplomatic and journalistic remains delivering its basic functions, where they often intersect within the field of communication as described. As some scholars stress, superficial daily news and media accounts cannot compensate for in-depth diplomatic reports, richer in information, sources, analysis and recommendations (Vukadinović, 1994: 248-249). Also, public diplomacy is not merely a technique of state promotion, its basic content and quality is formulated and implemented foreign policy, which cannot be merely compensated by means of public relations, advertising and branding. The most important roles are still played by credible and competent foreign affairs speakers who are involved with the policy decision-making process (Plavšak, 2002: 114).

(Public) diplomacy as a system and a practice, today persists in its main international communication role, though, enduring a/n r/evolutional shift. As shown, within the new paradigm of world politics, in particular by means of the global reach of modern technologies and media images, international relations now flow above, below, around, through and in spite of diplomacy and the modern diplomatic system no longer is the master institution of international society. However, diplomacy still remains its central practice: "The less obvious or "natural" the identities of the agents appear and the thinner the social context in which they operate, the more diplomacy is needed." (Sharp, 1999: 50) Diplomats nowadays have to take on roles of agenda setters, issue raisers, coalition builders, regime or order builders, and catalysts of collective action. Contemporary diplomacy communicates with multiplicity of

actors in international relations, including media, adapting to new functional modes, as "network diplomacy" (Livingston, 2002); it catalyses, translates and moderates between various actors and issues as "catalystic diplomacy" (Hocking, 2002); and strives to add value in its outputs, to analyse, interpret, offer synthesis, multifold scenarios and solutions, also in its media and public appearances (Cooper, 2002). Thus, understanding of diplomacy in today's world should go more in the direction of a public partnership in foreign policy, where state becomes merely a moderator and diplomacy represents an intermediary and alternative channel between regulation and self-regulation. In such a model, contemporary diplomat can be actually anyone who identifies with values of a particular state within the international community and with humane models of solving open questions of globalisation.

At this point one can observe, or at least predict further r/evolution, toward a contemporary "communicative" diplomacy where communicative power, i.e. the ability of competent and convincing communication in international and diplomatic relations, has become essential precondition and asset for any actor entering the world stage. This can be only realised through social re-construction, interaction and communicative action - through so-called diplomatic communicative interaction which is characterised by behaviour oriented towards mutual understanding, where perceptions of reality, interests, preferences, and desirable behaviour are subjected to a collective process of interpretation guided by argumentative rationality and the claim of validity (Lose, 2001: 188-190; Risse, 2000). Crucial for understanding such a communicative approach to power is a specific concept of practices that includes not only interactive attempts, but also people's emotional involvement to political rites, routines, and discourses (Guzzini, 1993: 465). Within such an understanding, traditional concepts and perceptions of small states and their potentials in world politics can be completely repositioned and reframed. This simply means that any actor in international and diplomatic relations is as big and as influential as it is communicated, presented, perceived and agreed to be by the others. Or put in terms of open market competition: "Brand states still 'make war' (and are themselves 'made' - i.e. shaped and constructed - by 'war'), but here in a non-violent contest for market-share and visibility." (Ham, 2002: 265). Here, Slovenia as a small, new, EU member serves as a case study of what public diplomacy in its communicative (branding) potential can or cannot do.

### **Slovenia: Brand of a Success Story**

Slovenia declaring its independence from Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991, started off as "a nation without an image and known identity" (Serajnik, 1998: 687) or vaguely as a country "on the sunny side of the Alps". Thus, today it is widely recognised as a stable, prospective country in the Central Europe, proved to be able to take on a model role of "an exporter of stability" to the region, a mediator and "an honest broker" in international community. The pictures and the words of the former US President Clinton during his visit to Slovenia on 21 June 1999 bear historic importance of communicating Slovenia's role in the world: "We must build a Europe with no frontline states - a Europe undivided, democratic, and at peace for the first time in history. And Slovenia can lead the way." The international media report on the first summit meeting between US and Russian Presidents, Bush and Putin, taking place at the castle Brdo near the Slovene capitol Ljubljana in June 2001, only added to visibility and prominence of such an image.

While riding the wave of favourable international developments and coincidences, Slovene representatives also have made consistent, intensive efforts to make Slovenia's competent voice heard within the international community. Slovene diplomacy made an excellent use of its smallness and unproblematic position in particular as a non-permanent member the UN Security Council in years 1998-1999, at some crucial moments even in a presiding role, with all the international media attention (Jazbec, 2001). It has been further building on its "brand" of a regional leader also within other multilateral organisations (presiding over CEFTA in 2003, the Central European Initiative-CEI in 2004; the OSCE in 2005). At the moment Slovene decision makers are also aware of the importance of communication within the framework of the European Union, its common policies and the new European diplomacy. It is repeatedly stressed that, "as a small state we must build our recognition on grounds such as image of a trust-worthy partner, being constructive, principled and efficient. We can only succeed by means of expertise and professional approach, motivated and highly educated people." (Rupel, 2003a)

After having accomplished a multifold, systemic shift like other East-Central European diplomacies - from previous socialist/federal systems to independent, internationally recognised and also multilaterally active diplomacies, Slovene diplomacy is facing yet another challenge with the accession to the European Union. Slovenia has indeed achieved a crucial

breakthrough with the EU membership, however, therewith it has outsourced its main foreign policy aims, leading its identity (also its image and brand) formation for the past decade. This process has been specific and even controversial in the definition and relation to the significant other - toward Europe/the European Union and the Balkans/Yugoslavia. Thus, one presented European identity as lying at the heart of Slovene national history and Slovenes always considering themselves as a European nation (with a leitmotiv "Slovenia. Home in Europe"). On one hand, the European identity became the desirable development model and main aim of Slovene sovereignty, on the other, the former Yugoslav federation represented the contra-identity, contributing to a large extent to the strengthening of the new Slovene identity. However, also the construction of European identity becomes a nationally and personally internalised process and at this stage of self-consciousness or even self-confidence Slovenes take an active position toward the important other, either the imperfect European Union or the unstable Balkans (Plavšak, 2001; also in Hansen, 1996).

These socio-psychological developments reflect in several current, parallel attempts to question, rethink, reformulate and even to re-brand the very core of the Slovene identity. In search for a modern, recognisable and inventive Slovene image or even a positive, likable stereotype to be efficiently and convincingly communicate externally, new Slovene state symbols (flag, heraldry) were chosen through a concourse in October 2003. At the same time a major initiative for a new creative and communication action, branding Slovenia abroad, in particular as in Europe, has been launched by the Slovene Tourism Board (with one of the proposed new slogan: "Slovenia-Eden of Europe"). In the same month, President of the Republic Janez Drnovšek brought together around 50 relevant speakers, representatives and experts from state institutions, academia, private sector, NGOs and media to discuss on "Active and recognisable Slovenia in the world" and to build a platform (i.e. network) for further debate on Slovenia's future.

Here, one of the conclusions was that public diplomacy should be included among the priorities of the future Slovene foreign policy, with no further explications or recommendations at this point. The formulation follows the basic definition of public diplomacy, not yet taking into account all implications for contemporary diplomacy: "It is necessary to strategically plan and carry out a foreign policy of relations with foreign publics in order to improve the image and recognisability of Slovenia, of Slovene companies, of our

values and potentials as well as of individual state and civil society initiatives in the international environment." (Drnovsek, 2003) Still, it seems that Slovene foreign minister intuitively is aware of Slovenia's potential in contemporary world politics, mentioning the soft powers of Slovene cultural, civilisation and economic achievements that exceed its actual size (Rupel, 2001). He also pointed to the importance of culture and international cultural cooperation, thus, warned of the unsolved, crucial question of national language promotion within the EU. His psychoanalysis of the country was indeed significant: "In last decade Slovenia has achieved a lot; we have many achievements, however, they have been more or less introverted, self-protective. Slovenia has fought for ourselves, for our own benefits; first for the existence, then for a respectable position within international relations." (Rupel, 2003b)

### **Toward a new creative European identity?**

In this respect, how can then Slovenia become even more "powerful" as a new EU Member State? I suggest to take into account some parameters within the outreach of public diplomacy, which can potentially affect the future, renewed Slovene brand in Europe and elsewhere abroad.

1. With the increasing dynamics of processes in the international environment, it is most essential to understand the ongoing changes in time, to be able to adequately react and to adapt to them. Therefore, holistic projections of middle- and long-term developments in the international relations, in particular within the European Union, are top priority for a foreign ministry.

Slovene diplomacy should base its activities primarily on value-added analytical work, where beside expertise and specialisation also a skilled use of information access and material provided by new technologies and media, is essential to remain in track. This backup will equip Slovene diplomats with professional confidence to strive toward a non-stop, active, inventive and cooperative presence in the multilateral fora (the UN; the EU; the OSCE). Here, Slovene diplomacy should communicatively act with a creative ambiguity, as expressed by Slovene former long-time ambassador to the United Nations and nowadays the UN Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs, dr. Danilo Türk (2003).

Also at the level of the European Union, in particular when knowing the developments within CFSP framework, Slovenia as a new Member states can take advantage of the potential shortcuts in communication. A study on concrete “emanations” of EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy within the UN (Plavšak, 1996) showed that large credit for a successful policy implementation actually goes to every day communication, regular contacts, informal consultations, and coordination at lower levels and “in the field”, among the diplomats of the EU Member States at the embassies abroad whereby diverse actors within the EU constantly interact, parallel to regular institutional channels.

2. Slovenia should fully grasp on potentials of contemporary public diplomacy, mechanisms and techniques of 'imagination', i.e. media representation, image-making, branding. Slovene diplomacy should work toward being more transparent, inclusive and communicative - it should build networks on all levels to include all relevant actors and provide for a synergy of diverse efforts in the field of public diplomacy and international public relations.

Special attention should be devoted to media related work: work of Slovene diplomats to a great extent relies on international media reporting, and the international media in turn, can importantly strengthened Slovene foreign policy positions if dramaturgically well in time and place (as to the newsworthiness criteria). Here one observes that Slovene foreign policy actors tend to often use the domestic media as a communication channel and also, a testing variable, while Slovene media seem to be increasingly interested to perform as official representatives (and defenders) of Slovene national interests. Still, communication and messages by Slovene diplomats and foreign policy actors should be based on thorough analysis and well thought foreign policy formulations, on one side, and any foreign policy decision should take into account also public opinion and communication aspects.

For such changes within the diplomatic practices, some organisational, structural, creative support is most needed. The following adaptations and re-organisations within and among relevant institutions should be a priority:

- establishment of public diplomacy unit at the Slovene foreign ministry or at the Office of the Prime Minister with a high-ranking official responsible for overall planning and coordination of public diplomacy activities;
- expansion, re-organisation and coordination of public diplomacy activities in other government institutions (office of media and information, spokesperson's office, ministries and offices involved with promotion abroad - of culture, of economy, of tourism etc.);
- active involvement of media and public relations professionals, branding experts with the public diplomacy activities, also by employment and rotation in their job positions at the Foreign Ministry and the Slovene embassies abroad;
- cooperation and coordination with relevant outside institutions, involved with public diplomacy activities (Chamber of Commerce, Slovene Tourism Board, public relations and marketing agencies; NGOs, cultural and academic institutions, media);
- expansion of common research and policy oriented projects in the field of public diplomacy, potentially resulting in the establishment of a new independent (non-governmental, non-profit) organisation (think-tank) for such purposes.

However, proper education and training of modern diplomats for the communication and media age remains at the core of any public diplomacy efforts in Slovenia. Courses on public diplomacy with workshops on media and public relations should be introduced not merely for students of international relations, but primarily for serving diplomats at the foreign ministries and embassies abroad, as well as for all other interested actors involved with public diplomacy. This could be followed up with relevant, tailor-made courses like communication and lobbying within the European Union, marketing communication and branding for states, creative, visual workshops etc. These could be expanded to more comprehensive training programmes in different aspects of public diplomacy at diplomatic academies, institutes and other (independent) organisations, as already functioning in Western Europe.

3. Last but not least, only a clear and comprehensive definition of Slovene national interests, aims and values provides stable grounds for systematic and efficient communication, represented and implemented by the state actors and the citizens themselves. The ideal of image making and branding is to be realised at high levels of identification and of active involvement.

Here, one should first pose the basic questions of how do we see ourselves within the European Union, what image we (want to) project abroad, what is contemporary Slovene identity as to the European identity. Answering to these is problematic in particular when looking into some survey results showing explicit mono-cultural, non-tolerant, xenophobic patterns in Slovenia, which are incompatible with plurality of ethnic and language communities, life styles and cultural practices within Europe. So far, Slovenes have based their perceptions of the "other" mostly on their monoculture experiences, fears and frustrations of a small, young nation, past history and migration from ex-Yugoslavia. Still, the future lies with the young population, which is characterised by new understanding of freedom, by individual life styles, by flexibility and openness to multicultural flows and dialogue etc. (Ule, 2003). If they are to be the future diplomats of Slovenia, their creativity as a particular lifestyle most certainly represents a distinct trait of contemporary Slovene identity and can work efficiently, if not contagiously within the new European home.

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