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Diplomatic Actors Beyond Foreign Ministries¹

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Already in the 20th century foreign ministries and the diplomatic corps began to lose their monopoly on political contacts across national boundaries. The development toward a “hybrid diplomatic arena” with a variety of potential diplomatic agents beyond the traditional ones will in all likelihood continue and accelerate in the 21st century. New actors can be identified along several dimensions. Elsewhere I have discussed supranational, subnational, trans-governmental and transnational challenges to traditional diplomatic “actorness”.² Of these, the transgovernmental and transnational challenges seem the most serious ones, but I’ll comment on each in turn.

The Supranational Challenge

The EU is the prime example of a supranational actor in today’s world. With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009 the European Union as such, not just the Commission, acquired a diplomatic *persona*. The EU “foreign minister,” the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, is assisted by the European External Action Service (EEAS). The recruitment process has not been unproblematic. Some 1,600 officials were transferred to the EEAS from the Commission and the Council Secretariat on 1 January, 2011. In addition, staff is recruited among member-state diplomats. The representational function of EU delegations is well established, and EU diplomats take an active part in the local *corps diplomatique*. Yet several organizational questions are still to be solved.³

One set of challenges concerns the “double-hatted” character that the service shares with its foreign minister. Skeptics wonder how the two sets of career streams in the Commission and the Council Secretariat can be fused. And the recruitment of member-state diplomats adds to the heterogeneity and potential tensions. If the EU has acquired a foreign minister and a foreign ser-

vice, however problematic, the crucial question remains whether it has been and will be able to develop a foreign policy of its own. Another problematic aspect of supranational European diplomacy concerns the persistence of traditional, national diplomacy among the member states. The emergence of the EU as a diplomatic *persona* has not replaced, but merely added a new layer to, traditional diplomacy.

The question remains whether the anomaly of the EU as a recognized diplomatic actor represents the beginning of new development in the history of diplomatic relations. Will it trigger the emergence of additional regional diplomatic actors? So far, we haven’t seen any development in that direction. Other regional organizations are still far from being granted similar diplomatic status. Nor is regionalized diplomacy discussed as a likely future scenario in the way regionalized trade is. Moreover, Brexit and increasing tensions among EU member states do not bode well for the future of existing supranational foreign policy and diplomacy.

The Subnational Challenge

Traditional diplomacy presupposes centralized control of interaction across state boundaries. Regions and cities are then not recognized as diplomatic *personae*. Nor are constituent states in federal governments. Yet today the terms “micro-diplomacy” and “para-diplomacy” are sometimes used to refer to the cross-border activities of subnational units.

Today, some authors speak of a renaissance of cities as international actors.⁴ The “governments of large cities and urban areas increasingly engage directly in diplomatic activities, opening representative offices in foreign capitals and other major world cities and sending their mayors on ever more frequent ‘state’ visits to their foreign counterparts”.⁵ City governments engage in a variety of international activities and receive increasing recognition for this role. The in-

² Jönsson, »States Only? The Evolution of Diplomacy«.

³ Koops/Macaj, The European Union as a Diplomatic Actor; Petrov/ Pomorska/ Vanhoonacker, *Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, »Special Issue: The Emerging EU Diplomatic System«.

⁴ Nijman, »Renaissance of the City as Global Actor«.

⁵ Pigman, *Contemporary Diplomacy*, p. 47.

creasing engagement by local governments in peaceful areas or countries in helping their counterparts in more troubled regions received special attention at the First World Conference on City Diplomacy in the Hague in 2008.⁶ City governments have organized themselves in one general NGO, United Cities and Local Governments, which has observer status with the United Nations.

Saskia Sassen (1991) has coined the term global city to denote the new strategic role for major cities in economic and financial activity. The more globalized the economy becomes, the higher the agglomeration of central functions in relatively few global cities. Given their critical role in the global economy, they have potentials for increasing political clout and growing involvement in international relations.

Subnational levels of federal nations constitute a special case. US states ranging from California and Florida to New York and Massachusetts have representation in various foreign capitals, as do Canadian provinces, such as British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario. Scotland, Wales, Catalonia and Bavaria are other examples of regional diplomatic representation. The Belgian Constitution grants the federated entities full competence to act abroad. Public diplomacy, treaty-making, transnational partnerships and participation in multilateral organizations and networks are examples of diplomatic activity by federated entities.⁷

While the diplomatic involvement by subnational actors is still relatively marginal, it is not farfetched to anticipate that their role will be enhanced in 21st century diplomacy.

The Transgovernmental Challenge

The transgovernmental dimension refers to interactions between governmental subunits across state boundaries. It implies that relations across state borders are not handled

exclusively by foreign ministries. Transgovernmental relations across national borders are the result of “vertical disintegration,” in the sense that the number of departments in national bureaucracies possessing external policy interests increases.⁸ This is particularly evident in the European Union. Member-state permanent representations in Brussels are inhabited by bureaucrats from a diverse range of government departments. Today officials from domestic ministries constitute the majority in the permanent representations. Thus, “other government officials increasingly are called upon to function as diplomats”.⁹

Not only have European foreign ministries lost their former monopoly of government contacts across national borders and “found that the policy milieu in which they work is inhabited by bureaucrats from an ever more diverse range of government departments”¹⁰, they have also become more permeable. The trend is toward specialization and secondment to foreign ministries from other ministries. This is not unique to the European Union. For instance, more than 60 percent of those under the authority of US ambassadors and other chiefs of mission are not State Department employees.¹¹ Foreign ministries, in short, have lost their traditional role as sole manager of government contacts across national borders.

Examples of transgovernmental diplomacy abound. Suffice it to point out that the establishment and entrenchment of specialized international agencies within and outside the UN system contribute to strengthening the cross-border links between individual government ministries and agencies beyond the control of foreign ministries. By eroding the exclusive authority of foreign ministries and diplomats to act on behalf of the state, the transgovernmental challenge has transformative potential in the 21st century. It represents a movement away from territorial toward functional differen-

⁶ Sizoo /Musch, »City Diplomacy: The Role of Local Governments in Conflict Prevention, Peace-Building and Post-Conflict Reconstruction«, p. 7.

⁷ cf. Crikemans, »Regional Sub-State Diplomacy from a Comparative Perspective«; Pigman, *Contemporary Diplomacy*, p. 47.

⁸ Underdal, »What’s Left for the MFA? Foreign Policy and the Management of External Relations in Norway«, p. 188.

⁹ Pigman, *Contemporary Diplomacy*, p. 43.

¹⁰ Hocking, »Introduction: Gatekeepers and Boundary-Spanners«, p. 3.

¹¹ Leguey-Feilleux, *The Dynamics of Diplomacy*, p. 142.

tiation of political authority. Authority over portions of space is overshadowed by authority over distinct functional domains or issue-areas. In that sense, it is paralleled and reinforced by the transnational challenge.

The Transnational Challenge

Transnational actors are individuals and groups who act beyond national borders yet are not controlled by governments. These include NGOs or civil society organizations, advocacy networks, party associations, philanthropic foundations, multinational corporations, and the like. International relations today involve a broad set of transnational actors and processes, which have come to play an increasingly important role, especially in multilateral diplomacy.

Given their enhanced role, transnational actors (TNAs) of various kinds have begun to claim, and are increasingly granted, access to various diplomatic forums. For instance, some 3,000 NGOs now have consultative status with ECOSOC, as compared to 41 in 1948. The openness toward NGOs has subsequently spread to other parts of the UN system, generating a pattern where few or no UN bodies remain entirely closed to TNAs.¹² In the mid-1980s international negotiations on ozone depletion attracted only a handful NGOs, and not a single environmental NGO was present at the signing of the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer in 1985. In the 1990s and early 2000s, by contrast, NGOs typically outnumbered states at key negotiations dealing with climate change. In global health governance the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has emerged as a major player.

States and international institutions are engaging TNAs as policy experts, service providers, compliance watchdogs, and stakeholder representatives. A new dataset, containing information on formal TNA access to 298 organizational bodies of 50 international organizations during the time period 1950-2010, shows that, while hardly any of these organizations were open in

1950, more than 75 percent provide access in 2010.¹³

In addition to gaining access to diplomatic forums, TNAs can enact diplomatic roles by means of informal networking. Prominent examples of networking between states, NGOs and international organizations include the processes leading to the Ottawa Treaty banning landmines and the creation of the International Criminal Court.

A special case that fits neither the trans-governmental nor the transnational category concerns the diplomatic role of parliaments and parliamentarians. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), founded in 1889, originated as a network of likeminded parliamentarians but has turned into the world organization of national parliaments. Having earlier treated the IPU as an NGO with consultative status with ECOSOC, the UN in 2002 granted the IPU special status as a permanent observer, having characterized it as an “organization of an inter-state character” having a “unique status.” The IPU has played an important role as facilitator of parliamentary involvement in global governance. For instance, the Helsinki process, which sought to bring East and West together in the 1970s, was actually launched by MPs at the IPU; and the Final Act of 1975 was in large measure written by them. After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the IPU brought together the Speakers from all the countries surrounding Iraq, who formulated several recommendations to resolve the crisis. A few months later the UN Security Council took inspiration from those recommendations, adopting some of them as part of its decision to extend a UN umbrella to the operation in Iraq. By blurring the distinction between global and domestic governance, the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a great potential for increased “parliamentary diplomacy.”¹⁴

In sum, one may speak of a transnational turn in diplomacy. Senior diplomats admit that traditional bilateral and multilateral diplomacy has been “progressively supplemented by transnational issues which may

¹² cf. Tallberg/Jönsson, »Transnational Actor Participation in International Institutions«.

¹³ Tallberg et al., *The Opening Up of International Organizations*.

¹⁴ Johnson/Jönsson, »Completing the Architecture«.

or may not involve government-to-government activity”.¹⁵ Whereas the trans-governmental challenge fragments state authority in relating to the global environment, the transnational one amplifies the transformative potential by eroding the exclusive cross-border authority of states.

Conclusion

The range of actors in 21st century diplomacy will in all probability be broadened and diversified. In particular, the tendency of growing involvement of transgovernmental and transnational actors is likely to continue. In this “hybrid diplomatic arena” the individual diplomat needs to be an “orchestrator” of a broad range of voices and interests. Interactions require an abandonment of the “club” model in favor of a “network” model of diplomacy. In the club model diplomats meet primarily with government officials, fellow members of the club, with whom they feel most comfortable. In the network model diplomats interact with a vastly larger number of players, many of whom are far from “the rarefied atmosphere of the salons and private clubs the diplomats of yesteryear used to frequent.” Thus, “diplomacy is becoming ‘complexity management’ to a degree earlier master practitioners like Cardinal Richelieu would not have imagined”.¹⁶

¹⁵ Hamilton/Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy*, p. 267.

¹⁶ Heine, »On the Manner of Practising the New Diplomacy«, p. 273.

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