

**International Conference**

**DIPLOMACY OF SMALL STATES**

**The Role of Diplomats from Small States**

By Dietrich Kappeler

Small States considered by this conference all have special problems as regards the activities and therefore the choice and training of their diplomats. They have to make do with smaller services and therefore need more versatile diplomats. But among such small States the categories of those which have a population of less than 200 000 (20) and especially of less than 100 000 (13) feel these problems more acutely. Should they even consider setting up a foreign service, especially if they are also very poor? The answer to this question has changed in recent years with the development of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

Traditionally small and especially very small States had to be content with maintaining only a minimum of diplomatic missions. In the case of older countries like Andorra, Liechtenstein and Monaco these missions were accredited to neighbouring countries only, France and Spain for Andorra, Austria and Switzerland for Liechtenstein, France for Monaco. One of these neighbours was then entrusted with representing the diplomatic and consular interests of the small State in the rest of the world. Newly independent countries set up bilateral missions in the former colonial power and very few countries of special importance for them. The USA, in order to attract missions to Washington, sometimes paid part of their expenses. Commonwealth countries tended to entrust the United Kingdom with looking after their consular interests. All newly independent countries set up a permanent mission in New York, those who could afford it also in Geneva.

Some small countries tried the system of joint diplomatic missions. This was the case in the 1960s in the Caribbean, and for some West African countries in the 1970s. In both instances the problem was the choice of the head of mission who, inevitably, hailed from only one of the countries concerned and was often suspected by the others of favouring the interests of his country over theirs.

As regards sending negotiating teams abroad, lack of human and financial resources often made this difficult. Therefore countries keen on developing bilateral relations with small and poor partners were usually content with sending their own teams there without regard to the tradition of alternating venues for bilateral negotiations. As for attending international conferences and meetings of deliberative organs of international organisations, small and poor nations often had to forgo most of this. In New York some inventive law firms offered their services to act as representatives of such countries. This proved problematic as these firms had little knowledge of the countries they represented and moreover did not

hesitate to accept several mandates from countries whose interests did not always coincide.

Today Information and Communications Technology (ICT) offers the possibility of participating in international relations at little cost and need of human resources. Already the mere setting up of a country website on the Internet can be a first step towards a meaningful international presence. On it and through links it provides important information is made accessible to governments, institutions and individuals intent on dealing with that country. Even certain services like the granting of visas can be organised over such links.

For bilateral relations, virtual embassies and consulates can be created. These are websites oriented towards specific countries and administered by the sending foreign ministry. Instead of sending staff abroad, business is handled from home. In the case of a virtual embassy, the desk officer in charge of bilateral relations will also act as ambassador. In this capacity, he will visit the receiving country from time to time to cultivate the necessary personal relationships with the latter's government and other interested circles. If the importance of bilateral relations warrants this, a resident diplomat may be sent to the receiving State to act as human interface with the virtual embassy website. Such human interfaces are easier to provide in the case of consular relations through the appointment of honorary consuls.

As regards multilateral diplomacy, virtual permanent missions can also be set up. In this case the presence of one or more resident diplomats acting as human interface may be necessary. Increasingly international venues offer the facility of virtual presence of delegates operating from their home base. This enormously increases the possibility for small and poor countries to be present on the international scene.

One important contribution of ICT to small diplomatic outfits is the possibility for officers attending negotiations or meetings abroad to stay in permanent contact with home base and thus to continue attending to matters there. This is all the more important as the same officer is usually in charge of preparatory and supervisory activities at home and represents at the same time his country as delegate abroad.

A typical foreign ministry of a small and poor country could therefore soon consist of a few desk officers acting at the same time as virtual ambassadors and as real or virtual delegates to international meetings. In the latter case a same diplomat could be attending simultaneously two or more meetings dealing with quite different subject matters. This has consequences for the selection and training of the diplomats involved. A first precondition for the job would be a solid all-round grounding in international law, international economics and international politics as well as in the rules and practices of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. Only in addition to this might specialisation in one or several fields be of use. A second precondition would be the capacity to quickly assimilate even complex issues that must be tackled at short notice. In practice this would mean that such diplomats could make good use of the various quick learning facilities made available for instance by Diplo, as will be shown in a later presentation by Jovan Kurbalija.

The picture of the ideal diplomat of a small and poor country that emerges from this is very interesting. In the small ministry he would have to assume a considerable number of functions. This means that even at junior level such

diplomats would develop a great versatility. At the same time familiarity with a variety of relations and issues would develop a breadth of view that is often lacking in diplomats of bigger services who normally spend turns of service devoted to a relatively limited sector of their country's diplomacy. Having to handle many different subjects also leads the small country diplomat to become familiar with a great number of colleagues from bigger countries. This combination of broad knowledge and multiple human contacts can lead a small country diplomat to play an important role as provider of contacts and mediator far beyond what would be warranted by the importance of his country. The latter will then benefit from the recognition resulting from the good work of its diplomat.

So far small and very small countries have hardly exploited the possibilities provided by joint action. They follow the example of bigger countries acting on their own except where belonging to a specific group imposes a degree of common positions. An informal "small countries' club" ought not to be too difficult to set up by the kind of diplomats that is described above. Being in charge of several sectors in their ministry they would enjoy a considerable amount of freedom in shaping decisions and conducting policies. They would also know most of their counterparts and thus be able to find out easily with which ones to initiate joint action. By putting together the voting power of their countries they would thus be able to influence multilateral discussions to a considerable extent. It can be hoped that the fact that many of the coming diplomats of small and poor countries will have undergone training at the same programmes as are offered for instance by Diplo and already know each other and have even become friends will accelerate a trend towards joint action that is in the interest of all.

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**States with a population under 100 000**

1.	Tuvalu	11 500
2.	Nauru	12 000
3.	Palau	20 000
4.	San Marino	28 000
5.	Liechtenstein	34 000
6.	Monaco	35 000
7.	St. Kitts & Nevis	39 000
8.	Marshall Islands	58 000
9.	Andorra	67 000
10.	Dominica	67 000
11.	Antigua & Barbuda	68 000
12.	Seychelles	80 000
13.	Grenada	89 000

**States with a population of 100 000 – 200 000**

1.	Kiribati	101 000
2.	Micronesia	108 000
3.	Tonga	110 000
4.	St. Vincent and the Grenadines	117 000
5.	St. Lucia	164 000
6.	Samoa	178 000
7.	Sao Tomé & Príncipe	182 000