Renaissance diplomacy: Compromise as a solution to conflict

Diplomacy and technology: A historical journey

Dr Jovan Kurbalija, June 2021
Timeline of our journey

- **FEBRUARY**: Prehistory: Origins of diplomacy
- **MARCH**: Ancient civilisations: Sumer, Assyria, Egypt, Persia
- **APRIL**: Ancient Greece
- **MAY**: Rome and Byzantine Empire
- **JUNE**: Renaissance diplomacy, and the Reformation
- **AUGUST**: Golden age of diplomacy (19th century)
When? | 14th - 16th century

**Culture:** Renaissance (Petrarch, Dante, Boccaccio, Michelangelo)

**Society:** The Black Death plague (14th century)

**Church:** The Great Western Schism (1378-1414)

**Politics:** The emergence of new monarchies

**Invention:** Printing press (1450, Gutenberg)

**Discovery:** The Americas (1492, Columbus)

**Geo-strategy:** Byzantine Empire collapse (1453); Reconquista (1492)...
The Italian Renaissance diplomacy scene consisted of many small city states and five major ones:

- **The Papal State**, with Rome as its capital, located in central Italy
- **The Kingdom of Naples** occupied the southern part
- **Republic of Venice**, the **Duchy of Milan** and the **Republic of Florence** dominated the North, with their strong manufacturing industry and trading
Overview

1350 - 1494
Italian Renaissance diplomacy

1454 - 1494
Golden age of Italian Renaissance Diplomacy
1454 - Treaty of Lodi

16th century
Spread of diplomatic practice from Italy to the rest of the Europe
The emergence of Renaissance diplomacy

Two main characteristics of relations among Italian city states:

- the lack of a hegemonic power
- a strong interest in cooperating and solving problems through peaceful means

The figure of Peace in Allegory of Good Government, Ambrogio Lorenzetti
Renaissance diplomacy: **Structure**

- **First resident ambassador** (1450) - ‘Sweet Nicodemus’, envoy of Duke of Milan to Florence
- **Early Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, developed around diplomatic archives
- Centrality of **diplomatic reporting**

*The Story of Esther*
Marco del Buono Giamberti
Renaissance diplomacy: **Main developments**

- Diplomatic privileges and immunities
- Elaborate diplomatic protocol
- Early public diplomacy
- Early science diplomacy
- Marriage diplomacy - 16th century

*The Ambassadors*
Hans Holbein
Renaissance diplomacy: Papal diplomacy

- The main objective: to keep doctrinal control over Europe
- Diplomatic tools: negotiation, treaty-making, alliances, arbitration, but also espionage, subversion, and conspiracy
- Complete control over information distribution (using parchment over papyrus) - the clergy became the sole custodians and suppliers of written information
Renaissance diplomacy: **Tools**

- ‘Combinazioni’
- Frequently changing alliances
- Bribery
- Spying

An ambassador is an honest gentleman, sent to lie abroad for the good of his country

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Sir Henry Wotton, 1604
Reformation | Invention of the printing press

- Invented in 1450 by German inventor Johannes Gutenberg
- By 1500, around six million books were produced in Europe
- The church’s dominance through parchment-based writing was challenged, and church’s participation in diplomacy gradually started to decrease.
Meanwhile in... Americas

The Aztec Empire

- The Aztec Empire was an alliance of three city-states, with Tenochtitlán being the largest.
- The Aztecs were famous for their cruelties to remain in power, but they also knew how to ‘negotiate’ with their neighbours.
- The rivals were offered protection, stability and economic integration into a flourishing trading system, if they decide to subdue to Aztecs.
- If they failed to subdue, after peaceful diplomatic persuasion led by Aztec ambassadors (Quauhquauhnochtzin), principal city would be sacked and its king, nobility and warriors all sacrificed to Aztec gods.
- The Aztec Empire was a very broad alliance, kept together by the fear of the bloody reprisals against the mutineers.
- The Empire was wiped out by smallpox disease, brought by European invaders...
'Its glory is inestimable; it is the parent and lord of all medicines, and its effects are marvelous'

Taddeo Alderotti, Italian doctor-scholar-alchemist

Many alchemists believed distillation actually put fire into the base liquid, making alcohol a combination of two elements, fire and water.

One German recipe, created by a noble female distiller, required 387 ingredients and nine separate distillations spaced over two years to make the white aqua vitae.

Medical thought at the time was dominated by the Ancient Greek idea of balancing "humours" in the body - the hot and the cold, the wet and the dry.

After one Irish nobleman died from taking a bit more aqua vitae, it was recorded in the Annals: "... it was not aqua vitae to him, but aqua mortis [water of death]"