ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF DEMOCRATIZATION OF DIPLOMACY IN THE CONDITIONS OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Prednosti i mane demokratizacije diplomatije u uslovima novih tehnologija

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Abstract

In this paper it is presented how new technologies influence democratization of diplomacy. Primarily, the advantages of democratization of diplomacy in the conditions of new technologies are explained. It is shown how increasing influence of non state players decreases the monopoly of state players. It is suggested that media and social network are catalysts of democracy. On the other hand, negative effects of democratization of diplomacy in the conditions of new technologies are analyzed. The new technology as potential source of propaganda and vulgarization is described. Finally, although there are disadvantages of democratization of diplomacy in the conditions of new technologies, it is concluded the advantages surpass the disadvantages. The new technologies raise the democratization of diplomacy for a general well-fair and have a tendency to reduce hard power and to strengthen soft power.

Ključne reči: Diplomacy, New technology, Democracy.

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1. Introduction

New technologies are the most important innovation (started with Morse’s telegraph and telephone and currently with the Internet) in diplomacy since the fifteenth century. These changes have profound influence on diplomatic traditions. Although, there is still resistance to accepting the new digital realities by traditionalist, old habits die slowly. The important difference between traditional diplomacy and contemporary diplomacy is the accelerating pace, volume and extent of information which diplomats need to make appropriate decision. Information has always been the raw material of two of diplomacy’s basic tasks - reporting and negotiating. In both cases, the advantage will have the one who better uses advanced technology to collect and process the date needed for decision-making. Transparency of information through mass media makes it easier for diplomats, politicians and businessmen to fulfill their tasks. The global circuit of information is rising day by day. Politicians and all the other influential elite are aware that everything they say and do will be heard worldwide. That transparency of data is reducing potential abuse of power by people who are in power. Also the new technology makes it possible for ordinary people to express opinion through different kind of media such as television, radio and social networks. It that way they are no more passive observers but active participants influencing behavior of people who are in power. So, the main hypothesis of this paper is that new technologies raise the democratization of diplomacy. Apart from integration of ordinary people in saber space, new technologies enable different kind of trade unions, research institutes, NGOs, think tanks and lobbying firms to integrate, share and promote common values and interests. Organizing video conferences, creating web sites and web pages they create date bases available all over the world. Governments, parliaments and embassies of sovereign states and international organizations are not immune to all of these influential bodies.

2. Advantages of democratization of diplomacy in the conditions of new technologies

With discovery of Johann Gutenberg printing press in Europe in 1430s and later with the telegraph, telephone and the Internet the way information is recorded, stored and accessed, made huge leaps forward. Gutenberg “broke” the monopoly [Wriston 2005] of the monks who copied manuscripts by hand and guarded them jealously. This was one of the first examples how technology influences the raise of possibilities of sharing the manuscripts and documents. This further caused the raise of availability of information, involvement of ordinary people in previously unknown matters, and consequently the raise of democracy.

2.1. Public diplomacy – increasing influence of non state players and decreasing monopoly of state players

The constellation of influential factors in international affairs has dramatically changed over the past ten years. There has been a tremendous shift toward NGOs, academics, international journalists, foundations, church groups, and the like. These groups are becoming “big players” whose benevolence, interests, and loyalty the nation-state have to capture. Many of these newcomers to international politics are using the Internet as a low-cost, interactive platform for disseminating their messages, recruiting new allies and friends, coordinating their organizational work and alliances, and
advocating their political and cultural interests. Through these channels diplomacy has been becoming democratized. The technology allows more people “to play” and it increases the size of “playing field”.

“The basic distinction between traditional diplomacy and public diplomacy is clear: the former is about relationships between the representatives of states, or other international actors; whereas the latter targets the general public in foreign societies and more specific non-official groups, organizations and individuals”. (Melissen 2005, p. 5)

Through the Internet, however, NGOs, journalists, and corporations can now publish information that is more timely, accurate, insightful, and useful than that of state actors. In short, the “information revolution has reduced the transaction costs of communication and further democratized access to information and knowledge - the key assets of power.” [Bollier 2008, p.7]. It is clear that the Internet carries conversations between millions of people without regard to gender, race, or color.

2.1.1. The term noopolitik

In the sense of public diplomacy the term neopolitik will be shortly discussed. The neopolitik incorporates not only mass and cyber media but also the concept of soft power on the world stage. Enabling the exchange and transfer of information the new technology gives the opportunity to different interest sides to give their opinion irrespective of their power. Individuals from some of the most isolated corners [Bollier 2003] of the world can now interact with the richest centers of civilization on daily basis. In some way the new information technologies have a tendency to reduce hard power and to strengthen soft power. “Public diplomacy is the exercise of soft power - the use of persuasion, public information, education, communications, culture, trade, aid, investment, and marketing to secure public support of interests, values, and policies” said Waring Partridge, who has advised the U.S. State Department about using the Internet for such purposes. [Bollier 2003, p. 16]

“Noopolitik is an approach to statecraft, to be undertaken as much by non-state as by state actors, that emphasizes the role of soft power in expressing ideas, values, norms and ethics through all manner of media”. Arquilla & Ronfeld [1999, according to Bollier 2003, p. viii]

The Internet has greatly lowered the costs of transmitting information, enabling people to bypass traditional intermediaries whose power revolved around the control of information: national governments, the diplomatic corps, transnational corporations, and news organizations, among others. As a result, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academic experts, diasporic ethnic communities, and individuals are using the Internet to create their own global platforms and political influence. As the velocity of information increases and the types of publicly available information diversify, the architecture of international relations is changing dramatically.
2.1.2. The raise of democratization of diplomacy with the emergence of international organizations after WWI and especially after WWII

The new system of diplomacy developed in the first half of the twentieth century. There were more reasons for emerging of new diplomacy. Firstly, there was a demand that diplomacy should be more open to public scrutiny and control, and the second idea related to the importance of establishing an international organization, with the aim to be neutral mediator, such as the League of Nations and after the Second World War, the United Nations. This period demanded the democratization of foreign policy. In addition, diplomacy within international organizations was more open to public scrutiny and control because the traditional diplomacy was exclusive secret and the diplomats were from the close society. With the emergence of international organizations the international power started to diversified.

2.2. Tendency from conventional diplomatic communication towards electronic communication

It is clear [Dašić 2008] that in the conditions of development of information and communication technology (ICT) and narrowing scope of confidential information on the global level, the dispatches objectively lose the importance they had before information revolution, but they still rest indispensable way of diplomatic communication. Today each diplomatic mission has its own web site or presentation within the site of Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There could be seen the basic information of sending state as well as the information about the activities which diplomatic mission implement in receiving state. Fifty years ago it was unthinkable that widen public could be timely informed about the activities of diplomatic missions. Apart from that, the governments became [Grant 2005] more skilled in presenting online services. For example, German Bundestag has established an online forum for policy discussion. The White House and European Commission have launched virtual chat rooms on the Web.

“New technologies greatly facilitate dialogue and participation with distant publics (through the creation of forums, debates and discussions, virtual worlds, video conferencing, etc.), but these technologies must be carefully chosen and used in ways that properly exploit their capabilities”. [Teresa 2011, p. 16]

It is useful to add that increasing [Islam 2005] importance and power of the electronic press (media) has intensified the work of a Press Attaché to the major embassies with the aim to secure that the views of its government obtain adequate publicity.

2.3. Media and social networks as catalysts of democracy

The role of media in the condition of new technologies is intensively rising. In that sense, in democratic society, from mass media it is expected to create public opinion, to criticize ruling parties, to articulate opinions and interests of citizens, to contribute to citizens political socialization (and education) and to stimulate them on political participation. These expectations are not limited on the national level, they are
becoming worldwide. The internet and social media are fundamental elements through
which institutions and citizens engage in democratic processes and civil actions.

"The wider use of new technology media, the greater the potential
number of people who follow international affairs". [Grant 2005, p.18]

Individual way of use of online media could be the key for restructuring the
hierarchy in political communication and participation. It is a fact that the new media
increases the participation of citizen in public affairs. With online campaigns and
alternative news portals it is possible to widen debates on global issues, such as,
vioilation of universal norms of behavior. It may be said that the embassy reporting
(Shultz 2005) is “no longer needed today”, that Cable News Network (CNN) does it
faster and better. In diplomatic circle it could be heard that CNN has become the “sixth
permanent member” of the United Nations Security Council.

Considering that on television and radio there is a censorship, social network
became the free tool for expressing people’s opinions. The main goal of social networks
is to share ideas that will initiate the debate. So social networks allow ordinary citizens
to become active in the creation and transformation of certain ideas. It can be said that
through social networks democracy is strengthened.

Politicians and all the other influential elite are aware that everything they say
and do will be heard worldwide. That transparency of data is reducing
potential abuse of power by people who are in power”. [Plavšin 2012, p. 381]

Whereas the mass media have to select the information they publish, web-sites
make it possible to publish everything, leaving the surfer free to choose what he is
interested in. One application of this principle would be to publish on the Internet all the
official documents of every kind of assembly, at all levels of authority, and all citizens
would in this way be able to follow the topics of interest to them and join together in
order to influence the discussions. Representatives would thus be subject to scrutiny not
only at election time, but constantly and would be more attentive and therefore more
responsive to the wishes of citizens.

The website of the European Economic and Social Committee has the “Take
Part” page (EESC Final Report, 2012) which contains a full list of the EESC’s social
media profiles and encourages social media users to become involved with the output
from the its various social profiles. In addition, the EESC has linked its collective social
media profile to other initiatives where online users can become involved in the
activities of the organization such as the various cultural events, youth events,
information about jobs, traineeships and Public Procurement.

Network such as “Facebook” or “Twitter”, not only that could provide
multilateral communication, but they provide bilateral communication between famous
influential persons and ordinary persons. These networks are erasing the gap between
unapproachable elite and ordinary persons. The blogs are one more proof for that. The
new, extremely important, thing is feedback of ordinary people. Exchanging of
information is crucial for perception of the problems of people. It is very important to
mention [Plavšin 2012] the power of social networks through real example. Moldovans
used social media in 2009 to turn out 20,000 protesters in just 36 hours. This example
shows the power of social media to integrate the behavior of groups quickly, cheaply, and publicly, in ways that was not available and possible a decade ago. It can be concluded that with the rest of media, social networks will result in improvement for democracy. Advances in communication technology make it harder and costlier for autocrats to isolate their people from rest of the world and gives ordinary people tools to built alternative sources of power and make diplomacy more democratized.

In the 21st century, the attitude and criticism that the information which circulates on the Internet are just available to internet user is failed. It became general practice that the conventional (traditional – printed newspapers, journals, etc.) media very fast convey the information about some “hot” problem discussed within social network. So the people who are not internet prone are quickly informed about the online published news via traditional media.

2.4. New Technology and Diaspora

The new technologies could help establishing an “electronic” community (web platform) consisted of the people who expatriated its motherland that constitute its Diasporas. This electronic network may enhance communication and raise the importance of Diasporas, which is especially important for small countries which do not have the resources to establish the embassies around the world. This would very significant for Serbia considering the amount of money which is provided by the Diaspora in last two decades. Although during the past year it was tried to establish the sustainable network from the Diaspora, no one of them was very productive. Different interest groups, politicians and misuses influenced that people started to lose their confidence in such organizations. Considering that the Serbia has very successful people in Diaspora this should be long term state goal. So new technologies could make it easier to integrated people from Diaspora, making Diaspora working together and sharing the information for a general welfare. The measurable and transparent results of the potentially invested money from Diaspora sources could potentially regain the confidence in such idea. This all would raise the circuit of information between motherland and Diaspora, which is of mutual interests, making this communication more democratized on the web platform.

3. Negative effects of democratization of diplomacy in the conditions of new technologies

Although there are a lot of advantages about new technology and its influence on democratizations of diplomacy, at the same time there are some bad points. The key question is: whether and to what extent the online efforts are able to initiate significant changes in the offline reality? There is a sense that very often lobbying by the ordinary people is neglected. People who have political power formally want to hear the “voices” of ordinary people and non-goverment sector, but essentially they rarely take it into account. Although through the different kind of media people are trying to fight for their rights, there is still law level for the understanding of their needs by the people in power. Also the Internet is not available to all people in the world, so there is kind “democratic discrimination” in the world depending on geographical position and economical power of the states.
3.1. Problem of publishing of disinformation

Activism through the digital networks can be stimulated much faster and geographically far-reaching, and it is easier to gather a larger number of activists than by the equivalent offline media. On the other hand, this is linked to a serious problem of credibility of published information, especially as cyber activists use encryption software so they can not be easily detectable.

“The incorrect information published by the media can make deceptive picture of some event. It can be very dangerous, because there are a lot of people who catch the information at first sight and do not think deeper about the subjects. Therefore, there should be huge responsibility in media business codex.” [Plavšin 2012, p. 381]

The new varieties of information are creating new dilemmas. How can government leaders and diplomats assess the reliability of sources? Which news account and which should be discounted? When does the perceived credibility of a source make it worthy of respect, when not?

3.2. Media and social networks – freedom of speech as a potential source of “vulgarization” and “misuse”

However, it is clear that in all there should be moderation. Unlimited freedom of expression, through media and social networks, often initiates the "vulgarization" of certain ideas, issues and personalities, which is not good. Apart from that, it should be noted that the use of social networks often neglect their primary function, which is a two-way communication. In this sense, for example, deleting the comments, from some web page, which do not correspond with the interests of some interest groups does not allow for "feedback" to initiate further debate. This is kind of “misuse” of new technology.

3.3. New technology as source of propaganda

USA very often, through the film scenario, presents itself as powerful and human country. In the film “Casablanca” (1942) Europeans escape [Radojković & Stojković 2009] from the Nazi invasion seeking shelter in the USA. The film very vividly describes USA as a shelter for persecuted and oppressed from all over the world. After the Second World War there were a lot of films with a similar message. So it can be concluded that the new technology (film production) from the first half of twenty century also was good “weapon” for diplomacy. Even at that time with technology was possible to influence people behavior. The film “Casablanca” managed to make young people all over the Europe perceived the USA as a stable, rich and human country.

Radio communication focused on foreign countries was analyzed by MacBride Commission which was for the need of UNESCO research world communication situation. MacBride report [Radojković & Stojković 2009] was a 1980 UNESCO publication written by the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, chaired by Irish Nobel laureate Sean MacBride. Its aim was to analyze communication problems in modern societies, particularly relating to mass media and
news, consider the emergence of new technologies, and to suggest a kind of communication order and to strengthen peace and human development. The Commission noticed five goals where four were legitimate and permitted (maintaining contacts, informing, cultural diplomacy and presenting the domestic politics to foreign countries), while the fifth goal put into question the rules of international fair play dealing with aggressive and unscrupulous propaganda. *This fifth goal was one more proof for “misuse” of new technology.* Among the problems that report identified were commercialization of the media and unequal access to information and communication. *The Commission called for democratization of communication and strengthening of national media to avoid dependence on external sources, among others.* While the report had strong international support, it was condemned by the United States and the United Kingdom as an attack on the freedom of the press, and both countries withdrew from UNESCO in protest in 1984 and 1985, respectively (and later rejoined in 2003 and 1997, respectively).

In very recent past there was one good example [Plavšin 2012] of influence of television program on international relations. Last riots in Moscow (post-election protests in 2011) and New York (“Occupy Wall Streets” demonstrators in 2011) streets started as a result of different reasons. Correspondents from Moscow and Washington reports on “media war” between Moscow and Washington, via protesters, mentioning that Russian and American television stations have recently reported on arresting and brutality of police. In America they reported on “brutality of Russian police” and in Russia they reported on “brutality of American police”. There was impression that the relations between two countries are at the lowest level after Cold War. “CNN” and “Fox News” emphasized the importance of demonstrations in Moscow which were organized because there was suspicion that the elections in Moscow were faked. At the some time “Russia Today” was more occupied with the “lies and frauds” of American media than with the demonstrations in its own country. “Russian Today” reported that Americans had inspired and helped Russian demonstrations. In Russia, it was said that “Fox News” had broadcasted the recording with title of Moscow, but it was clear that the recording was from riots from Greece. At the same time “CNN” broadcasted the recording in relation to Russian demonstrations about elections, but actually it was conflict between Russian police and football fans. After that there was apology for the mistake from “CNN”, but “Fox News” did not announce anything. At the same time “Russian Today” paid more attention on American movement “Occupy” than to demonstrations in its own country. The most interesting thing is that the media from both sides did not analyze the core of problems about the demonstrations in Moscow and Washington (dissatisfaction of people and mistakes of governments). Taking into account this example, it is clear how huge influence television could have on international relations. It is very powerful tool for international communication and potential source of manipulation.

4. Conclusion

The most powerful engine of reducing the country’s autonomy and “information sovereignty” is telecommunications revolution. Widely accessible and affordable technology has broken government monopoly on the collection and management of large amounts of information. In contemporary society there is a tendency of raise of citizen power and the changing nature of the states. The Internet and other information technologies are no longer a peripheral force in the conduct of world affairs but a
powerful engine for change. NGOs, diasporic communities, critics of human rights abuses, antiglobalization protesters, journalists and others are finding their own voices on a global public stage. So, today, there is no longer a question of whether the ICT media change our political everyday life, but only - how will do it? There is huge potential for the cyber-world for solving problems in the real world. In contemporary society no longer strategic and programming document can survive if it does not take into account the ICT-media and all of their features.

Advancements in communication technology pose fundamental challenges to conventional diplomacy such as reducing hierarchy, breaching confidentiality, promoting openness and transparency, encouraging multilateral debate, influencing and mobilizing global social movements. With these global changes, the diplomatic power should not be centralized in diplomatic corps, serving to powerful countries, but should be democratized through NVO, trade unions and different human rights organization.

The new technology established the new platform for international politics. It is clear that electronic platforms make democratic countries more democratic and autocratic countries less autocratic. There is a huge awareness of politicians and international companies that all their steps, statements and decisions are scrutinized by the people all over the world. Through the Internet network people could discuss, criticize all the irregularity and with that definitely narrow the space for anomaly. It can be concluded, although there are a lot of disadvantages of democratization of diplomacy in the conditions of new technologies, such as: propaganda, widening of disinformation, manipulation and “vulgarization”, the advantages surpass the disadvantages. The new technologies raise the democratization of diplomacy for a general well-fair and has a tendency to reduce hard power and to strengthen soft power. The nongovernmental organizations, academic experts, diasporic ethnic communities, users of social networks and individuals use the Internet to create their own global platforms and political influence, which really tackle traditional “decision-maker” bodies strengthening democracy on the global level.

References


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**Apstrakt**


**Ključne reči:** diplomatija, nove tehnologije, demokratija
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Advantages and disadvantages of democratization of diplomacy in the conditions of new technologies