

## **Reflections on Public Diplomacy Today.**

**Speech delivered at the Conference ‘Public Diplomacy’, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Ankara, 6th February 2006.<sup>1</sup>**

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Dear Minister Gül, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you very much for inviting me here to speak. It is a privilege to be present at this conference, and it is a tremendous pleasure for me to visit Turkey for the first time. Turkey and the Netherlands are almost at opposite geographical ends of Europe, but the two countries have many links. No less than 400.000 people of Turkish descent live in the Netherlands. More than a million Dutch people visit Turkey every year. The Netherlands is the fifth investor in Turkey and the Dutch Trade Board has listed Turkey among its top priority countries. It is all evidence of rapidly growing Dutch interest in Turkey. In Dutch politics there is however controversy on the question of future Turkish membership of the EU. One of the features of this debate is that Dutch opinions on Turkey are related to a number of issues and developments, including attitudes towards the integration of immigrant communities in the Netherlands.

The overall message should however be clear: Turkey and the Netherlands are interconnected at many different levels. This is clearly reflected in Dutch public diplomacy. Together with eight other countries worldwide, including for instance the United States, Britain and Germany, Turkey has been singled out as a priority country in the public diplomacy policy of the Dutch MFA. Creation of strong links with Turkish society is an evident objective of Dutch public diplomacy. But the interests of the public diplomacy of the Netherlands in Turkey go further than that: your MFA’s active involvement in the debate about the image of Turkey in

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the ideas and arguments presented here are elaborated in: Jan Melissen (ed.), *The New Public diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005).

Europe is strongly supported. In other words: the Dutch feel that they are to benefit a great deal from Turkish public diplomacy!

Ladies and gentlemen, Dutch diplomats can learn a lot from their Turkish colleagues in the field of public diplomacy. For the Turkish ambassador in my country public diplomacy is a natural pursuit. The public diplomacy peak hour for Turkish diplomats in the Netherlands was the second half of 2004, when the Dutch presidency of the European Union coincided with a debate in Dutch society about the future of Turkey in Europe. Another example of Turkish astuteness, in the same year: a young man from the Turkish Consulate-General in Rotterdam who participated in a Clingendael course for diplomats from Southeast Europe stated with genuine conviction that Turkish diplomats have a great interest in engaging with Dutch society. He firmly believed in the 'power of the better argument'. When it comes to public diplomacy, the Turkish diplomatic service has many talents.

### **No 'one-size-fits all'**

The relationship between Turkey and The Netherlands should underline one characteristic of public diplomacy that is pretty well understood in my own country: no bilateral relationship is the same and public diplomacy is therefore always 'tailor-made'. No country can develop its public diplomacy as a 'one-size-fits-all' concept. The overall stories about one's country always have to be adapted to local circumstances – and whereas some issues work well in some countries, others don't. Among the dominant issues in Dutch public diplomacy in Germany and France, for instance, are the so-called 'moral issues', including euthanasia, liberal policies on soft drugs, and abortion. These are not the kind of themes that are addressed widely in Turkey, or, for that matter, in the United States. Dutch public diplomacy in Turkey would not get very far with stories about euthanasia and drugs. Generally speaking, the tailor-made approach evidently requires a lot of work from embassies and a good interplay between missions abroad and the MFA. No embassy can be effective in public diplomacy if the head of mission does not believe in the importance of public diplomacy. And no public diplomacy policy can be effective if the division of labour between the foreign ministry and overseas missions is not clarified. The challenge is to develop a cohesive strategy at both levels and, even more so, make that strategy work in day-to-day operations.

Public diplomacy is about getting other people on one's side. It is about the relationships between diplomats with foreign societies, particularly multipliers of opinion in those societies,

and the facilitation by diplomats of the relationship between people in their own civil society with their counterparts in the receiving state. As said, public diplomacy is not a ‘one-size-fits-all’. Equally important is that countries are getting involved in public diplomacy for many different reasons. The global debate about public diplomacy was triggered by the tragic events of September 2001. In the United States and beyond this debate took place against the background of the ‘War on Terror’ and global cross-cultural divides. But public diplomacy, like diplomacy in general, can serve many different purposes. Let me mention just five different reasons why countries have ‘gone into public diplomacy’, to underline the broader point that public diplomacy, unlike a baseball cap, is no one-size-fits-all attribute of foreign policy.

- *1. To boost a country’s economic performance.* Commercial diplomacy has long been the Cinderella of diplomatic work, but it is now in the forefront of it. For countries in the Global South and elsewhere, public diplomacy is there to support their attractive power in promoting tourism and foreign investment.
- *2. To support long-term aims in foreign policy.* This was clearly the driving force of the public diplomacy of EU accession countries in the last wave of EU enlargement. The public diplomacy activities of these countries cannot be separated from their ambitions in Europe. For some of them one thing was to meet European Commission requirements for accession; quite another to persuade other Europeans that their countries were not corrupt, economically backward, or safe havens for international criminal gangs. Public diplomacy served such countries to tell other stories to foreign publics going beyond the rather unfriendly stereotypes that kept cropping up in the international press.
- *3. To enhance a country’s visibility and articulate its perceived identity abroad.* Norway is a clear example here. The reasons why the Norwegians started thinking about public diplomacy, has everything to do with the country’s peripheral geographical location in Europe, its relatively young history as an independent state, its rather dull image, and its non-membership of the European Union. The latter is symbolized by the coin of the euro, which shows the water of the North Atlantic Ocean washing on the shores of Sweden – Atlantic shores that do not exist. But Norway is well known for its contributions to the stability of international society, and Norway’s investments in public diplomacy have been so successful that I do not

hesitate to speak of Norway as one of Europe's great powers when it comes to public diplomacy.

- 4. *To do away with stereotypical images related to a country's history.* We all tend to think of other countries in terms of stereotypes, but for some the problem is more serious than for others. Countries with a recent history of warfare are generally plagued by a total lack of self-confidence when it comes to their image abroad. The Croatian nightmare, for instance, is to be associated with the civil war, extreme nationalism or even xenophobia. Germany is another example: in some places in the public mind Germany is still largely related to the Second World War, and such images are stimulated by the media. In fact, for Germany 'politische Öffentlichkeitsarbeit' was looming large in foreign relations from the inception of the Federal Republic. Germany's flirt with modern public diplomacy started in 1949, long before the term was coined.
- 5. *To head off a crisis or negative perceptions abroad.* Few foreign ministries' policy planning departments have identified the need for public diplomacy. Many countries have in fact started to think about their public diplomacy more systematically in response to negative perceptions abroad, or a sudden crisis. The Indonesian MFA now has a Public Diplomacy Department that did not exist before the Bali Bombing. My own country can also serve as an example. The Dutch began to develop their public diplomacy very seriously because of the moral issues that became seriously detrimental to perceptions about Dutch society. More recently, the public diplomacy of The Netherlands has received a triple wake-up call: the political climate in the Netherlands transformed as a result of the assassination of a populist politician in 2001, the killing of a film maker by a Muslim radical in 2004, and the no-vote to the European constitution in the referendum of 2005. Some people abroad appear to have the impression the Dutch 'lost their head' - I can assure you that this is keeping the MFA on its toes. There is no doubt that Dutch public diplomacy is presently going through its steepest learning curve. What is being developed in the Netherlands, and required in many other places, are a proactive rather than a defensive public diplomacy, and one that builds on the strengths of The Netherlands as a society and Dutch culture.

### **Small and middle powers**

Many discussions about public diplomacy are dominated by the public diplomacy concerns of the United States. One can certainly draw many interesting lessons from the American experience, under the surface of government rhetoric the US administration is creating innovative schemes, and it is going to great lengths incorporating public diplomacy into its wider diplomatic effort. The problem is the policy environment in which this public diplomacy develops, but there are nevertheless things one can learn about 'PD' in Washington DC. This does however not mean that one should overlook the fact that small and middle powers have preoccupations of their own. Four of the specific challenges for them are:

- *1. Either countries want to be noticed, or they feel that they are noticed for the wrong reasons.* Slovenia does not want to be taken for Slovakia, the three Baltic Republics dislike being mixed up even by people working in international affairs. Priority number one for small countries is: to be noticed, and that can be a hard job. It is hard for Balkan countries to be noticed in Western Europe - i.e. for the right reasons - and it is hard for the Netherlands to be noticed in the United States. The foreign ministry rather prefers Dutch society to be associated with good things and with Tulips (even though they originate in Turkey) than with problems in the field of integration of ethnical minorities or the fall-out of its 'No-vote' on the EU Constitution.
- *2. Small countries have limited resources.* Few countries have the resources to do large polls, like the Pew Opinion Polls conducted by the United States. Interestingly, in this area it looks like the Dutch are in a sense conducting public diplomacy on behalf of Turkey. The results of a study on the opinions and attitudes towards Turkey in the Netherlands will be made public soon. This could be called 'interlocking' public diplomacy: favorable attitudes towards Turkey in the Netherlands are a Turkish interest, but they are clearly also in the Dutch interest.
- *3. Small countries also have a small repertoire of public diplomacy.* If one wants to score and keep scoring, it is better to focus on a limited number of themes that either show a country's evident strengths or deal with issues that are controversial abroad. For the Netherlands there will always be the 'moral issues' that are even hard to explain to its own neighbours, but right now the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is working on the development of a number of key themes in its public diplomacy. They are: water, Europe, and integration policies towards the immigrant population in The Netherlands. It has taken some time for the Dutch to get this far and

focus on a limited number of themes, and we see a similar pattern in other countries. Key themes are the building blocks of one's reputation abroad.

- *4. Small and middle powers rely more on the ingenuity, communication skills, public diplomacy antennae, and public networking strengths of individual diplomats.* Generally speaking, those who are small have to be smarter - and do everything in their power to attract people who are likely to be good 'public diplomats'. This is an appeal to change recruitment policies. If countries say they are serious about prioritizing public diplomacy, they should have the courage to appoint the best and the brightest in their public diplomacy departments, introduce training programmes, and provide excellent career development prospects in a sector of the MFA that is traditionally not seen as a launch pad for a fast-track career.

### **Public diplomacy, interdependence and 'societization'**

Public diplomacy has become a staple commodity in the more integrated parts of the world. It is nowadays the bread and butter of the ambassadors of EU member states posted in other EU countries. As the German Paschke Report (2000) on an investigation of embassies in other EU countries confirmed, public diplomacy is now the most important activity of German embassies across the whole spectrum of issues. The spectacular growth of economic interdependence in the European Union and the multiple connections between the populations of European countries, are the most fertile breeding ground for public diplomacy. This is often small-scale public diplomacy, under the motto 'small is beautiful', consisting of a myriad of direct-contact initiatives aimed at relationship building. Such initiatives often have nothing to do with the issues that dominate the headlines of world politics. To the outsider such public diplomacy may look relatively insignificant in comparison with the rather more visible initiatives dealing with high politics, war and peace, but in reality it is small public diplomacy that makes the big difference.

Another observation that I would like to make here is that public diplomacy is not a stand-alone phenomenon, but rather an expression of broader patterns of change in diplomacy. The practice of diplomacy is moving into another phase. It is no longer the conduct of international relations in a rather self-contained CD world. What we witness is the rise of a collaborative model of diplomacy. Working with outsiders and operating in increasingly diverse networks results in a changing mode of diplomacy in which public diplomacy is thriving. Ministries of foreign affairs have increasing connections with the non-

governmental sector. Their coordination skills are now not only tested horizontally, i.e. between the MFA and line ministries, but also vertically, between the MFA and non-governmental diplomatic actors and players in their own civil society.

The fast-growing activity in consular affairs also gives credence to the idea that we are witnessing a tightening link between diplomacy and society. Migration, a dramatic increase in foreign travel and changing patterns in tourism and rising citizens' expectations of the protection and help their own governments should afford while overseas, are some of the factors that have contributed to consular affairs as a growth business. Public diplomacy and consular relations have something in common: in these two fields of diplomatic work people are beginning to look like consumers and in public diplomacy as much as in consular affairs the MFA is actually delivering a product. In both fields of activity the MFA is also confronted with issues of image and reputation: public diplomacy is about the management of the country's image and consular affairs may directly affect the image of the MFA itself. The point I want to make here but that I will not develop is that public diplomacy can be seen as part of the broader 'societization' of diplomacy, which goes to the heart of the diplomatic profession.

What is going on in diplomacy may be put in perspective by means of a comparison. It is easy for us to spot some of the most important and highly visible developments in diplomacy in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the multilateralisation of international affairs and the unstoppable proliferation of summit diplomacy. I wonder whether future observers of diplomacy will look back upon the present process of diplomacy's societization as the most significant development in diplomatic practice in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Even if this is too far-fetched: public diplomacy will not go away, but is here to stay - and the key question is whether foreign ministries are equipped for it. Fundamental in this respect is for practitioners to understand that public diplomacy is a DIY (do-it-yourself)-business - not something to leave to consultants to work out for you. Professional advice and advice from experts looking at your country with the eyes of foreigners may be very useful, but diplomats better realize that they themselves have to master public diplomacy and cannot leave it to eager consultants or doctors of spin.

### **The new public diplomacy**

Defining public diplomacy may seem an academic exercise, but how others see public diplomacy is far from irrelevant. To be sure, many academics find it hard to see public diplomacy as anything else than propaganda wearing a new jacket, and benefiting from a lot

of recent experience with the manipulation of foreign opinion. This line of thinking may be reinforced by two factors:

- First, propaganda has not been stamped out of international affairs. In fact, more productive than juxtaposing public diplomacy and propaganda, may be to see communication with foreign audiences on a continuum ranging from crude and manipulative propaganda aiming at short-term political effects to two-way public diplomacy for the ‘long haul’ based on dialogue with foreign audiences. It would be naive to ignore the fact that public diplomacy and propaganda often go hand in hand.
- Second, many countries that profess to be ‘into public diplomacy’ are in fact doing little more than paying lip-service to the latest flavor in diplomacy. Their so-called public diplomacy comes closer to ‘info bullying’. Incidentally, let us not forget that public diplomacy is not the prerogative of democratic countries. There is in fact a distinct tradition of communication with foreign audiences going back to the practices of non-democratic regimes, including the Soviet Union during the Cold War, China at the time of the Cultural Revolution and Libya before its reintegration in international society.

The distinction between on the one side the new public diplomacy that is currently being developed by a growing numbers of countries, and on the other side both propaganda and more traditional forms of public diplomacy does not lie in their purpose. Both want to influence foreign publics. The distinction lies in the pattern of communication. More simple forms of public diplomacy are a one-way flow of communication, preoccupied with selling messages and pouring out all sort of informational products. At bottom, like propaganda, this is the rather primitive business of peddling one’s own views and narrowing other people’s minds. If experience with propaganda is any guide – it may work, but its effect will not be lasting. It does not make friends. Traditional public diplomacy has no listening capacity and is not dialogical – and not being ‘interactive’ is the kiss of death in the age of ICT and the ordinary individual. In today’s world the main business of yesterday’s MFA information departments is increasingly a waste of time. The new public diplomacy has distinct basic characteristics:

- First, it is two-way communication. Its keywords are ‘engagement’, ‘dialogue’, and ‘mutuality’. Practitioners of cultural relations cannot be blamed if this sounds to them like reinventing the wheel. Public diplomacy as far as it is not news or crisis



management but aimed at relationship building has a lot in common with foreign cultural relations.

- Second, the new public diplomacy is based on the assumption that there is not just a broad group of people on the other side of the hill, but that there is a much broader group of people on both sides. Traditional public diplomacy largely ignores the domestic public hinterland as relevant for the MFA's communication with foreign publics. New approaches in public diplomacy emphasize working with and through one's own society as a means to get through to foreign audiences. The role of MFA's is then more a strategic and initiating one, and in such a scenario diplomats become facilitators and mediators. As far as this is possible and in order to be more effective, they often choose to stay in the background.

### **Diplomats and citizens**

Public diplomacy is difficult to learn. It is a multi-year job for MFA's to integrate public diplomacy into the overall foreign policy effort and it is no mere afterthought for diplomats-on-the-job. It is an intriguing question too what extent public diplomacy can be taught, i.e. beyond routine media training. The fact of the matter is, however, that few foreign ministries have incorporated public diplomacy into their diplomatic training. My purpose here is not to discuss training but to raise a few points that underline the inherent difficulties of dealing with foreign audiences.

Like all diplomacy, public diplomacy is about credibility and the tricky thing here is that the credibility of diplomats is not in large supply at the receiving end, i.e. with ordinary citizens. Imagine the situation in a country where citizens do not hold their own governmental bureaucracy and its representatives in high regard. Why would they place confidence in the well-intentioned messengers of other countries? Diplomats should not fool themselves. First, people abroad are not in need of our public diplomacy initiatives. They are not waiting for public diplomacy, and official messengers from other countries do not easily persuade the more critical gatekeepers of opinion. Second, a point that may be overlooked is that people in other countries may enjoy the dialogue inherent in modern public diplomacy, but that does not imply that they share the objectives of a government's public diplomacy. Underestimating ordinary people is a fatal error in the present international environment. Third, in Europe public diplomacy appears to be complicated by something else. In a number of other countries there appears to be a crisis of confidence between the non-official sphere of society and

government, and among the EU institutions communication with Europe's citizens is becoming priority number one.

Government representatives speak with less authority than non-governmental players. It matters who is the messenger, and that point is well taken by many diplomats becoming skilled in public diplomacy. But there is also a risk in working with non-official agents. Other actors may potentially undermine the aims of public diplomacy, because their credibility is often earned through their independence and sometimes criticism of government. It does not harm realizing that is a fact of life in modern public diplomacy. Diplomats like to be in control, but much public diplomacy is rather about taking risks, sticking out one's neck and working with partners who may have some objectives of their own. This is why it is more difficult for the new public diplomacy to root in a non-democratic environment. It also sits uneasily with a traditional and introverted diplomatic culture. Accepting the importance of public diplomacy equals to accepting that diplomacy itself is changing fundamentally.

### **Conclusion: call for modesty**

The type of 'public diplomat' emerging here is often a facilitating person and somebody who realizes that he or she is sometimes more effective in the background. This links into one of my final themes for today: public diplomacy can only achieve so much. This is not least message to senior managers in MFA's, eager to 'see results': expectations should be realistic when it comes to dealing with foreign opinion and modesty is therefore in order. Much public diplomacy should be satisfied with the aim of influencing 'milieu factors', i.e. the environment in which opinions are formed and attitudes take shape. Public diplomacy, it appears, is better suited to promoting broad national values and interests than serving short-term foreign policy objectives. 'PD' should of course deal with daily events, but it should not be limited to what is discussed in parliament and in the press. Public diplomats should not suffer from 'presentism' and they should never lose sight of the broader picture. In this context it may also be useful for those on the payroll of MFA's to realize that they are no longer automatically at the centre of international relationships. One could even argue that in interdependent regions like the European Union diplomats often move to the periphery of multilayered transnational relations. Interestingly, diplomats themselves make this point and it is evident that this realization has implications for public diplomacy.

The combined forces of globalization and the democratization of access to information have called for more public diplomacy, but they have also turned foreign publics into harder target groups for foreign ministries. After all, unlike recognized international actors, publics

have no clearly states aims, nor do they follow agreed rules or norms of conduct. Publics are elusive and amorphous, but the individual members of such publics have multiple sources of information, they can perfectly make up their own minds, and modern technology gives them a great deal of mobilization power. As stated before, underestimating such publics is a fatal error: many countries have found out that one can lose credibility in a fleeting moment but it may take years to build up good will.

The essential quality of public diplomacy is then that it is able to go where traditional diplomacy cannot reach. It is fairly safe to speculate that international society will have more rather than less nooks and crannies where traditional diplomacy has limited access, or where it is largely ineffective. The conclusion is that there will be a greater demand for public diplomacy in the years to come. This observation does not answer the question as to what will be the future role of diplomats in public diplomacy. Please allow me to leave that question with you.

Thank you very much for your attention.